

Chapter I

Empirical Realism and the Great Outdoors: A Critique of Meillassoux

G. Anthony Bruno

If finitude is placed at the point of departure for transcendence as clearly as it is by Kant, then it is not necessary, in order to escape an alleged 'subjective idealism', to invoke a 'turn to the Object', a turn which is praised again today all too noisily and with all too little understanding of the problem. In truth, however, the essence of finitude inevitably forces us to the question concerning the conditions for the possibility of a preliminary Being-oriented toward the Object, i.e., concerning the essence of the necessary ontological turning-toward the object in general.

Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*

Introduction

Central to the new realist movement in contemporary continental philosophy, Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*¹ is an unabashed pursuit of knowledge of the Absolute, that is, of reality independent of the structures of human experience. It is informed by the history of philosophy to the extent that it requires that any claim to such knowledge be *post-Kantian*. A post-Kantian claim to absolute knowledge would be non-metaphysical in so far as it would reject the rationalist idea of a necessary entity, following Kant's association of this idea with dogmatism. The dogmatic path is characterised in the *Critique of Pure Reason* by an unreflective use of the principle of sufficient reason (PSR), according to which an entity is only intelligible locally, in its particular context, if its relative explanatory ground is known and globally, in relation to all other entities, if its absolute explanatory ground is known. The dogmatist seeks the latter ground for systematic reasons, locating it in God, the necessary entity whose existence is allegedly proven by the

ontological argument. Her unchecked use of the PSR thus leads her to the kind of metaphysical claims to knowledge that Kant subjects to critique. By eschewing such claims, Meillassoux's argument for absolute knowledge aims to be post-Kantian.²

And yet, Meillassoux's argument is explicitly *anti-Kantian*. Its conclusion – that no entity, but only contingency itself, is necessary – rests on rejecting the PSR as a temptation to metaphysics.³ This differs markedly from Kant, for whom critique is meant only to limit the PSR. The principle traditionally necessitates the ontological argument as the source of knowledge of the absolute explanatory ground of the intelligibility of all entities and thus leads to dogmatism. Kant's critique consists in restricting the theoretical use of the PSR to appearances, and does so for the sake of morality. It serves to show that our theoretical concern for why things are as they are, that is, for their sufficient reasons, presupposes our practical concern for how things ought to be.⁴ By rejecting the PSR for what he calls 'the principle of unreason',⁵ which signifies the chaos of necessary contingency, Meillassoux defends a position whose standpoint, while post-Kantian in so far as it is non-dogmatic, is resolutely anti-Kantian. This point bears emphasising: Meillassoux aims to overcome Kant on the basis of the latter's refutation of dogmatic metaphysics and thus, in pursuing absolute knowledge, aims to do so on Kantian terms.

Meillassoux seeks '*intellectual intuition* of the absolute' and identifies this knowledge with 'our grasp of facticity'.⁶ By 'facticity', he means 'the property whereby everything and every world *is* without reason, and is thereby *capable of actually becoming otherwise without reason*'.⁷ Meillassoux blames Kant for inaugurating what he calls the 'correlationist' fusion of thinking and being, which, by proscribing independent access to either, replaces '*adequation*' between them with '*intersubjectivity*' as the 'criterion of objectivity'.⁸ It is by abandoning the PSR and embracing unreason in the form of necessary contingency that we are said to grasp facticity as the Absolute. In particular, according to Meillassoux, this is the only way of giving a satisfactory account of the meaning of the 'ancestral statements' of science, statements whose referent is 'reality antecedent to the emergence of the human species'.⁹

In order to assess Meillassoux's argument for absolute knowledge, I will examine three charges on which it depends: (1) Kant distorts the meaning of ancestral statements, preventing us from affirming the findings of science; (2) Kant fallaciously infers the necessity of the causal structure of experience, obscuring a proper conception of facticity; (3) Kant's revolution is Ptolemaic, not Copernican, yielding a realism that is incapable of grasping 'the great outdoors'. By Meillassoux's lights, (1) represents

correlationism's weakness in the face of science, (2) its naive faith in reason and (3) its uselessness for ordinary life.

I want to resist these charges. (1) interprets Kant through Cartesian lenses. This, I argue, explains Meillassoux's false assumption that for transcendental idealism objects do not exist in the absence of subjects. (2) misreads Kant's defence of causality's necessity: he infers it, not from the stability of experience, but from our inability to experience without it. I suggest that a correct reading reveals a hitherto undeveloped Kantian conception of facticity to which Meillassoux's is at best an unmotivated alternative. (3) casts Kant's revolution as subjective, ignoring his portrayal of it as perspectival. If we view the transcendental turn through this portrayal, I claim, we see that empirical realism grasps nothing less than the great outdoors.

Preliminaries

Before evaluating these charges, I want to clarify Meillassoux's method as well as the focus of my objection.

