

Spinoza and the New Realism: Exploring the Meillassoux Example

Spinoza ve Yeni Gerçekçilik: Meillassoux Örneğinin Çözümlemesi

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Abstract: New Realism, which emerged with the critique of correlationism—a stance said to be dominantly shaped by Kant and subsequent thought—is increasingly becoming a noteworthy contemporary school. This philosophical intervention places at its center the discussion of the existence, nature, and most crucially, the accessibility of an autonomous reality independent of human cognition. Central to this debate is the French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux, who introduced the term “correlationism” and delineated the core axes of this discourse. However, Meillassoux’s new realist perspective, particularly developed in his seminal work *After Finitude*, seems to distance itself from certain thinkers who, historically, could be seen as offering significant preparatory frameworks for his approach. Chief among these thinkers is Spinoza. What justifies this apparent distance? The primary rationale appears to be as follows: Meillassoux’s philosophical program inevitably pits the “metaphysics of necessity” against the “metaphysics of contingency,” whereby Spinoza is positioned within the former and Meillassoux within the latter. In this paper, I argue that this presupposed distance is unfounded. I aim to demonstrate that Spinoza, in nearly every respect, can and should be considered a pivotal initial catalyst for realism in general, and for Meillassouxian speculative materialism in particular.

Keywords: Spinoza, Meillassoux, speculative realism, metaphysics.



Introduction¹

New Realism emerged as a reaction to post-Kantian philosophy, which, in a sense, ties the existence of the world to human cognition. Around the globe, a small number of thinkers—initially unaware of each other’s philosophical programs—produced texts that could be seen as calls for a return to an objective ontology concerning the autonomous dynamism of a reality independent of human thought.² Despite differing emphases and priorities, their critiques found a minimal common ground in the term “correlationism,” introduced by the young French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux in his groundbreaking work *After Finitude*. Meillassoux argued in this book that the autonomy of the world could be reclaimed through a speculative-materialist approach. He proposed that the critical philosophy inaugurated by Kant and widely accepted within the philosophical community could be reduced to the concept of “correlationism”:

By ‘correlation’ we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call correlationism any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined. (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 5)

According to this view, the human mind could neither access pure thought nor the pure world, which is both the source and object of this thought. As Kant’s transcendental critique demonstrates, whatever the mind accesses is always and inevitably the correlate between thought and world. Any philosophical discourse attempting to transcend this

¹ In the article, the following abbreviations are used in the footnotes for references to two thinkers and their works: “E” stands for Spinoza’s *Ethics* with Roman numerals for the part; and abbreviations for elements (p = proposition; a = axiom; d = definition; dm = demonstration; c = corollary; s = scholium). For example, “EIVp3c” refers to *Ethics*, Part IV, Proposition 3, corollary. “AF” stands for Meillassoux’s *After Finitude*; page numbers are used for direct references.

² Important works by the thinkers associated with contemporary realism include Ferraris’s *Introduction to New Realism* (2015) and *Manifesto of New Realism* (2014), DeLanda’s *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (2002), Harman’s *Tool-Being* (2002) and *The Quadruple Object* (2011), Bryant’s *The Democracy of Objects* (2011), Grant’s *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (2006), Brassier’s *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (2007), Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), and Meillassoux’s *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (2008).



correlation was henceforth to be labeled as either naïve realism, dogmatism, or a form of uncritical idealism. In other words, as Meillassoux summarized, “Every philosophy which disavows naïve realism has become a variant of correlationism.” (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 5) The only legitimate philosophical endeavor, then, was one form or another of correlationism, while attempts to move beyond this correlation would yield nothing more than speculation. In this sense, Kant represented an endpoint in philosophy, rendering any ontological inquiry into reality itself merely an epistemology for humans.

Meillassoux highlighted at least one reason why this Kantian prescription for philosophy was problematic: the findings of science make claims about objective reality that date back far earlier than human existence or the emergence of organic life. A correlationist, however, would necessarily remain ambiguous regarding the sense in which such claims could be considered realistic. For instance, how should a post-Kantian correlationist interpret the scientific proposition that “the universe is 13.5 billion years old”? Does this “universe,” the subject of the proposition, simply signify a metaphorical or intersubjectively universal agreement—a correlational consensus detached from the essence of reality-in-itself? Or does it refer to an objective reality independent of human minds (and hence correlation)? If the former, then science’s endeavor is no more than an expression of intersubjective universality, with no claim to objectivity independent of humans. Furthermore, it would mean there is no substantive distinction between science and religion concerning claims about the objective reality of the universe. If the latter, the correlationist must explain how at least some scientific claims can have direct meaning beyond the correlation, which would, in any formulation, amount to invalidating Kantian critique. Meillassoux describes this dilemma, which he terms the “ancestrality problem,” as follows:

