Essay on Transcendental Realism

Introduction

The object of realist metaphysics is generally thought to be to describe the structure of the world as it is in itself, or, alternatively, to determine precisely what is real. The purpose of this essay is to suggest that, although there have been many attempts to achieve this goal, they all fall down, not simply because they have misconstrued the nature of the in-itself or precisely what is real, but because, more fundamentally, they are not clear about what it is to talk about the in-itself or the real. In short, contemporary realism, both continental and analytic, does not have an adequate concept of reality.

To demonstrate this point, I am going to rehearse a couple different dialectics between realist and non-realist positions in order to tease out their inherent problems. This will take up the first two parts of the essay. In the first part I will tackle Quentin Meillassoux’s reconstructed dialectic of correlationism, and identify some key problems with it. In the second part I will examine several different debates within analytic metaphysics that exhibit a common dialectical structure, within which I will locate a position that I term deflationary realism.

The final two parts will bring together the various considerations that have arisen, to show how we can move from deflationary realism to a properly transcendental realism, in which the task of realist metaphysics is made properly explicit. In the third part I will define transcendental realism, and outline an argument for it. In the fourth part I will try to work out some additional consequences of the position, while further situating it in relation to the history of philosophy. In particular, I will try to show why the considerations put forward in the essay motivate a return to, and radicalisation of, the Kant’s philosophical project.

Part I: The Classical Dialectic

To begin with, I am going to briefly introduce the classical dialectic between realism and idealism, and show where what Meillassouxx calls correlationism stands in relation to it. To this end I am going to introduce a series of definitions:-

Classical Realism: Any position that takes there to be a real structure of the world that is ontologically independent (and thus distinct from) the structure of thought. This position is exemplified by thinkers such as Aristotle and Locke.

Classical Idealism: Any position that takes there to be a real structure of the world that is in some sense identical to (and thus ontologically dependent upon) the structure of thought. This position is exemplified by thinkers such as Berkeley and Hegel.

This opposition can also be described in terms of how the two positions view the relation between subject and object, or that between thought and being. In each case, realism takes the latter to be primary, and to be independent of the former, whereas idealism takes the former to be primary, and the latter to be dependent upon it. Given this, we can introduce correlationism as the position which gives primacy to neither subject or object, but to the relation between the two:-
Correlationism: Any position which holds that the real structure of the world is to some extent unknown, insofar as knowledge is always relativised to the subjective conditions of knowledge (e.g., forms of intuition, cultures, or language-games, etc.). This means that there can be no access to the world as it is in-itself, but only as it is for-us. This position is exemplified by Kant, Heidegger and Wittgenstein.

It is important to note that whereas realism and idealism are defined in explicitly ontological terms, even if they have epistemological consequences, Meillassoux takes correlationism to principally be an epistemological position. This does not mean that there cannot be ontological forms of correlationism (e.g., the later Heidegger’s notion of Ereignis as the appropriation of Man to Being and Being to Man), but it does hold that correlationism can be motivated independently of ontology. This will turn out to be a crucial point.

In the subsequent discussions we will seek to determine the meaning of three crucial notions that appear within these definitions: reality, the in-itself, and the structure of the world.

1. Meillassoux on Correlationism

Meillassoux takes it that correlationism defeats both realism and idealism, by deploying a different argument against each: the circle of correlation against realism, and the argument from facticity against idealism.

i) The Circle of Correlation

Meillassoux takes Fichte’s initial account of consciousness in the Wissenschaftslehre to provide the most basic form of the circle of correlation:

Fichtean Consciousness: The I (subject) posits the not-I (object) as not posited.

In essence, consciousness thinks about the object, and attempts to think the object as independent of its thinking. However, it ends up in a pragmatic contradiction. The fact that it posits the object contradicts the content it posits, namely, that the object is not posited.

Meillassoux holds that all forms of classical realism display the same pragmatic contradiction. They try to think the object as it is independent of thought. This is impossible, because one cannot have knowledge of anything independently of the subjective conditions of knowledge. One cannot know if the in-itself is either the same as or different from the way it appears under these conditions. This is what constitutes the unknowability of the in-itself.

ii) The Argument from Facticity

Classical idealism is immune to the circle of correlation, because it absolutises the correlation itself. It identifies knowing with what is known, and thereby denies the possibility that the in-itself could be different from how it is for-us. We thus can know the real structure of the world, because it is the same as the subjective conditions of knowledge, or the structure of thought.
To refute the idealist, the correlationist needs to shore up the possibility that the in-itself is different from the for-us. This is done by insisting on the facticity of thought. This is to say, the existence of thought is taken to be contingent. Given that there must be a real structure of the world, this implies that there can be a world without thought, and thus that they are not identical.

iii) Speculative Materialism

Meillassoux motivates his own neo-realist position by hijacking the argument from facticity. Whereas the idealist absolutises the correlation, Meillassoux absolutises facticity. He does this by showing that the argument against idealism only works on the condition that thought can think its own contingency as an absolute, i.e., as something that is not relative to the conditions of its thinking. In order for us to know the non-identity of in-itself and the for-us, we must be able to know absolutely that there could be a world without thought. We must thus have some absolute knowledge of the possible.

However, because we can still have no absolute knowledge of particular entities, this means that in order for thought to be absolutely contingent, everything must be absolutely contingent. This leads to a position, which he calls speculative materialism, in which we can know the real structure of the world, but this structure is just the structure of the radical contingency of everything.

2. Problems with Correlationism

There are at least three distinct issues with Meillassoux’s presentation of correlationism.

i) Propositions Vs. Concepts

First, the Fichtean account of thought is ambiguous as to whether ‘thinking X’ is a matter of thinking a proposition about X or grasping the concept of X. A proposition provides the content of an isolated claim about something, whereas a concept can incorporate a variety of such contents, as long as they are sufficient to individuate its object.

For example, it is ambiguous as to whether ‘thinking Bill Clinton’ is a matter of thinking a specific thing about Bill Clinton, such as ‘Bill Clinton is ladies man’, or a matter of grasping who Bill Clinton is. Alternatively, it is ambiguous whether ‘thinking mytochondria’ is a matter of thinking something like ‘mytochondrial DNA is inherited from the mother’ or a matter of grasping a series of facts that specify what mytochondria are.

ii) Presentation Vs. Representation

Secondly, the argument is not sensitive to an important distinction between different accounts of the structure of thought. This is best demonstrated by taking a quote from Meillassoux:-

No X without givenness of X, and no theory of X without a positing of X... the sentence ‘X is’, means: ‘X is a correlate of thought’.

What this demonstrates is that Meillassoux runs together accounts of thought in which objects are initially presented to us in a certain way (e.g., phenomenological accounts of
thought, such as Husserl's), and accounts in which we must always represent them as being a certain way (e.g., linguistic accounts of thought, such as Sellars').

For example, say we encounter a tree in the park and we make an observation statement about it (e.g., 'this tree is green'). The difference between the two approaches is that presentational accounts take the content of that observation to have been already given to us in our experience of the tree, and that the statement just makes it explicit, whereas representational accounts holds that only the observation statement has content, and that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a 'content' of experience.

The crucial difference between these approaches is that representational accounts emphasise the way that we are responsible for the way we take things to be, insofar as we must actively represent them as being some way, whereas presentational accounts tend to diminish this responsibility, by treating us as more or less passive.

iii) Two Forms of Dependency

Finally, we can see that the dialectic of correlationism is structured around two different questions about dependence upon the structure of thought.

On the one hand, there is the question of whether the in-itself is ontologically dependent upon the structure of thought. This is the primary dimension of the debate between classical realism and classical idealism. Correlationism sides with classical realism on this issue, holding that the in-itself cannot be dependent upon thought because of its facticity.

On the other hand, there is the question of whether our knowledge of the in-itself is epistemically dependent upon the structure of thought. This is the debate over whether we can know anything absolutely, or whether all knowledge is relative. Correlationism sides with relativism on this issue.

The crucial point is that the correlationist makes the following assumption:--

**Sufficiency Thesis**: the ontological independence of the in-itself from thought is sufficient to establish the possibility that the in-itself could be different from the way it appears in relation to thought, and thus to establish epistemic dependence.

The problem with this thesis is complicated. To understand it, it is necessary to recognise that the circle of correlation does not tell us how exactly the content of thought is relative to its subjective conditions (or structure). In other words, it doesn't explain what this relativity consists in. The problem with the sufficiency thesis is that it only holds if it is supplemented by such an explanation. This is even more problematic than it initially appears, because the essential features of thought that such an account would take to be potentially absent in the in-itself, must be accounted for in ontological terms. In essence, the correlationist requires an ontological account of thought, because only such an account can draw consequences from the ontological fact about the independence of the in-itself from thought. The real problem here is that such an account would undermine the simplicity, and thus the force of the circle of correlation itself.

The real weakness of Meillassoux's approach is that its understanding of the notion of the
in-itself, for all that it is supposed to support an epistemological argument, is always implicitly ontological. This is already indicated in the way Meillassoux situates correlationism between classical realism and classical idealism: the former gives Being primacy over thought, the latter gives thought primacy over Being, and correlationism gives primacy to the relation between the two. The classical positions both view the relation between thought and Being, and thus the question of primacy, in explicitly ontological terms. In defining correlationism in the terms he does Meillassoux guarantees that whatever its epistemological consequences are, it will always be based on some form of implicit ontology.

Viewing the argument in this way also lets us understand the relationship between Meillassoux’s speculative materialism and Graham Harman’s object-oriented philosophy (OOP). In effect, both positions try to draw out the implicit ontological assumptions underpinning the correlationist argument. Meillassoux recognises the ontological character of the assumption that thought is factical, and then because correlationism still precludes knowledge of particular entities, he extends this facticity to all entities. Harman on the other hand recognises the ontological character of the epistemic dependence of thought about the object upon its subjective conditions, and then, for the same reason as Meillassoux, he extends this structure of all entities (or objects).

The problem for both speculative materialism and OOP is that their arguments only work if there is some independent reason to accept correlationism beyond the very ontological assumptions they draw out of it. However, as we have seen, correlationism requires such ontological assumptions to motivate it. This is not to say that both of these ontological positions are false, only that they need to be motivated by different arguments.

In the next two parts of the essay I will expand upon this problem with Meillassoux’s presentation of correlationism:—

1) I will show that there is a non-ontological way of conceiving the dependence of the structure of the world upon the structure of thought. This allows for a further position between classical realism and classical idealism, which I call deflationary realism.

2) I will provide an alternative account of thought, which provides us with a way of understanding epistemic dependence in a non-ontological manner. This allows for a further position which I call transcendental realism.

**Part II: Deflationary Realism**

I will now examine a series of different debates in analytic metaphysics, within which I will uncover a common dialectical structure, and use this to introduce deflationary realism. Unfortunately, I will have to ignore much of the context and specific detail of these debates, and will present them in a somewhat truncated form. Nonetheless, it should still be apparent that there is a common philosophical theme running through them.

1. **Local Deflationism**

Whereas the classical debate between realism and idealism is about the real structure of the world as a whole, each of these debates deals with a specific aspect of this structure. We will thus make a distinction between global and local metaphysical debates. It should
be noted that we still have not yet come across a good definition of this notion of ‘the real structure of the world’, and so it is even less clear what an ‘aspect’ of it would be. However, examining these debates will bring us closer to understanding both.

i) Numbers (Quine)

The first debate is a disagreement over whether a particular domain of entities exists, or whether they are real. We’ll take numbers as our example, given that they provide the most tried and tested example of such debates in the history of philosophy.

The debate initially takes place between local realism about number (traditionally called platonism), and local anti-realism about number (traditionally called nominalism). Both are forms of classical realism, insofar as both take there to be a real structure of the world independent of thought, and both hold that there are some domains of entities that are real, and thus part of this structure. For instance, both tend to think that physical objects are real. The difference is that the platonist thinks that numbers are just as real as tables and chairs, whereas the nominalist thinks they are not.

Now, the deflationary realist steps into this traditional debate and opposes both forms of classical realism. In this instance, the deflationist is none other than Quine. Quine holds that there is nothing more to existence than existential quantification, and that there is no notion of reality distinct from existence. In effect, Quine denies that either form of classical realism can make good sense of what they mean by ‘real’.

The major consequence of Quine’s view is that all ontological questions about whether or not a given domain of entities exists (or is real) become trivial questions about whether we take there to be true statements which quantify over that domain. For instance, if we take it to be true that ‘There are infinitely many prime numbers’, we are thereby committed to the existence of both numbers, and prime numbers more specifically. In essence, if we take there to be true mathematical statements, then we’re committed to the existence of mathematical objects.

Quine does qualify this idea somewhat, insofar as he thinks we should only work out existential commitments from those statements that do genuine explanatory work. This means that we work out what exists only on the basis of the claims made by our best scientific theories. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that he does not take scientific claims possess a different kind of truth.

There are many problems with this qualification, and with Quine’s characterisation of ontological questions more generally. Kit Fine has perhaps provided the most comprehensive critique of the Quinean position. What is most interesting is that he uses this to motivate a thick notion of reality in opposition to Quine’s thin notion. However, Fine does not shake the problem of classical realism, insofar as his definition of reality (in the sense of realness) appeals to an intuitive but ultimately unexplained notion of Reality (in the sense of the world as it is in-itself). I will adopt something similar to Fine’s approach later on, but I will explicate the intuitive notion of Reality he appeals to (which I will call the Real). The other problem with Fine’s account is that he does not show how his notion of reality can be extended outside of debates about the reality of particular domains of entities. As we will see from the two subsequent debates, this is a very important issue.
Leaving all this to one side, we can translate Quine’s basic idea as follows:-

**Quine Thesis:** There is no **thick** notion of reality for entities, but only a **thin** notion. An entity is real in this sense **iff** we take there to be something **true** of it.

