

Copyrighted Material

# YOUR TRUTHS MATTER

**EXPANDING  
PERSPECTIVISM  
TO TACKLE  
MODERN  
PROBLEMS**

CHAMATH ARIYADASA

Copyrighted Material

**YOUR  
TRUTHS  
MATTER**

Copyright © 2024 Chamath Ariyadasa

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form without written permission from the publisher or author.

First Edition 2024



*To those who do little  
things to help others ...*

## *Preface*

We all care about subjectivities. From meeting friends we haven't seen in a while, to family members returning home, it's the little things that matter. So why does this process, at times, get complicated?

The complication arises from the various ways we frame these situations. The theoretical ideas, values, and philosophies we bring to these situations.

They can be called *ontologies*.

Contained in this book is an expansion of perspectivism based on ontological differences. Ontological differences impact everything significant in our lives, from the ways we navigate relationships to how we frame economic policy.

# Contents

Preface	ix
Introduction	xix
1. Characteristics of Ontology	1
2. The Ontological Imagination	7
3. Dramatic Self / Nominality / Performativity	19
4. Structural Self / Holism / Stoicism / Heideggerianism	41
5. Relational Self / Values / Context	61
6. Objective Rational Self / Representation / Causality	79
7. Pragmatic Self	95
8. Subjectivities	103
9. Perspectivism	117
10. Our New Science	131
11. Further Characteristics of Ontology	141
12. Tackling Modern Problems	147
<i>The Economic Pendulum</i>	148
<i>Shifting Perspective</i>	150
<i>Excess</i>	152
<i>Culture / Control</i>	154
<i>Workplace / Cultures</i>	155
<i>Political Futures</i>	156

<i>Reconciliation</i>	157
<i>Policy / Cycles</i>	158
<i>A Colony on Mars</i>	159
<i>East / West</i>	160
<i>Reputation</i>	161
<i>Capabilities</i>	163
<i>Philosophy of Crime</i>	163
<i>Experiments</i>	165
<i>Ontology / Gender</i>	166
<i>Mental Health Crises</i>	169
<i>Rethinking Autism</i>	173
<i>Dimensionality of Pain</i>	175
<i>Coherence</i>	176
<i>Compulsion</i>	177
<i>Body / Mind</i>	177
<i>Attraction / Fear</i>	178
<i>Strangeness</i>	179
<i>Assumptions</i>	180
<i>The Missing Oranges</i>	181
Summary	183
Contact the Author	187
Notes	189





*Enjoy your problems.*  
—*Suzuki Roshi*

*The surest sign that intelligent life exists elsewhere in  
the universe is that it has never tried to contact us.*

*—Bill Watterson*

# *Introduction*

Every philosophy can be upended by another, in an ontological sense, only to stand upright again. This gives us our dimensionality and oppositions, co-arising and necessary contradictions.

Your truths matter, now more than ever. But we must make way for a perspectival reality.



The Harvard Business Review interviews our best and brightest people for their insights into the human condition. It's a collation of insights if you will.

Their articles frequently extol the virtues of pragmatism. Get along with people, they say, and don't hold on to your ideals too tightly.

I like this advice. It's sensible and appeals to common sense. But I wish the world was this cut and dry. Pragmatism often seems like we've put our ideals in a blender to make a smoothie.

That's one way to look at it.

Our ideals are what produced the first antibiotics, the first aerial flight, and the first parliament. And on the downside, the first act of discrimination, the first inquisition, and the first invasion.

So, when should we hold on to our ideals? And when should we let go? Is there just one idealism? Or are there many?

Presented in this book will be an expansion of perspectivism based on ontological differences. Ontological perspectivism has been explored by many philosophers. I take the arguments to the next level. Although controversial to some, they are also intuitive.

For instance, people are different. This realization has the power to simplify our lives and even resolve social conflict. If you get how that works, the rest of this book is purely academic. See. It's not that complicated. I promise.

In political philosophy, the formative assumptions are *una mens* and *tabula rasa*, meaning people of one mind likened to blank slates. But the evidence does not support this. The arguments here are for *mentes multae*, many minds.

To put it differently, one's silence is another's duplicity, one's enthusiasm is another's caprice, and one's focus on the mind is another's disregard for the body. We judge truth, character, goodness, and humility in vastly different ways. We need subtexts.

I will be using the word ontology a lot. An ontology is more than a disposition or perspective, it's a way of being, unspoken and possessing one's own perspective on knowledge. This usage is related to, but often different from what is meant in linguistics, computer science and philosophy.

What will critics say? Contextual philosophers will argue that I have privileged the mind over the body, that I favor the impersonal over the personal, and that I am more reductive than integrative.

These criticisms are valid. The excesses of philosophy, throughout history, and attempts to install one as superior

to another, is one of the major themes of this book. Argued for will be a principle of equivalence.

Some have pronounced philosophy dead, saying it's in complete disarray due to the monumental arguments within. But I believe it is as it should be. Wearing appropriate lenses, the disarray begins to make sense.

Every work in philosophy can be considered a contribution to perspectivism. Your truths matter, now more than ever. But we have to make way for a perspectival reality.

Thankfully, we have been working on the answers for a very long time. It's time to put the pieces together.

The Wheatleys, Tagores, and Ban Zhaos of the world offered their insights in the hope they would contribute to our collective understanding. And they have. I must thank them.

Niels Bohr said, "The opposite of a fact is falsehood, but the opposite of one profound truth may very well be another profound truth."

Love thy neighbor, as they say, and all will be well. Respect the views of others, and all will be well. But that's not always easy to practice, is it? I certainly struggle with this.

So, this book is about exploring why this happens, and finding another way to attack the problem. Sometimes the answers are surprisingly easy.

With thoughtful and respectful conversations, reconciliation is possible. With patience and effort, we can get there!



## *Characteristics of Ontology*

An ontology is more than a disposition or perspective, it's a 'way of being,' unspoken and possessing one's own perspective on knowledge.



People are different. This realization has the power to simplify our lives and even resolve social conflict.



To quote Anaïs Nin, “We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.”



We all care about subjectivities. From meeting friends we haven't seen in a while, to family members returning home, it's the little things that matter. So why does this process, at times, get complicated?

The complication arises due to the ways we frame these situations, the theories, values, and philosophies we bring to these situations. These are essentially ontologies.





Reality appears to be multidimensional, yet we live in single dimensions. Ontology allows us to explore this dimensionality.



At our best, every ontology is an expression of love, kindness, compassion, generosity, and our other best qualities.

A discussion of theoretical aspects then involves discussing our argumentative and stubborn selves, the various roads we travel to find harmony and integration.



Every ontology is prone to obsession, error, and excess.



There are many femininities, many masculinities, and many genders. More importantly, there are many ontologies. The various battles for gender dominance, over the centuries, are better understood as battles for ontological dominance.



There is an equivalence between ontologies. Outside of pragmatic standpoints, such an equivalence is not accepted

within academia. This drives our philosophical and cultural battles.



Environments and culture have characteristics of ontology. Dissonance with one's environment is a cause for concern and raises questions.



In a simplified sense, ontologies are capabilities.



Perspectivism gives us the tools to disambiguate complex questions such as beauty, justice, culture, gender, and our political crises.



Every work in philosophy should be considered a contribution to perspectivism. In this sense, there is no crisis of truth in philosophy. There is a crisis of interpretation.



An ontology is a universe, an all-encompassing worldview. Crossing from one universe to another is not easy. But we can develop a healthy appreciation for others.



To quote Niels Bohr, 'The opposite of a fact is falsehood, but the opposite of one profound truth may very well be another profound truth.' As our new science suggests, we must embrace our necessary contradictions.



As long as we respect differences and keep equivalence in mind, how we see the world, in an ontological sense, is entirely up to us.



Presented in this book is one approach to ontologies. One academic will carve the pie differently from the next. What is important is to recognize differences and their possible equivalence.



*(For further characteristics of ontology, see chapter 11)*



## *The Ontological Imagination*

*We don't see things as they are,  
we see them as we are.*

—Anaïs Nin

We all care about subjectivities. From meeting friends we haven't seen in a while to family members returning home, it's the little things that matter. So why does this process, at times, get complicated?

The complication arises from the various ways we frame these situations. The various theoretical ideas, values, or philosophies we bring to these situations.

For instance, we may believe there's a 'proper way' to do things. We may overthink our role. Or we may consider a myriad of philosophies. With our tendency to do a little more, we end up doing a little less. The various ways we frame subjectivities can be called ontologies.

There's nothing inherently wrong with an ontology. Ontologies help us understand our lives and provide insights into reality. These 'ways of being' are embodied philosophies, in a sense. The methods of this book reflect one such perspective.

However, in excess, we end up emphasizing our ontologies more than our appreciation of subjectivities. How and why this happens will help us better understand our perspectives and our ontological reality.

To put it differently, at our best, every ontology is an expression of love, kindness, compassion, generosity, and our other best qualities. In excess, our ontologies involve our argumentative and stubborn selves, the various roads we travel to find harmony and integration.

Ontology is arguably the biggest question we face in philosophy. Heidegger would agree with this sentiment. Elizabeth Grosz describes the challenge we face in the following way:

Without broader and different concepts of the real, the ontological, and the relation between the problem and solutions, feminist theory is unable to invent or develop its own cosmologies, its own ontologies and epistemologies, and ultimately to regenerate or revitalize its political practices.<sup>1</sup>

Gilles Deleuze, in his book *Difference and Repetition*, noted the importance of ontology. Deleuze's philosophy provides a measure of difficulty for even career philosophers. This highlights the challenge we face when attempting reconciliation. Deleuze wrote:

The subject dealt with here is manifestly in the air. The signs may be noted: Heidegger's more and more pronounced orientation towards a philosophy of ontological [D]ifference; the structuralist project, based upon a distribution of differential characters within a space of coexistence; the contemporary novelist's art which revolves around difference and repetition, not only in its most abstract reflections but also in its effective techniques; the discovery in a variety of fields of a power

peculiar to repetition, a power which also inhabits the unconscious, language and art.<sup>2</sup>

As we shall discuss, Deleuze's arguments have strong contextual and nominal themes. These are considered as broad ontologies in this book. Yet he pulls them together to present a coherent ontology. To the extent that we present a coherent ontology, we may not recognize differences. But this is also a matter of interpretation.

Charudatta Navare highlights the implications of perspectivism and ontology, and the challenge that philosophy faces, in the following way:

Science is often described as objective and value-free, but philosophers of science have pointed out that values can guide the questions that scientists ask, the hypotheses they make, and the way they interpret their results.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, ontologies determine our perspectives and shape our reality. Ontologies change our frame of reference. We must essentially consider multiple frames of reference.

This dimensionality challenges any coherent narrative I might attempt as an introduction to the following chapters. Given this difficulty, if you have a sense of what an ontology is, you should dive into any of the chapters from 3 to 7 that discuss broad ontologies.

Each ontology is a window to reality. This means we must leave behind a sense of complete knowledge.

Nevertheless, the rest of this chapter will present my version of introductory context. Summarized characteristics of ontology are presented in chapters 1 and 11.



Despite our search for solutions, the modern condition leaves much to be desired. Seeing a homeless person struggling with mental dissonance, for instance, is a painful reminder of our civilizational failures.

Many people suffer in silence, some famous personalities being notable examples. The call emanating from many quarters is that an evolution of our thought is warranted, the relentless march of 'progress' needs a rethink.

This book is another attempt, in a rich history of attempts, to interrogate this reality.

Building on literature on perspectivism, though with an unconventional twist, I take the argument to the next level. The more we consider people for who they are, rather than who we need them to be, the easier these arguments become.

The way I frame ontologies in the next few chapters can be controversial, but they fall within well-known paradigms in philosophy. And in our search for coherence, we will struggle with reconciliation.

Still, what's clear to me is that everyone is trying their best. Each one of us will continue to learn and evolve in the same way that we must collectively learn and evolve.

The question is, how do we do this?

Like Gilgamesh or Odysseus, let's set off on this journey.

Anaïs Nin summarized the message of this book far better than I can when she said, "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."



As mentioned, it may suffice to say that 'people are different.' This realization has the power to simplify our lives and even resolve social conflict.

But what does it mean to say we see things 'as we are?' Do we change and transform regularly? Are our personalities broadly consistent over time? Does our environment condition us? And, if so, are we easily deconditioned?

The prevailing theory is that we have been conditioned in various ways. But this doesn't hold up to careful inquiry—not on its own. It means a period of education should bring us all to the same page. After all, we've been focused on answering the same questions for a while now, right?

It means Heidegger was Beauvoir, and Beauvoir was Nietzsche, and Nietzsche was Nin. These writers made an intense effort to explain themselves. They should have arrived at common principles. But these inferences don't fit the evidence. We need a better explanation.

As we shall discuss, Heidegger's philosophy was indeed different from Nietzsche's. Given that they were prolific writers, we can observe differences in philosophy and style. Why would Heidegger see reality differently?

Do our minds perceive more than one interpretation? Our many schools of philosophy support this conclusion. This raises two possibilities. Either that one of them wasn't as perceptive as the other. Or reality is multifaceted.

We have gotten used to thinking that it's the first possibility, that some people aren't perceptive enough, that one philosophy is just better than another.

But this book is about the second possibility. That reality allows us vastly different insights. And, if we try hard enough, we can sense and perceive these possibilities.

We don't need to, but we could if we wanted to. Nin's quote attests to this reality.

If what we truly care about are subjectivities, then why discuss ontology? One reason is that we can develop a healthy appreciation for the necessity as well as dangers associated with each ontology.

Given that I've been researching this topic for more than a decade, how has this impacted me, you might ask? Has this attempt at weighing different ontologies been problematic? Have I changed at all?

Like everyone else, I have evolved over time. Ontological perspectivism has helped me develop a healthy appreciation for alternative perspectives. Even though I may find certain ways of being unsettling, I don't need to rush into arguments anymore. Yet, my 'way of being,' my ontology, is broadly the same.

As mentioned earlier, people are different. This realization has the power to simplify our lives, and even resolve social conflict.

Love thy neighbor, as they say, and all will be well. Respect the views of others, and all will be well. That's the message of this book. Easy as pie, right?

But some things are easier said than done. We react to excess in all its forms. So this book is about exploring why this happens, and digging deeper into personal and cultural ontologies.

One source of evidence for differences comes from epistemologies. They are 'theories of knowledge,' but grander

projects than just mere theories. They can be considered the engines of philosophy.

Epistemologies can answer questions like, what's going on in the minds of people? These engines are prototypes, there's much that we still don't know. Leibniz and Kant both considered the possibility of prototypes in the mind. Leibniz called them monads.

Consider the question, 'What is Truth?'

We receive various responses. That the truth is fixed, the truth depends on context, the truth is a variation of the same principle, the truth is rhetorical, and the truth is a matter of utility are likely responses.

These perspectives are found in the schools of objective rationality, contextualism, nominalism, structuralism, and pragmatism, respectively.

Notice that we've been given vastly different responses to a simple question. Each truth essentially contradicts the others. Entire perspectives are built around these core epistemologies.

For instance, contextualism is a dominant theme within gender studies. Structurality and objective rationality are dominant themes in science. Nominality and pragmatism are dominant schools in philosophy in general.

They are considered broad ontologies in this book.

Some of you will ask whether I am proposing a framework. I am not. Differences are inherent to ontology. One academic will carve the pie differently from the next.

What's important is to recognize a principle of difference and consider their possible equivalence. Outside of pragmatic standpoints, ontological equivalence is not widely accepted in philosophy.

The ontologies presented in this book are ultimately unnecessary. In other words, they are heuristic devices designed to make a dimensional conversation more manageable.

And, as we shall discuss, our personal ontologies color our perspectives.

If you are reading this paragraph, and you are welcome to, of course, it means you haven't adopted my suggestion to skip ahead. My concern is that you are engaging with what appears to be a 'coherent' introduction to ontology.

Coherence is not our friend in this situation. This is because each ontology is based on a different frame of reference. Instead, we must rely on an ontological imagination to gauge this reality.

The question, 'what is truth?' helped the author develop their ontological imagination. The epistemological breakdown of this question will be explored more in chapter 8.



Differences between people are easy to observe. But let's consider some examples that have a rich history of philosophical debate.

When contextual philosophers say that the so-called 'objective' perspective, or the 'view from nowhere' is problematic, they are speaking for alternative ontologies. When this 'view from nowhere' excludes others, it becomes problematic.

As we shall discuss, there is more than one form of objectivity. 'Objective rationality' and 'structurality' are both

considered broad ontologies in this book. In this sense, it may be better to consider all perspectives as subjective.

When Cornel West says that analytic modes of philosophizing fail to consider justice, culture, history, and context, he is comparing different ontologies. That doesn't mean that analytical philosophy doesn't have justice in its fold.<sup>4</sup>

To consider another example, 'caring' about people was an important aspect of Heidegger's philosophy. However, even when people appear to be uncaring, carefree, or careless, in a Heideggerian sense, they are being caring or careful.<sup>5</sup>

This can be a confusing aspect to anyone outside his ontology. With better communication and interpretation we can reconcile such differences, but seeming tensions will remain.

For those of you familiar with the Heideggerian definition of ontological difference, this book adopts a different meaning. What is meant are differences between equivalent ontologies. Heideggerian and related philosophies are broadly considered as the 'structural' ontology in this book.

To consider another example, the Q&A is a popular format in general conversation, media, and academic discussions, and it is often used in therapy.

From the point of view of ontology, the process reveals a particular way of thinking and being. Changing this dynamic, by making observations, comments, and rephrasing questions, becomes a reorientation towards alternative ontologies. 'Non-judgmental' forms of communication frequently consider this dynamic.

Does science provide us guidance on any of this? Examples from science for dimensionality will be considered throughout this book.

Neuroscience, for example, has begun to explain how our brains work. There appear to be 10 times as many neural connections arising from the neocortex that are cognitively driven—top-down— as there are neural connections that are sensory-driven—bottom-up.

This suggests that most of the information we use to ‘see,’ for instance, comes from the brain itself, and much less comes from our eyes. Sandra Blakeslee reports that this could mean we simulate reality:

Some of our behavior is conscious, but most of it is notoriously unconscious. ... And what is consciousness? ... Many scientists now believe that the brain basically works by simulating reality. The sights, sounds and touches that flow into the brain are put in the framework of what the brain expects on the basis of previous experience and memory.<sup>6</sup>

This supports the argument in this book that we process reality in different ways. Further evidence will be explored in subsequent chapters and chapter 10.

A principle of difference seems to apply to any question in social psychology. This means we can disambiguate complex questions such as values, hierarchy, beauty, justice, and leadership.

And our perspective shapes our laws and institutions and defines our environment. As Grosz suggests, we need better tools to develop new cosmologies and redesign our environments. Ontology provides those tools.

These conversations around differences are just getting started.

## *Dramatic Self / Nominality / Performativity*

*[we] are capable of the greatest vices as  
well as of the greatest virtues.*

—Rene Descartes

The dramatic self, and the need for rhetoric in the art of persuasion, as Aristotle noted, are topics of some significance in philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Yet, they appear to be largely misunderstood.

Can we identify an ontology here? The nominal ontology, broadly understood, revolves around philosophies such as nominalism, performativity, speech acts, the dramatic self, Ockham's Razor, and the emphasis on 'leadership.' It is a key theme within postmodernism.

Philosophers include David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Michel Foucault.

The ontology considers nominality over grand narratives, art over analytics, detachment over engagement, the center over the periphery, and performativity over other ontologies.

At its best, nominality expresses humanity's best qualities. But, like all ontologies, it is prone to obsession, error, and excess. Nominality is not restricted to a gender.



Let's hear some practical expressions before we consider theoretical aspects. The perspective comes across to me in the poems of Amanda Gorman, Dorothy Parker, and Phillis Wheatley. Here are a few verses:

Thus may our crisis be our cry, our crossroad,  
The oldest ode we owe each other.  
We chime it, for the climate,  
For our communities.  
We shall respect and protect  
Every part of this planet,  
Hand it to every heart on this earth,  
Until no one's worth is rendered  
By the race, gender, class, or identity  
They were born. This morn let it be sworn  
That we are one one human kin,  
Grounded not just by the griefs  
We bear, but by the good we begin.

—Amanda Gorman, *An Ode We Owe*<sup>2</sup>

Lilacs blossom just as sweet  
Now my heart is shattered.  
If I bowled it down the street,  
Who's to say it mattered?  
If there's one that rode away  
What would I be missing?  
Lips that taste of tears, they say,  
Are the best for kissing.

Eyes that watch the morning star  
Seem a little brighter;

Arms held out to darkness are  
Usually whiter.  
Shall I bar the strolling guest,  
Bind my brow with willow,  
When, they say, the empty breast  
Is the softer pillow?

That a heart falls tinkling down,  
Never think it ceases.  
Every likely lad in town  
Gathers up the pieces.  
If there's one gone whistling by  
Would I let it grieve me?  
Let him wonder if I lie;  
Let him half believe me.

—Dorothy Parker, Threnody<sup>3</sup>

TO show the lab'ring bosom's deep intent,  
And thought in living characters to paint,  
When first thy pencil did those beauties give,  
And breathing figures learnt from thee to live,  
How did those prospects give my soul delight,  
A new creation rushing on my sight?  
Still, wond'rous youth! each noble path pursue,  
On deathless glories fix thine ardent view:  
Still may the painter's and the poet's fire  
To aid thy pencil, and thy verse conspire!

—Phillis Wheatley, To S.M. A Young African Painter,  
On Seeing His Works. (1773)<sup>4</sup>

Foucault frequently elaborated on nominal themes. He questioned why life as art wasn't a notion that was more commonplace. In this way he critiqued the excesses of modernity:

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? ... we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity.<sup>5</sup>

Excesses of mind and 'reason,' characteristic of the modern age, weakened the body, passions, and spirit, according to Foucault. This critique is valid. However, as we shall discuss, it is not complete. Foucault does not disambiguate diverse motivations and ontologies that produce this result.

Nominalism denies the existence of abstract entities and universals. Instead, there are distinct and particular instances. Terms like 'green' or 'dignity,' do not have independent existence, they group individual instances that share similarities. Understood this way, 'truth' reflects variations of the same principle, and differences are expressions of the same principle.

As we shall discuss, nominality plays an important role in modern politics.

William of Ockham was a 14th-century Franciscan friar who was an early exponent of nominalism. Stephen Lahey explains Ockham's view:

Everything outside the soul is really singular and numerically one, for anything outside the soul is either simple or composite. If it is simple, it does not include many things ... If it is composite, one will finally have to arrive at a certain number of parts. Consequently each of these parts will be numerically one.

Nominalists argue that universal terms are linguistic conveniences rather than reflective of separate metaphysical realities.<sup>6</sup>

Related to nominalism, in my opinion, are speech acts and performativity. Speech act theory developed in the mid-20th century with J.L. Austin's work. The theory considers how there are several layers to communication, especially performance.

Austin refers to the 'force' and intensity of what is said. For instance, 'I WANT ICE CREAM,' and 'I want ice cream,' has different meanings. One is a demand and the other is a request. This way, we can distinguish between the strong form and the more relatable form of any argument.<sup>7</sup>

Notably, 'intensity' can be discerned in all ontological arguments.

Performativity refers to how certain actions or expressions convey meaning. They have the power to bring about the reality they signify.

In this way, Judith Butler argued that gender is not a fixed or essential characteristic. Rather, repeated performance leads to reinforcement of gender norms and social identities. Butler wrote:

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results.<sup>8</sup>

From the point of view of ontology, Butler’s view is a valid ontological perspective. Each ontology contributes to the formation of gender identity.

In a similar vein, sociologist Erving Goffman explored the perspective of the dramatic self. Individuals represent themselves in daily life, play social roles, and shape their identities. Goffman noted that individuals participate in impression management by portraying themselves according to others’ perceptions, intentionally or unintentionally.

On the front stage, individuals perform their parts under the gaze of public scrutiny. Motivations may be different backstage. Although not an argument for nominality, and often an argument against, Goffman explored some of the issues involved.<sup>9</sup>

In this book nominality is considered an ontological perspective with unique epistemological roots.

Ockham popularized a principle called Ockham’s razor. It states that, for any given argument, the response with the fewest assumptions will be the best one. It was originally stated as “pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate,” “plurality should not be posited without necessity.” The idea is to avoid unnecessary complexity.

In practice, Ockham’s razor may amount to a conflation of nominality with objective rationality. This produces arguments with slim logical support, a result frequently seen in the context of modern-day politics.

Arguments generated this way are, nevertheless, significant because nominality makes a case for nominality

itself. The ontology may produce its own consequences and logical effects.