First, Meillassoux rejects the metaphysical supposition that the Absolute must be an entity, seeking instead a 'form of absolute' that is not a 'being'. By employing what he calls speculative thinking,¹⁰ he aims to show that the Absolute is no entity, but is contingency itself, and thereby to avoid the dogmatic consequences of metaphysics. Speculation without metaphysics has two conditions: (S1) we must know 'a world that is essentially unaffected by whether or not anyone thinks it'; (S2) we must know this world 'without reactivating the principle of reason', with its 'mysteries of real necessity'.¹¹ Meeting (S1) as a post-Kantian requires proving (1) and (3), for it requires showing that, since Kant undermines statements about reality prior to human existence and thereby subjectivises reality, we need a way of knowing the world as it is absolutely independent of human thought. Meeting (S2) requires proving (2), for it requires showing that, since Kant illegitimately endorses the necessity of causality, we need a conception of the world as it is absolutely independent of thought that nevertheless avoids a misguided faith in reason.

Second, Meillassoux differentiates between 'weak' and 'strong' correlationism, identifying the former with Kant and the latter with various post-Kantians, particularly Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Their difference concerns whether or not 'the thing in itself' is thinkable. I will focus my objection on Meillassoux's critique of weak correlationism for three reasons. First, he devotes the bulk of his critique to Kant. Second, he provides no textual analysis of works by Fichte, Hegel or Schelling and makes

only scant reference to Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Third, he claims that strong correlationism is the 'exacerbated consequence' of 'the Kantian catastrophe',¹² implying that his critique of the former depends on the strength of his critique of the latter. As I will argue, his critique consists of a misreading of Kant.

Empirical and transcendental idealism

The charge that Kant distorts the meaning of ancestral statements is the conclusion to 'the argument from the arche-fossil', which I reconstruct as follows. The first premise states a criterion for realism: a position is realist only if it affirms scientific knowledge claims about 'occurrences of matter independent of humanity'. 'Arche-fossil' denotes such occurrences in that 'it does *not* designate an ancient event [...] but] an event *anterior* to terrestrial life and *hence anterior to givenness itself*'.¹³ An arche-fossil is thus not a phenomenon, for phenomena are always already given to us in experience. It is rather a thing in itself. Ancestral reality, then, is not empirical, but transcendental.¹⁴ The second premise is that Kant cannot affirm knowledge claims about such a reality. Hence, Kant is not a realist. For Meillassoux, a correlationist such as Kant is bound to this failure because she cannot but qualify, and so undermine, the claim 'x preceded human existence' with a codicil: '*– for humans*'.¹⁵

It is worth considering an implication of this argument. Its first premise suggests a criterion for idealism: a position is idealist only if it denies ancestral statements. One can satisfy this criterion in many ways, such as by denying that ancestral reality is thinkable, denying that an arche-fossil is possible, or asserting that ancestral statements are meaningless. Although these are claims that Berkeley might hold, Meillassoux, recognising that ancestral statements are analogous to statements about the in-itself, attributes them to Kant.¹⁶ But Kant holds none of them. He asserts in the first *Critique* that the in-itself is thinkable on the grounds that its concept is implied by that of an appearance.¹⁷ Although the in-itself is not a real possibility of experience, he observes in several *Reflexionen* that it is nevertheless a logical possibility.¹⁸ And although the in-itself is unknowable, Kant argues in the first *Critique* and in *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* that thinking it is meaningful for no less than the unity of empirical knowledge.¹⁹ Neither these considerations nor the context of either the *Prolegomena* or the Refutation of Idealism deter Meillassoux from explicitly conflating Berkeleyian and Kantian idealism.²⁰ Indeed, he sees no difference between empirical and transcendental idealism when he states that an ancestral statement has a realist sense or 'no sense at

all',²¹ for, as the first premise of his argument states, this sense can only be transcendental.

An illuminating historical precedent for Meillassoux's misreading of Kant occurs in Jacobi's *David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism, a Dialogue*. There, Jacobi criticises the transcendental idealist's claim to objectivity:

according to the common use of language, we must mean by 'object' a thing that *would be present outside us in a transcendental sense*. . . . But since the whole of transcendental idealism would collapse as a result, and would be left with no application or reason for being, whoever professes it must disavow that presupposition. For it must not even be *probable* to him that there be things present outside us in a transcendental sense, or that they have connections with us *which we would be in a position of perceiving in any way at all*. . . . The transcendental idealist must have the courage, therefore, to assert the strongest idealism that was ever professed, and not be afraid of the objection of speculative egoism, for it is impossible for him to pretend to stay within his system if he tries to repel from himself even just this last objection.²²

Our common presupposition, according to Jacobi, is that objects are transcendently real. Contra transcendental idealism, what is '*present outside us*' is independent of us, not simply in terms of its sensible matter, but also formally. This is because the purported a priori forms of human experience – space, time, the categories, the ideas of reason – do not condition the possibility of objects' external presence, but are merely internal to a perceiving mind.²³ It would follow from this presupposition that externality is univocally transcendental, while internality is univocally empirical.

