

The Inner Life of Objects: Immanent Realism and Speculative Philosophy¹

Michael Austin

Often a division of concepts can help us better understand unknown or seldom charted philosophical terrain: historically, the distinctions and differences between idealism and materialism have proven helpful, but with Quentin Meillassoux's concept of correlationism, the divisions between realism and anti-realism which once seemed clean-cut are now harder to understand. Graham Harman has gone a step further than Meillassoux's initial definition of correlationism, by which "we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other,"² claiming in lectures that those who have pledged fidelity to the realism banner after Meillassoux aren't realist enough. Instead, says Harman, we should demand that any philosophy which claims to be realist must grant that no entity is more real than any other, whether they be atoms, quarks, institutions, regimes, human beings, bonobos, dreams or distant galaxies. A robust realism must maintain therefore that the universe is composed of objects of all shapes, sizes and types. It is here that I wish to stage something of an intervention; it seems to me that we could rather create a new division to help us understand the contemporary situation facing philosophy based on how various philosophies view objects. I propose that we contrast those philosophies which see objects only working through exterior means (effects) with those which grant some level of (causal) autonomy to objects; in other words, we should compare those philosophies which grant only an *outer life* to objects with those which also grant them an *inner life*. A robust realism must not only count objects as means of our causal ends (as in the case of eliminative idealism), or billiard balls in an extended chain of causation (as in the case of eliminative

¹ This essay was first presented at The Fourth International Conference of the Whitehead Research Group, *Metaphysics and Things: New Forms of Speculative Thought*, as "The Inner Life of Objects: Speculative Metaphysics for the 21st Century." I have expanded the essay since then in response to the wonderful comments and questions from Graham Harman, James Bradley, and Roland Faber.

² Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 5.

materialism). Rather, a full-blown realism must look to the inner lives of objects to understand the cosmos and not simply satisfy itself with studying their effects. By making this distinction, we can see more clearly the relevance of a number of figures who have yet to be regarded with any seriousness by the emerging speculative realism movement, creating another metaphysical option besides weak and strong correlationism, eliminative materialism or idealism, speculative materialism and object-oriented philosophy, as well as better understand the future of speculative metaphysics.

The Outer Life of Objects

Two of the most common metaphysical systems today share a common emphasis on reductionism; they could be termed jointly “eliminative” both in the form of *eliminative materialism*, as in scientific naturalism, and in the form of *eliminative idealism*, as in the cases of both structuralism and social constructivism. Eliminative materialism is the almost crude adherence to the sciences whereby one’s ontology is dictated by physics, chemistry and neurology. What exists is not to be determined by the philosopher but by natural scientists; it is the task of the philosopher then to debunk the myths of the speculative metaphysician and point out where they stray from the scientific findings of the day, whether it is on the subject of human consciousness and subjectivity or what constitutes reality. The eliminative idealist positions themselves in opposition to the eliminative materialist, but is no less the enemy of speculation due to their reductive nature. The eliminative idealist, who is perhaps synonymous with Meillassoux’s correlationist, reduces reality not to quarks or strings but to human beings themselves whether in the form of linguistic signs, power, or the concept. While the eliminative idealist may object to the title of “idealist,” it cannot be denied that they either reduce reality to some human realm, be it linguistic or social, or compose an entirely human-centric model of the cosmos whereby the human being in some form is ontologically necessary for the existence of the rest of reality.³

What do these reductionisms mean for objects, for things? In neither case do objects matter, if they can be said to even exist at all. Objects are instead relegated to the role of causal means, either for blind deterministic causation in the case of the materialist or for human usage and understanding in the case of the idealist. This is fairly clear for the materialist: an object is not really as it appears, but is rather an assemblage of what can be said to really exist: subatomic particles. Any object is really the effect of these particles and interaction is explained on the basis of them and not any macro-thing. The object that appears to interact is itself nothing but the interactions of these smaller existents. If the materialist acknowledges the existence of the object at all, it remains indebted

