



Trans/Form/Ação

ISSN: 0101-3173

ISSN: 1980-539X

Universidade Estadual Paulista, Departamento de Filosofia

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Commentary on "Meaning and fate of critique on the Ontological Turn"
Trans/Form/Ação, vol. 45, núm. 1, 2022, Janeiro-Março, pp. 115-118
Universidade Estadual Paulista, Departamento de Filosofia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2022.v45n1.p115>

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COMMENTARY ON “MEANING AND FATE OF CRITIQUE ON THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN”


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Referência do artigo comentado: PUCCIARELLI, Daniel. Meaning and fate of critique on the ontological turn. **Trans/form/ação**: revista de Filosofia da Unesp, v. 45, n. 1, p. 95-114, 2022.

In the article by Daniel Pucciarelli (2022) the author seeks to establish a theoretical framework for philosophical critique in contemporary thought. He presents the state of the art of contemporary philosophy, concerning mainly the ontological exhaustion diagnosed in Quentin Meillassoux’s work *Après la Finitud* (2018), which carries a suggestive subtitle (“an essay on the necessity of contingency”).

The referred work brings forth several consequences to historic philosophical prepositions of stability, ontic-ontological order and, therefore, objective access to either the reality of thought or the reality of the world itself. Such impossibility, stresses the author, was greatly expressed by Kant, in whose work the resulting entanglement between thought and world (focused, thereafter, on the parameters of its knowability) is aptly named by Meillassoux as correlationism.

Pucciarelli (2022) does a great work in summarizing Meillassoux’s line of thought, as well as the main implications surrounding it. He then proceeds

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<https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2022.v45n1.p115>



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to apply the consequences of such thinking process towards two philosophers that are considered milestones to the historical tradition of critique – namely, Kant and Adorno. In doing so, he comes up with an interesting question, on which I will concentrate the efforts of this commentary:

[...] if radicalized, correlationism itself not only replaces ontology by epistemology, but also tends to equate epistemology and politics (or truth and power). From this point of view, there is no doubt that speculative ontology is in fact depoliticizing. This hyperpoliticization of knowledge is even generally seen by speculative philosophers as a *symptom* of the exhaustion of correlationism. It will be necessary to consider, not only in epistemic but also in political terms, whether this is effectively a symptom of exhaustion or, rather, of the very potency of correlationist forms of thought. (PUCCIARELLI, 2022, p. 111-112).

This quarrel seems to lie on the very core of the presented question and it is – for the delight of some and the angst of others – very intimately linked to the so-called ontological turn, at least in terms of its undeniable consequences in academia and general Western culture. Because if, in short, we are taking contingency to the highest of (an)ontological orders, then the ‘*could be otherwise*’ argument would necessarily overflow to/from every aspect of readable reality – be that the laws of physics, currently replaced by entropic probabilities; be that political hierarchies and power structures.

In short: contingency is something both correlationist and post-correlationist thought has to deal with, regardless of the terms of their intellectual handling. That implies a meta-diagnostic of contemporary philosophy, as Pucciarelli stresses that the latter category of theoretical approach (i.e. post-correlationalism) does not exactly shape the outlines for a consistent framework, but rather encompasses several distinct approaches towards a philosophical knot. One of Meillassoux’s decisive contributions, in this case, is precisely offering a name to such problem, that once christened enters intellectual visibility.

In this direction, without losing sight of the political implications previously mentioned, I would like to comment on one specific thinker that is listed in Pucciarelli’s array of “representatives of the ontological turn” (10): Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, cited in the paper as the herald of the perspectivistic approach. I would like to demonstrate how Viveiros de Castro’s awareness towards correlationism does not necessarily imply a theoretical

demonization of it; however, the cultural/political turn of perspectivism makes it just as potent in terms of handling its referred philosophical exhaustion.

One of the main fenomenontological distinctions pointed out by the anthropologist lies between Western multiculturalism and Amerindian multinaturalism. While the first understands the world as something devoid of representations, which are culturally forced on top of nature's inaccessible objectivity (that is, multiple cultures perceive one unchanging nature differently), the latter understands the point of view as a purely pronominal stance of cosmological subjectivity, entangled in radically different realities of nature (that is, one culture which perceive multiple different natures). In short: "[...] perspectivism is multinaturalism, because a perspective is not a representation." (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2015, p. 65).²

That is to say: there is no room for an absolute outside or a homogeneous thing-in-itself; not because our flawed perception forces cultural representations on top of its outside entity, but primarily because there is no 'naked' nature-in-itself devoid of perspective – however fractal such cosmological arrangement might turn out to be: "[w]hat exists in multinature are not auto-identical entities differently perceived, but rather multiplicities immediately relational [...]" (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2015, p. 67)³. Furthermore, to address the precise point of Pucciarelli's article: "[...] perspectivism assumes a constant epistemology and variable ontologies: the same representations, but other objects; same sense [meaning/direction], but multiple references." (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2015, p. 68).⁴

This is but a short example of how a cultural/political intellectual angulation might well address the core issues of Meillassoux's diagnosed historical exhaustion – namely, the *for-us* as a "compensation" for the *in-itself*, as well as the necessity of contingency – without exactly demonizing

² No original: "O relativismo cultural, um 'multiculturalismo', supõe uma diversidade de representações subjetivas e parciais, incidentes sobre uma natureza externa, una e total, indiferente à representação. Os ameríndios propõem o oposto: de um lado, uma unidade representativa puramente pronominal – é humano quem ocupa vicariamente a posição de sujeito cosmológico; todo existente pode ser pensado como pensante ('isto existe, logo isto pensa'), isto é, como 'ativado' ou 'agenciado' por um ponto de vista –; do outro lado, uma radical diversidade real ou objetiva. O perspectivismo é um multinaturalismo, pois uma perspectiva não é uma representação."

³ No original: "O que existe na multinatureza não são entidades autoidênticas diferentemente percebidas, mas multiplicidades imediatamente relacionais."

⁴ No original: "Em outras palavras, o perspectivismo supõe uma epistemologia constante e ontologias variáveis: mesmas representações, mas outros objetos; sentido único, mas referências múltiplas."

the source of its christened term: correlationism and the correlation between thought and world.

In the case of Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism, the *for-us* is tightly related to the notion of cultural relativism, or multiculturalism, from which the author establishes a significant distance: *us*, in this case, means Western traditional phenomenology and its central notion of a single Nature dressed up differently by different cultures. As for the necessity of contingency, the fractal cosmos derived from perspectivistic multinaturalism also implies an internal difference to every entity, which radicalizes the argument that it *could be otherwise*. Even so, perspective and (multi-)nature are irredeemably entangled, and access to an absolute outside remains impossible – although the transit between perspectives lies at the core of its shamanic structure.

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Recebido: 11/10/2021

Aceito: 21/10/2021