

Fear of Reality: On Realism and Infra-Realism

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ABSTRACT

Two different sorts of claims are often conflated under the name “realism”: (a) that a world exists outside the mind, and (b) that we can gain knowledge of that world. As recent examples of such conflation we consider Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude* from the continental tradition and Paul Boghossian’s *Fear of Knowledge* from mainstream analytic philosophy. These authors seem less interested in reality per se than in promoting mathematics and natural science, respectively, as exemplary means of reaching it. Boghossian implies further that “real” means “untainted by human construction,” neglecting to note that society or literature have a genuine autonomous depth despite being causally dependent on humans. In this way, Boghossian joins the art critic Michael Fried in falling into what we might call an “antitheatrical fallacy.” In closing, the article defends an “infra-realism” in which the real is always a surplus beyond possible knowledge of it, and traces this position to no less a figure than Socrates. Only infra-realism can avoid the lapse into Meno’s Paradox found in realisms of knowledge such as those of Meillassoux and Boghossian.

This article considers an important but often neglected distinction between (a) realism as a theory of the autonomous existence of the world and (b) realism as a theory of our ability to *know* that world. I hold that these positions are ultimately incompatible, and that Realism A must be chosen over Realism B. Hence ontological realism takes precedence over the problem of knowledge, and even requires that this problem be reformulated in a way that runs counter to how scientific knowledge is usually held to function. As a further consequence, we will see that whatever makes human beings unique by contrast with animals, plants, and stones must not prematurely be built into the very foundations of ontology. That is to say, whatever the special capabilities of human thought may be, there is no justification for viewing such thought as *necessarily* different in some radical way from physical matter or other modes of being. Here I refer not just to the overt taxonomical dualism between thinking and extended substance found in Descartes, but to any philosophy which holds that the relation between thought and world must be utterly different in kind from the relation between any two nonhuman entities.¹ Another way of putting it is that we must endorse the existence of Brentano’s “immanent” objects without accepting his taxonomical assumption that such objects belong only to the sphere of human

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psychology and never to physical reality in general.² And furthermore, the danger that such a move leads inexorably to panpsychism is overrated.

En route to these conclusions, we will also see what is wrong with two separate but closely related arguments that philosophy needs to be based on some minimal absolute knowledge-claim in order to avoid performative contradiction. As luck would have it, these familiar but newly retooled arguments are found in perhaps the leading continental and analytic manifestoes for a new realism. Quentin Meillassoux deploys what he calls “the correlationist circle” to argue that we cannot think the unthought without turning it into a thought, so that any straightforward or “naïve” realism founders on the rock of German Idealism. Accordingly, Meillassoux is compelled to offer a somewhat extravagant indirect proof of realism.³ Paul Boghossian, for his part, salutes the equally established argument that we cannot claim there are no absolute truths, since this amounts to claiming that there are *absolutely* no absolute truths: a manifestly self-destructive position.⁴

Accordingly, both Meillassoux and Boghossian are quick to align themselves with the knowledge-centered brand of realism specified above as Realism B. It is in this spirit that Meillassoux tells us: “I call ‘realism’ every position that claims to accede to an absolute reality”—not every position that claims the *existence* of an absolute reality, mind you, but every position that claims further to *reach* that reality.⁵ Boghossian expresses a similar thought in the form of a rhetorical question: “Indeed, what would be the use of an absolutism about . . . truths which combined that absolutism with the affirmation that those truths are necessarily inaccessible to us?”⁶ For these two authors as for so many others, the successful knowledge-gathering of Realism B is *the whole point* of realism. Since this is admittedly what most people mean by “realism,” let’s concede that word to Meillassoux and Boghossian for now. By contrast, the proposed Realism A of a reality that cannot be converted into knowledge might sound like an empty form of negative theology that leaves relativism unchallenged.⁷ Since this position aims at a real that somehow flies under the radar of knowledge, let’s call it “Infra-Realism”—a name used so far only by a Hispanophone literary movement, and thus conveniently devoid of philosophical baggage. My claim is that Infra-Realism is the only pertinent sort, for insofar as mainstream Realism holds that reality can be converted into knowledge under the right conditions, it is actually a flagrant form of idealism.

1. MEILLASSOUX’S REALISM

Frank defenses of either realism or antirealism have been respectable options in analytic philosophy for most of its history. In the continental tradition, the situation has always been different. Here the realism/antirealism dispute has generally been viewed as a clumsy pseudoproblem, largely as a result of Husserl’s and Heidegger’s claims to stand beyond it. For Husserlian phenomenology, the intentional structure of consciousness entails that we are always already outside our minds in aiming at intentional objects; for Heidegger, human *Dasein* is always already thrown into a world and thus never exists apart from that world. Both positions are belated echoes of Brentano’s claim that all human comportment has an intentional object at which it aims.⁸ Yet the ontological status of these intentional objects in Brentano’s work remains unclear. What is their relation to possible real correlates outside the mind,

assuming that such real objects exist at all? And what about intentional objects that seem not to be real in the usual sense: Sherlock Holmes, unicorns, or the spiraling flower-patterns witnessed by the drug abuser? These sorts of issues were the topic of intense discussion among Brentano's students in the 1890s,⁹ but the most famous thinkers in this lineage (Husserl and Heidegger) adopted tacitly idealist resolutions that they mistook for fresh solutions *beyond* realism and idealism. For Husserl objects are always the correlate of an intentional act, or at least of a *possible* intentional act. For Heidegger, entities are always either present-at-hand in consciousness or are the correlate of an unconscious background use of equipment. This situation did not change among the later French phenomenologists, who generally pushed even further in an idealist direction. A good example is Maurice Merleau-Ponty's catchy but derivative and inadequate slogan: "there is *for us* an *in-itself*."¹⁰ Another is Jacques Derrida's brutally idealist credo that "fundamentally nothing escapes the movement of the signifier and . . . in the last instance, the difference between signified and signifier is *nothing*."¹¹ The usual attempts by Derrideans to finesse such statements always culminate in the usual continental dismissals of the realism/antirealism dispute, thereby sealing the case against their champion.