³For more on the reductive metaphysics of structuralism, a form of eliminative idealism, see my “Sense, Structure, and Territory” in *Speculations Vol. 2*, available online at <http://www.speculations-journal.org>.

entirely to these smaller particles and obeys their laws. In the case of the idealist, objects and things are entirely anthropocentric; any object is reduced to its use or meaning for human beings. It is not the thing that is primary, but how the thing is used, who uses it and why and what the thing means. There remains no-thing outside of these chains of signs, signifiers, concepts, meanings and histories. As Nietzsche put it:

When someone hides something behind a bush and looks for it again in the same place and finds it there as well, there is not much to praise in such seeking and finding. Yet this is how matters stand regarding seeking and finding "truth" within the realm of reason. If I make up the definition of a mammal, and then, after inspecting a camel, declare "look, a mammal" I have indeed brought a truth to light in this way, but it is a truth of limited value. That is to say, it is a thoroughly anthropomorphic truth which contains not a single point which would be "true in itself" or really and universally valid apart from man. At bottom, what the investigator of such truths is seeking is only the metamorphosis of the world into man.⁴

Post-Kantian philosophy has had the effect of slowly minimizing the potential terrain of the philosopher. Like setting up a nature preserve that is slowly and quietly shrunk, philosophers have been destroying their own habitat. The materialist will tell the metaphysician that they ought not to speak of reality because that is the task of the sciences, that Spinoza and Leibniz really have nothing to contribute now that the natural sciences have proven so effective. The eliminative materialist is ultimately attempting to eliminate philosophy itself, to do away with idle "speculation" which contributes nothing to the correct scientific view of reality. The philosophical preserve has largely busied itself with preserving not metaphysical speculation, but subjectivity, limiting philosophy to issues of language, meaning, ethics and consciousness, though these too are slowly being eroded by the materialist as well. What the idealist shares with the materialist is this "fencing off" of philosophy, the self-imposition of limits in order to curtail speculation, reducing it ultimately to the human. The idealist agrees that philosophy should not concern itself with the study of reality since, following Kant, metaphysics is dead. This is precisely why the eliminative idealist is so violently opposed to the materialist. While they shared an agenda from Kant until sometime in the Twentieth Century, the materialist is now looking to quash the philosophical domain entirely. No longer satisfied with allowing philosophy to even discuss the human being, the materialist brings new breakthroughs in the sciences to the table in an effort to shame the idealist into submission. Language is historical and not exclusive to human beings; meaning

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense (1873)," in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 118-119.

is a human construct and has no reference to reality itself which is cold and indifferent; ethics can be explained through evolution and psychological conditioning; consciousness is nothing but the result of neural interactions, and though it may be complicated, it has nothing to do with anything beyond the scope of a rigorous naturalism. The materialist will maintain that all of reality follows but a few basic laws and is therefore rationally ordered; things are really nothing, just some stuff held together by empty space charged with energy and this stuff is pushed around by other stuff and all of reality is really just a sequence of pushing. The idealist won't even dare go that far; we can't really say anything about reality, nor should we try. Instead, we should look at how things affect us, what they mean to us, what we mean when we discuss how these things (if they even exist, who knows!) affect us and so on. This quickly moves to nothing but talk of talk, an unending discussion of the functions of language and the play of concepts. In opposition to these suffocating views, we should turn our attention to those thinkers who oppose the Kantian tradition of fencing-in philosophy, of limiting speculation, and of reductionism.

The Inner Life of Objects

There is a common story told of the immediate aftermath of Kant: we are told that Fichte took the logical step of removing the things-in-themselves, or rather, making them a function of transcendental subjectivity. There is no reason for us to suppose there is anything outside of human knowing since that would be precisely what we cannot know. While Fichte ultimately had ethical reasons for this elimination of the noumenal, what is remembered is the emphasis on the lack of logical necessity for things-in-themselves and the focus on subjectivity itself. Schelling is said to have broken with Fichte, though most can't be bothered to figure out why or how. He is instead reduced to the position of some stepping stone to the greater Hegel. With Hegel we have the decisive break with things-in-themselves as they are entirely absorbed into the apparatus of subjectivity, of the Absolute. After Hegel, we have many figures who oppose his Absolute Idealism either in the name of some return to Kant or in the name of individual existence which is said to be lost in the Hegelian system.

