

Can Anybody Hear?

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The Separator is the Connector

How the semantic gap between Ontology & Epistemology can be generalized to provide a metaphysics-of-postmetaphysics which not only yields a univocal conceptualization of pluralism, integralism and evolutionary nondualism but also resolves the superficial impasse between the “integral” and “critical realist” styles of metatheory.

Overview: The Rocky Marriage of Knowing & Being

Young school children have, for generations, tried to tickle each other’s funny philosophical bone with a seemingly naive question: *If a tree falls in the forest, and nobody is around to hear it, does it make a sound?*

Older children (all of us) continue this playground game in many curious ways. Just think about how much of our collective mindspace has been used or abused wondering, for example, whether quantum-scale observations can be said to exist before they are observed. As soon as human beings get a little education and free time, they are at risk of slipping into the endless quagmire of being, nonbeing & protobeing.

This is a particularly relevant issue for the intellectual wing of integrative culture because it touches on the relationship between fundamental facets of reality such as subjectivity and objectivity. An integral model is a metatheory that attempts to functionally integrate the greatest diversity of types-of-perspectives. Although there are many ways to begin such an effort, with persistent development metatheories seem to converge upon a common set of basic existential fault lines presented by numerous philosophers under various names. One such common result is the relative independence, but deep correlation, between subjective and objective aspects of reality. In the popular integralism of Ken Wilber this “hard problem” is associated with the so-called Quadrants. The proposal is a tidy way of tracking the idea that objective phenomena do not arise

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prior or apart from communities of subjective experiencers but always in tandem. This *tetra-
arising* of internal, external, singular and plural facets of being is a constitutive element of Wilber's model. Yet another cluster of metatheorists, drawing inspiration from the history of the physical sciences, has challenged this "correlationism."

Critical Realists, Bhaskarians & Object-Oriented Ontologists are among the names associated with a doctrine about the intrinsic existential status, and independent dignity, of objects. External facts are believed to have a self-nature that stands prior to and does not depend upon being perceived, measured or observed. This is the fundamental assumption that guided the enormous success of the physical sciences from the 17th century until the early explosive arguments about the significance of quantum phenomena. It is a robust and productive assumption that is shared, in practice, by every being. We all behave as if objects existed prior to our detections of them. The mere fact that we can make discoveries seems to imply that "something" is "there already" to be discovered.

The primal independence of objects AND the profound entanglement of subjective-objective reality are both very attractive concepts which seem to be at odds with each other across the playing field of emergent metatheory.

Or maybe every discovery is secretly a kind of "inventing"?

METATHEORIST A: Reality is always a participation between observers and objects. They arise together. To be is to be experienced. Nothing is known outside of moments of detection. You really have no evidence of non-detected realities. And, morally, it is essential to keep subjectivity in the picture at all scales and in every vision of reality.

METATHEORIST B: The mere fact that we can discover things means that Reality behaves exactly as if it already existed before it was experienced by us. This is the higher understanding. It escapes the narcissism and metaphysical prejudice of people who believe, like infants, that the cosmos is here only for their own consciousness. The universe was made from electrons for billions of years before human consciousness was aware of electrons.

METATHEORIST A: You missed my point. Humans are not the special observers. Every holon is subjective. Electrons are a community of holonic observers. They experience each other. External and internal arise together at every scale. This has nothing to do with mere human psychology and sociology.

METATHEORIST B: Actually, you missed MY point! Even if electrons are conscious there are still many things at their scale of reality that exist unbeknownst to them. And even when an electron experiences (sic) another electron it only imperfectly or approximately knows that that other electron really IS. Every "something" is more than what I perceive and stands prior to my partial knowing of its nature...

And that's where the argument stood until, unfortunately, I entered the picture. In a typically verbose and cavalier I began to propose that quadrants (i.e. internal/external) are simply the wrong aspect of integral metatheory to address this slippery problem. Both the Objectivists and the

Correlationists struck me as being unduly fixated upon the notion of subjectivity and objectivity. They made good points but got nowhere because they were arguing in the wrong terrain and therefore could not see how they were trying to make the same point from different angles. Instead of having an argument about how internal and external lenses of reality are related to each other, I suggest that the debate should shift by taking serious the ontological status of what integral theory calls “the states.” In particular the structure of the Causal and Nondual states – when they are broadened beyond the mentality of meditators, spiritualists and psychedelic explorers such that they each form a full, four-quadrant and always-present dimension of every moment of existence – provide a key concept that allows us to organize and simplify our vision of reality. At the end of this essay I reproduce my cheerful old diagram demonstrating the world-picture that unites “Wilberian” and “Bhaskarian” types of metatheories. However, in the meantime, we must dive more deeply into the many little streams that feed this undulating river....

An Exegesis of the Tumbling Timber Problem

What does it mean to be “pre-detected?” Before we ask whether there ARE or ARE NOT any pre-detected *things*, we need a sense of what we are even talking about. This will start to sound like a Zen koan (What was there before anything detected anything else?) but try to keep your intellect online until the end.

One thing that “pre-detected” could mean is just nothing. Really nothing. If you aren’t registered by interaction with any other phenomena at all then you are essentially nothing. Not just an empty space of potential (for that is also “something”) but really, really nothing. Not-existent. Unreal. Unthinkable. No.

Alternatively, a pre-detected “something” might actually exist, out there, irregardless (yeah, that’s right) of whether we know anything about it or not. That’s pretty close to the entire premise of Science. After all, the fact that we detect things means they had to exist prior to our detection. If they just came into existence at the moment they got encountered then what was it that came into existence and what was it that did the encountering???