Only recently has continental realism come to seem like a feasible option. At present, the Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris seems to be the earliest continentally trained thinker who took a candidly realist position, which he did as far back as the early 1990s.¹² A later wave of continental realism was perhaps triggered by two books published in 2002: Manuel DeLanda's *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* and my own *Tool-Being*.¹³ But here we will focus on Meillassoux, whose 2006 debut *After Finitude* has exerted considerable influence on the current generation of graduate students. This is the book in which Meillassoux coined the term "correlationism" as a diagnosis of recent continental philosophy. Rather than face the question of realism directly, the continental tradition has adopted the vague default position of asserting that we cannot think of humans without the world or the world without humans, but only of a primordial correlation or *rapport* between the two. Beginning in 2007 the Speculative Realism movement in continental philosophy was catalyzed by this critique of correlationism, and regarded itself as constrained by a reality independent of the mind.¹⁴

It was probably Markus Gabriel who first noticed the striking parallels between Meillassoux's *After Finitude* and Boghossian's *Fear of Knowledge*.¹⁵ Both were published in 2006, and both mount brief but powerful assaults on the finitude (Meillassoux) or relativity of knowledge (Boghossian). Yet while Meillassoux and Boghossian each hopes to put an end to the fashionably proclaimed limits on human knowledge, I will argue that their shared crusade against finitude and relativism ends in a tacit support of idealism. The reason is that both are too quick to identify the existence of the real with our ability to know it, and in this way they give realism an initial epistemic twist from which it can never hope to recover. I will start with Meillassoux's highly unorthodox model of epistemic realism and follow with an account of Boghossian's less speculative version.

In a continental context in which the word "realism" had rarely been spoken with a straight face, the ostensible return to realism in Meillassoux's *After Finitude* sparked

controversy that continues to this day. His most famous term is surely “correlationism,” a name for philosophies that sidestep the realism/antirealism question altogether in favor of a purportedly more sophisticated alternative. For correlationism, philosophy is forbidden from speaking of either world or thought in isolation, demanding instead that they always be considered as a pair. The theme is addressed in the early pages of the book:

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 [that] maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined. (*After Finitude* 5; hereafter AF)¹⁶

Phenomenologists often insist that they are not idealists, insofar as intentionality entails that the mind is “always already outside itself” in aiming at objects. Yet it is quite clear that Husserl’s motto “to the things themselves” has nothing to do with things-in-themselves in the realist sense, since Husserl bars from consideration any entity that is not (at least potentially) the target of some observing consciousness. Nor does Meillassoux think that Heidegger escapes correlationism any better:

The notion of *Ereignis*, which is central to the later Heidegger, remains faithful to the correlationist exigency inherited from Kant and continued in Husserlian phenomenology, for the “co-proprietation” which constitutes *Ereignis* means that neither being nor man can be posited as subsisting “in-themselves” . . . [since] both terms of the appropriation are originally constituted through their reciprocal relation. (AF 8)

Whether or not this reading of Heidegger is correct, and whether or not it also applies to his earlier period, the point is that Meillassoux thinks correlationism must be avoided, whether or not Heidegger truly exemplifies it.

With respect to the natural sciences, the correlationist tries to avoid any “naïve realist” reception of scientific results. For example, the sciences tell us that the universe originated 13.5 billion years ago, the earth 4.56 billion years, life on earth 3.5 billion, and humankind a mere 2 million years before the present day (AF 9). But since the correlationist cannot allow for the objective existence of facts outside the thought-world correlate, he or she will have to contort scientific statements to say things like: “the universe originated 13.5 billion years ago—for us.” By contrast with such an oblique outlook, Meillassoux might seem to endorse the spontaneous realism of the natural sciences. Readers often find such an endorsement in Meillassoux’s introduction of the terms “ancestrality” and “arche-fossil”:

I will call ‘ancestral’ any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species—or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth. I will call

‘arche-fossil’ . . . materials indicating the existence of an ancestral reality or event; one that is anterior to terrestrial life. (AF 10)

Indeed, this is how Meillassoux’s argument is usually interpreted by friend and foe alike: as an appeal to scientific realism against the anthropocentric sophistries of correlationism. We might note that Christopher Norris, by no means a great admirer of Meillassoux, is nonetheless pleased by his discussion of ancestry and the arche-fossil, which Norris takes “to offer a standing refutation of the basic anti-realist idea that truth is coextensive with the scope and limits of attainable human knowledge”¹⁷ In a review of a different work by Norris, John McCumber also follows Norris’s line that the “first part [of *After Finitude*] . . . argues from the case of fossils that there are facts independent of our minds.”¹⁸ At times even Meillassoux’s own patron and former teacher, the prominent continental philosopher Alain Badiou, reads his ex-student as a straightforward scientific realist:

this is what Quentin Meillassoux calls “the fossil’s argument”: the irrefutable materialist argument that interrupts the idealist (and empiricist) apparatus of “consciousness” and “the object.” The world of the dinosaurs existed . . . millions of years before it could be a question of a consciousness or a subject To deny this point is to flaunt a rampant idealist axiomatic.¹⁹

The point missed by Norris, McCumber, and even the well-positioned Badiou is that Meillassoux is by no means a straightforward realist. His mention of the arche-fossil is not designed as an “argument,” but merely points to a congenital tension between correlationism and science. Far from shouting aloud the priority of science, *After Finitude* employs a lengthy and intricate argument to resolve the tension just described—in my view unsuccessfully. Meillassoux admires correlationism at least as much as he admires science, and insists as clearly as possible that we take the correlationist position seriously.