This is essentially the story told by Meillassoux in his account of correlationism which is divided along the lines of whether or not a thinker does away with things-in-themselves. If someone maintains the possibility of things-in-themselves while accepting the Kantian division of phenomena and noumena they are a *weak* correlationist, while those who accept Kantianism but do away with the possibility of things-in-themselves as superfluous and illogical are *strong* correlationists. Out of this account, Meillassoux proposes a third option (excluding dogmatic metaphysics as a viable option), that of *speculative materialism*. With this move, Meillassoux remains within the correlationist program as he claims we cannot simply reject the Kantian position, but must work our way out from it. We have also recently seen the emergence of object-oriented philosophy, which is itself another post-Kantian option that does not

presume to simply return to dogmatism. There is however another option. There is a tradition which emerges post-Kant, which accepts the Kantian model of subjectivity and nevertheless rejects the views of both the weak and strong correlationists when it comes to things-in-themselves. That is to say, there is the option to say that there are things-in-themselves and that we *do in fact have access to them, albeit not through knowledge*. This tradition will maintain that there is a reality prior to human beings, which will remain after we are gone and that it cannot be reduced to our access to it. The chief figures we should consult on this tradition are Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Whitehead.

While both Schelling and Schopenhauer are lumped in with other post-Kantian “idealists” and are therefore not given their due by those interested in realism,⁵ both provide us with similar (perhaps nearly identical due to the influence of Schelling on Schopenhauer) ways out of the correlationist circle which I have termed *transcendental realism*.

Both Schelling and Schopenhauer raise critiques towards transcendental idealism concerning knowledge of the in-itself, in *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (1833-34)⁶ and “Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy,”⁷ respectively. While they will both acknowledge that thought does not have access to things-in-themselves, this neither means that they do not exist, nor that we do not have access to them through some other means. Both thinkers reject the decidedly Cartesian project of assuming a total transparency to thought, let alone the body, which is anything but rational. In opposition to the phenomenalism of Descartes-Kant, of basing speculative philosophy on the limits of thought, we should instead concern ourselves with the *ground* of thought, with that which allows for thought in the body. Instead of following either Descartes or Kant, we should instead agree with Nietzsche when he writes:

What does man actually know about himself? Is he, indeed, ever able to perceive himself completely, as if laid out in a lighted display case? Does nature not conceal most things from him — even concerning his own body — in order to confine and lock him within a proud, deceptive consciousness, aloof from the coils of the bowels, the rapid flow of the blood stream, and the intricate quivering of the fibers! She threw away the key.⁸

⁵ This has changed recently in the case of Schelling, due in large part to Iain Hamilton Grant’s *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2006).

⁶ F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁷ In Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation (Volume 1)*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 413-534.

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense (1873),” in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 115.

Outside of rational thought is an entire spectrum of ways the embodied subject experiences the world, including physicality, feeling, desire, will, hunger, and drive. It is felt in the body as well as the mind, but is intuited in the whole of the cosmos, that unconscious ocean of dust and darkness. There is no reason to suppose that the real must be rational, cognizable, or reductionist in nature. What Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Whitehead share is a common emphasis towards the non-rational (non-conceptual, non-reductive) ways we encounter the world.

Contra Meillassoux, we should accept this form of “transcendental realism” as a viable and living alternative to the self-imposition of correlationism. While Meillassoux will briefly mention Schelling and Schopenhauer as correlationists in *After Finitude*, he fails to see the merit of their own correlationist “inside job,” their working within the Kantian confines to reach the great outdoors, albeit a more bizarre outdoors than we may be accustomed to hearing from the realist tradition. Meillassoux and others have lumped Schelling and Schopenhauer, along with Bergson, Whitehead and Nietzsche under the banner of “vitalism” or “process philosophy” as a way of dismissing them in the same way that Lacanians dismiss Freud’s “biologism.” These thinkers, we are told, are too fond of their biology, seeing everything as an organism and so blinded by the shimmering truth of Darwin that they apply this rigorous science to the “merely speculative” domain of metaphysics.