**ii) Values (McDowell Vs. Blackburn)**

The second debate is a disagreement over whether certain kinds of **predicates** pick out **real properties**. The predicates in question are **values** such as ‘good’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘funny’. In this debate, Simon Blackburn plays the role of the local anti-realist. He opposes his position, which he calls **quasi-realism** about value, to what he calls **naïve realism** about value, which is the corresponding local realism.

The naïve realist supposedly holds that entities in the world are really imbued with values, independently of the way we take them to be. This means that a sunrise could be beautiful even if sentient creatures had never evolved, in just the same sense that it would still last the same amount of time even if no systems of time measurement had ever been invented. In opposition to this, Blackburn claims that the properties studied by the natural sciences are real, but that values are not. Instead, he holds that values are **projected** onto the world by us. The sunset is beautiful just in the sense that we project some positive reaction it produces in us upon certain genuine properties it possesses.

The deflationary realist in this debate is John McDowell, who classifies his position as anti-anti-realism. The crux of the debate between McDowell and Blackburn is whether or not statements which predicate values of objects are **truth-apt**. For a statement to be truth-apt is just for it to be able to be **true** or **false**. Blackburn effectively tries to deny truth-aptness to value statements by showing how the ways we identify and argue about values fall short of the **paradigm case** of those properties studied by the natural sciences.

In response to this, McDowell has a number of good points, but his central argument is that even if value discourse can never have the form of natural scientific discourse, it nonetheless displays all the features characteristic of assessing the truth and falsity of claims. We can give detailed reasons for and against value-ascriptions, deploying whole networks of interconnected value concepts. For instance, assessment of whether something is funny does not simply depend upon our dispositions to laugh at it, but can involve appeals to complex concepts like satire and irony.

In essence, McDowell establishes **deflationary standards** for what kinds of discourse count as truth-apt, and then denies that there is anything more to the reality of properties than there being true claims about them. On this basis, we can locate a parallel of the Quine Thesis:-

**McDowell Thesis:** There are only **thin** notions of **reality** and **truth**. A property is real **iff** we take some ascriptions of it to entities to be true.

**iii) Modality (Lewis Vs. Blackburn and Price Vs. Brandom)**

The third debate is harder to classify than the first two. It regards the reality of the **modal** dimension of the world, or the reality of **possibility and necessity**. The problem with classifying this is that, although it can potentially be interpreted as a debate about whether
or not a certain kind of entity exists, namely, possible worlds, or as whether there are real modal properties, such as dispositions, it is really more general than this. This can be demonstrated by considering two different versions of the debate, between David Lewis and Simon Blackburn on the one hand, and Huw Price and Robert Brandom on the other.

Taking the former debate first, Blackburn initially attacks Lewis, who is famous for advocating the reality of possible worlds, as if he occupies the local realist position. Blackburn’s own view is that modal discourse is projective in a similar way to his view of value discourse. However, Lewis’ response to Blackburn reveals that he is in fact a deflationary realist. In effect, he accuses Blackburn of ascribing a thick notion of reality to the actual which he denies to the possible. By contrast, he is not claiming that possible worlds are real in the thick sense, but deploying a uniformly thin sense of reality on which the possible and actual are on equal footing. Lewis argues that we take modal claims (e.g., counterfactuals) to be true, and that we must thereby commit ourselves to the existence or reality of whatever is required to properly interpret their truth. This means that we are committed to the reality of the elements we use to formulate the semantics of modal discourse. For David Lewis, this means the reality of possible worlds.

The debate between Price and Brandom is parallel to this. Price takes up a similar quasi-realist position to Blackburn, from which he criticises Brandom’s own modal realism. The question of whether Price is actually a classical realist is not straightforward, but we needn’t answer it. This is because it is Brandom’s defense of his position against Price which gives him an affinity with Lewis. He explicitly denies that we can make any sense of the idea of a real structure of the world distinct from the structure of our thought and talk about it. He then maintains precisely the same position as Lewis: we are committed to whichever features of the world we need to make sense of the semantics of modal discourse. The main difference between Brandom and Lewis is that he takes incompatibility relations between propositions (and the facts they represent) as his semantic primitives, and thus is not committed to the reality of possible worlds.

What comes out of these related debates is that there can be aspects of the world not straightforwardly reducible to questions about entities and their properties. We can translate the basic ideas of Lewis and Brandom as follows:-

Lewis-Brandom Thesis: There is only a thin notion of reality with respect to aspects of the world. An aspect of the world is real in this sense if and only if we take there to be true claims about it. The nature of this aspect is determined by the semantics of those claims.

2. Global Deflationism

Now that we’ve had a look at the way deflationary realism functions within local debates, we can try to work out the general character of the position. An important point to make is that it is not possible to be a deflationist in one debate and not in another. This is because the deflationist’s tactic involves substituting a thick notion of reality for a thin one, and it is the same notion which is deployed in all these debates. This means that if one is a deflationary realist, one must be a global deflationary realist.

I think we can pick out three essential insights of deflationary realism from the debates just considered:-
1) There is a crucial link between a *thin* notion of reality and the notion of *truth* (from the Quine Thesis).

2) To be genuinely deflationary, this notion of truth must be *equally thin* (from the McDowell Thesis).

3) The **structure of the world** is reflected by the **semantics** of our truth claims. This means that the structure of the world is reflected by the **structure of our thought and talk** about it (from the Lewis-Brandom Thesis).

i) **Brandom’s Deflationism**

Now, just because all of the deflationary realists discussed above *should* have a coherently articulated global deflationist position doesn’t mean that they do. The exception is Robert Brandom, who articulates a systematic position that incorporates all three insights just discussed. Brandom does this by explicitly addressing the question of the **dependency** of the structure of the world on the structure of thought. However, he articulates a dependency thesis which is *non-ontological*, and which thus does not collapse into classical idealism. To do this, Brandom introduces the notions of **sense dependency** and **reference dependency**:-

**Sense Dependency**: “Concept P is sense dependent upon concept Q just in case one cannot count as having grasped P unless one counts as grasping Q.”

**Reference Dependency**: “Concept P is reference dependent upon concept Q just in case P cannot apply to something unless Q applies to it.”

In short, P is sense dependent upon Q if one cannot understand P without understanding Q, and reference dependent upon Q if there cannot be P without Q. The former is a kind of **epistemic dependence**, whereas the latter is a kind of **ontological dependence**.

Brandom then points out that there can be sense dependence is **independent** of reference dependence, meaning that there can be sense dependence without reference dependence. He also points out that sense-dependence is by default an **asymmetrical** relation, meaning that there can be one-way sense dependence. For example, one cannot understand the concept ‘nail’ without the concept ‘hammer’, but it is entirely possible that we could destroy all hammers, and yet there would still be nails. Equally, one can understand ‘hammer’ without understanding ‘nail’, because hammers may be used to do things other than hitting nails.

We can then articulate Brandom’s position as follows:-

1) The **world** is all that is the case, or the totality of what is true. This is the same definition of world with which Wittgenstein opens the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

2) **Thought** is just the rational process through which we update and revise what we take to be true.

3) The concept of world is **reciprocally sense dependent** upon the concept of
thought. This means that one cannot understand the structure of the world without understanding the structure of this rational process, or vice versa.

The consequence of this is that Brandom takes there to be various pairs of fundamental concepts that must be understood together or not at all. For instance, he thinks that we cannot understand what objects are apart from understanding what singular terms are, that we cannot understand what properties are apart from understanding what predicates are, that we cannot understand what facts (or states of affairs) are apart from understanding what claims (or assertions) are, and he thinks that we cannot understand what laws are apart from understanding what counterfactual robustness is.

This then allows him to make various claims about the structure of the world, on the basis of claims about the structure of thought (which for him is just the semantics and pragmatics of language). For instance:

1) Propositions necessarily have a subject-predicate structure, therefore, the world must be composed of objects and properties.

2) Facts are just true claims, and there are normative truths, therefore there are normative facts.

3) There are modal incompatibility relations between propositions, and between predicates, therefore there are modal incompatibility relations between states of affairs, and between properties.

Now, it should be noted that Brandom actually calls this position ‘objective idealism’, and he takes it to be Hegel's position, as well as his own (even if he does take himself to disagree with Hegel on the possibility of providing an exhaustive account of logic, and thus metaphysics). However, I think that Brandom is incorrect in ascribing this deflationary position to Hegel, insofar as Hegel most definitely has more classical metaphysical ambitions when it comes to the applicability of his Logic. I therefore take myself to be justified in classifying Hegel as a classical idealist (albeit the most powerful and subtle of them) and Brandom as a deflationary realist.

Moving on, Brandom provides us with the resources to posit the general definition of deflationary realism we are seeking:

**Deflationary Realism**: Any position which denies that there is a thick sense of reality, and which holds that the structure of the world and the structure of thought are reciprocally sense dependent, without being reference dependent.

**ii) Deflationism Vs. Correlationism**

I have thus shown that it is possible to have a position between classical realism and classical idealism that is not correlationism. Moreover, the possibility of this position tells against the Sufficiency Thesis that the correlationist argument depends upon. This is because the deflationist can accept that the world is ontologically independent from thought, and thus that there could be a world without thought. In short, the deflationist can accept the facticity of thought and still hold that the structure of the world is dependent upon the structure of thought (albeit reciprocally).
It is thus the case that deflationary realism trumps correlationism. This means that the only way to avoid deflationary realism is to answer the deflationist’s challenge to classical realism, by providing a genuinely thick notion of reality. However, this thick notion of reality must not appeal to the ontologically defined notion of the in-itself deployed by correlationism, lest it collapse back into correlationism. I think that the only position capable of meeting this task is what I call transcendental realism. The rest of the essay will be devoted to expounding this position.

**Part III: Transcendental Realism**

Deflationary realism is an impressive position, especially when it is explicitly articulated in the form Brandom presents. However, I don’t think that it is right. There are a variety of reasons for this, some of which are specific to the various local debates we’ve considered (see Fine’s critique of Quine on existence), but the simplest and most compelling is that we seem to have an intuitive grasp of a genuinely thick notion of reality. This is obvious when we look at the debate between platonism and nominalism. We have a good understanding of the difference between the positions, the problem is simply that no one has managed to make explicit the role that the term ‘real’ is playing in the debate. This is what lets the deflationist claim that the argument makes no sense.

The task before us is thus to explicitly define a thick notion of reality. However, in doing so we must also avoid defining reality in ontological terms. This is because the notion of reality is actually supposed to make sense of what ontology is, not vice-versa. The only way to do this is to define reality in epistemological terms. This means providing a non-ontological account of the structure of thought, and then showing that there is a thick notion of reality implicit within it. I take this to be the essence of a genuinely transcendental approach to realism. I will thus define transcendental realism as follows:-

**Transcendental Realism:** Any position that shows that the structure of thought itself implies that there is a real structure of the world in excess of the structure of thought.

It is important to note that this position is actually a development of deflationary realism, rather than a simple return to classical realism. This can be seen if we look at the dependence relations this definition implies.

For transcendental realism, the structure of the world is sense-dependent upon the structure of thought, but the dependence is not reciprocal. This looks strange, until one realises that understanding the structure of thought is a necessary but not sufficient condition of understanding the structure of the world. In short, one must understand the structure of thought in order to understand what it would be to give a proper account of the real structure of the world. This is what Kant would call the critique of metaphysics, which is supposed to come before metaphysics itself.

**1. Rethinking Thought**

I’m now going to suggest a way of motivating transcendental realism, and I’m going to do this by sketching an alternative account of thought to the one Meillassoux provides. The account of thought I’m going to present is based on the historical successor to Fichte’s account of consciousness, namely, Hegel’s account of *Natural Consciousness* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. 


I) Hegel Contra Fichte

Hegel's account is almost as simple the Fichtean one we considered earlier. It posits two basic features of consciousness:

1) Consciousness relates itself to its object, or takes its object to be a certain way. What this means, is that it makes a claim about its object.

2) Consciousness distinguishes between its relating (or its claim) and the object as it is in itself. In essence, consciousness allows for the possibility of error.

These then have two implications:

3) Because consciousness itself makes the distinction between its claim and the object it is about, the object cannot be truly in-itself, but must be for-consciousness. This means that consciousness must have a concept of its object.

4) However, consciousness cannot be aware that the object is for-it without ceasing to be consciousness, and thus must suppress this fact. This means that consciousness cannot recognise that the concept of the object is dependent upon it, without undermining the possibility of error.

The first thing to recognise is that this account solves the two problems we identified with Meillassoux's account of thought. First, the proposition/concept ambiguity of the Fichtean approach is resolved by having a role both for propositional claims about objects (1&2) and for concepts of objects (3&4). Secondly, although it is misleadingly named 'consciousness' this is most definitely a representational account of thought. Consciousness is active in making claims about its object, and is thus responsible for those claims. Moreover, it undertakes this responsibility by establishing the object as an independent standard distinct from its claim. It is precisely by giving the object authority over whether its claim is correct that consciousness opens up the possibility of error.

The next thing to note is that Hegel has effectively split Fichte's notion of 'positing as not posited' into two distinct subjective acts: what I will call withdrawing authority (2), and suppressing the concept (4).