We might summarize the correlationist argument as follows: any attempt to think a reality outside thought fails, since by thinking the unthought, we automatically convert it into a thought. Therefore, we remain within the closed circle of thought. Meillassoux calls this argument “the correlationist circle” (AF 5). The surprising thing is that, unlike most realists worthy of the name, Meillassoux finds this argument compelling. Though he defends the absolute against every form of finitude or cultural relativism, he thinks this can only be done by passing through the correlationist circle rather than dismissing it:

[must we] once again become pre-critical philosophers, or . . . [must we] 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 the heirs of Kantianism. (AF 28–29)

His admiration for the correlationist argument was stated even more bluntly in his London lecture of April 2007:

By the term “correlationism” I also wanted to exhibit . . . —I insist on this point—the exceptional *strength* of this argumentation, apparently and desperately implacable. Correlationism rests on an argument as simple as it is powerful, and which can be formulated in the following way: No X without givenness of X, and no theory about X without a positing of X. If you speak about something, you speak about something that is given to you, and posited by you. Consequently, the sentence: “X is,” means: “X is the correlate of thinking” in a Cartesian sense. That is: X is the correlate of an affection, or a perception, or a conception, or of any subjective act. To be is to be a correlate, a term of a correlation.²⁰

To repeat, the reason the arche-fossil is introduced in *After Finitude* is not to show that science is marvelous and correlationism ridiculous, as in the interpretations of Norris, McCumber, and Badiou. Quite the contrary: the passages in question are designed to show that we must adhere to the supposed power of the correlationist argument, even while trying to push it so far that it yields some sort of ontological absolute rather than a mere epistemological limit.

We should also note that he distinguishes between two kinds of correlationism: “a ‘weak’ model, which is that of Kant, and a ‘strong’ model, which seems to be dominant today, even if it is never explicitly thematized as such” (AF 30). We know that for Kant, and thus for weak correlationism, “the thing-in-itself exists, otherwise there would be appearances without that which appears, which for Kant is contradictory” (AF 31). In other words, what Meillassoux calls “weak correlationism” does not accept the argument of the correlational circle at all, since weak correlationism finds no contradiction in thinking what is beyond thought, and only denies any claim to *know* it. The thing-in-itself is perfectly conceivable for weak correlationism. By contrast, strong correlationism “[contests] even this conceivability” (AF 66). This is the path beyond Kant normally associated with German Idealism, along with this movement’s echo in present-day crypto-idealist “materialists” such as Slavoj Žižek.²¹ Yet while Meillassoux openly admires the argument of the correlationist circle, and thus celebrates a supposed escape from Kant’s thing-in-itself, he claims to avoid any slide into outright idealism. How so? Both the strong correlationist and the idealist agree that we cannot think what lies beyond thought without turning it into a thought, thereby immediately contradicting ourselves. But whereas the idealist concludes from this that what lies beyond thought is impossible, strong correlationists (and Meillassoux with them) counters that just because we cannot *think* what lies beyond thought does not mean that it is impossible for anything to *exist* beyond thought. But as I have explained elsewhere, this simply amounts to a contradictory double game.²² Namely, Meillassoux first renders the thing-in-itself *meaningless* by claiming that it is a performative contradiction to claim we can think what lies beyond thought. But then second, in a contrary gesture, he relies on the *meaningfulness* of the thing-in-itself to disempower idealism’s sweeping claim that nothing can exist except as a

correlate of thought. That is to say, Meillassoux begins in the strong correlationist camp, positioning himself midway between Kantian weak correlationism and Hegelian idealism. He then tries to flip strong correlationism into his own new position, “speculative materialism,” by inverting the strong correlationist argument that we cannot be sure of what lies beyond the correlate into a new argument that we *can* be sure that anything *could* be different from how it is, and therefore that the world itself is marked by a hypercontingency in which the laws of nature could change at any moment for no reason whatsoever. This argument has been dealt with extensively in the literature on *After Finitude*, and need not concern us here. Since we are more interested in what sort of “realism” Meillassoux ends up with, we will focus on his results rather than his means of arriving at them.

In Meillassoux’s philosophy the difference between the for-us and the in-itself is essentially the difference between the sensible and the intellectual, with the latter defined more precisely as the *mathematizable*. As he puts it:

all those aspects of the object that can be formulated in mathematical terms can be meaningfully conceived as properties of the object in itself. All those aspects of the object that can give rise to a mathematical thought . . . rather than to a perception or sensation can be meaningfully turned into properties of the thing not only as it is with me, but also as it is without me.

[O]n the one hand, we acknowledge that the sensible only exists as a subject’s relation to the world; but on the other hand, we maintain that the mathematizable properties of the object are exempt from the constraint of such a relation, and that they are effectively in the object in the way in which I conceive them, whether I am in relation with this object or not. (AF 3)

What we learn from this is that Meillassoux’s conception of the thing-in-itself is not of something unknowable (as for Kant), but is simply a *temporal* in-itself that is in principle exhaustively knowable, but which simply might continue to endure even if all humans become extinct. In the passages just cited, Meillassoux describes the mathematizable in-itself as nonrelational, in the sense that they exist outside their relations to us. But notice that his things-in-themselves remain relational, insofar as they are completely isomorphic with our mathematizing grasp of them. Meillassoux would be dismissive of this charge, since he claims that he is no Pythagorean: mathematics is not the thing-in-itself, but only *refers* to the thing-in-itself (AF 12). Thus, Meillassoux would apparently agree if we remark that a perfect mathematical model of a dog is not itself a dog, since the model does not run around barking and hunting. It will not do to say that this is obvious and that no one ever made such an absurd claim. The point is not that anyone *explicitly claims* that a mathematically modeled dog is no different from a real dog; instead, the point is that mathematicistic philosophies like Meillassoux have a hard time explaining the difference between real things and the models we make of them. And predictably enough, Meillassoux’s 2012 Berlin lecture is left with nothing more than a commonsensical distinction between mathematically conceived primary qualities on one side and something called “dead

matter” on the other.²³ Matter thus serves as an empty, formless receptacle capable of receiving forms that the mind (at least in principle) can perfectly extract in mathematical form. All it takes to turn the mathematical dog into a real one is to stamp the mathematical form into dead matter, though it is unclear whether this is the task of God or some other entity.