The question that interests us here is then the following: what is it exactly that astrophysicists, geologists, or paleontologists are talking about when they discuss the age of the universe, the date of the accretion of the earth, the date of the appearance of pre-human species, or the date of the emergence of humanity itself? How are we to grasp the meaning of scientific statements bearing explicitly upon a manifestation of the world that



is posited as anterior to the emergence of thought and even of life—posited, that is, as anterior to every form of human relation to the world? (Meillassoux, 2008, pp. 9-10)

Meillassoux contends that a philosophical strategy to address this problem should neither completely reject Kantian correlationism nor merely return to dogmatic metaphysics. Instead, it must explore how, despite the constraints of correlationism, certain scientific claims about objective reality can be shown to be not only universally valid but also objectively meaningful. As he puts it, “We cannot go back to being metaphysicians, just as we cannot go back to being dogmatists. On this point, we cannot but be heirs of Kantianism.” (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 29) As the title of his book suggests, the finitude of the human mind can still produce realistic claims about what precedes and follows this finitude, all while maintaining a legitimate pursuit of knowledge about the absolute. However, Meillassoux argues that achieving this requires abandoning the “principle of sufficient reason”—a principal humans often consider fundamental to understanding reality. (Meillassoux, 2008, pp. 33-35) While preserving other logical and mathematical principles (e.g., the law of non-contradiction), he insists on elevating contingency as a fundamental principle. In other words, Meillassoux asserts that neither Kant’s transcendental forms and categories nor logic itself necessitates the principle of sufficient reason. The human mind is neither bound to the necessity of Leibnizian dogmatism nor weakened by Humean skepticism. Instead, he proposes that the nature of reality is characterized by contingency—the absence of any necessary reason for things to be as they are—and that this perspective is not only plausible but necessary.

In *After Finitude*, Meillassoux thus sets out to develop two interrelated projects: first, a “critique of the critique” that follows Kantian transcendental philosophy; and second, a positive program for a “realist philosophy.” From the point of view of both projects, it is striking that Meillassoux almost never speaks of Spinoza: for Meillassoux, the “problem” (correlationism) is the result of a kind of awareness made possible by Kant’s critical philosophy; does this mean that pre-Kantian philosophers are simply ignorant both of this awareness and of the problem it articulates? For the same reason, is Spinoza entirely outside the scope of the discussion



at hand? If so, what might the reason be? If the reason is simply that Spinoza is a pre-Kantian and Meillassoux is in pursuit of a post-Kantian realism, does Meillassoux thereby assume that being a pre-Kantian necessarily requires a break from any post-critical realist project?

Since this paper does not aim to provide a comprehensive exposition of Meillassoux's philosophical program, which he articulates with remarkable coherence and depth, I will refrain from offering my potentially reductive rendition of it. Instead, within a context framed by these questions, and motivated by Meillassoux's conspicuous silence concerning Spinoza, I aim to argue that neither his critique of correlationism in general nor his positive realist program should, on any significant grounds, exclude Spinoza's philosophy. Moreover, I contend that Spinoza's ontological framework can substantially contribute to the speculative materialism that Meillassoux seeks to develop.

In the next section, I will summarize the core argument of Meillassoux's *After Finitude*. The third section will examine the extent to which Meillassoux's critique of correlationism applies to Spinoza. The fourth section will explore the possible reasons for Meillassoux's silence on Spinoza, focusing on the concepts of "necessity," "contingency," and the "necessity of contingency," and argue that the philosophical divergence between the two thinkers lacks a solid foundation. Finally, I will assert that far from being incompatible with new realism, Spinoza should be recognized as one of its earliest proponents.

1. After Finitude: A Brief Outline of the Argument

(A) Correlationism

1. All possible knowledge for the human mind is strictly limited to access to the *correlation* between thought and being without any further access to either of these.
2. Correlationism thus denies the possibility of accessing a reality-in-itself beyond this correlation and asserts that any philosophy rejecting this claim will inevitably devolve into either naïve realism, dogmatism, or into a form of uncritical idealism.

(B) The Ancestrality Argument

Scientific propositions about ancestral phenomena (e.g., the age of the universe) pertain to the nature of a reality that precedes the correlation



between thought and being (and even organic beings).

3. If correlationism is true, it is impossible to interpret scientific ancestral propositions as being about a “reality-in-itself,” and correlationism cannot provide an objective realist explanation independent of human relativity.