Withdrawing authority is just a different way of talking about the way consciousness opens up the possibility of error. The reason I am using this term is that granting authority to the object over whether one’s claims about it are correct can also be viewed as a matter of withdrawing one’s own authority over one’s claims. In doing so, one thereby undertakes a responsibility to provide reasons why one’s claim is correct if challenged. It is precisely by undertaking a responsibility to give reasons for one’s claims about an object that one thereby undertakes a responsibility to that object. In effect, what all of this means is that all claims are essentially open to debate.

In contrast to this, the content of concepts is not always open to debate. This is because mutual grasp of a concept is a condition of the possibility of disagreement about anything. For example, we can only have a genuine argument about whether ‘Bill Clinton is a ladies man’ if we both understand who Bill Clinton is, and what being a ‘ladies man’
entails. The point is that in order to open up the possibility of error, we must nonetheless **exclude** some things from the resulting debate. So, while we accept the possible difference between the our **claim** and the object in itself, we **suppress** the possible difference between our **concept** and the object it stands for.

**ii) Mind Independence Vs. Attitude Independence**

This account of the basic structure of thought gives us the resources to properly articulate **epistemic dependence** in a **non-ontological** manner. We can do this by distinguishing between two different ways of understanding the notion of the **in-itself**: in terms of **mind independence** and in terms of **attitude independence**.

**Mind Independence**: Something is in-itself if it can **exist** independently of the existence of minds.

**Attitude Independence**: Something is in-itself if the **way it is** is independent of the **way we take it to be**.

The former is an ontological understanding the in-itself, whereas the latter is non-ontological. Importantly, it is the fact that this is a **representational** account of thought, rather than a **presentational** one, that makes this possible. This is because it enables us to conceive of the relation between subject and object in terms of **authority** and **responsibility**. In essence, the withdrawal of authority is a matter of establishing a form of attitude independence.

I would suggest that Meillassoux’s indifference to the distinction between presentation and representation, and Harman’s dependence upon a phenomenological, and thus presentational, account of thought, is what leads them to adopt the ontological understanding of the in-itself. By contrast, the Hegelian model of thought enables us to adopt the epistemological understanding of the in-itself, and thus to undercut the arguments for their respective ontologies.

On this basis, we may also reformulate the **intuition** underlying correlationism in more exacting terms:-

**Correlationist Intuition**: The suppression of the concept prevents us from ever establishing the **absolute attitude independence** of the object of representation. This means that whether or not our claims about the object are true is never completely up to the object, but is always **mediated** by something that we, either as individuals or as a community, have **authority** over.

**iii) Types of Truth**

Let us call this absolute attitude independence **objectivity**. For a claim to be **objectively assessable** is for its **truth** to be independent of any attitudes that anyone has ever had, or will have. This means that no claims about anyone’s attitudes can count as **good reasons** for taking it to be true. The correlationist intuition can then be understood as the claim that we are unable to objectively assess the truth of any claim.

Now, it is important to note that some truth claims are obviously not objectively assessable
in this way. For instance, the claim ‘Harry Potter is a wizard’ is not assessable independently of our attitudes about Harry Potter. Indeed, there are claims such as ‘Harry Potter has a secret half-sister’ that we would take JK Rowling’s attitudes to have special authority over. In these cases, we can nonetheless have arguments about whether the claim is true, because we can still withdraw our own authority, even if we cannot withdraw JK Rowling’s.

In these cases we have established a form of relative attitude independence.

What this indicates is that in contrast to deflationary realism, which holds that there is only a single notion of truth, there are at least two kinds of truth: objective and non-objective truth. There thus is a thin concept of truth which functions as a genus and a variety of thick notions of truth which function as its species. The withdrawal of authority and the attitude independence it establishes is the common form of truth, and the various ways this withdrawal is modified, producing a variety of forms of relative and absolute attitude independence, constitute the variety of types of truth.

It is this insight which gives us the leverage we need to not only overcome deflationism, but to resolve many of the issues involved in the various local debates we considered:-

1) The problems with Quine’s attempt to distinguish a privileged set of truth claims from which to work out ontological commitments can be overcome if we posit a distinct type of truth. Instead of working out our ontological commitments from the set of scientific claims we take to be true, we can work it out on the basis of the set of claims we take to be objectively true.

2) The debate between Blackburn and McDowell can be resolved once we recognise that it is not a matter of whether both scientific and value discourse are truth-apt in the same sense, but a matter of determining the differences in the structure of these discourses which differentiate the types of truth-aptness they exhibit.

3) This will give us the resources we need to extend the notion of aspects of the structure of the world we uncovered in the debates over modality, and the connection between these and the semantics of discourse, by allowing us to break the reciprocity of Brandom’s pairs of sense dependence of Brandom’s pairs of fundamental concepts.

However, we will only be able achieve any of these goals if we can fight off the challenge to objectivity that the reformulated correlationist intuition represents.

iv) Conceptual Revision

The key to this is grasping two interconnected points. First, that our concepts are not fixed, but are revisable. Second, that the world itself can sometimes force us to revise our concepts. This makes the assessment of those concepts independent of our attitudes in a principled way.

First, it is important to recognise that the suppression of the concept is not irrevocable. It is possible for us argue about the content of our concepts, but doing so suspends the initial debates which those concepts were a condition of. In short, we always perform a
suspension of representation in order to examine the conditions of representation. The important point is that we can never perform a global suspension, but only local suspensions. This is just to say that if we disagreed about everything then we couldn’t disagree about anything. If we are to examine some concepts, we must always use others.

Second, we must distinguish between two types of commitments one can undertake by making claims (and thus two types of claim):

Objectual Commitments: Undertaken by claims about specific objects (e.g., ‘this liquid tastes sour’, and ‘everyone in this room has excellent taste in philosophy’). These constitute the content of singular concepts (e.g., ‘Bill Clinton is male’, ‘Bill Clinton was president of the US’, etc.).

Conditional Commitments: Undertaken by claims which make explicit inferential rules. These constitute the content of predicate concepts (e.g., ‘if something tastes sour then it is an acid’ and ‘if something is an acid then it turns litmus paper red’).

It is to some extent obvious that we can be forced to revise our objectual commitments about objects on the basis either of perception, wherein further objectual commitments are acquired, or of inference, in virtue of the rules relating the predicates used in them. It is thus to some extent obvious that we can be forced to revise our singular concepts.

However, we can also be forced to revise the inferential rules which constitute the content of our predicate concepts on the basis of perception. So, let us take the above example of the concept ‘acid’, which we will take to be constituted by the two inferential rules:

1) If something tastes sour then it is an acid.

2) If something is an acid then it turns litmus paper red.

Now, say that through perception we then acquire an objectual commitment of the form:

3) This liquid tastes sour and it turns litmus paper blue.

We are now in a position where our perceptually acquired commitments contradict the content of our concept. This means that if we accept the truth of the observation statements, we are forced to revise our concept of acid, by abandoning or modifying one or more of these rules. This example of objective concept revision is deliberately very simple. The truth is that there is a lot more to the content of concepts, and thus a lot more to the structure of the process of revision. I cannot provide an exhaustive account of this structure here, but I will provide an overview of how this picture needs to be supplemented.

v) Dimensions of Conceptual Content

First of all, we have to get a bit more clear about what concepts are. It is important to recognise Kant’s insight that concepts are rules for making judgments. It is also important to recognise Brandom’s pragmatic insight that we must understand the propositions
which form the contents of judgments in terms of the **assertions** which express them. Since assertions are principally **linguistic**, this means we must understand them in terms of the **sentences** deployed in those assertions. We thus have a threefold distinction between the **pragmatic** (assertion), **syntactic** (sentence), and **semantic** (proposition) dimensions of thought and talk. Kant’s insight thus becomes Sellars’ insight that to understand a concept is to understand the rules governing the use of a **word** in forming sentences which can be asserted, through which we express propositions. This is not only a **representational**, but a properly **linguistic** account of thought.

Given this, we can see that there is more to the **content** of concepts than the rules made explicit by inferential commitments. This is most evident in the distinction between concepts governing the use of **singular terms** and **predicates**. The obvious move would be to understand their content as being **exhausted** by objectual and conditional commitments, respectively. However, at the very least, familiar Kripkean problems with **proper names** (which are a type of singular term) imply that the content of singular concepts cannot be understood as what is made explicit by objectual commitments alone. Indeed, as Putnam has shown, the problem is more general than this, insofar as it extends to **natural kind terms** (which are a type of predicate). What underlies both of these problems is a general worry about how it is possible for us to argue about the rules governing the use of the **same** word (or the content of the corresponding concept), if what **individuates** that word (or concept) from its **homonyms** (which have distinct concepts, e.g., the ‘bank’ of a river from the ‘bank’ on the high street) is just these rules. In essence, there must be more to the **individuation** of concepts.

These **semantic externalist** challenges require us to posit some additional mechanism whereby we can have some minimal grasp of the use of a word which fixes its identity, allowing us to argue about how **that very word** (as distinct from its homonyms) should be used. The classical way to do this is to posit a special set of claims that one must accept in order to count as understanding the concept. These are **analytic** claims, and there can be no genuine disagreement about them. Only the opposing **synthetic** claims can support such genuine disagreements. I take Quine to have adequately demonstrated that there is no principled way of drawing this distinction, and thus take all claims to be synthetic. In the account I am presenting the intuitive boundary between analytic and synthetic is captured by **conceptual suppression**, wherein we hold the content of the concept **fixed** in relation to those claims that we open up for debate. The boundary is thus **dynamic** rather than **static**, shifting relative to the focus of the debate. It is important to recognise that rejecting the analytic/synthetic distinction in this way is a condition of accepting full blown conceptual revisability.

The crucial point is to recognise that the additional mechanism required to respond to the semantic externalist challenge must also make possible **semantic deference**, such as cases in which we use words of which we have a partial grasp, but nonetheless defer to experts who have a fuller grasp. For example, it is possible for two lay people to have a fairly interesting discussion about black holes, even though they only have a partial understanding of what black holes are. It is even possible for them to disagree about bits of what they do understand, and nonetheless be still talking about the **same** thing. This is because they have the ability to **defer** to physicists about the correct ways to use the word, or about what is true of black holes. There can be similar kind of debates about particular objects. For example, it’s entirely possible for me to talk about Bill Clinton, even if I’ve never met him, indeed, even if I couldn’t pick him out of a crowd, as long as I can
defer to the way others use the name ‘Bill Clinton’.

The answer to these problems, which Brandom goes a long way toward articulating, is that language use depends on an ability to keep track of relations of anaphoric dependence between different uses of words. The simplest kinds of such relations are exhibited by uses of anaphoric pronouns within and between sentences, such as in the sentence ‘Bill Clinton is a ladies man, but he is a mediocre saxophonist’. Here there is a simple anaphoric relation between my use of the name ‘Bill Clinton’ and the pronoun ‘he’, where the latter gets its significance from the former. This is true regardless of who I pick out with the name ‘Bill Clinton’. I could be speaking about a different Bill Clinton than the former president of the US, but I’d still be claiming both that he is a ladies man and that he’s a mediocre saxophonist. The important point is that these kinds of relation, where one use of a word can inherit its significance from another, can extend between the uses of different speakers. Thus, if a friend of mine has never heard of either Bill Clinton, but I tell him that he is a mediocre saxophonist, when he goes on to tell other people about a saxophonist called Bill Clinton, he’ll be referring to whoever I was referring to, in virtue of a dependence relation between our uses of the term. This holds equally of predicates as it does of singular terms. It is by virtue of being able to track these kinds of anaphoric dependence relations that we can take each other to be using the same concept, even if we disagree about particular features of its content. It is also what enables semantic deference of the kind just discussed.

There is a further dimension of conceptual content which needs mentioning, which is the role that our practical understanding of things contributes to content of our concepts of them. This is an idea common to both Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein. As we’ve already noted, grasping a concept is understanding how to use a word. This is already a kind of practical understanding. Although this understanding might be to some extent explicit, for instance, we might have conditional commitments that codify the inferential rules we follow in using the word, it will always depend upon some understanding that is implicit. This is the import of Wittgenstein’s rule-following regress. What it means is that shared concepts will always be dependent upon shared practices. Heidegger’s insight is that these shared practices for using words are in turn dependent upon our shared practices of dealing with the things that those words refer to.

The real significance of this is that whereas it is possible for us to engage in explicit concept revision, by first making explicit the content of our concepts and then putting them into question, it is also possible for there to be implicit concept revision, insofar as our practices for dealing with things, and thus the practices for using words that are dependent upon them, can adapt to the things themselves. In the implicit case, the world indirectly forces us to revise our concepts, by causing us to change our practices. In the explicit case, the world directly forces us by providing us with good reasons to do so. The distinction is precisely one between causal and normative force.

On the basis of this, we can hold that in order to be counted as a rational subject, or as something that can genuinely think and talk about the world, one must be-in-the-world in something like Heidegger’s sense, or have a form-of-life in something like Wittgenstein’s sense. This is because we are only in touch with the world insofar as it objectively constrains our thought about it, and this is the case only insofar as it can force us to either implicitly or explicitly revise the concepts we apply to it. This means that one needn’t be able to explicitly revise one’s concepts in order to be a rational subject, but that the
potential for acquiring the logical vocabulary (conditionals and negation) required to do so is nonetheless implicit within the abilities of such non-logical rational beings.