Let’s go back into that childish primeval forest where trees fall silently into the verdant moss of the forest floor. Think it through carefully. DOES a tree make a sound if no one is there to hear it? There is no human around. You are not there. No animal nearby has any ears. There is not digital recorder stashed nearby for later listening. Nothing noticed this tree falling. Not a single squirrel flinched. Not a single mote of dust in the air was wiggled by sound waves. Not one atom was displaced. No entangled quantum information was nonlocally exchanged. NO DETECTION WHATSOEVER.

Nothing registered or was changed by the event in any way.

So did it happen?

We are up against some very basic problems. We find that we are not totally clear about what “it” and “happen” actually mean. What is the rule for saying whether or not something *exists*? Well, perhaps this problem is not as nebulous as it first appears. Let’s put on our Heidegger caps

and think about the assumptions anyone would be required to make in order to determine that an “it” exists or not:

a) Operational distinction. We need to assume particularity. It is not some other it. The “it” is not interchangeable. Whatever we mean by “it” has to be specifically the “it” that we mean.

b) Ontological Comparison. We need to have already assumed that existing and nonexisting are options. These are two paths that our particular situation might end up travelling. It may be 0 (doesn’t exist) or 1 (exists) or some superposition or gradient between those two conditions. To ask “Does it exist?” means that we posit a comparison-of-being. The possibility of being or not being is presupposed. Either it totally exists, totally doesn’t exist or – like a measure of temperature – operates at some mixture of existing and not-existing.

So if we want to inquire into the status of “objects” prior to detection by any subjective consciousness or community of observers at any scale then we are, implicitly, trying to get the results of a specific comparison between being and non-being. All practical comparisons in the world already implied things that have been detected. But even things that haven’t been detected can only be thought about by means of comparative potential that can end up in at least two different states.

At the everyday level, detection means that something stands out (to somebody) from its background. Yet at a more bizarre and fundamental level there is already a comparison between being-able-to-stand-out OR not. Suppose I leave the forest and walk down the beach. As I stroll along in the breeze, I find that I am evaluating the beach as it passes into the ocean. Where is the moment of transition? Where does the beach end and the ocean begin? Am I dealing with sameness (still the beach) or difference (now the ocean). The *shoreline* is a gradient field of same-difference. Every possible detection falls somewhere between

Is < > Not
Same < > Different

Notice that we could phrase the comparison in reverse order. We might want the word “difference” to mean that our “it” is different than itself (therefore non-existent) or that it is different than something else (therefore existing). In either case we are utilizing the same operation.

Reality is constituted by the *minimum possible comparison*.

If there was no possible comparison then there would be no possibility of either existing or not-existing. Yet if the comparison was more elaborate then it would cease to pertain specifically to the question of existence. To inquire of existence is to focus, by definition, upon the lowest or most basic possible comparative potential.

This may seem like digression from the main theme but it is quite essential. In order to make sense of how the Causal and Nondual state-domains provide a key to resolving the metatheoretical

impasse of “objects themselves” we must get a sense of precisely how reality behaves and is structured at its most primitive.

If a Three Falls in the Forest...

Two apparently diverse streams of human wisdom have concerned themselves with the most fundamental ontological possibilities. Both have proceeded through rigorous introspection, contemplation and intensified coherent conscious inspection of the patterns of the world. One group is typically described as mystical or meditative. Their focus is often on the most primitive fact of their own self-awareness. The worshippers of pure awareness, the I-beyond-the-”I”, the mindspace between and prior to thought, the zero-degree of Self. Alternatively there have been mathematicians, logicians, philosophers, geometers, et al, who have spent their lives clarifying the precise moment of equality or inequality of reasoning, the ultra-abstract fact of identity, the quintessence of why $1+1$ “is” 2. There is really nothing less mystical or profound about higher mathematics but the historical friendliness of math and technology has made it seem foreign to many spiritually-oriented people.

I AM THAT I AM. IS-NESS. “=” . All those who fall in love with this most primitive existential intensity are involved in an attempt to contemplative the nature and results of the minimum possible comparison.

$$3+3=6$$

That is true. It is as true as possible. We know the answer is 6.

We could say, “Who knows? Maybe anything is possible!” but when we personally check for ourselves we come up $3+3=6$. Everyone who checks comes up with that answer unless they go to such elaborate and complicated lengths that it no longer seems as if they are answering the same question. Even machines come up with the same answer. $3+3$ DOES equal 6. Flip it over, take it apart, run it backwards and forwards – this is an extremely reliable piece of information. If anything can be said to be true, to have the “force” of “actually existing” then it is the equals sign which indicates that two abstract quantities are equivalent. Everything we’ve achieved as a species depends upon this intense and practical degree of veracity.

Still, you *could* doubt it. A least a little. I mean you do have “shift your attention” from one side of the equation to the other. You leave the $3+3$ behind and arrive, a nanosecond later, at the 6. Even if we said $3=3$ (I am that I am!) there would be a vanishingly small bit of wiggle room. How do you really, totally, finally know that those two 3s indicate the same thing?

Does it achieve 100% verification? Does it pass the existential comparison *utterly and absolutely* ?

Of course the answer is Yes and No. Duh. We are dealing with (a) the most true possible thing (b) non-total certainty. These facts, together, describe the situation. We are not facing absolute absence of all possible doubt but we ARE facing the least possible and vanishingly small and endless irrelevant possibility of being incorrect.

