

3. Having read more of Moran's book I see now that Husserl's position to the "world in itself" (I will use the term *ontic*, in the following) is more complex, and that yes, he stood in opposition to Kant's own clinging to the "thing in itself". The *ontic/transcendental* as a horizon (by definition unreachable) I think is a good image.

My interpretation of Husserl : **the world is never beyond experience in principle.** It is so vast and rich and "saturated" —and I can only see essentially inexhaustible spatial objects from this or that point of view — that I can never *in fact* see all of it. For Husserl, there just is no "world in itself." This for him is a round square (he uses just that metaphor.) It is alluring-seductive nonsense. I myself add that dualism looks to me like a misunderstanding of perspectivism. We see the same objects differently, but we do not therefore see "representations" of those objects. (The strongest argument for perspectival direct realism is semantic, but I won't digress here.)

What is unreachable is only the "complete" experience of the world. No part of it whatsoever is closed off from us. That for Husserl, as I see it, is not an empirical claim but an explication of the concept of world, one that rescues it from the confused mathematical mysticism of scientific realism. We both seem to agree especially that it's absurd to think the world is "really" "atoms and void" (the latest version thereof).

I think we get each other here. "Finality" is an ideal limit, and so is certainty. Any knowledge is contextual and limited, dependent on a background (minimal foundation) that itself is contextual and limited. Reality in its flow can only be experienced, and in the Wittgenstein essay I connect this to what I term epistemisation: "any epistemic process (linguistic, conceptual, mathematical, empirical) epistemises the *ontic*. The instant we move away from just experiencing, to structuring experience, talking about it, measuring it, the *ontic* has already evaporated. From the point of view of the epistemic everything is always-already epistemised. The *ontic* is, epistemically, an unreachable limit."

I am sympathetic to the gist, but if everything is always already 'epistemised,' then "the ontic" becomes a quasi-mystical placeholder, something like Kant's thing-in-itself. Is it not paradoxical to present the ontic as unrepresentable? It's possible you mean (roughly) that there is something "ineffable" about experience. I agree with you on that, but I think one should *and can* make a case for why that is so.

Reality is not "primarily" conceptual. It is "structured" by concepts. The lifeworld has "significance." But our relationship is primarily (as Heidegger emphasized) a matter of skill (of turning real doorknobs, brushing our teeth, slicing onions without cutting our fingers.) This world is full of "visceral" objects. The world is full of "value". We grasp the woman or the piece of music "as" beautiful. "It values." Value is not painted on. The world is **primordially** an affair of "quality." Conceptuality is a bit like the skeleton of this reality, not its pulsating, sensual flesh.

You are also echoing Heidegger (in a good way) in his famous critique of how the theoretical pose distorts a grasp of the lifeworld. For instance, in this lecture course : (<https://philpapers.org/rec/HEIBPO>) . But Heidegger was determined to articulate the lifeworld, just as you are. So there must be some way ("formal indications" and so on) to help people see this qualitative blazing plenitude of the world.

If you use ontic as a limit in the mathematical sense, then we should be able to get arbitrarily close to expressing the ontic. This fits in very well with Husserl's sense that phenomenology is a perpetual beginner. We can never quite say it. But I insist that we come close, that some say it better than others. Otherwise philosophy is a self-cancelling (it paradoxically preaches its own impossibility.)

I think the topic of metaphor/myth is the central relationship between the epistemic and the ontic: the former is irreducibly representation (metaphor, picture, etc.) of the latter. If one weren't cognizant of the ontic one would quickly be led to there being "metaphors all the way down", but if we see that our experience as a whole is irreducible, that it is always more than what can be said, and that the epistemic is necessarily representational and limited (dependent on a contextual "minimal foundation"), the chain of metaphors gets cut, the way I see it.

To me this is the reappearance of dualism (and dualism is the great hydra, always growing a “new” head.) Conceptuality is **essentially** figurative. The world is essentially conceptual. I mean literally its speakable intelligible structure or essence is exactly concept, which is to say metaphor.

To be sure, mathematical physics sweeps its metaphoricity in the corner and lets math shine in the spotlight. But Popper’s admission of “basic statements” is the skeleton in the closet (Popper saw that conceptuality in its elusiveness enables observation.)

