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Meillassoux, Q	. Potentiality and	Virtuality (2011)		•
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Meillassoux, Q. Potentiality and Virtuality (2011)

en The Speculative Turn, Continental Materialism and Realism, Bryant, Srnicek, Harman (eds), re.press Melbourne, 2011

Disponible online: re-press.org

In 'Potentiality and Virtuality', Quentin Meillassoux returns to the classic Humean problem of grounding causal connections. Against its progressive abandonment as an ontological problem, Meillassoux asserts the possibility of taking Hume's problem as an ontological question amenable to resolution. Meillassoux begins by reformulating Hume's problem in a more general manner: 'can a decisive conclusion be made as to the necessity or lack of necessity of observed constants? ' A lack of necessity would not en- tail that constants change, but rather that it is entirely contingent whether they stay the same or not. Once such a lack of necessity has been accepted, the question of whether phenomenal laws will remain the same or not falls to the side. A different question rises in its place: if there are no necessary relations between observable instants, then why do phenomenal constants not change at every moment? Meillassoux argues that this apparent paradox is contingent upon the acceptance of a probabilistic reasoning about the universe as a whole. This probabilistic reasoning is based upon the totalization of the world of possibilities: the range of potentials which can then be assigned a probability of occurring. Yet if this totalization is impossible, as Cantor's discovery of multiple infinities suggests, then there is no basis for ascribing probabilities to any phenomenal event on the level of the universe. It is on the basis of this Cantorian advance that Meillassoux sets forth a fundamental distinction between potentiality and virtuality. Whereas the former is premised upon a totalization of the world, with a determinate set of possibilities inscribed within it, the latter rejects this totalization and asserts the fundamental novelty that is able to emerge beyond any preconstituted totality.

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