The nominal ontology of 18th-century Scottish philosopher David Hume is evident in the following comment. He emphasizes how the philosophy that's 'easy' generally wins over the 'abstruse':

It is certain that the easy and obvious philosophy will always, with the generality of mankind, have the preference above the accurate and abstruse; and by many will be recommended, not only as more agreeable, but more useful than the other. It enters more into common life; moulds the heart and affections; and, by touching those principles which actuate men, reforms their conduct, and brings them nearer to that model of perfection which it describes. On the contrary, the abstruse philosophy, being founded on a turn of mind, which cannot enter into business and action, vanishes when the philosopher leaves the shade, and comes into open day; nor can its principles easily retain any influence over our conduct and behaviour. The feelings of our heart, the agitation of our passions, the vehemence of our affections, dissipate all its conclusions, and reduce the profound philosopher to a mere plebeian.<sup>10</sup>

Hume's argument may at times be true. However, he fails to disambiguate ontological and situational exceptions. Instead, Hume sticks to a simple narrative in line with Ockham's razor.

Public opinion, for instance, is often divided. Such diversity of opinion supports the argument in this book for ontological diversity.

And Hume doesn't discuss whether nominality can be applied in support of complex and abstruse conversations. Arguably, it can be.

Given this single mindedness, it's not surprising that Hume said, "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions." In this way, Hume highlights one of our ontological battlegrounds.

Bertrand Russell considers the same question in his book, *A History of Western Philosophy*. Russell says prudence versus passion is a conflict that runs through history. According to Russell, we should not side wholly with one side or the other. Referring to Bacchus, the god of wine, vegetation, and fertility in ancient Greece, he says:

The worshipper of Bacchus reacts against prudence. In intoxication, physical or spiritual, he recovers an intensity of feeling which prudence had destroyed; he finds the world full of delight and beauty, and his imagination is suddenly liberated from the prison of everyday preoccupation ... Without the Bacchic element, life would be uninteresting; with it, it is dangerous ... It is not a conflict in which we ought to side wholly with either party.<sup>11</sup>

The terms 'prudence' and 'passion' encompass diverse possibilities—there can be many forms of prudence, and many forms of passion, which makes the binary meaningless. Nevertheless, Russell makes a case for ontological equivalence when he argues for both prudence and passion.

Ontologies represent sustained emphases. It's not that individuals who are prudent aren't, at times, passionate. Or that individuals who are passionate aren't, at times, prudent. As such, ontology allows us to disambiguate such binaries into more meaningful constructs.

It is not surprising that, in excess, nominality is a philosophy that plays to populism. Many politicians have realized that this gives them an edge.

As Hume observed, nominality will deviate from the accurate and abstruse in favor of the easy and obvious. This argument came up in Habermas's debate with Foucault, one that can be characterized as situated between the objective rational and nominal ontologies.

Politicians frequently utilize nominality and Ockham's razor to make a case for nominality itself, as well as their specific agendas. But they may fall foul of alternative systems of knowledge assessment.

Ross Douthat, speaking on a New York Times podcast, said, "There is, I think, a way in which a male braggadocio, this performative masculine rebellion against liberal politesse shows up again and again, from Silvio Berlusconi, to Trump. Even Boris Johnson had some of this. I don't think it's a coincidence ... "<sup>12</sup>

In a political context, nominality often makes a case for excess rather than balance and perspectival equivalence. The roots of this imbalance may lie in our ontological battlegrounds.

In 1848, Alex de Tocqueville, speaking against socialism, after the French Monarchy of Louis Philippe was overthrown, said:



Was it by appealing to the material needs of man, as a speaker of yesterday insisted, that the French Revolution accomplished those great deeds that the whole world marvelled at? Do you believe that it spoke of wages, of well-being, of unlimited wealth, of the satisfaction of physical needs?

Do you believe that by speaking of such things it could have aroused a whole generation of men to fight for it at its borders, to risk the hazards of war, to face death? No, gentlemen, it was by speaking of greater things, of love of country, of the honor of France, of virtue, generosity, selflessness, glory, that it accomplished what it did. Be certain, gentlemen, that it is only by appealing to man's noblest sentiments that one can move them to attain such heights.<sup>13</sup>

Tocqueville could have promoted socialist ideals by applying nominality, but he chose not to. Instead, he utilized Ockham's razor to promote a different political agenda. He made a case for nominality itself, as well as his politics.

The need for 'leadership' is a common refrain in management and government. Experts say there are schools of leadership, but no philosophy of leadership.<sup>14</sup>

'Leadership' can be understood as the ability to facilitate operations. On the one hand, it's a hands-on, performative process. On the other hand, every ontology makes a case for leadership and different operational cultures.

There could be contextual, objective-rational, structural, nominal, or pragmatic cultures, to name a few possibilities.

Leadership styles have been studied in the corporate sector, and they are best understood in conjunction with organizational culture.

Gary Hamel and Michele Zanini describe how some companies have experimented with flatter structures and how employees on the ground make significant decisions. These companies have profited from these changes.

One initiative at the Large Hadron Collider opted for a bottom-up peer-to-peer system that allowed more than 3,000 scientists to coordinate their activities successfully. Meanwhile, companies like IBM and Nokia may have missed market opportunities due to bureaucracy that hampered internal communication and creativity.

In their book *Humanocracy: Creating Organizations as Amazing as the People Inside Them*, Gary Hamel and Michele Zanini describe companies that ‘upended canonical management beliefs’:

The problem is, conjuring up a plausible image of a super-flat, thoroughly decentralized organization isn’t easy. As human beings, we’re prisoners of the familiar—and there’s little that’s more familiar than bureaucracy. ... Nucor, the world’s most innovative and consistently profitable steelmaker, is a case study in what happens when you invert the pyramid and unleash the capabilities of those on the front lines. Haier, the Qingdao-based home appliance maker, has built a culture that

encourages everyone to think and act like an entrepreneur.<sup>15</sup>

The argument for decentralized organization is not an argument against 'leadership,' per se, but these examples highlight alternative possibilities.

When viewed in isolation, those in favor of 'leadership,' say the function is necessary for motivation, and coordination.

On the downside, leadership creates problems of hierarchy that stifle innovation and lead to corruption and favoritism. Flow of information is warped. And, in the absence of a consultative process, arbitrary and poor decisions are often made.

A group of peers may not need a leader. If an individual proposes to be the 'leader,' it destabilizes the group and creates a hierarchy. The leader is empowered and the rest are disempowered. This is the very reality the group wants to avoid.

It seems, the question of leadership is a matter of ontology. Structurality will support existing hierarchical structures, while the value ontology may be ambivalent on the question.

Nominality will claim privileged insights into the question, and objective rationality will oppose hierarchies.

The concept may have been necessary in the past. But now it should be considered a situational need tied to the way we understand culture.

Nominality is both necessary and unavoidable. Leadership, in many modern contexts, is not, and we are in the early days of its ontological disaggregation.



Friedrich Nietzsche, in his book *Beyond Good and Evil*, speaking for the nominal ontology asks a pertinent question:

SUPPOSING that Truth is a woman—what then? Is there not ground for suspecting that all philosophers, in so far as they have been dogmatists, have failed to understand women—that the terrible seriousness and clumsy importunity with which they have usually paid their addresses to Truth, have been unskilled and unseemly methods for winning a woman? Certainly she has never allowed herself to be won; and at present every kind of dogma stands with sad and discouraged mien—IF, indeed, it stands at all!<sup>16</sup>

Nietzsche was a volatile proponent of the nominal ontology, albeit an articulate one. He may have been justifiably frustrated with the state of the world in the late 19th century—the excesses of bureaucracy, and the excesses of the structural and objective rational ontologies.

Misplaced values no doubt played a part too. Nietzsche's comments on 'truth' must be weighed against ontological diversity which paints a complex picture.

Nietzsche frequently swung between balanced expressions of his ontology and calls to excess. Here he asks whether truth can originate out of error:

How could anything originate out of its opposite? for example, truth out of error? or the will to truth out of the will to deception? or

selfless deeds out of selfishness? or the pure and sunlike gaze of the sage out of lust? Such origins are impossible; whoever dreams of them is a fool, indeed worse; the things of highest value must have another, peculiar origin—they cannot be derived from this transitory, seductive, deceptive, paltry world from this turmoil of delusion and lust. Rather from the lap of Being, the intransitory, the hidden god, the 'thing-in-itself'—there must be their basis, and nowhere else.

Despite hyperbole, Nietzsche suggests that something good can indeed come out of its opposite. In a world of differences, this is an important insight.

The perspectival nature of differences suggests that 'truth,' as we often understand it, is generally complex. This complexity, from an epistemological perspective, is discussed more in chapter 8 under *epistemological equivalence*.



In our exploration of nominality the question 'Who are you?' is significant. Hannah Arendt suggests that this question lies at the center of participatory democracy. We are pushed to consider differences and dimensionality, and the uniqueness of an individual. Paul A. Kottman writes:

... immediately after Arendt writes of the 'curious intangibility' of 'who' someone is for philosophical discourse, she links philosophy's inability to determine 'who' someone is to '*politics*.' Philosophy's failure to name 'who'

someone uniquely is, in other words, also signals a failure of traditional Western politics. It indicates, for instance, the extent to which traditional philosophy and politics respond to universals, rather than to unique persons and their interaction.<sup>17</sup>

Adriana Cavarero, in her book *Relating Narratives: Story-Telling and Selfhood*, explores the subjectivity of the 'you,' and says that the 'you' comes before the *we*, before the plural *you* and before the *they*:

Symptomatically, the *you* [*tu*] is a term that is not at home in modern and contemporary developments of ethics and politics. The 'you' is ignored by the individualistic doctrines, which are too preoccupied with praising the rights of the *I*, and the 'you' is masked by a Kantian form of ethics that is only capable of staging an *I* that addresses itself as a familiar 'you' [*un 'io' che si da solamente del 'tu'*]. Neither does the 'you' find a home in the schools of thought to which individualism is opposed—these schools reveal themselves for the most part to be affected by a moralistic vice, which, in order to avoid falling into the decadence of the *I*, avoids the contiguity of the *you*, and privileges collective, plural pronouns. Indeed, many 'revolutionary' movements (which range from traditional communism to the feminism of sisterhood) seem to share a curious linguistic code based on the intrinsic morality of pronouns. The *we* is always positive, the *plural you* [*voi*] is a possible ally,

the *they* has the face of an antagonist, the *I* is unseemly, and the *you* [*tu*] is, of course, superfluous.<sup>17</sup>

In the form of ontologies, the alterity of 'you' can be understood in several dimensions. Even if we consider instances when these dimensions collapse to one, we must consider instances when they do not. There are contextual, structural, objective-rational, nominal, and pragmatic implications to consider.

Certain interpretations may seem superfluous, but we cannot reject any realities. This discomfort gives us our multiple ontologies.

Similarly, Butler, in *Senses of The Subject*, reconciles diverse approaches, and captures an ontological perspective that highlights one of the major tensions in philosophy.

Butler says:

Just as philosophy founders time and again on the question of the body, it tends to separate what is called thinking from what is called sensing, from desire, passion, sexuality, and relations of dependency. It is one of the great contributions of feminist philosophy to call those dichotomies into question and so to ask as well whether in sensing, something called thinking is already at work, whether in acting, we are also acted upon, and whether in coming into the zone of the thinking and speaking I, we are at once radically formed and also bringing something about.<sup>18</sup>

But in this reconciliation we go back to the question of coherence, dimensionality, partiality and incompleteness. Every ontological perspective is valid but not complete.

Nominality, just like all ontologies, attempts to express itself equally across genders. In reality, the situation is more complex. Due to cultural norms men within a nominal ontology may feel a lot freer to be themselves. They may believe they've been given a license to do so, more than women within the same ontology.

The necessary counterweights to the excesses of an ontology are alternatives. In the case of nominality, objective rationality plays such a role.

Even though the ontology positions itself against making generalizations, in excess nominality will resort to loose generalizations backed by Ockham's razor.

Objective rationality, based on a consistent methodology, will react against these 'irrationalities' giving us one of the major tensions in philosophy.

Hume wanted to go as far as to limit the scope of objective rationality to mathematics and logical reasoning, and not belief-formation, and ethical or aesthetic deliberations.

In support of this position Hume said 'causality' was a display of regular succession and constant conjunction. This supports the argument for ontological diversity. Hume believed that we cannot understand effects by looking at causes. This is discussed more in chapter 10.

Despite its merits, there are arguments against it. For one, nominality tends to ignore the consequences of its actions.

Nietzsche couldn't help creating metanarratives, even though this was anathema to his philosophy. Ivan Spencer explains, comparing his ideas with postmodernism:

Like Nietzsche, present-day postmodern culture undermines systems and refuses to



replace them. Postmodernism, a recent but waning movement that loves Nietzsche, sees all metanarratives as merely another perspective ... Yet postmodernism waned because it began to look like a metanarrative itself.<sup>19</sup>

Postmodernism is an intellectual and cultural trend that began in the mid-twentieth century that influenced fields such as philosophy, literature, architecture, and cultural studies. The movement rejects overarching narratives and universal themes.

In terms of knowledge construction, postmodernism holds that this varies according to social context, and blends insights with contextuality.

For instance, Jacques Derrida's ideas around deconstruction and Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality critique consumer culture, and commodification driven by advertising.

But it's important to disambiguate postmodernism as a mix of contextual, structural, and nominal ontologies, a complex program positioned against the excesses of modernity.

As a result, the movement wasn't well understood. Discussing postmodernism, Noam Chomsky said:

If you look at the phenomena as a whole ... I think the effect is pretty clear, it allows people to take a very radical stance, more radical than thou, but to be completely dissociated from anything that's happening, ... One reason is nobody can understand a word they're saying.<sup>20</sup>

Every ontology faces the challenge of avoiding obsession and excess. Excess may seem seductive in the short term, but it can be calamitous in the long term.

Hume, in his essay "Of National Characters," resorts to loose generalizations about people from several nations. He believed he was making insightful philosophical observations. But his failure to research his beliefs thoroughly may have been his mistake.

Not surprisingly, he comes across as racist when he wrote of racial inferiority of 'black' people. Hume wrote:

There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present Tartars, have still something eminent about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular.

In the *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche wrote: "This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!"<sup>22</sup>

Nietzsche's rousing claims likely inspired the war-mongering Nazis. Although he spoke against antisemitism, he made a strong case for nominality. This, in my opinion, was his mistake.

In excess, and given the tendency to reject values, deductive conclusions, and the constraints of structurality, nominality is capable of colossal blunders. We are seeing

such blunders in the form of wars being played out on the international stage.

As such, the challenge we face is to balance our motivations and appreciate diverse ontologies. The arguments for nominality are certainly valid. But not in excess.



## *Structural Self / Holism / Stoicism / Heideggerianism*

*Consider that everything is opinion, and  
opinion is in thy power. Take away then, when  
thou choosest, thy opinion, and like a mariner,  
who has doubled the promontory, thou wilt find  
calm, everything stable, and a waveless bay.*

—Marcus Aurelius

Can 'nothingness' have an ontology? Structurality tends to fly under the radar. At the same time, it's a dominant ontology that revolves around philosophies such as structuralism, holism, stoicism, Heideggerianism, interconnectedness, and philosophical aspects of conservatism, when broadly understood.

Central philosophical aspects include 'being,' 'spaciousness,' and 'nothingness.' Before considering theoretical aspects, let's hear some practical expressions of the ontology.

"What I want in my life is compassion, a flow between myself and others based on a mutual giving from the heart," wrote Marshall Rosenberg.<sup>1</sup>

At its best, every ontology reflects our best human qualities. Rosenberg comes across to me as someone situated within the structural ontology. His focus on the subjective

experiences of others made him beloved as the founder of NVC, an empathic school of communication.

People are on a spectrum and they are a mix of ontologies. Rosenberg's belief that we can get inside the minds of others is uncharacteristic for the structural ontology. Structurality tends to observe subjective experiences rather than engage with them.

Broadly understood, structurality emphasizes family values and traditions, maintaining social structure, optimism over realism, and gender conformity.

The ontology appreciates self-reliance, resilience, and stoic values. The belief is that radical change is unnecessary, and we have everything we need to be productive citizens and be content. The ontology is not restricted to a gender.

Let's consider what Margaret Thatcher, who was the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom for over eleven years, says about self-reliance:

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand 'I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!' ... and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.<sup>2</sup>

Thatcher promotes self-reliance while suggesting that it is difficult to get inside the minds of individuals. In addition, portrayed is a structured worldview. Thatcher's view is valid but not complete.

Arthur Brooks of the American Enterprise Institute, who co-wrote with Oprah Winfrey the book 'Build The Life You Want,' speaking on CNBC, promotes similar values. He says:

If you've been to an unhappy family that's rich, I bet you have, they're doing just fine, but everybody is unhappy. The truth of the matter is your relative level of prosperity and ups and downs of paycheck has nothing to do with whether or not the family is going to be happy. ... The truth is we have leaders who are just unfailingly negative about the country. ... What we need, we need happier leaders.<sup>3</sup>

Brooks emphasizes resilience and optimism and offers a structural perspective. And there's ontological tension in his message too when he promotes resilience as well as the need for leadership. This aspect of nominality is discussed in chapter 3. Like all ontological truths, Brooks's perspective is valid. But it's not complete.

Stoic values find a ready home within this ontology. Being a person of principle, keeping your word, and believing in something bigger than yourself, for instance, are well-known Stoic values.

Such principles are found within several cultural and religious traditions. However, it is important to consider how Stoic values embody an ontological perspective. And in excess it can be problematic.

Epictetus, the Greek philosopher, is referred to as saying, "An important place to begin in philosophy is this: a clear perception of one's own ruling principle."

And, to consider another quote, "A podium and a prison is each a place, one high and the other low, but in

either place your freedom of choice can be maintained if you so wish."<sup>4</sup>

Stoic philosophies come across as universally applicable. However, a single observer perspective, also called the 'view from nowhere,' can be discerned.

There's also a tendency towards individualism. Direct engagement in subjective experiences of others is avoided in the belief that this will be unproductive.

These teachings are both attractive and sufficient to help us develop individual philosophical positions. But under deeper scrutiny, they present ontological challenges.

To consider another example, the tradition frequently advocates for 'rationality' and the detachment from emotion. Seneca, in *On Anger*, says:

Other vices affect our judgment, anger affects our sanity: others come in mild attacks and grow unnoticed, but men's minds plunge abruptly into anger. There is no passion that is more frantic, more destructive to its own self; it is arrogant if successful, and frantic if it fails. Even when defeated it does not grow weary, but if chance places its foe beyond its reach, it turns its teeth against itself. Its intensity is in no way regulated by its origin: for it rises to the greatest heights from the most trivial beginnings.<sup>5</sup>

Anger is an extreme form of emotion, and Stoics advocate for emotional equanimity. These beliefs and the tendency towards individualism have contributed to an overall charge of androcentrism leveled against philosophy.

In excess, this perspective fails to acknowledge ontological differences.



Structuralism emerged during the mid-20th century and influenced several fields such as linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and physics.

Reality is considered to be unconscious, universal, and hidden behind what we can observe. The focus is on relations between elements in a system. These elements display binary oppositions such as light/dark, hot/cold, heaven/earth, and may be normative binaries such as good/bad, beautiful/ugly, successful/failed, and innocent/guilty.

In the same way, 'signs' reflect the signifier and the signified. A 'stop' traffic sign, for instance, is the signifier, and the act of stopping is the signified.

Robert Scholes explains how structuralism can be foundational and unite the sciences:

Structuralism, I am suggesting, is a response to the need ... for a 'coherent system' that would unite the modern sciences and make the world habitable for man again ... Man can be defined by his insistence on a believable belief, whatever his standards of believability ... At the heart of the idea of structuralism is the idea of system: a complete, self-regulating entity that adapts to new conditions by transforming its features while retaining its systematic structure.<sup>6</sup>

In anthropology, Claude Lévi-Strauss believed that cultural phenomena were composed from symbolic structures. He believed universal mental structures molded cultural practices, and binary oppositions were the foundation for myths and rituals.

Similarly, in linguistics, structuralism considers how the sound of a word can reflect what it describes in the world. Reuben Cohn-Gordon says this reveals how humans have a tendency to attribute meaning to such patterns.<sup>6b</sup>

Psychologist Jean Piaget, in his book *Structuralism*, discusses the harmony between mathematics and this ultimate structural reality.<sup>7</sup> He wrote:

... the steady agreement between physical reality and the mathematical theories employed in its description is of itself amazing, since the mathematics so often antedates its physical application ... This harmony between mathematics and physical reality cannot, in positivist fashion, be written off as simply the correspondence of a language with the objects it designates. Languages are not in the habit of forecasting the events they describe ... Here we have remarkable proof of that pre-established harmony among windowless monads of which Leibniz dreamt ...



Heidegger famously asked, why is there something rather than nothing? The question of 'being' or ontology is the fundamental question in philosophy, according to Heidegger. On the face of it, this supports the premise of this book. Jean Grondin discussing Heidegger writes:

No one before Heidegger had truly defended this very strong thesis, but it has the advantage of linking the most primordial

question of philosophy to the question that man is for himself, as soon as he finds himself confronted with the question of Being and its meaning. However, Heidegger's more complete and rather mischievous thesis is that the question of Being is one before which both man and philosophy tend to flee, for it is a destabilizing question, a question that tends to dissolve every certitude.<sup>8</sup>

Heidegger's perspective is valid. However, to claim that 'being' is the fundamental question in philosophy is to deny, for instance, that 'conflict,' 'ethics,' 'love' or any other question can take center stage in philosophy.

In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger explains that ontological difference is the distinction between 'being' and 'beings.'

This explanation diverges from the meaning adopted in this book. In this book, ontological difference are observed during the comparison of equivalent ontologies. Heidegger wrote:

What does it mean to say that being belongs to beings? The correct answer to this question is the basic presupposition needed to set about the problems of ontology regarded as the science of being. We must be able to bring out clearly the difference between being and beings in order to make something like being the theme of inquiry. This distinction is not arbitrary; rather, it is the one by which the theme of ontology and thus of philosophy itself is first of all attained. It is a distinction which is first and foremost constitutive for ontology.

We call it the ontological difference —the differentiation between being and beings. Only by making this distinction—krinein in Greek—not between one being and another being but between being and beings do we first enter the field of philosophical research. Only by taking this critical stance do we keep our own standing inside the field of philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

Heidegger is motivated by a desire to reconcile contradictions. And while this sentiment is laudable, we must keep in mind that contextual, objective-rational, nominal, and pragmatic ontologies claim primacy as well. Each unique interpretation of our reality gives rise to an ontology.

This book emphasizes how all perspectives are subjective. This means the structural perspective is valid, but it cannot be privileged over others.

And, if such inquiry highlights contradictions within philosophy, this fits in with our observations in science. These tensions cannot be ignored. Rather, they have to be embraced.

Heidegger emphasized the structural over the subjective, or the 'ontological' over the 'ontic' as he called it, and spent less time focusing on subjectivity. Although we cannot say there is less interest in the subject, the proper focus of philosophical inquiry is considered to be underlying reality.

Susan Iacovou and Karen Weixel-Dixon, from the perspective of existential therapy, explain ontic and the ontological in the following manner:

Ontic refers to what is, and what can be observed and measured in some way.

Ontological is about what it means to be—the

theory or experience of a thing. So, for example, a doctor measuring a patient's anxiety through a psychological inventory is focusing on the ontic, while an existential philosopher seeking to understand the human given of anxiety is taking part in an ontological inquiry.<sup>10</sup>

This view is both valid and incomplete. And it is problematic because it appears to privilege certain knowledge claims over others.

The ontic is referenced from a place of ultimate meaning, and the observer may view the subject from a position of privileged knowledge. The attempt may then be to convince the subject of the observer's way of thinking.

Steven Crowell notes that this competing vision of subjectivity, or the first-person perspective, has been noted by philosophers.<sup>11</sup>

The reference to a philosophical interpretation of anxiety too, in the above comment, is from a singular perspective. There could be many reasons for anxiety. Ontological dissonance could be a cause for anxiety.

As argued in this book, to the extent that we focus on theoretical or ontological concerns, we lose sight of subjectivities. Heidegger's perspective is not wrong, and all ontological perspectives are valid, but there are difficulties of interpretation. And in excess the ontology will discourage alternatives.

The debate, at times, gets heated. Alexius Meinong, in *The Theory of Objects*, speaking for structurality, expresses his distaste for 'psychologism':

"Psychologism," as the name of a natural or considered tendency to solve problems with

predominantly psychological means, involves no blame in itself. However, within a certain sphere of problems, including just those problems that concern us here, the word does not lack a pejorative connotation: what is meant is simply the inappropriate use of psychological method. Since cognition is an experience, the psychological way of considering things is certainly not to be banished in principle from the theory of knowledge. ... cognition is a double fact. One who neglects the second side of this fact and so proceeds in the theory of knowledge as if there were only a psychological side of cognition, or one who would foist the viewpoint of psychological events on this second side, is not to be spared the reproach of psychologism.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, David Goddard reports how Lévi-Strauss was less than sympathetic to sociology which he regarded, like economics, to be in complicity with its object:

... since sociology and economics have emerged within the framework of the institutions for which they seek an account, they must necessarily be relative to their respective objects of analysis. For this reason they cannot be considered genuine human sciences, such as linguistics and anthropology, which approach their objects externally and objectively, and which are for this reason in a relationship of "disciple" rather than "client" to the methods of the natural sciences ...

