Thinking Nature: Towards a Phenomenological Naturalism

by

David Roel Chiu Suarez

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Department of Philosophy
University of Toronto

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Abstract

What is subjectivity, and how can it be understood as a natural phenomenon? Drawing on the resources of transcendental philosophy and phenomenology, I argue that because subjectivity is what makes the world available to us, subjectivity cannot be an object in the world; it is, instead, a way of being open to the world. Subjectivity, as a context of openness to being, is the transcendental condition of all scientific and metaphysical understanding. It follows that neither science nor metaphysics can explain their own conditions of possibility. Rather, such an explanation requires an account of the transcendental structure of subjectivity. Nevertheless, subjectivity is a natural phenomenon, because nature is the ontological ground of transcendental structure. In contrast to scientific naturalism, which makes science the final arbiter of our ontological commitments, I develop a phenomenological naturalism, which holds that nature encompasses the existence of both the objects and laws discovered by the sciences, as well as the transcendental structures that allow objects and laws to be discovered in the first place. Phenomenological naturalism respects the ontological significance of transcendental reflection, in contrast to
‘naturalized’ phenomenologies that cede questions of ontology to the sciences. Instead of taking subjectivity to be metaphysically grounded on things, subjectivity should be understood as the transcendental ground of the possibility of the system of relations that we can bear to things. This allows for a more thoroughgoing integration of phenomenology with the sciences, one which does not diminish phenomenology to armchair psychology. Understanding subjectivity in this way allows us to account for the underlying unity of conceptual thought and nonconceptual embodied coping, since the same transcendental structure of openness to the world can be operative in different ways at different times, actualizing some experiential possibilities and not others, while nevertheless determining the form of experience in general. At the limits of scientific explanation and transcendental-phenomenological reflection lies a nature that is not a specific object nor the totality of objects in the world, but the ontological ground of all phenomenal manifestation.
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# Table of Contents

## Introduction

1

## Chapter 1: Problem of Consciousness or Paradox of Subjectivity?

- A Methodological Argument for the Irreducibility of Subjectivity 7
- Qualitative Characters and Subjective Points of View: Defining ‘Subjectivity’ 8
- Phenomenology as Transcendental Philosophy 24
- Unraveling The Paradox of Subjectivity 33

## Chapter 2: Phenomenological Naturalism

- Transcendental Phenomenology and Naturalism 41
- Towards a Phenomenological Naturalism 47
- Nature from a Phenomenological Standpoint 54

## Chapter 3: Facticity and the Metaphysics of Mind

- Phenomenology, Psychology, and Facticity 71
- Naturalized Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Realization 76
- Psychology from an Existential Phenomenological Standpoint 91

## Chapter 4: The Nature of Thinking and Coping

- Thinking and Coping 99
- Dreyfus’s Criticism of McDowell 103
- McDowell on Conceptual Capacities 105
- The Unity of Transcendental Conditions 108
- Naturalism and Ontology 116

## Chapter 5: How Nature Shows Itself

- Nature at the Limits of Science and Phenomenology 124
Introduction

This dissertation is an attempt to get at the common root that joins experience with the objects discovered by the sciences. Its title, ‘Thinking Nature,’ should be understood in two senses. In the first sense, ‘thinking nature’ refers to the kind of beings that we ourselves are: beings that think and experience, while also being manifestations of nature. In the second sense, ‘thinking nature’ refers to the project of understanding nature in light of its containing and its giving rise to our peculiar way of being. Accordingly, my dissertation focuses on two tightly connected questions: (1) ‘What is it to be an instance of thinking nature?’ and (2) ‘What must nature be in order to contain and give rise to thinking natures?’ Drawing on the resources of transcendental philosophy and phenomenology, I will argue that answering these questions requires us to revise and enrich our understanding of nature in order to account for the phenomenon of subjectivity.

What is it to be an instance of thinking nature? In what follows, I will argue that transcendental philosophy and phenomenology provide a valuable methodological corrective to the default assumption of scientific naturalism in the philosophy of mind. Scientific naturalism demands to know what kind of thing the mind is, while requiring any candidate answer to cast the mind as the kind of thing that can be discovered using only the methods of natural science. This exclusively scientific approach requires us to understand ourselves as objects in the world, rather than subjects open to it. Against this approach, I argue that our thinking natures are essentially and irreducibly constituted by a subjectivity that makes the world available to us. Natural science necessarily distorts subjectivity in its attempts to describe the mind in purely objective terms. The methods of the sciences are
limited because they presuppose, and therefore cannot explain, the openness to the world, the subjectivity, that makes the practice of science possible in the first place. So, while we do have natures that can, in part, be scientifically specified, I argue that descriptions in those terms cannot exhaust what our thinking nature is. Instead of identifying the fundamentally real objects that constitute the ultimate basis of all other phenomena, the sciences should be understood as uncovering only some of the ways that nature manifests itself to thinking beings, while leaving out the way that such beings show up to themselves as subjects of experience.

What must nature be in order to contain and give rise to thinking natures? This brings us to the second sense of ‘thinking nature’—the project of understanding nature as encompassing the subjective and experiential, as well as the objective and scientifically determinable. I argue that the limits of scientific understanding with respect to our subjectivity imply that nature cannot be understood simply as an object or as the totality of objects that constitute the physical universe. Nature is, rather, the condition of possibility for the manifestation of anything whatsoever. The phenomenological naturalism I develop here understands nature as the ultimate basis of what is manifest both in science and in reflection on our own subjectivity. On this view, what grounds everything is a single, unified nature that weaves together the variety of ways that phenomena can show up for us, a nature that manifests itself to itself through a structured field of phenomena. This conception of nature allows us to understand nature as the ultimate ground of everything we encounter in experience, while avoiding both the dogmatic scientism that is often associated with naturalism, as well as the spooky anti-naturalism that is often associated with transcendental and phenomenological philosophy.
While there has been a wealth of discussion in recent decades concerning the place of consciousness in nature, that discussion has, for the most part, taken for granted that consciousness is best understood as a kind of object, one that is amenable to scientific investigation and a priori metaphysical speculation. As I hope to show, phenomenology, as a form of transcendental philosophy, offers the methodological foundations for a different approach, one that begins by understanding consciousness in terms of subjectivity, and subjectivity, in turn, as the transcendental structure of our openness to the world. Moreover, despite growing interest in the integration of phenomenology with the sciences, most attempts at integration have focused primarily on harvesting insights from phenomenology for the cognitive sciences, while granting the sciences the final word on the question of what ultimately exists. This ignores or downplays the foundational philosophical issues that have been raised by transcendental philosophers and phenomenologists—in particular, it leaves their arguments against scientific naturalism untouched. Therefore, instead of ‘naturalizing phenomenology,’ I will explore a different avenue here, one that involves ‘phenomenologizing nature.’

In chapter 1, I argue that our openness to the world is irreducible to an object in the world. While it has been argued that experience is irreducible to anything physical because of its ‘subjectivity,’ this has usually meant that experiences are irreducible to anything physical because they possess qualitative characters, or qualia. I argue, instead, that ‘subjectivity’ needs to be understood in terms of its transcendental role, as what makes possible our experiential access to entities in the world. Because subjectivity makes it possible for entities in the world to be manifest to us at all, subjectivity cannot be explained in terms of the entities it makes available. Since the very intelligibility of the existence of the entities posited by metaphysics and natural science depends on subjectivity, those posited
entities cannot function as explanations of subjectivity unless we simply assume that those entities are capable of grounding their own intelligibility.

In chapter 2, I lay out the requirements for a phenomenological naturalism, and attempt to show how they might be satisfied. A phenomenological naturalism must answer two questions: (i) How can transcendental structures of subjectivity be natural? (ii) How can nature show up in virtue of transcendental structures of subjectivity, while also being the ontological ground of those structures? I argue that transcendental structures cannot be ontologically grounded in a nature understood only through physics or metaphysics. Instead, nature must be conceived in such a way that it can be the ontological ground of the transcendental structures of subjectivity that are the context of inquiry for science, metaphysics, and phenomenology. Because the phenomenological conception of nature that I will defend is articulated in terms of what is phenomenally manifest rather than the structure of an experience-transcendent metaphysical reality, it has a marked methodological advantage in justifying its fundamental ontological concepts.

In chapter 3, I argue that attempting to ‘naturalize’ phenomenology by limiting it to the ontology of the sciences is problematic on both phenomenological and metaphysical grounds. I focus on Michael Wheeler’s “Heideggerian cognitive science” in order to show that the project of ‘naturalizing phenomenology’ faces a dilemma: it must either give up phenomenology’s transcendental approach to subjectivity, or make it unintelligible how subjectivity relates, metaphysically, to physical stuff. Neither of these approaches is entirely satisfactory, and I suggest an alternative strategy for integrating phenomenology with the natural sciences: a phenomenological naturalism that situates the ontology of the natural sciences within the context of the phenomenal field disclosed by phenomenology.
In chapter 4, I argue that the necessary unity of the transcendental conditions of experience allows us to overcome the debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists about experience. Focusing on the disagreement between John McDowell and Hubert Dreyfus, I argue that conceptual forms of openness to the world pervade all of our experience even though embodied coping can occur in the absence of discursive thought. This is because same total structure of openness to the world can be operative in different ways at different times, actualizing some experiential possibilities and not others, while nevertheless determining the form of experience in general. Now, can such a view, couched in terms of transcendental structures of subjectivity, remain naturalistic? I argue that a phenomenological approach to ontology provides good methodological grounds for rejecting a scientistic “bald naturalism,” while also laying the methodological grounds for a positive ontological understanding of the nature that underlies subjectivity.

In chapter 5, I examine Kant and Heidegger’s reasons for thinking that subjectivity escapes scientific explanation, while simultaneously enabling it. This understanding of the relationship between subjectivity and science places limits on the explanatory scope of the sciences. But what makes transcendental reflection on the structure of subjectivity possible in the first place? Transcendental philosophy encounters its own limits in attempting to characterize its own conditions of possibility. I argue that the limits of science and the limits of transcendental philosophy entail that nature cannot be conceived as a specific object or as the totality of objects in the world, but only as the ontological ground of phenomenal manifestation in general. Nature, then, is not a being of the ordinary kind; as Merleau-Ponty argues, nature is not identical with anything discoverable in either science or phenomenology; it is, rather, the origin from which the discovery of all phenomena proceeds. This means that for the phenomenological naturalist, the study of
nature isn’t limited to the study of the world disclosed by the natural sciences. Phenomenological naturalism involves the study of both the transcendental structures and the empirical laws that govern the manifestation of phenomena. Nature is what shows itself to itself in our subjectivity, and any adequate understanding of nature must take that into account.
Chapter 1

Problem of Consciousness or Paradox of Subjectivity?

A Methodological Argument for the Irreducibility of Subjectivity

Subjectivity is what explains the possibility of experiential access to entities in the world. It is a transcendental condition for the experience of objects, and as such it is a condition that cannot itself be reduced to an object. *A fortiori*, this means that subjectivity cannot be reduced to a physical thing. Because the intelligibility of the entities posited by metaphysics and natural science depends on subjectivity, those posited entities cannot function as ontological explanations of subjectivity unless we assume that entities are capable of grounding their own intelligibility. This assumption is unfounded, and thus, I argue that we should reject physicalism on the grounds that it fails to provide a transcendental explanation of the possibility of ontological understanding.

Crucially, the considerations which motivate this anti-physicalist argument do not themselves constitute a metaphysical position, but are, instead, methodological principles concerning the way that ontological claims ought to be justified. I argue that if we take on board the methodological considerations that motivate phenomenological philosophy in the tradition of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, then we are not left with the brute clash of intuitions that stymies standard metaphysical debates over physicalism.

I should note that this argument does not seek to show that we should do away with philosophical consideration of the modal relations between the experiential and the physical, or do away with the scientific study of the mind; rather, it places these kinds of
investigation into the existential context of the investigating subject. Our subjectivity is a necessary condition of the possibility of positive investigation into ontology, and this condition, I will argue, is not reducible to the physical.

**Qualitative Characters and Subjective Points of View: Defining ‘Subjectivity’**

Arguments for the irreducibility of conscious experience to physical stuff most often focus on the question of the reducibility of phenomenal qualities or ‘qualia’—the so-called ‘what it’s like’ of first-person experience. Some of these arguments are well-known. Thomas Nagel argues that the “subjective character” of bats’ echolocatory experiences is incomprehensible to human beings in physical terms or otherwise; as such, the claim of physicalistic reductionism is one that we cannot presently understand (1974). Frank Jackson purports to show that Mary, the monochromatically-raised super-scientist, however perfect her knowledge of neurophysiology, still doesn’t know what it’s like to experience the color red (1982). More recently, David Chalmers has argued that the conceivability of perfect physical duplicates of human beings (“zombies”) who lack qualia altogether implies (since identities are necessary) that physical and phenomenal qualities cannot be identical (1996). The task of explaining the ostensibly necessary connection between our physical nature and the phenomenal qualities of our conscious experiences has come to be known as the “hard problem of consciousness” (Chalmers 1995), and the alleged lack of such an explanation, “the explanatory gap” (Levine 1983).

Here, I will be trying to motivate an argument for the irreducibility of the experiential which doesn’t focus on the irreducibility of phenomenal qualities, but on the irreducibility of subjective points of view on the world. To put this in Uriah Kriegel and Dan Zahavi’s terms, I will be focusing on the *subjective character* of conscious experience
rather than its qualitative character; its “for-me-ness,” rather than its particular phenomenal bluishness, redness, loudness, or what-have-you (Zahavi and Kriegel 2015; Kriegel 2009, 1). More succinctly (and following Joseph Levine), I will call this feature of conscious experience its subjectivity, arguing that this feature is irreducible to the physical.¹

Now, one might ask whether the distinction I am making between subjectivity and qualitative character is a distinction without a difference. After all, what more is there to be explained with respect to conscious experience than how it feels to be conscious? Isn’t it the feeling of being conscious—i.e., its qualitative character—that accounts for the intuition that subjectivity is something peculiar, ontologically speaking? Isn’t giving an account of the qualitative character of experience in physical terms already to give an account of its subjectivity?

Against this, I would argue that identifying subjectivity with the mere experiencing of qualia is to miss the way that qualitative characters can come apart, conceptually, from our simply being open to the world as subjects. Of course, conscious experience has a qualitative character—it feels this way to see red and that way to see blue—but the fact that qualities can be experienced at all is, and should be, a source of wonderment all on its own. It is strange enough to think that the biochemical activity of some bit of nerve tissue could amount to the sensation of seeing the color red, but it is at least as strange, if not

¹ In attempting to characterize the difference between subjectivity and qualitative character, Levine writes: “take my current visual experience as I gaze upon my red diskette case, lying by my side on the computer table… There are two important dimensions to my having this reddish experience. First… there is something it’s like for me to have this experience. Not only is it a matter of some state (my experience) having some feature (being reddish) but, being an experience, its being reddish is “for me,” a way it’s like for me… Let’s call this the subjectivity of conscious experience. The second important dimension of experience that requires explanation is qualitative character itself. Subjectivity is the phenomenon of there being something it’s like for me to see… Qualitative character concerns the “what” it’s like for me: reddish or greenish, painful and pleasurable, and the like” (2001, 5–6).
more so, to think that that activity, considered as an objective state of affairs, could constitute the existence of a first-person perspective on the world.²

In *The View From Nowhere*, Nagel attempts to characterize the unique puzzle raised by the existence of subjectivity (1986). Nagel begins as follows: take all the objective, worldly facts about a person—call him ‘TN’. How, Nagel wonders, do these facts—facts which can be considered from any perspective at all (or, as Nagel suggests rather problematically, from *none*)—make it the case that this person is identical with a subject of experience capable of thinking about his place in the universe? Nagel’s point is that if we consider the universe in itself to be ‘centerless,’ in the sense of containing no essential and ineliminable reference to subjective perspectives in its objective description, then the connection between the facts about the universe and one’s own identity as a subject of experience cannot seem anything more than arbitrary:

To arrive at this idea I begin by considering the world as a whole, as if from nowhere, and in the oceans of space and time TN is just one person among countless others. Taking up that impersonal standpoint produces in me a sense of complete detachment from TN, who is reduced to a momentary blip on the cosmic TV screen. How can I, who am thinking about the entire, centerless universe, be anything so specific as this: this measly, gratuitous creature existing in a tiny morsel of spacetime[…]? How can I be anything so small and concrete and specific? (1986, 61)

Following Nagel’s line of thought, there seems to be another explanatory gap, distinct from the one which is often supposed to yawn between the physical facts and qualia, in this case separating the objective facts about a person from their capacity to be aware of their thoughts, feelings, and the rest of the world. Attempting to shake the sense of existential vertigo created by a consideration of one’s place in the centerless universe by

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² Susan Hurley and Alva Noë (2003) mark this as the distinction between “comparative” and “absolute” explanatory gaps. The question raised by the *comparative* explanatory gap is why particular physical substrates should give rise to particular experiences, while the question raised by the *absolute* explanatory gap is why physical substrates should give rise to consciousness at all.
focusing on the particular facts that are supposed to make up one’s own person will not 
help since these facts are no more significant in the cosmic scheme of things than any 
others. In fact, as Nagel observes, it is the very particularity of the set of facts that are 
relevant to our person that makes the relationship of those facts to our subjectivity seem 
so gratuitous. What should my subjective perspective on the world have to do with the 
existence of an animal on a watery planet at the edge of some galaxy?

What’s interesting about this question, and what differentiates it from the related, 
but nevertheless distinct question about the reducibility of qualitative characters, is that 
the present question can be articulated without reference to any particular feelings at all.³ 
In “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”—Nagel’s older essay—the problem is supposed to 
concern our understanding of the “subjective character” of bat-experience. In the end, 
however, the argument turns on the feeling of bat echolocation. It is the qualia that elude 
our understanding. However, as we can see in Nagel’s presentation of the problem in The 
View From Nowhere, it isn’t just feeling and its relation to the objective facts about the uni-
verse that is puzzling, but something at the same time more basic and more general than 
feelings—namely, the relationship between the facts and the subjects for whom feelings and 
facts can show up in the first place.

Nagel’s latter problem brings into view one of the central problems to which clas-
sical phenomenology is addressed, namely the nature of subjective points of view.⁴ The 
classical phenomenologists are allied in their diagnosis of the persistent difficulties we 
encounter in trying to integrate subjectivity into the natural world: these difficulties, they

³ See Kriegel (2011) for further discussion of this point.
⁴ By “classical phenomenology,” I mean to refer to the philosophical tradition that begins with 
Husserl in the early 20th century, and continues through Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty.
argue, stem from the attempt to ‘objectify’ the subject in an improper way. Their point is that subjectivity is not just a thing alongside other things. Subjectivity is what makes experiential and epistemic access to things possible in the first place. It should not be conceived merely as some object in the world, but instead as the ontologically irreducible context of openness through which our access to objects must be understood. Subjectivity is our ‘way of being,’ and this needs to be understood through the characteristic of openness to beings, rather than through the existence of beings that might be made available by subjectivity.

To put this another way, the phenomenologists’ suggestion is that our way of being needs to be characterized primarily as a kind of existential situation, rather than as a kind of substance, property, or physical process. It is my openness to the world, not my existence as a kind of stuff, that characterizes me essentially. In particular, it is essential to my way of being that I am caught up and involved with a world that is, as Heidegger says, ‘always already’ manifest to me. This should be understood in what Heidegger called the ‘a priori perfect tense,’ meaning that the world is there for me without my having done or thought anything, without my having reflected on my experience or come to any explicit judgment about how things are. This openness to the world is implicated in each and every experience, regardless of whether it is explicitly introspective or reflective. That this openness is properly thought of as a priori with respect to experience is supported, not by

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5 See Matthew Ratcliffe (2002) for a direct comparison of Husserl’s and Nagel’s views on subjectivity.
6 See Kris McDaniel (2009; 2010), Jason Turner (2010), and Heidegger (2010) for more on the notion of a ‘mode of being’ or ‘way of existing’. McDaniel and Turner attempt to reconstruct the logic of Heidegger’s notion using a set of restricted existential quantifiers, each applying to a proper subset of the entities to which the unrestricted quantifier applies. This approach underscores the point that the notion of a way of being can be represented logically without collapsing into the notion of an entity, or a property of an entity.
7 For more on the notion of the ‘a priori perfect’ in Heidegger see Cristina LaFont (2000, 253–8).
induction, or by rationalistic conceptual analysis, but by phenomenological reflection on the limits and possible variations that experience can take. In saying that my situation always involves openness to the world, I mean that it is essential to my subjectivity always to be structured by a particular sort of context. My existential situation, my being a subject, places me in the context of a world with which I could be out of touch in the first place—it is my very openness to the world that provides me with something I could be wrong about. Crucially, even when I conceive myself to be radically mistaken about the way things are, my openness to the world still provides the context that allows my mistakes to be intelligible as mistakes.

This implies that the world, in this very specific sense, is not just ‘prior’ to me temporally, in the sense of being a thing whose existence precedes my existence in time as the physical cosmos does. The connection between my existence and the world is not an empirical hypothesis, needing to be verified, as if my ‘claim’ to be open to the world could be given fresh evidential support by things reappearing after I close my eyes and reopen them. Indeed, so long as I exist, my openness to the world can never seriously be in question. Granted, at some point in the future, I might well not exist, but so long as I do, there is a world for me. What is ‘always already’ there for me is a world in this very thin sense, a context of possible access to objects, not just the ‘world’ as the physical cosmos. More succinctly, then, we might say I am in a situation of being open to the world in every case where I exist as a subject of experience.

Note that the adequacy of this description of my situation does not depend on an appeal to a merely conceptual analysis which would claim that the very concepts of ‘subject’ and ‘world’ (or ‘subject’ and ‘object’) must have an internal relation, on pain of some fundamental logical contradiction. The ‘proof’ of my openness to the world is gotten,
rather, by asking what the experience I presently have involves, and indeed, *must involve*, essentially, and as a condition of its possibility.\(^8\)

I grant that we can conceive of situations in which we, as knowing subjects, would be radically disconnected, epistemically-speaking, from the way things are, in which one is a brain envatted or a soul deceived. Nevertheless, in any such situation, I claim, we would still be subjects who are open to the world in the thin sense I mean to indicate by the notion of ‘subjectivity.’ The kind of epistemic disconnection envisioned in such scenarios, is not one that jeopardizes the openness to the world that I claim characterizes subjectivity, since we would still be open to the world in precisely the way that would allow us to be wrong about it.\(^9\)

Note that no claim is being made here that would contradict Hume’s suggestion that we lack any impression of a substantial self.\(^10\) Indeed, it is exactly the contrast between awareness of *objects* and awareness of the context of openness that makes things available to us to which I would like to draw our attention. The givenness of our subjectivity is exactly *not* the givenness of an object—our subjectivity is given to us precisely as the context or situation that makes objects available for experience and knowledge. We risk losing our grip on this crucial feature of subjectivity when we try to turn it into just

\(^8\) It is important to see that this means looking to my experience as *situated*, rather than the idea of an experience in general. As Mark Sacks puts it, “Unpacking transcendental arguments in terms of the device of situated thought has the advantage of drawing the line in the right place, for the right reason, and without being committed to transcendental psychology as a means of doing it. […] [T]hese are the conditions of any experience that is articulated from the perspective of an embedded subject. That includes more than human experience, obviously, and excludes God’s experience, which is precisely not situated, or from a point of view. […] The suggestion here is that it is not that our point of view is tainted by a particular cognitive structure that we bring with us, but that it is the notion of a situated thought, the mere notion of experience as being from a point of view, that itself imposes the relevant structure” (2005, 455).

\(^9\) Matthew Ratcliffe (2013) argues along similar lines that the basic distinction between what is and isn’t the case—the “sense of reality” which undergirds the possibility of scientific inquiry—is based in our inhabiting of a world constituted by a space of experiential possibilities.