In other words, Meillassoux blames perception for being relational because it delivers qualities (such as flavor, color, and odor) that only exist in our presence and that cannot possibly outlive us. Meanwhile, he praises mathematical understanding for referring to properties of the thing that are able to outlast the human lifespan. But what makes something truly nonrelational and hence autonomous is not merely that it outlives us, but that it is irreducible to our contact with it even while we are still alive and staring it directly in the face. For Meillassoux there is no difference between the dog-form in our minds and the dog-form in the dog; the latter’s incarnation in matter is the sole difference between the two cases. Form is completely penetrable to the intellect, with only the defects of matter and sensibility blocking us from transparent access to the essence of all things. Part medieval Thomism and part seventeenth-century rationalism, this basically intellectualist standpoint does not take the ignorance of Socrates seriously enough. For what makes us unable to access entities directly and transparently is not the unfortunate fact that humans have senses and objects are material rather than just intellectual. Instead, the form of the dog or tree themselves can never be fully commensurate with the form of the dog or tree insofar as we think them.

This touches a great deal on the old distinction between substantial and accidental forms, or between substance and relation, resurrected by Francisco Suárez and then G.W. Leibniz after it fell into late medieval disrepute. But perhaps the most contemporary way to defend this distinction is to consider why the usual reading of Heidegger’s tool-analysis is in fact a misreading.²⁴ As first described in his 1919 Freiburg lecture course,²⁵ but first published in *Being and Time*,²⁶ Heidegger objects to Husserlian phenomenology primarily because (contra Husserl) the presence of something in consciousness is *not* the usual state of things. As Heidegger shows with a range of examples, the primary way of dealing with things is simply *relying* on them as a background taken for granted. Tools or equipment are the case he considers in most detail: the hammer tends to disappear into the work we do with it, until it malfunctions and becomes explicitly present. There are numerous problems with the way the tool-analysis is usually interpreted, but two in particular are of interest to us here. First, it is usually said that the tool-analysis describes a passage from implicit to explicit: previously I did not realize that the hammer-head was cracked, but when it exploded in my hands, this fact became consciously visible to me. The problem with this reading is that it assumes a commensurability between the crack itself and the presence of the crack in consciousness, even though conscious thought about the crack does not exhaust its reality any more than unknowing use of a cracked hammer does. Second, it is also usually said that Heidegger teaches us that all theory is grounded in praxis, with a dark background of use preceding a later cognitive awareness. The problem here is that neither theory *nor* praxis makes direct contact with the things. Einstein contemplating gravity presumably has a better grasp on it than

does a monkey making use of gravity to knock bananas to the ground, but in both cases gravity itself stubbornly resists our use of it or contemplation of it, neither of which ever really gets us to the bottom of things, even if some relations to gravity can be said to be “closer” to the truth in ways that need not concern us here.

The relevance of these points to Meillassoux’s argument should be clear enough. First we see that Meillassoux, like mainstream readers of Heidegger, thinks that the form of a thing can easily be translated from implicit to explicit once we take note of it. Here there is none of the quantum theorist’s principle that the thing measured (i.e., the thing in relation) is not the same as the thing itself, a principle whose implications may go well beyond physics. Second, whereas Heidegger might seem to hold (though I think this reading is a bad one) that our direct relation to things is pragmatic while the cognitive relation is derivative, Meillassoux like Husserl simply opts for the reverse, making the cognitive relation to things the one that is capable of seizing on their most essential qualities. But in fact, both the pragmatic and cognitive relation to things are *relations*, and thus are guaranteed to be *translations* of the things themselves, just as the measurement of either the position or momentum of a particle is at best a translation of the particle’s prior statistical indeterminacy.

We are now ready to conclude this opening section. We have seen that what Meillassoux means by “realism” is not primarily the *existence* of the real, but the mathematical *knowability* of it. Indeed, he much prefers the word “materialism” to realism, by which he simply means that there must be a Cartesian dichotomy between things that think (humans) and things that do not (dead matter). What is real in the things, though it is always fused with “dead matter,” is that which is cut to the measure of knowledge. There is no problem translating the real into the known; this can be done without distortion or energy loss of any sort. This is why I claim that Meillassoux’s supposed realism is not ontological, but merely epistemic. He defeats finitude and relativism only at the price of stumbling into idealism: which is the genuine enemy of the real even more than relativism.

2. BOGHOSSIAN’S REALISM

Though Meillassoux works in the continental European tradition of philosophy and Boghossian is the architect of the world’s top-ranked analytic philosophy department, there is more than a passing resemblance between *After Finitude* and *Fear of Knowledge*. Both are brief and lucidly written, both were published in 2006, and both combat the purported menace of antirealist theories of knowledge. As Gabriel notes, there is even a similarity of argument joining the two authors: “Both Meillassoux and Boghossian have recently made a compelling case that no position in ontology or epistemology can avoid acknowledging absolute facts: Something is the case regardless of whether we acknowledge it or not, for even if almost all facts were interest-relative, this fact would not itself be interest-relative.”²⁷ Despite these similarities, it is nonetheless difficult to imagine either Meillassoux or Boghossian fully appreciating the other’s book. For whereas Meillassoux’s philosophy is wildly speculative in flavor, Boghossian is a more mainstream sort of realist. This stylistic difference stems from a substantive one. Meillassoux regards the correlationist circle (“we cannot think the unthought without turning it into a thought”) as a powerful argument that must be defused as

carefully as an unexploded bomb in the city center. By contrast, Boghossian shows every sign of confidence in our ability to access the world directly, and no sign at all of following Meillassoux's circuitous path to the world by way of the correlationist circle.