(C) Critique of Kant and Post-Kantian Philosophy

3. All forms of Kantian philosophy confine the absolute (thing-in-itself) to the unknowable and prioritize the correlation between subject and object as the sole possibility.

4. Post-Kantian thinkers (e.g., phenomenologists) accept this prioritization of correlation and reject thinking about the absolute.

5. For these thinkers, the invariability of physical laws is a necessary presupposition of human experience, rendering contingency unthinkable.

6. Kantian and subsequent philosophy fails to grasp that the human mind can access the absolute, understand contingency in general, and especially recognize the fundamental contingency of physical laws.

(D) The Notion of Facticity

3. Facticity is the awareness of the absence of any necessity compelling all elements of reality to be as they are.

4. The recognition of the absence of causal necessity is justified both logically (the principle of sufficient reason is not logically necessary) and empirically (there is no possible experiment to justify an end to infinite regress legitimately), thereby validating the Principle of the Facticity of Contingency.

5. This principle applies to physical laws as well; they are contingent and may change for no reason even if they sustain certain stability in time.

6. Contingency, including that of physical laws, is the only possible absolute—everything could be otherwise.

(E) The Only Absolute Is Contingency

3. The absolute must be independent of the human subject or correlation.

4. The absolute is not a fixed substance or necessity but, instead, a “contingency of everything,” including physical laws.

5. The invariability of physical laws is not certain; their observed stable patterns are contingent rather than necessary.



6. Contingency is the sole necessary principle of absolute reality independent of human thought.

(F) Mathematics

17. Mathematics—and scientific practices utilizing it—describe a reality indifferent to human thought, and mathematical sciences presuppose contingency of not only the theories of physics but also the physical laws.

18. Therefore, mathematics serves as a tool to describe a contingent absolute in which even physical laws are subject to transformation.

(G) Conclusion of the Argument

Speculative materialism, affirming contingency as the only necessity, constitutes a realist claim about the nature of reality-in-itself that can be validated through mathematical reasoning.

2. Spinoza's Position

The condensed version of Meillassoux's argument, as presented above in points A, B, and C, fulfills the goal of the first stage of the speculative materialist program, which is to critique "post-critical" philosophy. Points D, E, and F, however, are primarily aimed at establishing the positive perspective of the program. Consequently, in exploring the degree to which Spinoza's philosophy aligns with speculative materialism, we must examine both how the critique applies to Spinoza's philosophy and how far his system permits the positive perspective to take shape. This section will focus on the first of these tasks.

When considering the observations summarized in point A of Meillassoux's critique, it is impossible to classify Spinoza as a correlationist. This is not just a matter of Spinoza being pre-Kantian or pre-critical, and therefore pre-correlationist. The most fundamental reason for this is the singularity of substance, as established in the first part of the *Ethics* (EIpV), the *causa sui* immanence of this substance (EIdI, p6), and the explicit emphasis that the infinite and diverse finite modes, which emerge, move, and transform within and through this immanent plane, are merely expressions of the one and same substance (EId6, pXV). Accordingly, every mode, as a distinct expression of the single substance that endlessly differentiates and expresses itself in all possible ways (EIpXVI), belongs to and exists within this substance. For the same reason, none of these modes observes the substance from outside or is ontologically separate and independent



from it; rather, they are ways of experiencing the substance within and through it.

To assert that a correlationist perspective exists in Spinoza's philosophy, one would have to demonstrate either (a) that the human being (which, in Spinoza's system, is merely one of the infinite finite expressions of the substance, a *modus*) does not emerge from the immanent plane of reality, or (b) that, despite emerging from it, the human is "in principle" incapable of understanding the substance's self-immanent, absolute dynamism. Neither of these can be demonstrated. (EIpXV, EIIpXLI-LIII) On the contrary, Spinoza wrote the first part of the *Ethics* (On God) and part of the second (On the Nature and Origin of the Mind) precisely to show the fallaciousness of these two claims.