In the matter of $3=3$ or $3+3=6$ we infinitesimally likely to be wrong. INFINITESimally. If you more toward it, you never get any closer. It is the horizon. It is the vanishing point. It is not 0 but rather 0.000000000..... n

When we say “ABSOLUTELY” we mean “ENDLESSLY POSITIVELY APPROXIMATE”. It never gets there. It goes forward. It is infinitely true because you can never get out in front of it and find a spot where it ceases to apply. It runs forever like the digits of pi. We may say that something is real or false with infinite practical certainty but it does not sit there like a discrete lump. It flows toward (not TO) eternity.

Thus we do not particularly care whether something is true or untrue. We care in rather a more elegant and pragmatic fashion that something is “as true as possible” or as “untrue as possible”. Or else we admit that we cannot, at this time, determine it maximally. “=” is not total truth. It is maximum truth. The essential is-ness potential, the ontology self-identity of anything is a maximum.

So if we want to explore the question of whether a “something” can “exist” prior to detection, then we are pondering it’s potential to occupy a position within the comparison between maximum self-approximating validation and minimum self-approximating validation. To potentially exist, to be checkable-for-existence, is to be pre-supposed to be on the spectrum between vanishingly-small-confirmation and vanishingly-small-disconfirmation. Between almost totally real and almost utterly non-existent. This is the situation of the ontological comparison. It is the condition that makes possible the question, “What is Real?”

Reality IS the condition that makes possible the question “What is Real?”

Realness is the opening to the unlimited comparison between “more real” and “less real” unto their endless self-approximating and incompletely achieved extremes. A spectrum of approximate comparison running from the least to the greatest confirmation.

ONTOLOGY & EPISTEMOLOGY: Marriage counselling

It is commonplace to say that ontology studies *the condition of being* & epistemology studies *the condition of knowing*. What exists AND how do we know things? Two great questions.

When integral theory is accused of metaphysical correlationism, it is precisely these two questions that are leveraged. People want to know: does the integral theorist make the obvious mistake of conflating “knowing” and “being” ? Surely you are not even dealing with ontology when you talk about tetra-arising? The external world is not what is known or perceived about the external environment! Do the four quadrants not merely refer to four lens of knowing? Do they not actually *ignore* the true real of objects by substituting in their place the “external knowing” of the Upper Right quadrant which is really just a form of epistemology? What about what what really exists whether anyone knows about it or not????

To which the integral theorist replies, placidly, that if we say it really exists then... aren't we knowing about it? Isn't every situation an onto-epistemological situation? Don't we always find both of them interblended into everything?

This is a restatement of the basic metatheoretical divergence that this essay is confronting. We are seeing, again and again, two issues:

- a) the critical assertion of the independence of objects (and "others") from our perception and interpretation
- b) the integrative assertion that being & knowing move hand-in-hand at all scales

One class of metatheory implores us to remember, both practically and philosophically, that others/objects always exceed what we know about them. They are more than just "in relationship" to us. We can be wrong about them. An excess, a surplus, a remainder will always exist. No matter how well you know "something" it must actually consist of more than just how it appears to your brain, your eyes, your measurement devices, your knowledge. Being exceeds knowing.

Another class of metatheory reminds us sagely that Being and Knowing can never be fundamentally separated. Beings are knowable beings & knowing is always knowing-about-beings. Ontology is the ontology we know about. Epistemology is what we know about ontology. Reality is ambidextrous. These two brain hemispheres must operate in tandem. Every outside has an inside. Every inside has an outside. Knowledge presupposes a world. A world MUST appear as interactions, knowledge, detections or else it does not appear at all.

- a) ontology, compared to epistemology, exceeds, withdraws, escapes, transcends
- b) epistemology, compared to ontology, is always present, always tracking, always relating, always interacting

They are in comparison to each other. Even to say that one is MORE REAL (i.e. that beings are most fundamental and modes of knowing only ever potentially and partly encounter them) is a comparison.

- (a) ONTOLOGY asserts that reality consists of DETECTABLES whether they are detected or not. In order to enter into a relationship of being known, something must already exist.
- (b) EPISTEMOLOGY asserts that reality consists of DETECTIONS because there is no proof of existence other than in relationship and via interpretation. Things do not enter into relationships of knowing but always already occur within such relationships.

You will see that neither position is *thinkable* on its own. Only detectables can get detected. Only detections prove that there are detectables. They are complementary. Mutually required. Variant angles upon the same situation. The reason Ontology and Epistemology are traditionally paired in academic discourse is, at its most basic, because they only be defined relative to each other. The comparison between them is presupposed by the idea of either of them.

To know is to know ABOUT something. To be is to be distinguished from what is merely known. The comparison both separates and connects them. A common root structure makes available the degree of their independence and, at the same time, the fundamental entanglement of their shared operational identity.

We have come again to the same observation:

A most primitive existential comparison – allowing for variable outcomes of sameness-and/or-difference on a scale between maximum-but-not-total & minimum-but-not-total – is implied. Existence, per se, is indistinguishable from this comparison. It is presupposed by the question of whether a being “is” and it appears at the most basic conceivable thresholds. This operators is implicit between two sides of a balanced algebraic equations, between ontology & epistemology, between being & nonbeing.

And it is performatively affirmed by everyone who takes a position about the relationship between Knowing and Being. To be prior to being known, to be and be known at once & the being of knowing itself are all variants of the same comparison. It is this ambidextrous and fertile comparison, rather than detections or detectables, that constitutes the most primitive or abstract facet of Reality. We begin with same-differences. We begin with is/n’ts. We begin with the necessary enabling condition for the possibility of beings and relationships.

Now we are describing reality in a manner that suggests the unique characteristics of Causal and Nondual experience.