\(^10\) For Hume’s view on the nature of the subject, see *A Treatise of Human Nature* (2001), 1.4.6.1-23.
another entity, for, as we have seen in our discussion of Nagel, nothing about any part of
the world, nothing that merely shows up in the world, seems the right sort of thing to
constitute a subjective perspective on the world.

This is to say that every experience we have demonstrates what Jean-Paul Sartre
calls a “pre-reflective” awareness of our own subjectivity.11 This self-awareness is “pre-
reflective” in the sense that it does not require me to engage in introspection or other
metacognition of my mental states. Thus, saying that all awareness is an awareness given
to somebody is compatible with saying that the ‘self’ to which experience is given is not itself
an object given in experience. To stress the point: subjectivity, in the relevant sense, isn’t an
object. It is, rather, a structural feature of our openness to the world that our awareness
includes both objects, and a way that those objects are given. The general structure under-
lying the ways that things in the world are given to us is what constitutes our subjectivity.

Admitting that we can be aware of this structure does not require us to supple-
ment our awareness of objects with an additional awareness of a kind of “mental paint”
possessing phenomenal qualities distinct from the kinds of qualities possessed by the
objects themselves (Harman 1990). This conception of subjectivity as openness to the
world is compatible with a transparency thesis that holds that experience presents us with
ordinary worldly qualities, not special phenomenal ones. I agree that experience puts us
in touch with properties of worldly objects, and not properties of some other thing—the
experience—bearing special phenomenal qualities and acting as a representational inter-

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11 Alvin Goldman provides an example of the relevant phenomenon: “[Consider] the case of
thinking about x or attending to x. In the process of thinking about x there is already an implicit
awareness that one is thinking about x. There is no need for reflection here, for taking a step back
from thinking about x in order to examine it . . . When we are thinking about x, the mind is
focused on x, not on our thinking of x. Nevertheless, the process of thinking about x carries with it
mediary between ourselves and worldly objects. As Zahavi puts it, “Experiences are not objects, but rather, they provide us with access to objects; I attend to the objects through the experiences” (2005, 121–2). Where proponents of the transparency thesis often go wrong, however, is to infer that if experience doesn’t introduce special phenomenal properties, then the representation of properties in the external world is all there is to experience. This is wrong because it moves too quickly from the claim that all awareness involves only awareness of worldly objects to the identification of this awareness with the existence of a representational or intentional state, passing by the obvious phenomenological datum that all awareness is also an awareness given to somebody in some way or another. But as our short exercise in phenomenological reflection above shows, our awareness always comes along with an implicit awareness of a context of openness in which objects become available to us, an awareness whose structure can be made explicit.

Of course, it is clearly the case that our way of existing as subjects open to the world is not detached from the existence of physical nature. The problem moving forward, then, will be how to understand our subjectivity in a way that does not make its coincidence with a physical body with arms, legs, etc., into a mere metaphysical accident, or a brute and incomprehensible metaphysical necessity. Any account of our subjectivity must account for its essentially first-personal character, while at the same time accounting for the fact of our embodiment and embeddedness in the physical order.

I will argue that the best way to achieve both of these ends will be to adopt a non-reductive, transcendental-phenomenological approach to the nature of subjectivity. This means taking subjectivity on its own terms, examining it through the structure of first-personal experience which it itself is, showing on the basis of detailed examination of this structure how subjectivity reveals itself to be intertwined with the physical body and the
These structures of experience provide a transcendental explanation of the relationship between mind and body. They make the modal relationships between mind and body possible in a way that is prior to, and independent of metaphysics.

As should be clear by now, phenomenologists do not just discuss what it’s like to have experience in the sense of how it ‘feels.’ Experiences aren’t just isolated instances of feeling, but determinations of the general way in which we, as subjects, are open to worldly objects. As even undisciplined reflection can easily demonstrate, these determinations are highly structured. What phenomenology, as a method, adds to the bare notion of subjectivity as openness to the world, is a way of generating rigorous descriptions of how experiences are structured, which is to say, in what way they present the world as intelligible and meaningful. When we reflect on our experiences, we can make explicit to ourselves the structures through which the world shows up for us as intelligible and meaningful. These structures of phenomenal manifestation are themselves structures of subjectivity, features that constitute our openness to things and make up our first-person perspective on the world. Disciplined reflection can help to make clear how it is that entities appear to us as the entities they are. In phenomenology, this ‘how’ is explained in terms of structures of ‘meaning’ or ‘sense’ found in experience.

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12 See Zahavi (2003b) and Johnston (2007) for further argument to this effect.
13 See Steven Crowell (2001) for incisive argument to the effect that phenomenology should be understood as centered on the issues of meaning. Following Crowell, I use ‘meaning’ and ‘sense’ interchangeably to refer to structures of phenomenal manifestation—i.e., to those structures which allow entities to show up for us in experience in various ways as intelligible and meaningful. This agrees with Husserl’s usage as well: “Originally, these words [i.e., ‘Bedeutung’ and ‘Bedeuten’] concerned only the linguistic sphere... But one can scarcely avoid [...] extending the signification of these words and suitably modifying them so that they can find application [...] to the whole noetic-noematic sphere... Thus we have continued to speak of ‘sense’ [‘Sinn’] in the case of all intuitive mental processes — a word which is used in general as equivalent to ‘signification’ [‘Bedeutung’]. For the sake of distinctness we shall prefer the term signification for the old con-
To head off a worry at the outset, this does not mean that phenomenology is an incorrigibly anti-scientific or anti-naturalistic approach. Its focus on structures of phenomenal manifestation does not entail the denial of the independent existence of physical entities, or the idealistic reduction of physical entities to mental or experiential entities. The claim is that physical objects are real and ‘transcendent’ (that is, independently existing) objects, which can become manifest to us through certain forms of experience. They are not merely constructions within a self-enclosed mental sphere. Thus, transcendental phenomenology does not deny the ability of natural science to describe the world accurately, nor does it deny that the existence of nature grounds our existence as creatures with mental lives (although, as may already be apparent, the type of grounding, and the operative conception of nature will turn out to be much different than is typically supposed). Nevertheless, despite its compatibility with the truth of scientific theories, phenomenology holds that the descriptive abilities of natural science are limited in two crucial ways.

First, natural science is not a self-sufficient method for understanding the world. The results of science are, of course, rightly prized for their objectivity. Ideally, the truths ascertained by scientific investigation do not depend on one’s idiosyncratic situation, perspective, temperament, or beliefs. It is precisely for this reason that science is said to aim at objective truths, rather than merely subjective ones. Nevertheless, all actual scientific inquiry remains within the context of our openness to the world, as do all scientific

cept... We shall continue to use the word sense as before in the most all-inclusive range” (Husserl 1983, 294). Husserl’s use of ‘sense’ [‘Sinn’] is related to Frege’s in that it refers to a mode of presentation. For Husserl, however, senses are involved in every case where something is presented in experience, whereas for Frege, senses are only involved in propositional thought, the rest of experience being consigned to mental imagery.
findings. Given that our access to objective truths can come to light only in the context of the lived world, all objectivity, including the objectivity of science, is an objectivity whose structure, as a form of understanding and knowledge, is ultimately grounded in what can be phenomenally manifest. On this account, our grasp of objective truths is constituted by a complex, temporally extended process involving the individual and intersubjective grasp of regularities in the world through structures of anticipation and fulfillment. All of this takes place in the context of our openness to the world, and is made possible by structures that make manifest and available a world that is amenable to such a process.

Thus, in contrast to views of objectivity such as Bernard Williams’s “absolute conception” of reality (2005), or Nagel’s “view from nowhere” (1986), which take scientific objectivity to involve a process of theoretical reconstruction that whittles-away ‘merely’ subjective appearances in order to reach an underlying core of ‘real’ objective properties, phenomenology takes objectivity itself to be a species of phenomenal manifestation, a dynamic process in which objects become manifest as real, or as merely apparent. In this way, a phenomenological understanding of the practice of natural science claims that the very possibility of objectivity in the scientific enterprise has an essential and ineliminable tie to our subjectivity.

I provide more further argument in support of this claim in Chapter 2.

Hilary Putnam makes a similar argument against conceiving of natural science as directed towards a perspective-independent “absolute conception” of reality, or a “view from nowhere.” One of Putnam’s central points is that if we attempt to abstract away from the values of scientists in our descriptions of the practice of science, we cannot give an account of the standards that determine what counts as a scientific fact (1992; 2002). The search for facts necessarily involves the presupposition of some set of values that function as regulative ideals determining the overall shape, though not the precise content, of facts. I would add that understanding what it is to recognize facts involves reference to what I have been calling structures of subjectivity. ‘Factuality’ or ‘objectivity’ are modes of phenomenal manifestation.
To underscore this last point: natural science operates within a context that is already informed by the structures of subjectivity which concern the phenomenologist, and this means that an account of the possibility of natural science cannot be given just in the terms of natural science, but requires explanation in terms of the structures of subjectivity that make the objectivity of natural science possible in the first place.\textsuperscript{16}

Second, the objects of natural science do not exhaust what is disclosed for us in everyday being in the world. Natural science may provide our best standards for determining how things are in regards to the indisputably real framework of causality in space and time, but it does not disclose our way of being open to the world, as we experience it in the first-person. Thus, any account of what there is in nature must be supplemented and supported by phenomenological investigations of the first-person perspective that constitutes our subjectivity. Natural science may allow for the discovery of the physical conditions of conscious life, but these physical states of affairs, taken outside of their relation to subjectivity, cannot explain, or even be used to identify, the structures that characterize our way of being open to the world as we experience it in the first-person. When it comes to subjectivity, the phenomena we are trying to explain are not constituted by only third- (or second-) personally describable facts; the relevant features of conscious life are, on the contrary, essentially constituted by what is undergone in the first-person.

In saying this, I do not mean to commit myself to a conception of experience as a purely private and ‘inner’ domain, separate from the public and ‘outer’ domain of things.

\textsuperscript{16} In *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl attempts to provide a sketch of the way that the objectivity of the natural sciences comes to be constituted, historically, within the “Lebenswelt,” or “lifeworld,” i.e., the world as phenomenally manifest (1970). See also Merleau-Ponty’s account of the relation of science to the world of perception in *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012), and section 3 of my Chapter 2.
and their behaviors. In order for our talk about our mental lives to make any sense, there must be criteria detectable in the third- (or second-) person that are usually suitable to determine what is going on with a person—or rather, for a person—first-personally. This doesn’t conflict with the claim that our subjectivity has an essentially first-personal nature unless one makes the much stronger claim that only what we can detect in the third- (or second-) person matters to our understanding of what experience and subjectivity essentially are. I see no compelling reason to adopt this contentious assumption, and so it seems to me that accepting these considerations regarding the publicity of criteria for mental vocabulary leaves me free to maintain that subjectivity needs to be understood as a point of view on the world, essentially constituted by its being taken up or undergone in the first-person.¹⁷

Now, might there be a way to accept the unique methodological problems raised by the essentially first-person character of subjectivity without granting that they raise issues of any special ontological significance?

One way physicalists have attempted to account for the difference in the way that experiences and physical objects show up for us is to admit that even though there is such a difference, it amounts to a cognitive or epistemological difference, rather than an ontological one—a difference between two senses without a corresponding difference in reference (Frege 1980). So, even though experiences really are just physical entities, we often come to know about our experiences in a different way from the way we come to know about

¹⁷ I take to heart Wittgenstein’s point that the criteria guiding our thought and talk about experience must be public (1963). On my reading, however, Wittgenstein isn’t trying to demonstrate that there are, as it were, no beetles in our boxes, which is to say, that there is no interiority to our mental lives, and no subjectivity in anything more than a grammatical sense. Rather, I take his point to be that the intelligibility of our talk about our mental lives cannot be based entirely on events or states which are, in principle, only accessible to their owners.
other, non-experiential physical entities—namely, by undergoing them. The physicalist can explain that in conceiving of an experience as a subjective state, undergone in the first-person, we are making use of a unique sort of concept—a phenomenal concept. The extant literature is full of proposals as to how and why phenomenal concepts would function differently from physical concepts, but the core idea is that a difference in concepts accounts for the two very different ways that our own experiences can show up for us; as physical things on the one hand, and as subjective states of mind on the other. As Ned Block puts it, “The idea … is to substitute a dualism of concepts for a dualism of properties and facts” (2006, 9–10). This hypothesized difference in concepts allows the physicalist to defend the claim that there is no ontological difference between the physical and the experiential—just a cognitive or epistemic one. Daniel Stoljar has dubbed this way of defending physicalism, “the phenomenal concept strategy” (2005).

Katalin Balog, however, has argued that while the phenomenal concept strategy is internally consistent, it fails to gain any argumentative ground for supporters of physicalism (2012). Although it presents an debunking explanation of the supposed ontological difference between the physical and the experiential, and does so in a way that is compatible with physicalism, the physical concept strategy does not provide a positive reason, on its own, to accept that physicalism is conceivable, much less actual. Balog thus concludes:

This is a stalemate. Each side can unseat the other side’s core assumption if they are permitted to make their own core assumption. The anti-physicalist appeals to anti-physicalist principles, the physicalist appeals to the conceivability of a purely physical world with phenomenality. Both can show that, once granted that one core assumption, their view is consistent and can rebut challenges from the other side. Neither side can, without begging the question against the opponent, show

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18 See for example, Brian Loar (1997), David Papineau (2002), and Ned Block (2006).
that the other’s position is untenable. Where you end up depends on what you take as your starting point. (2012, 20)

The question I want to raise now is whether application of the phenomenal concept strategy to subjectivity, as I have described it, will result in the kind of dialectical stalemate which Balog has identified. Are we left with a rationally irresolvable and ultimately dogmatic choice between the assumption that subjectivity is not physically reducible and assumption that it is?20

In what follows, I will argue that if we start from the methodological considerations that motivate classical phenomenology, we are not left with a stalemate of dogmatically-held metaphysical positions. The considerations that lead phenomenologists to deny physicalism are not merely metaphysical counterclaims to core physicalist assumptions, but methodological and epistemological principles concerning the way that ontological claims ought to be validated in the first place.

It is on transcendental grounds, that I argue we need to reject physicalism: subjectivity is a transcendental condition for the experience of objects, and for this reason, it cannot be reduced to an object, and a fortiori, to a physical thing. If this argument is successful, then the starting point of transcendental phenomenology is one that we must adopt, and we are able to push past the stalemate Balog identifies towards an anti-physicalist position.

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19 Interestingly, this echoes Fichte’s claim in the First Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre that due to their initial posits (the ‘intellect’ and the ‘thing in itself,’ respectively) idealism and materialism are unable to directly refute one another (1994, 15–20). Nevertheless, Fichte maintains that the idealist posit of the intellect has the advantage that it “can be shown to be present in consciousness” (1994, 14). I try to unpack a version of this latter claim in my discussion of phenomenological method in section 3.

20 Balog claims at the end of her paper that “The only way empirically equivalent and internally consistent theories can be compared with each other is by considerations of simplicity and overall explanatory strength” (2012, 21). I provide reasons in the next section for thinking that considerations of this sort are not decisive.
Clearly, then, to evaluate this suggestion we will need to consider the methodological principles which lead phenomenologists to endorse the claim that subjectivity is a transcendental condition for the experience of objects.

Phenomenology as Transcendental Philosophy

As Kant argued in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, if we are to pilot the ship of metaphysics between the rocky shores of skepticism and dogmatism, then our knowledge of the basic structure of reality cannot rest on objects known to us only contingently (if at all), nor on an obscure and inscrutable mode of supposedly rational intuition. For Kant, neither empiricism nor rationalism contain the resources necessary to vindicate a method of metaphysical knowledge, leaving us with either no justified metaphysical knowledge, or a proliferation of dogmatically-held views whose competing claims to rationality we are unable to adjudicate systematically. These early modern positions are echoed in contemporary approaches to metaphysics: empiricism by a nominalist metaphysics whose epistemic credentials are overseen by a Quinean naturalized epistemology; rationalism by constructive methods of metaphysical theory-building which rely on a haphazard negotiation between common sense and a supposedly ‘intuitive’ grasp of theoretical virtues.

But just as Kant questioned empiricism’s capacity to provide rationally justified metaphysical *knowledge*, rather than an inventory of metaphysical *prejudices*, we might question whether Quinean pragmatism is capable of delivering anything but an ever-shifting catalogue of the discursive “custom or habit” of a particular socially- and historically-situated scientific culture. Likewise, our judgments about theoretical virtues (such as fit with prior intuitions, parsimony, and generality) are often used to adjudicate between speculative theories in metaphysics according to their relative ‘costs’ and ‘benefits’, but
this kind of analysis is seldom, if ever, critically assessed with respect to its ability, in principle, to disclose reality. Principled explanations are seldom given as to why our intuitions about the values defining the relevant ‘costs’ and ‘benefits’ should be assumed to bring us closer to the metaphysical joints in nature. Beyond a general sense of desirability of the theoretical virtues, there is little consensus as to how or why they are ultimately to be justified as virtues. The Kantian moral here is that without a transcendental logic (or the like) showing how our preferred metaphysical categories themselves necessarily structure the objects we encounter in experience, it is unclear why a ‘general’ or merely formal logic (including an ersatz economic one) should be thought to have a grip on the nature of worldly objects in the first place.

Kant’s attempt to set metaphysics on the secure path of science, by contrast, suggests that at least some of our metaphysical disputes regard categories that are best considered not as features of objects considered apart from our access to them, but instead as features of objects whose natures are in some sense constituted by our mode of access to them. Kant’s ‘Copernican Turn’ suggests that the metaphysical structure of at least some objects may be known to us a priori; a claim to knowledge whose right can be vindicated

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21 Regarding this latter methodology, see, for example, Nick Effingham’s *An Introduction to Ontology*: “The generally agreed upon view is that we should carry out what is called a cost-benefit analysis of the theories on offer. That is, for each theory we figure out the benefits of that theory and then figure out those things that are detrimental about it. Then we compare how it performs in light of this with each of its competitors and hopefully we will be able to weigh up which theory is better overall. This analysis is particularly apt for ontology, as in most cases where we need a theory to account for a certain phenomenon or solve a certain problem, no theory manages to do so perfectly — there are always some costs or downsides of believing it. *So all we are left with being able to do is determine which has the best balance of costs and benefits over all*” (2013, ch. 2; my emphasis).

22 Stephen Biggs (2011) attempts to demonstrate how theoretical virtues can contribute to modal knowledge through ‘abduction,’ or inference to the best explanation. Biggs’s argument, however, is intended to apply to knowledge at the level of the modal relations holding between scientific entities already assumed to be empirically knowable. At issue in Kant’s worry, however, is our entitlement to empirical knowledge claims about the natures of scientific entities in the first place.
through a critical self-examination of the form of the subjectivity through which those objects appear.

Kant’s transcendental philosophy, then, provides us with an account of the proper evidential basis of metaphysics: those forms we find necessarily conditioning appearances are transcendental structures of subjectivity, and are the only legitimate contents of metaphysical knowledge claims. Notably, Kant took this way of justifying our metaphysical knowledge to be sufficient to provide rational grounds for all of the metaphysical categories legitimately presupposed by Newtonian natural science. His transcendental idealism, rather than frustrating the explanatory aims of natural science, was intended to support these aims by explaining how natural scientific explanations are possible, both as a subjective way of understanding things, but also as thoroughly rational and objectively valid claims to know reality. Following Kant, classical phenomenology is a broadly transcendental approach in that it focuses on understanding the being of objects in terms of the way that they are phenomenally manifest.

Phenomenology, however, radicalizes the epistemic demand that we ground metaphysical claims in the structure of experience, denying the intelligibility of an experientially-inaccessible reality, beyond the limits of our openness to phenomena.

Certainly things exist without being perceived or thought, and this independence is

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23 See Chapter 5 for a more detailed account of Kant’s conception of the relationship between transcendental philosophy and natural science.

24 As Husserl puts it in *Cartesian Meditations*, “The attempt to conceive the universe of true being as something lying outside the universe of possible consciousness, possible knowledge, possible evidence, the two being related to one another merely externally by a rigid law, is nonsensical. … If transcendental subjectivity is the universe of possible sense, then an outside is precisely nonsense” (Husserl 1991, 84).

25 As Husserl clearly states in *Ideas I*: “[I]f the thing exists, then it is what it is, even if the experience, which would experience it, did not exist, and even in if the thoughtful thinking did not exist, which would determine it in an objectively valid way. When all humans sleep, or when a geological upheaval kills all human and living beings, then there is no one on earth to think about and
understood in phenomenology as the ‘transcendence’ of the object. This transcendence means, however, that the object is something possessing an infinite array of possible manifestations that goes beyond what is manifest in any actual set of experiences. The phenomenological concept of the transcendence secures the independence of objects from given acts of perception or thought, thereby avoiding the worst excesses of a crude subjective idealism, but without, on the other hand, committing to a Kantian transcendental idealism that would still recognize the sense of a metaphysical ‘remainder’ exceeding all possible experience. For the phenomenologist, the hypothesis of a thing in itself that exists, that has its being, in way that lacks a reference to even possible experience is ungrounded at best. To the extent that things in themselves can be meaningfully discussed, our activity of experiencing a structured reality provides the only possible basis for that meaning.

Transcendental structure plays a dual role in phenomenology, by explaining in theory, and making possible in actuality, the world which we inhabit. First, with respect to our theorizing, the notion of a transcendental structure marks the fundamental joints according to which the things that show up for us can differ in their meaning or sense. These structures explain why certain manifestations count as manifestations of this kind of object (objects with this meaning) versus manifestations of that kind of object (objects with that meaning). Given contact with the world, we are able to develop a precise understanding of the variety and variability of these structures, and can even come, scientifically, to a determinate understanding of how the particular world we inhabit fills out the space of
determine the revolving earth and all its objects. Nevertheless, with all these determinations, the earth is what it is” (Husserl 2006, 36).
possibilities with actual objects, whose parameters are defined in advance by the transcendental structures through which they are manifest.

Second, these transcendental structures make possible the manifestation of objects by constituting, not just our experiences of them, but the objects’ very own way of being. This is to say that the very existence of things is defined by the conditions that make their manifestation to subjects possible. What licenses this surprising claim is the following line of thought.\textsuperscript{26} First, any understanding of being must depend on our having access to being. Since our subjectivity constitutes the only possible access we have to being, any attempt to conceive of the meaning of ‘being’ in a way that is completely detached from our subjectivity will be unjustified. To apply the concepts of ‘being’ or ‘existence’ to what is, in principle, phenomenally inaccessible is, therefore, to deploy that concept in way that lacks justification. The consistent application of this methodological principle to questions of fundamental ontology implies that such questions can only concern what can be manifest, the phenomena we are open to, not ‘being’ in a hidden realm lying beneath, behind, or beyond what could possibly show up for us. In this way, phenomenological reflection on the structure of subjectivity turns out to be reflection on the structure that makes our encounters with the reality (and unreality) of things possible; it is reflection on the structure of being itself.

It needs to be stressed, however, that this understanding of being does not reduce the fact of an object’s existence to a ‘merely subjective’ appearance since it is exactly the independent existence of the object itself that is manifest to us, not the existence of a mere representation, construed as a kind of ‘picture in the mind.’ Transcendental structure

\textsuperscript{26} I take this to be Heidegger’s line of thought in §7 (“The Phenomenological Method of Investigation”) of Being and Time (2010).
belongs not just to our subjective forms of thought, but to the subject-world pairing that constitutes our subjectivity, essentially, as an openness to the world. This pairing of subject and world, which Heidegger dubs “being-in-the-world,” allows objects to manifest themselves as existing and as the objects that they are in our perception, judgment, imagination, and so on. It belongs to the structure of the world that it is capable of manifesting itself to subjectivity in the ways that it does, namely as a domain of accessible beings.