Therefore it is condemned to a sort of imperfect empiricism in which sociological analysis is situated at the level of empirical relations rather than oriented toward the disclosure of unconscious structures.<sup>13</sup>

Ludwig Binswanger pointed out problems with the Heideggerian interpretation of ontological difference, and his discussions with Heidegger are well documented. Binswanger pointed out that the phenomenological world is experienced freely in an undistorted way. His was essentially a change in emphasis. Anthony Vincent Fernandez says:

One of the most famous misinterpretations is found in the work of Ludwig Binswanger, the founder of existential analysis — a fusion of psychoanalysis and phenomenology.

Binswanger adapted Heidegger's philosophy of human existence for his own studies of mental disorder and, in the course of this adaptation, critiqued Heidegger's philosophy.

Fernandez supports Binswanger's interpretation by suggesting that we should recognize contingency, particulars, and context which breaks structural assumptions:

To admit contingency in the ontological structures is, in a sense, to particularize them — to admit that they are always instantiated in a concrete human existence and are therefore susceptible to disturbance and disorder. This admission moves us beyond the ontological difference, beyond the distinction between the ontic human being and the ontological structure of human existence in general.<sup>14</sup>

Holism is a related philosophy within the structural ontology, as considered in this book, and is appreciated in various fields such as philosophy, ecology, and medicine.

In holism, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. An automobile, for instance, is more useful to us than its individual components. Holism suggests that complex systems must be appreciated as integrated and interconnected wholes.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, was one of the thinkers in the early 19th century who promoted holism as well as the interconnectedness of nature. He proposed that opposing forces were a necessary aspect of the universe.<sup>14b</sup>

'Emergence' is a related concept where complex properties or behaviors emerge from the interactions within a system. The properties of a gas such as temperature and pressure, for instance, cannot be attributed solely to the behavior of individual particles.

In this sense, every ontology has unique insights into our reality.

Nevertheless, Arthur Koestler, in *Ghost in the Machine*, critiques the holistic approach to psychology from a contextual perspective. He says that although the Gestalt school represented a different approach, 'holism' turned out to be as one-sided as atomism because both treated 'whole' and 'part' as absolutes. Koestler says:

If we replace for a moment the image of the inverted tree by that of a pyramid, we can say that the Behaviourist never gets higher up than the bottom layer of stones, and the holist never gets down from the apex. In fact, the concept of the 'whole' proved just as elusive as



that of the elementary part, and when he discusses language, the Gestaltist finds himself in the same quandary as the Behaviourist.<sup>15</sup>

Koestler essentially offers a critique of 'objective' approaches and expresses his interest in alternatives such as contextuality and relationality.

If you want to read Heidegger's *Being and Time*, be prepared for an onslaught of impenetrable prose. This is clearly intentional, a rhetorical device developed to elicit the ontology itself.

Sam Dresser describes his most notorious phrase as 'ahead-of-itself-already-being-in [a world] as Being-alongside [entities encountered within-the-world].' Thankfully, he shortened this to 'care.'<sup>16</sup>

'Care' was an important concept for Heidegger. But then he infuses it with double meaning. Michael Inwood explains that even when people are being uncaring, carefree, or careless, in Heidegger's sense, they are being caring or careful:

It is because Dasein's being-in-the-world is care that we can speak of its concern (Besorgen) about the ready-to-hand, such as shoes and hammers, and its solicitude (Fürsorge) for other people. But again concern and solicitude are compatible with neglect, contempt, and hatred; the only entities that lack care, concern, and solicitude are those that are wholly incapable of them, such as stones, trees, and animals.<sup>17</sup>

Such an explanation presents problems of interpretation and is a characteristic of ontological differences.

Many would argue that caring about people is of primary importance to humans. The focus on care then thrusts Heidegger's ontology into the realm of subjective experiences, the ontology of values, and a departure from his original focus.

In other words, there's both complementarity as well as contradiction when juxtaposed with the value ontology. This is because Heidegger's emphasis on 'being' can diminish the primacy of care.

From the point of view of ontology, such contradictions are necessary and a matter of interpretation. They can be reconciled and are at the heart of ontological perspectivism.

Heidegger highlights 'errancy.' He says individuals find themselves 'thrown' in the world, and particular circumstances. They 'fall' into conformity with societal norms, values, and expectations.

This 'thrownness' and 'fallenness' can lead to a sense of being lost from one's authentic self. Errancy is evident in this state of fallenness. In, *On the Essence of Truth*, Heidegger writes:

Errancy is the essential counter-essence to the primordial essence of truth. Errancy opens itself up as the open region for every opposite to essential truth. Errancy is the open site for and ground of error. Error is not just an isolated mistake but rather the realm (the domain) of the history of those entanglements in which all kinds of erring get interwoven.<sup>18</sup>

Heidegger applies his perspective to all phenomena.

Discussing aesthetics, he says modern traditions eclipse the true work of art. Building on normative oppositions such as good/bad, worthy/worthless, and noble/base that provide implicit structure, he explains how an ancient temple unified its historical world while implicitly reinforcing what is and what matters:

It is the temple-work that first joins together and simultaneously gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline obtain the form of destiny for human being. ...The temple first gives to things their look and to humanity their outlook on themselves.<sup>19</sup>

Heidegger's view can be considered a valid perspective, but it cannot be considered the only one relevant to aesthetics.

The philosophical aspects of conservatism fall within the 'structural' ontology. Conservatism appreciates traditions and social structure, and its philosophers are typically against radical social change. Instead, family values and community bonds are emphasized.

In the same way that 'errancy' was important to Heidegger, conservatism considers 'fallibility' as inherent to human nature.

It is noteworthy that the structural ontology can be considered as represented on both the left and right of the political spectrum, in the form of establishment politics, for instance. Whereas conservatism, as a political ideology, is typically associated with the right.

In other words, every ontology is represented on every side of the political spectrum. We have different ontological tensions beneath our politics.

The British monarchy often makes its way into the news cycle. Around 30 percent of the nation's populace consider its constitutional monarchy 'very important.' Another 25 percent believe it is 'quite important.'<sup>19</sup> Despite its symbolic status and the nation being a meritocracy, a significant number still value this hierarchical system.

In every society, 'hierarchies' have public support. But not complete support. A significant minority believe it is the very problem that needs fixing. Others are on the fence. This highlights a principle of difference.

A group of peers may not require a hierarchy. Researchers Gary Hamel and Michele Zanini found that a few companies that flattened bureaucratic hierarchy in favor of dynamic structures boosted their bottom lines.

Similarly, Sandra Harding notes that unprivileged social positions generate perspectives that are less partial and less distorted.<sup>20</sup>

Critics say hierarchy is anathema to objective rationality and perpetuates systems of domination. Opacity destabilizes communities, leads to poor decision making and corruption.

State and social hierarchies reflect the same failures. Some say hierarchies reflect patriarchy, but this is better understood as a battleground over ontology.

Hierarchy is also discussed in chapter 3, in terms of 'leadership' and in chapter 12 under *Reputation*.

Every ontology can be problematic. Structurality, in excess, may amount to a denial of subjective pain in the world. This will contribute to failure in our systems of therapy, for instance.

In excess, one's structurality may seem meaningless to someone else and poses problems of interpretation. In addition, structurality will support politics of hierarchy and conformity, and deny reform and alternatives. How this impacts our economic policies is discussed in Chapter 12.

A related question is, why does a version of reality reel us in until it becomes an obsession? Heidegger may have been lured by his philosophy and 'superstar' status.

He expressed support for the Nazi party in the 1930s. But, after the world war, Heidegger failed to interrogate the catastrophic events and his involvement. Philip Oltermann, writing in *The Guardian*, noted:

The most controversial passages of the black notebooks (his diaries) are a series of reflections from the start of the Second World War to 1941. While distancing himself from the racial theories pursued by Nazi intellectuals, Heidegger argues that Weltjudentum ("world Judaism") is one of the main drivers of Western modernity, which he viewed critically.<sup>21</sup>

Peter Trawny, the editor of the 'black notebooks' concluded that, "Heidegger didn't just pick up these antisemitic ideas, he processed them philosophically—he failed to immunise his thinking from such tendencies."

Heidegger privately admitted that his involvement with the Nazi party had been a 'stupidity.' But a critical

interrogation of events, in terms of his philosophy, is the least we would expect from a philosopher of his status.

As such, we are all susceptible to obsession, error and excess—the excessive belief in one’s own ontology.

Ontological differences will remain mysteries that require interpretation. And without subtexts we will continue to struggle with interpretation.



## *Relational Self / Values / Context*

*Never forget that justice is what  
love looks like in public.*

—Cornel West

Cornel West is known for his moral outrage. West's statement equating justice with love would seem obvious to someone from what I call the 'value' ontology, but to someone on the outside, it is not an easy interpretation.

This is an example of difference, and how the same quality is interpreted and understood differently. Whether subtexts can help us communicate across differences is discussed in chapter 8.

Broadly understood, the value ontology represents a family of philosophies in which values, morals, ethics, justice, 'primacy of love,' relationality, and contextuality play a central role.

It's important to distinguish between importance and centrality. Values and relationality are important to everyone, but centrality shapes an ontology.

Could philosophy be a love story? It's certainly the kind of philosophy that would get everyone's attention. So, before we consider theoretical aspects, let's consider some practical expressions of the value ontology.



At our best, every ontology reflects our best human qualities. At the same time, all ontologies are prone to obsession, error and excess.

Nicholas Sparks captures the relational aspects of the perspective when he writes:

I finally understood what true love meant. ...  
love meant that you care for another person's  
happiness more than your own, no matter how  
painful the choices you face might be.<sup>1</sup>

Sparks speaks for a relational imperative in the same way that Emmanuel Levinas discussed an ethical imperative towards others in his philosophy. And for one more quote from Sparks:

You're going to come across people in your life  
who will say all the right words at all the right  
times. But in the end, it's always their actions  
you should judge them by. It's actions, not  
words, that matter.<sup>2</sup>

The ontology privileges actions over words. In a sense, this prioritizes the body over the mind, and the personal over the impersonal. This is an important aspect of difference tied to our struggles with 'representation,' which will be discussed more in Chapter 6.

'Values' can be understood as truth values produced in a communal sense. They provide us with balance, and a communal and internal sense of meaning. Values can also check and counterbalance truths produced by other ontologies. Discussing this, B. Charles Henry writes:

I construct meaning from my personal and  
social view of morality and the law, from  
applying my cognitive skills, from my ethical  
principles, from ideology and culture, from my

intrinsic and extrinsic values, from common sense, and from pedagogical, and epistemological knowledge. I therefore incorporate a plethora of ideas, reasons, and principles to derive meaning because of the values I place upon the very ideas, reasons, and principles. Values help me to construct meaning but meaning gives me value.<sup>3</sup>

Value formation, in a collective sense, requires assessing the opinions of a large number of people. This process is distinct from the construction of nominal, structural, and deductive truths.

In a hierarchical society, a few individuals with inordinate power can skew values towards their beliefs. In this way, values may discriminate against individuals who are different or have unusual points of view.

Like every ontology, the value ontology may be applied in excess, or we may adopt false values.

In India, for instance, an unmarried woman who chooses to work outside her home jeopardizes her reputation of chastity and her family's 'honor.' This contributes to a labor force participation rate of around 30 percent. In comparison, the participation rate in China is double that.<sup>4</sup>

Some say this highlights a battle for gender dominance, but such struggles are better understood as battles for ontological dominance. This is because each ontology is represented within each gender, and ontologies compete within each gender.

For instance, the structural ontology will advocate for tradition and social structure. The value ontology will prioritize values, relationality, and context. Nominality and objective rationality too will claim superiority.

In the absence of a principle of equivalence, we have complex ontological battlegrounds. Outside of pragmatic standpoints, ontological equivalence is not a principle widely accepted in philosophy.

Contextualism is a central aspect of the value ontology, which holds that the 'truth' depends on context. This means fixed truths, as well as nominal and structural truths, are essentially challenged and questioned.

Contextualism is one of several ontologies that offers a distinct response to the question, 'What is truth?'

In the hands of a child, for instance, a key can turn into a toy. In the hands of an artist, it could turn into a work of art. There are symbolic, historical and cultural meanings to consider. Stephanie Lawson describes how the contextual turn emphasizes specificity, particularity, and contingency:

There is certainly much to be welcomed in the turn away from an ahistorical, objectivist and materialist positivism towards more nuanced approaches. Contingency attends virtually every development in human affairs, making predictability a very inexact science. And facts simply do not speak for themselves. They are made to speak in different ways by different people located in varying positions of power and influence and with particular agendas or projects.<sup>5</sup>

Beau Lotto, the author of *Deviante: The Science of Seeing Differently*, provides insights into a contextual way of thinking. Lotto highlights how we can 'see differently' with contextuality and values:

By understanding how thoughts, feelings, and beliefs are intrinsically relative to one's physical, social, and cultural ecology, one can better understand the source of coherence and conflict within and between individuals. By re-seeing the process through which we are shaped by our communities, and remeaning our historical experiences, we feel a stronger sense of skepticism and, through this, also a sense of belonging and connectedness... and thus courage and respect for ourselves and all things and people around us. This conception of communities encourages us to be still more humble, as it illustrates that all of us are defined by a collective ecology. So choose that ecology well, because your brain will adapt to it.<sup>6</sup>

Lotto says that it is sometimes necessary to 'just stop' when listening in order to listen differently, a counterintuitive suggestion and an example of difference. Such differences pose challenges of interpretation across ontologies.

Highlighting another aspect, Lotto says that, "as soon as you've told something to someone, you've taken the potential for a deeper meaning away from them."

This suggestion too runs counter to the way communication is understood by some, especially within the objective rational ontology.

Cynthia Freeland in her critique of the movie, *The Matrix*, provides contextual feminist insights. Western

philosophy, according to Freeland, is characterized by men seeking mental escape from the reality of flesh and blood.

Plato described the world of transcendent forms, for instance, Augustine and Aquinas sought purity of souls in heaven, and Descartes emphasized the mind over the body.

In this tradition, men distinguish between thinking and feeling and associate objective rationality with 'higher' mental faculties, and women with the body, emotions, and 'lower' faculties. Freeland says:

This mentalistic bias is evident again in the undoubtedly male perspective of *The Matrix* ... The allure of this new, savior Neo is that he is physically perfect and pristine—no penetration ... Equipped with all the guns he could ever need, he dodges Agents' bullets. This perfect, exciting, memorable Keanu/Neo is intact, closedup, with no openings or flaws, no vulnerability—in short, with no relationship to his actual physical flesh-and-blood body. He has superceded the physical reality of the flesh.<sup>7</sup>

Freeland argues that we must rebalance toward the body, the material, and pragmatism of the everyday. Freeland's perspective is valid.

In the absence of a principle of equivalence we have privileged certain philosophies over others, especially 'objective' perspectives over 'subjective' perspectives. This is discussed more in chapter 12 under *Body / Mind*.

One problem with Freeland's argument is the lack of disambiguation around gender. Privileging the mind over the body and the search for so-called 'objectivity' are ontological characteristics.

Many women would consider these to be their natural tendencies in the same way that many men do, and many men do not.

Disambiguation gives us contextual and nominal ontologies, as well as objective structural and objective rational ontologies. Given these complications, it's better to consider all points of view as subjective. This is discussed more in chapter 8.

As highlighted, contextual ways of thinking, co-creation, and transformation are important aspects of the value ontology. Emily Carr, a professor of ecofeminism, describes a classroom creative writing process in the following way:

Everyone performs an original ecopoem—  
which, according to the definition we've co-  
created this term, is a poem that radically  
redefines home as bodies, vulnerability, love,  
energy in motion, a place for shapeshifting and  
transformation, where you share everything  
you have: food, equipment, medicine,  
technology, time, labor, emotional space,  
knowledge, the most intimate stories ...

Carr taught courses like 'The Sexual Politics of Meat,' 'Poetry Recess' and 'How a Woman Becomes A Lake, and Other Unheroic Acts: a Seminar in Gender and Genre Bending.' In the midst of an 'anti-woke' campaign, Carr resigned from the New College of Florida in 2023.<sup>8</sup>

Intertwined with the value ontology are ethics.

Emmanuel Levinas believed we must consider ethics as a 'first philosophy.' We face an ethical imperative that

flows from the face-to-face encounter with another person, Levinas noted. Kenneth Gergen, who similarly explores relationality in his book, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, writes:

For Levinas, individual subjectivity is not independent of others. Rather, personal consciousness is constituted by the existence of the other. In this sense one is fundamentally responsible for the other; ethics and consciousness are co-terminal.<sup>9</sup>

Gergen describes how philosophy should refocus towards the relational. All questions then arise and flow out of this central question. In this way, Gergen says he is motivated to replace the bounded self:

My hope is to demonstrate that virtually all intelligible action is born, sustained, and/or extinguished within the ongoing process of relationship. From this standpoint there is no isolated self or fully private experience. Rather, we exist in a world of co-constitution. We are always already emerging from relationship; we cannot step out of relationship; even in our most private moments we are never alone. Further, as I will suggest, the future well-being of the planet depends significantly on the extent to which we can nourish and protect not individuals, or even groups, but the generative processes of relating.

The question of ethical imperatives takes us to the core of our conflict, and there is much that still requires disambiguation and interpretation. Without a principle of

equivalence, we have battlegrounds that claim exclusivity to truth and knowledge.

Gergen's perspective captures an important ontological perspective, it is valid but not complete.

Separation of the mind from the body, and our imperatives appear to be core questions in human psychology. However, we must include our structural, nominal, and pragmatic ontologies in the mix.

This gives us our multiple dimensions, mirroring, opposites, co-arising and dependence.

Excessive attachment to an ontology is always problematic, and like all ontologies, the value ontology may dismiss alternatives.

Discussing therapy and Levinasian ethics, for instance, Ruth Domrzalski generalizes that pain and vulnerability are connecting experiences. Domrzalski writes:

Levinasian ethics provide crucial dimension from which to understand how psychotherapy can create a new experience for the client. By re-thinking the nature of suffering, clinicians can begin to see the possibilities for change inherent in the therapeutic relationship. ...

When human relational growth becomes stunted, practitioners can look to Levinas to help clients find real hope for change in the transformative power of the encounter with the other.<sup>10</sup>

Pain is common to all of human experience, but we have to recognize ontological differences. How we frame and process subjectivities will vary based on differences.



In addition, transformation of pain won't lead to transformation of ontology, which is related to why the way we frame subjectivities pose complications.

For instance, some psychologists have identified the word 'should' as problematic. If we imagine we 'should' do a certain activity, it is "always a clue that it's not your passion," says Christine Carter.<sup>11</sup>

Choosing to do certain activities freely feels liberating, Carter says, adding, "There is a world of difference between things we choose freely and those society chooses for us."

The view from ontology is a little different. The value ontology centralizes 'should' as an ontological consideration. Other ontologies may not. This means accepting or rejecting Carter's proposition depending on ontology. It becomes an aspect of difference.

The 'primacy of love' and care is central to the value ontology. Heidegger considered caring about people as important to his philosophy as well. However, there are differences in the way Heidegger explained this.

Even when people are being uncaring, carefree, or careless, in a Heideggerian sense, they are being caring or careful. This highlights complementarity as well as differences between the value ontology and other ontologies.

Such differences are often misunderstood across ontologies. Michael Inwood, discussing Heidegger's perspective, says:

Care is distinct from specific attitudes such as willing, wishing, striving, or knowing. To will, wish, or strive for anything whatsoever one must in advance already care. One must care in order to acquire knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Heidegger's view on care, and our ability to reconcile such tensions, is discussed more in chapter 4.

Extreme skepticism finds a home within the value ontology. 'Cartesian Meditations' refers to the philosophical approach adopted by René Descartes in the early 17th century.

In his work 'Meditations on First Philosophy,' Descartes applied a method of radical doubt to everything that is not certain and questionable. The purpose was to discover a foundation of certain knowledge upon which to build a system of philosophy.

Descartes wrote, "The first precept was never to accept a thing as true until I knew it as such without a single doubt."

He famously concluded, 'cogito, ego sum,' 'I think, therefore I am.' But we can just as easily conclude, 'I feel, therefore I am,' 'I sense, therefore I am,' and 'I am, therefore I am.'

The conclusion, in other words, is valid, but not complete. It doesn't produce a foundational philosophy. If he gave birth to the notion that thinking and objective rationality are foundational, this was unfortunate.

But his radical skepticism was a worthy endeavor, in my opinion, guided by the right instinct. Descartes wrote:

... I have long had fixed in my mind the belief that an all powerful God existed by whom I have been created such as I am. But how do I know that he has not brought it to pass that there is no earth, no heaven, no extended body, no magnitude, no place, and that nevertheless (I possess the perceptions of all

these things and that) they seem to me to exist just exactly as I now see them?<sup>13</sup>

From the perspective of ontology, skepticism is a valid approach to truth principles. It supports the argument of diverse ontologies. Skepticism recognizes that although we may ascertain the truth, it is always partial and incomplete.

However, in excess, skepticism divides us and encourages distrust about human nature and our ability to transform and reconcile differences.

Martha Nussbaum, in *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble But Flawed Ideal*, describes how Stoic cosmopolitanism envisioned a 'cosmopolis' where all people are citizens of a universal community.

This cosmopolitanism conceived of equal human dignity, which in turn influenced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But Nussbaum notes a troubling point of difference.

The framers of the declaration impose duties to end aggressive war, support people who have been attacked, and ban crimes against humanity. But no duties are formed in terms of material aid. The argument is that human dignity, in this case, remains unaffected. Nussbaum writes:

The tradition appears to hold that material possessions make no difference to the exercise of our capacities for choice and other aspects of our dignity. If one really believes that human dignity is totally immune to the accidents of fortune, then slavery, torture, and unjust war do not damage it, any more than hunger and disease. But this seems false: people who are ill-nourished, who have no

clean water, and who have no access to resources connected to health, education, and other “material” goods are not equally able to cultivate their capacities for choice or to express their basic human dignity.<sup>14</sup>

This example highlights how ontology shapes our institutions. Some perspectives are encouraged, and others are discouraged. In other words, our political institutions remain framed in ways that are ontologically contested.

Social constructionism is a perspective that explores how social processes, culture, and language influence human understanding and reality.

Seen this way, knowledge, identity, and reality are not inherent or objective but are socially constructed. For instance, the way societies outline gender roles leads to behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity. Gergen writes:

Both as an orientation to knowledge and to the character of psychological constructs, constructionism forms a significant challenge to conventional understandings. Although the roots of constructionist thought may be traced to long-standing debates between empiricist and rationalist schools of thought, constructionism attempts to move beyond the dualism to which both of these traditions are committed and to place knowledge within the process of social interchange. Although the role of psychological explanation is rendered problematic, a fully developed constructionism could furnish a means for

understanding the process of science and invites the development of alternative criteria for the evaluation of psychological inquiry.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, evolutionary psychology seeks to understand human psychology through the lens of evolution. This view proposes that psychological traits and behaviors have evolved and may continue to evolve over time.

Humans do have the ability to learn and evolve collective knowledge. The question then is, ‘Which qualities are desirable as we continue to evolve?’

One answer, from the point of view of this book, is that our ability to interpret diverse perspectives is a desirable quality.

Stronger skills of interpretation will ensure diversity that strengthens us as a collective. This is especially important, given modern trends that seem to promote ontological conformity and exclusion.

Even ontologies that espouse inclusion are capable of exclusion. This is discussed more under the topic *Excess* in chapter 12.

Hierarchies are common features of societies. Ontology provides us with competing insights into this question. In a community of peers, for instance, hierarchy may be unnecessary.

Gary Hamel and Michele Zanini, in their book *Humanocracy: Creating Organizations as Amazing as the People Inside Them*, describe how some companies are breaking bureaucratic structures in favor of flatter dynamic structures. They write:

Across the world, organizations are disabled by bureaucracy—they are inertial,

incremental, and inhuman. This is a problem not just for CEOs, but for all of us. Ponderous, inflexible institutions misuse society's resources and reduce productivity. They squander imagination, suppress initiative, and bungle the future.<sup>16</sup>

Hierarchies are usually supported by the structural ontology which tends to protect social structures and block reforms. But this may be the result of misplaced structural values and our lack of awareness around ontological diversity.

Similarly, Arthur Koestler, in his book *Ghost in the Machine*, discusses hierarchies from what seems to be a contextual perspective:

The members of a hierarchy, like the Roman god Janus, all have two faces looking in opposite directions: the face turned towards the subordinate levels is that of a self-contained whole; the face turned upward towards the apex, that of a dependent part. One is the face of the master, the other the face of the servant. This 'Janus effect' is a fundamental characteristic of subwholes in all types of hierarchies. But there is no satisfactory word in our vocabulary to refer to these Janus-faced entities: to talk of sub-wholes (or sub-assemblies, sub-structures, sub-skills, sub-systems) is awkward and tedious ...