Wars for Subsistence

In his Response to the Critical Realists, Ken Wilber attempted to clarify his version of integral metatheory by calling upon the distinction between existing & subsisting beings. He asserted that tetra-arising worldspaces, while being inherently both subjective AND objective, do not limit reality merely to what is known, perceived and interpreted. That which ex-ists (“stands out”) in relationship to perceivers is only a small subset of the total number of entities that sub-sist (underwrite) the world.

Here Wilber (subsisting vs. existing) makes roughly the same distinction as Bhaskar (transitive vs. intransitive) and Badiou (belonging vs. inclusion) among others. This is what we would expect if we assumed that metatheories converge over time as they fleshed out by various philosophers. However we should not be hasty in assuming that similar things are identical. Are these thinkers really making the same distinction? Clearly they all involve the difference between a large class of entities that *could* be presented and a smaller class of entities that actually *are* presented. Wilber argues YES but his position is guided by a desire to demonstrate that all positions are already incorporate into the basic framework of his integrative model. Alternatively, certain Critical Realists who are incompletely satisfied by his remarks have felt that he is not naming the same distinction.

Let us take a closer peek at Wilber’s distinction:

He specifies that entities (e.g. atoms) may subsist in primitive, low-information worldspaces even if they do not exist for communities of interpreters and observers at that level of cultural and cognitive development. There is much more to reality that is known by any particular set of perceivers. He happily agrees with the Critical Realists on this point, he says. The problem in his view is not simple correlationism which treats only “detected” entities as real. Wilber’s difficulty is that a mix-up between “levels” and “quadrants” is occurring. While he accepts that ontology contains more than is known in the epistemology of any given community, he nonetheless rejects the precedence of ontology. Knowing is not predicated upon a *prior* condition of being. Neither is being dependent upon the prior existence of knowers. They co-emerge. Their relationship is in parallel – not a relationship of levels or emergent states.

Thus he is careful to attack both the “epistemic fallacy” (reality is dependent upon knowers) AND the “ontic fallacy” (reality is independent prior to knowers and cognition is a late epiphenomenon). There is no priority in this relationship. It is synchronous at every level and every scale of the cosmos. So the official (sic) integral position is not that there are not unperceived beings, no beings apart from relationships, but rather that neither beings nor relationships of knowing can be characterized as first or more basic.

Sounds good but it does not entirely remove the problem that is triggering the object-emphasizing metatheorists. They might feel that Wilber is still being a correlationist, still committing the epistemic fallacy but just in a sneakier way. After all, isn’t he just shifting the role of the perceiver and keeping the same game going? What does that mean?

I am aware that quarks exist within the bodies of sharks. The sharks are not aware of this. So when we say that the quarks *subsist* even though they don’t *exist* – aren’t we really saying that they’re reality is dependent upon MY perception? We’re still saying that quarks didn’t exist until the knower-of-quarks emerged. All we’re doing is stipulating that we are knower-of-quarks and the shark is being “considered” within OUR universe. Still sounds an awful lot like universes are real only when they are known.

On the other hand, this maybe makes no difference. Both versions of metatheory are saying that objective reality, as considered by us, contained more than is being evoked by the methods-of-knowing used cognitively and socially by any set of knowers. Arguably this IS the same position. It could be accepted but it generally isn’t accepted. Why? Because, according to me, the issue was never about the relationship between knowers and entities, detections and detectables. Wilber’s internal and external quadrants are a decoy. Attacking them will not bring the problem to light. Defending them will not resolve the problem. The two forms of metatheory we are considering have come to a stalemate by arguing over the wrong football.

Object-emphasizing metatheorists are concerned, whether they articulate this well or not, that objects/others are inherently MORE than what can be known through any given method of perception. However, they make the mistake of supposing that – in integral terms – they are claiming that the external quadrants cannot be reduced to the internal quadrants.

Tetra-enactive metatheorists (Wilber, et al) argue that objects and knowers already occur together at every level and scale of reality but that every level involves more entities (and more

dimensions of entities) than are known – as is revealed when one grows into higher worldspaces and retroactively real-izes that such additional entities and additional information was present all along. However they make the mistake of thinking that they need to defend the mutual irreducibility of ontology and epistemology which then turns out not to address the main issue.

The main issue was the MORE of objects. The relationship of the external to the internal is not particularly relevant to this impasse.

Metatheorist A: There is implicit entanglement and synchrony between internal and external realities.

Metatheorist B: Entities are MORE than can be known.

These are complementary positions.

The In(de)finite Excess

We've already spent some time discussion the infinitesimal nature of some aspects of Reality. Certain real entities or functions operate as if they were a “vanishing point”. Zero. Infinity. Pi. Although they are very real and functional, they nonetheless do not present themselves to us completely. We move toward knowing them. We get better and better. Yet we never arrive.

We discussed how “=” in mathematics and “self-identity” in mysticism both have this flavor of being maximally true, endlessly true, but never finally and ultimately true. The force of the absolute is not a given chunk of proof (as it was perhaps conceived in earlier, more concrete epochs of human thought) but rather an equivalent force expresses as an indefinitely intense approximation.

Everytime we said “100%” we really meant “99.99999999...%”.

I am just reminding us about vanishing points. Why? Because, very interestingly, this is what everything looks like if we strip off the factors that are added by knowers, perceivers, observers, detectors, interpreters, etc.

We are down at the beach, still quite near to the forest where the tree fell silently, and we are looking at a rock. A simple, plain and sturdy beach rock. What do we know about this rock?