If Spinoza cannot be classified as a correlationist, does this mean he must be categorized as a naïve realist, a dogmatist, or an uncritical idealist? All three of these options are invalid. Spinoza explicitly emphasizes that, as a mode of immanent reality, humans, while necessarily bound to produce "inadequate ideas" due to their sensory and imaginative limitations, can also strive to attain adequate ideas. In the second part of the *Ethics*, after defining the mind as "the idea of the body," Spinoza explains that the human mind, as the idea of a finite body, inevitably produces confused ideas when affected by the infinite variety of other finite bodies with which it interacts. This argument precludes the possibility of labeling Spinoza a naïve realist. As one mode among others, human understanding is often mistaken regarding the true nature of reality. (EIIpXXVII, XXVIII, XXXVI, XLI)

Similarly, to label Spinoza a dogmatist, one would need to argue that the finite human mind possesses innate ideas that allow it to know reality (the substance) independently of its interactions with other finite things. This is unsustainable. On the contrary, as summarized above, Spinoza considers the human mind to be the idea of the human body and sees the body's encounters and interactions with other finite bodies as expressions of the same substantial necessity. In *Ethics* Part I, Proposition 25, Spinoza underscores that the human mind, in relation to any state of the body, does not contain adequate knowledge of the external causes that produced this state. Moreover, as reiterated in Part V, Proposition 24, the human mind



can understand God/Nature only to the extent that it understands other things interacting with its own body. (EI_pXXV, EV_pXXIV) Nonetheless, Spinoza maintains that humans are capable, at least in principle, of forming “adequate ideas” of reality, and the *Ethics* is fundamentally an exploration of this possibility, albeit one that is extraordinarily challenging to achieve.

Equally, it would be incorrect to categorize Spinoza as an idealist. For Spinoza, reality (God, Nature, substance) cannot be reduced to mere “thought.” Thought is only one of the infinite attributes through which the single substance expresses itself. A finite thinking mind (a human) neither creates reality nor renders it necessarily dependent on itself. Rather, it utilizes thought, one of the substance’s attributes, to understand reality. For the same reason, Spinoza cannot be considered “merely” a materialist. In the second part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza declares thought (*res cogitans*) to be one of God’s attributes and asserts that extension (*res extensa*) is another. (EI_pI-II) Consequently, Spinoza’s original monistic conception of substance cannot be reduced to either the idealist view that derives all reality from thought or the materialist view that locates all reality’s origins in matter. As he states: “Infinite things in infinite ways (that is, all things which can fall under an infinite intellect) must necessarily follow from the necessity of the divine nature.” (EI_pXVI)

In line with the observations summarized under point A, Spinoza’s system also defends itself against the critique presented in point B. Spinoza’s philosophy contains no room for a form of transcendental idealism that would justify limiting the ancestral propositions of science to their surface-level meaning. On the contrary, as a finite mode of reality, Spinoza grants human mind access to an epistemological progression: from inadequate ideas shaped by raw experience and imagination to clear and distinct ideas in the domain of reason, and finally to an intuitive understanding that grasps the conditions of possibility for all things in motion as expressions of the absolute’s dynamism. In this framework, which deserves to be considered as a coherent argument on its own, Spinoza first establishes that “thought” and “extension”—merely two of God’s infinite attributes—are parallel paths that express the same singular substance: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.” (EI_pVII, EI_aIV) As a continuation of this parallelism, thought and



extension, which are two possible ways for humans to reach the infinite substance, are explained as different, holistic, and simultaneous actualizations of the same substance without any causal relationship between them: “The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension that actually exists, and nothing else.” (EIIpXIII) Therefore, the qualifier of thought, which correlationists confine within the bounds of correlation, is not the sole pathway to the adequate knowledge of the infinite substance’s essence in Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Due to the parallelism between the cognitive and the bodily, the paths available to humans for attaining this knowledge cannot be confined to the limits of correlation, that is, to the capacities of the thought qualifier alone. In principle, humans, as a mode, are capable of experiencing the fact that the parallel qualifiers—without causally determining one another—express the same adequate knowledge. For Spinoza, this capacity for development resembles evolutionary epistemology. It transforms scientific effort into an expression of humanity’s *conatus*—its striving—among the modes. It is precisely this effort that paves the way for delivering the ancestral propositions of science to their genuine and singular meanings, a pursuit also emphasized by Meillassoux.

Thus, there are no solid reasons to classify Spinoza as a direct target of Meillassoux’s critique of correlationism, one of the pillars of his philosophical program. The author of the *Ethics* explicitly states that humans are not, by nature, actors endowed with an innate ability to mirror reality in a dogmatic or naïve manner, free from doubt. Like all finite beings, humans are subject to influences and are often driven by passions, resulting in inadequate ideas. Beyond this, however, Spinoza also demonstrates that the finite human modes, like all other finite modes, are capable of affecting and being affected by the immanent plane of reality that is “one and the same” for all beings, in proportion to its power of expression: “The human mind is apt for perceiving many things, and more so according as its body can be disposed in more ways.” (EIIpXIV) However, this is only a *potential* increase in capacity; it cannot always become actual because the human body does not possess adequate knowledge of the other bodies it interacts with: “The idea of each modification of the human body does not involve an adequate knowledge of an external body.” (EIIpXXV) According to



Spinoza, the human mode's susceptibility to inadequate ideas, as well as its capacity to access adequate ideas despite this susceptibility, is a necessity of reality's immanent dynamism: "Inadequate and confused ideas follow with the same necessity as adequate or clear and distinct ideas." (EIIpXXXVI) In other words, for the human mode, the possibility of error in first-order knowledge and the widespread occurrence of such errors are as many necessary outcomes of reality's immanent dynamism as the possibility and accuracy of second and third order knowledge.