A society without hierarchic structurings would be as chaotic as the random motions of gas molecules flying, colliding, and rebounding in all directions. But the structuring is

obscured by the fact that no advanced human society—not even the totalitarian state—is a monolithic structure, patterned into one single hierarchy.<sup>17</sup>

The contextual ontology tends to have mixed feelings on questions of hierarchy, another aspect of ontological difference.

Hierarchy is, however, anathema to processes of objective rationality. Hierarchies encourage opacity, poor decision making, and corruption. And they stifle innovation. This is discussed more in chapter 3, in terms of ‘leadership,’ chapter 4, and chapter 12 under *Reputation*.

Jean Baudrillard was a French philosopher known for his description of ‘hyperreality’ and ‘simulacrum,’ which can be understood in terms of ‘representation’ and imitation. His philosophy adopts a skeptical approach and critiques conventional perception of reality.

Baudrillard argued that in a media-saturated society, the distinction between reality and representation becomes blurred by simulations and copies. This leads to a condition of hyperreality.

Baudrillard's postmodern approach appears to be an ontological mix of contextual, nominal and structural themes, all the while critiquing problems of representation.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard says, "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning." The various aspects of ‘representation’ are discussed in chapter 6.

His critique of the modern condition is valid. However, as with any ontological perspective, it is ontologically incomplete.

It is noteworthy that 'coherence' appears to be the source of incompleteness, while 'contradiction' allows for greater inclusion of competing perspectives in an ontological sense.

Every ontology is prone to obsession, error, and excess. The value ontology is no exception. In excess, the dimension will tend towards radical skepticism or moral outrage which divides us as much as it unites us.

At other times, excess presents in the form of perspectival certainty, the belief that there are no alternative ontologies, and one is never wrong.

This adds to the complexity of our modern condition that requires subtexts for interpretation and connection across ontologies.



## *Objective Rational Self / Representation / Causality*

*I am Loki of Asgard, and I am burdened  
with glorious purpose.*

—Loki, Marvel Cinematic Universe

*The reality of the other person is not in what he reveals to  
you, but in what he cannot reveal to you. Therefore, if you  
would understand him, listen not to what he says, but  
rather to what he does not say.*

—Kahlil Gibran

*Together, we form a necessary paradox;  
not a senseless contradiction.*

—Criss Jami

What is rationality? We must comprehend its meaning. The Oxford Dictionary states that rationality is the ability to think clearly and make decisions based on reason rather than emotions.<sup>1</sup> From the point of view of this book, this definition needs an overhaul.

Rationalities allow us to apply our minds to learn about our environment. They help us understand other people and navigate the world.

There are many rationalities—contextual, structural, objective rational, and nominal rationalities are considered in

this book. Each rationality relies on a distinct epistemology. Not only can we rely on our deductive abilities, but we can also develop contextual insights and perceive nominal and structural realities.

Our various philosophies explore these possibilities.

It's unsurprising, then, that some of us take offense at the suggestion that meaningful decisions cannot be made without recourse to reason. A clash of cultures and philosophies has ensued.

In *Star Trek* (2009), the future Spock tells the younger Spock, "Put aside logic. Do what feels right." Younger Spock is advised to value his still nascent relationship with Kirk.

Overall, the narrative around logic and emotion in the series, and the unnamed qualities of Kirk, conflates several issues. But it's entertaining.

The apparent tradeoff between logic and emotion collapses several dimensions into one. Rather, contextual emotion should be understood as an alternative path to knowledge.

These confusions have not served humanity well. By privileging logic and placing it on a pedestal, the result is that it is quite often demonized. By privileging any ontology we create a host of problems.

Is causality the driving principle in science? Cause-and-effect shaped our scientific literature over the last few centuries. You would be forgiven for believing that it was.

But our new science answers that causality is not the driving principle. It is one of several principles. Entanglement, contextuality, electromagnetism, gravity, and other phenomena change our perspective and are better understood outside the lens of causality.

As a way of thinking about science, objective rationality, causality and logic have served us well. They continue to support the most important ways we measure and verify scientific results.

However, contextual, structural, and nominal perspectives appear to be just as important. For more on this see chapter 10.

Objective rationality is considered the aggressor in certain contexts and faces charges of androcentrism and scientism. This appears to be true. However, every ontology is prone to obsession, error and excess. We must consider our ontological battlegrounds and excesses perpetrated by every ontology.

Plato had reservations about the role of poetry in ancient Greece, for instance. If irrational values such as 'honor killings' are adhered to in certain parts of the world today, similar values were most likely a problem in ancient Greece.

Plato was concerned that poetry would evoke strong emotions, appeal to people's irrational tendencies, and misrepresent the truth. However, he did appreciate poetry's potential to convey moral and philosophical lessons.<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, every ontology reacts to aggressions and commits its own aggressions. Without a principle of equivalence, it has been a case of one act of excess after another.

Broadly understood, objective rationality includes related themes such as representation, approximation, frameworks, transformation and goal orientation.

Experimenting and learning are priorities. The ontology is not restricted to a gender.

'Representation' is a central concept in philosophy and collates several issues, often unsatisfactorily.

Firstly, it is an important aspect of objective rationality. Representation can be considered in terms of utility. Observations provide us with an approximate understanding of the world. We 'represent' this understanding with theories and frameworks, and we replace these theories when we have better ones.

Concepts and frameworks are daily features in our lives, from 'inflation' to 'gym routines,' they allow us to communicate about best practices.

The 'representational' use of language was an early human innovation. Language was developed to represent objects, thoughts, and feelings. We can't transfer reality onto a written page, but we can represent this reality with approximate words.

However, words are limited. If I say, 'I feel excited,' what I am feeling may be nuanced, or entirely different. As such, what is represented is always an approximation. Worse, it can be a misrepresentation.

This inherent 'incompleteness' was discussed by Wittgenstein who emphasized that language and thoughts are inherently imprecise. Popper said that scientific theories aren't proven to be true beyond a shadow of a doubt. And Kuhn noted that science will have regular paradigm shifts.

In other words, our knowledge is always incomplete.

And, when we consider our diverse ontologies, 'incompleteness' takes on entirely new significance.

In positive terms, 'representation' is both the desire for progress and the acknowledgment that the truth must be

represented in one form or another. It is assumed that it is better to have theories about the world than not have any at all.

The question is, which truths seek representation?

Rene Magritte wrote, "Everything we see hides another thing, we always want to see what is hidden by what we see."<sup>3</sup> In this sense, representation is in the nature of all things.

Excessive belief in representation leads to 'objectification,' a general failure to understand ontological differences.

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, wrote: "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth."<sup>4</sup>

Like every perspective, objective rationality is prone to obsession, error, and excess. But 'objectification' cannot be considered a problem limited to one ontology. This excess manifests in every ontology. It appears to stem from a lack of awareness of differences.

Representation as 'deception,' is a frequent theme in postmodern critiques of modernity. Tied to radical skepticism, we are liable to second guess everything. This too is problematic. A question posed by Baudrillard will be considered later in this chapter.

Franz Kafka wrote, "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect." Kafka captures the alienation that we, at times, experience during situations of transformation and representation.

The representational nature of the ontology poses several questions. What is represented? Is it something that we can talk about easily? What impedes these conversations?

That there are things we are not comfortable talking about, if we consider society as a whole, is easy to surmise. Pain, grief, and anguish are perpetual aspects of the human condition, whether due to war, illness, crime or other circumstances.

And if they are difficult to talk about, how do they manifest in everyday life? Once we get past the answer, objective rationality represents the search for progress, and the approximate nature of answers discovered so far. In this sense, the ontology is always goal-oriented and focused on continuous learning.

Philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Levinas all considered the role of suffering from a philosophical standpoint. Schopenhauer said suffering was a fundamental aspect of human existence. Nietzsche noted that, 'To live is to suffer; to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.' Levinas took a contextual and ethics approach to the question.

The view from ontology is that any question can take center stage in philosophy. Due to a principle of difference, diverse perspectives emerge. How we frame subjectivities such as pain, grief, and anguish, is part of the problem.

The answer doesn't seem to appear until we acknowledge ontological equivalence. By considering diverse perspectives as equivalent, the role of pain and grief becomes clear. It becomes as important as any other question.



Muhammad Yunus, the social entrepreneur, says, "Poverty does not belong in civilized human society. Its proper place is in a museum. That's where it will be."

The search for transformative solutions is an important aspect of the social sciences. Each ontology has its own approach to transformation. Objective rationality seeks solutions with an objective rational bias, for instance. The value ontology seeks solutions with a contextual bias.

Relying on communication to resolve conflict is an important aspect of this search. We have different forms of communication such as verbal and non-verbal forms, and implied and explicit forms. Objective rationality is biased towards verbal forms.

This book, for instance, proposes that 'subtexts' can help us communicate across ontologies especially in an academic setting.

John Burton proposed a needs-based approach to conflict resolution that involves transforming negative perceptions of the other. Louise Diamond and John McDonald, co-founders of the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy, advocate for people-to-people diplomacy as means to humanize the other.

And William Ury discusses the role of perception and misperception in conflict.

Marshall Rosenberg explored how our usual forms of communication may lead to misunderstandings. By switching to expressing observations, feelings, and needs, we change habitual dynamics. Effectively, this changes our usual ontology.

For instance, a Q&A is a popular form of communication. By rephrasing questions in the form of

observations and comments, we effectively change our habitual ontology.

A related idea is the 'transformation of enemy images.' This can be considered an objective rational approach to empathy, an attempt to understand the other. On the other hand, a contextual approach involves empathizing with the feelings of others. François Beausoleil says:

Simply put, when we have an enemy image of someone, it means that they have stopped to some degree being human, and become a thing, an obstacle. To bring back the humanity of people whom we're upset with, there is a simple formula: put our attention on what they might have been feeling and needing at the moment of the action that they took.<sup>5</sup>

Ontology adds a layer of understanding to needs-based approaches to conflict by highlighting that we have diverse motivations mediated by ontology.

Additionally, we may appreciate different forms of empathy such as cognitive, affective, structural or nominal styles of empathy.



Over the last few centuries, objective rationality has had an overbearing influence on our culture and perception of self. Without a principle of ontological equivalence, we may have gone overboard.

And nothing rattled us like Darwin's idea of natural selection. Kenneth Miller, in his book *The Human Instinct*, argues that we lost our sense of self post-Darwin. By accepting competitive natural selection, we lost a more



complex narrative that involves self-determination. Miller says:

Stories matter. And once, we had one. ... And then we lost it. Our stories seemed to vanish, and with them our souls, our place in the heavens, and in many ways, ourselves. ... But I don't think the concerns of all who resist evolution should be dismissed as naïve, trivial, or uninformed. In fact, the passionate unease with which some of evolution's critics regard many of its messages proclaimed in the name of science speaks to the humanist within many scientists, including myself. ... I believe this unease derives not so much from how we came to be, but rather from what we should make of ourselves as creatures of evolution.<sup>6</sup>

Darwin proposed a specific narrative. From the point of view of ontology, the picture is unlikely to be that simple. Jeremy Rifkin, in *The Empathic Civilization*, says the 'mirror neurons' that we possess suggest we are also wired to empathize with people, build relationships and cooperate.<sup>7</sup>

As such, it may be time to expand Darwin's theory in favor of a complex narrative that considers multiple dimensions of determinism as well as free will.

The Economist magazine recently posed the question: Can we have a healthy democracy without a common set of facts?<sup>8</sup> Some have answered yes, and then backtracked. Like Nietzsche, for example. Nietzsche may have been responding to the excesses of modernity more than 100 years ago—industrialization and bureaucracy remain excesses to this

day. Others say no. In, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, Nietzsche wrote:

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.

He was adamant that fixed truths had become oppressive and attempts at meaningful theorizing and representation had failed. This is the general position from the nominal ontology.

Yet he frequently backtracked. He spoke for the individual, then spoke for the collective. He suggested that great minds were of instrumental value, and then appreciated their capabilities. He spoke for the *Übermensch* (superman), and then valued perspectivism.

As such, Nietzsche failed to disambiguate how ontologies, including his own, could contribute to war, racism, discrimination, incompetence, and other assorted miseries. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's overall stance can be considered a call for balance and equivalence.

Habermas, In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, discusses the 'colonization of the lifeworld.' He describes

how cooperative search for the truth, or 'understanding-oriented' action is displaced by 'success-oriented' action influenced by state power and market forces.

According to Habermas, social cohesion is lost when attempts to forge a shared understanding are overwhelmed by the desire to bring about some result. Political rhetoric and advertising, along with widespread cynicism and disaffection contribute to the problem.<sup>10</sup>

This was one of Habermas's arguments in his well-known debate with Foucault. Captured, in my opinion, is the struggle between objective rationality and nominality. The political aspects of nominality and perspectives of Foucault and Nietzsche are discussed more in chapter 3.

Would you rather build a Ferrari or drive one? The first choice involves years of planning and labor. The second choice is immediate and enjoyable. This is an important aspect of the debate between objective rationality and nominality.

That we cannot drive a Ferrari without building one first is true for the modern societies we have created. There is a Faustian pact, in a sense, that involves obsessing about the details of building. Without this effort our modern societies would not function, and we would not have the benefits of technology or medicine.

This raises the need to balance our perspectives and reconsider 'representation.' Some of us separate the 'work' aspects of our lives from our 'private' lives. Others attempt a seamless integration. These ontological differences reflect different capabilities and strengths.

Representation as 'deception' is a common motif in postmodern critiques of modern societies. "If we consume the product as product, we consume its meaning through advertising," wrote Baudrillard.

In line with problems of 'objectification,' after prolonged conditioning, we may believe the representation is real. Equally problematic, we may believe the deception is real.

Consider the example of a modern city that loses its signs posed by Baudrillard. A complex interplay of ontology must be considered. Baudrillard wrote:

Let us imagine for the moment modern cities stripped of all their signs, with walls bare like a guiltless conscience ... And then GARAP appears. This single expression, GARAP, is inscribed on all the walls: pure signifier, without a signified, signifying itself. It is read, discussed, and interpreted to no end. ... Then what does it signify, if not a society capable of generating such a sign? And yet despite its lack of significance it has mobilized a complete imaginary collectivity; it has become characteristic of the (w)hole of society ... Advertising, like GARAP ... induces receptivity, mobilizes consciousness, and reconstitutes itself in the very process as the collective. Through advertising mass society and consumer society continuously ratify themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Baudrillard's argument about the excesses of the modern condition are valid. Nothing galvanizes us like the feeling that something is wrong. And we can disambiguate

the ontologies that give us such a scenario. Each ontology will view the question differently and contribute to the problem.

To consider that one perspective is the correct answer would be a mistake. And every ontology can offer solutions.

Foucault, in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, explores the institutions and systems that were developed to grapple with 'madness' in Western societies. He asks whether 'reason' should have been the universal standard, when reason itself may have been the culprit.<sup>12</sup>

And Cornel West, in *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, offers a similar critique of the modern condition. He refers to constructed 'styles of rationality' biased across sciences, moralities, and the arts that form a system of domination. West says:

No longer are humanistic scholars content with a historicizing of science, morality, and art that shuns the ways in which sciences, moralities, and the arts are inextricably linked to structures of domination and subordination. This preoccupation with the materiality of language—such as the ways in which styles of rationality and scientificity or identities and subjectivities are socially constructed and historically constituted —has focused cultural investigations on the production, distribution, and circulations of forms of powers, be they rhetorical, economic, or military powers.<sup>13</sup>

Critiques by West and Foucault are valid and highlight our battlegrounds. Each ontology has been fighting for dominance, and we must disambiguate the forces within our

societies. Ontological factors that affect mental health, for instance, are discussed in chapters 4 and 12.

There is an argument to be made that the objective rational ontology is somewhat unnatural, the perspective we are culturally least familiar with. Our practices generally don't include references to and an appreciation of these tendencies.

On the one hand, we are capable of observing excess in all its forms. We are wired to instinctively, and sometimes selectively, distrust excess.

On the other hand, we haven't had more than a few centuries to assimilate certain tendencies, which makes it more unnatural than the rest. And we must include physiological considerations as well.

Given our struggles with difference, it seems every ontology struggles with social acceptance. This means there is a need to update our social narratives.

Every ontology is prone to obsession, error, and excess, and objective rationality is prone to scientism. The collation of objective rationality with nominality seems to produce Ockham's razor. Collated with structurality we may get the excessive conclusions of structuralism.

Foucault considers the need for ontological equivalence when he speaks for the necessity as well as the dangers of the objective rational ontology here:

... [If] philosophy has a function within critical thought, it is precisely to accept this sort of spiral, this sort of revolving door of rationality that refers us to its necessity, to its indispensability, and at the same time to its intrinsic dangers.<sup>14</sup>

And we must disambiguate his use of the term 'rationality.' Foucault's nominality comes across if we take seriously the 'if' in his comment. This tension is one of the enduring mysteries of philosophy.

We either understand the debate from one side or another. Its meaning doesn't reveal itself without a consideration of equivalence.

## *Pragmatic Self*

*Rule-following, legal precedence, and political consistency are not more important than right, justice and plain common-sense.*

—W. E. B. Du Bois

Pragmatism is an ontology that emphasizes the importance of practical considerations, utility, and getting along with people. As a philosophical school, pragmatism emerged in the late 19th century with key figures being Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey.

Discussing early exponents, Barbara Simpson says:

They were all concerned with the effectiveness of thinking/doing, where in their view, thinking and doing are as inseparable as two sides of the same coin. They developed a future-oriented instrumentalism that starts from doubt, and proceeds through an experimental attitude of inquiry to construct emergent futures. At the same time, they were reformist intellectuals committed to the improvement of society.<sup>1</sup>

In a sense, pragmatism reflects an evolution in philosophy. The futility of philosophical debates prompted its founders to propose a balanced approach. What pragmatism loses in terms of a foundational ontology, pragmatism gains in practical utility. William James explains:



For the philosophy which is so important in each of us is not a technical matter; it is our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means. ... The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable. Is the world one or many?—fated or free?—material or spiritual? ... If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle.<sup>2</sup>

The Greek philosopher Protagoras, from 5th century BCE, may have been the original pragmatist when he said, "Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not." Although Protagoras is considered a relativist, his pragmatism was noted by F.C.S. Schiller.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, it seems that Plato did not fully grasp Protagoras's approach, an intriguing tension that has traveled down to us through Western philosophy. This is an example of ontological differences from ancient times. In *Theaetetus*, Protagoras is referred to as saying:

As for wisdom and the wise man, I am very far from saying that they do not exist; but I also call the man clever who, by transforming things makes them appear to be good and be good for someone to whom they appeared to be bad and were bad.<sup>4</sup>

Protagoras noted that food would seem bitter to a person who is ill, and not bitter to a person who is not. The validity of judgments and their truth claims then depend on other conditions. Protagoras does not deny truth, but

introduces the notion of usefulness and acknowledges diverse possibilities.

"About the gods I am able to know neither that they exist nor that they do not exist nor of what kind they are in form: for many things prevent me for knowing this, its obscurity and the brevity of man's life," Protagoras is quoted as saying.

It seems Protagoras got into trouble for his agnosticism. For this his books were burned and he was charged with atheism and heresy.

In a modern context, pragmatism rejects fixed metaphysical doctrines, and appreciates dynamics of evolving reality. Philosophies prioritized by other ontologies such as relationality, structurality, nominality, and objective rationality, are, arguably, all important to pragmatism. However, they do not override practical considerations.

This explains why pragmatism has diverse roots that, nevertheless, come together in a coherent fashion.

Iris Murdoch is considered a moral philosopher, but her philosophy aligns with pragmatic themes. Murdoch questioned the idea that we have an eternal core that must be revealed, and raised pragmatic concerns when she wrote:

[We] are not always responding to the magnetic pull of the idea of perfection. Often, for instance when we pay our bills or perform other small everyday acts, we are just 'anybody' doing what is proper or making simple choices for ordinary public reasons.<sup>5</sup>

Murdoch notes that the quest for self-knowledge that provides a minute understanding of oneself is usually a delusion. "Self is as hard to see justly as other things, and

when clear vision has been achieved, self is a correspondingly smaller and less interesting object," says Murdoch.

Pragmatism considers the intensity of arguments in the same way that J.L. Austin refers to the 'force' and intensity of what is said. For instance, 'I WANT ICE CREAM,' and 'I want ice cream,' has two different meanings. One is a demand and the other is a request.

In this way, we can distinguish between the strong form and the more relatable form of any argument— a characteristic of 'intensity' appears to apply to all ontologies and arguments. Pragmatism honed in on this aspect.

The 'correspondence' nature of truth is less of a concern from a pragmatic perspective. Richard Rorty, describing the utility aspect of pragmatism, says:

For the pragmatist, true sentences are not true because they correspond to reality, and so there is no need to worry what sort of reality, if any, a given sentence corresponds to no need to worry about what "makes" it true. (just as there is no need to worry, once one has determined what one should do, whether there is something in Reality which makes that act the Right one to perform.)<sup>6</sup>

Understood this way, the attempt by pragmatists to outline a theoretical project runs into difficulties. This is because pragmatism borrows the best ideas and capabilities of diverse ontologies. As a result, pragmatism is required to acknowledge ontological equivalence. Otherwise, it gets dragged into philosophical debates.

For instance, the neopragmatists Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam were on different sides of the realism-

antirealism, and objective-subjective debates. As David Hildebrand explains:

The central issue dividing Rorty and Putnam concerns the proper basis for epistemological warrant. Both agree that the correspondence picture of truth is mistaken, as is the ideal of foundational certainty. They also agree that our norms and standards for warrant are historical products that always reflect our interests and values; these norms are capable of reform.

However, they are at odds about how we should construe the authority of our epistemological norms. Putnam has argued that warrant must be connected to a "fact of the matter," some inherent "substantive property" that renders assertions true (or warranted) independently of whether the majority of one's cultural peers would say so. According to Putnam, Rorty's denial of this view constitutes an openly relativistic and subjectivistic position.<sup>7</sup>

From the point of view of ontology, these debates encompass necessary contradictions and are effectively resolved when we consider ontological equivalence. This gives us our multidimensional reality.

Like every ontology, there are strengths and weaknesses that we can associate with the capabilities of pragmatism. For instance, Arthur Lovejoy claimed to have identified 13 different pragmatisms.

To the extent that pragmatism specializes in its own methods, it is not as skilled in the methods of alternative

ontologies. In other words, capabilities are limited to pragmatism.

If we propose that ontological diversity is unnecessary, that takes us in the direction of conformity. However, diversity may strengthen us as a collective. This requires developing skills of better interpretation and understanding. This is something pragmatism is geared to achieve.

On the political stage, what can be called 'blenderized pragmatism' appears to be a necessity. Astra Taylor says that we cannot escape contradictions inherent to democracies. According to Taylor we must learn to embrace politics that are:

... both unified and diverse, individualistic and collective, that mix egalitarianism with hierarchy and autonomy with constraint. More than oppositions, these are paradoxes, contradictory elements that, while liable to clash, must coexist.<sup>8</sup>

This sounds good in theory. But, at the level of politics, this gives us the reality we have today. Without an appreciation of ontological differences and their equivalence, we are unlikely to find true reconciliation.

Pragmatism must be considered as an ontology shaped both by its own philosophy as well as its views on other philosophies. It can be distinguished from specialized ontologies with focused capabilities.

Pragmatism's ability to consider alternative ontologies and their equivalence makes pragmatism uniquely positioned to evaluate its own expression and the instability of ontological projects.

The interest pragmatism takes in emergent futures and evolving reality allows it to take these essential conversations forward.

If we acknowledge that diversity strengthens a collective, then the future for pragmatism may involve adding skills of interpretation and communication to its skillset.

This is because, arguably, there is no crisis of 'truth' in philosophy. There is a crisis of interpretation.

## Subjectivities

*Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.*

—Aristotle

*Omwana taba womoi. A child belongs  
not to one parent or home*

—Bantu proverb

We all care about subjectivities. From meeting with friends to spending time with loved ones, it's the little things that matter. So why does this process, at times, get complicated?

It gets complicated because of the various ways we frame these situations. The various theories, values, and philosophies we bring to these conversations can be problematic. These are essentially ontologies.

Let's clear up some definitions. Subjectivities refer to personal and individual moments we experience and enjoy. They are unique ways we experience the world.

'Subjective' points of view, on the other hand, can be contrasted with 'objective' points of view. In this book, they are the objective rational and objective structural ontologies.

How we frame subjectivities can be called ontologies.

Are all points of view subjective?

I may claim to have an objective point of view. But you may wonder why this should be true.

One reason is that there's more than one form of 'objectivity.' Objective rationality works based on deduction, evidence, justification, and verification.

Then there's structurality. Structurality assumes there is an underlying and unchanging structural reality. This is identified by the signifier and signified, as well as constant normative binaries. This is a different kind of so-called 'objectivity.'