To conclude this section, we can thus draw a distinction between the primary and secondary dimensions of conceptual content. Objectual and conditional commitments make explicit the rules constituting the primary dimension of conceptual content. These provide the representational core of the content of singular and predicate concepts, respectively. The secondary dimension of both kinds of conceptual content is articulated by the anaphoric relations between particular uses of words and the practical relations between the way we use things and the way we talk about them. These provide the non-representational periphery of conceptual content, but they are no less essential to it. The reason for this is that the secondary dimension is what makes possible the revision of the first, and thus what lets it be properly constrained by what it aims to represent. On the one hand, tracking anaphoric relation is what enables us to disagree about the primary content of the same concept, and thus what to revise that primary content through argument. On the other, tracking practical relations is what enables the things we deal with to constrain the way we use the words that correspond to them.

Providing a detailed story about the relation between the primary and secondary dimensions of conceptual content is just describing the way the latter structures arguments about the former. Doing this is just a matter of giving a much more detailed account of the suspension of representation.

2. Objectivity

Moving on from the discussion of the content of concepts, we can now properly articulate a defence against the correlationist challenge. The first thing to recognise is that although we can never completely withdraw authority in any given debate, or that we cannot perform a global suspension of representation, there is an ideal subset of our truth claims in which:

1) There is no claim for which we cannot perform a local suspension, and thus bring the concepts it deploys into question.

2) There is no claim about the primary content of these concepts that cannot itself be suspended, bringing the concepts deployed in it into question. In principle (if not always in practice) there may be recursive suspension.

3) There are no claims about attitudes (e.g., ‘Pete believes that Bill Clinton is a ladies man’, ‘Most people believe that unicorns are white’, ‘The norse people believed that Thor is the son of Odin’, etc.).

4) There are no claims the assessment of which bottoms out in claims about attitudes (e.g., ‘Harry Potter has a secret half sister’, ‘Unicorns are white’, ‘Thor is the son of Odin’, etc.).

This subset is just the set of objective truth claims, i.e., those things we take to be true independently of the attitudes anyone ever had or will have.
i) Bottoming Out

To unpack this a bit more, this means that all **objective assessment**, or **arguments** about claims within this subset, including all arguments about the primary content of the concepts deployed within these claims (and by recursion, all arguments about the primary content of concepts that these depend on), cannot deploy claims about attitudes as **reasons**. The only exception to this are claims in which there are further reasons why those attitudes are authoritative that do not **ultimately** depend upon claims about attitudes for which we cannot in turn supply such further reasons. This is what it is to say that arguments should not **bottom out** in claims about attitudes.

An argument bottoms out in this way either when it must appeal to the **ultimate authority** of some group or individual, or when it is not possible to make a claim without **pragmatic contradiction**. In those cases, we can say that the claims being made are **non-objective**. In the former case they are **interpretational** claims and in the latter case they are **transcendental** claims. The former are non-objective because they appeal to **specific** attitudes, and the latter are non-objective because they provide the structure of attitudes **as such** (insofar as they provide the **conditions of the possibility** of having attitudes). It is interesting to note that, because we have rejected the possibility of analytic truth, these transcendental claims are by definition **synthetic a priori** claims.

It is important to recognise that this ‘bottoming out’ should not primarily be understood as a matter of reaching **indubitable** claims about which there can be no debate. Although there are interpretative cases in which there is a sole authority that can settle the debate directly through **stipulation**, these are not necessarily the norm. We can engage in very complex interpretative debates about the beliefs and intentions of those who have such authority if they cannot enter the debate directly (e.g., interpreting the works of dead authors), and we can engage in similar interpretative debates about matters which are determined by **communal**, rather than **individual** authority (e.g., communal norms, and claims such as ‘Thor is the son of Odin’). The structure of these debates is just the structure of **hermeneutic rationality**. Similarly, in the case of arguments about the transcendental structure of thought itself, although there are obvious cases of pragmatic contradiction, there can equally be arguments wherein the proof that the denial of a claim leads to pragmatic contradiction will be very elaborate (and thus debatable). We might call the structure of these debates the structure of **reflective rationality**.

What ‘bottoming out’ consists in is thus not a regress to claims about which there can be no debate, but rather, a fundamental shift in the structure of the debate itself. The only way to understand this properly is to examine the structure of those debates which don’t bottom out in this way. The major thing we have identified about these debates is that all of the concepts deployed within them are subject to revision, and that they are subject to revision in a way which is not dependent either upon **specific attitudes** (as in the interpretational case) or upon the structure of **attitudes as such** (as in the transcendental case). In the absence of these, the only thing that can force us to revise our concepts is the **world** itself. However, there are two different forms that this kind of revision can take, and thus two different kinds of objective claims: **empirical** claims and **mathematical** claims.

ii) Varieties of Discourse

What differentiates empirical from mathematical discourse is the kind of claims they give
priority to. Empirical discourse gives priority to perceptually acquired objectual commitments, insofar as these can force us to revise the contents of our concepts, as we saw in the simplified example of the concept of ‘acid’ above. Mathematical discourse, on the other hand, gives priority to its axioms, from which all particular mathematical truths must be derivable. These axioms are a set of claims which specify the rules of mathematical deduction (conditional claims), and a few basic premises from which these can proceed (objectual claims). Most importantly, the axioms are revisable, but they are not revisable on the basis of anything like observation claims about independently accessible mathematical objects, since everything about these objects is derived from the axioms. It is not exactly clear how the world forces us to revise our axioms, but I take this not to be a problem, but rather to indicate the possibility of a deeper understanding of the metaphysical status of mathematics.

It is interesting to point out that at least some of mathematics is transcendental or synthetic a priori insofar as the structure of quantification is a necessary part of the structure of rationality. The important point is that the axioms modify the basic structure of quantification, and in doing so extend it beyond simple arithmetic (e.g., by allowing quantification over infinite sets). It is thus possible to revise these modifications, but to understand precisely how these revisions take place is a matter of giving a full account of the structure of mathematical reason. Importantly, it is the tension between truth and proof demonstrated by Gödel – the fact that given any set of axioms, there will always be some mathematical truths which cannot be derived from them – which makes mathematics objective. We might say that far from bringing about the ruin of mathematics, Gödel discovered the very essence of the mathematical itself.

Returning to empirical discourse, we can show how it is possible to deploy claims about attitudes in a way which does not bottom out. This is in virtue of the way observation claims (or perceptually acquired objectual commitments) function. We owe this insight to Sellars, whose account of perception refuses to take there to be some special dimension of content (what seems to be the case for-us) over which the perceiver has a special form of authority. If this were the case, and we needed to justify claims about what is by appealing to claims about what seems to be, then empirical discourse would bottom out in claims about the attitudes of whoever has this special authority in each case. Sellars’ real insight is that claims about seeming play no important role in empirical discourse. When we endorse the observation claims that others make (e.g., ‘It is snowing outside’), we do so on the basis of a kind of authority we ascribe to them, namely, a testimonial authority that we give to anyone who can reliably identify the sort of state of affairs in question (e.g., reliably discriminating between types of weather). However, this kind of authority is provisional, and this means that it is possible to put into question the inference from an observer’s reliability under usual conditions to the conclusion that their attitude reflects the way the world is in this case.

The crucial point is that arguments about whether an observer’s reliability warrants endorsing their observations in a given case are arguments about the observer’s causal dispositions, the environmental factors which affect them, and the objects these dispositions are triggered by. These are not claims about attitudes, and this means that empirical discourse does not bottom out in the way that interpretational or transcendental discourse does. Of course, such arguments will inevitably have to depend upon further observation claims, but all such claims can in principle be put into question, even if they cannot all be put into question at once. This is a special and rather limited case of
suspending representation, insofar as it involves a revoking provisional authority over observation commitments in precisely the way that we revoke the provisional authority we have over the content of our concepts. There can also be more general cases of suspending the use of empirical concepts in order to examine the mechanisms underlying their application. For example, we might suspend all uses of the concept of ‘aura’ to examine whether there are any reliable mechanisms underlying its common usage. In the absence of such mechanisms we would do well to deny that it is a genuine empirical concept at all.

So, the question remains: what exactly about the structure of argument shifts in cases of bottoming out? In the case of interpretational discourse, something is added, namely, the ability to use claims about attitudes as reasons on the basis of non-testimonial forms of authority. In the case of transcendental discourse, something is subtracted, namely, the ability to use any claims other than those about the structure of thought itself. Reflective reason involves a bracketing of all claims other than those about the very structure of reason itself. On this basis, we can now see that the four forms of discourse we have so far identified form a hierarchy, in which claims from the higher forms of discourse may be deployed as reasons in the lower forms, but not vice-versa. They are ordered from highest to lowest as follows: transcendental discourse > mathematical discourse > empirical discourse > interpretational discourse. We can also represent this as a partitioning of the set of truth claims:-

![Partitioning of Truth Claims](image)

One could take this setup to suggest that we could do away with interpretational discourse entirely, but this is not exactly true. All discourse necessarily involves the possibility of interpretation, both of individuals and groups. On the one hand, discourse depends upon the possibility of navigating the commitments one’s interlocutors undertake by their utterances. On the other, discourse depends upon the possibility of navigating the communal norms constituting the secondary dimension of conceptual content discussed earlier. Strictly, one need only be able to do these things implicitly. However, just as in the case of concept revision discussed earlier, the potential for acquiring the vocabulary necessary to do so explicitly, namely, by engaging in interpretational discourse about individuals and groups, is implicit within these abilities.
iii) The Ideal of Objectivity

Moving on, it is necessary to show why the set of objective truth claims is an ideal subset of what we take to be true. The reason for this is that claims are not included within the set, but rather excluded from it, and the process of excluding them is potentially indefinite. What this means is that we take claims to be objectively true by default, but that we are under an obligation to continuously separate out whatever non-objective claims we find within this default set. This process of separation is potentially indefinite, not only because it involves recursively suspending our claims in order to examine the concepts deployed in them, but because, as noted earlier, such suspensions must always be performed locally, and thus require that one use some concepts to examine others. This means that although there is nothing that cannot in principle be suspended in this way, in practice we will never be able to suspend and examine all of our concepts. The task of separation is never finished.

What we can take from this is that objectivity is an ideal implicit within the very structure of truth. All discourse aims at truth, and the basic structure underlying this is what I’ve called the withdrawal of authority. This is involves all of those engaged in the discourse giving up authority over their claims in order to grant such authority to the object of their claims. This is always abrogated to some extent by conceptual suppression, wherein we hold fixed the primary content of some of our concepts, in order to make this withdrawal possible. However, we can see that the underlying ideal is that of maximising withdrawal. This is why we strive to remove authority from absolutely everyone by default, and thus why claims are taken to be objective by default. It is only when debates bottom out in the ways discussed above that we separate them out, but even here we still strive to limit the relevant authority as much as possible. The very structure of truth compels us to divest ourselves of authority over the claims we make to the greatest extent it is possible. This means that we are compelled to talk about the world as it is in-itself.

Now, one could still maintain that it’s possible to be involved in no objective discourse whatsoever, by holding that one could just engage in transcendental and/or interpretational discourse to the exclusion of all else. However, there is a good argument against this. As we’ve explained, some form of interpretation is implicitly involved in all discourse (including transcendental discourse), and interpretational discourse just makes this explicit. We’ve also showed that interpretational discourse can deploy objective claims as reasons, but not vice-versa. The additional insight is then that to be properly explicit, interpretational discourse must deploy such objective reasons. In the interpretational debates about both individuals and communities one can always be forced to provide objective claims about what they have done that license us to ascribe certain commitments to them. For instance, debates about what an individual believes can always regress to arguments about what sentences they have actually uttered, and debates about communal norms (i.e., about what one should do) can always regress to claims about the practices of that community (i.e., about what they actually do). Interpretational discourse thus always has some grounding in objective matters.

What this means is that one cannot be fully explicit about anything unless one can talk about the way the world is in itself. Given that the potential for such explicitness is contained within all discourse, this means that the very structure of thought and talk implies that there must be a way the world is in-itself. This amounts to a transcendental deduction of objectivity.
3. Towards Transcendental Realism

However, although this is an adequate defence against the correlationist intuition, it does not yet amount to a demonstration of transcendental realism as it was defined earlier. This is because the latter holds not only that there is a way the world is in-itself, but that there is a real structure of the world in-itself. I’m now going to provide a brief argument for this kind of full-blooded transcendental realism.

First of all, we can agree with Brandom that the world is the totality of what is true, and that our picture of the world is just those claims that we take to be true. However, because we have provided a purely formal account of the distinction between objective and non-objective truth, in terms of an ideal subset of what we take to be true, we can now draw a distinction between the world and the Real:-

The World: All that is the case. The totality of all that is true.

The Real: All that is really the case. The totality of what is objectively true.

We can then distinguish between the formal structure of the Real, which is just the structure of thought about objective matters of fact, and the real structure of the Real, which is the structure of the world as it is in-itself. The former is a transcendental (synthetic a priori) and thus non-objective matter, whereas the latter is properly objective (synthetic a posteriori). The former is the object of the critique of metaphysics, whereas the latter is the object of metaphysics itself. To repeat the distinction:-

Formal Structure of the Real: The structure of discourse about the Real. It is the structure of our picture of the Real as opposed to the structure of our picture of the world, or the formal structure of the ideal objective subset of what we take to be true, in distinction from the set of what we take to be true.

Real Structure of the Real: This is the structure of the world as it is in-itself. This is the essential structure of the world as distinct from its contents, or what happens to be in the world.

We can then say that, because the ideal of objectivity is part of the structure of truth as such, we are compelled to move from the formal structure of the Real to the real structure of the Real. Rather than treating the question ‘What is the Real?’ (or ‘What is the world in-itself?’) as a question about the structure of our attitudes, we must treat it as an objective question, the answer to which is independent of our attitudes. In short, this means that the structure of thought implies that there is a real structure of the world which is not only independent from, but also in excess of the structure of thought. This is the essence of transcendental realism.