Therefore, this susceptibility to interaction reveals that the dilemma posed by the correlationist limitation—which Meillassoux rightfully highlights—may not, from Spinoza's perspective, be a genuine dilemma. If science, despite the mentioned limitation, can advance ancestral propositions and demonstrate that their truth value can be given as an objective relation to reality itself—not merely as a metaphorical expression of intersubjective universal agreement—then this necessitates reconsidering the possibility of an evolutionary epistemology that takes the transformative practices of the human mode seriously. Spinoza should be considered as a philosopher who has, in essence, assembled the toolkit for such reconsideration.

However, it could be argued that the fundamental disagreement between the two philosophers arises concerning the positive doctrine, which constitutes the second pillar of Meillassoux's philosophical program. In the following section, I will examine the possible contours of this debate.

3. Necessity vs. Contingency

Regarding Meillassoux's positive program, points D, E, and F of the reduced argument are largely devoted to explaining the contingency of the absolute, the necessity of this contingency, and the role of mathematics in demonstrating this fact. Accordingly, the potential disagreement to be sought in the systems of these two philosophers can be thought of as related to a kind of "necessity versus contingency" debate. In this section, the dynamics of this potential disagreement will be elucidated.

Spinoza explicitly demonstrates in multiple places and contexts within *Ethics* that the metaphysics of a singular substance is largely based on the concept of necessity. (EIpXI, XXXIII, XXXVI; Appendix) Furthermore, in *Ethics*, contingency is presented primarily as the result of



inadequate ideas produced by the finite human mind, which often fails to grasp the necessary movement of reality. (EIpXXXIII, XXIX; EIIpXXXI) Thus, the apparent abundance of passages in *Ethics* in favor of necessity and against contingency seems to permanently exclude Spinoza from Meillassoux's positive project that absolutizes contingency. Therefore, it is important to closely examine this initial impression.

Before focusing on the concept of "necessity" in Spinoza, it should be emphasized that this concept is associated with two different meanings that are often conflated. One of these can be termed "restrictive necessity." Restrictive necessity fundamentally relies on the assumption of a closed singular reality or a reality that is necessarily confined by the design of a transcendent creator infinitely open to all possibilities. Classical atomism can exemplify the former, and any type of classical scholastic or Abrahamic teleology the latter. Despite entirely different explanatory apparatuses, in both systems, the reason for reality being as it is lies in the inherent or deliberate finitude of the design that makes such a reality possible. For instance, in Epicureanism, this finitude is the finitude of a design possible only with atoms, while in transcendent Abrahamic religions, it is the finitude of a design determined by God's will—which, as God is perfect and completely sufficient, does not change. In both cases, it is assumed that a design allowing no alternative to the universe being as it currently determines reality.

Another type of necessity is also conceivable, which can be called "un-restrictive necessity." There are good reasons to argue that the notion of necessity encountered in Spinoza is of this latter kind—a necessity that does not rely on a reductive, restrictive, or transcendent concept of necessity and instead allows for the creation of the new. Spinoza's substance is not a power-expressing entity presupposing a purposeful agential subject; rather, substance itself is *causa sui*, an infinitely diverse "power of expression." "*Dei potentia est ipsa ipsius essentia*"—"The power of God is his very essence" (EIpXXXIV)—and the expression of this power is not arbitrary, planned, or intentional but necessary: "...it is impossible for us to conceive God inactive as to conceive him non-existent." (EIIpIII) When Spinoza asserts that such infinite expression of power must be understood as an immanent-necessary requirement of substance's intrinsic nature (nature,



God, cosmos, or reality) without relying on any notion of transcendent law, he turns away from any idea of a law external to substance compelling it to act as it does. On the contrary, Spinoza's substance is that which cannot be sought for any necessity beyond its infinite necessity to express power in the ways it does. "God acts solely according to the laws of his own nature, and is compelled by no one" (EIpXVII) and thus the freedom in question here should not be confused with "freedom" in the sense of "free will": "...God does not act from freedom of will". (EIpXXXII)