As a criticism of transcendental idealism, this will not do. It imposes a Cartesian picture of a mind barred from objectivity in the absence of divine intervention. This ignores Kant's claim in the Fourth Paralogism to 'distinguish empirically external objects from those that might be called "external" in the transcendental sense, by directly calling them "things that are to be encountered in space"'.²⁴ Empirical externality is a reality to which we have a legitimate, because sensible, access. If we can distinguish this reality from a reality to which we have no legitimate access, then, according to Kant, we can distinguish empirical from transcendental reality.

Compare Jacobi's gloss of the ordinary standpoint with Meillassoux's view of the scientific perspective. He claims that this perspective, which the scientist 'shares with the "ordinary man"', is one from which we experiment, not in order to demonstrate what is valid for 'all scientists', but instead 'with a view to external references which endow these experiments with meaning'.²⁵ Meillassoux's claim is that demonstrating the validity

of our judgements of experience to individuals who share our perspective is not an indication of what is really, externally present. This would follow if, as the first premise of the argument from the arche-fossil states, what is really present transcends this – or any – perspective. Jacobi and Meillassoux's common assumption is that external reality can only be construed transcendently. Both infer from this that transcendental realism contrasts with an idealism for which such distinctions as 'empirical' and 'transcendental' are simply useless.²⁶ Hence, just as Jacobi exhorts the transcendental idealist to cease speaking inconsistently about externality and embrace 'egoism', so Meillassoux presses the Kantian to see the subjective idealist in the mirror:

the consistent correlationist should stop being modest and dare to assert openly that he is in a position to provide the scientist with an *a priori* demonstration that the latter's ancestral statements are *illusory*. . . . Confronted with the arche-fossil, *every variety of idealism converges and becomes equally extraordinary* – every variety of correlationism is exposed as an extreme idealism.²⁷

Like the passage from the *David Hume*, this passage imposes a Cartesian picture on to Kant's position. Specifically, it projects the Cartesian problematic concerning whether statements about a mind-independent world are veridical or illusory. Berkeley plausibly operates within this problematic and concludes that such statements are illusory. By contrast, Kant is driven, not by the question of the truth or falsity of statements about a mind-independent world, but by the question of what makes true and false statements about the world possible in the first place.²⁸ The Kantian problematic concerns, not whether our judgements are veridical, but how they could even be said to be veridical.²⁹ Thus, the relevant, but ignored, context for Meillassoux's critique is not the question of whether what appears thus-and-so is thus-and-so in itself, but the question of how anything can so much as appear thus-and-so.

Meillassoux's Cartesian misreading perhaps stems from his own driving concern, namely, how we can grasp the meaning of ancestral statements, that is, how we can know whether such statements designate anything real.³⁰ This question falls squarely within the Cartesian problematic. But although this suits Meillassoux's intention of providing a 'contemporary' defence of a Cartesian claim to know the arche-fossil *qua* thing in itself,³¹ it shows that he fails to critique Kant in light of the appropriate problematic.³² As Meillassoux himself illustrates, a Cartesian assumes that meaning generally is possible and asks of a particular kind of statement – about the external world, about other minds, about the arche-fossil – whether it is actually meaningful. By contrast, a Kantian assumes that statements generally are actually meaningful and asks what in particular makes this

possible. It is crucial for any critique of transcendental idealism to address this founding premise, rather than simply its conclusion.

To close my rebuttal of (1), the charge that Kant distorts the meaning of ancestral statements, I suggest that Meillassoux's misreading accounts for an assumption that runs throughout his critique of Kant:

scientists are much more likely to side with Cartesianism than with Kantianism: they would have little difficulty in conceding that secondary qualities only exist as aspects of the living creature's relation to its world – but they would be much less willing to concede that (mathematizable) primary qualities only exist so long as we ourselves exist, rather than as properties of things themselves.³³

He goes on to write that 'we must grasp how thought is able to access *an absolute* . . . whose separateness from thought is such that it presents itself to us as non-relative to us, and hence as capable of existing whether we exist or not'.³⁴ Ultimately, Meillassoux concludes that his preferred 'Galilean-Copernican revolution has no other meaning than that of the paradoxical unveiling of thought's capacity to think what there is whether thought exists or not'.³⁵ These passages reveal the assumption that, for transcendental idealism, objects of experience depend on the existence of subjects in just the way that perceptions and memories do and therefore that the empirical is tantamount to the internal.³⁶ In other words, Meillassoux assumes that transcendental idealism is tantamount to empirical idealism.