Part IV: Kant’s Revenge

In the main part of this essay I’ve provided an analysis of the dialectical terrain of contemporary realism, located the potential for a new position within it — transcendental realism — and then provided the outline of an argument for it. In this final part of the essay, I’m going to work out some of the consequences of this position in more detail, and further situate in relation to the historical tradition. Specifically, I will show how it recapitulates and
modified many of the important insights of Kant’s philosophy. The moral I would like to
draw from this is that far from rejecting the critical turn that Kant instigated, the real aim of
contemporary metaphysics should be to radicalise it. It is precisely only by properly
performing the critique of metaphysics that we may properly attend to metaphysics
itself, and we may only do this from a genuinely transcendental perspective.

1. From General to Transcendental Logic

The first point to make is that the move from the formal structure of the world to the formal
structure of the Real is analogous to Kant’s move from what he calls general logic to
transcendental logic.

Kant identifies general logic as that which describes the form of thought in abstraction from
all possible content, which is to say, in abstraction from its applicability to objects. In
contrast from this, transcendental logic deals with the form of thought in abstraction from
the content of particular objects, but in accordance with the content of objects in
general. The various forms of judgement which constitute general logic, understood in
terms of their applicability to objects, are then converted into categories, which constitute
transcendental logic. The process by which this is achieved is what Kant calls a
metaphysical deduction. Taken together, the categories also constitute the concept of
an object in general, or the transcendental object.

i) The Categories

The formal structure of the world, as I have defined it, is just the formal structure common
to all discourse. It is governed by a generic notion of truth, which does not yet discriminate
between different kinds of truth. Within it we can find various other generic concepts,
which play the same role as Kant’s logical forms of judgement. These include existence,
predication, relation, identity, essence, modality (in its various forms), ground and
consequence, number, part and whole, among others. These are abstract logical forms
which can be deployed within any discourse, including non-objective interpretational
discourse such as fictional discourse. The move from the formal structure of the world to
the formal structure of the Real involves thinking these notions in their applicability to real
objects (or entities).

This means that in each case the generic concept gets split in two, into one which applies
to constituents of the Real and one which does not. For instance, the notion of generic
existence is split into the notion of entity and pseudo-entity, and the notion of generic
predication is split into the notion of property and pseudo-property. This split allows us
to make sense of the first two classical debates discussed earlier, as the questions become: ‘Are numbers pseudo-entities?’ and ‘Are values pseudo-properties?’ In both
cases we can modify the deflationary realist position in a systematic way:-

Entity: An object is an entity iff we take there to be some claims about it that are
objectively true of it (modified from the Quine Thesis; it is interesting to note that this is
very close to Kit Fine’s solution to the problems of Quine’s approach).

Property: A predicate is a property iff we take some ascriptions of it to entities to be
objectively true (modified from the McDowell Thesis).
This also lets us make better sense of the notion of a **aspect** of the structure of the world, or an **aspect of the Real**. In effect this breaks down into a question about whether or not some aspect of our talk about the world is also an aspect of our talk about the Real. There can be aspects of the Real which are not reducible to entities and properties just because there are **categories** other than those of **entity** and **property**, such as that of **modality**.

However, there is a very tricky issue here with regard to precisely how we define the notion of real object (or entity) used to define the notion of category above. The difficulty stems from the fact that there are two kinds of objective truth which constitute the Real – empirical and mathematical – and thus ostensibly two corresponding kinds of object. My solution here is to say that mathematical objects are **not real**, or that there aren’t any mathematical entities. This might seem like an *ad hoc* move, but there is a genuine reason underlying it. It regards an important difference between empirical and mathematical discourse. In empirical discourse, we grant **authority** to objects themselves to force us to revise not only our claims about them, but also the content of the concepts we apply to them in those claims. In mathematics, the objects discussed do not have this kind of authority. Not only what these objects are but which of them exist is completely **derived** from the axioms, and this means that they cannot play a meaningful role in revising those axioms analogous to the role empirical objects play in revising our concepts of them. One way of looking at this is to say that a mathematical object is not an **in-itself** in the way that an empirical object is. Another way would be to say that mathematical claims are **weakly** objective, whereas empirical claims are **strongly** objective. We must then modify the above categorical definitions to refer to **strong objectivity**, rather than objectivity *per se*. This has the consequence of answering the question of the reality of mathematical objects **a priori**: mathematical objects are pseudo-entities.

This move makes sense given the fact that, as I mentioned earlier, mathematics is at least partly *transcendental*, or synthetic *a priori*. The structure of quantification is part of the the basic logical structure of thought, and this means that arithmetic and the mathematical objects it discusses, namely, the **natural numbers**, can’t be seen as radically independent of our attitudes. This means that there is an important way in which my position is in agreement with Kant, but also an important way in which it breaks with Kant. On the one hand, I am in agreement with Kant in treating the objects of empirical discourse as the primary objects of knowledge, and thus taking the categories as solely applying to them. On the other hand, I am in disagreement with Kant insofar as I take mathematics to be more than simply synthetic *a priori*, and thus take it to genuinely constitute a part of the Real.

Nonetheless, even if we recognise that the mathematical is part of the Real, there is still the question of how it is part of the **formal structure** of the Real. My provisional suggestion is that the formal notion of an **axiom**, which functions to modify the synthetic *a priori* structure of quantification in a potentially revisable way, is the crucial notion here. However, this notion cannot be a **category** in precisely the same sense that existence is a category, insofar as it does not have the same direct application to real objects (or entities). Nonetheless, there is a good sense in which mathematics is applicable to entities, as repeatedly evidenced in the natural sciences. As such, I will draw a distinction between **empirical categories** and **mathematical categories**. I will not provide more examples of mathematical categories here, but I suspect that there are others. As should be obvious, a much more thorough study of the structure of mathematical rationality in its relation to empirical rationality is required in order to properly flesh out this position.
ii) Mathematising the Aesthetic

It is nonetheless interesting to note that this split in the formal structure of the Real between the empirical and the mathematical mirrors Kant’s division between the **transcendental logic** and the **transcendental aesthetic**. Whereas the former deals with the categories, or **pure concepts**, which provide the very form of the conceptual, the transcendental aesthetic deals with **space** and **time**, or **pure intuitions**, which provide the very form of intuition. The really interesting point is that not only did Kant take the whole of mathematics to be synthetic *a priori*, but that he took it to be derived from the pure intuitions of space and time. The position I am proposing allows us to modify Kant’s approach here in at least three ways:

1) The Sellarsian account of perception allows us to deny that there is a distinct kind of **representation**, such as **intuitions**, which must be subsumed under **concepts**, and thus to deny that there are anything like pure forms of intuition.

2) We can thus hold that mathematics is properly **conceptual**, but that there is a distinction between **mathematical** and **empirical** concepts (and likewise between **pure concepts** or **categories**).

3) We can thus invert the Kantian story, holding that **space** and **time** must be understood in **mathematical** terms. However, because mathematics is nonetheless an **objective** discourse, this means that the Real can in some sense **force** us to revise our mathematical axioms in order to properly understand the **real** structure of space and time. This resolves Kant’s inability to deal with both non-Euclidean geometry and the Einsteinian space-time that requires it.

The final consequence of this position is that although we must perform a **metaphysical deduction** of the categories in a manner similar to Kant, the corresponding **transcendental deduction** of the validity of the categories must be very different. Kant’s transcendental deduction aimed to show the necessary applicability of the **categories** to the **forms of intuition**, and thus the necessary applicability of **concepts** to **intuitions**. However, the model provided here contains no such split between concepts and intuitions. Instead, the transcendental deduction, which was already sketched earlier, consists in demonstrating the necessity of **objectivity**. In essence, it involves demonstrating that we cannot **think** without **thinking about the Real**.

There is one remaining problem for this deduction, and it rests on another question about the interface between mathematical and empirical discourse. We have provided a brief argument to the effect that it is not possible to **explicitly** engage in transcendental or interpretational discourse without also engaging in empirical discourse, but it might still be possible to hold that one could explicitly engage in mathematical discourse without in turn engaging in empirical discourse. Indeed, I earlier posited a hierarchy in which empirical claims could not be deployed as **reasons** within mathematical debates. This would seem to suggest that there could be autonomous mathematical reason, in a way which would undermine my attempt at a transcendental deduction of the categories.

The response to this problem is to distinguish mathematical **computation** from mathematical **discourse**. The former simply works out the consequences of a given set of axioms in an algorithmic fashion, but cannot allow for the kinds of **axiom revision** which is
necessary for full fledged mathematical discourse. If we can then show that axiom revision necessarily involves empirical discourse, we will have shored up the transcendental deduction I have proposed. The key to this is to show that there is a secondary dimension to the content of mathematical claims, just as there is in the content of other claims, and both that this is essential to the structure of axiom revision and that it can only be made explicit through interpretational discourse, which can in turn only be made explicit through empirical discourse. Unfortunately, this can only be demonstrated by carrying out the more in depth study into the structure of mathematical rationality recommended above.

What emerges from this story is that in order to pursue the genuinely Neo-Kantian (or perhaps Hyper-Kantian) strategy I have been outlining, we need to tell a much more in depth story about the relation between the primary and secondary dimensions of conceptual content. There lies the key to the transcendental deduction.

2. The Question of Being

Kant is remembered more for his critique of metaphysics than for the actual metaphysics he expounded. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that Kant thought philosophy did not end with critique, but that critique is only a means to the proper pursuit of metaphysical knowledge. This is an idea that I have been advocating strongly throughout the whole of this essay. However, although much has so far been said about what the critique of metaphysics consists in, little has been said about what metaphysics itself consists in. In the last section I outlined the move from the formal structure of the world to the formal structure of the Real, which is the main part of the critique of metaphysics, in this section I will outline the move from the formal structure of the Real to the real structure of the Real, which comprises the whole of metaphysics.

I) Heidegger’s Project

The other figure who must be brought in at this point is Heidegger, who perhaps has the deepest vision of the nature of metaphysics after Kant. In order to expound this, it is necessary to be clear about the fact that Heidegger initially took himself to be doing metaphysics, and indeed, to be doing it more thoroughly than the metaphysical tradition that preceded him. His early work was focused upon ontology, which aims to provide an account of the Being of entities (das Sein des Seiende), or that which defines entities as entities. Following the Aristotelian tradition, he took this to be part of metaphysics, but he deviated from the scholastic variants of this tradition in taking it to be the core of metaphysics.

Heidegger also followed the Aristotelian tradition in conceiving the question of Being as a matter of unifying the different senses in which ‘Being’ is said. For Aristotle, these were the being of the categories (including substantiality, spatio-temporality, quantity, quality, etc.), potentiality and actuality (modality), the possession of accidents (predication), and being-true (truth). Despite rejecting Aristotle’s manifold of senses, Heidegger never established his own definitive list. Nonetheless, there is good evidence that he saw the problem of defining entities qua entities in terms of uniting the different senses in which ‘Being’ could be said of them.

However, Heidegger’s real innovation over this tradition was to see the potential for approaching the question, in a way independent of any given list of senses of Being, within
the tradition itself. He did this by carefully reconstructing the idea of metaphysics as that which asks after entities as a whole as such. This means that metaphysics in general is concerned with entities as a whole and with entities qua entities in its guise as ontology. Heidegger then diagnosed the inherent problem with the tradition as onto-theology, namely, its tendency to understand both of these in terms of entities. Traditionally, metaphysics ends up understanding entities as a whole in terms of some privileged entity (e.g., God) which functions as the ground of their existence, and understanding entities qua entities in terms of some property of entities (e.g., Physis, Logos, Hen, Idea, Energeia, Substantiality, Subjectivity, Objectivity, the Will, the Will to power, the Will to will, etc), which he calls beingness (Seiendheit). Heidegger’s own strategy was to try and locate the structure of entities qua entities (Being) within the structure of the whole of entities.

Now, Heidegger called this structure of the whole ‘world’, and understood it in phenomenological terms as a temporal horizon projected by the thinking entity, or Dasein, within which entities are given. This is what underlies the early Heidegger’s identification of phenomenology and ontology. This early approach failed, precisely because, in attempting to locate Being within the structure of this temporal horizon, it made Being completely dependent upon Dasein. Heidegger’s mid to late work replaces the notion of world with a more complicated structure, in which Dasein’s projection of a world is in strife with a fundamental excess (called earth) which it can never fully assimilate. This structure is articulated in various ways (including as the fourfold of gods, mortals, earth and sky), but we will lump all of these together under the heading of Ereignis.

Ultimately, Heidegger abandoned the original Aristotelian question, coming to the position that there cannot be an answer to the question of entities qua entities, in the sense of an answer that would overturn all the various conceptions of beingness the metaphysical tradition has provided. Instead, he took it that Ereignis presents the structure underlying the succession of historical epochs within which these conceptions of beingness emerge, and that we must overcome metaphysics by describing this structure. The development of Heidegger’s thought can thus be understood in terms of the way he switches the reference of the term ‘Being’ from the unifying structure of entities qua entities to the structure of the givenness of entities as a whole. This is a move from the Being of entities to Being as such, from Sein to Seyn, or from Sein to Ereignis.

ii) Beyond Heidegger

Now, we must reject Heidegger’s position both early and late, insofar as in both cases it collapses back into some from of correlationism. However, we can accept many of Heidegger’s innovations over the Aristotelian tradition. The parallels between these insights and the position I’ve so far been articulating will become clear shortly, but it is first important to point out where the most important divergence from Heidegger is to be found. The position I’ve been articulating advocates a thoroughly representational account of thought, as opposed to the presentational account of thought that Heidegger inherits from Husserl. This means that we cannot view the structure of the whole of entities as a phenomenological horizon within which entities are given. We must nonetheless accept Heidegger’s point that whatever this structure is, it cannot be understood in terms of some kind of privileged entity.