- It is blue-grey. Or, rather, it isn't. It absorbs every other frequency of the visible spectrum of electromagnetic radiation and rejects only that one which our culturally indoctrinated eye-brain system hallucinates as blue-grey-ish.
- It is heavy. Or, rather, it isn't. It's presence in the Earth's gravitational field accelerates its mass to create the temporary illusion of “weight” when measured against a scale whose results are displayed as units of distance which are now known to be relative to the motion of the observer through space-time.

- It is made of all rocky subcomponents. Or, rather it isn't. Much of the rock is invisibly shed on the ground nearby. It is filled with empty space that vastly dwarfs the meagre amount of matter which makes up the rock. And it may be permeated by antimatter, dark energy, vacuum flux, nanoscale organisms, et al.

As science has progressed, we have learned more and more about how the most solid and pragmatic measurements are still relative to the mechanisms and methods of the observers. Our perception of the physical world was revealed to be a neurological and cultural phantasy and then the most basic phenomena of mass, time, space were revealed as complex and relative calculations. Today many of the top physicists argue that “being in a particular state” is only a temporary epiphenomena of the vast, uncertain and pluralistic nature of physical reality.

So what would happen if we removed everything that was added to reality by the observers? If every relative measure and relational calculation were stripped away – what would remain of any thing?

What would the rock be without brains to perceive it? Without the Earth to pull upon it? Without the geometry of space-time to give it motion and position? Without a Higgs field to give it mass?

It would be... nothing? Virtually nothing.

You can see whatever the rock “really is” outside of its relationships must be analogous to a vanishing point. It withdraws its essence. If it is anything at all, on its own, for itself (prior not only to what we know about it but to the knowable quantities made available in relationship to other entities) then this identity must recede to infinity. Or, more precisely, it must zoom to almost nothing. Almost. It is 0.000000.....x

If we initiate a philosophical striptease in which we try to identify the essence of an object or entity *beyond* what is our could be known about “it” by others, then we encounter this absolute but incomplete purity. An infinitesimal. We want to know what it “is” that can, through interaction, give rise to perceptions, knowledge, interpretation. But as soon as we encounter any fact whatsoever, we have already encountered knowledge, perception, interpretation.

The MORE of ontological objects, prior to correlation with observers, has the character of a particularized vanishing point. It becomes a particular version of the minimal existential comparison. Any qualities are evoked by interaction between entities and observers. The ontological status of entities prior to these interactions is real but eludes characterization by any qualities or quantities.

This seems abstract but it is the heart of the matter:

The excess of objects (asserted by object-emphasizing metatheorists) is perfectly compatible with the fact that all observables are co-evoked by behavioral and cognitive interactions (asserted by tetra-arising metatheorists) IF the ontological essence of any “it” or “other” is assumed to be *analogous to an infinitesimal*.

To simultaneously affirm that the internal and external quadrants co-evolve all “detections” AND that every “detectable” is more than, beyond or prior to any detection simply requires that there be a class of entities who possess self-identity as a structural vanishing point or indefinitely receding process.

And integrative metatheory already has such a class of entities...

The Four Ontologies

Integral metatheory follows the lead of many other attempts at Western trans-rational supersystems by affirming the validity of multiple states of consciousness epitomized in even very ancient historical literature as waking, dreaming, deep sleep & transcendence. The terms Gross, Subtle, Causal & Nondual are employed. While these words are over-associated with spiritual and mystical practices they can be readily generalized to describe whole legitimate facets of Reality. I will employ the term *state-domains* to indicate that I am treating them as not merely “inner states” but as distinct, co-equal types of Being that show up in across many philosophies under many diversely suggestive names.

The four classes of ontological entities, grouped into their state-domains, are these:

- Resistant Bodies
- Evocative Bodies
- Logical Bodies
- Blended Bodies

Or, to bring it back to what we have covered in the previous section:

- Concrete Beings
- Qualitative Beings
- Infinitesimal Beings
- Transcendental Beings

These are all strange and unfamiliar terms. We will try to use a variety of phrasings for these four state-domains of ontology so that we can both set a “sense” of their nature and also open ourselves up to how they might appear, differently phrased, in many seemingly unrelated areas of philosophy and scholarship. This is akin to what we did earlier in trying to inspect what *the mystics of self-awareness* and the *higher mathematicians & logicians* have had in common over the millennia.

While the “four quadrants” – internal and external – may be treated as lenses of knowing, four styles of detections, these may be treated as four ontologies or types of detectables. These types are revealed, like a lump under the carpet, by the basic options by which entities could enter into relational evocation of perceptible “apparent facts”.

Let’s ponder this categorization more closely.

Detectable entities *could* exert forceful resistance upon other entities – whether we know about this or not. We could call this:

- Substantial Ontology (Gross Ontology)

Other detectable shapes *could* exert an evocative influence upon other entities – whether we know about this or not. We could call this:

- Qualitative/Morphodynamic Ontology (Subtle Ontology)

Some detectable differences *could* exert an indefinitely intense logical constraint upon other entities – whether we know about this or not. We could call this:

- Syntactical Ontology (Causal Ontology)

Some detectable in-differences *could* exert an uncannily satisfying blending of entities – whether we know about this or not. We could call this:

- Functional-but-Indistinct Ontology (Nondual Ontology)

All four classes of ontic/ontological factors play a role in all real situations. For example:

When I eat a banana it pushes back on my mouth because it is a physical body. There may be much about the banana that my senses do not detect but whatever is potentially physically detectable has some capacity to resist my own physicality. Yet whatever complex of elements forms the “real banana” also enables my experience of *banana-ness*. And it could not do either of these things without some implied syntactical parameters that enable reality to operate as a field-of-different-things. But differences are not enough. They rely upon having enough in common in order to be compared - they are the same enough to be different. And that commonality-in-difference is something I might miss, minimized or interpret in numerous different modes.