There's the human factor. As humans, we may not be capable of consistency. Our past, conditioning, and free will come into play. After all, fallibility is considered one of our primary characteristics.

Then there are the contextual and nominal ontologies to consider. The ontologies are inherently subjective.

Another reason is that objective rationality requires a beginning and an end for a complete investigation. A goal is reached from an initial set of assumptions. How these beginning and end points are selected is not specified. These choices are subjective.

That we have diverse interpretations of reality warrants the view that each interpretation is subjective. This is especially true if they produce equivalent insights. And if all ontologies are equivalent, the subjective-objective distinction becomes irrelevant.

Epistemological equivalence as a doorway to an ontological imagination is discussed later in this chapter.

The structural ontology tends to reject subjective experiences as the proper basis for philosophical inquiry. But this tendency can be argued against in the following way:

All positive experiences that we seek are subjective experiences. All problems, such as war and crime, are the



result of subjective experiences. And if we didn't have problems, we wouldn't need philosophy.

As such, this tendency sets a bad precedent. The ramifications of these notions have spread far and wide. Existential therapy, for instance, a profession that should be concerned with subjectivities, has instead absorbed Heideggerian emphases.

The structural ontology is valid but not complete. Every ontology frames subjectivities according to its ontology. In excess, each ontology is problematic.

### *A Closer Look*

Let's take a closer look at ontology, the nuts and bolts, as it were. At the same time, this section reflects my perspective on ontology. It's not important in the grand scheme of things, because each of us has an ontology.

An ontology is more than a disposition or perspective, it's a way of being, unspoken and possessing one's own perspective on knowledge.

Unlike personality traits, we can assume that our ontology drives our personality traits and perspective. An ontology lies underneath our personal and political perspectives, our diverse experiences, and cultural conditioning. However, our experiences shape our ontology.

Our 'way of being' comprises core epistemologies such as contextualism, objective rationalism, nominalism, structuralism, and pragmatism.

Theories of personality, such as MBTI, reach for similar interpretations. However, they are constrained by singular and external frames of reference. Frames of

reference should be considered as internal to individuals. This produces different insights.

An internal frame of reference is one's own perspective on knowledge. It appears that we gravitate towards certain dimensions. Though we have the capacity to appreciate others, we seem to form a psychological and physiological attachment to one.

Nietzsche said that all facts are interpretations. Then he privileged the nominal ontology. Heidegger may have considered an equivalence between subjective experiences. But he considered the structural ontology to be the proper stage for philosophical inquiry.

Similarly, the value ontology privileges values. I am biased towards objective rationality. In the final analysis, our personal ontology colors our philosophical insights and behavior. This is discussed more in chapter 9, on Perspectivism.

As long as we appreciate a principle of difference and equivalence, these ontological differences are not a problem. In this sense, ontology is a conversation about respecting differences. We are at the stage of identifying which differences constitute valid differences.

The focus of this book is on ontological dimensionality. The ontologies at our core underneath our personal and political perspectives, our diverse experiences, and cultural conditioning.

Over time our perspectives change. We reevaluate our environments, we may embrace fallibility more, or accept ourselves more. Sometimes, we accept ourselves less.

To change our ontology, we could be more relational, or pragmatic or appreciate structural insights more. We could be more performative, more contextual, or more centered and balanced.

However, changing one's ontology in a sustained way requires changing one's core philosophy. And that is not easy. And there is no need to change our way of being, if that is even possible.

But we can develop a greater appreciation of our core ontology alongside a wider appreciation of perspectivism. We can appreciate who we are more, alongside an appreciation of our perspectival reality.

Rethinking perspectivism and problems of 'representation' will allow us to navigate difficult situations better.

Our behavior is constrained by our ontology. The possibility of behaving in uncharacteristic ways highlights the multitudes within and the potential we have to reconcile and resolve conflict.

Nevertheless, we appear to form psychological and physiological attachments to our ontology. This is what makes them intractable.

As humans living in the world, we need practical ways of being that help us with our day-to-day affairs. Developing a strong philosophy appears to be important for modern life.

At the same time, a strong attachment to one is problematic. This is in line with Buddhist interpretations of our reality.

When we consider our socio-political reality, it's easy to lose focus on subjectivities, the little things that matter. So, we develop ontologies. These are essentially political projects

that we believe will help us reconcile our interest in simplicity with our broader reality. However, the existence of diverse ontologies complicates matters.

By consistently framing subjectivities in a particular way we create problems. We force others around us to see the world the same way.

They may struggle, especially if they don't have freedom of movement and choice. Such as children, for example.

Our environment has characteristics of ontology. Beliefs, traditions, and philosophies contribute to a culture and environment, as do language, laws, design, and architecture.

The ontology of our environment, or 'vibe,' to use a popular term, depends on context. It changes from one family to another, one community to another, and one country to another.

Our personal ontology may conflict with our environment, and this is cause for pause and reflection. When we experience dissonance with our environment, recognizing this may be the first step needed to achieve a more harmonious fit.

There are several possible solutions. Every ontology will offer solutions that are worth considering.

Ontological differences are not a problem, as long as they are respected and recognized, ideally explicitly. In other words, we should be free to be ourselves. Microaggressions, for instance, represent a failure to acknowledge differences for everyone involved.

Ontology provides us with the tools to understand mental health crises. It allows us to break free from a single-observer approach and consider several observer possibilities. See chapter 4 for more on this.

There is nothing essentially wrong with an ontology. It may even be necessary to counterbalance trends in our environment. In excess, however, we lose sight of our interest in subjectivities. Every ontology is essentially an exercise in respecting people.

A cup of water can be life-saving to a person dying of thirst. It can also drown an insect. We must acknowledge that what is life-saving, in a certain context, is what is life-threatening in another. This applies to all philosophies. There's no right or wrong, just moderate or excessive.

In a simplified sense, ontologies are capabilities. Theories such as Gardner's multiple intelligences and personality types provide insights into human capabilities. Epistemologies improve our understanding of capabilities and this will be discussed later in this chapter.

Our capabilities highlight intriguing and alternate interpretations of reality. Essentially, this is a defense of ontological equivalence.

We work based on the reality we perceive, which aligns with familiar modes of thinking. However, we must develop an ontological imagination to appreciate dimensionality. A thought experiment to support this imagination is discussed later in this chapter.

In ontology, 'contradiction' is the norm, not the exception. While our search for 'coherence' was an

understandable stage in our evolution, it must be balanced by meaningful and necessary contradictions.

Reconciliation is easier when we switch from the strong form to the gentler form of any argument, which is in line with Austin's theory of intensity.

Dimensional contradictions are the site of our differences. Our new science juggles with the same questions. This is important when we consider reconciliation.

The case is often made to unify humanity along one ontology. But this will not only limit human potential. It will amount to discrimination.

### *Subtexts*

There can be a world of difference between what is said and what is comprehended. The reason is quite often ontological differences. Incomplete information, preformed assumptions, diverse expectations, differing worldviews, and the various ways we communicate all contribute. The biggest reason is ontology itself.

One's silence may be perceived as duplicity, one's enthusiasm as caprice, one's emotionality as arrogance.

When there's sustained failure we seek mediation and counseling. Misunderstandings often play out on the national and international stage and can accumulate over time.

'Subtexts' could help us learn more about ontological differences in an academic context, and is a natural consequence of seeing the world in terms of ontology. Subtexts could help us understand ourselves.

If two people are in a conversation, one can be assumed to be in a position of equivalence with the other, whose ontology is different. We can assume that both individuals have subjective interpretations of reality. The academic challenge is one of facilitating communication rather than comprehension and documentation.

What is communicated and interpreted can be compiled from the point of view of the first participant. The second participant too will need to compile a different set of observations and interpretations around the same interaction. Comprehension and documentation would be the concerns of a third participant, the academic observer, which introduces a third ontology into the process and is therefore problematic.

Phenomenology tackles the same questions, but the field may view subjectivities from an objective point of view. The attempt may be to document subjectivities in a broadly academic and consistent manner, which introduces a presumed 'objective' perspective.

The phenomenological approach in question might espouse structural and Heideggerian assumptions. David Woodruff Smith describes phenomenology as:

... the study of “phenomena”: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view. This field of philosophy is then to be distinguished from, and related to, the other main fields of philosophy: ontology (the study of being or

what is), epistemology (the study of knowledge), logic (the study of valid reasoning), ethics (the study of right and wrong action), etc.<sup>1</sup>

Due to ontological differences, communication can be a struggle. Consider how Beau Lotto describes an ideal interaction, an interpretation of the communication process from a contextual perspective:

In my view, as soon as you've told something to someone, you've taken the potential for a deeper meaning away from them. True knowledge is when information becomes embodied understanding: We have to act in the world to understand it.<sup>2</sup>

Lotto promotes an unspoken, contextual, and value interpretation of communication. The perspective also highlights performative and nominal aspects, and is complementary with structurality. The interpretation however sidesteps objective rational and representational criteria. This is an example of ontological difference.

For instance, it doesn't meet requirements for official, public, and legal forms of communication. This poses questions about the efficacy of our social and political institutions and processes.

The second person in this conversation may adopt a 'representational' approach. This again requires interpretation with questions posed due to its representational nature.

As such, there is much that we can disambiguate in terms of ontological and communication differences.



From a certain perspective, all conflict can be considered as a failure to communicate. This elevates communication to the level of a 'first philosophy,' and its ontological implications take center stage.

The underlying assumption takes a monistic view of human nature. Monistic interpretations of philosophy are popular. But not when it comes to human nature. Then we are more likely to assume that humans are capable of committing crimes, for instance. This refutes the argument that all conflict represents a failure to communicate. And it refutes monism.

Ontological differences, on the other hand, highlight duality or multiplicity. In the complex world of ontology, both interpretations are valid. Individually they are insufficient. Considered as a whole, they are a necessary contradiction. In addition, our potential for 'transformation' and reform highlights how one ontology is insufficient.

Unspoken and unacknowledged assumptions give rise to entirely new ontologies. One begins where another ends, in a sense. This is another reason why 'subtexts' are essential to our academic comprehension of differences in philosophy.

### *Epistemological Equivalence*

The question, 'What is truth?' is a doorway to deeper insights into ontology and to developing an ontological imagination. It also provides a way to assess epistemological and ontological equivalence.

Consider the following scenario:

If I showed you a key and an apple and asked, 'What do you see?' How would you respond?

You may say you see a key and an apple.

This is the fixed and representational approach to truth, also called objective rationality. We give names to things. Whenever we see the same thing we call it by that same name.

It's a representational philosophy. It allows us to communicate reliably. Modern societies would not function if we couldn't do this. This consistency ties into causality which has, so far, been the dominant principle in science.

This consistency has helped us study physical reality. Whether it's the only principle of science, however, is discussed in chapter 10.

You look at the key and the apple again.

If we give the key to a child it can turn into a toy. In the hands of an artist, it might become an object of art. Then, consider the symbolic meanings we attach to objects. What about history and cultural knowledge? Maybe there's a hidden meaning?

The truth then depends on context. This is very different from saying truths are fixed. Understood this way, truth can be communally decided. There are benefits to doing so. Contextualism may advance or counterbalance deductive and other truths.

These communal truths may be in the form of values. Values give us a sense of balance and meaning. Values are an alternative way of producing knowledge.

And in our new science, contextuality, along with entanglement, is recognized as a valuable new way of understanding our reality.

Let's look at the key and the apple again.

We realize they are both made of the same sub-atomic particles. They are inherently the same. The objects represent variations of the same principle. This was the insight several philosophers had and is the nominalist approach to truth.

Nominalism holds that universal truths or qualities, such as 'greenness,' do not exist outside of individual instances. In the same vein, Nietzsche said there are no facts, just interpretations. That's a very different approach to 'truth,' that contradicts our previous philosophies. This approach can be associated with postmodern and performative philosophies.

Consider the two objects again. What do you see?

Would you search for an answer if I didn't ask you the question? Would you consider the two objects if I didn't ask you to? This is the rhetorical approach to truth. This perspective suggests that there's an underlying truth and reality that can be brought to the surface by rhetorical means.

Structuralism is a dominant theme in philosophy related to the philosophy of Heidegger. This theme is broadly considered in this book as the structural ontology. As we shall see, structuralism too offers alternative insights into science.

There can be many such philosophies.

To this group, we can add pragmatism. Pragmatism includes the above considerations along with the 'usefulness,' 'relevance,' and 'relatability' of a proposal. When we reduce the intensity of an argument from its strong form to a more moderate or gentler form, we make it more people-friendly.

Pragmatism evolved amidst the realization that infighting in philosophy was getting us nowhere. In the scenario of the 'key and the apple,' pragmatism would consider the utility, relevance, and relatability of an answer, and allow us to pick the most useful one.

The above thought experiment shows how very different considerations apply to a simple question. It reveals a principle of epistemological difference.

In addition, the thought experiment is a doorway to developing an ontological imagination. Ontologies can be considered as building on core philosophies. This gives us our ontological perspectivism.

We live in our ontology almost all the time, which makes an ontological imagination no easy feat. But it's good to imagine a different 'other' once in a while.

## *Perspectivism*

*We don't describe the world we see,  
we see the world we can describe.*

—René Magritte

*Yet only to teach men and not to teach women—is that  
not ignoring the essential relation between them?*

—Ban Zhao

*To know what you know and what you  
do not know, that is true knowledge.*

—Confucius

Perspectivism wrestles at the heart of philosophical thinking, and relevant debates can be found in philosophical traditions from ancient times. More recently, interest in perspectivism can be found in the work of Leibniz, Kant, Nietzsche, and Pepper.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, in the 17th century, popularized the term 'monad.' Monads display characteristics of ontology. Much like building blocks, Leibniz considered monads as immaterial, yet simple substances.

Monads carry internal representations or reflections of the universe, and they are in harmony with each other, said Leibniz. They reflect the perspectival character of humans. According to Leibniz:

Indeed, each Monad must be different from every other. For in nature there are never two beings which are perfectly alike and in which it is not possible to find an internal difference, or at least a difference founded upon an intrinsic quality. ... careful investigations into plants, insects and animals have shown that Nature's organic bodies are never produced from chaos or from putrefaction, but always from seeds, in which there is without doubt already some preformation.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Immanuel Kant, in the 18th century, wondered if there were inherent concepts in our minds. In his "Critique of Pure Reason," Kant proposed that knowledge doesn't solely stem from experience or pure reason. Instead, sensory experiences and inherent concepts shape how we understand reality.

Kant believed that all thought must be connected to intuitions and sensibility. He considered subjective perspectives when he wrote:

Now it is clear that it cannot be sensation again through which sensations are arranged and placed in certain forms. The matter only of all phenomena is given us a posteriori; but their form must be ready for them in the mind a priori, and must therefore be capable of being considered as separate from all sensations.<sup>2</sup>

Kant compared 'phenomena' with 'noumena.' Knowledge is limited to things as they appear to us, the 'phenomena,' according to Kant. But limitations of human

cognition prevent us from directly knowing the noumenal realm, the true nature of things.

A direct consideration of perspectivism is attributed to Friedrich Nietzsche. He emphasized how truth is always viewed from a particular perspective and is inherently subjective:

There is only a perspectival seeing, only a perspectival 'knowing'; and the more affects we allow to speak about a matter, the more eyes, different eyes, we know how to bring to bear on one and the same matter, that much more complete will our 'concept' of this matter, our 'objectivity' be.<sup>3</sup>

In the same vein, Nietzsche said that there were no facts, only interpretations. This position of Nietzsche suggests that he may have supported ontological equivalence. After all, we either privilege certain perspectives, or we don't.

Nietzsche critiqued 'dogmatic' philosophers and 'systematizers' for ignoring this reality. But he appreciated reversals of perspective they sometimes produced:

Particularly as knowers, let us not be ungrateful toward such resolute reversals of the familiar perspectives and valuations with which the spirit has raged against itself all too long... : to see differently in this way for once, to want to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future 'objectivity'—the latter understood not as 'disinterested contemplation' (which is a non-concept and absurdity), but rather as the capacity to have one's Pro and Contra in one's power, and to shift them in and out, so that

one knows how to make precisely the difference in perspectives and affective interpretations useful for knowledge.

What Nietzsche missed, in my opinion, was considering how his perspective, which can be called his nominality, might be an ontological perspective, one among several, with associated strengths and weaknesses.

He didn't highlight ontologies such as contextual and structural ontologies, for instance, as alternative paths to knowledge and interpretation. Or, explicitly consider their equivalence. His reference to 'objectivity' too requires clarification.

Nevertheless, in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche wrote that 'there are no eternal facts, nor are there any absolute truths.' He may have appreciated weaknesses inherent in his perspective.

In Buddhist fashion, Nietzsche advances cyclical and 'eternal recurrence.' This fits in with the idea in this book that there are complementary and necessary contradictions, co-arising, and dependence between ontologies.

In this sense, objectivity swings to subjectivity, and the simple to the complex, and this pendulum swings back and forth.

Stephen Pepper considered perspectivism in his 'World Hypotheses.' Pepper explored ways we understand reality in the form of root metaphors. He identified four primary ways as overarching frameworks in which we interpret and organize knowledge.

In 'Formism,' our perception of similarity between things is the root metaphor. 'Mechanism' compares the way we interpret knowledge to causality and the operation of a



machine. 'Contextualism' considers how historic events, as experienced intuitively, occur in a specific setting and context. While 'Organicism' refers to the dynamic nature of organisms, the way a seed turns into a tree, for instance, and the complex interconnectedness of organisms in a system. Pepper wrote:

Every consideration is relevant to a world hypothesis and no facts lie outside it. ... A man desiring to understand the world looks about for a clue to its comprehension. He pitches upon some area of commonsense fact and tries to understand other areas in terms of this one. This original area becomes his basic analogy or root metaphor.<sup>4</sup>

Pepper may have underestimated the way ontological perspectives are formed. Yet, he considered knowledge acquisition to be perspectival, and these root metaphors supported diverse epistemologies. Pepper seems to have considered perspectivism from a contextual standpoint.

In a similar vein, W.V.O. Quine argued for 'naturalized epistemology' and how knowledge was a natural phenomenon to be studied by empirical methods. We could pay attention to psychology and cognitive science, for instance, instead of assuming foundations for knowledge based on a priori principles or privileged beliefs. Curtis Brown and Steven Luper explain:

Most naturalists would ... reject many other features of Descartes' epistemology, including the view that knowledge requires certainty, the view that all our knowledge must be inferred from foundational beliefs, and the view that it is possible to know substantive

facts about the world a priori, that is, without needing experience to provide evidence of their truth.<sup>5</sup>

By making this argument, Quine was essentially supporting ontological perspectivism which cannot reject any methods of knowledge acquisition.

Perspectivism has been considered in many forms. There's epistemic, anthropological, historical, ontological, and scientific perspectivism.

Academia knows that humanity is circling the fire, the fundamental questions of our existence, when it comes to perspectivism. Yet there is resistance to its radical conclusions.

In anthropology, for instance, researchers are divided on the 'ontological turn.' Akos Sivado, in *Ways to Be Understood: The Ontological Turn and Interpretive Social Science*, writes that the radical goal is to accept multiple realities "as they are presented to social actors in different cultural settings." Such accounts can then be accepted as 'real.'<sup>6</sup>

However, Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, in their book, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition*, see it as a methodological approach that allows greater ethnographic understanding. But it doesn't require affirming metaphysical realities.

They explain that the method helps anthropology deal with questions such as:

... Marcel Mauss's idea that Maori gifts are returned because they are taken to contain within them the spirit of the donor. Or E. E. Evans-Pritchard's suggestion that Zande oracles don't answer the question of how

something happened, but rather of why it happened to a particular person at a particular time. Or Clifford Geertz's notion that certain Balinese calendars do not measure quantitatively the distances between past, present and future, but rather render each day qualitatively different from the one before—a matter not of what day it is but of what kind of day it is.<sup>7</sup>

According to the writers, questions needed to interpret such social behavior, such as, what is a thing, what is a person, and what is their mutual relationship, are ontological. A methodological approach is sufficient to assess such claims.

However, they admit they draw some inspiration from metaphysical proposals.

From the perspective of this book, this broadly fits in with 'structural' ontological assumptions. It is a valid ontological perspective. It's sufficient but not complete.

Researchers have reached similar conclusions when it comes to the work of historians. John Burrows says perspectivism must be acknowledged and that perspectives of historians color their reports:

Almost all historians except the very dullest have some characteristic weakness: some complicity, idealization, identification; some impulse to indignation, to right wrongs, to deliver a message. It is often the source of their most interesting writing.<sup>8</sup>

And Hayden White points out that historians inevitably impose a structure on historical data. 'Proper

history' is at the same time 'philosophy of history,' he says. In his book, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, White notes that historical work:

... combine a certain amount of "data," theoretical concepts for "explaining" these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past. ... they contain a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic, in nature, and which serves as the precritically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively "historical" explanation should be. This paradigm functions as the "metahistorical" element in all historical works that are more comprehensive in scope than the monograph or archival report.<sup>9</sup>

The many dimensions of perspectivism can be seen in theories about intelligence. A theory of multiple intelligences was popularized by Howard Gardner who suggested that we have diverse capabilities that help us excel in the world.

These are in the form of linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences, according to Gardner.

The theory was well received in the field of education as it suggests that individuals might have different learning styles. In, *Frames of Mind: the Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, Gardner wrote:

And so, drawing on the analogy of our era, I contend that we have not one general purpose computer but rather a set of discrete computers—the multiple intelligences—that operate somewhat independently of one another. No intelligence is in and of itself artistic or nonartistic; rather, several intelligences can be put to aesthetic ends, if individuals so desire.<sup>10</sup>

Gardner noted that these intelligences didn't lend themselves well to rigid testing, in the same way that ontologies in this book are not proposed as rigid categories. Instead, the purpose was to elucidate various possibilities:

I must stress that I've never felt that MI theory was one that could be subjected to an "up and down" kind of test, or even series of tests. Rather, it is and has always been fundamentally a work of synthesis; and its overall fate will be determined by the comprehensiveness of the synthesis, on the one hand, and its utility to both scholars and practitioners, on the other.

Alfred North Whitehead in his book "Process and Reality," explains a way of considering reality as a dynamic process of becoming. Detached questions in philosophy that had been of central concern had done its work, according to Whitehead. What was needed was a sustained effort of constructive thought. He says:

... the true method of philosophical construction is to frame a scheme of ideas, the best that one can, and unflinchingly to explore

the interpretation of experience in terms of that scheme.<sup>11</sup>

In a sense, he acknowledges difficulties of representation when considering schemes of ideas. Whitehead adds that there are implicit methods behind all constructive thought that need to be made explicit:

... all constructive thought, on the various special topics of scientific interest, is dominated by some such scheme, unacknowledged, but no less influential in guiding the imagination. The importance of philosophy lies in its sustained effort to make such schemes explicit, and thereby capable of criticism and improvement.

Whitehead acknowledges the inherent difficulties as well the importance of this work.

Theories that are tested will provide answers, but they won't be complete answers, he noted. We will be given a subset of answers that will fit within a range of possibilities.

Attempts at reconciling ontological perspectives pose significant challenges. Alexander Nehamas discusses how the tension between systematic philosophers and philosophers interested in the 'art of living' has run throughout history. Each side is suspicious of the other.

Systematic philosophers see the other side as poets and literary figures, or worse, charlatans. Philosophers of the art of living see systematic philosophers as 'cowardly, dry pedants' who lack creativity and are obsessed with scientific objectivity. Nehamas writes:

Both are wrong, for the same reason. They both overlook the fact that each approach is a

legitimate historical development of philosophy ... neither of these approaches has an exclusive hold on the essence of philosophy (which does not, in any case, exist).<sup>12</sup>

There's a similar divide between Continental and Analytic philosophy. Continental philosophy is often interested in existential, social, and cultural issues, while Analytic philosophy looks at problems in logic, language, and the philosophy of mind.

Cornel West highlights the tension between his ontology and 'analytic' modes of philosophizing when he says:

The professional discipline of philosophy is presently caught in an interregnum; mindful of the dead ends of analytical modes of philosophizing, it is yet unwilling to move into the frightening wilderness of pragmatism and historicism with their concomitant concerns in social theory, cultural criticism, and historiography. This situation has left the discipline with an excess of academic rigor yet bereft of substantive intellectual vigor and uncertain of a legitimate subject matter.<sup>13</sup>

When we consider diverse ontological perspectives, we confront 'contradictions.' Contradictions are apparent when we highlight questions from within an ontological perspective or a single frame of reference. From the perspective of ontology, such contradictions are necessary. This mirrors the struggle in the physical sciences.