The natural way to move beyond Heidegger can be seen by attending to the other name
he gives to this structure of the whole in both his early and late periods: truth. What this indicates is that the natural replacement for the presentational notion of world/Ereignis is the account of world that Brandom takes over from Wittgenstein's Tractatus. On this account, the world is all that is the case, or the totality of what is true, and the totality of what we take to be true is our representation of the world. We can then understand the Heideggerian strategy for answering the question of Being as seeking to unify the different senses in which 'Being' is said of entities in the real structure of the Real. Moreover, we can understand the question itself as seeking the underlying unity of the various aspects of the formal structure of the Real, which is to say the unity of the various categories in their applicability to entities (or real objects). This lets us formulate the question of Being in a way independent of any given list of categories or senses.

In essence, what this shows us is that Heidegger's question of Being, when shed of its phenomenological trappings, coincides with the task of metaphysics as we have so far defined it – to move from the formal structure of the Real to the real structure of the Real. Furthermore, we can draw a series of additional insights from this fact:-

1) The move from the formal to the real structure of the Real can be understood as uncovering the underlying unity of the various categories in their applicability to entities. This indicates that we cannot properly understand the various aspects of the Real that the categories correspond to in isolation from one another.

2) Heidegger’s claim that we must have some pre-ontological understanding of Being in order to answer the question of Being is satisfied by this account, insofar as the formal structure of the Real is implicit within the structure of thought as such. Indeed, we can identify this pre-ontological understanding with what Kant calls the concept of an object in general, or the transcendental object.

3) We must avoid understanding the real structure of the Real in terms of a privileged entity (i.e., onto-theology). For example, this means we must reject both Leibniz and Spinoza’s account of the world, in which God either plays a privileged role (Leibniz) or is taken to be identical to the world itself (Spinoza).

However, although these insights help us flesh out the account of metaphysics provided above, we still do not have an adequate idea of what it is to move from the formal to the real structure of the Real, or, indeed, how to do it. The rest of this section will try to sketch an answer to these questions.

iii) Metaphysical Concepts

The answer to the first question lies in the fact that, if it is to get at the real structure of the Real, metaphysics must be an objective discipline. This means that there must be some sense in which the world can force us to revise our metaphysical claims and the metaphysical concepts that constitute their content. The relevant question is this: what are these metaphysical concepts? The answer is that they are the concepts which pick out the aspects of the world to which the various categories correspond. The categories provide the form of these concepts, to which metaphysics adds content, and it is this content which the world can force us to revise, even if the categories themselves are fixed. Metaphysics is thus a matter of interpreting the content of the categories, or developing our pre-ontological understanding of Being into an understanding of Being as
It is helpful at this point to provide an example. I will pick the category of modality, insofar as it highlights the difference between the transcendental realist approach and the deflationary realist approach discussed earlier. The deflationary realists about modality (Lewis and Brandom) take the world to have a modal structure, but they take this structure to be exhausted by the semantics of modal discourse about the world. As such, Lewis takes there to be possible worlds and Brandom takes there to be incompatibility relations between predicates and between states of affairs. The transcendental realist on the other hand is able to interpret the metaphysical significance of the semantics of modal discourse, rather than simply taking it to reflect the structure of the world.

For example, one could be a Spinozist about modality, and hold that there is strictly speaking nothing other than the actual world, and that whatever happens is strictly determined, but that there are nonetheless real modal features of entities, such as capacities (or affects). This position holds that whichever capacities are actualised are in some sense necessarily actualised, but that our talk about possibility nonetheless makes sense, because it plays the role of individuating the capacities of both individuals and general kinds. A Deleuzian might then add that capacities are not the only modal (or virtual) feature of entities, but that there are also tendencies, which are individuated by our talk about probabilities. This would be a further example of interpreting the metaphysical significance of a category implicit within the structure of our thought and talk about the world.

What all of this means is that there are a series of metaphysical questions corresponding to whichever categories we locate through the metaphysical deduction: What are entities really? What are properties really? What are essences really? What relations really? What is modality really? Etc. In each case, the ‘really’ indicates that what is sought is the real structure of the corresponding aspect of the Real, rather than the formal structure of the aspect of thought about the Real.

We can see that this schema is the consequence of breaking the reciprocity of the sense-dependence Brandom posits between the structure of the world and the structure of thought. Just as understanding the structure of thought is necessary but insufficient for understanding structure of the world, so it is for the various pairs of fundamental concepts Brandom located: we must understand the concept of singular term to understand the concept of entity, but there is more to understanding the latter than understanding the former; we must understanding the concept of predicate to understand the concept of property, but again there is more to properties than the structure of predication, and so on for the various other concepts. There is thus an important correspondence, and an essential gap, between logical concepts and metaphysical concepts.

However, a proper critique of metaphysics should not only give us an idea of what it is to do metaphysics, but also how we should go about doing it. It is in relation to this that the first insight we drew from Heidegger rears its head. We can’t properly understand any of these various metaphysical concepts in isolation from one another. We require a systematic picture of the real structure of the Real, or a unified account of Being. The critique of metaphysics must thus be able to show us how metaphysics can be approached in such a systematic way. I do not claim to be able to fully answer this question here, but I believe that I can point to where metaphysics must begin.
iv) Metaphysics and Ontology

The crucial point is that the task of metaphysics, or the question of Being, is to unify the various categories in their applicability to entities. This is a point common to both the Aristotelian formulation of the question of Being, and to the Kantian conception of categories. What it means is that the category of real existence (or the concept of entity) has some form of priority in relation to the other categories. It is by first asking ‘What are entities?’ that we can get a grip on the other metaphysical questions we must tackle. This does not mean that this question can be answered independently of the others, only that it should be our entry point into thinking about them.

However, this seems to contradict Heidegger’s Aristotelian interpretation of the question regarding entities qua entities. Surely, this can only be answered by the question of Being as a whole? The answer to this is yes and no. As we have just admitted, the question of what entities really are cannot be answered properly in isolation from the various other question which make up the question of the underlying unity of the categories. However, there is a way of understanding the question which gives it a kind of relative autonomy from the question of unity. This is to understand it as asking after the beingness of entities, in precisely the way that Heidegger castigated the metaphysical tradition for. This means understanding the narrow form of the question ‘What are entities?’ as a matter of abstracting a general concept of entity from the totality of entities given to us by empirical discourse. For example, one might take all entities given by the natural sciences to be understandable in processual terms, and therefore take it that entities are processes. One would then proceed to answer the various other metaphysical questions in relation to this, for example, by working out how the properties and modal features of processes must be understood.

In short, all of this means that we can accept half of Heidegger’s critique of onto-theology, namely, that Being (or the real structure of the Real) should not be understood in terms of a privileged entity, but that we must reject his claim that one cannot genuinely inquire into Being by inquiring into beingness. This is because beingness (or real existence) is a genuine aspect of Being.

On this basis, we can formulate a neat division between the various questions of metaphysics and ontology:-

The General Question of Metaphysics: What is Being? What is the real structure of the Real? What is the structure of the world in-itself?


The Question of Fundamental Ontology: What are entities? What is the real structure of entities qua entities?


This means we have rejected the Heideggerian definition of ontology in favour of its more classical definition as a sub-discipline of traditional metaphysics, although we accept
Heidegger’s thesis that it is the core of metaphysics. It is also helpful to note that what analytic metaphysics calls metontology (not to be confused with what Heidegger calls metontology) is here labelled fundamental ontology, and what it calls ontology is regional ontology. Another way of drawing this distinction, advocated by Dale Jacquette, is in terms of pure ontology and applied ontology, respectively.

What emerges from this section is that although, on the one hand, the radicalised Kantian project I am recommending does not reject metaphysics, but must be seen as a continuation of the metaphysical tradition to some extent, on the other hand, it must nonetheless be seen as pursuing a genuinely post-Heideggerian metaphysical project. I have so far painted the critique of metaphysics as a matter of making explicit what was already to some extent implicit within classical metaphysics, in order to pursue such metaphysics properly. However, we could also view this in more Heideggerian terms, as the attempt to formulate the question of Being that the classical tradition has forgotten, but which nonetheless provides its hidden impetus.

3. Science and Metaphysics

The other interesting feature of Kant’s philosophy is the privilege he gives to the natural sciences, and thus his forging of an explicit relationship between science and metaphysics. We are now in a position to work out the consequences of the account I’ve been providing for this relationship.

i) The Structure of Science

The first thing to note is that the account of thought and talk I have been advocating is committed to some form semantic holism. This is because I follow Quine and Brandom in rejecting the analytic/synthetic distinction, although I take myself to have improved upon their accounts, insofar as the Hegelian account of thought I have introduced allows me to explain the intuitions underlying the notion of analyticity. What this means is that, at least with regard to the set of claims we take to be strongly objective (it is important to remember that the set of what we take to be true is partitioned, and that these partitions have a hierarchical relationship), we can see our commitments as constituting what Quine calls a web of belief. This is a nice visual metaphor, where we understand our observational commitments to sit at the edge of the web, facing what Quine calls the tribunal of experience, and then both the commitments which these depend on, and those which constitute the contents of the concepts deployed within them, to sit further in, so that the further we get into the web the more distant we get from experience. Quine held that in principle we could always make changes to commitments further towards the core of the web in order to hold fixed commitments at the periphery.

Now, Quine initially held that logic could be found at the very core of the web, but he later retracted this idea. The reason for this is that logic provides the very structure of the web itself. Brandom has emphasised this fact very strongly: the structure of revision cannot itself be revisable (at least not entirely). Another way of putting this is to say that the structure of the web is transcendental. The important question then is this: if logic does not lie at the core of the web, what does? On my account, it is metaphysical concepts which lie at the core. This nicely mirrors Quine’s initial intuition, insofar as these are not logical concepts, but the metaphysical interpretations of these concepts.
Now, to understand the consequences of this idea, we have to understand that the sciences are the principal discourses through which we acquire objective knowledge. This is because they structure themselves around the ideal of objectivity. In the case of the natural sciences (or empirical sciences) they are structured around the ideal of strong objectivity, insofar as they make experiment the final arbiter of all claims. In the case of the mathematical sciences, they are structured around the ideal of weak objectivity, insofar as they attempt to derive all of their claims from axioms which are nonetheless potentially revisable. Now, there has been plenty written in the philosophy of science about how the actual practice of science fails to live up to these ideals, or even how these ideals are approached in incommensurable ways through the use of differing methodologies. I don’t wish to go into these debates in much detail. I accept that these ideals can be realised in a variety of ways and thus that science will always have to address methodological questions. This is what it means for the structure of revision to itself be partially revisable. There is an interesting story to tell about how these methodological questions interface with what I earlier called the secondary dimension of conceptual content, but I will not attempt to tell it here. The important point is simply that nothing about the difficulties of realising the ideal of objectivity detracts from the ideal qua ideal.

ii) Reciprocity and Continuity

Now, insofar as metaphysics is a matter of interpreting the categories in their applicability to entities, and the notion of entity is defined in relation to the notion of strong objectivity, there must be an important relationship between metaphysics and natural science. Indeed, we can see that metaphysics depends upon natural science. This is because metaphysics does not describe the Real, but the real structure of the Real. Describing the Real is the job of science, and metaphysics is thus dependent upon it for its material. To describe this more concretely, insofar as metaphysics must begin by abstracting a general concept of real existence from the totality of real entities, it requires science to provide it with the set of entities it must abstract from. It is only in virtue of this connection to natural science that metaphysics can claim objectivity, because it is only through this connection that it can potentially be forced to revise its concepts.

However, the relationship is more complex than this. Metaphysics is not something that appears after natural science, but is always already implicit within it. This can be seen by appealing to the metaphor of the web of belief, which provides the ideal structure of natural scientific inquiry. The transcendental structure of the inquiry implies that the core of the web is always there, even if it is more or less developed, or more or less explicit. Metaphysics is implicit within the ideal of objectivity, and science is structured by this ideal, therefore metaphysics is implicit in science. We can even see this in the practice of science itself. Einstein’s supplanting of the Newtonian picture of the universe is a truly metaphysical revolution, insofar as it obliterates the absolute conception of the metaphysics of space and time that were more or less implicit within it. The Darwinian revolution in biology continues to challenge the way we think about the very notion of types of entities (and thus of essence), and complexity theory is forcing us to revise the way we think about part-whole relations. These are all cases in which science is already doing metaphysics, it is simply not doing it in a fully explicit manner. The task of the critique of metaphysics is precisely to make it explicit, so that it can be done properly.

What all of this means is that metaphysical discourse is actually a well-defined subset of empirical discourse. It also means that the relationship between natural science and
metaphysics is not one-way, but a matter of reciprocal influence. Metaphysics plays the role of organising the most fundamental concepts deployed within the natural sciences, and thus can play a very positive and explicit role within them, but in doing so it must also be sensitive to the results of those sciences, because experimental results and the theoretical innovations which follow them can ultimately force its revision. In essence, we can say that metaphysics and science are continuous, but this need not imply that the distinction between them is at all vague.

iii) Mathematics and Metaphysics

The final question to explore is that of the relation between mathematics and metaphysics. There is not too much that can be said here, given that I have already admitted that a more in depth study of the structure of mathematical reason is required, so as to describe the structure of the revision of both mathematical concepts and mathematical axioms, through which we can determine precisely what the mathematical categories are. However, there are a few remarks that can be made. First of all, it must be the case that mathematical categories play some role in metaphysics, insofar as mathematical concepts can be applied to entities, and metaphysics is just a matter of unifying the categories in their applicability to entities. Indeed, there is a good sense in which the primary content of many of the empirical concepts deployed within the natural sciences is in part mathematical (e.g., wave-form, chemical equilibrium, allele frequency distribution, etc.). This is possible because mathematical discourse > empirical discourse.