As I see it, the danger with a concept like the ontic (as Hegel saw, when discussing Kant’s thing in itself) is that it tends to be an entirely negative concept. It is given no positive content whatsoever. It is defined as not-cognitive. Or I may be misunderstanding you entirely. I hope it is at least helpful that I can give you a report from my POV. If you are trying to avoid dualism, then you may want to clarify whether the ontic is part of experience. If it’s “pretheoretical experience”, then that I relate to that, but I think that takes us back to my beloved Nietzsche quote. “Life” is beyond all theories or formulas. That is a bit like the infinitude of the world, which is too saturated and overflowing to ever be quite caught in concepts. We can always further clarify and articulate it. It surpasses or transcends whatever we *have* said about. The later Heidegger (as presented in Julian Young) might really appeal to you. I think you already know some Heidegger. But I love Young’s terse book and recommend it.

General comment/thought: What I am not convinced about and/or still thinking about is the efficacy of phenomenology, transcendental or not, of unfolding more of the ontic, related to what you said, that we gain other and new perspectives/views of it. I view experience as co-creative of the experienced, but I get the sense that Husserl believed in some stronger sense of the ability of transcendental phenomenology to penetrate into the ontic and say something about it. This is something I haven’t “thought through”, and maybe I never will, but my present take is that “pure” experience, unadulterated by language (the epistemic) is the path to the ontic, i.e. that the ontic is irreducible to the epistemic, hence “The ontic can only be experienced, not known.”

(From World Views). What I am undecided about is to what extent our ontic experience shapes the epistemic, and to what extent our epistemic shapes our ontic experience, if at all. By reducing our experience into the speakable (by phenomenology or any other approach), do we actually reveal something about the ontic, or do we "merely" reveal more about the structure of the epistemic? If I seem confused on this point it is because I am confused, or at least not settled in my thinking.

Reducing the ontic to the theoretical would indeed be a theoretical mistake. I prefer theoretical in this context, because the epistemic is (in my mind) too focused on certainty. For me Husserl is even more importantly a semantically focused thinker. Certainty is secondary to knowing what one even means in the first place. (One never knows exactly or finally what one means, in my view, because concepts have a certain blurry transcendence and metaphoricity.)

I think I addressed this above. The project of explicating reality need not assume (and should not !) that reality in its fullness can somehow be magically compressed into the single channel of conceptuality. That would be like musicians thinking they could translate the great painting into music without losing anything.

To explicate is to unfold. I find it helpful to think of phenomenology and Wittgenstein-inspired philosophy too in terms of explication or clarification of **what we are already doing with words**. Husserl and Heidegger are (in my view) figuring out (plausibly) by what we mean when we say that this or that exists. A spatial object exists in a different way than a number. Brandom is great on this stuff. For him the meaning of concepts is largely the role they play in inferential norms. We are not outside of reality peeping in. Ontology is its own necessary entity. If one (optionally) identifies with the (scientific) philosopher *as opposed* to the mystic, then one already assumes rational norms and "the forum" (the shared world) as basically intelligible (in a shared conceptuality).

To deny this forum is to deny the authority or meaning of one's own denial. For "language is a priori world-directed." "The world is all that is the case." It's not a bundle of junk in spacetime. It exists in the space of reasons. To deny this space of reasons is to function within

this very space as one dreams one is denying it. I hope you see why this realization is (for me) the rhetorical annihilation of the view that takes “atoms and void” (physics items) as the “really real.” The normative is irreducible, for any attempted reduction of the normative (into mere biology or physics or psychology), to be authoritative, invokes that same normativity (of rationality or science). Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* (a breakthrough early work) makes this kind of case, and it is still insufficiently appreciated IMO.

Are you familiar with Iain McGilchrist’s work? I think you would enjoy his “The Matter with Things”, which is partly a neuroscientific project arguing for the need for a return to right-hemispheric thinking, and partly a massive synthesis of the kinds of ideas we are discussing. Your Nietzsche quote reminded me of his position that the ontic may equally well be called God, where it not for the millennia of confusion that surrounds this term/name. Here are two quotes:

At the core of the contemporary world is the reductionist view that we are - nature is - the earth is - ‘nothing but’ a bundle of senseless particles, pointlessly, helplessly, mindlessly, colliding in a predictable fashion, whose existence is purely material, and whose only value is utility... Not only is it mistaken, I believe, but actively damaging - physically, to the natural world; and psychologically, morally, and spiritually to ourselves as part of that world. It endangers everything that we should value.