We should return to speculative philosophy, and not simply metaphysics, for one can be doing metaphysics without pursuing it *speculatively*. Following James Bradley,⁹ I maintain that for a philosophy to be considered properly speculative, it must adhere to a *strong* theory of existence. According to Bradley, a weak theory of existence “amounts to no more than the satisfaction or instantiation of a predicate, such as „... is a horse.“ To exist is to answer a description.”¹⁰ Speculative philosophy, properly understood, is unsatisfied with such quantificational statements, “putting to logical analysis what may be called the speculative question of existence: „What is it for something to be instantiated?“”¹¹ Such thinkers, unable to rest with mere instantiation, must instead find a self-explanatory reason or principle in order to understand how anything is at all. Bradley determines that the mark of a speculative thinker is to understand existence in the *active* sense, “what may be termed „actual existence” or „actualization” on account of the *activity* which, in one form or another, speculative philosophy characteristically maintains to constitute the self-explanatory ultimate.”¹² This distinction between speculative and “analytic”¹³

⁹ See James Bradley, “Transformations in Speculative Philosophy,” *The Cambridge History of Philosophy 1870-1945*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 436-446.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 436.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 437.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ The term is used by Bradley due to the fact that weak theorists largely descend to us from Frege. He has made clear however that “analytic” by no means refers to all “Anglo-

philosophy presents us with two radically opposed ways of understanding the nature of existence. For our purposes, it should be said that with their emphasis on activity and inner principles, only speculative thinkers present us with a view towards the inner life of objects, as they operate under a strong theory of existence. To again quote Bradley:

This is why strong theories talk of „being.“ Being can refer to a determinate or ontic entity of any kind (*to on, ens*). In its significant ontological usage, however, being is a gerund or verbal noun, which, like *sein* or *l'être*, translates the Greek *einai* and the Latin *esse* (to be) or *actus essendi* (act of being). These terms refer to that activity of actualization that makes things what they are, namely, bearers of predicates.¹⁴

To understand the inner life of an object is not to psychoanalyze sugar cubes, but to investigate and understand the principles of activity and interaction that govern the modes of existence of that thing.

It is clear how this differs from the eliminativist traditions outlined previously. There is a power granted to things beyond the effects listed by the materialist and the idealist. Objects are the mere interaction of smaller particles according to the materialist, they obey physical laws and beyond that is nothing but superstition or fantasy. The eliminative idealist does not need there to be objects, as philosophy deals with nothing but signs and concepts that stand in the place of things that exist whether or not there is anything beyond such signifiers. For the speculative philosopher, there are indeed things which make up the universe, and these things are not reducible to tiny bits of human abstractions, but exist by virtue of the nature of existence itself.

A New Philosophical Canon

I would now like to offer a brief overview of just some of the thinkers who are essential for a study of the inner lives of objects. Consider this something of an introduction to such a study. While we could perhaps mark the origin of such a canon at the Neoplatonists who emphasize the primacy of the World-Soul, or even among the Stoics, I will mark the beginning with Spinoza and his definition of *conatus* as the power to strive in preserving one's being. It is that element of existents which is closest to existence; it is the act of existence itself which is to

American” philosophy, nor does it refer to what he terms “analytic-speculative” thought which finds allegiance under McTaggart.

¹⁴ This quote is taken from a paper delivered at The Fourth International Conference of the Whitehead Research Group, *Metaphysics and Things: New Forms of Speculative Thought*, titled “The Semiotic Object: Speculative Philosophy, Nominalism and Trinity.”

preserve oneself, to remain existing.¹⁵ *Conatus* is also that which individuates particular things. Despite the fact that Spinoza will maintain the singularity of substance, his theory of drive clearly shows that things exist in opposition to other existing things; each mode must navigate and negotiate the universe according to its own particular joys and sadnesses. With his emphasis on the particular inner lives of entities, of their individual pursuits of joy and power (what Whitehead will call “self-enjoyment”), any immanent study of objects must acknowledge the debt to Spinoza.