Yet, we have a rich vocabulary to dismiss such possibilities. One term is 'relativism.' Clifford Geertz says this is an attempt to scare us away from certain ways of thinking:

... the moral and intellectual consequences that are commonly supposed to flow from relativism —subjectivism, nihilism, incoherence, Machiavellianism, ethical idiocy, esthetic blindness, and so on —do not in fact do so and the promised rewards of escaping its clutches, mostly having to do with pasteurized knowledge, are illusory. To be more specific, I want not to defend relativism, which is a drained term anyway, yesterday's battle cry, but to attack anti-relativism, which seems to me broadly on the rise ... Whatever cultural relativism may be or originally have been ... it serves these days largely as a specter to scare us away from certain ways of thinking and toward others.<sup>14</sup>





## *Our New Science*

*Science is not only a disciple of reason but also one of  
romance and passion.*

—Galileo Galilei

Here's a thought experiment. Imagine two particles in space. If one of them bumps into the other and the other effectively moves, that's causality. That is Newtonian physics as we've known it.

If they both look at each other and turn left, and surprisingly, this happens, this is a hot topic of research. It is called mutual constitution, entanglement, or contextuality. This is accepted in our new physics. Notice that causality is not the core principle here. A form of co-creation is.

If one particle exerts a force on the other one, this could be the electromagnetic force or gravity. These effects are different from causality and entanglement. The particles may be part of a larger system. Essentially, these principles sidestep causality.

If causality was the only principle at play with which to understand our reality, then we have a single dimension. This doesn't seem to be the case. Instead, we have various dimensions to consider.

This doesn't mean that we can't measure all phenomena and make predictions based on our measurements. In other words, causality is valid but it won't

provide a complete explanation. These diverse principles have implications for our interpretation of reality.

Our reality appears to be multidimensional.

Let's backtrack and consider this discussion in context.

In 1997, Ilya Prigogine, a Nobel Prize winner for chemistry, in his book *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos, and the New Laws of Nature*, asked if we were at the cusp of a new rationality.

Prigogine explained how the problems of time, determinism, and human creativity had been at the center of Western thought since ancient Greece. We are now considering new ways of thinking:

This question reflects a profound contradiction in Western humanistic tradition ... Popper and many other philosophers have pointed out that we are faced with an unsolvable problem as long as nature is described solely by a deterministic science.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Niels Bohr, who said the opposite of one profound truth may be another profound truth, suggested that we look outside causality to find our new science:

The question at issue has been whether the renunciation of a causal mode of description of atomic processes involved in the endeavours to cope with the situation should be regarded as a temporary departure from ideals to be ultimately revived or whether we are faced with an irrevocable step towards obtaining the proper harmony between analysis and synthesis of physical phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

Physicist James Clerk Maxwell spoke of a 'new kind of knowledge' that would resolve the issue, but the opinion generally held was that probabilities were states of mind rather than states of the world.

This is still a popular opinion.

Prigogine noted, "Mankind is at a turning point, the beginning of a new rationality in which science is no longer identified with certitude and probability with ignorance."

From the point of view of ontology, we have concurrent or superposed dimensions. Causality ties into the way we measure all phenomena. That doesn't mean we receive a complete explanation. It is not an ontology that needs to be abandoned. Rather, our new science suggests several new dimensions.

Mathematician and physicist Wolfgang Smith explains how quantum physics needs to consider ontology.<sup>3</sup> In his book, *A Science in Quest of an Ontology*, Smith says in our daily lives the grass is green. But when we contemplate the world from a scientific point of view the grass isn't green anymore.

Descartes helped formalize atomism and determinism by suggesting that the physical world operated according to deterministic laws. But these are the core assumptions around which an explanation of quantum phenomena repeatedly fails, according to Smith:

A worldview based upon physics is bound, therefore, to exclude the "qualitative dimension" of the cosmos —not because it is not there —but because this science is categorically incapable of grasping that dimension, that aspect of the world.

The act of measurement requires a shift between two ontological realms, the physical, and the corporeal; the quantum system is physical, and the measuring instrument must be corporeal to make the results perceptible. Smith explains:

The first step towards an ontological comprehension of physics consists then in the rediscovery of what we term the corporeal domain ... and it is inconceivable to him etiologically because a transition between two ontological domains can only occur instantaneously, whereas the causation known to physics transpires in time.

Similarly, John Bell noted that: "To restrict quantum mechanics to be exclusively about piddling laboratory operations is to betray the great enterprise. A serious formulation will not exclude the big world outside the laboratory."<sup>4</sup>

Philosophers have discussed how causality may not be the only dimension relevant to science.

For Hume, causation appeared to be based on regular succession and constant conjunction. He went a step further and questioned the basis for inductive inferences, and the assumption that future events will resemble past events. Hume suggested that causation is a mental association based on regular observations. This fits in with his broadly nominal ontology. Hume wrote:

Were any object presented to us, and were we required to pronounce concerning the effect, which will result from it, without consulting past observation; after what manner, I beseech you, must the mind proceed in this operation?

It must invent or imagine some event, which it ascribes to the object as its effect; and it is plain that this invention must be entirely arbitrary. The mind can never possibly find the effect in the supposed cause, by the most accurate scrutiny and examination. For the effect is totally different from the cause, and consequently can never be discovered in it. Motion in the second Billiard-ball is a quite distinct event from motion in the first; nor is there anything in the one to suggest the smallest hint of the other.<sup>5</sup>

For Dewey, 'values,' far from being an aspect of experience, were connected to all of experience. In the philosophy of science, value judgments such as coherence, plausibility, reasonableness, simplicity, and what Dirac called the 'beauty' of a hypothesis, were essential to science.<sup>6</sup>

Structuralism sidesteps the dimension of causality by presenting its own objective framework. Heinz-Juergen Schmidt says structuralism allows the reconstruction of theories with a focus on their mathematical structure, empirical claims, role of approximation, and intertheoretic relations.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Carl Jung and Wolfgang Pauli felt it important to identify how meaningful acausal situations share a deeper connection which they called 'synchronicity.' Pauli said:

It would be most satisfactory of all if physics and psyche could be seen as complementary aspects of the same reality. To us, unlike Kepler and Fludd, the only acceptable point of view appears to be one that recognizes both

sides of reality —the quantitative and the qualitative, the physical and the psychical —as compatible with each other, and can embrace them simultaneously.<sup>8</sup>

Contextuality is a fundamental concept in our new science that reflects the non-classical nature of quantum systems and how spatially separated particles can nevertheless be connected and entangled.

Similarly, emergence is the way novel properties can arise in complex systems due to interactions within, where a single cause cannot be identified. This is related to 'holism' where properties of the whole are greater than the sum of its parts. For example, organs of the body working together produce a living being.

And, even if we don't consider ontological dimensionality, the explanatory power of causality diminishes when we consider highly complex systems, the probabilistic nature of quantum mechanics and unpredictable emergent phenomena, where causal beginnings cannot be identified.

How does this dimensionality relate to living beings?

Physicist Roger Penrose proposed that there was a quantum nature to consciousness. Given that we have around 100 billion neurons and over 100 trillion synaptic connections, the possibility of emergent properties in the brain is quite high. Andréa Morris, writing about Penrose's theory, said:

Wave function collapse is important for reality as we know it. It's because of collapse that when we look at something with our naked eye, we see one thing. In the realm of big things, the world described by classical

physics, we don't see one thing as multiple possible things all at once.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, neuroscience tells us that there appears to be 10 times as many neural connections arising from the neocortex that are cognitively driven (top-down), as there are neural connections that are sensory-driven (bottom-up). This suggests that most of the information we use to see, for instance, comes from the brain itself, and much less comes from our eyes.

Sandra Blakeslee writes that many scientists now believe the brain basically works by simulating reality. This supports the argument for dimensionality proposed in this book. Blakeslee says:

The sights, sounds and touches that flow into the brain are put in the framework of what the brain expects on the basis of previous experience and memory.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Lukas Kob has noted that structuralism provides a promising avenue for investigating the neural basis of consciousness:

Although the question of the functionality of neural state space structures is complex, it can be resolved by understanding these structures as displaying functional similarities of underlying processes that abstract from the anatomical and mechanistic properties of the system.<sup>11</sup>

Several writers are drawing connections between ontological research and the social sciences due to dual-aspect monism. The assumption is that there is a fundamental unity between mental and physical aspects of reality. Deepak Chopra says:



The notion that quantum reality is your reality looms as a rich and enticing possibility. Until very recently, the very prospect was all but unthinkable ... What brings the quantum world suddenly closer to everyone's life is a major rethink. Instead of seeing quantum behavior as stranger than strange, it dovetails into something no one can do without: consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

Karan Barad, in their book, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, notes that intra-action gives rise to a new ontology. Philosophical concepts such as agency, structure, subjectivity, objectivity, knowing, intentionality, discursivity, performativity, entanglement, and ethical engagement can now reconceptualized. Barad says:

... the notion of intra-action constitutes a radical reworking of the traditional notion of causality. ... A lively new ontology emerges: the world's radical aliveness comes to light in an entirely nontraditional way that reworks the nature of both relationality and aliveness (vitality, dynamism, agency).<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Alexander Wendt suggests that social science should borrow ideas from quantum science for its proper understanding. In his book, *Quantum Mind and Social Science: Unifying Physical and Social Ontology*, Wendt writes:

As we have seen quantum processes ... are not causal, at least in the usual, efficient causal sense. For positivists this challenges the current fashion of trying to explain social phenomena by reference to causal

mechanisms, the very language of which exudes a classical worldview. For interpretivists the challenge might seem less, since they were never interested in causation in the first place ...<sup>14</sup>

This shifting of emphasis from the determinacy of the material world has implications not only for the relationship between 'positivists' and 'interpretivists,' but also for "rethinking the subordination of the social sciences to the natural," notes Karin Fierke.<sup>15</sup>

## *Further Characteristics of Ontology*

1. An ontology is a boat, and also a crutch, a way to understand life, and a way to get through life, a path to deeper insights, and a path to obsession and excess. Developing a strong ontology is useful for our modern ways of living. However, in excess, it can be problematic.
2. What is life-saving, in a certain context, can be life-threatening in another. There's no right or wrong, just moderate or excessive.
3. An ontology provides a window to reality. It is valid but not complete.
4. There are no 'objective' points of view. Every ontology has its own epistemology and process. They can be considered as equivalent and subjective.
5. Ontologies are characterized by complementarity and opposites, co-arising, and dependence. They are tied together by necessary contradictions.

6. Several mysteries lie at the center of philosophy. We should embrace them. They resemble mysteries in our new science.
7. There are many gardens of the self, many gardens of the soul. Each garden is vast with abundant trails within. Our relational, structural, objective-rational, dramatic, and pragmatic selves each have a garden.
8. Ontological perspectivism is about different capabilities and how we can coordinate our capabilities. Each of us brings a different skillset to the table.
9. The ontologies considered in this book are broadly based on contextuality, objective rationality, nominality, structurality, and pragmatism. They hold that the truth depends on context, the truth is fixed and representational, the truth varies based on the same principle, truth is rhetorical, and truth considers utility, respectively.
10. Our personal ontologies are a mix. The perspectives in this book accentuate differences in the form of heuristic devices to make a multidimensional conversation more manageable.
11. Each person has an ontology. If we take this perspective too far, we arrive at incorrect conclusions. It's important to be aware of broad differences.

12. Differences break our frame of reference. Getting caught up in comparative discussions is a mistake. One then collapses all facets to one dimension.
13. We must get away from a single-observer perspective. There are multiple observers, multiple forms of objectivity, and subjective perspectives.
14. Any question in the social sciences elicits several responses. This gives us a principle of difference.
15. That which we admire the most often reflects ontological differences.
16. The Q&A is a popular mode of communication. When we switch from asking questions to making observations, comments, and rephrasing questions, we shift our ontological perspective.
17. What does being around kids teach us? That we appreciate a bit of chaos in our lives. Policies can be adjusted. Our diverse ontologies should inform our techno-industrial trajectory.
18. Ontology can help us transform and re-engineer our environments. We can develop new cosmologies. The many nations in the world represent diverse ontologies.
19. Ontology is an academic attempt to formalize common sense. This is surprisingly challenging.

20. Our pursuits are generally a search for complementarity, as we struggle with differences.
21. Our differences have always been contentious. Mischaracterization of ontology is a common theme in both ancient and modern times. We must become better at staying with the 'discomfort' of difference, and growing skills of interpretation.
22. We are wired to fear aggression. We condition ourselves this way. The strong form of any ontology is harder to reconcile with than its moderate form.
23. Our desire to protect people is sometimes a problem. It creates a bedrock of assumptions that they cannot escape from.
24. Many ontologies fly under the radar. Their excesses are not questioned.
25. An ontology is political, the foundation on which further views are built. They shape our reality and preferred modes of interaction. Ontologies are not limited to a gender.
26. In the realm of politics, we are divided at the level of ontology. We must continue to engage in dialogue, reconciliation, and bipartisanship.
27. A collation of nominality with objective rationality may result in Ockham's Razor. Especially in politics, this often amounts to arguments with slim logical

support. In these situations, nominality makes a case for nominality itself.

28. Our behavior is shaped by our ontology. The possibility of behaving in uncharacteristic ways highlights potential for collective reconciliation.
29. Academic reconciliation is essential before we achieve wider reconciliation. The impossible is possible. But we may have to defy our ontology and adjust our time horizon.
30. There is no crisis of 'truth' in philosophy, there is a crisis of interpretation. The ability to appreciate diverse ontologies is within our grasp.



## *Tackling Modern Problems*

*All war is a symptom of man's failure  
as a thinking animal.*

—John Steinbeck

*We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable—but  
then, so did the divine right of kings.*

—Ursula K. Le Guin

*To summarize: it is a well-known fact that those  
people who must want to rule people are,  
ipso facto, those least suited to do it.*

—Douglas Adams

Many of our modern problems, the focus of this chapter, stem from ontological excess. Structurality and nominality, for instance, have been privileged throughout history.

Gender philosophers consider this to be androcentrism. But these battles are better understood as battles over ontology.



## *The Economic Pendulum*

Imagine if all economic activity, such as farming, nursing, and construction, was taken over by AI and robots. Economic production would effectively continue. But people would have no jobs.

This scenario is not all bad news, thankfully. The companies that owned the robots could be taxed heavily, and we would live off social security payments. This may be the future we're headed towards. Some would say this reality is here today.

Corporations have taken over economic production in many sectors at the expense of jobs. Corporations do not care about wealth distribution or jobs.

This means social security for wealth distribution is a necessity. I don't know if this situation is ideal, but it's both a current reality and a future one.

These outcomes reflect our ontological choices.

Economic production works in the following way: You are free to make a chair and sell it to your neighbors. You have just created economic value out of thin air. Before you were unemployed. Now you are employed.

If you form a collective, a group of people are now engaged in the production of a good or service.

The problem with this scenario is that the current economic philosophy does not support this. It will work against you. At some point, you will be asked to compete against corporations. This economic philosophy assumes that the local dynamic is not important. Diverse possibilities are not encouraged.

Corporations are designed to produce goods at the lowest cost. They are designed to accumulate resources. In

addition, corporations spend heavily to ensure their survival, whether it's by purchasing information or political influence.

Although staffed by humans, the design itself privileges specific values over others. This economic reality reflects ontological biases in terms of laws, institutions, and culture.

An ontology reflects how we understand reality and what types of interactions are encouraged. Philosophies that prioritize local production and employment, for instance, could be reflected in laws and institutions.

As artist Rick Lowe asks, "If you're creative, why can't you create a solution?"<sup>1</sup>

We could prioritize environmental, social, community, individual, or innovation goals. We could design systems that emphasize contextual, nominal, objective-rational, structural, or pragmatic philosophies.

We could test alternatives in the form of pilot programs and run experiments. Many 'cooperative' experiments are taking place at the micro level. These are experiments in alternatives, yet they are stifled as they work within the dominant paradigm. This multiplicity hasn't received due recognition and institutional support.

Economic designs could reflect our new abilities in information, technology, and communication. They especially require revision to legal systems which is why running experiments is necessary.

Variation can be observed within an ontology. When comparing capitalist nations, economic environments vary. There are differences in values, assumptions, laws, and institutions.

That we have begun to recognize how we can shift perspective and effectively our economic environment is

reflected in a report by the World Economic Forum in March 2024:

In the face of recent global crises, the essential role of the care economy has surged to the forefront of economic and social policy discussions. This white paper by the Global Future Council on the Future of the Care Economy calls on leaders worldwide to prioritize the care sector. It sheds light on the state of the care economy, emphasizing its critical importance to economic growth and societal well-being.<sup>2</sup>

This emphasis is essentially a shift in ontology, an acknowledgment that neoliberal values do not define an economic system. This is a step in the right direction.

### *Shifting Perspective*

Many social and economic crises are underreported. Research studies are skewed towards confirmation biases. If you follow certain media outlets, for instance, you may not be aware of current crises.

Extended economic meltdowns, such as in Argentina or Venezuela, for instance, won't make the news. These are symptoms of our ontological singularity.

Nevertheless, Antonio Guterres, the secretary general of the UN, received media coverage when he said, "Nearly 80 years later, the global financial architecture is outdated, dysfunctional and unjust."

Goals on hunger and poverty have 'gone into reverse' after decades of progress, he said referring to sustainable development goals.<sup>3</sup>

And one in three countries is at risk of a financial crisis. There have been 18 defaults on international debt in the last three years which is more than the total in the previous two decades.

Patricia Cohen, writing in the New York Times, said, "The once vaunted 'Washington Consensus' has fallen into disrepute." The system for fixing a huge debt problem is broken, Cohen noted.<sup>4</sup>

Guterres, in his statement, fails to recognize how we can shift ontology, both within the UN and without, which highlights the extent of the problem. Such a shift involves acknowledging alternatives and recognizing their equivalence.

The World Economic Forum report on the 'care economy,' in comparison, took a step towards progress.

Shifting ontology involves recognizing the freedom to make responsible adjustments. The structural ontology and its assumptions play an inordinate role in our economic design. We must get past the notion that there is one universal design.

Structurality and nominality have been privileged throughout history. Gender philosophers consider this to be androcentrism. But these biases are better understood as ontological in nature. This is because these agendas are promoted by individuals within all genders.

Along with an economic pendulum, we should consider the question of equilibrium. Systems tend towards equilibrium in the long run. But capital will accumulate in the short run, which is essentially an ontology tending towards

dominance. And we can make responsible adjustments in the short run.

These trends explain why environmental sustainability can be addressed by adjusting policies. We cannot wait for adjustment in the long run, which might take several hundred years and a few environmental crises to materialize.

Policies can be adjusted. We have the power to design new systems, balanced within an ecosystem of competing and collaborating ontologies.

## *Excess*

Excess can be observed in many guises, in many cultures. As argued in this book, every ontology is capable of obsession, error and excess.

In the United States, excess appears to be shaped by excessive faith and certainty in 'structural' values and, to some extent, 'nominal' values. This is to the exclusion of others.

Essentially, there's a blindness to differences. Differences are labeled and stereotyped, subsumed under nondifferences.

Writing about culture in the United States, Carol Gilligan says there is a crisis of connection that is both 'pervasive and urgent.' Judith Herman says there is a separation of the self from relationships.<sup>5</sup>

Excess is always problematic, and the United States seems to enjoy defying this truth to its detriment. This is visible in worsening social and health indicators.

The number of suicides per day, for instance, is reported at more than 130, which is around 49,000 individuals every year. Notably, these daily incidents don't make their way into the news cycle.<sup>6</sup>

Structurality is an ontology that emphasizes a single-observer perspective, 'objectivity,' hierarchy and social order, along with values of self-reliance and individualism. In excess, this is problematic.

Infallibility in the form of 'making sure,' 'and 'certainty' may have its place in the workplace. But these concepts shouldn't apply to everyday human relations. This situation reflects politics of conformity.

A culture of excess can be contrasted with other 'developed' nations. Some have done a better job of incorporating balance as a cultural perspective.

'Developing' nations seem to have better perspectives on this question. Daily activities are moderated by concerns about 'appropriateness,' and 'balance.' Nevertheless, such generalizations depend on situation, context and gender. And these cultures are under pressure to change.

Demands for ontological conformity are being made in 'alternative' cultures too. Jae L describes the struggle of fitting into a queer community in Australia:

A good queer loves to party. With their ever-widening circle of friends. The more the merrier. The goal is to dissolve into an undifferentiated mass of queerness. There's no room for individuality, not really. Not if you want to be queer in a way that doesn't fit the mass experience.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, politics of conformity are a problem everywhere. Communities that emphasize inclusion may still create a culture of exclusion.

## *Culture / Control*

What is culture? Culture provides us with a sense of coherence and meaning. Along with a feeling of continuity with the past, culture endorses a grand social project. It provides us a path to access knowledge.

It is also an attempt at collective coordination and control. If this is recognized and acknowledged, it can be a positive aspect. On the other hand, the way we understand culture at the moment, this is its weakness.

Cultures have ontologies. A multicultural environment has its own ontology. The search for culture means matching one's personal ontology with a complementary culture. As individuals, we must feel comfortable in it.

Different cultures in the world represent our diverse ontological aspirations, a blend of beliefs and practices deemed to have been beneficial to the collective in the past. And they continue to evolve. They may possess various ways of respecting minorities and recognizing individuals who are different.

In other words, cultural adaptations that help our diverse ontologies blend in better. Or they may not possess such adaptations. .

A collective always has a culture. Some individuals will fit in. For others, it will be a minor or major adjustment or a source of unease.

Amid the rapid transformation the world has seen over the last few centuries, many cultures now struggle to recognize and appreciate differences.

From the point of view of ontology, the way forward involves the explicit recognition of diversity and equivalence of personal and collective ontologies. This is because, as we create new cultures, we create new discriminations. New labels and language, as well as in-groups, and out-groups are created.

Reconciling diversity means developing a better relationship with 'discomfort,' an essential aspect of reconciling ontological differences.

Upgrading our techniques of communication involves better interpretation of 'representation' and differences in general.

### *Workplace / Cultures*

An understanding of ontology can be beneficial in the workplace. It allows for the formation of teams with diverse dynamics and cultures.

Not every individual will fit into every team. Rather, individuals can be supported to find teams in which they thrive. This requires a recognition of differences.

Ontology allows us to rethink managerial roles and styles. A group of peers, for instance, may not need a manager. Instead of imagining a single optimal work culture, we can imagine several coexistent possibilities.

Corporate structure can take various forms and need not be top-down bureaucratic. Several innovative companies are experimenting with alternatives.



China's Haier, for instance, with eighty-four thousand employees, runs on the basis of four thousand microenterprises each with ten to fifteen employees.<sup>8</sup>

Teams are free to form and evolve, but they share a common approach to target setting, internal contracting, and coordination.

Structure, in this sense, is tied to ontology.

### *Political Futures*

There's a growing gulf between young men and women in terms of political views, according to a report by the Economist magazine. Attitudes, they noted, are polarizing:

In all the large countries we examined, young men were more conservative than young women ... Men and women have always seen the world differently. What is striking, though, is that a gulf in political opinions has opened up, as younger women are becoming sharply more liberal while their male peers are not.<sup>9</sup>

Differential lenses can help us disambiguate such questions. At its core, these are philosophical battlegrounds. And without a principle of equivalence, everyone is battling for dominance.

Rather than disambiguate in terms of the left or right, we should consider an ontological picture.

An ontology is political. It is a view of reality and our preferred modes of interaction. This essentially redraws our political landscape. Political issues add several layers of

complexity. If we are divided at the level of ontology, we will struggle to reconcile at the level of politics.

The next stage of our evolution may be to accept that various differences are equally valid. This will facilitate how we reconcile and reach out across the aisle. Without this awareness, we are confrontational at the level of ontology.

In other words, ontological differences are not explicitly considered in our democratic institutions. We're at the early stages of grasping implications.

As such, academia can provide direction. We can run small-scale experiments to learn from test cases. An institution or a small community could experiment with alternative ideas.

It is important to make everyone feel recognized and included. Transparency of principles and appreciation of equivalence will go a long way toward easing such concerns.

Still, we may need to periodically change the ontology of governance. We can then expect policy cycles that emphasize different aspects of organization and governance.

## *Reconciliation*

We often face the dilemma, 'Should we reach across the aisle?' It goes against our instincts and highlights our struggles with difference.

Politics adds a layer of complexity to ontology. Reconciliation is always possible. But we must adjust our time horizon, and we may have to act against our ontology.

We have structural and nominal strategies for negotiation, and cognitive and affective forms of communication. We could attempt to 'transform enemy

images,' implement multi-track diplomacy, and there's 'cancellation,' the contextual option of last resort. When all else fails, we can try honesty and non-judgmental communication.

In general, our styles of communication are mediated by and perpetuate ontology, an awareness of which improves our chances of reconciliation.

Oprah Winfrey says, "Surround yourself with only people who are going to lift you higher." This is a popular sentiment, and it is defensible.

However, from the perspective of ontology, difference is an opportunity for growth and gaining insights into alternative ontologies.

Reconciliation is, ultimately, mediated by an awareness of equivalence of our ontological differences.

### *Policy / Cycles*

Who's present, and who's absent?

Ontology can be applied in the arena of policymaking, and there are several factors to consider. Policy design reflects philosophical frameworks and ontological assumptions.