Now, the applicability of mathematics to entities in themselves is an important issue in contemporary continental metaphysics, and is ostensibly the problem that motivates Meillassoux’s speculative materialism. I think there is at least one point of common ground between Meillassoux, Badiou and the position I am articulating here. Both of them hold that mathematics does not describe a special domain of entities (i.e., mathematical objects), but that it instead describes the Being of all entities. This is in broad agreement with my position, insofar as I take mathematics to describe the Real without describing any entities. The difference between our positions is that they take Being to be exhausted by the mathematical, which I think misses the real point of metaphysics.

4. Fundamental Deontology

The most powerful of the criticisms originally levelled at Kant, by none other than Fichte, was that the Critique of Pure Reason could not account for the possibility of the very form of knowledge it exemplified. This lead to a series of attempts by different figures to establish both an account of the nature of critical knowledge and a method for achieving it, culminating in Hegel’s attempt to create a completely presuppositionless philosophy, and Husserl’s attempt to create a purely descriptive phenomenology. Each of these in its own way strove to achieve a kind of critical immanence lacking in Kant’s work. I will bring the essay to a close by contemplating how the project I have outlined can meet this ideal of immanence.

i) Pragmatic Contradiction Revisited

I have already provided a partial account of the nature of critical knowledge. This is because I have provided a description of the basic structure of transcendental
discourse. On this account, transcendental discourse is at the top of the discursive hierarchy, meaning that transcendental claims can be deployed in all other discourses, and that the criterion of truth of transcendental claims is that the negation of the claim implies a pragmatic contradiction. Strictly speaking, this criterion is too broad. The kind of pragmatic contradiction involved must be one which is not dependent upon anything about the person making the claim, meaning that claims like 'I am talking', the negation of which is such a pragmatic contradiction, should not come out as transcendental claims.

Instead, the kinds of pragmatic contradiction we are concerned with are those which undermine the very structure of rationality itself, or the structure in virtue of which anyone can have an attitude about anything. Another way of saying this is that transcendental claims are those the negation of which would make rationality impossible, and thus those that represent conditions of the possibility of rationality.

For example, the claim that one need never provide reasons for one’s claims undermines the very structure of justification. It is tantamount to licensing bare assertion, in which the very fact that one takes something to be true is meant to ground its truth. This would amount to saying that authority is never withdrawn from the speaker. The corresponding transcendental claim is then that there must be at least some cases in which bare assertion is not permitted. These are all cases in which the speaker does not have some form of stipulative authority over the matter at hand. From this ban on bare assertion it is very easy to derive a ban on circular reasoning, because it involves justifying a claim by appeal to itself, which ultimately collapses into bare assertion.

So, when we say that the kinds of pragmatic contradiction that we are interested in are those that undermine the structure of rationality, what we are really interested in are those pragmatic contradictions which undermine the possibility of truth. The crucial point is that the possibility of truth is also dependent upon the possibility of falsity, and this possibility is established by the withdrawal of authority. This is why the withdrawal of authority provides the basic structure common to all types of truth. The kinds of pragmatic contradiction we are interested in are principally those that undermine this withdrawal.

ii) Radicalising Scepticism

The account so far provided also suggests the beginnings of a method for elaborating the transcendental structure of rationality, insofar as it suggests that if one brackets all other claims, one is left with transcendental discourse. This follows from the place of transcendental discourse within the discursive hierarchy sketched earlier. This idea presents an interesting connection with the projects of both Hegel and Husserl.

Husserl’s phenomenological method is predicated upon the idea of bracketing all evidence given in experience in order to provide an immanent description of the structure of givenness itself. He calls this an epoche, and takes it to be a radicalisation of Cartesian scepticism. In contrast to this, my alternative method would bracket all reasons, in order to provide an immanent description of the structure of rationality itself. This could equally be described as a radicalisation of Pyrrhonian scepticism, which is an inferential scepticism, rather than an evidential scepticism. This form of scepticism is more fundamental, both because the phenomenological position can itself be bracketed from within the Pyrrhonian standpoint (but not vice-versa), and because, as Sellars has showed us, we can provide an account of experience from within the structure of reason that has no need of notions
such as givenness or evidence (it's also interesting to note that the very notion of an epoche originates with the Pyrrhonians). Nonetheless, there is plenty to learn from Husserl's methodological rigour in any attempt to construct a counter-phenomenological method.

It is now a matter of immense interest that Hegel's attempt to create a truly presuppositionless philosophy is motivated by his encounter with Pyrrhonianism. Although this philosophy only comes to fruition in the Science of Logic, in which he forces thought to immanently think its own structure starting from the least it can possibly think (which he names Being), the project of the Logic is justified by the Phenomenology of Spirit. The goal of the Phenomenology is to prove that what Hegel calls Science is the correct mode of knowing, as opposed to the mode of knowing he calls Natural Consciousness. We gave a brief description of the structure of this mode of knowing earlier, and most of the results so far produced are dependent upon it. Situating the current project in relation to Hegel's own project would thus be doubly enlightening.

There are two important features of Hegel's project:-

1) The concept of Natural Consciousness is for Hegel just the concept of the separation of subject and object (or thought and Being), whereas the concept of Science is just the concept of their unity. One is the negation of the other, meaning that there is no ground in between the two. This means that one must adopt the standpoint of either Natural Consciousness or Science.

2) Hegel takes it that Science cannot justify itself without circularity, and that it must instead be justified from within the standpoint of Natural Consciousness. The Logic begins from standpoint of Science, and thus has a single assumption: the unity of subject and object, or the identity of thought and Being (i.e., classical idealism). The Phenomenology justifies this assumption by attempting to show how the concept of Natural Consciousness systematically undermines itself, thereby negating itself and becoming its opposite – the concept of Science.

However, the point which is not made explicit in all of this is that Hegel is taking up the challenge of Pyrrhonian scepticism. This challenge is best presented by the Agrippan trilemma:-

Agrippan Trilemma: How does one justify any claim, without a) bare assertion, b) circular reasoning, or c) appealing to another claim which itself must be justified ad infinitum, i.e., regress?

The Pyrrhonian initiates this challenge by asserting the negation of any claims their interlocutor makes, thus creating a state of equipollence, where we must choose between the claim and its negation. We are then confronted by the trilemma, because to break equipollence, we must provide reasons to accept one or the other of the claims, and for whichever reasons we give for either claim, the sceptic will assert their negation, reintroducing equipollence and leading us into a vicious regress.

Hegel recognises that if he can justify the assumption of the identity of thought and Being, he will be able to carry out an immanent deduction of the structure of thought (and thus also of Being) that requires no further assumptions (this is why the Logic is also a
The important thing to note is that this presuppositionlessness arises because the very form of Science does not allow for the introduction of equipollence at all. Each point in the dialectical development (Being, Nothing, Becoming, etc.) is necessitated by the last, making it impossible for the sceptic to assert its negation. However, Hegel must still justify the initial assumption which constitutes the structure of Science (or absolute knowing), and he must do this on the sceptic’s own turf, so to speak.

Hegel’s real innovation is that he realises that the Pyrrhonian is not without his own assumptions. To realise this, one must recognise that if one were confronted with a sceptic who merely asserted the negation of all of one’s claims, one would not have a philosophical problem, one would have a heckler. The sceptical problem is only a genuine problem when it is posed, as it is in the form of the trilemma. The sceptic must show how the very structure of justification undermines itself, so that what we aim at in making claims is by its own nature impossible. However, in order to do this, the sceptic must actually describe the structure of justification. Hegel attempts to defeat the sceptic by beating him at his own game, namely, by describing the structure of justification, knowing, or claiming, better than the sceptic does, and then showing how that structure—which supports the very equipollence that makes scepticism possible—systematically undermines itself, and thus justifies Science.

As we have already seen, Hegel does an excellent job of defining this structure. I would even go so far as to say that he describes the essence of claiming with a clarity and precision unparalleled in the history of philosophy. However, this does not mean that he has gotten it right. The pertinent question is this: how do we know that the structure cannot be described in a manner more adequate than Hegel’s account? What this question demands is a genuine method to immanently describe the structure of rationality. This is where Hegel falls down, insofar as he simply posits his concept of natural consciousness without presenting us with anything like criteria for assessing its adequacy. To refute Hegel is to develop such a method and to show his account of Natural Consciousness wanting. This would not be to declare it incorrect, but simply to show that it is insufficient, to show that there is more to the ordinary (non-dialectical) structure of justification than he countenances and that the argument of the phenomenology fails because of this. The proper anti-Hegelian maxim is this: Natural Consciousness contra Science.

What we can take from this encounter with Husserl and Hegel is that we require a method for the immanent description of the structure of rationality itself, and that the way to achieve this method is by radicalising Pyrrhonian scepticism. This method involves bracketing all claims, only to leave those that are immune from bracketing, namely, transcendental claims about the conditions of the possibility of rationality itself. The question that remains is this: what kind of claims are these?

iii) Transcendental Normativity

The answer to this is to be found by returning to Kant’s fundamental insight that thought is conceptual, and that concepts are essentially rules. For Kant, thought is an essentially rule-governed activity. The more modern way of putting this is to say that thought is an essentially normative matter. This lets us characterise precisely where Husserl went wrong. The systematic rigour of his phenomenological epistemology is admirable, as is the radicality of the phenomenological epoche. The problem is that he picked the wrong object
to describe: evidence rather than inference, givenness rather than bindingness. The counter-phenomenological method we require concerns itself precisely with this bindingness or normativity. Rather, than describing the fundamental structures of consciousness, it aims to describe the fundamental norms of rationality – those norms by which we are bound simply in virtue of making claims at all, or those norms that provide the conditions of the possibility of rationality itself. In contrast to Husserl’s phenomenology, I call this descriptive enterprise fundamental deontology.

It is only by immanently describing these transcendental norms that we can uncover the subset of these norms which we are bound by insofar as we make claims about the Real. These latter norms are just what we have called the categories. This allows us to extend the narrative I have given so far about the primacy of epistemology in relation to ontology. We can now see that, in turn, deontology has primacy in relation to epistemology. The practice of critique must begin with deontology, even if it does not end with it. The maxim here is this: deontology is first philosophy.

It is important to point out here that this does not mean that, as Levinas claims, ethics is first philosophy. There are different forms of normativity, and not all norms we are bound by are strictly transcendental ones. Fundamental deontology deals only with these transcendental norms, and thus must be distinguished from other normative discourses, including ethics, which would be interpretational rather than transcendental. This does not mean that fundamental deontology is completely isolated from ethics. There is a good sense in which there must be a critique of ethics, just as there must be a critique of metaphysics, and it must also proceed by describing transcendental norms. Kant obviously recognised this himself (though we needn’t accept his own deontological conclusions). This critique plays the role of what is usually called meta-ethics.

Now, ideally, I should posit some basic methodological principles governing fundamental deontology and then proceed to derive all of the results provided so far from them. Ultimately, this is the form that the project must take, but I will not begin it here. I will however give a working outline of what these methodological principles should be:-

**The Primary Bind**: This is the principle that there are some transcendental norms. It is demonstrable by pragmatic contradiction, insofar as one cannot deny that one is bound by the same norms of argument as one’s interlocutors without destroying the argument itself. There can be disagreements about what we might call subsidiary norms of argument, but the fundamental norms must be held in common, as these are what define the argument qua argument. For example, if an interlocutor points out that one cannot justify one’s claims via circular reasoning, one cannot simply hold that this norm doesn’t apply to you, without thereby undermining the very structure of argument itself (i.e., by collapsing the structure of the withdrawal of authority, and thus undermining the possibility of truth).

**The Principle of Correction**: This is the principle that by default, one is entitled to explicitly correct one’s interlocutors. Argument would not be possible if one was not able to correct one’s interlocutors in the manner of the above example, because pragmatic contradiction could never be made explicit. However, if one is to do this, one must therefore be able to explicitly state the transcendental norms from which the pragmatic contradictions follow. It is this principle which underlies the fact that transcendental claims can be deployed in all other forms of discourse. Although there are some cases in which transcendental claims might play some kind of positive role (e.g., mathematics, metaphysics, ethics), their
ubiquity derives from this **corrective** role.

**The Principle of Autonomy:** This is the principle (inherited from Kant), that one can only be bound by **commitments** to which one somehow **binds oneself.** This means that one has a unique **authority** over which commitments one undertakes, both **theoretical** (objectual and conditional) and **practical** (individual and collective). **Norms** are just **collective practical commitments**.

Now, this last principle is the most complicated. It has a host of consequences. First, although one has a **unique** authority over which commitments one undertakes, one does not have a **complete** authority. If one could simply specify in every case what one was committed to, one could not genuinely be **bound** by anything. For example, if one could retroactively specify the content of one’s theoretical commitments in every case, one would be in the position of Lewis Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty, able to mean anything by anything, and thus not able to mean anything at all (this is also the thrust of Wittgenstein’s private language argument), whereas if one could retroactively specify the content one’s practical commitments, one could simply redefine one’s obligations so as to get out of any contract one is part of. What this means is that, in both cases, there must be a distinction between the **force** and the **content** of one’s commitments. One is **uniquely** authoritative over the force of one’s commitments (i.e., **whether** one is bound), but one must to some extent **withdraw** one’s authority over the content of those commitments (**what** one has committed oneself to).