These four ubiquitous forms of detection suggest four entangled options beyond or prior to any particular detections. They might be considered as four co-present aspects of pre-detected detectables that can be “known” in any of the external or internal epistemological quadrants.

A Sidenote on Mystical Reductionism

We will spend a little more time thinking about what these state-domains are like and how they, especially the Causal and Nondual, pertain to the basic status of “being-a-thing” which is situated between the two schools of metatheory whose impasse provides the jumping off place for this essay. But first let us make a short digression...

If these four state-domains constantly co-exist – rather than being a particular historically-favored sequence of internal “states of consciousness” produced by conventional spiritual practice – then we would expect not only to constantly encounter them under different guises but also to

observe unique patterns of imbalance, specialization or peculiarity where a person attempts to favor one of these state-domains in their own attention, thought and life-practice.

Just as the *reductionism* of all quadrants to one particular quadrant is considered a well-known problem by Wilber's model, let us expand that principle and consider reductionism in terms of state-domains. I will use the term "mysticism" from now on to refer specifically to the exaggerated emphasis of one state-domain at the expense of the others. This is not a pejorative term because there is no reason why you shouldn't have favourites and specializations. Rather it is a descriptive terms which simultaneously conjures attractive and frustrating elements of such specialization.

An individual who focuses their theory or practice on one state-domain may make impressive gains in the force and sophistication of that aspect. A potent mystery of insight and self-development will appear. Yet, at the same time, the realities of that state-domain will seem vexing, ungrounded, incoherent or insignificant to people situated by their attention into other state-domains. The result is that both a profound positive *mystery* and a frustrating *mystification* occur together.

Here are four kinds of "mystical" experience emerging immediately from the notion of four ontological state-domains:

- The physical universe is all that really exists.
- A subtle realm of Luminous Living Nature exists beyond physical bodies.
- An infinite, dimensionless realm of Invisible Clarification (differentiations & truths) exists on its own even without any "things" to clarify.
- An "already perfectly complete" yet novel and unfolding commonality exists between and among all apparently differentiated entities.

Although altered states of consciousness may allow us to examine any of these realms in totalizing intensity they cannot be fundamentally disentangled. From a philosophical point of view we must think these domains in their most universal applicability – not in the poetic and pragmatic terms used to celebrate them or guide aspirants toward mystical experience. The job of philosophy is not to take such phraseology at face value but to elucidate the principles which permit such experiences to be articulated in any number of different ways.

Philosophical mysticism would mean to isolate one of these domains of ontology as THE REALITY of which the other three are veils, semblances, illusions, covers, etc. produced epistemologically by the knowing of other beings.

- Common sense realists are philosophers who take the physical entities as the ontology and presume that both qualities and logical differences (and their blends) are "just" abstractions made in the psychology of experiencers.
- Artistic-Idealists take the flavors and forms to be primary while reality and logic are "limitations" imposed by the psychology of experiencers.
- Badiou takes mathematics (or meta-mathematics in terms of a Set Theory of the basic preconditions of the thought of any universe) as Ontology, per se. This is very attractive. It

gives us a universe that “really is” differences and has both semblances and solidities manufactured by the interactions of experiencers.

- And some radical nondualists take “transcendentals” or univocal dichotomy-embracing commonalities as ultimately real such that differences and the appearance of differences as objects and qualities are considered as illusory epiphenomena.

A Closer Look at the Causal/Nondual

We have tried to get a sense of the nature of a real being. From various angles we has re-arrived at a the “causal” essence of beings – infinitesimal, indefinite, transparent, like pure syntax, eternal, a vanishing recess toward the original, pre-relational, pre-qualitative, pre-quantitative *difference* that constitutes the is-ness of any particular being. This was what we called the *minimum existential comparison* in an earlier section. If all relational and observable qualities are removed or looked-past in order to locate the prior nature of the “detectable” then we find it must be so stark, so naked, so minimal, so potential that it must operate like the most pure seed of any possible cognitive encounter. A causal entity is n-dimensional. It is like that place where the digits of pi flow toward endlessly but never arrive. It is always already arrived in that incomplete, self-approximating, minimalistic absoluteness. It is the “it” that makes perceptions of itself thinkable, doable, possible. A causal entity is a proto-detection.

And anything that has this nature could be called a “causal entity”. We could cite the “=” or the “isness” of anything. We could point to the “self” of self-nature or the perfect stillness of an ultra-precise data-point that withdraws to the limitless horizon but is already presented as this withdrawal.

Any pure boundary condition is a causal object. The ontological nature of anything prior to the subtle and gross observables which are generated by its interactions with other entities. Any “distinction, per se”. And that includes the distinction between the state-domains. It makes perfect sense that the differentiation or boundary-condition between the state-domains IS their causal nature. And the capacity for them to interact with each other, to simultaneously be differentiated and blended, is their nondual nature.

While the causal state-domain is primarily languaged in apophatic, cancellative or absolutizing terms (the most, the one, nothing, emptiness, infinitesimal, isness itself, eternal, beyond form, beyond quality), the nondual state-domain is generically described in paradoxical terms that simultaneously affirm & disconfirm oppositionality (neti neti, neither this nor that, both/and, form/less, all & none, the unity of the many, the general particular, shared uniqueness, radiant void, transparency, diaphaneity, luminous form, abiding as non-seeking, dynamic stillness).