Accordingly, the metaphysics developed in the first part of *Ethics* differs significantly from all traditional substance philosophies for a crucial reason: in Spinoza, the necessity of substance is the most comprehensive expression of the nature of substance, which is nothing other than the infinite variety of ways and forms in which it expresses itself. *Natura Naturans* is not the agent of a restrictive necessity but the plane of an unrestrictive necessity that is inherent to itself as an absolute. For precisely this reason, *Natura Naturata*—the finite actualizations that are the expressions of this plane of absolute immanence—are entirely open to contingency in their encounters, interactions, exchanges of power, and creations of novelty. In other words, Spinoza's substance is *infinitely capable*, and its infinite capability is *necessary*. Thus, there is no difficulty in thinking that infinite numbers and kinds of finite modes can arise from the movement of a substance infinitely capable and necessarily so. "Infinite things in infinite ways must necessarily follow from the necessity of the divine nature". (EIpXVI; EIpXVII) As a continuation of this reasoning, each finite thing that is an expression of the infinite as a self-caused power expression has its essence fundamentally rooted in power (*conatus*). (EIIpVI; EIpVII) As expressions of *Conatus*, all modes exhibit all aspects of contingency in their encounters and interactions with other modes (*Affectivity*). (EIpXXVIII; EIIpXLII, XXXI) Thus, for Spinoza, far from excluding contingency, his acceptance of substantial necessity leads us to a notion of "necessity capable of infinite possibilities," including contingency.

Why, then, should Meillassoux's thought, which asserts "the only necessity is contingency," exclude Spinoza's notion of "necessity capable of infinite possibilities"? Meillassoux might object as follows: "Why should we accept *the existence* of a substantial necessity capable of infinite



possibilities? By asserting the absoluteness of contingency, am I not eliminating the need for such a substantial necessity?" This objection faces several issues:

1. How can the principle that prohibits contingency from allowing for the possibility of necessity, either temporarily or permanently, under the proposition "the only necessity is contingency," itself be conceived of as necessary? Such a principle must legislate its contingency by itself, must do so arbitrarily, and must continuously validate the law of contingency. This type of principle would not only inevitably gravitate toward the acceptance of a substance but also, baselessly, presuppose another absolute necessity legislating its contingency. In order to resolve the problem of infinite regression, why is "absolute *causa sui* contingency" more valid than "absolute *causa sui* necessity as a dynamic expression of power"?

2. The proposition "the only necessity is contingency" cannot distinguish between infinite possibilities for any reason or type. However, each time something is "actual" in reality, it consistently demonstrates that some options among the infinite possibilities become actual. (Once something becomes actual, even by virtue of being actual, it must be different from the non-actualized options.) Yet Meillassoux does not allow for the idea that the actualized option among infinite possibilities must have at least one feature distinguishing it from the others simply by being actual. Meillassoux's frequent use of the phrase "for no reason" (The principle of unreason) in this sense trivializes the inquiry into differences between options, even in terms of actuality. (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 60)

3. From the premise that the principle of sufficient reason cannot be considered a necessary logical law, what does the conclusion—assuming this argument is valid—that physical laws are also changeable demonstrate? Meillassoux argues that the conclusion from the "facticity" argument does not show that everything, including physical laws, changes constantly but rather that a contingency capable of finite stability patterns is at work. (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 84) Therefore, the conclusion derived from this argument should be understood not as demonstrating the absolute impossibility of all forms of necessity but rather as pointing to the need for a new conceptual configuration that embraces a non-exclusive relationship between necessity and contingency. The fact that physical laws exhibit



finite patterns of stability as well as being changeable undermines the assumption of restrictive necessity while supporting an acceptance of unrestricted necessity that does not exclude contingency.

Spinoza's metaphysics, however, remains unaffected by these three objections: A necessary substance capable of infinite possibilities, even if it enables infinite possibilities—and thus contingency—cannot, by definition, permanently negate its own necessity. Moreover, it acknowledges that the reality-in-itself of the substance might express itself in one way or another through actualizations and that a non-reductive necessity could functionally help make sense of contingent actualizations within an infinitely broad framework. In other words, Spinoza's unrestricted substantial necessity accommodates Meillassoux's contingency, while Meillassoux's absolute contingency entirely excludes necessity.