As suggested by the title of his book, Boghossian's strategic enemy is the relativist or constructivist thesis that "there are 'many equally valid ways of viewing the world,' with science being just one of them" (*Fear of Knowledge 2*; hereafter, FK). He is hardly alone in this fight, for despite the recent prevalence of constructivist ideas in the humanities and social sciences, "there is one humanities discipline in which their hold is actually quite weak, and that is in philosophy itself, at least as it is practiced within the mainstream of analytic philosophy departments within the English-speaking world" (FK 7). As already seen, what Boghossian advocates instead of constructivism is not the sort of highly speculative realism that Meillassoux defends. Instead, Boghossian (like so many analytic philosophers) is primarily concerned with defending the exemplary cognitive status of *science*: "for if science weren't privileged, we might well have to accord as much credibility to archaeology as to Zuni creationism, as much credibility to evolution as to Christian creationism" (FK 4–5). The stakes here are high indeed, since if science is not as privileged as we think, then "we have fundamentally misconceived the principles by which society ought to be organized" (FK 5). Due to the booming prominence of constructivist ideas, we have witnessed "a growing alienation of academic philosophy from the rest of the humanities and social sciences, leading to levels of acrimony and tension on American campuses that have prompted the label 'Science Wars'" (FK 8). Boghossian's concern to defend the central status of *science* explains the title of his book: "Why this fear of knowledge? Whence this felt need to protect against its deliverances?" (FK 130) For as opposed to some relativist defense of Zuni or Christian creationism,

the intuitive view [i.e., the view Boghossian finds obviously correct] is that there is a way things are that is independent of human perception, *and* that we are capable of arriving at belief about how things are that is objectively reasonable, binding on anyone capable of appreciating the relevant evidence regardless of their social or cultural perspective. (FK 130–31; emphasis added)

Or stated differently, "whenever we confidently judge that some belief is justified on the basis of a given piece of information, we are tacitly assuming that such facts are not only knowable but that they are known" (FK 76).

For those of us raised in an academic world where relativist and constructivist views are taken for established wisdom, there is always something refreshing about defenses of scientific realism. When pushed far enough, constructivist claims often border on the vacuous. In an example given by Boghossian himself, it can feel rather forced to cling to relativism in cases such as the number of moons of Jupiter. If someone named Margo believes that Jupiter has sixteen moons, "Margo's belief is true if and only if it is a *fact* that Jupiter has sixteen moons," (FK 11) and yet "Jupiter, it turns out, has over thirty moons" (FK 12). Any defense of a claim that Jupiter's number of moons is individually or culturally constructed would seem rather facile. There is even a certain element of bad faith in extreme forms of

constructivism: as Ferraris often observes, a constructivist who falls ill does not choose randomly from many “equally valid” theories of medicine, but immediately seeks the best medical care available according to widely recognized principles of medicine. All of this lends Boghossian’s argument the combined moral authority of scientific method and everyday sincere human practice. Nonetheless, I hold that there are two separate problems with Boghossian’s standpoint: (1) He is too quick to elide the difference between justification and truth. (2) He adheres to a taxonomical distinction in which the objects of *nature* are unconstructed while the objects of *culture* are constructed. I will briefly try to show the problems with each of these views.

We have seen that Boghossian is concerned not just with reality, but with our ability to know it. Just as one would hope from a book entitled *Fear of Knowledge*, he is clear as can be in his definition of knowledge: “according to the standard, widely accepted Platonic definition of knowledge,” we have knowledge in those cases where our belief “is both justified and true” (FK 15). The problem here is the largely unaddressed gap between justification and truth. On one level Boghossian is well aware of this gap, and even embraces it as the core principle of scientific fallibilism: “one can have good reasons to believe something false. The evidence available to pre-Aristotelian Greeks made it rational for them to believe that earth was flat, even though as we may now be said to know, it is round” (FK 15). Or again,

reasons are defeasible: one can have good reasons to believe something at one time and then, as a result of further information, cease to have good reasons to believe that proposition at a later time. The pre-Aristotelian Greeks justifiably believed earth to be flat; we justifiably believe it to be round. (FK 15; emphasis removed)

But it is precisely this admirable fallibilism that brings suspicion upon Boghossian’s apparent commitment to *knowledge*. For in light of the fallibilist principle that knowledge-claims are always subject to revision based on new evidence, if knowledge is justified true belief, then we only ever have access to the “justified” part and never to the “true” part. That is why, throughout the book, we find Boghossian asking us to *assume for the sake of argument* that a given belief is true. For example: “The evidence available to pre-Aristotelian Greeks made it rational for them to believe that [the] earth was flat, even though *as we may now be said to know*, it is round” (FK 15; emphasis added). Or this passage: “Consider something that we now take ourselves to know—for example, that dinosaurs once roamed the earth—and *suppose that we actually know it*” (FK 19; emphasis added).

I cite such examples not as an empty skeptical quibble about how any of our current beliefs might eventually turn out to be wrong. The situation is more serious than this. For given the fallibility of our knowledge, which lies at the heart of Boghossian’s scientific world-view, it is impossible to imagine any scientific discovery that he would not need to preface with such qualifiers: “as we may now be said to know,” or “suppose that we actually know it.” It was not so long ago that Margo would have seemed correct about the sixteen moons of Jupiter, or that a top-flight

scientist might easily (and wrongly) have exclaimed as follows: “Consider something that we now take ourselves to know—for example, that dinosaurs were *reptiles*—and suppose that we actually know it.” Prior to James Chadwick’s 1932 discovery of the neutron, we might have heard physicists say this: “Consider something that we now take ourselves to know—for example, that atoms consist of protons and electrons—and suppose that we actually know it.” Given that we can never be sure of possessing knowledge (and if this is not the chief contribution of Socrates to philosophy, then I do not know what is) we can even imagine a better title for Boghossian’s book: *Fear of Justified True Belief*, a title far less compelling but perhaps more revealing than the bolder actual title.

At bottom, Boghossian is not really claiming that there is knowledge and we should govern our lives by it, but that there is scientifically justified belief and that we should govern our lives by it. He is surely right that some beliefs are “closer” (FK 31) to the truth than others, since we do not find that all of our opinions are equally valid or useful, yet the question of what the word “closer” means remains cloudy indeed. And moreover, Boghossian is wrong to imply at the end of his book that the oppressed cannot criticize the powerful without *knowledge*. If this were true then the future of political liberation would be in dire straits, since claims that one is being politically oppressed are every bit as fallible as scientific claims. All that political liberation really needs is the ability to appeal to some *reality* of human rights or dignity beyond the current imperfect state of human affairs. If we want to say that scientists can be wrong about Jupiter’s moons, then we must also admit that the protestors in Cairo’s Tahrir Square in 2011 might have been wrong about Egypt’s best path forward. If their case can seem so compelling, this is not because of some nonexistent political “knowledge” on the Cairo streets, but because of a “justified” belief that the then-operative political system was not doing anyone justice. But all this simply teaches once more the lesson of Plato’s *Meno*: there is no knowledge and hence no teacher, and thus true opinion is the best that humans can hope for. What saves this from being a trite, middle-aged life lesson about never being too sure of one’s beliefs? That will be one of the topics for the final section of this article. But first there is something else we need to discuss.