Transparency of assumptions is valuable during and after the drafting process. This way, everyone is informed of the context in which the policy was designed and its future direction.

Ontology suggests that safeguards for differences and minorities should be designed and included. These clauses can be made explicit. The question is, which differences are valid differences?

An overarching philosophy may reflect an effort at coordination and control. Acknowledging this common policy motivation will reduce negative consequences.

The committee entrusted with design requires individuals who represent diverse ontologies. We can then expect varied differential responses to any question.

Singular design perspectives are problematic because they privilege certain ontologies. In the absence of a principle of equivalence, they will foster resentment.

To address this, policies can be rotated and implemented for limited terms. Alternatives can then be tried out, possibly in the form of pilot projects.

In this sense, policies will see ontological cycles.

This will support the study of the strengths and weaknesses of any design as well as that of alternatives. Continuous learning and improvement over time can then be expected.

In this sense, building stronger communities involves recognizing our diverse ontological strengths.

### *A Colony on Mars*

Let's imagine we're setting up a colony on Mars. What insights can we draw from ontology? A new culture for the colony can be designed based on best practices. And this will work for a limited term.

However, they may want to experiment with new ideas, values, and philosophies. Given our struggles here on Earth, this is understandable.

This culture will move in one of several directions, the contextual, nominal, objective-rational, and structural ontologies being possibilities.

A principle of equivalence suggests that, in this new culture, individual differences should be explicitly recognized and appreciated. All members are then allowed to thrive and reach their full potential.

In a tight-knit community, the ability to speak freely may become a problem. An anonymous message board may be necessary.

As here on earth, a singular culture or political philosophy will be problematic. This culture will privilege some members more than others.

One solution is to rotate cultures and philosophies for limited terms. The colony can then continuously learn from these changes while respecting a principle of equivalence.

These experiments may offer valuable learnings for everyone, especially people here on Earth.

### *East / West*

That we are dealing with different ontologies is clear when we compare the cultural situations in the East versus the West. Of course, such comparisons depend on country and context.

Workplace culture, for instance, may be more of an issue in the West than the East. Human relations in general are more strained in the West, pressured by expectations of achievement, neoliberal economics and politics of conformity.

However, I apologize for making such generalizations. They may be entirely reversed depending on situation, context and gender.

Principles of ontology apply in every context. Recognizing and acknowledging differences, as well as our diverse capabilities and ontologies, appears to be a problem in both the East and the West. This often manifests in the form of political stigma and labeling.

Outside of pragmatic standpoints, equivalence of difference is an argument that is still new to our social psyche.

## *Reputation*

Systems of 'reputation' are anathema to objective rationality, innovation, and progress. However, this phenomenon is widespread which may explain our struggles with progress in the social sciences. The term 'reputation' conflates several issues.

On the one hand, we confuse reputation with track record. A track record is useful. That the past will be repeated is not ensured, but a track record provides information on likelihood. Reputation, on the other hand, may diverge from track record.

Reputation is a catchword for assessments based on multiple criteria. For the value ontology the criterion is values. The structural and nominal ontologies consider structural and nominal criteria. The objective rational ontology is generally interested in track record.

This collation leads to several problems:

People looking for a fresh start are discriminated against. A reputation may be difficult to change.

An irrational fear of failure will stifle innovation, reform, and taking risks.

Mistakes and failures within hierarchies will be hidden from public scrutiny which undermines careful evaluation.

And there's more: Being assessed along multiple unspecified criteria leads to confusion and regress rather than progress. Situations where there is asymmetry of information will worsen. Reputation is also a tool for social control.

These problems explain our struggles with legal reform, for instance, and our failure to innovate in general in the social sciences.

A positive development is that internet technologies have made it possible to track performance which allows public participation and promotes self-regulation.

However, self-regulation requires a large number of participants and a level playing field. In hierarchical situations, some people have the ability to unduly influence the process.

Without a principle of equivalence, self-regulation promotes cultures of conformity. Reputation then becomes a call to arms on our ontological battlegrounds.

As such, reputation requires clarification in terms of 'reputation for' x or y, in relation to a particular ontology.

## *Capabilities*

Ontologies can be simply understood as capabilities. Modern crises represent a failure in coordinating our capabilities.

In the absence of a principle of equivalence, each ontology claims superiority over its jurisdiction. Essentially, this means hampering coordination in our efforts.

That we don't want to hand over the reins completely is understandable. But we should encourage alternatives in the form of pilot projects and experiments.

For more on this see Policy / Cycles.

## *Philosophy of Crime*

A legal system is a nonissue if people behave well. This is the argument put forward from various perspectives. It may explain our apathy for legal reform. Guns don't kill people, people kill people, they say. This view is both true and incomplete.

Philosophies shape our reality. As a consequence, legal systems reflect our philosophical assumptions and shape our values and culture. They define our ontological environment. A legal system provides us with the opportunity to shape the environment we live in.

Notably, many jurisdictions are now overregulated to the point of irrationality. The inability to reform these systems reflect ontological biases. For instance, Ilya Somin says, due to the vast scope of current law in modern America, authorities can pin a crime on almost anyone:



Whether you get hauled into court or not depends more on the discretionary decisions of law enforcement officials than on any legal rule. And it is difficult or impossible for ordinary people to keep track of all the laws they are subject to and to live a normal life without running afoul of at least some of them.<sup>10</sup>

This culture clearly needs reform. So what and who is blocking these reforms?

How we understand culpability, rehabilitation, and our potential for personal transformation, are important aspects of culture. The question of crime itself produces diverse responses. Still, we rely on assumptions held since ancient times.

Public opinion is divided, and the question of crime elicits differential responses. For instance, Lady Anne Conway had this to say in the 17<sup>th</sup> century:

True justice or goodness, therefore, is not indifferent; there's no slack in it. Rather, it is like a straight line: there can't be two or more equally straight lines between two points.

Our assumptions shape our rehabilitative environments. A few experiments are providing us with the evidence needed to rethink our systems.

Restorative justice and contextual therapy, for instance, push the boundaries of how we interpret crime and rehabilitation.

Prisons such as Halden in Norway are trying out different approaches to incarceration and reintegration. Halden may reflect its own predetermined assumptions, but it is also progressive.

Recidivism in Norway runs at 20 percent. In the United States, the rate is over 60 percent. But when inmates have access to education programs recidivism drops to 4 percent.<sup>11</sup>

Ragnar Kristoffersen, an anthropologist who teaches at the Correctional Service of Norway Staff Academy, says:

We like to think that treating inmates nicely, humanely, is good for the rehabilitation. And I'm not arguing against it. I'm saying two things. There are poor evidence saying that treating people nicely will keep them from committing new crimes. Very poor evidence.<sup>12</sup>

Such experiments are just getting started. Testing ideas in the physical sciences is the norm, but it is the exception in the social sciences.

The ontology of 'structurality' generally perpetuates bureaucracy and reputation-based systems of government, along with its own worldview.

We could be piloting new ideas. Instead, we cling to old ones. This may be an effort at protecting ontological privilege.

## *Experiments*

Running experiments is the norm in the physical sciences. It is the exception in the social sciences. This reflects the state of play in philosophy.

One reason is that the results of pilot programs and social experiments could undermine assumptions around which current systems are built. Confirmation bias, as

explained by Kahneman, appears to be driving our social psychology.

Structurality, it seems, plays an outsized role in our social, academic, and institutional structures to our detriment.

To be fair, without a principle of equivalence, we have no way of interpreting alternative results. There's no precedent for defending such results.

As such, our narratives within social psychology require disambiguation. Running experiments and pilot programs, whether it is at academic institutions or local bodies, will help us better understand our diverse motivations.

## *Ontology / Gender*

There are many femininities, many masculinities, and many genders in our societies. More importantly, there are many ontologies.

The various battles for gender dominance, over the centuries, are better understood as battles for ontological dominance. And without a principle of equivalence, these battles will continue.

I would rather be known for my ontology than my gender. Ontologies free us from the definitional confines of gender. My way of being reflects my disposition, values, goals, and aspirations. The particular ways I behave and think reflect my ontology more than my gender.

That doesn't mean gender considerations, in our current context, are not important. Gender appears to be

social and cultural adaptations, ways of thinking and behaving mediated by ontology.

Butler's ontological interpretation is valid. But we must consider how gender is mediated by diverse ontologies.

Ontological differences are problematic in themselves, and so far, we have received minimal guidance from philosophy. Barring pragmatic standpoints, an appreciation of equivalence is still new territory.

Elizabeth Grosz outlines the challenge that gender theory faces in relation to ontology:

These questions of mind, matter, things—the provocation of the world, the entwining of the thing with the subject and the subject with the thing, the ways in which subjects are or can be differentiated from each other, and their different perspectives on and interests in the world—in short, the questions surrounding how we conceive ontological difference—are twentieth century reformulations of metaphysics, the ways the contemporary forms of philosophy have reconceptualized the intractable metaphysical problems of classical philosophy into the most fundamental if implicit questions of experience, its frame and horizon.<sup>13</sup>

Grosz appears to take a contextual approach to the question of difference. From an ontological perspective, it is important to consider 'necessary contradictions' when we consider differences.

Does this mean there's no problem with masculinities? There's a significant problem with masculinities. An awareness of differences and a principle of

equivalence will support the effort at differential education and fixing them. The current push for greater awareness and reconciliation must continue.

There are different problems with different masculinities, and they are problematic for everyone concerned.

Although 'structurality' flies under the radar, there's a tendency for the ontology to assume dominance in our societies, whether expressed in masculine or feminine form. Structurality prioritizes gender conformity, tradition, and outdated structural narratives.

Nominality is often restrained in women due to social conditioning, adverse narratives and peer pressure. This, in a sense, feeds excessive nominal masculinity.

Contextuality is represented in all genders. Contextual masculinity can be observed in collective behavior, for instance, in military institutions or team sports.

An excessive interest in discipline is another form of expression. Contextual masculinity is an underappreciated masculinity that will go overboard for reasons tied to its ontology.

Objective rationality is expressed in all genders and is equally misunderstood and problematic. Self-belief in its superiority can lead to a host of problems.

Questions of gender can be viewed through ontological lenses. Every ontology is prone to excess and has its toxic tendencies. Without a principle of equivalence, we will continue to defend certain motivations, which are viewed as toxic, while attacking others.

## *Mental Health Crises*

The United States seems to have created a difficult environment for itself. Time magazine in an article titled, "Why is our mental health getting worse?" noted that something isn't adding up. "Even as more people flock to therapy, mental health is getting worse by multiple metrics."

14

There was a 40 percent increase in the use of mental health services from 2019 to 2022, for instance.

Similarly, the head of the U.S. FDA Robert Califf has sounded the alarm on 'extraordinary headwinds' faced in the public health sector. The reasons he provides are tobacco use, poor diet, and drug shortages, but there seems to be more to this story.<sup>15</sup>

Life expectancy too has dropped to 76 years from 79 years. According to a Gallup poll, around half of the U.S. labor force doesn't feel 'engaged' in their places of work.<sup>16, 17</sup>

These pieces of evidence point to a problem. There appear to be imbalances in the social structure. The question is, what are they?

Jessica Carew Kraft offers possible answers and says we may need to 'rewild.' The dynamics of a technology society seem to be at odds with our true nature:

My peers were also sleep-deprived, anxious, self-medicating, and unable to enjoy the simple pleasures in life. Rates of stress-related illnesses and mental health problems were (and still are) increasing among my demographic. I grew sceptical about the supposed benefits of 21st-century technological progress that came at the cost of

our physical and mental wellbeing. From my training as an anthropologist, I knew that most cultures throughout history had not lived this way. ... As *Homo sapiens*, we evolved ... with our instincts to be outside, procreate, find food, and celebrate with our small clan. ... This means that most of us today are experiencing a profound discrepancy between how we evolved to live and how we now live.<sup>18</sup>

Ontology allows us to disambiguate such questions along multiple dimensions. That there are imbalances within the social fabric is clear. However, we must consider various dynamics.

Mental health can be understood in terms of harmony or struggle between one's personal ontology and one's environment, which also has an ontology. One's personal ontology may be doing well, yet we may struggle in certain environments.

If an individual is expected to behave differently from their core ontology, over time this will contribute to stress.

Ontology allows us to break free from a single-observer perspective to understanding mental health and consider multiple observer perspectives. The observer doesn't have a privileged position. Instead, the observer plays a role in every interaction.

To consider the United States, there appears to be resistance to incorporating differences. Differences are labeled and stereotyped, subsumed under nondifferences.

Instead, everyone is evaluated along the same standard. A single observer frame of reference, similar to a 'structural' perspective, is applied. This is an ontological bias.

'Fallibility' is an important aspect of human nature, people must feel free to be themselves, and feel free to make mistakes. And we must feel comfortable in every context. In addition, our diverse ontologies have diverse forms of expression.

Evidence in this regard is available when we travel to different countries. Different nations have different cultural ontologies. The pace of life and expectations differ.

Culture, for instance, can be shaped by a mix of contextual, structural, nominal, or objective-rational perspectives. Subjectivities can be framed in different ways.

Without a principle of equivalence, however, we will have environments framed by one ontology or another. This becomes more problematic when other ontologies are not recognized. This gives us our battlegrounds.

In this sense, cultural evolution involves the explicit recognition of differences along with a principle of equivalence.

Katherine Kinzler, in her book *How You Say It*, highlights how humans tend to create social ingroups and outgroups based on shared characteristics, especially speech accents. Kinzler writes:

Psychologists like me have spent a lot of time studying social group membership, trying to figure out why people feel that they belong with some groups but not with others, and why they vilify people whom they perceive as belonging to other groups—that is, people they perceive as other. Decades of social psychology research on intergroup and interpersonal relations suggest that we just can't seem to turn off our "category detectors,"



which divide the world into us and them. It is simply human nature.<sup>19</sup>

Kinzler's observations may be defensible within a situational perspective, especially a structural perspective. However, this could be the result of misplaced structural values. And these observations are not easily reconciled with other ontologies.

In other words, it may not simply be human nature.

The value ontology, for instance, tends to appreciate people from diverse backgrounds based on the philosophy that diversity builds collective strength. However, the value ontology will evaluate strangers based on perceived values.

The nominal ontology may not see a need to adjudicate based on differences. From a nominal perspective, all differences are variations of the same principle. Nevertheless, nominality will yield to context, culture, and conditioning.

Objective rationality may prioritize egalitarian values. Nevertheless, context and peer pressure may influence behavior.

In other words, each ontology is biased in different ways. We will observe the same differences yet interpret them in different ways.

Nevertheless, Kinzler's observations are valid and reflect our tendency towards conformity. Every ontology is prone to excess, and as a consequence, will demand conformity.

## *Rethinking Autism*

Debates on autism reflect our debates in social psychology. We have various theories, and this book supports the theory called 'neurodivergence.' However, if the suggestion is that there is 'divergence' from the norm, this is a misnomer. All ontologies should be considered as normal.

Kathleen Miller writes:

To oversimplify vastly, neurodiversity is the idea that neurological differences (including autism) are the result of normal variation. In other words, we may be creating pathology where there is none. Should we consider autism a disease? Or is it a variation of normal? This question has been the source of heated debate...<sup>20</sup>

There appear to be complex interactions between individuals and their environments. Environments have characteristics of ontology. This is an often ignored aspect of the debate. Different nations, for instance, have different ontological environments.

If an individual on the autism spectrum is more comfortable spending time with some people than others, this supports the view that the environment has a role to play. Research does show that people on the spectrum find interacting with people similarly placed to be more comfortable.<sup>21</sup> Chris Burcher writes:

I am just exceptionally sensitive to environmental stimuli associated with acceptance, and therefore pay much more attention and place much higher value on

environmental cues associated with group acceptance.<sup>22</sup>

Burcher's observation supports the view that the environment plays a role.

Another piece of evidence is that people on the spectrum display superior skills in certain respects. This is in line with the argument that ontologies are capabilities.<sup>23</sup>

And we must consider how there could be complex contextual and objective rational interactions with the same environment.

Diagnosis is in itself an ontology and contributes to a particular environment. Many researchers have recognized this to be part of the problem.

Kenneth Gergen, in an article titled, *Is Diagnosis a Disaster?* describes how in 1929 there were twelve psychological disorders. Now there are over 300. This creates a 'cycle of progressive infirmity,' according to Gergen:

I find myself increasingly alarmed by the expansion and intensification of diagnosis in this century. ... as the century has unfolded, the terminology has expanded exponentially, and public consciousness of mental deficit terminology has grown acute. ... one may be classified as mentally ill by virtue of cocaine intoxication, caffeine intoxication, the use of hallucinogens, voyeurism, transvestism, sexual aversion, the inhibition of orgasm, gambling, academic problems, antisocial behavior, bereavement, and noncompliance with medical treatment. ... What, we might ask, are the upper limits for classifying people in terms of deficits?<sup>24</sup>

An expansion of labeling and diagnosis is an expansion of a particular ontology to the exclusion of others. Politics of conformity, in this way, have taken over in many parts of the world.

This makes recognizing our diverse personal ontologies all the more important.

### *Dimensionality of Pain*

That there's a dimensionality to pain and anguish is not always acknowledged in our various therapeutic settings.

For instance, we are still learning about various forms of empathy such as its affective and cognitive variations, and structural and nominal variations. Levinasian ethics are discussed in chapter 5.

Nevertheless, we are making progress. Deborah McGuire, writing about pain management, says:

Current theories of pain and clinical experience support a multidimensional framework ... that has implications for assessment and management in any setting. Six major dimensions have been identified: physiologic, sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioral, and sociocultural.<sup>25</sup>

## *Coherence*

Let's imagine we write an article. Did we prioritize coherence? Is there some aspect of coherence, under deeper philosophical scrutiny, that makes it superior to an alternative?

Coherence limits us to an ontology. This is not to suggest that this is a bad thing. From the perspective of ontology, coherence is a one-dimensional look at a multi-dimensional reality.

Let's imagine the opposite, a completely incoherent article. We might find it amusing. This Nietzschean logic, that something good can come out of its opposite, appears to be true.

Intuitively, we are aware that coherence is not the end game. Appealing to human nature is a better approach. Abstract artists, for instance, understand this tension.

Then there's a bigger problem, our tendency to equate coherence with truth. This is a bias that we may become conditioned to believe is true. In this sense, fear of contradiction is misplaced and closes us to diverse possibilities.

Coherence provides us with clarity of communication, consistency, a culture of growth and comfort. And yet, ontology suggests that our contradictions are necessary.

## *Compulsion*

Compulsion may be one of the biggest afflictions of our times. It appears to be affecting our youth more than it does the older generations. At the same time, such an observation depends on context.

An obsession with an ontology is a form of compulsion. But feeling forced to adopt an ontology that is not one's own is what I mean here by compulsion.

Feeling compelled to believe in a single dimension, when there are several, is a compulsion that has no end in sight at the moment.

There may be easy fixes. Media may be part of the problem, but it can also be part of the solution. This requires conscious reframing.

## *Body / Mind*

The divide between the 'body' and 'mind' captures an important debate. Depending on how we look at it, an ontology will privilege one or the other, or attempt to sidestep the issue.

Contextual gender, for instance, will privilege the body as a reaction to the excesses of the mind.

The relative merits cannot be distinguished without a principle of equivalence, which is of course intuitively true. They are both important.

The need for balance goes beyond metaphysical debates, it has physiological implications. The human body isn't designed to merely be the vessel for the mind.

In one sense, modern life requires specialized capabilities, and this is why we evolve ontologies. And in this process of specialization, we privilege the body or the mind. Or we adopt a different ontology that considers their equivalence.

Without acknowledging that one is valuable, we will continue to resist acknowledging the other. This privileging of the mind or the body, however, appears to be inevitable and gives rise to our ontological perspectivism.

To deny that this happens, or say it is unnecessary, is shortsighted. Worse, it fuels our battlefields.

### *Attraction / Fear*

Differences fascinate us. Yet, we are wired to fear them. We condition ourselves to fear them. The laws of attraction, for instance, revolve around differences. But our narratives are based on stereotypes.

Every human being is attractive, but this appreciation requires developing an ontological awareness. Instead, everyday narratives perpetuate myths and biases. They do not serve us well. It's easy to attribute differences to conditioning, beliefs, or genetics.

A radical rethink is waiting patiently on the sidelines, and academia is several steps behind wider society.

Instead, we should consider how we are driven by the search for complementarity or chemistry in work and relationships.

Our attempts to communicate across differences, more often than not, do not produce the desired results.

As such, stretching towards differences and staying with this 'strangeness' and 'discomfort' is hard because we have little training. This is one reason why we may need subtexts in an academic setting.

In the absence of a principle of equivalence, we are not motivated to communicate. Without this recognition, communication can be dangerous.

### *Strangeness*

We do strange things without realizing it. Yet, we may believe we are being reasonable. This 'strangeness' goes to the core of our interpersonal conflict.

Without feedback, we are generally unaware of our behavior. What may seem normal to us will be strange to another. This means 'what is normal' is a question of ontology.

Similarly, there is a strange mirroring of narratives between ontologies. This supports an interpretation of co-arising, opposites, and dependence. Like in an endless knot, one's point of departure is another's point of arrival.

If we dig deep enough, we find reasons we've been looking for. Confirmation bias is built in, as it were. These are our necessary contradictions.

A related observation is 'discomfort.'

We condition ourselves to avoid discomfort. Yet this avoidance won't provide a path to learning and growth. Staying with the discomfort may offer more insights.

After the ecstasy, Jack Kornfield reminded us, there's the laundry. Even on a spiritual path, we have everyday



chores to think of. In other words, there is some discomfort that goes with everyday life.

Differences are essentially conversations around discomfort and strangeness because what is comfortable gets subsumed under acceptable behavior. Comfort is necessary, but it often means being dimensionally unchallenged.

Greater familiarity with differences will allow us to bridge these divides. Observations of 'strangeness,' across the board, supports the argument for equivalence.

To put it differently, it's ok to be a quiet person, and it's ok to be a loud activist. But we have to find some way for our worlds to meet.

## *Assumptions*

How does an assumption stick in our minds? Assumptions are problematic because they are thoughts about a world that we find difficult to understand. Possibly, they are thoughts about a world we were not meant to understand.

Yet, to make sense of something, we form assumptions. We care about subjectivities, but we gravitate towards assumptions, philosophies, and theories.

Ontological insights are useful because they help us loosen the bricks. What's behind a brick is not what we would expect. Maybe assumptions operate like dams. Anguish, misery, and frustration probably go into the formation of dams.

And, we have a choice, whether to stay with subjectivities or swing towards the theoretical. Like a

pendulum, we swing between simple truths and complex philosophies.

### *The Missing Oranges*

We are gifted a bag of oranges. And we enjoy the oranges. Then we wonder. What if half of them are missing? How would I know?

Our relationship with knowledge is similar, it's always partial. We don't know which part of the picture is incomplete. Do we really know people, for instance?

Given this reality, we try to minimize negative outcomes.

To mitigate negative outcomes, we invest in theories. Theories defend everything we do. In the physical and social sciences, they give us the benefits of consistency and our daily comforts.

They legitimize behavior and policies, and determine our quality of life. Many of us dedicate our lives to understanding theories, consistency and expanding the reach of science.

But if theories contradict each other, where does that leave us? Are all theories built on assumptions, and do assumptions commit us to ontologies? We must get back to the question of representation.

What is representation? And what is an ontology? Are we comfortable with our ontological choices? There is no reason why we shouldn't be.

And we can make a decision.

Do we care about our ontology, or do we just care about the oranges?

## Summary

*Reach high, for stars lie hidden in you.*

—Rabindranath Tagore

*Mind precedes all mental states.*

—Dhammapada

From wireless devices to rocket ships, our achievements in the physical sciences are remarkable. It seems the impossible is possible. And, even in the social sciences, ontology suggests that anything is possible.

We can shift ontological perspective, for instance. And we can reconcile.

Our failure to fix pressing problems then reflects the state of play in philosophy. Our ability to innovate, constantly learn, run experiments, and improve has been stifled as a result.

As Elizabeth Grosz points out, creating new realities and cosmologies is a priority. How we can create new economic realities, for instance, was discussed in chapter 12.

The answer to every problem won't reside in the individual. But it can be found in the collective. That there's progress in every sphere is a cause for optimism.

Some say we need to 'rewild' ourselves due to the stresses of the techno-industrial societies we live in. This first-world problem is spreading, and the argument is valid.

And yet, technology is presented as the panacea to make our lives simpler. How do we reconcile such

contradictions? Ontology suggests that there are several solutions to such a problem.

Being familiar with a certain amount of 'chaos' in developing countries, I feel a sense of relief. Ontologies in the developing world deserve greater consideration, and careful nurturing.

We live within an ecosystem of competing and collaborating ontologies —on a global scale. Rather than stifle this diversity, we can embrace it.

What is required may be as simple as explicit recognition of differences. In this way, many solutions are rather simple.