This has the result that one must be able to undertake commitments that one does not **fully** understand the **consequences** of. One undertakes commitments both through what one **says** and through what one **does.** The relevant question is to what **extent** one must grasp the consequences of what one is saying or doing in order to be counted as undertaking the commitment. There is a very complex debate to be had here, which I will not go into in depth. The important point is that whatever the **criteria of commitment** are they can vary from case to case. However, there is one very special case in which one can have no theoretical grasp of what one is committing oneself to, and nonetheless still be committed. This is the case of the **transcendental norms** themselves. These norms form the **limit-case** of autonomy, insofar as one commits oneself to them in virtue of doing anything that can be counted as **rational.** This is to say, one is committed to them insofar as one can be committed to anything. This is because they are the norms which specify **what it is** to be committed to anything.

What all of this means is that arguments about **force** will always be matters of **interpretation,** insofar as they concern authority. Arguments about the content of our commitments will always involve interpretation to some extent (this is partly what is involved in the secondary dimension of conceptual content), but whether or not they count as interpretative will depend upon whether and how they **bottom out** in claims about attitudes.

Arguments about the content of **objective** theoretical commitments don’t **bottom out,** arguments about the content of **non-objective** theoretical commitments do **bottom out,** and arguments about the content of practical commitments split in two directions, one of which bottoms out and one of which can go either way.

Arguments about **what it is** to do what the commitment entails can either **bottom out** or not
bottom out, depending upon whether the content is made explicit by objective or non-objective theoretical commitments (e.g., what it is to heat steel to melting point, and what it is to score a goal in a football match, respectively). Arguments about which thing we are to do must bottom out, but they can either bottom out in claims about the attitudes of the individual who undertakes the commitment (individual interpretation), the attitudes of the group that determines the norm (collective interpretation), or about the structure of attitudes as such (transcendental reflection).

Ultimately, what emerges from the principle of autonomy is a further principle:-

The Principle of Reflexivity: The structure of normativity can only be described in normative terms. This is what underlies the fact that transcendental discourse is at the top of the discursive hierarchy. John McDowell gets at the essence of this principle with the phrase: “It’s norms all the way down.”

So, what we find is that the primary bind codifies the existence (but not the reality) of transcendental norms, the principle of correction codifies their ubiquity in relation to other forms of discourse, and the principle of autonomy (via the principle of reflexivity) codifies their independence in relation to these other forms.

iv) Nature and Culture

If we assume that we can manage to reconstruct the results of the main part of the essay within the framework just presented, then we can posit an additional principle:-

The Principle of Asymmetry: The distinction between the natural realm and the normative realm, between Nature and Culture, is neither a natural distinction nor is it a distinction in some higher term (e.g., Being), but is itself a normative distinction. From the side of culture there is a sharp divide between the two, yet from the side of nature there is none.

What this means is that we can conclusively respond to Heidegger’s challenge to Kant. At the beginning of Being and Time Heidegger claims that Kant has done a good job of giving an account of the kind of Being belonging to Nature, but that he has failed to inquire into the kind of Being belonging subjectivity, which his whole philosophy is predicated upon. This is why Heidegger’s project begins with an analytic of the Being of Dasein, which is his successor to the notion of the subject. Against Heidegger, and in favour of Kant, we can claim that the subject has no Being. The transcendental subject is a purely formal ‘I’, and although it may need to be indexed to some real entity (e.g., a human being), this index is not a genuine property of that entity. Nor is the structure of rational subjectivity a real essence. This is because none of these are properly objective matters.

This also enables us to revive a some version of the distinction between facts and values. Facts are just objective truths, whereas values are non-objective truths. However, this does mean that there is a distinction between transcendental and historical values.

In essence, the Real is nothing but Nature, albeit a nature which is intrinsically mathematical, because objective discourse is nothing but talk about Nature and the mathematical structures embedded in it. We are compelled to talk about the world as it is in-itself, but in doing so we are also compelled to leave all of the normative machinery (both transcendental and historical) required to talk about it out of the picture.
v) Varieties of Criticism

The final issue to address is the status of critique itself. At the beginning of this section, I said that the account of thought presented in the rest of the essay provided a partial account of the nature of critical knowledge. Despite fleshing out the nature of transcendental discourse, this is still the case. The reason for this is that although transcendental critique is its most fundamental form, it is not the only one. The last part of this section will be devoted to both defining the more general concept of critique, and to highlighting the other forms it can take: historical critique and empirical critique.

To do this I’m going to try and trace a critical tradition that begins with Kant and extends well into the 20th Century. The figures I have in mind are Kant, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Foucault, although there are almost certainly others who could be fitted into this tradition in some way. What unifies these thinkers is the attempt to analyse the structures of thought in order to diagnose systematic errors or illusions that these structures create, so as to free us from these illusions. For Kant, this is a matter of preventing the overextension of reason; for Wittgenstein, it is a matter of preventing us from running our heads up against the limits of language; for Foucault, it is a matter of uncovering the ‘historical limits of necessity’; and for Nietzsche, well, it’s somewhat more complicated...

The important point is that each of these figures is in some sense concerned with the conditions of representation, and how these conditions might distort our view of the very things we are trying to represent. Kant and the early Wittgenstein are concerned with the specifically transcendental conditions of representation – the ahistorical structure of thought and language. Nietzsche, Foucault and the later Wittgenstein are all concerned with the specific historical conditions of representation – the language-games, epistemes, and networks of power relations that constitute the social dimension of representation. Nietzsche is then somewhat unique among these thinkers (though he would find many allies in contemporary philosophy) in also concerning himself with the empirical conditions of cognition – the psychological and biological structures which make thought possible.

The account of thought I’ve so far provided gives us a way of describing each of these different projects in a unified way, in virtue of the notion of the suspension of representation. Representation is suspended when we hold in abeyance the assessment of a claim about an object in order to examine the conditions which make it possible to represent the object. Now, in Part III this was mainly described as a matter of bringing into question the commitments which constitute the primary content of the concepts that constitute the claim. However, as has been suggested at times, suspension has a much broader range than this. What is common to the various forms of critique is that they implement suspensions of representation that abstract from primary content, whereas what differentiates them are the different kinds of conditions of representation that they examine.

Transcendental critique is the most fundamental form of critique, insofar as the bracketing it must perform is the closest thing we can get to a global suspension of representation. As has been noted, such global suspensions cannot be used to examine the content of our objective concepts, insofar as one must always use some concepts to examine others. The deontological epoche is not quite a global suspension of the kind discussed earlier, insofar as transcendental claims about the normative structure of discourse are immune to it. Nonetheless, in bracketing all other claims, it abstracts from the content of all ordinary
concepts in order to describe the structure of concepts as such, including the structure of concept revision. This is to say that it abstracts from the primary content of all concepts, leaving only the form of the conceptual.

By contrast, historical and empirical critique deal with the structures of specific concepts (or networks of concepts). However, they don’t suspend the claims these concepts are deployed in to examine the primary content of these concepts, but instead to examine the secondary content which structures the process of conceptual revision in each case (as opposed to the general structure of such revision). Historical critique examines both the networks of deference which constitute the anaphoric dimension of content, the social practices underlying the practical dimension of content, and the sociological structures that both these dimensions are situated in relation to. Empirical critique examines the way that other empirical factors shape our practices of dealing with things and using words, and by extension the sociological structures they are tied up in. As such, it is harder to draw a crisp distinction between these two forms of critique than between them and its transcendental form. Both deal with historically contingent structures, and both may deal with specifically social structures. The real distinction lies in whether they describe these structures in normative (interpretational) or causal (empirical) terms, or rather, the extent to which they use either. In truth, both are required to some extent, and this is why it is hard to draw the distinction properly. In essence, the distinction depends upon whether the emphasis is placed upon hermeneutic or natural scientific forms of explanation.

Once more, I must admit that without a more in depth account of the nature of secondary content and the nature of the suspension of representation, I am unable to provide a more detailed account of the nature of critique. Nonetheless, we are in a position to glimpse the general character of the critical impulse. Critique aims to pick apart the various structures underlying the process of knowledge acquisition, which is both the process of acquiring claims and the process of revising our concepts, in order to differentiate legitimate constraints on this process from illegitimate ones. It is a kind of conceptual technics through which we both uncover the properly transcendental limits of knowledge while removing historical and empirical impediments to it. The project outlined in this essay is thus doubly critical: critical insofar as it is transcendental, and critical insofar as it seeks to give a transcendental account of the process of empirico-historical criticism, so as to facilitate critique in all its forms.

The final point to make is that just as we saw that scientists are already doing metaphysics to some extent implicitly, so it is that philosophers are already doing critique to some extent. This is the whole purpose of the schema ‘philosophy of X’ (e.g., philosophy of science, philosophy of art, philosophy of law, etc.). Philosophers are already conceptual technicians, even if this is not all that they are. Following the ideal of explicitness, our goal should be to make explicit precisely what philosophers are already doing in these cases, so that it might be done properly, just as it has been the goal of this essay to make explicit what scientists are already doing.

On this basis, we can draw a distinction between the critical and the constructive dimensions of philosophy, the former exemplified by transcendental philosophy and the latter exemplified by metaphysics. The former dimension maintains the structure of knowledge, while the latter aims to actually produce knowledge, by creating new concepts which order existing fields of inquiry.
Conclusion

The aim of this essay has been to announce the possibility of something like a transcendental realism, and to do so by engaging both with contemporary debates about realism and with the historical tradition more broadly. In the course of it, I have not only defined what such a transcendental realism would be, but also provided an argument for it, and worked out many of the details and further consequences of it. What has emerged across all of this is the necessity of once more returning to the philosophy of Kant, as it seems we are destined (or doomed) to do every hundred years or so. However, this call for a renewed take on the Kantian project is motivated neither by nostalgia, nor by some deep seated frustration with the contemporary philosophical terrain. It is neither a call for novelty for its own sake, nor a call for tradition for its own sake. It is motivated by a problem that is deeper than such trite narratives.

On the one hand, against deflationists, anti-realists, correlationists, and all other anti-metaphysicians of the 20th Century, we seem to genuinely understand the significance of metaphysical questions. On the other, against the pre-critical metaphysicians and those who would return us to the era of unconstrained speculation, we are not so sure that we know what this significance really is. The only response to this is a critique of metaphysics, which defines its exercise and its limits, and the progenitor and most powerful exponent of that critique is Kant.

However, as I have also demonstrated, this renewal of Kantianism should also be critical in the more common sense of the word. There is as much in Kant that is ripe for revision as there is that is ripe for appropriation. First of all, following the last wave of Neo-Kantians, we must excise the transcendental aesthetic and the dependence upon non-conceptual forms of representation that it embodies. Second, we must also update both the theories of and the perceived relation between logic, semantics, and pragmatics underlying Kant’s conception of thought, to adopt the insights of Hegel, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Quine, Sellars, Brandom and others. These two changes amount to a substantive revision of the whole of Kant’s account of thought, along the lines already discussed.

On the basis of this, we must revise the Kantian architectonic of reason. This must be done by distinguishing the various forms of rationality in terms of the way they modify the withdrawal of authority, and thus in terms of the types of truth they correspond to. It is possible to use the insights so far provided to provide such a taxonomy of truth:-

![Taxonomy of Truth Diagram]

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Here we can see that the various types of objective truth can be ranked in terms of the extent to which they grant authority to objects, and thus the extent to which they are **object-dependent**, and the types of non-objective truth can be ranked in terms of the extent to which they grant authority to individuals attitudes, and thus the extent to which they are **attitude-dependent**. For instance, natural scientific truth is more object-dependent than metaphysical truth because the former can depend upon specific kinds of entities, whereas metaphysical truth is dependent upon all entities equally. In a similar vein, subjective truth depends upon the attitudes of a specific individual who has unique authority, whereas intersubjective truth depends upon the attitudes of groups of individuals, none of which need have this kind of authority. Mathematical and logical truths are distinctive insofar as they are not dependent upon any specific objects or attitudes.

This schema is not exhaustive, insofar as there are many further subtypes of truth that are not presented in it. For instance, we could distinguish **ethical truth** and **aesthetic truth** (the major concerns of Kant’s second and third Critiques) as further types of intersubjective truth. We could equally break down mathematics into its logical (**quantificational**) and non-logical (**axiomatic**) parts, as well as breaking down logic into its **general** and **transcendental** parts. There is thus much work to be done in extending this taxonomy of truth and the corresponding architectonic of reason.

Beyond this, we must do something about the infamous notion of the **thing-in-itself**, the poor reception of which has haunted Kant’s philosophy since its inception, in order to retain the kernel of insight it represents while banishing its more problematic connotations. This means rejecting any ontological understanding of the difference between **phenomena** and **noumena**, and reconceiving the latter as the concept of the **ideal limit** of the rational process of revising our theoretical commitments, which can be thought in relation to any given entity. However, much more needs to be said about precisely how to understand this limit-concept, and the relation between it and the notion of the Real.

Finally, we must establish a method (which I have called **fundamental deontology**) to recapitulate all of these insights in an **immanent** and **systematic** fashion. This is a daunting task, but it is one that is undoubtedly worthwhile. If nothing else, the promise of working out both what **thought** demands of us, and what the **world** demands of us, is too good pass up.