Now if a skeptic about this form of “being-in-the-world” rejects the claim that their subjectivity at least purports to put her in contact with objects that could exhibit the ways of being revealed by transcendental reflection, then (to the extent that her skepticism isn’t mere empty vocalization) what has broken down isn’t just her knowledge of the external world, but the very intelligibility of her experience—the intelligibility of the world she inhabits as a world.27 The suggestion that we have access only to experiences, conceived as mental particulars, distinct from the world itself, is an ontological hypothesis, not an immediately obvious metaphysical fact. The suggestion here, by contrast, is that experience purports to be of a world, which means that although experience can lead us astray in a piecemeal sense, about how things are, it cannot do so systematically with respect to the structures of subjectivity, the structure of being-in-the-world in which the possibilities are laid out. Granted, transcendental structures can be misdescribed by phenomenologists, but since such structures are always implicated in the experiences we undergo, they provide relatively stable and accessible targets for our attempts at phenomenological description.

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27 James Conant calls this form of skepticism Kantian as opposed to Cartesian, since what is at stake isn’t the possibility of a gap between the nature of the external world and our experience of it, but the very intelligibility of experience itself (2004).
Now it is a fundamental insight of Kant’s transcendental philosophy, inherited by its phenomenological descendants, that the structures of subjectivity that make experience of objects possible cannot themselves be understood as worldly objects. This point concerns the proper way to characterize what we know through transcendental reflection and how we know it. Transcendental structures do not fit into our ontology as more objects, but as the way that we are open to the world as subjects. What we come to know are the norms or forms presupposed by the activity of experiencing a world of objects. How we know these norms or forms is by noticing that they are already active in each and every experience, and, in particular, in our pre-reflective ability to understand and interpret what we experience in terms of the existence of objects.

Since we come to any given experience of an object already prepared to make sense of its existence, it follows that the structures which allow for this intelligibility must always already be active in our being open to the world. As we saw earlier, transcendental structures are always already in play whenever we are open to the world, determining, among other things, what it means for an object of a certain kind to exist in the first place. Since these structures make our encounters with objects possible, they will be explanatorily prior to the objects themselves.

To attempt to explain our ability to make sense of objects based on the objects themselves would be to move in a tight explanatory circle. We would be, first, surreptitiously helping ourselves to the context within which objects are intelligible, only to ‘explain’ that very context by means of objects whose intelligibility depends on that context. Such an ‘explanation’ presupposes subjectivity, since the intelligibility of the explainers (the objects), depends on what they purport to explain (subjectivity). Object-first explanations of this kind make the structure of subjectivity explanatorily dependent.
on something else. In doing so, however, object-first explanations deny themselves the ability to give transcendental explanations of our understanding of being. Our understanding of fundamental ontological categories turns out, on this picture, to be explained by objects, not the transcendental structures that make such objects available. Rather than taking subjectivity—as a condition of intelligibility—to itself be an explanatory primitive, object-first explanations take objects to be the only legitimate explanatory primitives, but this form of explanation can succeed only if objects can be coherently assumed to produce the conditions of their own intelligibility.28

Now, a physicalist might suggest, along the lines of the phenomenal concept strategy, that subjectivity, like an experiential state, is something to which we have access in two different ways. In this case, however, ‘there’s no two ways about it,’ so to speak. There aren’t two ways of accessing one’s own openness to the world; there is only one: being a subject. The proposed doubling is impossible with respect to subjectivity because of its unique role in constituting one’s access to the world. Subjectivity cannot be encountered in experience as just another among the many objects in the world. In opening us to the world, subjectivity is the context for experience, not a particular experience (like a quale) that could be targeted by other means, or encountered in different ways. This is to say that when it comes to one’s own subjectivity one does not find a pair of cognitively distinct objects, that might turn out to be identical, ontologically-speaking. Thus, a consistent and phenomenologically-respectable exposition of our grasp of the world’s ontology requires us to acknowledge, at the outset, the condition that makes beings available to us,

28 The suggestion that we maintain both transcendental and metaphysical explanations runs into the problem of double grounding, discussed in Chapter 2. In brief, the problem is that we cannot consistently give both a metaphysical explanation of the possibility of subjectivity and a transcendental explanation of the possibility of metaphysics since each purports to be the ultimate explanation of the other.
namely, subjectivity. The attempt to “kick away the ladder” of subjectivity once it has secured knowledge of objects for us cannot succeed because subjectivity is the condition of possibility for our encounters with objects, and not an object itself. An important corollary of this last conclusion is that subjectivity cannot be reduced to the physical, since anything physical shows up for us as an object.

Note that the argument that got us to this conclusion was not a straightforwardly metaphysical one. It did not rely on a dogmatic metaphysical assumption about the inconceivability of a physical reduction of qualitative characters. Rather, it involves the application of a methodological principle that constrains what we can count as a well-grounded ontology. The claim is that in order to give a well-grounded ontological account of anything, including our subjectivity, we must also provide a transcendental account of our access to the phenomenon with which the ontological account is concerned. Crucially, the transcendental philosopher points out that such access always involves the intelligibility of the phenomenon in question, and so the transcendental structure of subjectivity must be presupposed as ‘always already’ in place in order to explain both how, and what it is, that we experience. The status of transcendental structures of subjectivity as a priori with respect to the objects that they make available disallows the reductive explanation of those structures in terms of those objects.

Thus, this argument shouldn’t be thought to play into the stalemate Balog identifies with respect to the disputants on either side of the phenomenal concept strategy; it serves instead as a methodologically-motivated move towards a denial of physicalism. Were it the case that subjectivity presented itself to itself as a worldly object, then it might be explicable in terms of a causal or metaphysical dependency between objects—a dependency say, between experiential particulars and physical ones. But since subjectivity
manifests itself, not as an object, but as the very context which makes it possible for objects to be intelligible in the first place, then it seems that it must occupy a position in the order of explanation that cannot be usurped, elided, or replaced by explanations that refer to objects alone. Attempting to give an explanation of subjectivity, qua condition of possibility, in terms of a domain of causes or entities whose manifestation is made possible by subjectivity would be to change the subject, to explain the being of an object instead of the being of subjectivity itself.

Unraveling The Paradox of Subjectivity

If the being of things is always tied up with our access to their being, then how is it that subjectivity accesses itself and its structure? What is subjectivity’s mode of being? Here a closer look at Husserl’s phenomenological method will be helpful, particularly his development of the procedure of ‘transcendental reduction.’ Husserl’s first systematic presentation of the transcendental reduction in Ideas I involves what has come to be known as ‘the epoché.’ The epoché is a modification of our ordinary attitude towards the world, a posture which Husserl calls “the natural attitude” (Husserl 1983, 51ff). In the natural attitude, we are concerned primarily with things in the world, with the mundane objects and properties we encounter in everyday life. Underlying this concern, is a “general positizing” of the world itself as “factually existent” (Husserl 1983, 56–7). Our concern for particular things, that is, depends on a background ontological commitment to the existence of the world in general. Husserl suggests that we can see more clearly what this commitment involves if we step back from it, “parenthesizing” or “bracketing” the general positizing of the world upon which the natural attitude depends. In adopting the epoché we deliberately avoid any reference to the world’s factual existence in describing
the structure of what shows up for us. As Husserl puts it, “the positing undergoes a modification: while it in itself remains what it is, we, so to speak, ‘put it out of action’ we ‘exclude it,’ we ‘parenthesize it’” (1983, 59). This bracketing of the world’s existence allows us to shift our attention away from the objects disclosed by our openness to the world back to the openness itself. To bracket the world’s existence isn’t to deny it—as Husserl says, “It is still there, like the parenthesized of the parentheses” (1983, 59)—but once it is bracketed, we are freed to focus on subjectivity itself.\textsuperscript{29}

Husserl is careful to differentiate the method of transcendental reduction from the Cartesian method of hyperbolic doubt. The reduction effected by the epochē ‘reduces’ in the sense of ‘leading back’ (reducere, in Latin) to experience, but this is quite different from the way in which hyperbolic doubt might be said to involve a ‘reduction.’ In the epochē, crucially, nothing is lessened in its magnitude or extent.

First, unlike Cartesian hyperbolic doubt, the epochē does not seek to reduce the strength of our beliefs, even temporarily; it doesn’t involve doubts about the reality of things which would serve to weaken the strength of our standing beliefs or the credence we give to them. The aim of the epochē is, rather, to allow us to set aside the ontological

\textsuperscript{29} An analogy may help. When someone is learning to draw (“from life,” as they say), one learns a different way of relating to what it is that one sees before them. In life drawing exercises, one unlearns the habit of projecting onto the thing seen a form which is merely expected. As is apparent to anyone who has attempted life drawing, as a beginner, one tends towards cartoonish or symbolic representations, which depict objects in a way that reflect one’s memories and expectations more than the object’s present visual appearance. Representational drawing requires one to attend to the act of seeing, and less to one’s understanding of the features of the thing seen. In this way, without changing what she sees, the more experienced draftsperson focuses on a different aspect of their seeing, on structures of line, contrast, colour, and shade, which can subsequently be used to reconstruct the appearance of the scene in pigment. This new way of relating to one’s seeing isn’t a replacement for the original seeing of the object, but depends on that seeing, and is simply a modification of one’s relation to it. One still looks at the object and sees it, but the experience of seeing is taken up in a different way. Similarly, the transcendental reduction has the function of leading us back from awareness of objects to awareness of subjectivity and its structure.
commitments involved in our everyday openness to the world, while allowing that openness to remain operative. This allows us to focus on what shows itself in our experience: the phenomena. This refocusing on phenomena is the key positive result of engaging in the epochē, and is orthogonal to our actual states of belief or doubt.

Second, the phenomenological reduction does not reduce the scope of our theorizing to ideas ‘internal’ to the mind. Experience is, for the purposes of phenomenological description, the manifestation of phenomena as such. Since our ontological understanding of things depends on this manifestation, we cannot simply assume a dichotomy of internal mental states and external reality in order to understand the phenomena the reduction has led us back to. Rather, we need to explain how ontological distinctions, like that between the ‘inner’ and ‘outer,’ are themselves made possible by the structured manifestation of phenomena to subjects. Thus, Husserl’s epochē isn’t a restriction to what is ‘contained’ in the mind, but instead refocuses our attention on the way that objects—including our mental states—are made available to us as phenomena.

Across the span of his career, Husserl ultimately provided two ways into the performance of the reduction, which have come to be known as the ‘Cartesian’ way and the ‘ontological’ way. While the ‘Cartesian’ way into the reduction suggested by the epochē and its method of ‘bracketing’ help to bring the phenomena that ground ontological understanding into clear view, it also has the unfortunate effect of suggesting that Husserl takes subjectivity to be a self-enclosed world of pure experience. Nothing, however, could

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30 Iso Kern (1977) argues that Husserl provided three ways to the transcendental reduction, but I follow John Drummond (1975) in thinking that Kern’s ‘third way,’ through intentional psychology, is simply a special case of the ontological way. What we have just traced now is the so-called ‘Cartesian’ way, but we have already pursued the ‘ontological’ way through our phenomenological interpretation of science, which uncovered our openness to the world as the transcendental condition of ontological, and in turn, scientific understanding.
be further from the truth. What Husserl’s phenomenology aims at making explicit is the transcendental structure of our access to the real and independent world. This was the motivation for Husserl’s later development of the ‘ontological’ way to the reduction, to his speaking in terms of the ‘lifeworld,’ and eventually to Heidegger’s talk simply of ‘world’. These locutions are meant to indicate that the phenomenological analysis of subjectivity shows not that we are given to ourselves as the sole spectators of a solipsistic picture show, but precisely as participants in a world that is manifest as a domain of meaningful objects, inhabited by other subjects. In whatever way it is achieved, however, the transcendental reduction allows us to examine the mode of being of subjectivity in a way that is independent of any dogmatic metaphysical views concerning the relationship between the subject and the world.

The everyday, object-revealing natural attitude and the phenomenological, subjectivity-revealing transcendental attitude constitute two ways of relating to our mental lives. On the one hand, considered from the natural attitude, we encounter our own mental states and processes, and those of others, as objects tied up in relations of ‘conditionality’ with other objects in the world, including our bodily states and processes. On the other hand, considering our mental lives from the transcendental attitude, we can step back from the factual existence of bodily and mental objects, and attend to the way these are given to us as phenomena.

This leads to what Husserl calls the ‘paradox of subjectivity’. How is subjectivity, in the transcendental sense, related to the objects in the world that constitute us as empirical subjects or persons? It is undeniable that persons exist as empirical phenomena, both

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31 See chapter 3 of David Carr’s *The Paradox of Subjectivity* for a more in-depth discussion of Husserl’s approach to this paradox (1999).
embodied and possessed of mental states. Is transcendental subjectivity, then, somehow identical to the empirical subject or person? In considering this possibility, Husserl asks: “How can a component of the world, its human subjectivity, constitute the whole world, namely constitute it as its intentional formation … while the … subjects … are themselves only a partial formation within the total accomplishment?” (1970, 179). As Husserl realized, this way of thinking quickly slides into paradox. For if transcendental subjectivity were identical to the empirical subject, then the subject in the world would also have to contain the world, like a snake eating its own tail: “The subjective part of the world swallows up, so to speak, the whole world and thus itself too” (Husserl 1970, 180).32

How, then, is the paradox to be avoided? Husserl’s answer is to maintain that subjectivity, considered transcendentally, cannot be understood in terms of the objectified body or the objectified mind encountered in the natural attitude. As David Carr puts it, “the pure or transcendental ego relates … to the world, not as a part to whole, but as subject to object—or rather, as subject to horizon of objects” (1999, 90–1). While the transcendental subject is conceived as the condition of openness to the world, the empirical subject or person is understood as a complex object, constituted in experience by and for transcendental subjectivity.33

This brings us to the limits of what transcendental philosophy can hope to accomplish. The relationship between subjectivity and the constituted empirical person reflects

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32 Note that this paradox takes the form of the “problem of double grounding” identified by Steven Crowell (2001, 231–3) discussed in Chapter 2.

33 To be more precise, Husserl argues that we need to maintain two distinct senses of ‘I’, each of which implicates the other in a particular way: there is the transcendental ‘I’ which constitutes, and the empirical ‘I’ which is constituted. In understanding the transcendental ‘I’ as the structured context of openness to the world within which the empirical ‘I’ is constituted, we acknowledge both its different mode of disclosure, and its explanatory relation, as transcendental condition of possibility, for the manifestation of the empirical ‘I’.
the complexity of our situation with respect to our own subjectivity. A scientific understanding of myself can supplement my self-understanding in various ways. It can make me aware of the way that various aspects of my person change together—how, for example, my mental states and bodily states are related. In the final analysis, however, these scientific findings do not provide a means of access to my subjectivity that would be independent from subjectivity. Science alone cannot ground my grasp of my subjectivity; it cannot replace my first-personal grasp of my being-in-the-world with a third-personal grasp, for even the ‘third-personal’ investigations of natural science are already involved in, and already presuppose the manifestation of phenomena. As Husserl puts it in Ideas II:

> From the foregoing considerations, there results a limit to possible naturalizing: the mind [Geist] can be grasped as dependent on nature and can itself be naturalized, but only to a certain degree. A univocal determination of mind through merely natural dependencies is unthinkable... Subjects cannot be dissolved into nature, for in that case what gives nature its sense would be missing. (1989, 311; translation modified)

We can discover the empirical conditions of conscious experience, but crucially these empirical conditions cannot show up for us as absolute or self-sufficient metaphysical grounds of subjectivity itself. Instead, they remain objects for a subjectivity whose mode of being is to be a context of phenomenal manifestation that is structured by relations between different types of phenomena. Now, while the existence of the empirical person cannot function as the complete explanation of the existence of subjectivity, it is nevertheless closely bound up with way that subjectivity manifests itself. Subjectivity is always constituted for itself in relation to an empirical person, who is both embodied and pos-
sessed of a mental life, and the transcendental reduction allows us to recognize this inter-
relation and interplay between transcendental and empirical structure.  

Phenomenology shows us why the “hard problem of consciousness” should be seen, not just as an isolated ontological question within metaphysics, but as the question of what makes ontological investigation possible at all. Phenomenology shows that our grasp of objectivity cannot be metaphysically grounded on objects alone, but requires a detour through the transcendental subjectivity that allows objects to manifest itself in experience. Metaphysical inquiry must then operate within the context of a transcendental condition it cannot explain, and cannot serve as first philosophy.

Failure to consider “the hard problem of consciousness” as, in part, a transcendental question leads us to think that an appropriate solution to that problem would consist in the discovery of some property in the world that would causally produce or metaphysically constitute consciousness. But against this, the phenomenologist contends that the transcendental analysis of ontological categories cannot be replaced by explanations of subjectivity that simply presuppose an ontology, physicalist or not: the sense of the objectively real cannot be explained in terms of the objectively real, without begging the question of how our understanding of the objectively real is grounded. This is why transcendental phenomenology, while not in conflict with the natural sciences, is methodologically prior to them in the order of philosophical investigation in that it attempts to show how the structures of manifestation necessary for natural science are possible in a way that the natural sciences are not equipped to do on their own. As I have

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34 See Chapter 3 for further discussion of the relationship between subjectivity and the physical body.
argued, phenomenology provides reasons, in principle, why subjectivity cannot be understood just in terms of objects.

This will not allow us to do away with the need for empirical, and in particular, natural scientific investigation of the mind, since our subjectivity is not merely spectatorial, but thrown into, and engaged with the world. As Merleau-Ponty puts it,

The most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction. This is why Husserl is always wonders anew about the possibility of the reduction. If we were absolute spirit, the reduction would present no problem. But since, on the contrary, we are in and toward the world, and since even our reflections take place in the temporal flow that they are trying to capture […], there is no thought that encompasses all our thought. (2012, lxxvii–lxxviii)

Transcendental phenomenology can lead us back to the phenomena as the experiential grounds of our ontological understanding, but pure reflection cannot lay bare, on its own, the structure of our embeddedness in the world.35

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35 In Chapter 3, I examine this embeddedness in more detail, in order to see how subjectivity shows itself to be bound up with nature in its manifestation of itself to itself.
Chapter 2

Phenomenological Naturalism

Transcendental Phenomenology and Naturalism

My goal here will be to show that transcendental phenomenology can be reconciled with a form of naturalism. The main obstacle to the reconciliation of transcendental phenomenology and naturalism is that phenomenology, insofar as it represents a form of transcendental philosophy, rejects the commitment to the primacy of metaphysical explanation that stands in the background of most contemporary versions of naturalism. The phenomenological naturalism that I outline here claims that transcendental structures of subjectivity exist as features of the very same natural world as the objects they make available. This means, however, that phenomena that constitute the natural world cannot be limited to those of a scientifically-oriented physicalist metaphysics.

Philosophy of a naturalistic orientation typically aims to explain phenomena in terms of the existence of a mind-independent reality, a reality that we come to know through empirical investigation and conceptual analysis. In its most disciplined and rigorous form, this investigation of reality is thought to amount to natural science. The naturalist program thus involves two interrelated commitments: the first, metaphysical, and the second, methodological. Naturalism’s metaphysical commitment holds that, ultimately, everything that exists is metaphysically grounded on a mind-independent nature, and thus can be fully explained by the contents of the natural world, its structure, and
nothing else. All that exists is natural, and nature is all that exists. But what is nature? What does it contain and how is it structured? Trying to answer this question leads us to naturalism’s *methodological* commitment, which holds that the natural sciences are our best guide to knowledge of the world. This is to say that naturalists hold, as Wilfrid Sellars once put it, that “in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not” (1997, 83). So, although disciplines like philosophy can contribute to our theorizing by clarifying our concepts and theoretical assumptions, naturalists hold that natural science is the final arbiter in any dispute about what there is. For the naturalist then, nature, and hence reality, consists of only those entities, properties, and structures that are, or would be, referred to in successful natural scientific explanations. Combined with the view that physics is concerned with the most ontologically basic entities, properties, and structures, this methodological commitment leads many naturalists to spell out their metaphysical commitments in terms of physicalism. Thus, on one popular version of the naturalist view, everything that exists is metaphysically grounded on a natural world that consists of only the entities, properties, and structures that would be the explanatory posits of an ideally complete physics.

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1 In referring here to ‘metaphysical grounding,’ I mean to characterize as neutrally as possible the nature of the relation (or relations) by which less ontologically fundamental things are supposed to metaphysically depend on more ontologically fundamental things. Most naturalists would, of course, substitute a more determinate conception of the relevant metaphysical relations.

2 Take for example, D. M. Armstrong’s materialist naturalism which claims that “the world contains nothing but the entities recognized by physics,” and that “everything there is is wholly constituted by such entities, their connections and arrangements” (1978, 268). David Lewis writes with respect to metaphysical ontology that “This world, or any possible world, consists of things which instantiate fundamental properties and … fundamental relations,” adding to this the methodological view that, “It is a task of physics to provide an inventory of all the fundamental properties and relations that occur in the world” (1999, 291–2; see also, 33–34).
For the phenomenologist however, metaphysical notions, such as, ‘existence,’
‘mind-independence,’ and ‘grounding’ (of any sort) are intelligible only relative to tran-
scendental structures of subjectivity that enable what exists to become manifest to us as
what it is—i.e., as existing, as depending on other things in various ways, and so on.\(^3\) As
Heidegger puts it, “Ontology is possible only as phenomenology” (2010, 33). This is to
say that understanding the meaning of our ontological claims (and moreover, justifying
such claims) requires us to make clear to ourselves the conditions that make ontological
understanding possible in the first place. Crucially, the phenomenologist holds that this
clarification must be carried out in a way that does not beg any questions by assuming an
ontology ahead of time. So, for example, an empirical theory of perception would not
suffice for a phenomenological explanation of ontological understanding since such a
theory must already presuppose (among other things) the existence of the body of a per-
ceiver who would carry out acts of perception, and would in this way, explain knowledge
of ontological categories on the basis of a prior, presupposed ontology of the perceiving
body. Accordingly, transcendental phenomenology takes transcendental explanation of
the possibility of ontological understanding to be prior to any putative metaphysical (or
empirical-scientific) explanations. In making possible the manifestation of the very things
we seek to explain in metaphysical ontology, transcendental structures of subjectivity
function as prior and independent grounds of the possibility of any ontological under-

\(^3\) It is sometimes argued that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty differ from Husserl in that they
reconceive phenomenology as a ‘hermeneutic’ or ‘existential’ project rather than a transcendental
one, a project concerned with a historicized being-in-the-world as opposed to the structure of
transcendental subjectivity. To the extent, however, that hermeneutic and existential approaches
to phenomenology remain concerned with first-person reflection on the conditions that make
possible the manifestation of a meaningful world, I would argue that it remains correct to describe
them as transcendental projects concerned with the structure of subjectivity. For further discus-
sion of this issue see Zahavi (2008), Crowell (2001; especially ch. 9), and the essays in Crowell &
Malpas (2007).
standing whatsoever. As a result, the transcendental phenomenologist holds that metaphysical grounding cannot function as a self-standing explanation of the existence of things, because the intelligibility of such an explanation must already presuppose the transcendental structure of subjectivity as its explanatory ground. As Dan Zahavi explains,

reality is not simply a brute fact detached from every context of experience and from every conceptual framework, but is a system of validity and meaning that needs subjectivity, that is, experiential and conceptual perspectives if it is to manifest and articulate itself. It is in this sense that reality depends upon subjectivity, which is why Husserl claims that it is just as nonsensical to speak of an absolute mind-independent reality as it is to speak of a circular square... This is obviously not to deny or question the existence of the real world, but simply to reject an objectivistic interpretation of its ontological status. (2003a, 69–70)

The ineliminable reference to transcendental structure in all metaphysical and ontological understanding has the consequence that nature, as a metaphysical posit, loses its explanatory independence from subjectivity—and, for this very reason, its capacity to serve as the most fundamental form of explanation. Rather than being the metaphysical ground of mind-independent reality, the natural world becomes the explanatorily-dependent 'corre-

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4 See Amie Thomasson (2007), however, for a more conciliatory conception of the relationship between transcendental phenomenology and realist metaphysics. Thomasson conceives phenomenology as a method (rather than a body of doctrine) which is “transcendental in the sense that it is concerned with uncovering conditions of the possibility of having certain types of experience or representation” (2007, 88). Furthermore, since this method is concerned not with reality itself but with a “meaning analysis,” yielding conditions of possibility, she argues that it has no immediate bearing on metaphysical questions about “what really exists” (2007, 91). In particular, it has nothing to say about the existence or non-existence of a mind-independent reality. For Thomasson, phenomenology, construed austerely as a method, is neutral with respect to the mind-independence of reality. But, as Husserl, himself takes pains to say at the end of his Paris Lectures, “in order to avoid misunderstanding, I would like to point out that in phenomenology, we exclude not every metaphysics, but only the naïve kind, the metaphysics working with things that are in themselves nonsensical” (2003, 35–6). This blocks a phenomenological recovery of transcendental realism because once the question of the conditions of the possibility of experience has been raised, there is no sense to claims about “what really exists” apart from those conditions, and so no way back to the speculative understanding of reality ‘in itself’ presupposed by transcendental realists (in Kant’s sense of the phrase). Phenomenology, as transcendental philosophy, rules transcendental realism out, not as a matter of doctrine, but as an immediate consequence of applying its methodology.
late’ of the subjectivity through which it comes to be understood. So, although the explanatory dependence of nature on transcendental structure is not due to a metaphysical dependence (since, for example, transcendental subjectivity is not taken to be the cause of the existence of the natural world), it nevertheless gives transcendental grounding priority over metaphysical grounding as the most fundamental form of explanation. Husserl puts the point starkly, saying that “The existence of a nature cannot be the condition for the existence of consciousness, since nature itself turns out to be a correlate of consciousness” (1983, 116). This commitment to the explanatory priority of transcendental grounds over metaphysical grounds means that any advocate of a phenomenological naturalism will face two potential problems.