This linguistic distinction is very clear if we simply consider the difference between saying EMPTINESS versus saying WHATEVER EMPTINESS AND FULLNESS HAVE IN COMMON. Or between saying the UNIVERSAL ONE and THE ONENESS OF THE MANY OR THE MULTIPLICITY OF ONENESS. The difference pertains to the absolute specificity of entities in the causal state-domain and the simultaneous affirming & cancellation of polarities which, all together, constitute entities of the nondual state-domain. Whereas your “casual essence” might be language as the indefinitely withdrawn, and unmanifestly pure, is-ness of your being,

your “nondual essence” would be more akin to that transrational and perfect synchronicity of your manifest forms and your unmanifest potential. The quintessential and unconditional difference that makes you a self that can enter into relations of knowing with other being – even the relations we call “space” and “time” – is the description of your causal self-nature. Conversely, the description of your nondual nature is whatever Self and Not-Self have in common.

You dig?

Obviously all terms will be confused in actual usage by various communicating agents with various understanding and purposes. And looking back through our personal and anthropological history we are likely to find clunkier, more naive, more simplistic ways of phrasing these things. Increased social and cognitive complexity leads to more precise, abstract and peculiar generalizations that are typically found in conventional usage but which, nonetheless, must be structured such that they can explain why those conventional usages make sense in context.

So what we are dealing with here is a very complex nuancing of the semantics pertaining to more common experiential dimensions of everyday and extraordinary Reality.

For the entities of the causal state-domain we are using variations of a *most basic distinction prior to qualities, quantities and cosmic history*. And for entities of the nondual state-domain we are deploying *trans-oppositional terms* – concepts that simultaneously provide separation & nonseparation. Functional paradox.

Many of the most profound concepts in both spirituality and intellect make themselves available to us in both forms. That is to say there are many semantic terms which can be suggestive of either causal or nondual experience depending upon the angle from which we encounter them.

Consider the mark of the “/” in writing. This sign is a break but it may also act as a simultaneous break-and-joiner. A woman known both as Betty and Ariadne might be referred to casually as Betty/Ariadne. This means on the one hand that a basic difference exists – an alternative, a choice. A fundamental disjunction. The person we mean is specifically the one who is either referred to as Betty or Ariadne. Yet in the same mark we find these two terms brought into the most intimate possible conjunction. There is an implication that a shared identity moves between them. This common feature does not undo the dichotomy but rather eludes it while accepting it. “Someone” is both Betty AND Ariadne while also being presented as either.

A choice or a shared identity of non-cancelled opposites?

A difference or a same-difference?

The mark “/” is a nice example, though others could be chosen, because of its visual similarity to any straight line used to diagram a boundary condition. Recollect how such lines are used in metatheory diagrams to elucidate the relationship between fundamental categories of Reality. Internal/external, for example. These two territories are identified as by their pure difference from each other. Zoom in on the that dividing line and watch it retreat toward infinity like an endless fractal horizon. Yet these territories are fundamentally conjoined by that same boundary. Every

boundary connects the two things which it separates. They touch each other in the form of the boundary. A basic differential is also a shared contact point which mutually distinguishes AND mutually connects the identities that are involved.

The most basic possible form of reality is a minimal existential comparison (or *constitutive differential*). This is a causal structure but with a small shift of focus it can reveal a nondual structure as well. There is both a causal and a nondual gestalt for this fundamental unit of Reality.

The Separator is the Connector

Assuming we are totally deluded, how can we make use of this remarkable quasi-concept that seems to be able to harness the irreducible, unmanifest structure of a pre-detected Being AND its transcendental potential to operate simultaneously as itself and also as what is not itself? We see that a basic disjunction is needed to point at the causal essence and with a small shift of context any such separation can be cognized, felt, contemplated, utilized in its nondualistic character. What will do with that?

A very simple use is to unify pluralism, integralism and transcendentalism. This is what I have called the Metaphysics of Adjacency because it explicates the implied metaphysics of so-called “postmetaphysical” stances by rooting them in the logic of this “separator-connector”.

If we invoke a simplified version of the higher developmental stages in systems such as Spiral Dynamics, Gebserian philosophy, Integral Theory, etc. then we can speak generally of several postformal phases of cognition. Green, Teal & Turquoise. Higher 1st Tier, Second Tier & Third Tier. Deconstructionism, Reconstructionism & Supermind. There are numerous ways to parse these terms. I mean only to suggest a general tripartite concept in which (1) multivalent, contextual, pluralistic reason is joined by (2) integrative, meta-structural, trans-contextual, evolutionary universalism which peaks toward a more stabilized (3) transrational, nondual, ultra-consciousness.

Our humble slashmark (“/”) can symbolically provide the centerpiece for all three of these profound phases of developmental complexity. It can, for example, suggest the parallax or a-perspectival contrast which emerges into the authentic postmodern, pluralistic, postform mind which becomes increasingly conversant with multidimensional rationality and alternative reality-contexts. This form of perception has many gifts but also many challenges including fragmentation, exacerbated nihilism, narcissistic loss of objectivity and other phenomena which could be predicted from an over-emphasis on the contextual nature of reality and the awareness that distinct contexts are in tension or juxtaposition with each other across the cultural landscape. Thus the emergence of an integrative transperspectival universalism because necessary and desirable. Metatheory (and its non-cognitive correlates in other forms of intelligence) works to include & balance the various types of contexts and perspectives in a complementary and coherent fashion. A great integrative mandala of perspectives begins to emerge in a manner analogous to Einstein’s famous deployment of the speed-of-light to integrate relative measurements of space and time into a single universal system. The variations among the contexts are not lost but instead affirmed within a Great Reason that allows every perspective to co-contribute to the Whole. This “integralism” affirms the ambidexterity of the cosmos. Thus the two sides of the “/” are again presented but this time as mutually comprehensible partners rather than mutually exclusive worlds