After the Pantheism debate, and influenced by Herder’s theosophic reading of him,¹⁶ Schelling was the great defender of Spinoza amongst the Romantics and Idealists. His *Naturphilosophie* which broke with Fichte’s dismissal of Nature, reinvigorated the project begun by Spinoza of investigating things within Nature but also their interactions and their coming into being. His true greatness though was in the introduction of the *unconscious* as a metaphysical principle. Unconscious drives and desires are not exclusive to human beings, but actually constitute the dark ground of existence itself as the desire for further existence. Schelling begins his career by building off of Kant’s own philosophy of nature, claiming that the organic principles which govern all living things express unconscious or hidden principles of structure and organization.¹⁷ Form and matter are inseparable in the organic object, the organizing form arising with the matter through development and reproduction, and cannot be said to be projected by human reason. The intuition of organic wholeness shines a light on the unconscious purposiveness within beings and Nature as a whole.¹⁸ The development of consciousness from Nature shows the

¹⁵ On *conatus* in non-human objects, see Baruch Spinoza, “Ethics” in *The Complete Works of Spinoza*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Cambridge: Hackett, 2002), IIIp6; IIIp9-11 details the relation of *conatus* specifically to human minds, though it is unclear how *conatus* operates differently (if indeed it does) in mind and body, or even in different modes.

¹⁶ See Johann Gottfried Herder, *God, Some Conversations*, trans. Frederick H. Burkhardt (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1940). “The world is not held together by space and time alone as if by external conditions, but much more intimately by its very essence, by the principle of its own existence, since everywhere only organic forces may be at work in it. In the world which we know, the power of thought stands highest, but it is followed by millions of other powers of feeling and activity, and He, the Self-dependent, is Power in the highest and only sense of the word, that is, the primal Force of all forces, the Soul of all souls.” *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁷ See the “Introduction to the Second Edition” of his *Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature as an Introduction to the Study of This Science*, trans. Priscilla Hayden-Roy, in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 2003), 167-202.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 201. We can see the seeds of this universalization of the metaphysical unconscious in his earlier *First Outline for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004). In this text, originally published in 1799, Schelling attempts to understand the system of Nature through an analysis of the process and principles of individuation, development, and preservation, albeit without the

purpose within natural beings, the movement from darkness to light in the birth of reflectivity. The principle of activity governing such a development is *Freedom*, understood as the activity of creative production.¹⁹ In his famed *Freedom Essay*,²⁰ Schelling will undertake an investigation of the development of personality in the human individual through Freedom and decision, the self emerging from unconscious darkness to conscious, rational, personhood. Although such a study is far too ambitious for the space of this essay, I believe one could use such an individual analysis to read back into Schelling's earlier work on emergence and development in Nature in order to better understand the inner lives of, at least organic, things.²¹

Schopenhauer agrees with our general project, affirming that philosophy must study the "inner nature of phenomena" while also maintaining that "we can never get at the inner nature of things *from without*."²² While Schelling moves psychologically from consciousness to the unconscious, Schopenhauer begins not with conscious mind, but with the human body itself. I am able to grasp my body in two ways, both as phenomenal object as well as willing subject.²³ According to Schopenhauer, this latter aspect, the body in intuitive action, is the noumenal within. Since I know my own body intuitively, that is, can grasp its essence as growing, desiring, moving, etc, I know something of things-in-themselves. Behind representations lie Will, which surges forth in existents who hunger for being. This is also not limited to the human being or even simply to organisms either, as Schopenhauer maintains that Will is the root of all of reality, using it to explain scientific phenomena such as gravitation, magnetism and the formation of crystals.²⁴ Following Spinoza, Schopenhauer emphasizes different modes of knowing, showing clearly that it is possible to have access to things outside of thought. In fact, it seems that Schopenhauer should be a hero to those against correlationism for this very reason; it is Thought *qua* representation that is the problem and so we must approach the world through other means such as sensation or imagination. The corporeality of Schopenhauer, unlike that of

language of the unconscious and Freedom that would become central to his work in later years.