Kant would hold this view if, when thinking away the experiential conditions that are enacted by our existence, he were to infer that the phenomenal world cannot or does not exist. When thinking just this in the Transcendental Aesthetic, however, he infers otherwise:

We can accordingly speak of space, extended being, and so on, only from the human standpoint. If we depart from the subjective condition under which alone we can acquire outer intuition, namely that through which we may be affected by objects, then the representation of space signifies nothing at all.³⁷

Kant's inference from our non-existence is not that nature cannot or does not exist. It is rather that nothing whatsoever is signified. Compare this inference with his claim in Chapter III of the *Analytic of Principles*:

the doctrine of sensibility is at the same time the doctrine of the noumenon in the negative sense, i.e., of things that the understanding must think without this relation to our kind of intuition, thus not merely as appearances but as things in themselves, but about which, however, it also understands that in this abstraction it cannot consider making any use of its categories, since they have significance only in relation to the unity of intuitions in space and

time, and can even determine this unity *a priori* through general concepts of combination only on account of the mere ideality of space and time. Where this [spatial and] temporal unity cannot be encountered, thus in the case of the noumenon, there the entire use, indeed even all significance of the categories completely ceases; for then we could not have insight even into the possibility of the things that would correspond to the categories.³⁸

When thinking beyond the human standpoint, judgements of existence lack all sense.³⁹ Hence, although a transcendental idealist holds that, without subjects, nothing is cognised, she does not infer from this absence that nothing exists, but only that the very idea of existence becomes meaningless.⁴⁰

This does not mean that a transcendental idealist cannot meaningfully speak of an arche-fossil. Her ancestral statement is meaningful precisely as a fallible judgement about an externally present fact that contributes to our knowledge of an indefinite empirical past.⁴¹ In Meillassoux's words, it consists of '*a retrojection of the past on the basis of the present*'.⁴² One begs the question in favour of transcendental realism if one objects that the transcendental idealist thereby sacrifices the determination of the measure of the arche-fossil for the demonstration of this measure's validity for those of a common perspective.⁴³ These are inseparable on her view.⁴⁴ It is this fallacy that ultimately undermines (1). The Cartesian projection on which it rests, I suggest, is what leads Meillassoux to confuse the correlationist link between thinking and being for an ontic relation between beings, one in which objects depend on subjects for their existence.

Necessity and facticity

Meillassoux's critique of Kantian claims about ancestrality is hamstrung by a Cartesian projection of an antithesis between the empirical and the external.⁴⁵ This is not the case in his critique of Kant's deduction of the category of causality. He charges, (2) that Kant fallaciously infers causality's necessity from the stability of our experience and thereby fails to grasp the truth of facticity, namely, that contingency alone is necessary. I will show that this charge rests on a misreading, one consequence of which is to neglect a competing, and hitherto unexplored, Kantian conception of facticity.

A preliminary remark is in order. Meillassoux claims that Hume also assumes the necessity in question and that he 'merely doubts our capacity to ground [it] through reasoning'.⁴⁶ This is mistaken. Rather, Hume assumes our use of the idea of causation, seeks its justification, and finds none. Thus, he says in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* that

'we are not entitled to form a general [causal] rule' and that, while causal inference is necessary for our subsistence, it arises from mere 'sentiment'.⁴⁷ It is precisely the justificatory threat that this poses to our inferential practice – not an assumption of causal necessity – that, for Kant, calls for a transcendental deduction.

I turn to Meillassoux's charge that Kant fallaciously infers the necessity of causality and of the natural laws that presuppose it. By his lights, Kant argues as follows: (N1) if natural laws were not necessary, they would frequently change without reason; (N2) they do not frequently change without reason; (N3) hence, they are necessary.⁴⁸ Meillassoux discerns this argument from the following passage from Section II of the Transcendental Deduction:

Unity of synthesis in accordance with empirical concepts would be entirely contingent, and, were it not grounded on a transcendental ground of unity, it would be possible for a swarm of appearances to fill up our soul without experience ever being able to arise from it. But in that case all relation of cognition to objects would also disappear, since the appearances would lack connection in accordance with universal and necessary laws, and would thus be intuition without thought, but never cognition, and would therefore be as good as nothing for us.⁴⁹

In this section, Kant argues that experience has a single form, a unity whose ground lies in the categories of the understanding, one of which is causality. The cited passage infers this ground's necessity from the impossibility of unified experience that would result from its absence. Kant does not infer that experience would become fragmented, taking on varying and vanishing forms. Indeed, he does not even mention the frequent alteration of natural laws when considering causality's absence, for the scenario is one in which there would be no standpoint from which to discern anything, much less shifts in the rules by which objects interact.⁵⁰ This is sufficient to reject Meillassoux's reconstruction, with its inclusion of (N1) and (N2).

Meillassoux's misreading partly stems from interpreting (N2) as representing the '*fact*' of the causal stability of experience.⁵¹ On this interpretation, Kant's deduction would indeed be 'tautological', for (N2) would contain 'the condition of consciousness' deduced in (N3).⁵² However, Kant does not assume the conditions of experience, which would make a transcendental deduction redundant. The Kantian problematic starts rather from our experience of a world and interrogates its conditions of possibility. The only '*fact*' we assume prior to a deduction is that we have some empirical knowledge.

