

ABSTRACT

TITLE: BEYOND FINITUDE: EXPLORATIONS IN SPECULATIVE REALISMS AND MATERIALISMS

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The publication of the English translation of Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude: An Essay in the Necessity of Contingency* in 2009 arguably marked the genesis of a new movement in continental philosophy: speculative realism and materialism. Meillassoux identifies himself as a materialist of the speculative variety. In *After Finitude*, Meillassoux makes two central philosophical claims which are as follows:

- The influence of Immanuel Kant and Kantian transcendental idealism on subsequent philosophy transformed the key question of enquiry regarding ontology from 'what is the nature of reality?' to 'what best mediates the access to reality?' Meillassoux describes this trend as correlationism, which states that 'to be is to be a given', or to be, is to be a correlate. Reality-in-itself cannot be accessed, and the phenomenal realm is accessed through the mediation of *a priori*, mental forms (for Kant), which gave rise to other correlationist philosophies, which states variously that reality is accessed or 'constructed' by the mediation of language, consciousness or historically situated culture. Meillassoux's first aim is to counter Kantian transcendental idealism and the later correlationist philosophies through an elaboration of the arguments for the materializing of the mind and the transcendental categories of understanding of Kant.

- Correlationism, or the idea that reality-in-itself cannot be accessed and that all knowledge is mediated by consciousness or mind or *a priori* mental categories or language, in assigning central importance to mediation challenges metaphysical concepts such as the uncaused Absolute, the principle of sufficient reason and real or causal necessity. Meillassoux argues that correlationism's challenge to metaphysics does not consist in refuting the existence of metaphysical entities but of stating that insofar as all knowledge of reality is mediated, and since reality-in-itself cannot be accessed, it cannot be known for certain whether metaphysical absolutes which are necessary beings exist or not. This correlationist uncertainty regarding the status of metaphysical concepts is called facticity by Meillassoux. In order to challenge necessity, he posits arguments for absolutizing the correlationist uncertainty regarding the status of metaphysical entities or facticity which entails stating that it is certain that necessary beings cannot exist, and that the uncertainty is not of knowledge (regarding metaphysical entities) but of reality. Everything extant in the physical or natural realm exists contingently.

Meillassoux is, therefore, a speculative materialist; he dwells on and draws from schools such as materialism and realism to formulate his speculative counters to these correlationist and metaphysical problems but eventually makes a sharp break from both traditional materialism and scientific realism. The aim of this dissertation is to critically examine how Meillassoux's speculative materialism as elaborated in *After Finitude*, differs from materialism and realism, and consequently, the contradictions to which it gives rise.