¹⁹ F.W.J. Schelling, "Deduction of a Universal Organ of Philosophy, or Main Propositions of the Philosophy of Art According to Principles of Transcendental Idealism," trans. Albert Hofstadter, in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, 203-216.

²⁰ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

²¹ For a similar work, that is, a work attempting to connect the inner processes and principles of human life to organic nature as well as the inorganic, see Gilbert

Simondon's *L'Individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (Paris: Editions Jérôme Millon, 2005). It is entirely possible that Simondon was influenced by the early Schelling; he studied under Merleau-Ponty, who gave a lecture series on the philosophy of nature, including Schelling as well as Whitehead, while Simondon was writing his dissertation.

²² Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 97, 99.

²³ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 100.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109-110.

Merleau-Ponty for instance, is not a hindrance but an asset to speculative philosophy; we are not locked in knowledge only of our bodies and our flesh, but our bodies provide us with knowledge of *bodies as such*. Our capacity to grasp the inner principles of the cosmos within our own organic selves provides the ground for an immanent realism, founding metaphysical knowledge on intuition rather than logic.

Along with those listed above, we should include Whitehead as a primary figure in the tradition being sketched. Though he is often, along with Bergson, thought of as simply someone who rejects the Kantian/Idealist turn in favour of a return to dogmatic metaphysics, Whitehead maintains the “subject-object relation as the fundamental structural pattern of experience . . . but not in the sense in which subject-object is identified with knower-known”²⁵ and thus avoids the trap of correlationism. While he does not follow the Kantian project as far as orthodox Kantians, or even the German Idealists, Whitehead can only be understood properly within the context of post-Kantian philosophy. Whitehead maintains that Kant unjustifiably moves from the “Transcendental Aesthetic” to the “Transcendental Logic” without fully understanding the consequences of the “Aesthetic,” falsely maintaining the necessity of the Categories of reason for a complete understanding of the foundation of experience.²⁶ Kant remains tied to a Humean theory of sensation, whereby “the primary activity in the act of experience is the bare subjective entertainment of the datum, devoid of any subjective form of reception.”²⁷ That is to say, while Kant will emphasize the role of the understanding in the “Transcendental Logic,” he begins with the premise of experience as a chaos of “mere” sensation, working to show how this chaos can be ordered or structured, ultimately striving to avoid Hume’s skeptical conclusions. Whitehead rightly points out that the kind of sensation at work in Kant’s “Transcendental Logic” is far different from that of the “Transcendental Aesthetic:” while the former is premised on “the radical disconnection of impressions *qua data*,”²⁸ the latter operates on the level of pure sensation; space and time are not organizing principles or logical categories which structure formless nonsense, but give us the intuitive *how* of experience. Space and time are not concepts, but the immanent conditions of all sensible intuition, serving as the source of cognition. Two crucial points emerge from Whitehead’s analysis: First, Kant’s move to the “Transcendental Logic” only makes sense under the Humean understanding of sense experience as meaningless flux, meaning that it is a misstep under alternative conceptions of sensation (even that of the “Transcendental Aesthetic”), and second, he continues a line of thought that ignores “primitive types of experience,”²⁹ thus privileging not only human

²⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 225.

²⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality (Corrected Edition)*, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 113.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

experience above any and all other existing things, but even privileging the intellect above other modes of human knowing.