I said above that the second problem with Boghossian’s standpoint is his *taxonomical* view that natural facts are nonconstructed but cultural facts are constructed. We can all assent to Boghossian’s harmless remark that “the fact that slurping your noodles is rude is not a universal fact: it holds in the [United States] but not in Japan” (FK 13). But he goes further than this, suggesting that *all* facts involving human society are socially constructed, whereas the opposite is true of nature. For instance: “In the case of Jupiter’s having over thirty moons, we can go further . . . [it] looks to be completely *mind-independent*: it would have obtained even if human beings had never existed” (FK 13). Yet “the fact that there is money in the world is not a mind-independent fact—money could not have existed without persons and their intentions to exchange goods with one another” (FK 13). But here Boghossian, like so many others, conflates two entirely different issues: whether or not humans were involved in the causal origins of a thing, and whether or not that thing is independent of the human understanding of it. DeLanda, one of the great realists of recent continental

philosophy, deals with this issue wonderfully in the opening pages of *A New Philosophy of Society*.²⁸ What DeLanda seeks here is a realist theory of society, by which he means a theory of society in its reality apart from us. But how is this possible, given that human society is inherently constructed by humans? DeLanda answers this rhetorical question by drawing an important distinction. While on a causal level it is obviously true that human society was constructed by humans, this does not entail that human society is equivalent to what humans say or know about it. Statements in sociology, economics, history, or art criticism are every bit as fallible as those in the natural sciences, even if they are often more difficult to test with empirical precision. Thus Boghossian is wrong to claim that “there would . . . be precious little point in writing a book revealing that facts about money or citizenship are cultural constructs, for this much would be obvious” (FK 18). While I believe that such a book would be wrong, it would by no means be trivial: the point of such a book would not be that humans created society and money, but that all claims about society and money are “equally valid,” a view that Boghossian and I would immediately agree in rejecting.

Why is any of this important? By assuming in advance that money and citizenship are socially constructed (which is true causally but not ontologically) while the number of moons of Jupiter is *not* socially constructed, he effectively gives the natural sciences a higher-class status in the forward progress of human inquiry. Research on money or citizenship will always seem somewhat tainted due to the contamination brought about by their human origin. In a way this is simply the pessimistic inversion of Giambattista Vico’s view that since humans created society but not nature we can also *know* society better than nature.²⁹ Obviously this is not always or even usually the case, and neither is Boghossian’s converse view. Against Vico, the causes of World War I are not inherently clearer than the causes of black holes. And against Boghossian, books such as Georg Simmel’s *Philosophy of Money* or Marx’s *Capital* must answer to the pressure of reality as much as any treatise on the wave-particle duality of light.³⁰ If someone approves of Simmel’s book, or Marx’s, then presumably this is because they think these authors shed light on the true nature of money, not because money is social constructed and therefore all diverse views on money have equal validity. Marxists in particular hold precisely the opposite view on this question.

Another example will prove unexpectedly helpful, this one drawn from the field of art criticism. During the generation of high modernism from roughly 1948–1963, the leading standpoint was that of the formalist critic Clement Greenberg.³¹ Among other things, Greenberg was devoted to the formalist (and in fact ontologically realist) principle that art is autonomous both from its sociopolitical and gallery context and from biographical facts about the artist. This formalist view remained central to Greenberg’s one-time disciple Michael Fried, who in 1967 wrote a scathing attack on the emerging minimalist style of Donald Judd and Robert Morris.³² This attack had two components that, as I see it, were wrongly conflated by Fried. In a first gesture, Fried rejected what he called the “literalism” of minimalist art. Rather than creating an artwork with a certain aesthetic depth beyond our personal encounter with it, the minimalists simply threw literal objects in our path in physical space: bare white

concrete blocks, or mere frame-like metallic solids affixed to a wall. In a second, given that there could be no autonomous depth to such objects, Fried assumed that their whole purpose must be to generate some sort of effect on the viewer: a strategy he called “theatricality,” and which he found just as lamentable as literalism, since he assumed that these two tendencies walked hand in hand.

Now, it seems to me that Fried on minimalist art makes essentially the inverse mistake of Boghossian on money and citizenship. For Boghossian, since money was created by humans then the study of money cannot have the same realist status as the study of Jupiter’s moons. Thus, any turn to realism must also mean a turn to natural science as a discourse privileged over anthropology and presumably art as well. For Fried, since presenting the literal surface properties of an object does not yet constitute art, any art relying on the theatrical involvement of the human observer must also not be art. This would entail the view that art would remain art even if all humans were exterminated, which is every bit as far-fetched as claiming that money remains money in a human-free world. Let’s coin the phrase “Anti-Theatrical Fallacy” to refer to theories, such as Fried’s and Boghossian’s, which hold that the only way to preserve reality is to remove all human contamination from it. The problem is as follows: there exists a very large class of real objects that require human entities as a component, just as organic chemicals require carbon as a component. There is little point imagining what it would be like to have politics, society, art, chess, or basketball without humans, just as there is little point imagining an organic chemistry without carbon. It does not follow that we cannot conduct rigorously realistic investigations of politics, society, art, chess, or basketball, any more than it follows that organic chemistry is hopelessly tainted by a “carbon-centric standpoint.” Just as special attention to carbon is the price of admission to organic chemistry, special attention to “theater” (i.e., human involvement) is the price of admission to human affairs, which do not thereby become irrevocably compromised by social constructionism. The root of the problem is that realism is always so severely on its guard against the human *observer*, as the one with relative standpoints that must be undercut by human-independent evidence, that it also becomes needlessly suspicious of the human as an *ingredient* in numerous situations. Thus it too quickly condemns the study of human affairs as somehow forever banished from realism, which becomes the exclusive province of the natural sciences.