First, a phenomenological naturalist might face skepticism from naturalistic quarters concerning the supposed ‘naturalness’ of transcendental structures of subjectivity. The worry here is that the structures of subjectivity that the phenomenologist claims are necessary preconditions for ontological understanding are not natural structures precisely because they are not understood to be metaphysically grounded in entities countenanced by the natural sciences. That is, a naturalist might object that since the phenomenologist claims that explanation in terms of transcendental structure is prior to and independent of explanation in terms of metaphysical grounding, any reference to transcendental structure will inevitably fail to be naturalistic since the domain of the natural is exhausted by whatever turns out to be metaphysically grounded in entities which would, ideally, be recognized by successful scientific theories.5

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5 An even stronger version of this objection might come from physicalist or materialist naturalists who would claim that because transcendental phenomenological theories refer to structures which are not grounded in the entities recognized by physics, such theories must be false since the only
Second, the thesis that transcendental subjectivity is explanatorily prior to nature implies that the attempt to understand transcendental subjectivity naturalistically will face what Steven Crowell has called “the problem of double grounding” (2001, 233). Supposing that a naturalist recognizes the explanatory role of transcendental subjectivity in the first place, most naturalists will nevertheless want to show how this subjectivity is metaphysically grounded in scientifically-recognized natural properties—perhaps through a reduction of the structures governing the phenomenal manifestation of things to the existence of some set of physical processes. The transcendental phenomenologist however will want to maintain that transcendental subjectivity is the ground of the possibility of the manifestation of anything at all, including nature. The problem here is that if transcendental subjectivity, as the transcendental ground of nature, is explanatorily prior to nature, then the attempt to provide a metaphysical grounding for transcendental subjectivity in nature will end up claiming both (a) that transcendental subjectivity is ultimately explained by its being metaphysically grounded in nature, and (b) that the phenomenal manifestation of nature is ultimately explained by its being transcendentally grounded in the activity of transcendental subjectivity. Attempting to hold both (a) and (b) would result in a “double grounding” of transcendental subjectivity in nature and of nature in transcendental subjectivity, with each grounding relation providing what is supposed to be an ‘ultimate’ ground, thereby leaving metaphysical explanation and transcendental explanation in competition for explanatory priority. So, to return to the example above, if one were to try to explain transcendental subjectivity by grounding it, metaphysically, on the occurrence of a physical process, one would have to hold (a) that the existence of trans-
scendental subjectivity is ultimately explained by the occurrence of that physical process, and (b) that the phenomenal manifestation of that physical process is ultimately explained by the activity of transcendental subjectivity. It should be clear that this fails to provide even so much as a circular explanation of either transcendental subjectivity or nature since each half of the ‘circle,’ each explanatory ‘arc’, purports to take precedence over the other, with the supposed metaphysical ground shrugging off the need for a transcendental ground, and vice versa. As Crowell notes, such a position is unstable if not incoherent, and threatens to collapse phenomenology’s “genuine insight” into the distinction between the conditions of the intelligibility of things and the intelligible things themselves, leading us back towards a pre-critical metaphysics which attempts to understand the transcendental ground of the phenomenal manifestation of things as, itself, just another thing (2001, 231).

Towards a Phenomenological Naturalism

At the heart of both skepticism about the naturalistic credentials of the transcendental, and the problem of double grounding, is the question of how we could possibly construe the transcendental structure of subjectivity as something natural. A first step towards a viable answer to this question would be to drop the assumption, shared by most naturalists and transcendental philosophers, that if transcendental structures are not properly thought of as metaphysically grounded in the existence of the entities studied by the natural sciences, then transcendental structure must be non-natural. As Zahavi notes, on this dichotomous understanding of the relationship between the transcendental and the empirical, the attempt to naturalize phenomenology can only be a kind of “category mistake” (2013b). This means that if naturalism and transcendental inquiry are to be reconciled, naturalism’s commitment to the primacy of metaphysical explanation must be
dropped, as must the shared commitment to a sharp separation between the empirical and the transcendental. The existence of the transcendental structures disclosed in phenomenology will have to be understood as grounded in the very same nature as the empirical structures discovered in natural science. Phenomenology will have to shift its efforts from the production of ontologically-neutral description of the transcendental structure of subjectivity to ontological inquiry into the nature that makes the existence of subjectivity possible. By the same token, nature, as the naturalist’s object of study, must be approached not just as a metaphysical reality external to the mind in need of theoretical modeling or representation, but as a phenomenally manifest reality whose structure is revealed in both ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ experience of the world, a reality whose various modes of givenness underlie the very distinction between what is immanent to the mind and what is transcendent to it, between mind-dependent and mind-independent existence.

Kant and Husserl, of course, hew to a sharp divide between our understanding of what is constituted for transcendental subjectivity (namely, the empirical world) and our understanding of transcendental subjectivity itself (the domain of non-objectified structures and activities that account for the possibility of experience of an empirical world). Against this division, however, it might be objected that conceiving of the relationship between transcendental subjectivity and the empirical world in this way is philosophically unproductive to the extent that it blocks the development of an ontological understanding of transcendental subjectivity. If transcendental subjectivity is conceived only as the condition allows for the manifestation of beings, and never as an existing being itself, then the question of the mode of being of transcendental subjectivity will be unjustifiably sup-

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6 As will be obvious to their readers, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty’s conceptions of phenomenology already make substantial moves in this direction.
pressed. In this way, a metaphysically-inflected naturalism and a ‘pure’ transcendental philosophy mirror one another in trying to provide fundamental explanations of our experience of the world by making reference to just one side of the transcendental/empirical divide, indexing their explanations to the ‘pure’ acts of a transcendental subject on the one side, or the blind activity of physical matter, on the other. In attempting to provide an ontological understanding of transcendental subjectivity, however, we cannot simply return to the pre-critical metaphysics of mind supported by most naturalists, since the concrete existence of subjectivity in nature will nevertheless involve a transcendental dimension that makes possible the manifestation of objects to subjects, and the manifestation of subjects to themselves.

It might be objected at this point that the attempt to understand what I am calling the ‘transcendental dimension’ of subjectivity is superfluous, and that ordinary empirical natural science can account for even the supposedly ‘transcendental’ aspects of the phenomenal manifestation of the world. In support of this objection, one could point out that cognitive science and philosophy of mind are already making great strides in explaining the phenomenal manifestation of the world in terms of a nature which is, at base, physically construe. The point here would be that what the phenomenologist thinks of as transcendental structure is, in reality, nothing more than a feature of certain physical processes. For example, in his 1941 paper, “Kant’s Doctrine of the A Priori in Light of Contemporary Biology,” Konrad Lorenz argues that the structure of the Kantian a priori might be “due to hereditary differentiations of the central nervous system which have become characteristic of the species, producing hereditary dispositions to think in certain

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7 Alva Noë (2007) argues along similar lines that the phenomenology should not be thought of as “autonomous” from the findings of empirical science and metaphysics, though he demurs from understanding its subject matter as in any way ‘transcendental.’
forms” (2009, 231). On this view, the structure of our experience would not require a
distinctively transcendental explanation, separate from empirical explanation, since the
supposedly a priori forms of experience—space, time, causality, and so on—can be en-
tirely accounted for empirically by means of evolution through natural selection.

Instead of being non-empirical conditions for the possibility of a phenomenally-
manifest nature, the Kantian a priori would be nothing more than the functioning of a
physical organ of representation. For Lorenz, then, the structure of experience is not
determined by functions that take place beyond the empirical world, but by functions
which take place within it. As Lorenz puts it,

the a priori is based on central nervous systems which are entirely as real as the
things of the external world whose phenomenal form they determine for us. This
central nervous apparatus does not prescribe the laws of nature any more than the
hoof of the horse prescribes the form of the ground. (Lorenz 2009, 232)

Lorenz’s physical reconstruction of supposedly transcendental structures presents
an alternative to the Kantian understanding of the relationship between the transcenden-
tal and the empirical. While, for Kant, the notion of the transcendental refers to forms of
representation that do not apply to the world considered in itself, Lorenz points out that
whatever the structuring principles of our representations are, their ultimate source might
still be explicable in terms of what they ostensibly represent, namely the physical world.
As Lorenz notes, however, this way of explaining the source of the a priori “means the
destruction of the concept” (2009, 231), since the supposed ‘a priori’ forms of representa-
tion would in fact be the physical result of an a posteriori process of evolutionary
adaptation to environmental conditions. If Lorenz’s hypothesis is correct, then transcen-
dental explanation is reducible to physical explanation, and the structure of experience is
metaphysically grounded in the natural world, physically described.
While I agree with Lorenz that Kant’s conception of the transcendental goes too far in trying to understand transcendental structure without any reference to the subject’s worldly existence, I think Lorenz’s alternative goes too far in the opposite direction in its attempt to metaphysically reduce transcendental conditions to empirical ones. Kant may be wrong to take empirical facts to be irrelevant to the structure of our experience, but this does not mean that the structure of experience can be fully explained by reference to only empirical facts.

To see why Lorenz’s empirical account does not fully explain the structure of experience we need to consider how Lorenz believes experience relates us to the world. He writes that

The faculty of understanding does not in itself constitute an explanation of phenomena, but the fact that it projects phenomena for us in a practically usable form on to the projection-screen of our experiencing is due to its formulation of working hypotheses, developed in evolution and tested through millions of years. (Lorenz 2009, 239)

What is important to note here is that Lorenz takes the objects manifest to us in experience—the “phenomena”—to be projections onto an internal “projection-screen” standing over against an external reality. But in virtue of what are such projections able to present an external reality? Moreover, how would we even know it if they did present an external reality? Such a view courts skepticism about the very intelligibility of experience as experience of an external world since we would have no way of knowing from within the ‘theater’ of the mind whether what is projected on the ‘screen’ bears any relation to what it is supposed to represent, and whether it is, therefore, a representation at all.

The moral to draw here is that Kant’s search for the conditions of the possibility of experience was not a search merely for an account of how our representations happen to be, but of how they must be in order to give us access to the empirical world. Indeed, Kant
provides reasons for thinking that without a transcendental account of the connection between experience and the objects it presents, we would lack a justified account of how knowledge of the empirical world is possible. To explain how this is possible—how the empirical world could be accessible to us through its manifestation in experience—it is unhelpful to imagine experience in terms of an internal ‘theater of the mind.’ Such an account would explain our access to the world only on the prior assumption that the existence of empirically real representations would be sufficient for such access. But an empirical account of representational awareness does not explain how awareness of one thing, the representation, constitutes awareness of another thing, namely, the external world. The connection between mind and world would be, from the point of the view of experience, purely external. Thus, a purely empirical investigation into the mind is cast at the wrong level of explanation to answer the Kantian question about the conditions of the possibility of experience—it presupposes the world-disclosing power of experience and of empirical science without giving explicit recognition to the deeper question of how experience itself makes the disclosure of the world possible in the first place.\(^8\)

In just the same way, Quine’s thought that we can replace transcendental epistemology with empirical psychology helps itself to the normative concepts involved in scientific descriptions without giving an account of how those norms are themselves justified (1969). The analogy, borrowed from Otto Neurath, of the sailor gradually replacing the planks of a ship at sea simply assumes that the ‘ship’ of science is floating in the first place (Quine 1960). An empirical genealogy of the norms of scientific description doesn’t succeed in showing why we should trust those norms, only that ‘we’ do in practice—whatever ‘we’ are, and only to the extent that ‘we’ do seem to act in accord with some set

\(^8\) See Mark Johnston (2007) for similar worries about representationalist accounts of ‘presence.’
of empirically describable regularities. But what happens when ‘we’ run into disagreement or doubt about ‘our’ norms? How can we answer skeptical doubts about the validity of our descriptions? Does it really solve the problem to just remind ourselves how ‘we’ do things?

For Kant, by contrast, this kind of skepticism about the validity of our norms of description is ruled out because the phenomena disclosed in experience are not taken to be representational surrogates for empirical reality, but empirical reality itself. A causal account of the physical evolution and operation of the organs of cognition is certainly important, but it misses the transcendental import of the question concerning the conditions of the possibility of experience. No naturalist would deny that physical conditions are tied up with the possibility of subjective experience of the world, but the question raised by Kant about the conditions of experience is, in large part, a question about the normativity of experience, a question about how phenomenal awareness itself could constitute knowledge of the world.

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9 One of Kant’s arguments for this view can be found in the ‘Refutation of Idealism’ section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998). While I don’t endorse Kant’s particular version of transcendental idealism, and don’t endorse the argument in his ‘Refutation’, I would argue that only a view which takes perceptual experience to be a relation to reality can account for both the epistemology and the phenomenology of perception. See John Campbell (2002) and Alva Noë (2012) for two different defenses of the relational view of our contact with the world. For some differences between the relational view and Kant’s view, see Campbell (2011).

10 The problems I raise here for Lorenz’s view are shared by causal theories of representational content like Jerry Fodor’s (1987), and by teleoinformational and teleosemantic theories like Fred Dretske’s (1988) and Ruth Garrett Millikan’s (1990), respectively. Such accounts may provide insights into the functioning of the subpersonal representational machinery at work in producing behavior, but they fail to provide satisfying explanations of how the intentionality of neural representations is connected with their phenomenal character.
Nature from a Phenomenological Standpoint

Conceiving of the transcendental structure of subjectivity in a naturalistic way requires us to rethink the relationship between the empirical and the transcendental such that each form of understanding remains distinct, while nevertheless remaining incomplete without the other. Likewise, what is understood by empirical and transcendental standpoints on the world—the concrete empirical objects and the transcendental subjectivity through which they are revealed—would need to be understood as ontologically (though not merely metaphysically) interdependent. This is to say that while neither concrete objects nor transcendental subjectivity can be taken to be the independently existing metaphysical ground of the other, the way in which each is understood must be such that its mode of being, the way it shows up as a phenomenon, depends on the mode of being of the other.

Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty move phenomenology in this direction through their deployment of the concept of *being-in-the-world*, a concept in which the subject and its world are inextricably and internally linked. Instead of taking for granted a conceptual starting point that separates subjects and objects according to metaphysically-charged notions of psychological immanence and metaphysical transcendence, the concept of being-in-the-world begins with a field of phenomenal manifestation that *can*, in certain situations, manifest itself in a relation holding between a subject and an object. More often, however, our being-in-the-world allows for the manifestation of phenomena *without* the manifestation of an explicit divide, for example when we are deeply absorbed in a practical activity such as a fast-paced tennis game, or driving down a smooth, clear
stretch of highway. Being-in-the-world thus allows for the manifestation of a psychological subject and a transcendent world, without the assumption that this difference is grounded in a constant and pre-existing *metaphysical* difference between subjects and objects, between the mind and the world it inhabits. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject who is nothing but a project of the world; and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world that it itself projects” (2012, 454). Merleau-Ponty’s own account of embodied perception suggests that transcendental structure and empirical reality are mutually dependent in the following way: without the actual and ongoing manifestation of empirical objects to a concretely existing body, reflection on transcendental structures would be impossible since it is only in the context of the perceptual interrelation of body and world that there is any transcendental structure to illuminate; conversely, without transcendental structures of subjectivity to define them, the manifestation of empirical objects (as empirical objects) would likewise be impossible, since the manifestation of such objects occurs within a world of perception whose horizons are delineated by the structures involved in our bodily being.

On this understanding of the relationship between the empirical and the transcendental, what is manifest to us in lived experience are not, as Husserl thought, two separate regions containing subject-‘relative’ constituted beings on the one hand, and the ‘absolute’ being of transcendental subjectivity on the other—rather, we inhabit a single

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11 See Hubert Dreyfus (1990) for an exploration of the concept of being-in-the-world in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, and for discussion of the phenomenological ramifications of absorbed coping.

12 A typical formulation of this divide between the ‘relative’ and the ‘absolute’ can be found in Epilogue of *Ideas II*, where Husserl writes that, “The result of the phenomenological sense-clarification of the mode of being of the real world, and of any conceivable real world at all, is that
region of being whose unity is manifest in our ability to grasp both sides of the supposed divide. This rethinking of the relationship between the empirical and the transcendental means that transcendental reflection doesn’t reveal pure and abstract structures specifying merely formal laws of appearance for consciousness, but structures of a being-in-the-world whose concrete existence is made manifest in the existence of subjects whose involvement in a world and capacity for reflection on transcendental structure are interrelated aspects of one and the same natural mode of being. This way of approaching the relationship between the transcendental and the empirical has the benefit of showing how the existence of transcendental subjectivity is intertwined with the existence of the world it experiences, allowing the phenomenological naturalist to avoid Crowell’s “problem of double grounding.” Since neither the transcendental subject nor the empirical world is understood as the independent ground of the other, nature can be understood as the ontological term grounding both phenomena, a horizon of manifest being whose way of existing can be grasped through both transcendental reflection and empirical investigation. The difference between things and the conditions of their intelligibility can be maintained alongside their essential interconnection in a natural ground, with the result that our ontological understanding of nature will not take the form of a metaphysics of ground, but will include an ineliminable transcendental dimension.

Nature, on this view, would be that which explains the possibility of our grasp of the objects of natural science, as well as the possibility of our grasp of transcendental structures of subjectivity. The crucial point here is that in order for nature to encompass

only the being of transcendental subjectivity has the sense of absolute being, that only it is “irrelative” (i.e., relative only to itself), whereas the real world indeed is, but has an essential relativity to transcendental subjectivity, due, namely to the fact that it can have its sense as being only as an intentional sense-formation of transcendental subjectivity” (1989, 420).
transcendental subjectivity it will have to be capable of expressing the relevant features of transcendental subjectivity in its way of existing. Now, in saying that nature expresses features of transcendental subjectivity, I do not mean to suggest that nature itself, as a whole, \textit{is} a conscious subject, nor that consciousness is a property spread throughout nature in the sense advocated by property dualists or panpsychists. Views like these attempt to locate subjectivity in nature by referring it to some metaphysical ground that is to be found in some part, or in the whole, of nature. David Chalmers’ “naturalistic dualism” (1996), for example, claims that consciousness ought to be understood as a set of properties of individual entities (“phenomenal properties”) that are distinct from any and all of their physical properties. Chalmers suggests that these phenomenal properties find their place in nature in one of two ways: either (a) by being fundamental features of reality themselves, existing alongside the fundamental features postulated by physics, or (b) by being based on fundamental features of reality that metaphysically ground both phenomenal and physical properties. In either case, Chalmers assures us that his is a \textit{naturalistic} dualism “because it posits that everything is a consequence of a network of basic properties and laws, and because it is compatible with all the results of contemporary science,” stressing, moreover, that “[t]here need be nothing especially transcendental about consciousness” (1996, 128). On Chalmers’ view, accounting for consciousness naturalistically is simply a matter of inserting new fundamental properties into a fundamental ontology that is conceived, like ordinary physicalism, through the lens of metaphysical realism. Similarly, Galen Strawson’s monist panpsychism—which he describes variously as an “agnostic materialism” (2010), “real materialism” (2008), or “real physicalism” (2006)—argues that whatever stuff turns out to be ontologically fundamental (call it ‘matter’ or ‘the physical’), this stuff must possess experiential properties in its intrinsic nature. Straw-
son’s view, too, takes nature to be an object of metaphysical theorizing rather than a transcendental condition of the possibility of ontological understanding. As asked by the transcendental philosopher, the question, “what makes experience of the world possible?” is not just metaphysical, but ontological. It is among other things, the question, “how does our experience provide access to being?” Both Chalmers and Strawson’s views take conscious experiences to be merely another kind of entity within nature, an intrinsic property of something or other, rather than the transcendental condition of the phenomenal manifestation of beings. Metaphysical accounts like these try to explain what experiences are in terms of intrinsic properties while neglecting to account for the way that experience confronts us with beings.

By contrast, the view I am suggesting sees nature as existing not just in and through the existence of entities, but also in the world-disclosing transcendental structures that make possible the discovery of entities as the very entities that they are. Over and above entities, nature includes a self-reflexive circuit through which natural beings can become manifest to themselves and to each other. Without this transcendental dimension, the experiential order and the physical order would lack a principled connection to one another, threatening our ability to provide a unified account of how access to the experiential order could, in principle, provide access to the physical order. For the phenomenological naturalist, however, the modal connection between experience and being isn’t just a metaphysical proposition whose truth or falsehood might be susceptible to skeptical doubt—that connection is taken to be a manifest transcendental fact. Thus, the

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13 As Thomas Nagel puts it, “Mind is doubly related to the natural order. Nature is such as to give rise to conscious beings with minds; and it is such as to be comprehensible to such beings” (2012, 17). I should note that while I think that the explanation of this double relation requires more than natural science, I do not agree with Nagel’s assessment that this is because the double relation presents an insoluble problem for evolutionary biology in particular.
phenomenological naturalist concludes that nature itself is capable of phenomenological self-disclosure in virtue of the way that it, and the subjects within it exist.