Despite this, Meillassoux might argue that the idea of a Spinozist substantial necessity renders a realist philosophy striving to overcome correlationism inadequate in the face of Kantian critique, which absolutizes correlation. After all, as Meillassoux frequently emphasizes, a return to pre-critical metaphysics is no longer possible. If philosophy is to awaken from the slumber of correlationism, it can only do so by demonstrating the invalidity of the *absoluteness* of Kantian correlation. Spinoza's doctrine cannot be expected to achieve this because it appears to accept causality—understood as the principle of sufficient reason—as merely the transcendental condition for knowing phenomena. The necessity of the principle of sufficient reason, in a sense, would mean accepting the absoluteness of the correlation between knowledge and being. Thus, the reality discussed in the *Ethics* cannot transcend being a reality “for itself.” On the other hand, Meillassoux's positive philosophy aims to show that Kantian correlation is not absolute but rather the contingency is the absolute. If we are to consider scientific discourse not as merely an intersubjective universality of human beings but as expressions regarding the nature of reality itself, this is possible—and only possible—through the contingency of correlation.

This objection should be the subject of another study directly addressing the confrontation of Spinoza's philosophy with Kantian critique. Undoubtedly, such a study should elaborate on how much the ontology laid



out in the *Ethics* can surpass an epistemology informed by Kantian critique. For now, however, the following can be stated: The *Ethics* does not assume that the finite modes, which are necessary expressions of a substance capable of infinity, must relate to this substance solely and necessarily in a “cognitive” manner. (This was briefly touched upon above.) Cognition is merely the subject of one of the infinite attributes of the substance. In other words, Spinoza inspires the idea that the conatic effort of modes, which is the shared expression of their relationship with reality-in-itself, cannot necessarily and exclusively be reduced to the effort indicated by Kantian correlation. Even if the absoluteness and immutability of correlation were assumed, this assumption would only show its limits in terms of *representations* that humans consider expressions of their capacity to think or know. However, the abundance of non-cognitive, irreducible modes of interaction between humans and self-reality continues its dynamism. Indeed, as Meillassoux highlights through “ancestral statements,” scientific findings, which exemplify this abundance of human interactions with reality, have multiplied despite the prohibition imposed by correlationists on thinking and/or knowing. From Spinoza’s perspective, this multiplication is not surprising; on the contrary, it is the necessary outcome of the human mode’s effort to interact with the-reality-in-itself in every cognitive and non-cognitive way—to affect and be affected, to transform and be transformed.

The principle of sufficient reason operating in the *Ethics* is not the law of motion of a purposive substance that implies cosmic teleology. It is, though, a law of motion. Still, just as there is no obstacle to the emergence of new causes from a substance capable of infinity, the emergence of new forms of operation of the principle of sufficient reason due to the necessity of these new causes is also not impossible. The reason is straightforward: Spinoza’s principle of sufficient reason presupposes no cosmic purpose. “...nature does not exist for the sake of an end, nor does it act for the sake of an end; rather, nature has no final cause for its existence and action”. (EIV, Preface) Spinoza is particularly diligent in distancing almost every form of teleology from his system. (EI, Appendix) Substance is precisely the expression of a power capable of infinite diverse motions, to which no cosmic purpose can be attributed. The possible motions of finite modes,



as expressions of such a substance, also constitute the plane of immanence of transformation and transformative processes, within and through this same substance. The human, being one of these finite modes, is by no means exceptional. Human motions, too, are expressions of the effort to accompany this immanent plane. (EIVpXIX–XX) Spinoza states that these motions, which represent the effort to accompany the mentioned plane of immanence and are valid for all modes, will sometimes increase and sometimes decrease a mode's capacity to act. For all modes, the success of the effort to accompany implies harmony with the reality accompanied. For the human mode, the effort to understand, in the least erroneous, cautious, and critical ways possible, why reality-in-itself moves as it does is an expression of this effort to harmonize. (EIVpXXIII–XXIV)

Conclusion

With his monism, emphasizing that everything existing and real is only possible within and through one single substance; his immanence, demonstrating that reality does not require a transcendent exterior (a transcendent God or a Platonic *Good*, etc.); his flat ontology, which allows no hierarchy among beings for any reason (ontological, ethical, or axiological) within this self-immanent plane of reality; his non-anthropocentric perspective; and his non-linear reasoning that never approaches an ungrounded cosmic teleology, Spinoza should be regarded as a natural ally of contemporary realists of any kind.