This will not allay Meillassoux. His mantra of 'an absolute without an absolute entity'⁵³ commits him to the exclusive necessity of contingency, that is, to facticity as signified by the principle of unreason. Deducing

the necessity of causality, as Kant does, does not simply oppose this thesis: it assumes reason's ability to vouchsafe the PSR by grounding its validity in the human standpoint. In this, Meillassoux suspects a threat comparable to dogmatism.⁵⁴ But we misconstrue the necessity proved by a transcendental deduction if we suppose that it is anything stronger than anthropic,⁵⁵ for it is logically possible that causality is not necessary and that, consequently, appearances are 'less than a dream'.⁵⁶ Kant's inference to necessity simply shows that the conditions of the possibility of experience lie between logical necessity and empirical contingency, for such conditions are contingent with respect to the principle of non-contradiction – since their absence entails no logical contradiction – yet necessary with respect to our empirical knowledge – since experience is impossible without them.⁵⁷

Although I do not have the space to develop this thought here, and while he does not use the term, I want to suggest that, for Kant, the logical contingency and empirical necessity of the conditions of the possibility of experience converge to express facticity, in so far as they are brute facts of experience that are incapable of derivation from rational principles. These conditions function as the a priori forms of the faculties of cognition: space and time, the categories and the ideas. Notice that it is brute fact that our cognition involves sensibility, that sensibility is spatio-temporal, that space is three-dimensional and chiral, and that time is unidirectional. Notice, also, that the ideas represent the unconditioned condition of cognition for which it is reason's 'peculiar fate'⁵⁸ endlessly to strive, a desire the fact of which is as brute as it is a temptation to dogmatism. Notice, finally, that neither does an absolute first principle ground the table of judgements from which the table of categories is derived nor is the deduction of the categories possible without our openness to the justificatory threat that is posed by Humean scepticism, a receptivity whose contingency is exemplified by Kant waking from his dogmatic slumber. For these reasons, at least, the conditions of the possibility of experience are factual.⁵⁹

Meillassoux, of course, has an alternative to this Kantian conception of facticity. But motivating his alternative requires that he meet (S2), according to which we know the Absolute without recourse to a principle of reason. This he cannot do since he fails to prove (2). As a result, Kantian facticity remains a live option.

Ptolemy and Copernicus

We saw that rebutting the distortion charge in (1) leaves transcendental idealism's account of ancestral statements intact. The restricted, empirical

realism of this account, however, may appear useless to the ordinary standpoint, particularly if Jacobi is right about the 'common use of language'. If so, then (3), the charge that Kant's revolution is Ptolemaic and therefore insufficiently realist, might arise and, with it, another chance to meet (S1). I will show that, in raising (3), Meillassoux misrepresents transcendental philosophy and so does not show that empirical reality and the great outdoors differ in any meaningful sense.

Meillassoux defends (3) by reclaiming the term 'Copernican revolution': what we have in mind is not so much the astronomical discovery of the decentering of the terrestrial observer within the solar system, but rather the much more fundamental decentering which presided over the mathematization of nature, viz., *the decentering of thought relative to the world within the process of knowledge*.⁶⁰

According to Meillassoux, the Copernican revolution consists in the restoration of the human standpoint to the secondary position of dependence on a world whose existence is absolutely primary. He credits this revolution to Galileo, for whom the world is an exhaustively mathematisable substance that persists in spite of human thought. It is because such a revolution depicts transcendental reality that, for Meillassoux, it provides the proper means of grasping the great outdoors.

By contrast, Kant ushers what Meillassoux calls a 'Ptolemaic counter-revolution' according to which the subject is 'central to the process of knowledge':

What was the fundamental question on the basis of which the first *Critique* reconfigured the whole of philosophy? It was the question about the conditions under which modern science is thinkable – *that is to say, the conditions of the Copernican revolution in the literal and genuine sense of the term*. In other words, the philosopher who placed the task of understanding the conditions of possibility for modern science at the heart of his project is also the philosopher who responded to this exigency by abolishing its initial condition.⁶¹

Meillassoux's conflation of empirical and transcendental idealism is evident in his gloss of the revolution that Kant himself calls 'Copernican', for he insists that transcendental idealism undermines our capacity for scientific knowledge, where this is construed as knowledge of transcendental reality. If this threatens our grasp of the world as such, irrespective of ancestry, it must appear fanciful from the ordinary standpoint.

However, this disregards why Kant does not call his revolution 'Ptolemaic'. When, in the B Preface to the first *Critique*, he says that objects of cognition must conform to the subject, he does not compare this to a view on which our claims about the world are grounded in an absolute

standpoint that determines how the world is by fiat. He rather likens it to a view on which our claims are *perspectival*, namely, Copernicus's view that the observer's standpoint is not absolute, but revolves around fixed celestial bodies.⁶² Meillassoux misreads the transcendental turn as yielding an idealism for which the subject is so 'central' that the world's existence is by comparison dubious or false – an idealism that Kant explicitly refutes.⁶³ In fact, Kant's is an idealism for which the world's knowable properties are determined by conditions that, from the human standpoint, apply to any possible claims about such properties.⁶⁴ The convergent logical contingency and empirical necessity of these conditions – what I suggest is their facticity – reflects the peculiarity, not the centrality, of the anthropic perspective.