This view of the natural world as involving the transcendental conditions of its self-disclosure is, I think, best motivated by taking into account the context of empirical and scientific understanding within the lived world of experience. While the entities studied by physics are certainly independent of us in the sense that they are not causally produced by our subjectivity and exist when they are not perceived, the transcendental structures through which such entities become manifest to us must already be in place, must already give us cognitive access to nature, in order for scientific investigation to be possible at all. This is true, not just in the banal historical sense that the existence of nature has, in fact, preceded all natural scientific study, and currently enables natural science in a causal sense, but in the transcendental sense that scientific study is made possible, is constituted as a domain of inquiry, by nature’s being ‘always already’ manifest in the lived world on which scientific study is based, and to which it is directed. As Charles Taylor puts it,

We can ponder distant events, or theoretical perspectives on things, because we are first of all open to a world which can be explored, learnt about, theorized about, and so on. And our primary opening to this world, the inescapable background to all others, is through perception. (1978, 154)

This is to say that natural scientific theorizing operates on the basis of the pre-theoretical intelligibility of the lived world as a world, an intelligibility belonging to the things we experience that is always there, and indeed must be there, before any theorizing, and which is developed and elaborated, but never replaced, by scientific understanding. As Merleau-Ponty puts it,

Everything that I know about the world, even through science, I know from a perspective that is my own or from an experience of the world without which
scientific symbols would be meaningless. The entire universe of science is constructed upon the lived world... (2012, lxxii)

In attempting to place the world as it is disclosed in science ‘beneath’ the lived world as its metaphysical ground, physicalistic naturalism ends up uprooting itself, breaking its immediate experiential connection to the very world it originally set out to investigate. The world we inhabit in our everyday experience is not merely a seductive mirage thrown up in a haze of neurochemistry, an ‘apparent’ world, disjoint from the ‘real’ world of nature described in scientific theory. Thus, expanding on Merleau-Ponty’s claim, John J. Compton writes that

The world for science – the experimentally and theoretically determined world – is not an autonomous world, not another world postulated to lie somewhere “behind” or “below” the world of pre-scientific life. The world for science just is that world of pre-scientific life explored, interpreted, disclosed, and enriched in scientific terms. (1988, 70)

As Compton puts it elsewhere, “there is but one world, the lived world, in which scientific activity takes place” (1979, 11).

Moreover, this “one world” is the properly natural one. Nature transcendently grounds the possibility of science, rather than just metaphysically grounding it. ‘Nature’ cannot just refer to the world as physically described because the transcendental aspect of nature’s manifestation is not itself manifest in the manner of the physically real. The nature I am, which I experience both in me and around me, is structured in a way that is prior to, and that makes possible, our scientifically-articulated experiences of a law-governed world of physical objects. Nature, as described by the physical sciences, constitutes only one aspect of the nature that is manifest to me in lived experience. The intelligibility of the world in lived experience is something more than physical reality not in the sense of being constituted as some additional non-physical entity, but as an addi-
tional aspect of nature that constitutes the explanatory condition for the manifestation of physical reality as physical. Since this intelligibility is manifested in lived experience of the very same world investigated by physics, it is nonetheless natural despite being more than merely physical. By referring us to the original ‘site’ of our lived experience, the phenomenological conception of nature takes nature to be the unified domain of empirical manifestation and the transcendental subjectivity that apprehends it.

But what if some future physics could, by itself, account for phenomenal experience? Noam Chomsky, for example, has argued that arguments over the status of physicalism are idle because physics itself is not (or, at least, need not) be committed to an ontology which would exclude mental or experiential properties from its catalogue of acceptable fundamental physical properties (2009). Chomsky’s argument is that, first, based on the past history of physics, we have no reason to think that our current physical theories are both true and completely exhaustive in their catalogue of fundamental reality. So, the fact that our current physics does not refer to mental or experiential properties gives us no reason think that such properties will not be a part of some future physics. It may turn out that future physics will tell us that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our current theories. Moreover, even if no physics, present or future, includes the mental and experiential within its purview, this may simply reflect the

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14 Chomsky cites Bertrand Russell’s argument in *Analysis of Matter* (1927, ch. 37) to the effect that physics does not tell us about the intrinsic nature of our perceptual experiences, but is instead a logical construction formed out of such experiences, leaving it open whether our perceptual experiences themselves might be constituted of physical stuff. See also Chalmers (1996, 153–4) for a similar view regarding our ignorance of the intrinsic properties of the physical.

15 Barbara Montero presents this argument as constituting one horn of what has come to be known as ‘Hempel’s dilemma’ for would-be physicalists: “On the one hand, it seems that we cannot define the physical in terms of current microphysics since today’s principles of microphysics are, most likely, not correct. Despite some physicists’ heady optimism that the end of physics is just around the corner, history cautions prudence. […] Yet on the other hand, if we take microphysics to be some future unspecified theory, the claim that the mind is physical is extremely vague since we currently have no idea of what that theory is” (Montero 1999, 188–9).
limits of our cognitive abilities, and not some fundamental rift or division in reality itself (Chomsky 2009, 184–5).¹⁶ On this point, Chomsky appeals to Daniel Stoljar’s “ignorance hypothesis” (Stoljar 2006), which suggests that if we find ourselves unable to comprehend how there could be entailments between non-experiential (i.e., physical) properties and supervening experiential properties, then this may be the result of our epistemic limitations, rather than a lack of such entailments obtaining in reality.

Chomsky’s recommendation is that instead of remaining in thrall to possibly unanswerable philosophical problems regarding the metaphysics of mind, we ought to bracket such considerations, let the natural sciences take care of themselves, and wait to see what ontology falls out. Instead of allowing metaphysics to place limits on scientific theorizing, scientific theories should be assessed according to their ability to successfully explain their target phenomena, allowing that such explanations may not form a completely unified metaphysical picture:

To learn more about mental aspects of the world—or chemical or electrical or other aspects—we should try to discover “manifest principles” that partially explain them, though their causes remain disconnected from what we take to be more fundamental aspects of science. The gap [between mind and matter] might have many reasons, among them, as has repeatedly been discovered, that the presumed reduction base was misconceived, including core physics. (Chomsky 2009, 173)

Chomsky’s suggestion is that the sciences of the mind ought to be pursued as the sciences were after Newton’s reconfiguration of physics, unfettered by worries stemming from prior metaphysical commitments regarding the nature of matter. To focus on just one of his examples from the history of science, Chomsky argues that Newton’s conception of

¹⁶ Nagel raises the possibility that there are metaphysical truths we are constitutionally unable to comprehend in *The View from Nowhere* (1986, ch. 6). The possibility that we are systematically unable to comprehend the metaphysics of conscious experience has been further elaborated and defended by Colin McGinn (1989) and Daniel Stoljar (2006).
gravity represented an advance in our understanding of physical reality despite its inability to fit with the received, mechanistic view of the nature of matter, which did not allow for ‘occult’ forces (like gravity) capable of action at a distance. As Chomsky points out,

Science of course did not end with the collapse of the notion of body... Rather, it was reconstituted in a radically new way, with questions of conceivability and intelligibility dismissed as demonstrating nothing except about human cognitive capacities... (2009, 171–2)

Chomsky argues that, “The ‘hard problems’ of [Newton’s] day were not solved; rather abandoned” (2009, 179) in the pursuit of workable scientific explanations. So, to return to the point above, it may be that the hard problem of explaining experience in physical terms may simply be superseded by a new physics in the just same way that the ‘hard problem’ of explaining the laws of motion in terms of mechanistic terms was superseded by Newtonian physics.

I think Chomsky’s challenge to the value of physicalism for the pursuit of natural science is worth taking seriously. However, there is a deeper question that isn’t addressed by Chomsky’s move to sideline the question of physicalism. This deeper question isn’t whether the mind can be accounted for in terms of physical properties as we understand them presently or could potentially understand them in the future, but whether the question of the nature of the mind is best understood as a metaphysical problem at all. Despite Chomsky’s injunction to leave metaphysics aside in our pursuit of scientific explanation, he remains committed to the view that the mind is an entity in the world and nothing more. For Chomsky, the question to which our scientific inquiry is directed, the question that it either succeeds or fails to answer, is the question of the kind of entity that metaphysically grounds our cognition and experience. Thus, even while he holds that metaphysical considerations do not add anything on their own to our understanding of mind, the no-
tion of metaphysical grounding relations between entities remains in the background, providing the structure for any putative answer to the question of what the mind is.

Against this, I want to suggest that the question of the nature of mind and the question of its naturalness are made problematic, not by the limits of our understanding of physical or metaphysical nature, but by experience’s transcendental role in providing us with access to the world. This is something that no scientific or metaphysical account of the mind can explain fully, given the necessary interdependence of the transcendental and the empirical in providing a full account of what it is to have experience of the world. Accounting for the transcendental role of experience along with its manifest phenomenology requires us to take into account the transcendental structures that make our experiences into experiences connecting us to a real and objective world. I think we should accept that our minds are natural phenomena, without thereby committing to a view of them as mere entities. As I’ve argued above, our minds aren’t merely entities in the world, but subjects for whom there is a world, subjects with points of view made possible by a nature that includes transcendental structure. So, Chomsky is right to the extent that he thinks that the nature of nature isn’t made transparently available through physics or cognitive science, but wrong to think that the natural sciences are our sole means for addressing the question.

Phenomenology provides a method for thinking about the limitations of scientific knowledge in a way that doesn’t lead to a Kantian split between represented phenomena and unknowable noumena, or to a physicalist ‘mysterianism’ which suggests that there is a physical basis for the mind, even if we are, in principle, unable to discern that basis due to our cognitive limitations. Instead of thinking that the limits of experience are best thought of as limitations on our ability to track an experience-transcendent nature by
means of mental representations, phenomenology holds that whatever unity and systematicity there is to nature is (at least in principle) phenomenally manifest to us. What extends beyond our reach is a horizon of possibilities for phenomenal manifestation, not a noumenal world separate from experience.

The recalcitrance of the world to scientific unification and systematization need not be interpreted as a failure on our part to grasp metaphysical reality. Instead, the process of theory-creation and theory-correction can be understood as occurring within the horizontal unfolding of a phenomenally manifest world, obviating the need for reference to anything that would, in principle, be ‘outside’ of that unfolding. On this view, science is a dynamic process of cognition in which the phenomena themselves suggest their possible developments over time, and either fail or succeed to meet those expectations. The notion of a metaphysical reality ‘in itself,’ is a needless hypothesis on this account—the ‘in-itself’ itself is understood as a mode of phenomenal manifestation—that is, as a founded mode of manifestation constituted by things continuing to show up in a predictable, stable, and internally coherent way. The object ‘in itself’ is constituted by means of a regulative ideal of predictability, stability, and coherence, which can be fulfilled to a greater or lesser degree, and whose status can change dynamically over time. These conditions of success and failure aren’t reducible to facts just about how we happen to think about the world, they are facts about how a coupled subject-object system, being-in-the-world, develops over time. Like metaphysical realism, this view respects the possibility of persistent failure in our attempts to know things objectively since the unfolding of experience may not be fully compatible with our regulative ideals. However, it maintains

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17 Varela, Thompson, and Rosch have elaborated on this phenomenological conception of the “coupling” of the subject and the world in their notion of “enactment” or the “the bringing forth of a world” (1991, 205). See also Thompson (2007).
this possibility of failure without supposing that success or failure is explained by our ability (or inability) to track metaphysical reality.\(^\text{18}\)

Mysterians like McGinn (1989), Stoljar (2006), and Chomsky (2009) respond to the inherent difficulty of providing a metaphysics of mind, not by rejecting the conception of ontological understanding that led to the problem, but by accepting that metaphysical reality is transcendent to our cognitive faculties, and hypothesizing that as matter of empirical fact we are simply not in a position to have metaphysical knowledge of the nature of our own minds. Against this conception, phenomenology suggests that the transcendence of objects is better understood as a feature immanent to the lived experience, such that the notion of a thing in itself functions as a limit to that experience understood from within; it is understood as arising out of the horizontal character of experience, its endless movement between indeterminacy and determinacy, and between projected anticipations and achieved fulfillments. In this way, phenomenology gives content to the notion of the independence of the world—it is that which is capable of both confirming and of frustrating our theories—without thinking that this is explained by the brute existence of a transcendent metaphysical reality.\(^\text{19}\)

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\(^\text{18}\) This may not seem to capture our ‘common sense’ assumptions about how the world hangs together as a totality, but I would argue that if we examine closely what is implied by the conception of a worldly totality, common sense may find its intuitions accommodated by a view that doesn’t take metaphysical grounding or metaphysical explanation to be fundamental.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^\text{19}\) Indeed, this seems to fit with Chomsky’s own view of how to understand the quest for unity in our scientific theories: “there is no objective science from a third-person perspective, just various first-person perspectives, matching closely enough among humans so that a large range of agreement can be reached, with diligence and cooperative inquiry. Being inquisitive as well as reflective creatures, if we can construct a degree of theoretical understanding in some domain, we try to unify it with other branches of inquiry, reduction being one possibility but not the only one” (Chomsky 2009, 184). If I understand him correctly, Chomsky agrees that science doesn’t afford us with a direct view onto metaphysical reality, but instead provides an interpretive framework within which we attempt to fit together various subjective viewpoints according to an ideal of unity that we provide.
The source of conflict between transcendental phenomenology and naturalism isn’t a disagreement about any of the practices internal to science. The disagreement doesn’t concern which particular scientific claims are to be accepted or how scientific claims are to be established experimentally. Rather, the disagreement turns on the naturalist’s claim that the posits of scientific theory ought to be understood as attempts to represent a metaphysical reality that is, itself, explanatorily fundamental. What the phenomenologist is claiming, by contrast, is that while science really does describe the world accurately, the nature that is uncovered in this way is not, at the most fundamental level of explanation and analysis, exhausted by the existence of objects bearing the properties attributed to them by scientific theories. The independence of objects from the mind is guaranteed, not by their mere existence construed as metaphysically real in a way that goes beyond actual and possible phenomenal manifestation, but as a feature immanent to an ongoing process of manifestation—namely, the very coherence with which different kinds of objects manifest themselves in and across time and space, and through various perspectives. The world—which is to say, the natural world—is an order of beings whose actual and possible phenomenal manifestations really do follow the patterns tracked by natural science, but an order whose underlying structure is not exhausted by the bare existence of entities possessing the properties that successful science attributes to them. What is fundamental, instead, is the order we find at the level of phenomenal manifestation itself.

Having sketched what a ontological understanding of transcendental structure would require, the next step will be to defend the thesis that this ontological understanding of transcendental structure actually applies to nature itself. Barry Stroud observes that what is usually at issue in disagreements about naturalism “is not whether to be ‘naturalistic’ or not, but rather what is and what is not to be included in one’s conception of
nature” (1996, 43). My claim is that in order to determine what nature is, we must take into account the results of phenomenological investigation. Transcendental structures of subjectivity are natural in that they are grounded in the same non-human, non-divine reality that grounds the empirical structures discovered by that subjectivity: the world revealed in lived experience. Since the world of lived experience is certainly real, and has at least as much (if not more) claim to reality as any theoretical posit of science, accounting for what we find in reality will involve more than just the application of scientific method.

One might worry that supplementing the empirically-accessible world of nature with a transcendental dimension multiplies orders of determination and explanation unnecessarily, but this charge is a threat only if greater parsimony really does “save the appearances,” by explaining them in a narrower set of terms. Parsimony threatens to become a false economy if it involves the simple denial of what is manifest in experience, and—as it so happens—transcendental structure is manifest in experience. Our grasp of the physical, whether in the highly developed form of the sciences or in our immediate and everyday engagement with things, already involves structures of subjectivity that are evident in the variable, but still systematically limited possibilities provided by lived experience. Subatomic physics, as much as soccer, begins with a pre-theoretical grasp of the possibilities afforded by lived experience of the natural world. Phenomenologically-focused reflection can thematize the structure of these possibilities, drawing out the implicit involvement of a subjectivity that grasps these possibilities in its lived experience.
Moreover, just like physical structure, transcendental structure is found, not made. The transcendental is part of “what is there anyway,” in an objective and absolute sense, because its structures describe what is possible in the domain of phenomenal manifestation, what would be the case with our lived experience if such and such else were the case.

Whatever nature is, it must be understood in a way that doesn’t just assume the fundamental ontological concepts and distinctions through which it is understood, but shows how these concepts arise out of possibilities already manifest in the structure of our lived experience. As I’ve tried to show above, there is reason to think that transcendental phenomenology studies the very same world as the natural sciences, differing from them only in its emphasis, focusing on structures of manifestation themselves, rather than the structure of what is manifested. And, since transcendental structures shape experience by structuring the mode of being of a subject that exists concretely, they are not just formal structures internal to a ‘pure’ consciousness, shorn of all worldly features, but specifications of the mode of existence of a subjectivity that is ‘always already’ bound up with the world, and situated in it.

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20 As Mark Johnston puts it, we are not “Producers of Presence,” but “Samplers of Presence,” whose “mental acts are samplings from a vast realm of objective manners of presentation” (2007, 253).

21 This is Bernard Williams’s shorthand phrase for the proper objects of perspective-independent knowledge of the order of things (2005, 48).

22 Robert Hanna calls this a ‘counterfactual’ version of transcendental idealism, according to which “the apparent or manifest objects of human cognition are mind-independently ‘empirically real’, in the sense that they exist even if rational human minds had never existed or do not currently exist,” while remaining “inherently ‘mind-friendly,’” since they “necessarily conform […] to the cognitive forms or structures of the rational human mind, and necessarily would be cognizable if and whenever rational human minds were to exist” (2014, 761).

23 Although this understanding of transcendental structures makes them ‘impure,’ I will continue to use the terminology ‘transcendental’ to refer to them insofar as they shape the way that we experience the world in a way that is not fully determined by, or reducible to, the holding of some state of affairs, physically understood.
What do we gain in thinking the transcendental as an aspect of the natural, and what do we lose? On the one hand we lose the comfort and simplicity of the supposition that the methods of natural science are, in principle, sufficient to lay bare the nature of nature. On the other hand, what we gain is an ontological unification of reality in a single world that includes the mode of being of our subjectivity, as well as the mode of being of the objects we experience. On this view, the study of nature involves more than natural science—it will also involve the first-person exploration of the processes and perspectives through which the objects studied by science become manifest. In certain domains, this manifestation takes shape in ways that are describable using the methods of natural science, but the entities referred to in these descriptions cannot be taken to be explanatorily basic. For a phenomenological naturalism, the study of nature is the experience-indexed study of the phenomenally manifest world.
Chapter 3

Factivity and the Metaphysics of Mind

Phenomenology, Psychology, and Factivity

Attempts to ‘naturalize phenomenology’ by interpreting phenomenological claims about subjectivity in terms of the ontology of the natural sciences encounter serious difficulties on both phenomenological and metaphysical grounds. In this chapter, I illustrate these difficulties, trace them to their philosophical roots, and suggest an alternative strategy for integrating phenomenology with the natural sciences, a phenomenological naturalism, which situates the ontology of the natural sciences in the context of the ontology belonging to existential phenomenology.

Phenomenologists since Husserl have argued that transcendental reflection on our subjectivity reveals a mode of being entirely unique to embodied, historical creatures like ourselves. The discovery of this mode of being puts pressure on the standard framing of the mind-body problem, because our openness to the world—our subjectivity—isn’t an object in the world, but the transcendental condition of world-experience, an existential situation that makes objects in the world available to us. Subjectivity isn’t anything physical, but neither is it a special kind of mind-stuff, nor is it a property belonging to physical stuff. Rather, to be a subject is to be something ontologically distinct from all worldly objects, a being that consists in the ongoing manifestation of a complex web of interrelated phenomena. The structured unity of these manifestations within a life is our subjectivity, our opening onto the world, and our way of ‘being-in’ it.
Where does this phenomenological conception of subjectivity leave the empirical sciences of the mind? Husserl distinguishes empirical psychology from both phenomenological psychology and transcendental phenomenology (1977; 1997). This division of intellectual labor suggests a separation between the study of subjectivity as such, and the study of the mental and bodily states that are the objects of intentional experience. For Husserl, empirical psychology is properly concerned with mental and bodily states understood as worldly objects, and is tasked with discovering the a posteriori psychological and psychophysical laws governing them. By contrast, phenomenological psychology attempts to determine the a priori structures according to which any possible mental state is constituted for transcendental subjectivity as an object of intentional experience. In transcendental phenomenology, subjectivity itself is conceived neither as a mind nor a body, nor, indeed, as a worldly object at all; transcendental phenomenology is concerned with the transcendental subject and the nature of the correlation between its intentional acts and the objects to which they are directed.

According to this division, phenomenological psychology studies neither the empirical laws governing mental states nor the transcendental subjectivity that is the condition of the possibility of all our experiences. Instead, phenomenological psychology helps to clarify the essential ontological structure of the mental objects that populate empirical psychology’s target domain. Husserl takes phenomenological psychology to reveal that our mental states are ontologically distinct from our bodily states, since each kind of state is given to us as an object in a distinct way. Nevertheless, the two kinds of states are tightly intertwined, and our mental states are, in certain respects, modally and

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1 See Dan Zahavi (2009) for a historical overview of the aims and motivations of Husserlian phenomenological psychology.
ontologically dependent on our bodily states. Some of these dependencies reflect a post-
riori psychophysical laws, to be discovered “empirically and if possible by experimental
psychology” (Husserl 1989, 308), while others reflect the a priori structures by means of
which transcendental subjectivity constitutes the mind and body as objects of experience.

Later existential phenomenologists like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty criticize
Husserl for imposing a division between the world-constituting transcendental subject and
the concrete conditions of its existence, stressing the way that subjectivity exists in and
through its bodily and historical situation. Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty agree with
Husserl that because subjectivity is what discloses the world, it has an ineliminable tran-
scendental dimension, and therefore cannot be reduced, ontologically, to objects in the
world. The innovation of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology,
however, is to integrate the concrete dimensions of human existence into transcendental
subjectivity itself. For the existential phenomenologists, these concrete dimensions—body,
history, and so on—are themselves transcendental structures through which the world shows
up for us. Body and history, as constitutive moments of our subjectivity, are to be un-
derstood as contingent, yet a priori, determinations of a structure of phenomenal
manifestation that constitutes the parameters of an embodied, historical openness to the
world.²

Heidegger insists that subjectivity (i.e., “Dasein”) “is never to be understood ont-
ologically as a case and instance of a genus of beings as objectively present [als
Vorhandenem]” (2010, 42). While he admits that “within certain limits” we can understand

² So, for example, with respect to the transcendental role of body, Merleau-Ponty writes that “To
have a body is to possess a universal arrangement, a schema of all perceptual developments and of
all inter-sensory correspondences beyond the segment of the world that we are actually perceiv-
ing” (2012, 341).
human beings in terms of their objectively present features, in doing so we “must completely disregard or just not see” the way that human beings inhabit the world as subjects (2010, 56). So, although there are anthropological, psychological, and biological facts to be discovered about human beings, it nevertheless remains that their subjectivity cannot be understood in those terms. To investigate human beings as objectively present worldly objects is to pass by the phenomenon of subjectivity, and to investigate, instead, objects that have already been made available by subjectivity.

Moreover, the subject’s worldly situation is not reducible to the objective facts about their body or their surroundings. Lived in the first-person, one’s situation is never merely factual; it is an inherent feature of one’s openness to the world. One’s situation shows up in the very structure of one’s subjectivity, in the way the world shows up, not merely as the organization of objects in the world. Heidegger calls the concrete situatedness of our way of existing our facticity.3 The concept of facticity points to an existential predicament that each of us lives out in the first-person: I find myself thrown into a life whose parameters are ‘subjective’ in the sense that they are always there for me, showing up as the parameters of my life, but not ‘subjective’ in the sense that I spontaneously create them. My life is always my own to live, but it is always lived in a way that bears the traces of a nature and history that precede me. This is not just a fact about the physical properties and historical provenance of some object in the world—it is a feature of my very perspective on things, a feature of my subjectivity, a feature of my way of being-in-the-world. Nature and history leave their traces, not just in the configuration of the objects that I encounter, but in the way that I relate to those objects as a subject.