In this context, Spinoza is not merely a historical figure ignored by Meillassoux; he constitutes a field of potential that could prove foundational for the future directions of metaphysical realism. The fact that contemporary realists such as Bennett have once again turned the Spinozist line into a major source of inspiration confirms this. Accordingly, in speculative realism's search for a new ontology, Spinoza's philosophy of immanence occupies a position of central importance both as a historical point of origin and as a vector oriented toward the future. In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett explicitly acknowledges Spinoza's influence when grounding her notion of vibrant matter. In the opening chapter of the book, she describes Spinoza as "one of the early modern philosophers of a vibrant materialism" and, drawing especially on the *conatus* doctrine in the *Ethics*, she emphasizes that each being has "an immanent tendency to persevere in its existence



and to increase its power of acting” (Bennett, 2010, pp. 2–3). For Bennett, this Spinozist principle—which makes it possible to construct a non-anthropocentric ontology—plays a central role in the reconstruction of modern materialism. Moreover, Spinoza’s treatment of mental and physical modes as two aspects of the same nature makes it possible, according to Bennett, to think about the plurality of affects and encounters without reducing them (Bennett, 2010, p. 23). For this reason, Bennett openly acknowledges the “metaphysical courage” her own work owes to Spinoza and argues that contemporary new materialism cannot attain conceptual coherence without Spinozist immanence (Bennett, 2010, p. 29).

Spinoza cannot be considered a correlationist, nor can he inevitably be relegated to being a philosopher of pre-critical thought. Metaphysics developed in the *Ethics*, while still a metaphysics, deserves to be read as the expression of an original realism that inherently includes reflexes of maintaining harmony with contemporary scientific theories and maths.

As Meillassoux rightly points out, the correlationist loop, absolutized by post-Kantian philosophy, had prohibited humanity from less erroneously understanding the dynamics of its relationship with reality, a reality which makes even this loop possible. Meillassoux seeks to abolish this prohibition. If so, isn’t Spinoza, who initially implied the transformability of the conditions enabling the prohibition, the old ally of Meillassouxian new realism?

This study shows that the tension between Spinoza’s conception of necessity and Meillassoux’s notion of absolute contingency does not simply mark an opposition, but rather discloses a productive point of intersection. Spinoza’s conception of “immanent necessity” does not entirely exclude Meillassoux’s oscillation around a “necessity of contingency”; on the contrary, it situates it upon an ontologically explicable ground. In this sense, Spinoza is not merely a historical figure ignored by Meillassoux; he constitutes a field of potential that could prove foundational for the future directions of realism.

Taken together, these considerations suggest that the presumed rupture between Spinoza and Meillassoux in fact harbours a productive zone of intersection. The tense co-presence of immanent necessity and absolute contingency is a conceptual possibility within speculative materialism that



has not yet been fully explored. Future work could investigate in more detail how Spinoza's ontology of power might reconfigure Meillassoux's mathematical conception of the absolute, and how it might contribute to the form of "ontological courage" that new realisms seek to reclaim.

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Öz: Kant ve sonraki dönemi baskın bir biçimde belirlediği ileri sürülen korelasyonculuk tavrının eleştirisiyle gündeme gelen Yeni Gerçekçilik giderek dikkat çeken çağcıl bir okula dönüşmektedir. İnsan zihninden bağımsız ve kendi içinde özerk bir gerçekliğin varlığı, neliği ve en önemlisi bu gerçekliğe insan erişiminin olanağı konusunu tartışmanın merkezine taşıyan bu müdahalede,



korelasyonculuk terimini de ilk kullanıma sokan Fransız düşünür Meillassoux sözü edilen tartışmanın temel eksenini belirlemek açısından merkezi görünmektedir. Ne var ki, Meillassoux'un özellikle *Sonluluğun Sonrası* adlı temel kitabında geliştirdiği yeni gerçekçi perspektifin, aslen bu perspektife tarihsel olarak son derece önemli bir hazırlayıcı çerçeve sunduğu gösterilebilecek kimi düşünürlerle arasına mesafe koyduğu görülmektedir. Bu düşünürlerin başında Spinoza'nın geldiğini ileri sürmek olanaklıdır. Sözü edilen mesafenin gerekçesi nedir? En temel gerekçe şu gibi görünmektedir: Meillassoux'un geliştirdiği program kaçınılmaz olarak "zorunluluk metafiziği" ile "olumsallık metafiziği"ni karşı karşıya getirmekte, buna göre Spinoza'nın yalnızca ilkinde Meillassoux'un ise yalnızca ikincisinde kendilerini evde hissedebileceği düşünülmektedir. Bu çalışmada sözü edilen gerekçenin sağlam olmadığını savunmak ve Spinoza'nın hemen her açıdan, genel olarak yeni gerçekçiliğin özellikle de Meillassouxcu spekülative materyalizmin önemli bir "ilk tetikleyicisi" olarak düşünülmesinin önünde herhangi bir engel olmadığını göstermek amacındayım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Spinoza, Meillassoux, spekülative realizm, metafizik.