3. THE INFRA-REALIST OUTLOOK

There is already such biodiversity of philosophical terms for different nuances of standpoint that one hesitates to release yet another term into the wild. But given that the word “realism” is so widely associated with the Boghossian/Meillassoux assumption that realism means our ability to *know* the real, a new term is in fact needed here. This is my reason for proposing Infra-Realism as a suitable term: it retains the worthy “realism” while adding the important caveat that we are dealing with a real located beneath all knowledge-claims, and indeed beneath any access to it at all. Just as virtue is never reached by Socrates’s or Meno’s various statements about it, so too the black hole, Higgs boson, copperhead snake, and *Pinus strobus* family of coniferous trees remain a permanent surplus beyond all of our claims to know them at any given

moment. This Infra-Realism does not entail a relativist free-for-all in which all viewpoints on everything are equally valid. What it does entail is a greater stress on fallibilism than we find even in the view of Boghossian, for whom the possibly incorrect character of any current knowledge-claim seems to have less weight than the obligation for everyone to follow whatever view seems most *justified* at any given moment. It also entails a more inclusive realism that does not disdain the cognitive status of the human sciences, art, and architecture simply because humans are causally linked to the very existence of these fields in a way that is obviously not true of astronomy.

If the slogan of Realism is “there is a real world, and it can be known,” the motto of Infra-Realism is “there is a real world, and it cannot be known.” The easy first reaction would be to call this a worthless insight, no better than a negative theology said to leave us empty-handed. The problem with this reaction is that it continues to ignore the achievement of Socrates, the ancestral hero of our discipline. Both etymologically and substantively, *philosophia* is neither wisdom nor ignorance but *love* of wisdom. As Socrates puts it, only a god has knowledge, and only an animal would be utterly ignorant. The human predicament is both to be and not to be in a state of wisdom. The contrary view would hold that there is either knowledge or ignorance and nothing in between, and thus no *philosophia*. This is essentially the position expressed in what is known as “Meno’s paradox,” though Meno himself credits it to the Sophists. According to this famous puzzle there is no point searching for anything, since you either have it or you do not have it. If you have it then there is no point searching for it, and if you do not have it then there is also no point searching for it, since you will not be able to recognize it when you find it. The argument is clearly feeble, Socrates demolishes it with little effort, and few take it seriously in this form today. Yet it remains effective even now in different, disguised forms.

One of those forms is the notion that philosophy must actually be grounded in some minimal form of *knowledge* if it is to escape being a mere fiesta of arbitrary proclamations. The topic arose earlier when we mentioned that Meillassoux and Boghossian are absolutely sure that there must be foundational principles for philosophy. In Meillassoux’s case it is the correlational circle: we cannot think the unthought without turning it into a thought. There is no thinking without givenness to thought. This circle is not just an initial problem that Meillassoux challenges himself to circumvent. Instead, his philosophical conclusions remain saturated with the correlationist starting point, for which nothing exceeds the scope of thought even if much of it either precedes or outlives human thought. In Boghossian’s case, as Gabriel noted, one cannot have a philosophy that denies the existence of knowledge. Why not? Because if someone says “there is no knowledge,” then this statement is either knowledge or it is not. And if it is not knowledge, then it is mere opinion and can safely be ignored. If it is knowledge, then the claim that there is no knowledge has obviously contradicted itself (FK 52–57).³³ The only solution is that there must be some form of knowledge. The lingering consequence for Boghossian is that his is a realism about *knowledge* rather than about the real, even though he admittedly cannot be sure of when something is true and when it is merely justified without being true. The mistake at the basis of both Meillassoux’s and Boghossian’s objections

is their shared Menoesque assumption that a philosophical view must either be knowledge or mere personal assertion, with no option in between. It is perhaps Alfred North Whitehead who has understood the stakes most clearly. As he tells us in *Process and Reality*: “after criticism, systems [of philosophy] do not exhibit mere illogicalities. They suffer from inadequacy and incoherence.”³⁴ More famously, Whitehead claims plausibly that “a system of philosophy is never refuted, it is only abandoned.”³⁵ And finally:

the primary method of mathematics is deduction; the primary method of philosophy [by contrast] is descriptive generalization. Under the influence of mathematics, deduction has been foisted upon philosophy as its standard method, instead of taking its true place as an essential auxiliary mode of verification whereby to test the scope of generalities.³⁶

The key to this passage is the phrase “descriptive generalization.” If someone says “truth is relative” or “truth is historically determined,” we can certainly always ask them if these statements themselves are merely relative or merely historically determined. As Boghossian notes:

relativists are prone to dismissing self-refutation arguments of this sort as clever bits of logical trickery that have no real bearing on the issues at hand. That attitude, I think, is a mistake. It is always a good idea to know how some very general view about truth, knowledge, or meaning applies to itself; and few things can be more damaging to a view than to discover that it is false *by its own lights*. (FK 53–54)

Meillassoux makes a similar complaint about those who avoid responding to the correlative circle argument by saying that it is simply boring and empty, and that we are better served if we ignore such petty logical tricks and move on instead to some “Rich Elsewhere” of interesting concrete truths.³⁷ Yet there are important problems with this way of looking at things. What Meillassoux fails to admit is that appeal to the “Rich Elsewhere” is not just a rhetorically evasive stunt, but an extremely powerful factor in how seriously a philosophy is taken.³⁸ If Parmenides no longer has many followers for his claim that “being is and non-being is not,” this is surely not due to any logical contradiction, since no contradiction is immediately obvious in the statement. Instead, Parmenidean ontology strikes us excessively abstract, as inadequate in accounting for the diversity of experience as we know it. What Boghossian fails to recognize is that basic philosophical statements such as “truth is relative” or “truth is historically determined” are neither knowledge nor mere assertion, but something more like Whitehead’s “descriptive generalization”—a general sense of what the truth should be like. Each of us is committed to certain tacit first principles of what philosophy ought to look like and how it ought to proceed, but we need not claim (whether consciously or not) that these first principles represent a form of knowledge. To cite Whitehead again: “the verification of a rationalistic scheme is to be sought in its general success, and not in the peculiar clarity, or initial clarity, of its

first principles.”³⁹ Or better yet, “the accurate expression of the final generalities is the goal of discussion and not its origin.”⁴⁰