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3 As Heidegger puts it, “the ‘factuality’ of the fact of one’s own Dasein is ontologically totally different from the factual occurrence of a kind of stone. The factuality of the fact of Dasein, as the way in which every Dasein actually is, we call its facticity” (2010, 56).
As a subject, I am thrown into my situation, not by being metaphysically determined by the objective facts, but by always already finding myself inhabiting the world in such a way that the beings I encounter matter to me in a more or less determinate way (Heidegger 2010, 133-4). The existential necessity of having to be some way or another, of having to be related to beings in some way or another, is a necessity that is disclosed as an aspect of my perspective on things; it is not given to me as a metaphysical necessitation of my perspective by things. As Merleau-Ponty puts it,

The central phenomenon, which simultaneously grounds my subjectivity and my transcendence toward the other, consists in the fact that I am given to myself. I am given, which is to say I find myself already situated and engaged in a physical and social world; I am given to myself, which is to say that this situation is never concealed from me, it is never around me like some foreign necessity, and I am never actually enclosed in my situation like an object in a box. (2012, 377)

I show up to myself as a phenomenon that is distinct from any object, and in my showing up to myself in this way, my concrete situation is given to me. Understanding subjectivity as concretely situated in the world, then, isn’t to understand it in terms of the objective facts; it is to understand it in terms of a facticity that is lived.

The significance of the phenomenological distinction between objective facts and facticity is this: since any relation to the facts about worldly objects springs out of a factical situation that is always already given, any facts about worldly objects arrive too late on the scene to make it intelligible, given my factical situation, why it is that I am in that situation. Metaphysical and scientific ‘explanations’ of subjectivity make the mistake of attempting to address my facticity in terms of the objective facts, but what I am as a

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4 Heidegger: “Even if one wanted to fall back on the fact that the subject must presuppose, and always already does presuppose the fact that the ‘external world’ is objectively present, one would still be starting with the construct of an isolated subject. […] With such presuppositions, Dasein always already comes ‘too late’; for insofar as it carries out this presupposing as a being […] it is, as a being always already in a world. ‘Earlier’ than any presupposition Dasein makes, or any of its ways of behavior, there is the ‘a priori’ of its constitution of being…” (2010, 198).
concretely situated subject is a way of living out a relation to the facts. Attempting to understand myself in terms of worldly objects is to give the mode of being of those objects explanatory priority in a way that is incompatible with the existential priority of the mode of being of my subjectivity, the priority of the givenness of my concretely situated perspective on the world over against the givenness of the worldly objects I happen to encounter. This existential priority cannot be factored out without deforming the ontological understanding that I always already have of myself as a being that is open to the world in some factically given way. My pre-reflective understanding of who and what I am—my sense of my life as thrown, factual being—is an existential a priori condition of my objective understanding of worldly things. My self-disclosure as a factically existing subject is therefore a condition of my relation to objective facts, and cannot be a determination by them.\(^5\)

With this account of facticity in hand, I can now begin to articulate a criticism of a prevailing conception of the way that phenomenology ought to be integrated with the natural sciences, a research program that often goes by the name of “naturalizing phenomenology.”

Naturalized Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Realization

In their introduction to the landmark anthology, *Naturalizing Phenomenology*, Jean-Michel Roy, Jean Petitot, Bernard Pachoud, and Francisco Varela propose a framework for interdisciplinary research that draws on the resources of both phenomenology and cognitive science (Roy et al. 1999). According to their proposal, ‘naturalizing phenomenology’ would involve the integration of phenomenology with cognitive science by means of “an

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\(^5\) This argument echoes my argument in Chapter 1 regarding the explanatory priority of subjectivity over objects. Here, I am pointing out that facticity—one of the essential structures of subjectivity—is existentially prior, and thus explanatorily prior, to all objects.
explanatory framework where every acceptable property is made continuous with the properties admitted by the natural sciences” (Roy et al. 1999, 1). By confining naturalized phenomenology to a purely scientific ontology, Roy et al.’s research program promises a way for cognitive science and philosophers of mind to glean insights from the phenomenological tradition—at the cost, however, of making a decisive break with phenomenology’s transcendental lineage.

Roy et al.’s suggestion that a naturalized phenomenology should restrict itself to an ontology of scientifically reputable properties necessitates a departure from the transcendental perspective that, I would argue, is essential to phenomenology, thereby undercutting the justification for a move from phenomenology to ontology. Since, according to their proposal, phenomenological claims about the structure of subjectivity are to be interpreted as claims about empirical structures that constitute our modes of cognition, and not as claims about transcendental structures that constitute modes of manifest being, we lack any reason to think that we can learn about what things are from phenomenological reflection on the way they appear to us. In particular, we can learn little, if anything, about what subjectivity itself is by reflecting on its manifest structure. If naturalizing phenomenology means understanding our subjectivity empirically rather than transcendently, then it involves psychologizing the processes by which the world is constituted for us in experience.

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6 Roy et al. clarify that “In this context the notion of natural property refers first to neurobiological properties, but it should be taken in a broader way as designating the whole set of properties postulated by the most fundamental sciences of nature, however abstract these properties might actually be and whatever their philosophical interpretation” (1999, 44).

7 Some proposals for ‘naturalizing phenomenology’ focus on the development of methodological approaches to the integration of phenomenology with the sciences. See Shaun Gallagher (2012) for a helpful survey. These methodologies, while helpful in practice, do not directly address my central concern here, which is to determine the best way to effect a systematic integration of phenomenology and the sciences with respect to their underlying ontological commitments.

8 See Zahavi (2004) for similar worries.
This deprives phenomenological reflection of its ontological significance, and threatens to turn it into a form of armchair empirical psychology.

In what follows, I will show how naturalized phenomenology’s rejection of the transcendental perspective results in a problematic understanding of the nature of our subjectivity. In order to do this, I will focus on what I take to be the most detailed attempt thus far to ‘naturalize phenomenology’: Michael Wheeler’s Heideggerian cognitive science (Wheeler 2005; 2012; 2013). My concerns regarding Wheeler’s specific approach are generalizable, however, and will apply to any naturalized phenomenology that attempts to understand subjectivity’s mode of being in the objectifying terms of science or metaphysics.

Wheeler (2005; 2012; 2013) argues that Heideggerian phenomenology can be used to provide philosophical foundations for the newly emerging theoretical paradigm of embedded-embodied cognitive science. According to Wheeler, Heidegger’s analysis of being-in-the-world can be fruitfully interpreted as an empirical hypothesis to the effect that cognition involves more than just a system of representations in the brain, but is instead grounded in “complex causal interactions in an extended body-brain-environment system” (2005, 13). Wheeler claims that recent empirical research is already leading in this direction, and he enlists Heidegger as a philosophical ally who seeks to replace ‘Cartesian’ accounts of cognition, framed in terms of isolated representational systems, with ‘Heideggerian’ accounts of cognition, framed in terms of embodied and embedded systems dynamically interacting with their environments.

For Wheeler, it is crucial to this cooperative endeavor that any contributions to cognitive science from phenomenology respect the commitment to naturalism that he takes to be essential to scientific research. Wheeler puts this in terms of what he calls the
muggle constraint, referring to the non-magical denizens of J. K. Rowling’s fictional Harry Potter universe: “one’s explanation of some phenomenon meets the muggle constraint just when it appeals only to entities, states and processes which are wholly non-magical in character” (2013, 156). What counts as “non-magical” in this context? Wheeler writes that

the consistency condition, as I understand it, involves a constraint running from science to philosophy, to the effect that if and when there is a genuine clash between philosophy and empirical science (in the sense that philosophy demands the presence of some entity, state, or process which is judged to be inconsistent with empirical science), then it’s philosophy and not science that must ultimately cede, through withdrawal or revision of its claims. (2012, 190–1)

Wheeler calls the position that results from applying this constraint, minimal naturalism. Minimal naturalism satisfies Roy et al.’s ontological constraints on a naturalized phenomenology, delimiting the domain of phenomena that we are to admit in our philosophical theorizing, and restricting the types of entities, states, and processes that may be claimed to exist to those that are consistent with the findings of science.

What, then, is a Heideggerian cognitive science aimed at explaining? Wheeler states that “The proper business of cognitive science is to identify the subagential states and mechanisms that explain, in an empirical (causal, enabling) fashion, how […] agential-level phenomena arise” (2005, 157). Wheeler is drawing here on a distinction made by John McDowell between constitutive and enabling understanding (McDowell 1994). As Wheeler explains,

Constitutive understanding […] is a characteristic target of philosophy… It concerns the identification, articulation and clarification of the conditions that determine what it is for a phenomenon to be the phenomenon that it is (e.g. what it is for a certain kind of creature to competently inhabit its world). (2013, 142–3)

By contrast,
Enabling understanding is the characteristic target of empirical science... It reveals the causal elements, along with the organization of, and the systematic causal interactions between, those elements, that together make it intelligible to us how a phenomenon of a certain kind could be realized or generated in a world like ours (e.g. how some creature-specific mode of competent world-inhabiting is causally enabled in a purely physical universe). (Wheeler 2013, 143)

Wheeler’s suggestion is that the difference between constitutive and enabling understanding allows for a particular division of intellectual labor. According to this divide-and-conquer strategy, “philosophy, as a source of constitutive understanding, will isolate and clarify phenomena for which the corresponding cognitive science will then try to identify the underlying causal mechanisms” (Wheeler 2012, 185). More specifically, “the aim of a Heideggerian cognitive science would be to develop an enabling explanation of (i.e., an account of causal states and processes that underpin) the phenomena that constitute Dasein’s being-in-the-world” (Wheeler 2012, 184).

Wheeler’s account of the distinct aims of constitutive and enabling understanding suggests a cooperative research program in which phenomenology provides a constitutive understanding of subjectivity (i.e., of “the phenomena that constitute Dasein’s being-in-the-world”), while cognitive science provides an enabling understanding of subjectivity in terms of the states and processes that realize it. In particular, a Heideggerian cognitive science ought to be concerned with our background understanding of the world (our “understanding of being,” in Heidegger’s terms), which makes possible the availability of the world that we inhabit as subjects. As Wheeler understands this phenomenon,

the background is the vast, holistic, indeterminate, and therefore unrepresentable, web of embodied, psychological, social and cultural structures that constitute one’s

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9 Hubert Dreyfus also seems amenable to this division of labor when he suggests that dynamic models of the brain might show “what the brain is doing to provide the material substrate for Heidegger’s and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological accounts of everyday perception and action,” while “the job of phenomenologists is to get clear concerning the phenomena that must be explained” (2012, 91–2; see also Dreyfus and Taylor 2015, 101).
world and that are implicitly presupposed by concrete examples of human sense-making. (2013, 146)

The job of Wheeler’s Heideggerian cognitive scientist, then, “is to specify the causal elements and their organization that make it intelligible to us how background coping could be realized in a world like ours” (Wheeler 2013, 147).\(^\text{10}\) Wheeler proposes that cognitive science can make the realization of background coping intelligible by discovering mechanisms that are \textit{structurally isomorphic} to the structures of background coping that phenomenology has independently identified as constitutive of our subjectivity:

> With due caution, and with caveats about defeasibility, the intelligibility condition in force here can plausibly be met in those cases where we are able to specify a candidate mechanism for background coping that, in some non-trivial way, is structurally isomorphic to the target structure as characterized by phenomenology. (Wheeler 2013, 147)

Wheeler notes in his discussion of this explanatory strategy, “that although such structural isomorphisms are sufficient for interlevel intelligibility, they aren’t necessary” (2005, 233).\(^\text{10}\) This is to say that the \textit{lack} of an isomorphism is a \textit{prima facie} reason to be suspicious of either the constitutive or the enabling account, but it isn’t a decisive reason to reject either since “intelligibility may perhaps be secured and explicated in other ways” (2005, 234).\(^\text{10}\) But how does an account of causal elements “make it intelligible” how our background coping with the world is realized in the first place? And what does structural isomorphism provide in the way of added intelligibility?\(^\text{11}\)

\(^\text{10}\) Similarly, Roy et al. claim that “the heart of the problem of naturalization is to make intelligible the fact that one entity can have both the properties characteristic of matter and those characteristic of mentality in spite of an apparent heterogeneity between them” (1999, 46).

\(^\text{11}\) See Pessoa, Thompson, and Noë (1998) for a discussion of the conceptual and methodological issues surrounding explanation by isomorphism in vision science. While Pessoa et al. find empirical support for the existence of neural-perceptual isomorphisms in particular cases (e.g., cases of neural ‘filling-in’), they conclude that there is no reason to adopt \textit{analytic isomorphism} as a methodological principle—i.e., they conclude that there is no reason to adopt “the a priori claim that isomorphism is conceptually preferable to nonisomorphism in cognitive neuroscientific explana-
Wheeler seems to have in mind here a notion of functional realization whereby the having of a higher-order property, defined in terms of a causal role, is realized by the having of lower-order properties that play that causal role. For example, we might define *fragility* as a higher-order functional property involving the causal role of breaking under certain conditions. We can then identify a set of lower-order, microstructural properties that play the appropriate causal role and thereby ‘realize’ the higher-order property of fragility. On this understanding of the metaphysics of realization, an enabling account makes the realization of a phenomenon intelligible by telling us which mechanistic properties play the causal role defined by our constitutive account of that phenomenon. Structural isomorphisms between enabling and constitutive accounts would contribute to the intelligibility of the relation between those accounts by indicating that the mechanisms specified in the enabling account are apt to fit the causal role specified by the constitutive account.

The problem for Wheeler is that the metaphysics of functional realization fits rather poorly with Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology. In order for Wheeler’s divide-
and-conquer strategy to succeed, Heidegger’s ontological understanding of Dasein would have to be susceptible to functionalization, and therefore, functional reduction.\(^{15}\) Once we start to talk in terms of ‘levels’ or ‘orders’ of properties that need to be connected, the framing assumptions of the mind-body problem are solidified, and metaphysical questions about identity, reduction, supervenience, and emergence begin to seem appropriate. From here, it’s hard to see how Wheeler’s functionalist understanding of realization could do anything but draw our understanding of Dasein back into a metaphysics of objectively present beings. The functional reduction of Dasein assumes that our mode of being can be made more intelligible by looking to the causal structure of objects in the world, but this is an assumption that Heidegger explicitly rejects. Heidegger denies that ‘taking care’ of things (‘background coping’ in Wheeler’s terms) is a matter of causality. Indeed, he denies that our ‘being together with things’ can be explained \textit{ontically}, in terms of objects in the world, at all:

\begin{quote}
Things at hand taken care of are not the cause of taking care, as if this were to arise only on the basis of the effects of innerworldly beings. Being together with things at hand can neither be explained \textit{ontically} in terms of those things at hand nor can things at hand be derived from this kind of being. (Heidegger 2010, 336)\(^{16}\)
\end{quote}

A functionalization of Dasein would cast the relationship between subjectivity and its ‘realizers’ as a relationship between sets of objectively present properties, but phenomenologists, Heidegger included, argue that this is, fundamentally, a category mistake (Zahavi 2013b). Heidegger stresses that we cannot understand Dasein’s being-in-the-

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{15} See Kim (1998, 25; 2005, 101–2) for a precise formulation of the steps involved in generating a functional reduction.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Dreyfus, by contrast with Wheeler, seems to acknowledge that Dasein cannot be causally explained when he says that “A theory of the physical causal powers of natural kinds tells us only what is \textit{causally} real, it cannot account for Dasein’s ability to deal with entities in various ways and so make intelligible various ways of being, thereby disclosing various beings including the entities of natural science” (1990, 260–1).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
world as the objective presence together of physical and ‘psychical’ properties: “The being present together of the physical and psychical is ontically and ontologically completely different from the phenomenon of being-in-the-world” (2010, 197).

The underlying problem is that Wheeler’s “enabling explanations” seem to conflate the existence of objects with the existence of subjects. The properties involved in enabling explanations are objectively present in the world, but Dasein’s being-in-the-world was supposed to be something entirely different, namely an unobjectifiable openness to the world. So, although enabling explanations might help us to understand how functionally-specified psychological properties are realized, these properties cannot be identified with Dasein’s being-in-the-world. As we saw in Chapter 1, our subjectivity is explanatorily prior to objects because it is the transcendental ground of their intelligibility, a feature that ensures that it is ontologically irreducible to them. Heidegger’s account of being-in-the-world isn’t just a constitutive account of objectively present functional properties of some entity; it’s a transcendental account of what makes the availability of things that are objectively present possible in the first place. It is also an ontological account because it suggests that it is Dasein’s unique mode of being that allows it to encounter objectively present beings. If we are to respect Dasein’s unique mode of being—Dasein as the existential predicament that each of us lives out—then we will have to conclude that Dasein’s being-in-the-world cannot be identified with any of the objectively present properties studied by the empirical sciences. So, not only does Wheeler’s minimal naturalism force him to take a questionable interpretive position with regard to Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein’s mode of being, there remains a deeper question as to whether Wheeler’s Heideggerian cognitive science can do justice to the style of transcendental explanation that is essential to Heidegger’s approach to phenomenology.
Wheeler is concerned to show that no aspect of phenomenology escapes the constraints imposed by minimal naturalism, such that even our understanding of *transcendental conditions* is subject to revision in the light of scientific discoveries. Wheeler claims that “the conditions that are transcendentally presupposed by any particular scientific explanation or model [...] are not immune to revision, or even perhaps rejection, in the light of the results of the empirical scientific research they make possible” (2012, 192). Wheeler argues that because Heidegger’s notion of the transcendental is situated and historical it should therefore allow for some influence from empirical science:

while there might be philosophical notions of the transcendental that succeed in screening off the conditions of the possibility of human experience from scientific influence altogether, it is mysterious how the domesticated and historicized notion of the transcendental that functions in Heidegger’s phenomenology could have that effect. After all, according to Heidegger, the conditions of possibility of specific enactments of sense-making are concretely embedded in history and thus may change as societies change, including presumably, as a result of scientific change, given that science is itself a sense-making activity embedded in human history. So in the light of the feedback loops in play, it is perfectly consistent with Heideggerian thinking to hold that the details of our phenomenological understanding of our sense of belonging to the world could be reshaped in the light of cognitive-scientific research on the enabling conditions that causally generate that sense of familiarity. (Wheeler 2012, 192)

But Heidegger’s reasons for maintaining a separation between scientific explanation and transcendental explanation aren’t as mysterious as Wheeler makes them seem. Empirical research in cognitive science might lead us to revise our account of the essential ontological structure of psychological states and processes, but this is a revision in our phenomenological psychology, not a revision in our transcendental-phenomenological understanding of subjectivity itself. So, while Wheeler is correct that, for Heidegger, factical conditions “may

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17 Similarly, neurophenomenology, as developed by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Antoine Lutz (F. Varela 1995; Thompson and Lutz 2003), provides a research framework that allows for mutual constraint between first- and third-personal forms of understanding. As Lutz and Thompson admit, however, it is not their intention to explain one set of phenomena in terms
change as societies change” (Wheeler 2012, 192), this doesn’t suffice to show that Heidegger’s conception of the transcendental would allow the results of the sciences to define Dasein itself, in its mode of being, ontologically. As we saw earlier, Heidegger conceives of Dasein’s embeddedness in history through a facticity that cannot be understood in terms of objectively present entities. While the specifics of this facticity are variable, this doesn’t suffice to make facticity a matter of objective presence, or Dasein an object amenable to empirical scientific inquiry. If Wheeler means to suggest that science could lead us to revise our understanding of Dasein itself such that Dasein would be conceived as an objectively present being, then I see little reason to think that Wheeler’s approach reflects Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein at all. Wheeler’s approach threatens to reduce phenomenology to phenomenological psychology, or worse yet, armchair empirical psychology.

Perhaps as an effort to defuse this threat, Wheeler allows that a successful enabling account need not be a reductive one. As he says, “There is no good reason to think that constitutive understanding and enabling understanding must be reductively related. In particular, there is no good reason to think that constitutive accounts must be reducible to enabling accounts” (Wheeler 2012, 184–5). Since constitutive accounts of Dasein are not necessarily reducible to enabling accounts, Wheeler allows that an enabling account may

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18 In the terminology of Being and Time, while the specific, existentiell determinations of Dasein’s mode of being are variable, allowing for different concrete ways of life, this is an ontic matter. The general structures of existentiality that characterize Dasein’s mode of being ontologically are not similarly variable (Heidegger 2010, 11–2).
only provide a partial understanding of Dasein: “because it stops a long way short of
reductionism, minimal naturalism does not demand that a complete cognitive science of
Dasein would be a complete understanding of Dasein, although it would be a complete
enabling understanding” (2012, 191). But is irreducibility the right way to make room for
Heidegger’s claim that Dasein is ontologically distinct from anything objectively present?

If Wheeler means to model the irreducibility of constitutive accounts on the au-
tonomy of the special sciences from physics, then irreducibility will not help to
accommodate Dasein’s unique mode of being. Jerry Fodor (1974) argues that theories in
the special sciences are autonomous from physics because the natural kinds that figure in
the laws of the special sciences need not be identical to the natural kinds that figure in the
laws of physics. So, for example, psychological laws might be disunified from physical
laws because the natural kinds that figure in psychological laws need not be identical to
natural kinds that could figure in physical laws. Thus, even if every token psychological
event is identical to a token physical event, psychological natural kinds might still be
multiply realizable, such that the lawfulness of psychological natural kinds cannot be
discerned in terms of physical laws that govern only physical natural kinds. Theories in
the special sciences, including psychology, might therefore be autonomous from theories in
physics, consisting of laws that are irreducible to the laws of physics.

The problem with trying to understand Dasein’s irreducibility in this way is that
Heidegger’s view about the distinctiveness of Dasein isn’t just the view that theories about
Dasein are autonomous with respect physics because they refer to non-physical natural
kinds. Rather, there is supposed to be something distinctive about Dasein’s mode of being,
that distinguishes it, ontologically, from any objectively present thing. Heidegger would
deny, categorically, that Dasein is token-identical to any objectively present entity. So,
insofar as Fodor’s defense of the irreducibility of psychological theory is designed to be compatible with an ontological physicalism involving token-identities between objectively present entities, it cannot help Wheeler to accommodate Heidegger’s view.

On the other hand, if Wheeler means something more ontologically substantive in allowing for the irreducibility of constitutive accounts of Dasein, then it isn’t clear how enabling accounts can help to make Dasein’s realization intelligible. If Dasein is ontologically irreducible to what enables it, then we are left with a metaphysical mystery: in virtue of what do Dasein’s enablers enable it? If enabling accounts are to make the realization of Dasein intelligible—which is to say, explicable—then we need some explanation of the ground of the realization relation. Such explanations would be easy to come by if subjectivity were functionally reducible to physical mechanism, but as we have seen, Wheeler denies that reducibility is needed in order for the intelligibility constraint to be met. But if all that an enabling explanation can tell us is that subjectivity supervenes on some set of enablers, then that fact—the obtaining of the supervenience relation itself—would remain unexplained. As Jaegwon Kim observes, “the mere claim of mind-body supervenience leaves unaddressed the question what grounds or accounts for it—that is, the question why the supervenience relation should hold for the mental and the physical” (1998, 13). Since Heidegger rejects explanations of Dasein in terms of objectively present things, there seems to be nothing left to ground the realization relation except a brute metaphysical law that renders the existence of Dasein dependent on the existence of its enablers. This ‘account’ of realization would amount to a radical emergentism that gives up on the idea that enablers can make the realization of what they enable intelligible, since the realization relation itself would be a brute and unintelligible metaphysical fact, to be accepted,
as Samuel Alexander once said, in an attitude of “natural piety” (quoted in McLaughlin 1992).

Metaphysical accounts of ‘weak emergence,’ like the powers-based subset strategy developed by Jessica Wilson (1999; 2011) and Sydney Shoemaker (2001; 2007), and the dynamic co-emergence view developed by Evan Thompson (2007), won’t help to secure the kind of ontological irreducibility that is needed in this context either, since they focus on securing the causal efficacy of emergent features while avoiding problematic causal overdetermination. Heidegger’s claim that Dasein has a non-objective mode of being isn’t the claim that Dasein has an emergent form of causal efficacy, however, so to claim that Dasein is ‘weakly emergent’ in the sense of having such efficacy, isn’t sufficient to capture the sense of ontological distinctness that Heidegger means to indicate. Moreover, Thomp-son (2007, 162–5; 2011) argues that the intelligibility of the relation between subjectivity and the living body requires transcendental explanation, and this implies that the intelligibility of embodiment cannot be accounted for solely by means of a metaphysics of emergence (Thompson 2007, 236).