In the “Transcendental Aesthetic” Kant claims that unlike cognition, sensibility tells us about the generic appearance of things, as well as *the way* that we are affected by that something. Space and time as understood in the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” that is to say, intuitively grasped, express the way we are affected by things generally, thus providing a connection between subject and object that are intrinsic (immanent) to any experience. We thus attain a non-cognitive understanding (because intuitions of space and time must precede any knowledge of particular things) of objects. Furthermore, because we can grasp connections between objects and subjects (as well as objects and objects) prior to the move to Kant’s Categories, we need not assume that connections are imposed by humans, as “the datum includes its own interconnections.”³⁰ Basing his understanding of experience on these immanent conditions rather than a Humean understanding of atomistic sense data, we can understand Whitehead’s Trinitarian conception of prehensions (understood as any relation between two entities), composed of Subject, Object, and the Subjective Form. Put another way, we can say that all relations are composed of three essential elements, (1) the *occasion of experience*, (2) the *prehended object qua provoking datum*, and (3) the *subjective form* or *affective tone*.³¹ There is no rationally-ordered nonsense necessary for experience, since it is *experience itself* which organizes in its formation of occasions *via* subjective forms. What could be termed “subjects,” or more accurately, *actual entities*, do not stand as transcendental egos over against a flux and flurry of sense impressions, but neither are they to be understood as passive tablets of wax who can do nothing but experience the sheer *givenness* of things. Rather, the objects of experience are to be understood as thoroughly objective entities, with any particular occasion of experience being shaped and determined by the *subjective form* of that experience, the *how* of the prehension. This is why my experience of a thing can be different depending on the mode of experience (e.g. logical-rational, aesthetic-artistic, etc.) as well as why my experience of a thing can shift from moment to moment, due to the effect of memory. More than this however, Whitehead’s theory of prehensions elevates non-cognitive varieties of experience, displaying the inherent *vagueness* of things-in-themselves and the multiple ways they are accessed. With this groundwork laid, we can see why Whitehead considered his project a “Critique of Pure Feeling” in opposition to the Kantian mode of critical philosophy. For Whitehead *feeling* is the vague intermediary between actual entities,³² the fundamental subjective form of relation. The various kinds of subjective forms can be understood as intensities of abstraction, with feeling being the integration or unity of experience within the occasion. Equipped with feeling, Whitehead determines, much like Schelling, that there is a single underlying principle within

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 176.

³² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

all entities, *creativity*, understood as either the spontaneity within things (their self-determination), or the principles of unification and novelty.³³

Immanent Realism and Speculative Metaphysics

We have here outlined both a historical tradition as well as a trajectory for future speculative metaphysics, namely, emphasizing what it means for a metaphysical theory to be truly *speculative*. Such a philosophy must be interested in fundamental principles, or, as Whitehead will put it, speculative philosophy is a “system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted.”³⁴ As such, all of the thinkers included herein fulfill the requirements of speculative thought. In addition, we have emphasized those who find such principles in varieties of *experience* rather than logic, have strong theories of existence, and have theories of objects as manifestations of such a theory of existence and underlying principles. I propose we term such a theory “immanent realism” due to the emphasis on the metaphysical principles being found *within things themselves* rather than strictly within human reason, God, or any other entity apart from the things of this world.

Though it may seem counter-intuitive to include Spinoza, Schelling, Schopenhauer and Whitehead together, I think it has been shown that the former three, though this does not fit their common caricatures, share in Whitehead’s protest against the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness.” Whitehead opposes eliminative materialism for taking an abstraction as the concrete and attempting to move from there; it could be suggested that the problem with eliminative idealism is similar since it begins with signs and concepts. All such figures oppose these systems with something of a superior empiricism, a return to things in order to understand reality. By emphasizing our relation to things through means other than thought-itself, we not only escape the pen of correlationism and its auto-cannibalism, but are able to better understand objects. There is more to things than billiard ball physics allow and they are not exhausted by language. Instead, the metaphysics of the future must continue these strains, carrying the possibility of the things-themselves via speculation. Holing ourselves away in the dank basement of subjectivity is no way to understand the world. Speculative metaphysics must no longer deny the reality of things and must not be afraid to speak of them, no matter how bizarre or frightening the conclusions reached; philosophy must not be afraid of the irrationality of the real, of the body and its desire, of the dark fire burning in all things.

³³I say “either” because there is debate amongst Whiteheadians as to the true nature of creativity in Whitehead’s work. For reference to this debate, see André Cloots, “The Metaphysical Significance of Whitehead’s Creativity,” available online at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3024>.

³⁴Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 3.