For Kant, a Copernican revolution in philosophy investigates the conditions that simply having a cognitive perspective places on the claims we can make. Such a revolution departs from the Galilean view by locating our claims along a peculiar orbit in logical space.

Meillassoux's neglect of Kant's Copernican affiliation would seem to explain his confusion about the motivation for and consequences of the transcendental turn. Regarding the turn's motivation, he says that science is the 'impetus' for the transcendental critique of metaphysics and that this critique seeks to prove 'the primacy of scientific knowledge', which obviously it does not do.⁶⁵ Were the transcendental turn so motivated, it would refuse both to adopt Humean scepticism and to limit knowledge for the sake of morality. However, it does not. Regarding the turn's consequences, Meillassoux says that transcendental philosophy degrades scientific claims as 'apparent, secondary and derivative' and thereby obscures science's '*eminently speculative character*'.⁶⁶ Were the results of the transcendental turn as he describes them, it would be unable to conceive of true as opposed to false appearances and so would be forced to identify empirical reality with illusion. Once again, it does not.

Heidegger acknowledges the importance of this second point in the *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*:

Appearance not only presupposes 'the relation to a consciousness that is at least possible' . . . but appearance is also appearance *of something* – as Kant puts it: of the *thing itself*. However, in order to eliminate right away the grossest misunderstanding, we must say that appearances are not mere illusions, nor are they some kind of free-floating emissions from things. Rather appearances are objects themselves, or things. Furthermore, appearances are also not other things next to or prior to the things themselves. Rather appearances are just those things themselves *that* we encounter and discover as extant within the world. However, what remains closed off to us is the thing itself insofar as it is thought as object of an absolute knowledge, i.e., as object of an intuition which does not first need the interaction with the thing . . . an *infinite* intuition which first of all produces . . . things.⁶⁷

Appearances are not to be construed as *mere* appearances, to be contrasted in a Cartesian manner from a knowable reality. Rather, they are appearances *to some perspective*, as Kant intends by the idea of a Copernican revolution. Grasping the non-Ptolemaic character of Kant's revolution requires keeping its Humean premises and non-Berkeleyian conclusions clearly in view. In this way, we avoid the 'improper and irrational complaint', which he dismisses in the *Amphiboly*,⁶⁸ that we cannot know – which is to say, cannot produce – the in itself. We thereby avoid falsely supposing that empirical realism is somehow second-rate and instead see that it is as wide open as the world we know.

Conclusion

In his preface to *After Finitude*, Alain Badiou says it is 'no exaggeration' to claim that Meillassoux escapes Kant's classification of philosophy into dogmatism, scepticism and criticism.⁶⁹ This is not at all obvious. As I have argued, Meillassoux misconstrues transcendental idealism in his bid for post-Kantian transcendental realism. He thereby succeeds only in talking past Kant. This raises serious questions. Can he truly claim to be post-Kantian? By not interpreting transcendental idealism on its own terms, is his argument for absolute knowledge a non sequitur? Does his criticism of correlationism simply repeat the complaint dismissed in the *Amphiboly*? However we choose to respond, it is clear that renewing the pursuit of the Absolute as Meillassoux does is guaranteed to meet with an undeterred critique.

Notes

1. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (New York: Continuum, 2008).
2. Ibid. p. 28: 'we must take up once more the injunction to know the absolute, and break with the transcendental tradition that rules out its possibility. Is this to say that we must once again become pre-critical philosophers, or that we must go back to dogmatism? The whole problem is that such a return strikes us as strictly impossible – we cannot go back to being metaphysicians, just as we cannot go back to being dogmatists. On this point, we cannot but be heirs of Kantianism.'
3. Ibid. p. 33: 'although thought may well be able to account for the facts of the world by invoking this or that global law – nevertheless, it must also, according to the principle of reason, account for why these laws are thus and not otherwise, and therefore account for why the world is thus and not otherwise. And even were such a 'reason for the world' to be furnished, it would yet be necessary to account for this reason, and so on ad infinitum. If thought is to avoid an infinite regress while submitting to the principle of reason, it is incumbent upon it to uncover a reason that would prove capable of accounting for everything, including itself – a reason not conditioned by any other reason, and which only the ontological argument is capable of uncovering'.