Wheeler’s view is that making physicalism a component thesis of minimal naturalism will either be redundant since “some form of physicalism will be assumed by science,” or mistaken since “science will embrace the existence and the causal-explanatory powers of non-physical stuff” (Wheeler 2013, 141n13). But if physicalism is assumed by science, then minimal naturalism will clearly be incompatible with Heidegger’s claim that Dasein’s existence can’t be understood in terms of objectively present things. On the other hand, even if science does allow for “the existence and causal-explanatory powers of non-physical stuff” this won’t make minimal naturalism compatible with Heidegger’s view, since non-physical stuff would be objectively present too. Thus, the incompatibility
of Heidegger’s view with minimal naturalism isn’t just an incompatibility with physicalism, but the incompatibility of Heidegger’s view with the idea that a complete constitutive understanding of Dasein could be provided in terms of the causal role of something objectively present whether physical or not.

In attempting to understand the realization of Dasein metaphysically, it seems we are left at a crossroads: either Dasein’s mode of being just is a higher-order functional property of physical things, or it is a mode of being that emerges from the physical in a fundamentally unintelligible way. This leaves anyone aiming at the naturalization of phenomenology through a scientifically-constrained ontology with a dilemma: either

(a) contradict Heidegger regarding the unique mode of being of Dasein, and maintain the ontology mandated by minimal naturalism by allowing that a functional reduction of Dasein provides a complete constitutive account of Dasein, or

(b) agree with Heidegger regarding the unique mode of being of Dasein, and give up the ontology mandated by minimal naturalism by allowing that a complete constitutive account of Dasein requires brute metaphysical emergence.

Option (a) naturalizes phenomenology, but only by giving up Dasein’s ontological distinctness, and its role as a transcendental condition of world-experience. Option (b) makes room for Dasein’s ontological distinctness, but only by giving up a scientifically-constrained ontology, and the intelligibility of Dasein’s dependence on objects in the world.

In the final section of this chapter, I will sketch an alternative strategy for integrating phenomenology with natural science. Instead of naturalizing phenomenology by downplaying the ontological significance of subjectivity’s status as a transcendental condition, we should embrace the need for transcendental conditions in our ontology, and use them to articulate a phenomenological understanding of the nature that grounds our
subjectivity. This will allow us to leave behind any attempt to make the ontological
grounding of subjectivity intelligible in terms of the metaphysics of realization. Phenome-
nological findings and scientific findings should instead be coordinated through a
phenomenological naturalism that grounds the mode of being of Dasein and the mode of being
of the objectively present in a nature that manifests itself to itself as a structured field of
phenomenal manifestation.

**Psychology from an Existential Phenomenological Standpoint**

Psychology is in a peculiar situation when compared to rest of the sciences. When it is
more than an investigation of the causal bases of our behavior, psychology involves taking
a reflexive stance towards one’s own being-in-the-world. As Merleau-Ponty observes,
while “the physicist is not the object he himself discusses … the psychologist [is] himself, in
principle, that very fact he [is] investigating” (2012, 96). This reflexivity exposes psychol-
ogy to a special kind of error. The objectifying tendencies of psychology incline us
towards an interpretive stance on our mode of being that overlooks the existential situ-
tion out of which the possibility of objectification emerges. The objectivists’ suggestion
that the difference between our understanding of subjectivity and our understanding of
objects is merely a difference engendered by a peculiar way of grasping what is ‘in reality’
or ‘at base’ a worldly object seems a promising way forward only if we assume that onto-
logical understanding is always an understanding of objects in the world—if we are led, in
other words, by “the unspoken, but ontologically guiding, dogmatic thesis that what is …
must be *objectively present,*” and conclude on that basis that “what cannot be demonstrated
as *objectively present* just is not at all” (Heidegger 2010, 265). As Heidegger and Merleau-
Ponty argue, however, and as I have argued over the course of the preceding chapters,
this assumption is mistaken. The metaphysical tradition has construed the meaning of ‘being’ too narrowly, and in such a way that it has skipped over the phenomenally manifest mode of being that makes our relation to other beings possible in the first place. Our being-in-the-world is the inescapable condition and context of all worldly discovery, and for this reason it cannot be left out of our final account; it isn’t something that we might explain reductively in other terms, or eliminate from our ontology.

Phenomenology complements psychology, however, by showing how the objectification that is essential to empirical psychology is made possible by the transcendental structures of phenomenal manifestation that constitute our being-in-the-world. This allows us to provide a transcendental account of the way that objectively present things like thoughts and bodies become available on the basis of an existential situation that is, in the first place, lived. These objectifications aren’t in any way defective as objectifications, since they track a real order belonging to things in the world. They are defective, however, when they pose as exhaustive accounts of the nature of our subjectivity. Objectifying explanations are perfectly fine within their proper domain; it is the interpretation of those objectifications as capturing the mode of being of our subjectivity that is problematic.

Following out the transcendental strand of the phenomenological project, it is clear that while the sciences can play a key role in understanding our place in the natural order, this role is itself squarely situated within the context of an existential situation that the sciences cannot explain. As Merleau-Ponty puts it,

To concern oneself with psychology is necessarily to encounter, beneath the objective thought that moves among ready-made things, a primary opening onto things without which there could be no objective knowledge. The psychologist cannot fail to rediscover himself as an experience, that is, as an immediate presence to the past, the world, the body, and others, at the very moment he wanted to see himself as just one object among others. (2012, 99)
So, even if the best way of coming to know about things in the world is through the sciences, it remains that the objects studied by the sciences are not capable of explaining our being-in-the-world. There is a limit on the extent that we can get ‘behind’ our openness to the world in order to explain it scientifically in terms of what is objectively present. Rather than getting ‘behind’ our openness, we necessarily operate within it in scientific inquiry. Moreover, our unique mode of being reveals the limits of metaphysical explanation of subjectivity: the ground of the relation between subjectivity and objects in the world can’t be understood in terms of a metaphysical dependence between objectively present things because our mode of being isn’t that of an objectively present thing. From a transcendental perspective, subjectivity isn’t a thing which we could understand as being metaphysically determined to exist.

If this is right, then subjectivity cannot be understood as a property of physical systems. Physical stuff seems to ‘underpin’ subjectivity not because physical stuff in a certain arrangement satisfies a metaphysical condition that makes subjectivity exist; rather, subjectivity is such that it always already finds itself in a situation where it is related to physical stuff, and related in a special way to the stuff that makes up its body. Subjectivity is related to physical stuff because of what subjectivity is, not because of what physical stuff is. The necessity of this connection is to be found in subjectivity’s mode of being, not in the mode of being of the things to which it relates. Understanding our embodiment in this way, from within our existential situation, recontextualizes the problem of the “explanatory gap” (Levine 1983). Rather than confronting us with a problem in accounting for the existence of subjectivity, metaphysically, on the basis of physical things, subjectivity turns out to be the transcendental explanatory ground of the system of relations that we bear to physical things. There is no subjectivity without an appropriately structured physical
body, not because an appropriately structured physical body brings subjectivity into existence through metaphysical determination, but because subjectivity’s manifestation of itself to itself is (among other things) the manifestation of a physical body systematically related to the manifestation of other things.\textsuperscript{19}

What is needed, then, is not a metaphysics of realization, but an account of the way that structures of subjectivity actualize a systematic interrelation between the nature that is disclosed in our facticity and the nature of what is objectively present. This will involve a careful survey of the transcendental structures governing the manifestation of the factual and the factual as \emph{phenomena}, not just an account of the empirical laws governing the behavior of objectively present entities. So, for example, my body, as a factual condition, is a transcendental structure of phenomenal manifestation that partly explains how it is possible for the world to show up for me as it does. The physicality of my insertion into the world is a consequence of transcendental structures of phenomenal manifestation, not just a consequence of empirical laws. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

\begin{quote}
I am not the result or the intertwining of multiple causalities that determine my body or my “ psyche”; I cannot think of myself as part of the world, like the simple object of biology, psychology, and sociology; I cannot enclose myself within the universe of science… I am not a “living being,” a “man,” nor even a “consciousness,” possessing all of the characteristics that zoology, social anatomy, and inductive psychology acknowledge in these products of nature or history. Rather, I am the absolute source. My existence does not come from my antecedents, nor from my physical and social surroundings; it moves out towards them and sustains them. (2012, lxxi–lxxii)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{19} While we can abstract from the concrete experience we have of our own subjectivity in order to conceive of ourselves as disembodied, and can conceptualize the metaphysical possibility of bodiless subjects, these intellectual feats do not suffice to show that any consequences follow for subjectivity as it really exists. In order to understand our subjectivity, we should look first to the way it is concretely given in lived experience, and not to a \emph{concept}—“subjectivity”—generated and tested through abstraction and metaphysical speculation.
To refer to Dasein is to refer to the phenomenal manifestation of the world, to the process by which things show up for us in lived experience. This does not mean that transcendental reflection on subjectivity, or the ability to refer to our subjectivity, require causal contact with a non-objective something that is somehow beyond the world we inhabit. Subjectivity is being-in-the-world, and part of what this means is that our transcendental reflection on subjectivity in phenomenology is nothing more than the phenomenal manifestation of the world brought to explicit self-awareness. When Merleau-Ponty says (as each of us can also say), “I am the absolute source,” he is not making the absurd metaphysical claim that his subjectivity causally produces the world. Instead, he is denying that there is anything beyond the process of phenomenal manifestation which could explain his being-in-the-world. The phenomenal manifestation of the world includes the disclosure of the causal order discoverable in the sciences, but the process of phenomenal manifestation itself is not disclosed as belonging within the causal order. What shows up as related by cause and effect are the empirical phenomena, and the fact that empirical phenomena can show up as related in this way is to be explained by the process of phenomenal manifestation and its structure. The target of transcendental reflection—what we refer to in our thought and talk about our subjectivity—is the phenomenal manifestation of the world itself, the field of phenomena that is non-causally given in the unfolding of experience. The phenomenal manifestation of the world is neither an empirical cause nor an effect, but is, rather, the transcendental and ontological ground of the manifestation of the causal order. That things show up in the way that they do explains, at a fundamental level, how the causal order of things becomes available to us.

This doesn’t rule out empirical psychological explanations of my thoughts about subjectivity. Because it is factical, our subjectivity involves the phenomenal manifestation of
empirical psychological events, and these events are part of the causal order. While it is possible, therefore, to give causal explanations of psychological events, the possibility of causal explanation of any kind is, nevertheless, itself to be explained by the fact that things show up for us in a particular way. Subjectivity does not intrude in the causal order in a way that is relevant to causal explanation in the empirical sciences, but this should come as no surprise given its transcendental role. What makes it possible for empirical causes to be phenomenally manifest in the first place cannot itself be understood as an empirical cause. Things show up for us, and while we can become aware of those things as causally connected, the fact that they show up is not itself an empirical cause or effect. From the (justifiably) narrow point of view of the sciences, the process of phenomenal manifestation can only be described as epiphenomenal, since it lacks any distinct empirical causal power. This isn’t to admit that subjectivity is explanatorily irrelevant, however. While our openness to the world isn’t causally efficacious, it is still necessary in order to explain, transcendently, the availability and accessibility of what is causally efficacious. As the condition of the possibility of a manifest causal order, subjectivity is not itself something that can be explained in terms of that order. This understanding of the transcendental role of subjectivity in disclosing a world shows that the task of understanding the world we inhabit, and of understanding how we inhabit it, is not exhausted by understanding the causal relations between objectively present things. Instead, our account of fundamental ontological grounds must encompass the wider domain of lived experience, the domain of phenomenal manifestation, constituted by the ongoing givenness of phenomena, a process which is not itself a part of the causal order.

This suggests that science should not constrain ontology in the way that Wheeler’s minimal naturalism suggests. A commitment to the soundness of scientific findings should
not be taken as a constraint on our ontological commitments in general, but only as constraint on the ontology of scientific accounts concerned with the causal structure of what is objectively present. Alongside the scientifically discoverable laws of nature, the transcendental structures discovered by phenomenology should also be understood as laws of nature, capturing those features of nature that allow it to show up in us, and for us, as concretely situated subjects. Since what is objectively present constitutes only a subset of the contents of the field of phenomena made available by subjectivity, a ‘cognitive science of Dasein’ is only ‘of Dasein’ metonymically, since it studies entities that are only related to Dasein, entities that show up in Dasein’s world, and not Dasein, the structure of being-in-the-world, itself.\(^{20}\)

Thus, grounding subjectivity in nature shouldn’t be a matter of naturalizing phenomenology, but of phenomenologizing nature. We should give up a fundamental ontology overseen solely by the sciences, in favor of a phenomenological naturalism that makes nature the ground of a domain of phenomena that includes both Dasein’s being-in-the-world and the objectively present beings studied by the sciences. Phenomenological naturalism allows for an integration of phenomenology with the sciences within a single ontological framework of interconnected phenomena, and doesn’t require us to bypass the transcendental role of subjectivity, or cede fundamental ontology to science. It allows us to accept Heidegger’s thesis that Dasein has a unique mode of being, while at the same time ontologically grounding Dasein in the very same nature that grounds what is objectively present. Phenomenological naturalism holds that our being-in-the-world has an

\(^{20}\) Like DaVinci’s *Virtuvian Man*, but shorn of the circle that surrounds him, the scientific conception of the human focuses on the objectively present human being shorn of its being-in-the-world, rendering it as a decontextualized figure of anatomical and behavioural study, but this is only a part, and not the whole of what we are as subjects.
ontological ground that makes the life of the subject, and the course and causal order of the physical world possible. This ground—nature itself—is not a subject or an object, but is instead what makes the manifest relation between subjects and objects possible.
Chapter 4

The Nature of Thinking and Coping

Thinking and Coping

John McDowell has argued that if experience is to provide us with knowledge of the world, then our rational, conceptual capacities must be involved in the very givenness of the world in experience. As McDowell puts it,

in experiencing itself, capacities that belong to their subject’s rationality are in play: capacities that their possessor could exercise … in deciding what reason requires her to think about this or that. That is what it means for capacities to be conceptual in the relevant sense: they are capacities whose content is of a form that fits it to figure in discursive activity. (2013, 42)

To deny this—to think that experience merely gives us nonconceptual contents, which serve as the raw materials for subsequent acts of conceptually-articulated thought—is a form of what McDowell calls, following Wilfred Sellars, “the Myth of the Given.” Of course, as McDowell notes elsewhere, “there is nothing wrong with saying things are given to us for knowledge. The idea of givenness becomes mythical—becomes the idea of Givenness—only if we fail to impose the necessary requirements on getting what is given” (2009, 258).

What are these requirements supposed to be? What does it take for experience to provide reasons for belief? McDowell (1996) argues that in order for experience to rationally constrain belief, it should provide more than just a causal constraint; it should make us answerable, in a normative sense, to the way things are. McDowell argues further that this answerability to the way things are entails that our experience possesses a conceptual
form. Because rationality is paradigmatically exercised in forms of thought, judgment, and reasoning that involve concepts, any source of epistemic warrant that is to interface with our rational capacities must itself be conceptually structured.

An oft-repeated criticism of McDowell’s view is that his account of experience is over-intellectualized, assimilating experience in its entirety to rational, conceptual thought. Hubert Dreyfus, for example, argues that in most of our activities, our engagement with the world involves experiences that are structured by meanings, but not in a way that involves our capacity for conceptual thought (2005; 2007b; 2007a; 2013). Instead, we cope with things through a bodily sensitivity to a system of attractions and repulsions that guides us through actions by means of a dynamic, situation-specific sense of the optimal way to carry those actions out. In articulating this form of experience, Dreyfus draws on accounts of what it is to be open to the world given by existential phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.1 These phenomenologists argue that at the most basic level, the structure of world-experience involves a form of engagement with things that is normatively structured, but not itself conceptually articulated.

In what follows, I will argue that we can accept the phenomenological point about the primacy of bodily forms of openness to the world, without giving up McDowell’s claim that conceptual forms of openness are also operative throughout all of experience. This is possible if we understand our openness to the world as enabled by a unified structure of transcendental conditions that is always operative, even when the potential for conceptual thought is not actualized in a given experience. While the potential for con-

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1 Dreyfus (2007b; 2013) denies that absorbed coping is a case of experience since it lacks an explicit subject-object structure relating a self-conscious ego to an object known. I follow Dan Zahavi (2013a), however, in thinking that these are not essential features of experience. I will therefore use ‘experience’ to refer to any awareness we have of the world, regardless of whether it involves an explicit subject-object structure or an explicitly self-conscious ego.
ceptual thought is based on our bodily openness to the world, bodily forms of openness cannot be extricated from the *totality* of transcendental conditions of which they are a part.

My contention is that neither conceptual openness nor bodily openness tells the whole story about what makes human experience possible, and that both are ‘always already’ implicated in any given experience that we have. This understanding of our openness to the world allows us to maintain that a full description of the transcendental conditions of our experience should involve nonconceptual forms of openness, while taking into account McDowell’s point that rational constraint on belief requires the world we experience to be fully within the “space of reasons.” Phenomenological accounts of subrational, bodily forms of openness to the world can therefore enrich McDowell’s conception of what it means to have the world in view by making room in experience for nonconceptual forms of awareness. The same structure of openness to the world can be operative in different ways at different times, actualizing some experiential possibilities and not others, while nevertheless determining the form of experience in general. Just as our ability to think in terms of conceptually-structured propositions shouldn’t lead us to overlook the way that the world is disclosed in absorbed bodily activity, our ability to be absorbed in bodily activity shouldn’t lead us to overlook the fact that conceptualized thought about the world is always a possibility for mature human beings. We can thus take account of the possibility of these different forms of experience without understanding them as operations of entirely separate capacities, provided that we understand them as aspects of a single unified structure of transcendental conditions that is always in effect, even in cases where experience is not realized in explicitly discursive activities like judgment.
Finally, I will argue contra McDowell that giving an account of our openness to the world in terms of transcendental conditions does not necessarily lead to a denial of naturalism. Admittedly, giving a phenomenological account of world-disclosure in terms of transcendental conditions might seem just as unnatural, just as “spooky” and “occult,” as McDowell’s appeal to *sui generis* rational, conceptual structures (1996, 82–3). McDowell’s attempt to make room for rational norms in nature is therefore instructive, since it suggests a strategy for integrating such structures into the natural world (1996, 92). McDowell’s strategy for restoring our sense of the naturalness of rational norms is a good first step towards a naturalistic, yet non-reductive, account of experience, but he lacks an explicit ontological account of the relationship between our openness to the world on the one hand, and our nature as animals on the other. McDowell demurs from providing an explicit ontological characterization of nature, suggesting instead that we should be content just to dispel the sense that the existence of norms in nature presents a philosophical problem in the first place. Nevertheless, we might feel compelled to ask: what is nature such that it can encompass the contrasting logical spaces of physical law on the one hand, and rational normativity on the other? While McDowell is content to treat this issue with Wittgensteinian philosophical therapy, his quietist treatment of the nature of nature might seem a less-than-compelling alternative to a “bald naturalism” that simply equates nature with the realm of law disclosed by the natural sciences (1996, 73). A phenomenological approach to ontology provides stronger methodological grounds for rejecting bald naturalism’s ontological austerity, while at the same time laying the methodological foundations for a positive ontological account of nature that is more informative than McDowell’s quietism.
Dreyfus argues that many of our experiences are best described as having a nonconceptual form (2005; 2007b; 2007a; 2013). Expert actions by athletes in so-called “flow states,” moves by grandmasters playing lightning chess, and even everyday doorknob-turning are cited as evidence that human beings are predominantly engaged with the world in ways that don’t involve the capacity to step back and reflect on one’s reasons for acting. These examples are supposed to demonstrate, among other things, that contrary to McDowell’s claim that rational, conceptual capacities pervade all experience, we are, in reality, “only part-time rational animals” (2007b, 354), and that “mindedness, far from being a pervasive and essential feature of human being, is the result of a specific transformation of our pervasive mindless absorbed coping” (2007b, 353). Against McDowell’s claim that the possibility of rational thought about the world requires that all experience be an exercise of conceptual capacities, Dreyfus argues that experience often comes in a manifestly nonconceptual form as demonstrated by the phenomenon of skillful, absorbed coping.

Dreyfus ties these observations to existential phenomenology, enlisting Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to argue that there is a “ground-level” of engagement with the world that is not conceptually structured. As Dreyfus puts it, our experience in absorbed coping has a kind of intentional content; it just isn’t conceptual content. A ‘bare Given’ and the ‘thinkable’ are not our only alternatives. We must accept the possibility that our ground-level coping opens up the world by opening us to a meaningful Given—a Given that is nonconceptual but not bare. (Dreyfus 2005, 55)

What is this nonconceptual intentional content supposed to be? Dreyfus explains, in terms borrowed from Merleau-Ponty, that it is a kind of “motor intentionality,” a bodily know-how aimed at optimal execution of bodily action rather than knowledge of truth, a responsiveness, not to objective states of affairs in the world, but to solicitations, the call of
affordances in one’s environment to do this or that, in this or that way. Crucially, in the relevant type of experience, we find a tendency in the subject to accommodate herself, in a bodily way, to the immediate situation, without judging that things are thus and so. Contrasting this space of meaningful engagement with the Sellarsian “space of reasons,” Dreyfus calls this, following Merleau-Ponty, “the space of motivations” (Dreyfus 2005, 56–8).

Existential phenomenologists take conceptual thought to be made possible by nonconceptual forms of experience. Conceptual thought—as an abstract, contemplative, and theorizing stance towards things—emerges out of a background engagement with things as they are disclosed in the space of motivations by our embodied coping. Nevertheless, I will argue that we can take this into account without giving up the claim that all human experience involves the operation of the very same capacities involved in explicit conceptual thought. Dreyfus himself admits that

McDowell’s account of the necessity of conceptuality to make possible our mind-to-world relation seems to me convincing. My objection to his view is that he assumes that his account of our concept-based, minded rational relation to the totality of facts is the whole story as to how we, in general, relate to the world. I don’t question McDowell’s transcendental ‘must,’ but I do question his überhaupt. (2013, 23)

Dreyfus’s criticism turn on two issues: first, whether McDowell’s view really does entail that conceptual form provides the whole story of how we are related to the world, and second, whether McDowell can allow that nonconceptual forms play an important, ground-level role in experience while maintaining that our conceptual capacities are always operative in experience.

I argue that the claim that our conceptual capacities are always operative can be borne out if conceptuality is a transcendental condition of the possibility of our having the
range of experiences that we do in fact have. This will be true even if conceptual form, alone, is not sufficient for experience, and true even if conceptual form depends on non-conceptual form. My claim is that conceptual capacities are always operative transcendently, even if conceptual contents are not actualized psychologically in every case of experience.

McDowell on Conceptual Capacities

In *Mind and World*, McDowell argues that in a veridical experience “what one takes in is *that things are thus and so.* *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgment” (1996, 26). In “Avoiding the Myth of the Given,” however, McDowell claims that the operation of conceptual capacities in experience is not the actualization of psychological states bearing contents parallel to those of judgments. He writes:

I used to assume that to conceive experiences as actualizations of conceptual capacities, we would need to credit experiences with *propositional* content, the sort of content judgments have. And I used to assume that the content of an experience would need to include *everything* the experience enables its subject to know non-inferentially. But both these assumptions now strike me as wrong. (McDowell 2009, 259)

McDowell is saying here that he has discarded two theses since writing *Mind and World*: (1) that all experiences feature propositional contents, and (2) that an experience must have as its content a fully determinate proposition that expresses explicitly all the information about the world that that experience allows its subject to come to know non-inferentially.

