

■ Abstract

In his book *After Finitude*, Quentin Meillassoux presents some objections against Kant's transcendental idealism that have been especially developed in the field of so-called "speculative realism". This article examines one of these objections. It is the objection according to which an access to things-in-themselves is possible. For Meillassoux, the case of the "arche-fossils" is the proof that some sciences produce knowledge about things. The aim of this paper is to show that what the arche-fossil refers to corresponds, strictly speaking, to the realm of the objects of experience possible for us. In this way, according to our interpretation, the objection does not succeed in attacking the difference between the objects of knowledge and things-in-themselves, which is the core of Kant's transcendental idealism.

Keywords: Transcendental idealism, speculative realism, thing-in-itself, object, arche-fossil

■ Introduction

In a recently published book, we have explained some of the objections that Quentin Meillassoux's speculative realism has raised against Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy. In that text we set out, in general terms, to show that the claim of speculative realism to reach things, as they are in themselves, fails to transcend the limits of experience possible for us, as understood by Kant. The general aim of this article, in particular, is to develop a detailed aspect of our line of argument, which has not been presented in the book. Specifically, we will analyse Kant's notion of the existent object in order to show why the arche-fossil argument fails to go beyond it. To this end, we will first explain the criticisms of speculative realism against Kant's transcendental idealism. Secondly, we will then examine some aspects of transcendental idealism that are important for understanding the relevance (or not) of such a critique. Finally, in the light of the first two parts of our argument, in the last part we will show that transcendental idealism succeeds in responding satisfactorily to its realist objections.

By "speculative realism", a term chosen by Ray Brassier, we understand a line of thought that aims to deal with a reality that is not conditioned by parameters centred on the nature of man. That is to say, a call to discuss the conditions under which knowledge of reality is not determined by our way of accessing it. In other words, speculative realism asks again whether it is possible to have scientific knowledge of the world as it is before it is determined by our way of

knowing it. This claim to transcend the conditions of our knowledge in order to access the very nature of things begins with a critique of the philosophical positions that philosophers of speculative realism call "correlationist".

Quentin Meillassoux clearly explains the notion of correlation in his essay *After Finitude*. There, in fact, we read the following: "By 'correlation' we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call correlationism any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined" (*Meillassoux*, p. 13). Correlationism seems to point to the thesis of the intentional character of the object. For this thesis, the object is always already constituted as something given for a subject who has some kind of experience of it. Correlationism implies that the object exists, even prior to the fact of it being known. Its existence is not a product of a mental act. But the cognition of it, the fact that it is something for us in general, is conditioned by the donation itself. Thus, in the act of knowing things we cannot escape their correlation with thinking. In the same way, moreover, correlationism assumes that the subject is also determined in the correlation. In this sense, in Meillassoux's text we can read the following: "Correlationism consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another. Not only does it become necessary to insist that we never grasp an object in itself, in isolation from its relation to the subject, but