Such attempts to claim that all philosophy must rest on some minimal grain of absolute knowledge therefore fail. The same holds for the fate of knowledge on other fronts: Meillassoux did not account for the difficulty of translation between primary qualities as active in the things and primary qualities as discerned by the mind; Boghossian did not grant sufficient importance to the tension between knowledge and justification. Reality and knowledge are in some ways opposite terms, since no human theoretical, cognitive, practical, perceptual, or sensible interaction with the things is capable of directly extracting the primary qualities of things and bringing them to the mind in transparent fashion. While this raises the problem of how we seem to gain some knowledge of the world, this is precisely the sort of problem worth philosophizing about rather than short-circuiting with a most un-Socratic attempt to replace the love of wisdom with knowledge itself.

Yet as hinted at the outset of this article, there is another, more troubling implication of the Infra-Realist line of thought. The usual way of expressing realism is to call it “the view that there is a world outside of human thought.” But this is only a small part of it. What realism really ought to mean is “the view that there is a world outside of any relation whatsoever.” Human thought is undoubtedly more rich and complex than the experience (if any) of billiard balls, yet these same billiard balls have no more capacity to touch one another’s features directly than does the human mind. We should consider here that there are at least *two* possible ways that the philosophy of Kant might be reversed. The first is the path of Meillassoux, following the German Idealists. According to this view, Kant was a great genius except for his silly archaic belief in the hidden things-in-themselves. If we simply note that to think things outside thought converts these things into a thought, then Kant is immediately flipped into the supposedly more advanced position of Fichte or Hegel. But there is another way to look at Kant, who not only defended the existence of things-in-themselves, but also mediated all relations through the central thought-world relation. For instance, we cannot talk about the collision of hailstones with a roof, but only about how this event is made present to us by way of the categories of the understanding and our pure intuition of space and time. If we were to reverse *this* aspect of Kant while retaining the things-in-themselves, we would have something more like “German Realism” than German Idealism. It would universally be the case that all objects (not just the mind, as for Brentano) make contact only with intentional objects, not real ones: that is to say, translations or caricatures of other objects, not real objects directly. It is admittedly difficult to persuade people to accept that there is no direct contact between thought and the world, no knowledge but only philosophy, and that direct causal contact between objects is just as impossible as direct human knowledge of the world. But these are the bullets that one must bite if we are to avoid *fear of reality*.

NOTES

1. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. D. Cress. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983). A similar assumption is made by Quentin Meillassoux in “Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Meaningless Sign,” trans. R. Mackay, unpublished Berlin lecture of April 20, 2012, quoted with permission of the author. Draft version available online at <http://oursecretblog.com/txt/QMpaprApr12.pdf>

2. Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. A. Rancurello, D. Terrell, and L. McAlister, (New York: Routledge, 1995.)
3. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. R. Brassier, (London: Continuum, 2008.) See also Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.)
4. Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.)
5. Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition."
6. Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, 76.
7. The classic work of negative theology, which in some ways is really less "negative" than metaphorical in character, is Pseudo-Dionysius, "The Divine Names," in *The Complete Works*, trans. P. Rorem, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 11987.)
8. Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*.
9. See Barry Smith, *Austrian Philosophy: The Legacy of Franz Brentano*, (Chicago: Open Court, 1995). Two of the decisive works in the debate among Brentano's students are Kasimir Twardowski, *On the Content and Object of Presentations*, Translated by R. Grossmann, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977) and Edmund Husserl, "Intentional Objects," in *Early Writings in the Philosophy of Logic and Mathematics*, trans. D. Willard, (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993.)
10. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith, (London: Routledge, 2002), 82–83.
11. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 22–23.
12. Maurizio Ferraris, *Manifesto of New Realism*, trans. S. De Sanctis, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014).
13. Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, (London: Continuum, 2002); Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, (Chicago: Open Court, 2002)
14. R. Brassier, I.H. Grant, G. Harman, and Q. Meillassoux, "Speculative Realism," *Collapse* III (2012), 306–449.
15. Markus Gabriel, *Fields of Sense: A New Realist Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 44–45. But I first heard Gabriel compare Meillassoux with Boghossian at his Bonn summer school in July 2012.
16. Beginning with "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition" in 2012, Meillassoux places the origin of correlationism in Hume rather than Kant.
17. Christopher Norris, "Speculative Realism: Interim Report with Just a Few Caveats," *Speculations* IV (2013), 38–47.
18. John McCumber, "Christopher Norris, *Philosophy Outside-In: A Critique of Academic Reason*," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, February 27, 2014. <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/46496-philosophy-outside-in-a-critique-of-academic-reason/>
19. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event* II, trans. A. Toscano. (London: Continuum, 2009), 119.
20. Brassier et al., "Speculative Realism," 409.
21. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, (London: Verso, 2012).
22. Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).
23. Quentin Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition."
24. The case is made in full in Harman, *Tool-Being*.
25. Martin Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. T. Sadler, (London: Continuum, 2008).
26. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).
27. Markus Gabriel, *Fields of Sense: A New Realist Ontology*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 44–45.
28. Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, (London: Continuum, 2006).
29. Giambattista Vico, *The First New Science*, trans. L. Pompa, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
30. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. T. Bottomore and D. Frisby, (New York: Routledge, 2004); Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S. Moore and A. Aveling (New York: Dover, 2011).

31. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).
32. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–72.
33. Boghossian is right to say that his own defense of this principle is more nuanced than the traditional defense. I am oversimplifying his position for reasons of space, though I do not think the difference between Boghossian's argument and Thomas Nagel's is as great as Boghossian thinks.
34. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, (New York: Free Press, 1978), 6.
35. *Ibid.*, 6.
36. *Ibid.*, 10.
37. Meillassoux, in Brassier et al., "Speculative Realism," 423.
38. See Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), 174ff.
39. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 8.
40. *Ibid.*