Being, then, is mysterious. The problem is that if we are to say anything about it, we still need some sort of placeholder, within language, for all those aspects of Being that defy direct expression, but which we sense are greater than the reality which language is apt to describe, almost certainly greater than whatever the human mind can comprehend. If we don’t have such a placeholder they will disappear from our awareness; yet what that placeholder signifies must not, above all at first, be tied down too tightly - if indeed it ever can be. In this it is rather like learning a language from experience only, without a grammar book or dictionary: in such a process what a word means must be initially left open, and narrowed only with deeper and repeated acquaintance. A drive for precision at the outset becomes the enemy of understanding.

The pretension, under such conditions, to be rigorously "scientific" or "exact" in our terms, writes James, would only stamp us as lacking in understanding of our task.* What we need, in fact, is a word unlike any other, not defined in terms of anything else: a sort of un-word. This is no doubt why in every great tradition of thought - and perhaps beyond that, in every language of every people - there is such an un-word. It holds the place for a power that underwrites the existence of everything - the ground of Being; but, as I shall suggest, it holds a place for more than that, otherwise some such phrase as 'ground of Being' would itself be enough. To Heraclitus it was the logos; to Lao Tzu the tao; to Confucius li; in Hinduism Brahman, and to the Vedic tradition rta; in Zen ri; to Arabic peoples, since pre-Islamic times, Allah; to the Hebrews YHWH.^o And in the Western tradition it is known as God

I looked him up last night. Likable person. He is not unlike <https://johnve>

I entirely and emphatically agree with his distaste for the reductionist view he describes. **But this is not the core of the world today.** I argued for years with a guy named Wayfarer on The Philosophy Forum about this. While there are few scientists and philosophers out there who currently believe that view, they are, in my view, extremely secondary culturally speaking.

The deep issue is, I claim, freedom and pluralism. We are atomized and privatized. We are nostalgic for something that was probably never actually here. But we are also insistent upon our own way of thinking of things. We are snarling individualists, who love our freedom, and yet it can be lonely and empty to have our own spiritual insights unrecognized by others.

You can see the crude, popular forms of the "new" religion in grievance politics (on both sides.) The culture war is a "holy" war. The loud-mouths on both sides do not invoke the meaninglessness atoms and void of the reductionist. They all very much believe in cultural entities like justice and freedom and so on. Actual traditional religion is a character on this stage too, as hero or villain. White straight colonizing man is inverted to black gay colonized woman. Plato is inverted to get pragmatism. One bit transformations. All the rage.

I am deeply influenced by Schopenhauer and game theory. Socrates

is properly the classic image of the true philosopher. He gets poison, but gratitude, for being recklessly honest and critical. The sophist (who sells mystifications of race class nationality etc) sits at the table with oligarchs, purges the institution of anything “purely” scientific. Spengler was great on this. He called it “ethical socialism.” It’s the now-default idea that the intellectual has to save the world by imposing the One Right Way of thinking. Of course science seeks the idea perspective on the world, but it is gentle. Because “pure” theory is transpersonal, forgetting itself in the object. It is even “amoral” in a certain sense, in its reluctance to get swept up in the mad passions of the mob.

Anyway, I think McGilchrist is clearly a genius, but I’m ambivalent about phenomenology being diluted by “spiritual” or “self-help” concerns. Even though I value spirituality and think Epictetus (one of my favorites, for instance) is “self-help.” Even if I were more political or evangelic, I think that phenomenology is most powerful and most convincing when it has an ice-cold neutrality. Ernst Mach in his *The Analysis of Sensations* has a great tone.

I was just rereading Husserl’s opening of his crisis lectures, and he is very much doing what McGilchrist and Vervakae and even Jordan Peterson are doing. But I think he dilutes his work by doing so. Of course Heidegger became a passionate Nazi. But this was a guy who was initially extremely loyal the idea of a **scientific** philosophy. But he got sucked in to the drama of his time. I myself try to “read the dead and write for the unborn.” The world is a horrorshow and the world is perfect. Both at the same time. Niether. And so on. But such value judgments are more politics or gossip than ontology. (I don’t mind talking about such things. I’m just articulating the boundaries of ontology — scientific philosophy – as I understand them.)

Mine is just one perspective, but my approach to ontology is “dry / cold ” or “mathematical”. As a total human being, I love Joyce and DADA and all kinds of stuff. So I’m not afraid or unable to talk about other things. I would like to write a novel that combines the existential and the ontological. I have written lots of stuff, so it’s a matter to taming the chaos. But the book is dark like Cormac –gallowshumor everywhere. I sucked at the tit of Nietzsche in my wild 20s.