There has been a recent trend to make movies about robots that possess AI. The lead character marvels at the wonders of life because they have fallen in love with a robot. The robot is portrayed as lifelike and more human than some humans that they know.

To the extent that it highlights the depths of our social alienation and trauma, it is worthwhile social commentary. Skepticism about our human abilities to heal and grow reflects the struggle between our subjective natures and our incongruent environments.

This reflects the state of play in philosophy.

Being surrounded by ontological battlegrounds, feelings of alienation are par for the course. This book argues for a principle of equivalence.

In this regard, the challenge that academia faces is significant. Without reconciliation within academia, we cannot expect wider reconciliation.

The discussion in this book has been presented in the spirit of academic exploration. It requires reinterpretation

and restatement. If another writer picks up an idea, then it has served its purpose.

Admittedly, I privilege the mind over the body, and the impersonal over the personal. For some, this method is home base. For others, it's alien planet and an example of difference.

When writing, what starts as an attempt to express something simple gets interpreted in various ways. This is unfortunate. Difference is a matter of utmost simplicity. To say that people are different is sufficient for most purposes.

We carve the academic pie in different ways, and each ontological perspective is significant. What's important is to recognize difference and a principle of equivalence.

With thoughtful and respectful conversations, reconciliation is possible. With patience and effort, we can get there.

There seems to be no crisis of truth in philosophy. But there's a crisis of interpretation.

## *Contact the Author*

The author, Chamath, can be contacted at  
[upendingphilosophy@yahoo.com](mailto:upendingphilosophy@yahoo.com)

# Notes

## 2. *The Ontological Imagination*

1. Grosz, Elizabeth. *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*. Duke University Press, 2005.
2. Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Columbia University Press, 1994.
3. Navare, Charudatta. "Biology Is Not as Hierarchical as Most Textbooks Paint It | Aeon Essays." Aeon, 26 Mar. 2024, [www.aeon.co/essays/biology-is-not-as-hierarchical-as-most-textbooks-paint-it?](http://www.aeon.co/essays/biology-is-not-as-hierarchical-as-most-textbooks-paint-it?)
4. West, Cornel. *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*. Springer, 1989.
5. Inwood, Michael. *Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction*. Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2019.
6. Blakeslee, Sandra. "How Does The Brain Work?" *The New York Times*, 11 Nov. 2003, [www.nytimes.com/2003/11/11/science/how-does-the-brain-work.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/11/science/how-does-the-brain-work.html).

## 3. *Dramatic Self / Nominality / Performativity*

1. Garver, Eugene. Aristotle's Rhetoric on Rhetoric's Definition and Limits, *Revue internationale de philosophie*, vol. 286, no. 4, 2018, pp. 333-359.
2. Gorman, Amanda. "An Ode We Owe" *thehummingbirdpost.com*, 24 Jan. 2024, [www.thehummingbirdpost.com/home-page/2022/9/22/amanda-gorman-ode](http://www.thehummingbirdpost.com/home-page/2022/9/22/amanda-gorman-ode).
3. Parker, Dorothy. "Threnody." *Poets.org*, 1926, [www.poets.org/poem/threnody](http://www.poets.org/poem/threnody).

4. Wheatley, Phillis. "To S.M. A Young African Painter, on Seeing His Works." 1773.  
[www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52519/to-s-m-a-young-african-painter-on-seeing-his-works](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52519/to-s-m-a-young-african-painter-on-seeing-his-works).
5. Rabinow, Paul. "The Foucault Reader." 1984. p. 350
6. Lahey, Stephen. "William Ockham and Trope Nominalism." *Franciscan studies* 55.1, 1998: 105-120.
7. Longworth, Guy, "John Langshaw Austin", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.),  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2023/entries/austin-jl/>
8. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 2002.
9. Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. University of Edinburgh 1956.
10. Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748, 1777) Hume Texts Online  
<https://davidhume.org/texts/e/1>
11. Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy*. Routledge, 2004.
12. Cottle, Michelle, et al. "Opinion | Are We All Authoritarians at Heart?" *The New York Times*, 1 Dec. 2023,  
[www.nytimes.com/2023/12/01/opinion/trump-milei-wilders-strongmen.html?showTranscript=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/01/opinion/trump-milei-wilders-strongmen.html?showTranscript=1).
13. Tocqueville's Critique of Socialism (1848) | Online Library of Liberty. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/tocqueville-s-critique-of-socialism-1848>.
14. Bohl, Kenneth W. "Leadership as Phenomenon: Reassessing the philosophical ground of leadership studies." *Philosophy of Management* 18.3 (2019): 273-292.
15. Hamel, Gary, and Michele Zanini. *Humanocracy: Creating organizations as amazing as the people inside them*. Harvard Business Press, 2020.
16. Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Beyond Good and Evil," translated by Walter Kaufmann in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, New York: Random House, 1966.



17. Cavarero, Adriana. *Relating narratives: Storytelling and selfhood*. translated by Paul A. Kottman, Routledge, 2014.
18. Butler, Judith. *Senses of the Subject*. Fordham University Press, 2020.
19. Spencer, C. Ivan. *Tweetable Nietzsche: His Essential Ideas Revealed and Explained*. Zondervan Academic, 2016.
20. Chomsky's Philosophy. "Noam Chomsky - Postmodernism I." YouTube, 13 Sept. 2015, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjQA0e0UYzI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjQA0e0UYzI).
21. Hume, David. "Of National Characters" *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, Part 1 (1741, 1777) Hume Texts Online. [www.davidhume.org/texts/empl1/nc](http://www.davidhume.org/texts/empl1/nc).
22. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

#### *4. Structural Self / Holism / Stoicism / Heideggerianism*

1. Rosenberg, Marshall. *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion*. First Edition. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 1999.
2. Thatcher, Margaret. 'Interview for "Woman's Own" ("No Such Thing as Society").' in *Margaret Thatcher Foundation: Speeches, Interviews and Other Statements*. London, 1987
3. "We Have Leaders Who Are 'Unfailingly Negative' About the Country, Says Harvard's Arthur Brooks." CNBC, 5 Jan. 2024, [www.cnn.com/video/2024/01/05/we-have-leaders-who-are-unfailingly-negative-about-the-country-says-harvards-arthur-brooks.html](http://www.cnn.com/video/2024/01/05/we-have-leaders-who-are-unfailingly-negative-about-the-country-says-harvards-arthur-brooks.html).
4. Epictetus. *the Discourses*, The Internet Classics Archive <https://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/discourses.html>.
5. Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. *On Anger*, Translated by Roger L'Estrange
6. Scholes, Robert. *Structuralism in Literature: an Introduction*. Yale University Press, 1974.

6b Cohn-Gordon, Reuben. "Are The Exact Words of a Language Arbitrary or Necessary? | Aeon Essays." Aeon, 4 Mar. 2024, <https://aeon.co/essays/are-the-exact-words-of-a-language-arbitrary-or-necessary?>

7. Piaget, Jean. Structuralism (psychology revivals). Psychology Press, 2015.

8. Grondin, Jean. "Why Reawaken the Question of Being?" Heidegger's Being and Time Critical Essays, edited by Richard Polt, Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

9. Heidegger, Martin. The Basic Problems of Phenomenology. Translated by Albert Hofstadter, Indiana University Press, 1988.

10. Iacovou, Susan, and Weixel-Dixon, Karen. Existential Therapy: 100 Key Points and Techniques. United Kingdom, Taylor & Francis, 2015.

11. Crowell, Steven. "Subjectivity: Locating the First-Person in Being and Time" Heidegger's Being and Time Critical Essays, edited by Richard Polt, Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

12. Meinong, Alexius. On the Theory of Objects (translation of 'Über Gegenstandstheorie', 1904). In Roderick Chisholm (ed.), Realism and the Background of Phenomenology. Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press. 1904

13. Goddard, David. On Structuralism and Sociology. The American Sociologist, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1976.

14. Fernandez, Anthony Vincent. "Beyond the Ontological Difference: Heidegger, Binswanger, and the Future of Existential Analysis." In K. Aho, Ed., Existential Medicine: Essays on Health and Illness,

New York: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018.

14b. Evans, Colleen A. "A Study of Goethe's Philosophy of Science." 1980.

15. Koestler, Arthur. The Ghost in the Machine. Macmillan 1967.

16. Dresser, Sam. "Heidegger V Carnap: How Logic Took Issue With Metaphysics" Aeon, 8 Apr. 2021, [www.aeon.co/essays/heidegger-v-carnap-how-logic-took-issue-with-metaphysics](http://www.aeon.co/essays/heidegger-v-carnap-how-logic-took-issue-with-metaphysics).

17. Inwood, Michael. *Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction*. Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2019.
18. Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence of Truth." *Engagements Across Philosophical Traditions*, 2008.
18. Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Harper & Row, 1971.
19. "Public Support for the Monarchy Is Lowest Among Young Britons, but That's Nothing New." PBS NewsHour, 15 Sept. 2022, [www.pbs.org/newshour/world/public-support-for-the-monarchy-is-lowest-among-young-britons-but-thats-nothing-new](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/public-support-for-the-monarchy-is-lowest-among-young-britons-but-thats-nothing-new).
20. Rolin, Kristina. "The Bias Paradox in Feminist Standpoint Epistemology." *Episteme* 3.1–2, 2006. 125–136.
21. Oltermann, Philip. "Heidegger's 'Black Notebooks' Reveal Antisemitism at Core of His Philosophy." *The Guardian*, 30 Nov. 2017, [www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/13/martin-heidegger-black-notebooks-reveal-nazi-ideology-antisemitism](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/13/martin-heidegger-black-notebooks-reveal-nazi-ideology-antisemitism).

### *5. Relational Self / Values / Context*

1. Sparks, Nicholas. *Dear John*. Hachette UK, 2010.
2. Sparks, Nicholas. *The Rescue*. Hachette UK, 2011.
3. Henry, B. Charles. "The Philosophy of Meaning and Value." *ARPN Journal of Science and Technology* 3.6 (2013): 593-597.
4. World Bank Gender Data Portal, <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/china>.
5. Lawson, S. (2008). Political Studies and the Contextual Turn: A Methodological/Normative Critique. *Political Studies*, 56(3), 584-603. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00706.x>
6. Lotto, Beau. *Deviate: The Science of Seeing Differently*. Hachette UK, 2017.

7. Irwin, William, ed. *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. Open Court Publishing, 2002.
8. Carr, Emily. "To Fight the 'War on Woke,' We Need Poetry and Poets - Ms. Magazine." *Ms. Magazine*, 12 Oct. 2023, <https://msmagazine.com/2023/10/12/new-college-of-florida-poetry-gender-studies-women>.
9. Gergen, Kenneth J. *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
10. "Suffering, Relatedness and Transformation: Levinas and Relational Psychodynamic Theory." Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, <https://crownschool.uchicago.edu/student-life/advocates-forum/suffering-relatedness-and-transformation-levinas-and-relational>.
11. Polan, Shira. "So Little Time." *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 1 Nov. 2016, [www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/201611/so-little-time](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/201611/so-little-time).
12. Inwood, Michael. *Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction*. Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2019.
13. Haldane, Elizabeth S., and George Robert Thomson Ross. "The philosophical works of Descartes." Cambridge University Press 1911.
14. Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal*. Harvard University Press, 2019.
15. Gergen, Kenneth J. "The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology." (1992).
16. Hamel, Gary, and Michele Zanini. *Humanocracy: Creating Organizations as Amazing as the People Inside Them*. Harvard Business Press, 2020.
17. Koestler, Arthur. *The Ghost in the Machine*. Macmillan 1967.
18. Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulations, 1981.

## *6. Objective Rational Self / Representation / Causality*

1. Rationality Noun - Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary [www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/rationality?q=rationality](http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/rationality?q=rationality). Accessed 3 March, 2024.
2. Güven, Melis. "Critical Art: Plato and Aristotle's Debate Over Poetry." Arcadia, 22 July 2022, [www.byarcadia.org/post/critical-art-plato-and-aristotle-s-debate-over-poetry#](http://www.byarcadia.org/post/critical-art-plato-and-aristotle-s-debate-over-poetry#).
3. Lloyd, Tara. "The Son of Man: Magritte's Famous Contribution to Surrealism." Singulart Magazine, 30 Jan. 2023, [www.singulart.com/en/blog/2019/10/10/the-son-of-man-magrittes-famous-contribution-to-surrealism/#](http://www.singulart.com/en/blog/2019/10/10/the-son-of-man-magrittes-famous-contribution-to-surrealism/#).
4. De Beauvoir, Simone. "The Second Sex." Social Theory Re-Wired. Routledge, 2016. 367-377.
5. Beausoleil, François. The Blame-Free State. 2014
6. Miller, Kenneth R. The Human Instinct: How we evolved to have reason, consciousness, and free will. Simon & Schuster, 2019.
7. Rifkin, Jeremy. The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis. Penguin, 2009.
8. "Can You Have a Healthy Democracy Without a Common Set of Facts?" The Economist, 14 Dec. 2023, [www.economist.com/leaders/2023/12/14/can-you-have-a-healthy-democracy-without-a-common-set-of-facts](http://www.economist.com/leaders/2023/12/14/can-you-have-a-healthy-democracy-without-a-common-set-of-facts).
9. Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense." Truth: Engagements Across Philosophical Traditions (2005): 14-25.
10. Habermas, Jürgen. The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason. Vol. 2. Beacon press, 1985.
11. Poster, Mark, and Jacques Mourrain. "Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings." 2001.
12. Foucault, Michel. Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason. Routledge, 2003.

13. West, Cornel. *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*. Springer, 1989.

14. Rabinow, Paul. "The Foucault Reader." 1984. p. 14

### *7. Pragmatic Self*

1. Simpson, Barbara. "Pragmatism: A Philosophy of Practice." *The SAGE handbook of qualitative business and management research methods*. Cassell, Cathy, et al. (eds) 2017.

2. James, William. *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. 1907.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5116/5116-h/5116-h.htm>

3. Schiller, F. C. S. *Plato or Protagoras? Being a critical examination of the Protagoras speech in the Theætetus with some remarks upon error*. Oxford, B. H. Blackwell. 1908.

4. Bonazzi, Mauro, "Protagoras", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.),

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/protagoras>.

5. Murdoch, Iris. *The Sovereignty of Good*. United Kingdom, Taylor & Francis, 2013

6. Rorty, Richard. *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays, 1972-1980*. University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

7. Hildebrand, David L. *Beyond Realism and Antirealism: John Dewey and the Neopragmatists*. Vanderbilt University Press, 2003.

8. Taylor, Astra. *Democracy May Not Exist, But We'll Miss It When It's Gone*. Henry Holt and Company, 2019

### *8. Subjectivities*

1. Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>

2. Lotto, Beau. *Deviate: The Science of Seeing Differently*. Hachette UK, 2017.

### *9. Perspectivism*

1. Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *The Monadology*. translated by Robert Latta, 1898

<https://people.uvawise.edu/philosophy/phil206/Leibniz.html>

2. Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. translated by J. M. D. Meiklejohn, 1781

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4280/4280-h/4280-h.htm>

3. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Vintage, 1989.

4. Pepper, Stephen C. *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence*. University of California Press, 2023.

5. Brown, Curtis and Luper, Steven. *Naturalized Epistemology*, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis, 2010,

<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/naturalized-epistemology/v-2>.

6. Sivado, Akos. "Ways to be Understood: The Ontological Turn and Interpretive Social Science." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 50.6 (2020): 565-585.

7. Holbraad, Martin, and Pedersen, Morten Axel. *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition*. India, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

8. Burrow, John. *A History of Histories: Epics, Chronicles, and Inquiries from Herodotus and Thucydides to the Twentieth Century* Burrow, Vintage, 2008.

9. White, Hayden V. *Metahistory : the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press. 1985.

10. Gardner, Howard E. *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. Basic books, 2011.
11. Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality*. The Free Press. 1979
12. Nehamas, Alexander. *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*. United Kingdom, University of California Press, 2000.
13. West, Cornel. *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*. United Kingdom, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989.
14. Geertz, Clifford. "Distinguished lecture: Anti anti-relativism." *American anthropologist* 86.2 (1984): 263-278.

#### *10. Our New Science*

1. Prigogine, Ilya. *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos, and the New Laws of Nature*. Free Press, 1997.
2. Bohr, Niels. *Discussions With Einstein on Epistemological Problems in Atomic Physics*. 1949.  
[www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/dk/bohr.htm#](http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/dk/bohr.htm#).
3. Smith, Wolfgang. *Physics: A Science in Quest of an Ontology*. N.p., Philos-Sophia Initiative Foundation, 2023.
4. Bell, John Stewart. 'Against 'Measurement'' *Physics World*, August 1990.
5. Hume, David. "Sceptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding" *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748, 1777) *Hume Texts Online*  
<https://davidhume.org/texts/e/4>
6. Putnam, Hilary. *The collapse of the fact/value dichotomy and other essays*. Harvard University Press, 2004.
7. Schmidt, Heinz-Juergen, "Structuralism in Physics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.),



<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/physics-structuralism>

8. Popova, Maria. "Nobel-Winning Physicist Wolfgang Pauli on Science, Spirit, and Our Search for Meaning." The Marginalian, 13 Mar. 2019, [www.themarginalian.org/2019/03/13/wolfgang-pauli-carl-jung-figuring](http://www.themarginalian.org/2019/03/13/wolfgang-pauli-carl-jung-figuring).

9. Morris, Andréa. "Testing a Time-Jumping, Multiverse-Killing, Consciousness-Spawning Theory of Reality." Forbes, 23 Oct. 2023, [www.forbes.com/sites/andreamorris/2023/10/23/testing-a-time-jumping-multiverse-killing-consciousness-spawning-theory-of-reality/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/andreamorris/2023/10/23/testing-a-time-jumping-multiverse-killing-consciousness-spawning-theory-of-reality/)?

10. Blakeslee, Sandra. "How Does The Brain Work?" The New York Times, 11 Nov. 2003, [www.nytimes.com/2003/11/11/science/how-does-the-brain-work.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/11/science/how-does-the-brain-work.html).

11. Kob, Lukas. "Exploring the role of structuralist methodology in the neuroscience of consciousness: a defense and analysis." Neuroscience of consciousness vol. 2023, 17 May. 2023.

12. Chopra, Deepak. "Why Quantum Reality Is Your Reality." Medium, 3 Apr. 2023, <https://deepakchopra.medium.com/why-quantum-reality-is-your-reality-c6d31c931181>

13. Barad, Karen. Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning. United Kingdom, Duke University Press, 2007.

14. Wendt, Alexander. Quantum Mind and Social Science: Unifying Physical and Social Ontology. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

15. Fierke, Karin M. "Contraria sunt complementa: Global Entanglement and the Constitution of Difference." International Studies Review 21.1 (2019): 146-169.

## *12. Tackling Modern Problems*

1. “‘If You’re Creative, Why Can’t You Create a Solution?’ One Artist’s Imaginative Activism | Aeon Videos.” Aeon, <https://aeon.co/videos/if-youre-creative-why-cant-you-create-a-solution-one-artists-imaginative-activism>.
2. “The Future of the Care Economy 2024.” World Economic Forum, 27 Mar. 2024, [www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-the-care-economy/](http://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-the-care-economy/)?
3. "Global Financial Architecture Has Failed Mission to Provide Developing Countries With Safety Net, Secretary-General Tells Summit, Calling for Urgent Reforms." United Nations Press Releases, 22 June 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21855.doc.htm>.
4. Cohen, Patricia. “The Debt Problem Is Enormous. Experts Say the System for Fixing It Is Broken.” The New York Times, 19 Dec. 2023, [www.nytimes.com/2023/12/16/business/economy/imf-world-bank-sovereign-debt.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/16/business/economy/imf-world-bank-sovereign-debt.html).
5. Spellman, James David. “Debt Deals Must Become Part of a Country’s Economic Plan.” South China Morning Post, 24 Jan. 2024, [www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3249476/debt-deals-must-become-part-countrys-economic-plan#](http://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3249476/debt-deals-must-become-part-countrys-economic-plan#).
6. Gilligan, Carol. “Silencing of the Girls.” Aeon, 29 Feb. 2024, <https://aeon.co/essays/for-girls-silence-is-the-bad-bargain-with-patriarchy?>
7. L, Jae. “Celebrating Queer Identity and the Tyranny of Neurotypical Fun.” Medium, 29 Feb. 2024, <https://jael999.medium.com/celebrating-queer-identity-and-the-tyranny-of-neurotypical-fun-504e530073ef>.
8. Hamel, Gary, and Michele Zanini. *Humanocracy: Creating Organizations as Amazing as the People Inside Them*. Harvard Business Press, 2020.

9. "Why the Growing Gulf between Young Men and Women?" The Economist, The Economist Newspaper, [www.economist.com/international/2024/03/13/why-the-growing-gulf-between-young-men-and-women](http://www.economist.com/international/2024/03/13/why-the-growing-gulf-between-young-men-and-women). Accessed 13 Mar, 2024.
10. Somin, Ilya. "Opinion | Why the Rule of Law Suffers When We Have Too Many Laws." Washington Post, 2 Oct. 2017, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2017/10/01/why-the-rule-of-law-suffers-when-we-have-too-many-laws/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2017/10/01/why-the-rule-of-law-suffers-when-we-have-too-many-laws/).
11. The Editorial Board. "Opinion | Let Prisoners Learn While They Serve." The New York Times, 16 Aug. 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/08/16/opinion/prison-education-programs-.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/16/opinion/prison-education-programs-.html).
- Kenner, Max. "Opinion | Something Wonderful Is Happening in American Prisons. Really. Something Wonderful Is Happening in American Prisons. Really." The New York Times, 17 Nov. 2023, [www.nytimes.com/2023/11/17/opinion/college-prisons.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/17/opinion/college-prisons.html).
12. Benko, Jessica. "The Radical Humaneness of Norway's Halden Prison." The New York Times Magazine, 26 March, 2015 <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/magazine/the-radical-humaneness-of-norways-halden-prison.html#>
13. Grosz, Elizabeth. Time travels: Feminism, nature, power. Duke University Press, 2005.
14. Ducharme, Jamie. "America Has Reached Peak Therapy. Why Is Our Mental Health Getting Worse?" TIME, 28 Aug. 2023, <https://time.com/6308096/therapy-mental-health-worse-us>.
15. Califf, Robert M. "We Are Facing Extraordinary Headwinds ..." Twitter, 30 Nov. 2023, [https://twitter.com/DrCaliff\\_FDA/status/1730298837950927246](https://twitter.com/DrCaliff_FDA/status/1730298837950927246).
16. Kory, Pierre and Pfeiffer, Mary Beth. This is bigger than COVID: Why are so many Americans dying early?" The Hill, 13 Dec. 2023, <https://thehill.com/opinion/healthcare/4354004->

[this-is-bigger-than-covid-why-are-so-many-americans-dying-early.](#)

17. Harter, Jim. "Employee Engagement Vs. Employee Satisfaction and Organizational Culture." Gallup.com, 13 Aug. 2022, [www.gallup.com/workplace/236366/right-culture-not-employee-satisfaction.aspx.](https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236366/right-culture-not-employee-satisfaction.aspx)

18. Kraft, Jessica Carew. "How to Rewild Yourself." *Psyche*, 14 Feb. 2024, <https://psyche.co/guides/how-to-reconnect-with-your-wild-nature?>

19. Kinzler, Katherine D. *How you say it: Why you talk the way you do? And what it says about you.* Houghton Mifflin, 2020.

20. "The Autism Paradox." *AMA Journal of Ethics*, edited by Kathleen, Miller, vol. 17, no. 4, Apr. 2015, pp. 297–98. [https://doi.org/10.1001/journalofethics.2015.17.4.fred1-1504.](https://doi.org/10.1001/journalofethics.2015.17.4.fred1-1504)

21. Crompton, Catherine J., et al. "'I Never Realised Everybody Felt as Happy as I Do When I Am Around Autistic People': A Thematic Analysis of Autistic Adults' Relationships With Autistic and Neurotypical Friends and Family." *Autism*, vol. 24, no. 6, Mar. 2020, pp. 1438–48. [https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320908976.](https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320908976)

22. Burcher, Chris. "It's Not Low Self-Worth. It's Autism." *Medium*, 20 Feb. 2024, [https://medium.com/@kpluseiswise/its-not-low-self-worth-it-s-autism-aac6ce80ab90.](https://medium.com/@kpluseiswise/its-not-low-self-worth-it-s-autism-aac6ce80ab90)

23. Baron-Cohen, Simon, et al. "The Paradox of Autism: Why Does Disability Sometimes Give Rise to Talent?" *The Paradoxical Brain*. Ed. Narinder Kapur. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 274–288. Print.

24. Gergen, Kenneth J., Hoffman, Lynn, and Anderson, Harlene. "Is diagnosis a disaster? A constructionist dialogue." *Handbook of relational diagnosis and dysfunctional family patterns* (1996): 102-118.

25. McGuire, Deborah B. "Comprehensive and multidimensional assessment and measurement of pain." *Journal of pain and symptom management* 7.5 (1992): 312-319.