4. For a lucid account of this presupposition, see Omri Boehm, *Kant's Critique of Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), ch. 4.
5. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 60.
6. *Ibid.* p. 82.
7. *Ibid.* p. 53.
8. *Ibid.* p. 4. It is not difficult to see that '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' (*ibid.* p. 5) fails to capture Kant's Copernican revolution, for which a 'critique of pure reason' denotes reason's access to itself because it implies the subjective no less than the objective genitive. Meillassoux overlooks the judiciary function of thinking whereby reason, in its critical mode, poses to itself the question *quid juris* regarding its entitlement to a priori concepts. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A739/B767.
9. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 10.
10. *Ibid.* p. 34.
11. *Ibid.* pp. 116, 126, 128.
12. *Ibid.* p. 124.
13. *Ibid.* pp. 18, 20.
14. Meillassoux obscures this point somewhat when he says that the referents of ancestral statements 'can be posited as real (albeit in the past) once they are taken to have been validated by empirical science' (*ibid.* p. 12), for empirical validation presupposes givenness.
15. *Ibid.* pp. 13–14.
16. *Ibid.* pp. 15–17. Meillassoux is inconsistent in attributing the first claim; see p. 38.
17. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxvii: 'even if we cannot cognize these same objects as things in themselves, we at least must be able to think them as things in themselves. For otherwise there would follow the absurd proposition that there is an appearance without anything that appears.'
18. See Immanuel Kant, *Notes and Fragments*, trans. Curtis Bowman, Paul Guyer and Frederick Rauscher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Ak. XVIII: 111–12, 232, 349.
19. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A326–7/B383–4. See also Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Gary Hatfield, in Henry Allison and Peter Heath (eds), *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781* (Cambridge: Cambridge University of Press, 2002), Ak. IV: 354–5: 'We should, then, think for ourselves an immaterial being, an intelligible world, and a highest of all beings (all noumena), because only in these things, as things in themselves, does reason find completion and satisfaction, which it can never hope to find in the derivation of the appearances from the homogeneous grounds of those appearances.'
20. See Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, pp. 18, 122. Curiously, Žižek ignores this. See Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), pp. 625–6.
21. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 17.
22. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, 'David Hume on faith, or Idealism and realism: a dialogue', in *Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel* Allwill, trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press), pp. 227–9.
23. See Jacobi, 'David Hume', pp. 216–17: 'what we realists call actual objects or things independent of our representations are for the transcendental idealist only internal beings which exhibit nothing at all of a thing that may perhaps be there outside us, or to which the appearance may refer. Rather, these internal beings are merely subjective determinations of the mind, entirely void of anything truly objective.'
24. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A373. For an account of Jacobi's misreading, see

- Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 156–60.
25. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, pp. 13, 17.
 26. Meillassoux takes the requirement of the existence of the transcendental subject – conceived as the site of the enactment of the a priori conditions of experience – as sufficient to collapse the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical (*ibid.* pp. 24–5). This ignores the fact that developments in post-Kantian philosophy cast the subject's existence as itself an a priori condition of experience. Thus, neither the existence of a community of subjects, for Fichte, nor the social existence of Dasein, for Heidegger, is to be construed merely empirically.
 27. *Ibid.* pp. 17–18.
 28. Thus, Johnston errs when he says 'the one thing that saves Kant from being Berkeley is the thing-in-itself'. Adrian Johnston, 'Hume's revenge: À Dieu, Meillassoux?', in Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (eds), *The Speculative Turn* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), p. 111. Compare his acquiescent account of Meillassoux's critique of Kant in Adrian Johnston, 'The world before worlds: Quentin Meillassoux's and Alain Badiou's anti-Kantian transcendentalism', *Contemporary French Civilization*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2009), pp. 78, 82.
 29. For an analysis of the Cartesian and Kantian problematics, see James Conant, 'Varieties of skepticism', in Denis McManus (ed.), *Wittgenstein and Skepticism* (London: Routledge, 2004).
 30. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, pp. 9–10.
 31. See *ibid.* p. 2.
 32. See *ibid.* p. 18: 'might not the meaning of the arche-fossil be to test the philosopher's faith in correlation, even when confronted with data which seem to point to an abyssal divide between what exists and what appears?'
 33. *Ibid.* p. 13.
 34. *Ibid.* p. 28.
 35. *Ibid.* p. 116.
 36. For a similar assumption, see William Blattner, 'Heidegger's Kantian idealism revisited', *Inquiry*, vol. 47, no. 4 (2004), pp. 321–37, here p. 322.
 37. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A26–7/B42–3.
 38. *Ibid.* B308. Compare *ibid.* A507/B535: 'appearances in general are nothing outside our representations, which is just what we mean by their transcendental ideality'.
 39. Compare Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), H. 212: 'When Dasein does not exist, "independence" "is" not either, nor "is" the "in-itself". In such a case this sort of thing can be neither understood nor not understood. In such a case even entities within-the-world can neither be discovered nor lie hidden. In such a case it cannot be said that entities are, nor can it be said that they are not.'
 40. Kant is therefore not committed to what Gabriel calls 'ontic nonsense'. See Markus Gabriel, *Fields of Sense: A New Realist Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p. 78. Contrast Marcus Gabriel, 'The mythological being of reflection: an essay on Hegel, Schelling and the contingency of necessity', in Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek (eds), *Madness, Mythology and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* (New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 87.
 41. Compare Peter Hallward, 'Anything is possible: a reading of Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*', in *The Speculative Turn*, p. 137: 'from an orthodox Kantian perspective there is little difference in principle between my thinking an event that took place yesterday from an event that took place six billion years ago. It's not clear that Kant should have any more trouble in accepting an ancestral statement about the accretion of the earth than he would in accepting a new scientific demonstration of the existence of previously unperceived "magnetic matter", or the discovery of hitherto undetected men on the moon (to cite two of his own examples)'.

42. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 16.
43. See *ibid.* p. 17. Compare Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 63: 'if correlationism is true, science's ancestral claims are false; if the latter are true, correlationism is false'.
44. Compare Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), p. 495: 'For what exactly is meant by saying that the world existed prior to human consciousnesses? It might be meant that the earth emerged from a primitive nebula where the conditions for life had not been brought together. But each one of these words, just like each equation in physics, presupposes our pre-scientific experience of the world, and this reference to the lived world contributes to constituting the valid signification of the statement. Nothing will ever lead me to understand what a nebula, which could not be seen by anyone, might be. Laplace's nebula is not behind us, at our origin, but rather out in front of us in the cultural world.'
45. Compare the misreading of Kant in Maurizio Ferraris, 'Transcendental realism', *The Monist*, vol. 98, no. 2 (2015), pp. 215–32. Ferraris claims that ontology has sense only if it grounds epistemology and that transcendental idealism, since it grounds ontology on epistemology, must be rejected. This fails to rise to the meta-metaphysical standpoint of Kant's critical turn, for it is from this standpoint that we can see that metaphysics is not on the path to a science and that scepticism and dogmatism distract it from this path. For an analysis of Heidegger's account of Kant's meta-metaphysical standpoint, see Camilla Serck-Hanssen, 'Towards fundamental ontology: Heidegger's phenomenological reading of Kant', *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2015), pp. 217–35. See also Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 10–11: 'the positive outcome of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* lies in what it has contributed towards the working out of what belongs to any Nature whatsoever, not in a "theory" of knowledge. His transcendental logic is an *a priori* logic for the subject-matter of that area of Being called "Nature".'
46. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 90.
47. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Other Writings*, ed. Stephen Buckle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 55, 74–5.
48. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 94.
49. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A111.
50. See Hilary Putnam, 'Philosophers and human understanding', in *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers, Volume 3*, p. 195: 'Replying to the contention that the future might be wholly lawless, might defeat every "induction" we have made, Kant pointed out that if there is any future at all – any future *for us*, at any rate, any future we can grasp as thinkers and conceptualize to see if our predictions were true or false – then, in fact, many regularities must *not* have been violated. Otherwise why call it a *future*?'
51. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 84.
52. *Ibid.* p. 93.
53. *Ibid.* p. 34.
54. *Ibid.* p. 128: 'If Hume's problem woke Kant from his dogmatic slumber, we can only hope that the problem of ancestry succeeds in waking us from our correlationist slumber, by enjoining us to reconcile thought and absolute.'
55. Compare the interpretation of Wittgenstein in Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 118–19: '[Wittgenstein's] philosophy provides, one might say, an anthropological, or even anthropomorphic, view of necessity; and that can be disappointing; as if it is not really necessity which he has given an anthropological view of. As though if the *a priori* has a history it cannot really be the *a priori* in question. – "But something can be necessary whatever we happen to take as, or believe to be, necessary".'
56. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A112.

57. Compare Merleau-Ponty on the world: 'the contingency of the world should be understood neither as a lesser being, a gap in the tissue of necessary being, a threat to rationality, nor as a problem to be resolved as soon as possible through the discovery of some deeper necessity. This is an ontic contingency, or contingency within the world. Ontological contingency or the contingency of the world itself, being radical, is on the contrary what establishes once and for all our idea of truth. The world is the real, of which the necessary and the possible are merely provinces' (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 459).
58. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Avii.
59. Meillassoux thinks that, for Kant, the forms of cognition are somehow factual, but his thought is incomplete: he includes space and time, but does not specify why they are factual; he omits the ideas of reason entirely; and he includes the categories, but denies falsely that they are deducible. See Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 38.
60. *Ibid.* p. 115.
61. *Ibid.* p. 118.
62. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxvi. See Franks, *All or Nothing*, pp. 159–60.
63. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B274.
64. Harman similarly misses this point: '[Meillassoux] rightly adds that despite Kant's famous claim to have performed a "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy, he is actually guilty of the opposite: a "Ptolemaic Counter-Revolution". For whereas Copernicus removed humans from the center of the world by putting the earth in motion, Kant's insistence that reality revolves around the conditions of our knowing it makes a better match with Ptolemy's ancient geocentric astronomy.' Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 10; compare pp. 51–2.
65. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 120.
66. *Ibid.* p. 119.
67. Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 97–9.
68. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A277–8/B333–4: 'If the complaints "That we have no insight into the inner in things" are to mean that we do not understand through pure reason what the things that appear to us might be in themselves, then they are entirely improper and irrational; for they would have us be able to cognize things, thus intuit them, even without senses, consequently they would have it that we have a faculty of cognition entirely distinct from the human not merely in degree but even in intuition and kind.'
69. Alain Badiou, 'Preface', in Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. vii.