ving for normalcy. That represent a currently emergent and fantastic possibility for higher cultural and cognitive life among human beings but our aspirations, combined with the extraordinary glimpses provided by the lives of saints, mystics and drug-takers, suggests that some even more luminous and profound state may lie beyond upper reaches of ambidextrous integrative vision-logic. Such a stage would not merely be identical to the further reaches of nondual state-mysticism found in the spiritual traditions but would bring the complex interblending of all the state-domains to such a rare degree of depth and development that the advanced mind & the incomparable illumination of non/being flow together and flower in remarkable novelty and virtually incomprehensible salience. Here the simultaneous both/and symbolized by “/” is a gift-giving jewel of endless separation-and-nonseparateness in the gross, subtle and causal dimensions of Reality at all scales. After all, proximity (when thought through carefully) is already a functional condition that unites separation and nonseparation. Love is the desire to be more transformatively “close” in operations with each other. When we are neither merged or radically separate we occupy a nondual condition whose peaks are unutterably ecstatic but whose general situation is unutterably ordinary and in fact provides the functionality of all functions! Nothing “works” until it is “close enough” – whatever that means in a given circumstance.

If we were so inclined (as I once was), we could utilize these three stages of the Metaphysics of Adjacency (MOA-1, MOA-2, MOA-3) to help us understand the growth beyond formal operational cognition into (1) pluralism (2) integralism (3) transrational, transcendental, all-state functional nondualism. To do so would be to operationalize the “/” or “proximity itself” or “adjacency” or the “separator-connector” as the fundamental reality-structure which emerges into greater and greater clarity and multidimensional utility at each progressively complex stage of development.

My own attention, as I indicated earlier, was drawn to this notion of “adjacency” when I pondered the metaphysical structures and presumptions that are necessarily implied in worldviews that call themselves *postmetaphysical* or even *post-postmetaphysical*. It became apparent to me that similar ultra-semantic proto-thought (sic) was being actively invoked by the deepest thinkers of postmodernism, integralism & evolutionary nondualism even where these individuals supposed that they were in fundamental disagreement with each other.

I began to use the term MOA (metaphysics of adjacency) to describe any worldview which assimilated the basic creative disjunction at the heart of identity and to use the term MOSP (metaphysics of simple presence) to describe “lower first tier worldviews” which supposed that reality consists of pre-given objects and entities.

The various types of MOA deal, implicitly or explicitly, with a creative separation-connection between epistemology and ontology. No entity is perfectly identical with itself. 99 is the new 100%. “=” is maximally but not totally true. Absolutes and almos are no longer in simple opposition.

That is to say that everything is either defined and perceived in relation to others OR prior to such detections anything exists as a self-approximating difference-from-itself which constitutes its identity. For a pluralist, your identity is no longer a simple given fact but rather an phenomenon which appears in the context of your point-of-view. The I becomes the “I”. As obvious as it seems

to you, it has reality only in a greater field which includes other relative viewpoints and alternative contexts. For an integralist, the fundamental co-presence of multiple fields of perspectival engagement (epitomized in the notion of internal and external or personal and collective reality) is the inherent “holonic” nature of any real entity. And for the higher evolutionary nondualist, the self and not-self are both the same and different.

All observable facts, all detections of reality, are co-created by objects and observers while, at the same time the pre-detected essence of anything – from which potential acts of knowing arise – is itself constituted as a self-difference, a minimal comparison, an ontological disjunction.

Such a conception of reality, implied in the emergence of the various “postmetaphysical” stages of cognitive and cultural development, provides a consistent way to articulate the complementary truth of both the tetra-enactive and object-emphasizing schools of metatheory. To predicate reality upon “adjacency” is a means of languaging pluralism, integralism, nondualism, pre-detected objects & subjective/objective co-arising all in the same common functional principle. We may or may not wish to pay attention to such an overflowing notion but it is *possible* to deploy such a MOA framing.

Appendix: The Wilber-Bhaskar Triangle

The following diagram examines Reality as a set of subsisting actualites (detectables) which are only partially revealed and known (detected) by any given set of observers or socio-technological methods of inspecting the cosmos. This actual world, with its smaller subset of known possibilities, is a four quadrant affair. Personal, mutual, objective and systemic aspects co-exist as the actual world whether it is known or unknown by any particular community of beings. Gross, subtle & causal ontologies also co-exist and provide distinct and necessary preconditions for any kind of internal or external knowledge. The causal domain, by its very nature, specifies that the intrinsic status of objects (and subjects, etc.) is indefinitely withdrawn and must be thought of as an excess, as more than what can be known by any interaction. It is “prior” to detections even though the external quadrants are not prior to the internal quadrants. Nonduality names the ontology that provides the capacity for interaction, blending and non-destructive transcendence of those other state-domains. Levels of emergent worldspace exist and each other offers more complex ways of integrating the state-domains, balancing the quadrants and shifting the ways that hidden actualities are presented into our personal and social knowledge. Lower levels of coherent functional complexity (simplexity) appear, retroactively, as relatively deluded, ignorant or simplistic. Any early level of developmental worldspace operates with the force of what Bhaskar called “demi-reality”. And the sway of more primitive, less accurate, less comprehensive understandings provides a regressive possibility for individuals and societies that must be guarded against by political, spiritual and scientific methods of progress.