In “Avoiding the Myth of the Given,” McDowell says that we should replace his older propositional understanding of the content of experience with “an idea of content that is not propositional but intuitional, in … a Kantian sense” (2009, 260). On McDow-
ell’s new view, judgments have discursive propositional content, while experiences have non-discursive intuitional content. On the new view, “experiencing is not taking things to be so;” rather, like Kantian intuitions, experiences “bring our surroundings into view, thereby entitling us to take certain things to be so, but leaving it a further question what, if anything, we do take to be so” (McDowell 2009, 269). Having an experience puts us in an epistemic position to make warranted judgments about objects in virtue of putting us into direct contact with them, bypassing the need to articulate anything explicitly to ourselves. In judgment, as in assertion, one makes one’s endorsement of a specific proposition discursively explicit. By contrast, the content of an experience is not limited to the things that one formulates explicitly; because it is intuitional, the content of an experience can remain unarticulated and implicit. Moreover, since the contents of experience are not propositional, experiences do not provide warrant for judgments through inferential relations. Instead, the epistemic entitlement that experiences provide “derives from the presence to one of the object itself” (McDowell 2009, 271).

Updated in this way, McDowell’s new view avoids making the implausible claim that all experience necessarily involves the actualization of psychological states that involve explicitly articulated, propositionally-structured content. On the new view, McDowell is able to maintain that reason is a defining characteristic of human life because our capacity for discursivity can always, potentially, be exercised. This is to say that the capacity to undergo experiences is one that always potentially discursive, even when that potentiality is not actualized. As he puts it,

Normally when experience provides us with knowledge that such and such is the case, we do simply find ourselves in possession of the knowledge; we do not get into that position by wondering whether such and such is the case and judging that it is. When I say that the knowledge experience yields to rational subjects is of a kind that is special to rational subjects, I mean that in such knowledge, capacities
of the sort that can figure in that kind of intellectual activity are in play, not that a subject who has such knowledge on the basis of experience is in that position as a result of actually engaging in that kind of intellectual activity. (McDowell 2013, 42)

By making clear that he is not committed to the view that experience always involves the actual exercise of a capacity for discursivity, McDowell is better able to account for what Dreyfus means to highlight, namely that a sizable portion of human life goes by unreflectively, without the occurrence of any explicit conceptualized thoughts.

But how could an unactualized potential for discursive activity mean that our conceptual capacities are always operative? Dreyfus objects that the claim that conceptual capacities are operative in all experience involves a kind of “category mistake,” arguing that such “Capacities are exercised on occasion, but that does not allow one to conclude that, even when they are not exercised, they are, nonetheless, ‘operative’ and thus pervade all our activities.” (Dreyfus 2007a, 372). Against this, I would argue that if we understand the operation of our conceptual capacities to be a matter of transcendental constitution, rather than psychological activity, then Dreyfus’s objection misses its mark. With respect to our psychological capacities, Dreyfus is right to say that our “Capacities can’t pervade everything” (2007b, 372). While we can agree that our psychological capacities can’t pervade everything, I maintain that the capacities that enable experience of the world transcendently, can, and indeed, must pervade everything. In order for our psychological capacities to yield experience of the world, a whole host of transcendental conditions must already be at work, making it possible, in the first place, for a world to be disclosed in all of the various ways that it can be disclosed. If we conceive of our conceptual capacities as psychological capacities, then clearly there are experiences in which such capacities are not deployed, experiences that are not discursively articulated. But the
transcendental conditions that make experience possible in the first place are not merely psychological capacities.

The Unity of Transcendental Conditions

What I want to highlight here is that the transcendental conditions that enable us to have the range of experiences that we do in fact have must form a unified whole in order to make the world available to us. This is the central point animating Kant’s discussion of the “transcendental unity of apperception.” Kant’s claim is that because the world is given through various experiences that are all available to the same subject, the structure of our subjectivity must be such that it allows our experiences to be unified in a single self-consciousness; and, since all of our experiences are experiences of the same world, the world must be such that it allows all of its manifestations to be unified in the cognition of a single system of interrelated phenomena. Put another way, the transcendental conditions that make possible the variety of our experiences must also make possible their unity in a single conscious life; likewise, the variety of what is given in experience must also make possible the givenness of the world as a single system of interrelated phenomena.

That an individual’s experience preserves sameness of subject and sameness of world across different particular instances of experience entails a necessary unity of experience’s transcendental conditions. The whole set of transcendental conditions stands in the

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3 Kant: “[T]he manifold representations that are given in a certain intuition would not all together be my representations if they did not all belong together to a self-consciousness; i.e., as my representations (even if I am not conscious of them as such) they must yet necessarily be in accord with the condition under which alone they can stand together in a universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not belong to me” (Kant 1998, B132; see also Kant’s footnote at A117).
background of any *instance* of experience. This means that the capacities that make it possible for us to engage with the world in all of the various ways that we do cannot be a collection of distinct psychological capacities that just happen to be bundled together in human subjects. What is “basic,” transcendentally speaking, isn’t a “ground-floor” of nonconceptual capacities onto which conceptual capacities may subsequently be grafted as an optional “upper deck.” Rather, what is “basic” with respect to the possibility of human experience is the *entire* structure of transcendental subjectivity.

Suppose this weren’t the case. If there *were* radical discontinuities between the operations of various capacities that make the disclosure of the world possible, then it would be hard to see how the products of those capacities could later come together to result in a unified consciousness of a unified world. Crucially for our discussion here, it would be hard to see how the givenness of the usable things that I cope with could be related to the givenness of the thinkable things about which I can reason. Experience doesn’t present us with two isolated ‘worlds’ that we are somehow led to connect through a kind of intellectual labor. Rather, the world we inhabit is one that is always already encountered as unified throughout all experience, however things are given, whether as thinkable, or as usable, in a given case.

We can flesh out this idea of a transcendental unity in terms of the phenomenological notion of experiential horizons. Phenomenologists, from Husserl onwards, have

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5 Merleau-Ponty, for example, claims that “Existence has no fortuitous attributes and no content that does not contribute to giving it its form,” and explicitly denies that the characteristics of human existence “are gathered together … merely through the encounter of multiple causes and by the caprice of nature” (2012, 173). Instead, as discussed in Chapter 3, these structures exist historically and factically.
6 For Dreyfus’s defense of a ‘two-worlds’ view of the relationship between the occurrent and the available (i.e., the thinkable and the usable) see his paper with Charles Spinosa (Dreyfus and Spinosa 1999).
argued that all of our experiences come to us structured by a set of horizons that intimate to us how those experiences can unfold. So, for example, the perception of the visible parts of an orange essentially involves a tacit understanding of how the presently occluded parts of the orange might be made available given specific changes in the position of the perceiver or of the orange itself. The horizontality of experience suggests that no individual experience is given in complete isolation from others; the individual experience is always given in relation to other possible experiences. Moreover, the various horizontal features belonging to different modalities of experience such as perception, imagination, thought, and so on, themselves belong to a unified ‘horizon of horizons.’ This totality of transcendental (or, if one prefers, existential) structures is the background context for all of our experience. Husserl calls this totality the “lifeworld,” saying that it is only by being in possession of this totality that one becomes capable of seeing and systematically investigating what we characterized as the ‘how of manners of givenness.’ It was just in this way that one could first discover that every worldly datum is a datum within the how of the horizon, that in horizons, further horizons are implied, and finally, that anything at all is given in a worldly manner brings the world-horizon along with it and becomes an object of world-consciousness in this way alone. (1970, 263–4)

This doctrine is not peculiar to Husserl. In Division Two of Being and Time, when Heidegger asks “how something like world in its unity with Dasein is ontologically possible,” his answer is that

The unity of significance, that is, the ontological constitution of the world, must [...] be grounded in temporality. The existential and temporal condition of the possibility of the world lies in the fact that temporality, as an ecstatical unity, has something like a horizon. (2010, 347)

For Heidegger, temporality is the ‘horizon of horizons’ that allows Dasein to ‘stand outside itself’ (from the ancient Greek, ekstasis) and be related to things in a context of
significance, *a world*, whose structure is characterized by the interwoven horizons of a past, present and future.

In Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, too, we find the claim that “The natural world is the horizon of all horizons, and the style of all styles, which ensures my experiences have a given, not a willed, unity beneath all of the ruptures of my personal and historical life” (2012, 345). Merleau-Ponty argues that every encounter with a worldly thing implicates the open-ended and unified horizontal structure of the world. As Merleau-Ponty puts it “the thing is the initial sketch of the world,” and

To this initial outline of being [...] whose possible completion I presume through indefinite horizons – from the simple fact that my phenomena solidify in a thing and follow a certain constant style in their unfolding – that is, to this open unity of the world, an open and indefinite unity of subjectivity must correspond. (2012, 428–9)

For all of these phenomenologists, the horizonality of experience implies that our various modes of access to the world need to be understood as aspects of a unified structure of world-disclosure that is operative throughout all of experience. In just the same way that visual perception is structured by a specifically *visual* horizon that makes possible the relation and the transition between different experiences of visibility and occlusion, so too Husserl’s ‘lifeworld,’ Heidegger’s ‘temporality,’ and Merleau-Ponty’s ‘natural world’ signify the *ultimate* horizon that makes possible the relation and the transition between any of the experiences had by an individual subject. Whatever one calls it, this ‘horizon of horizons’ provides the necessary unity that Kant argued was the transcendental condition of having experience of the world at all.

Thus, provided we are considering our capacities transcendentally, as conditions of the possibility of experience, accounts of our absorbed coping don’t establish that nonconceptual capacities yield experience independently of our conceptual capacities. To
draw that conclusion one would have to assume that our nonconceptual and conceptual capacities could be pulled apart, and that the independent functioning of our nonconceptual capacities could suffice to explain the possibility of a given experience of absorbed coping. But this would imply that the unity of the world and the unity of our subjective capacities across various modalities and instances could be built up out of psychological capacities and representations piece by piece—a claim that the existential phenomenologists to whom Dreyfus refers would not likely accept, given their commitment to the unity and horizontality of world-experience.⁷

Dreyfus claims that in thinking about the relationship between conceptual and nonconceptual forms of experience, “we must ask how the nonconceptual given is converted into a given with conceptual content so that perception can do its justificatory job.” (2005, 59). But the idea that some kind of conversion is necessary, makes it seem that in absorbed coping we are given solicitations that are only subsequently, and on occasion, made by some activity of the subject to fit into a thinkable, conceptually-structured world. This way of thinking about the relationship between the nonconceptual and the conceptual makes the unity of the world across different modalities and different times into a problem for empirical psychology, where instead one might have thought that a key result of transcendental philosophy is to have shown precisely why empirical accounts of synthesis are cast at the wrong level of explanation to account for the unity of world-experience.⁸

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⁷ See for example, Merleau-Ponty’s frequent objections to the view that perceptual experience is formed from components, “partes extra partes” (2012).
⁸ See Sebastian Gardner (2013) for an incisive discussion of the centrality of this point to transcendental philosophy from Kant onwards. As Gardner notes, “if the theory of synthesis is to amount to anything more than an outline for a possible subpersonal empirical theory of cognition, then [...] synthesis must not be understood as an act description referring to a mental doing on a
Transcendental philosophy uncovers a world that is always already unified, a world whose conditions of disclosure and interrelated modes of manifestation need only to be identified and unpacked. Heidegger’s being-in-the-world, Merleau-Ponty’s être au monde, Husserl’s transcendental consciousness, and Kant’s transcendental subject each constitute structural conditions that are supposed to explain (among other things) the very possibility of a unity of disparate world-experiences in an individual human life. Thus, as McDowell contends, Dreyfus’s question about the conversion of the nonconceptual into the conceptual, “should be rejected, not answered” (2007, 349) for reasons stemming from very philosophical tradition that inspires Dreyfus’s line of criticism.

This allows for a measured defense of the claim that conceptual capacities pervade all experience, a defense that does not require us to think that all experience involves judgment, or something like a judgment. Instead, we can say, in a transcendental register, that conceptual capacities pervade all of our experience in virtue of belonging to a structure that must itself be operative as a unified whole in order to disclose the world, and whose constant operation must be presupposed in order to explain how various experiences could be unified across different modalities at different times. When McDowell says that conceptuality pervades human experience, we can understand him to be saying that human experience is made possible in each and every case by the very same world-disclosing transcendental structures regardless of whether or not, in a given case, an explicit, discursively articulated thought has been actualized.

Thus, when Dreyfus claims that “It seems that the conceptualists can’t give an account of how we are absorbed in the world, while the phenomenologists can’t account for

par with say ‘remembering’ or ‘attending,’” nor, more fundamentally, as any sort of operation performed on a mental object” (2013, 115).
what makes it possible for us to step back and observe it” (2007b, 364), he seems to me to
be wrong on both counts. Regarding the first charge, I’ve argued that a conceptualist can
simply accept the phenomenological account of how we are absorbed in the world, while
stressing that this nevertheless involves conceptual capacities as part of the total package
of transcendental structures that make our “part-time” rationality possible.9 Regarding
the second charge, Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty do at least attempt to provide
accounts of how our conceptual capacities are founded on and emerge from a back-
ground of nonconceptual forms of engagement with things.10

Regardless of whether these accounts succeed in their details, the key explanatory
role of transcendental subjectivity is precisely to account for the unity and interconnection
between our various forms of openness to the world. There doesn’t seem to be any obsta-
cle, in principle, to a phenomenological account of the connection between
nonconceptual and conceptual forms of experience, a connection that doesn’t entail that a
psychologically real conversion of format needs to take place.

Thus, it seems we can defend the claim that nonconceptual and conceptual forms
of experience belong together as dependent moments of one and the same transcendental
subjectivity, a fundamentally unified subjectivity, open to a unified world. The necessary

9 McDowell makes this precisely this move in the later stages of his exchange with Dreyfus: “I
agree with Dreyfus and Merleau-Ponty that the world of the absorbed copernic – in the fact the
world of agents in general, whether they are acting reflectively or not – is richly populated with
solicitations to act” (2013, 52). Earlier, McDowell seems to make room for nonconceptual forms
of experience in responding to Charles Taylor: “I agree with Taylor that there is something
between spontaneity in what he calls ‘the strong Kantian sense, turning crucially on conceptual,
reflective thought,’ on the one hand, and conformity to Galilean law, on the other. We need this
middle ground for thinking about non-human animals, and it is what is supposed to be occupied
by pre-understanding even in our case” (2002, 283).
10 See, for example, Husserl’s account in Experience and Judgment (1973) of the relationship between
pre-predicative perception and the logical structure of judgment; Heidegger’s account in Being and
Time of “statement [i.e., assertion; Aussage] as a derivative mode of interpretation” that is based on
our circumspect dealing with equipment (2010, 149–55); and Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the
unity of transcendental subjectivity on the one hand, and the necessary unity of the world on the other, make possible the whole range of experiences that are available to human beings, as well as the interconnection of various particular experiences within a single life. These transcendental conditions must be thought of as always in effect, such that all experience is constituted by them, irrespective of an experience’s particular contents.

Dreyfus’s bafflement regarding how a rational capacity could be actualized outside of an explicit act of judgment is based on his neglect of the difference between conceiving of such capacities as psychological capacities and conceiving them as the transcendental conditions of the possibility of experience. Dreyfus claims not to “see an argument for the move from the reasonable claim that attentive experience with its attendant ego is sometimes exercised to the claim that this capacity is always operative” (Dreyfus 2007a, 376). But here is the core of the argument that I have been making: it is a transcendental condition of the possibility of our sometimes exercising a psychological capacity for discursive thought that a transcendental capacity for such thought be always already at work in the disclosure of a world about which explicit thoughts are possible. My subjectivity can accurately be characterized as the sort of thing that is structured by conceptual capacities, even if I don’t take advantage of these capacities through discursive activity in a given case. ‘Having world’ is a constant feature of our lives, one that is actualized at every moment. This doesn’t require that every possible way of dealing with the world be actualized all at once, but it does mean that the structures that make dealing with the world in all of those ways possible are always operative in every experience.11

11 It may be useful here to put this point in terms of Aristotle’s distinction between first and second actuality (De Anima II.1, 412a22-27; II.5, 417a21-b1). ‘Having world’ is the first actuality of the potentiality to have a particular range of experiences, while actually having a particular experience within this range is a further, second actuality of that same potentiality. Absorbed coping is
The moral of the story is that the capacity for absorbed coping and the capacity for discursive thought are both dependent moments of a pervasive and unified transcendental capacity for world-disclosure. The primacy of absorbed coping, and its independence as a psychological process from the process of discursive thought doesn’t show that the capacity for discursive thought informs our being-in-the-world only intermittently. For if being-in-the-world is understood as the structure of human experience in general, then its world-disclosing activities must ‘always already’ take a form that allows for both thinking and coping, thereby making it possible for our experiences to have the specific range and variety of contents that they do in fact have.

**Naturalism and Ontology**

McDowell’s engagement with transcendental philosophy is tempered by his goal of avoiding a “rampant platonism” that would makes human responsiveness to reasons seem “spooky” or “occult” (1996, 77–8, 83). For the rampant platonist, since rationality is not reducible to nature, conceived as the realm of physical law, it therefore seems that our capacity for rationality cannot be anything other than supernatural. Kant, for example, ends up committed to rampant platonism (by McDowell’s lights) since the activity of the subject in constituting its experience can only be known formally, as the activity of a transcendental ego. This has the result that for Kant, the subject “cannot be equated with the continuing life of a perceiving animal” (1996, 102). Moreover, “Such a subject could not be something substantially present in the world; it is at best a point of view” (1996, 111). Phenomenology, too, has often been articulated in a way that suggests a rampant plato-
nism—the points McDowell makes regarding Kant’s conception of the transcendental ego apply just as well to Husserl’s conception of transcendental consciousness, and, despite Heidegger’s concern to understand human beings as this-worldly, our being-in-the-world likewise turns out not to be discoverable in the realm of physical law. Husserl and Heidegger thus embrace explicitly anti-naturalist positions.\(^\text{12}\) However, the commitment to structures of phenomenal manifestation, irreducible to objects in the realm of physical law, need not entail a commitment to the supernatural. Merleau-Ponty, for example, rather than rejecting an ontological grounding of experience in nature, takes the investigation of human existence to show instead that the natural world is richer than the ‘nature’ described by physical law. For Merleau-Ponty it is nature that expresses its being in the structures of phenomenal manifestation uncovered by phenomenology.\(^\text{13}\)

McDowell’s diagnosis of the dialectical situation is that rampant platonism seems tempting only if one wrongly identifies nature with the “disenchanted” realm of physical law, while rightly maintaining that the demands of reason are sui generis. Thus, as an alternative to the spooky supernaturalism of rampant platonism, McDowell attempts to make plausible a form of naturalized platonism that rejects the identification of nature with the realm of physical law, while endorsing the thought that the demands of reason are sui generis. This naturalized platonism is platonistic in that the structure of the space of reasons has a sort of autonomy; it is not derivative from, or reflective of, truths about human beings that are capturable independently of having that structure in view. But this platonism is not rampant: the structure of the space of reasons is not constituted in splendid isolation from anything merely human. The demands of reason are essentially such

\(^\text{12}\) See Dermot Moran (2008) for an overview of Husserl’s reasons for rejecting naturalism. For a discussion of Kant and Heidegger’s relationship to naturalism, see my Chapter 5.

\(^\text{13}\) I take this to be the result of the extended argument running through Merleau-Ponty’s *The Structure of Behavior* (1963). I have tried to provide my own argument for this conception of nature over the course of the previous chapters.
that a human upbringing can open a human being’s eyes to them. (McDowell 1996, 92)

On this view, our rational capacities are both natural and cultural, the outgrowths of human beings’ animal nature when nurtured in an appropriate cultural context. This way of articulating a naturalized platonism depends on an expansion of the concept of nature to include what Aristotle called our second nature, the nature we acquire through enculturation into discursive and ethical practices. McDowell associates this process of enculturation with the German concept of Bildung:

*Bildung* actualizes some of the potentialities we are born with; we do not have to suppose it introduces some non-animal ingredient into our constitution. And although the structure of the space of reasons cannot be reconstructed out of facts about our involvement in the realm of law, it can be the framework within which meaning comes into view only because our eyes can be opened to it by Bildung, which is an element in the normal coming to maturity of the kind of animals we are. Meaning is not a mysterious gift from outside nature. (1996, 88)

Our rational and conceptual capacities are natural, since they belong to human animals, whose capacity to teach and learn practices are natural if anything is. Our understanding of second nature will thus be connected to descriptions of human activity at the level of “natural history,” in a broadly Wittgensteinian sense (McDowell 1996, 95). This is to say that

by dint of exploiting, in an utterly intuitive way, ideas like that of the patterns characteristic of the life of animals of a certain kind, we can insist that such phenomena [i.e., responsiveness to reasons], even though they are beyond the reach of natural-scientific understanding are perfectly real, without thereby relegating them to the sphere of the occult or the supernatural. We can accept that a distinctively human life is characterized by a freedom that exempts its distinctive phenomena from natural-scientific intelligibility, without thereby being required to push it back into the region of darkness, the region supposedly occupied by phenomena that resist the light cast by natural science because they are occult or supernatural… (McDowell 2008, 217)

But what are human actions, ontologically speaking? How does the reality of rationally-guided human activity, as a *sui generis* level of description, fit together,
ontologically, with the disenchanted nature that we must also admit as real? How are we
to understand the ontological unity of these different realities in a single natural world?

The problem is that McDowell’s naturalized platonism provides us with very little
in the way of a positive ontological understanding of what the word ‘nature’ in the phrase
‘second nature’ is supposed to mean. We have, on the one hand, the denial that nature is
to be identified with the realm of law, and on the other hand, the assertion that human
animals are natural, but we lack any further characterization of what nature itself is—
what nature would have to be in order to reveal itself both in the disenchanted space of
physical law disclosed by the sciences and in the space of reason disclosed in our more
general responsiveness to rational norms.

McDowell distances his naturalized platonism from a “crazily nostalgic attempt to
re-enchant the natural world” (1996, 72). As McDowell says, “I am not urging that we
should try to regain Aristotle’s innocence. It would be crazy to regret the idea that natural
science reveals a special kind of intelligibility, to be distinguished from the kind that is
proper to meaning” (1996, 109). Here, there is no intention to deny the scientific image of
the world as ‘disenchanted,’ and return us to Aristotelian metaphysics.

When pressed to elaborate on his conception of nature, however, McDowell in-
creases that his appeals to naturalism “do the work I want them to do only in a certain sort of
dialectical context, and one falsifies what I wanted to do with them if one lifts them out of
the context and presses for a formulation of a positive doctrine they might be names for”
(2008, 216). He goes on to add that “What ‘natural’ means, as the root of ‘naturalism’ in,
say, ‘relaxed naturalism’ as I use that phrase, is: not supernatural (not occult, not magical,
…)” (McDowell 2008, 218).
This fits with McDowell’s view that a positive ontological understanding of the space of reasons is unnecessary. In his Afterword to *Mind and World*, McDowell writes that

I think the response we should aim at being entitled to, if someone raises a question like “What constitutes the structure of the space of reasons?”, is something like a shrug of the shoulders… When I invoke second nature, that is meant to dislodge the background that makes such questions look pressing, the dualism of reason and nature. (1996, 178)

McDowell suggests in the quote above that the question of the constitution of the space of reasons seems pressing only because of a prior background assumption that there is a dualism of reason and nature, an assumption McDowell intends to show is dispensable. However, in articulating his non-dualistic conception of reason in nature, McDowell’s lack of specificity, and lack of explicit ontological methodology hobble the supposed advantages of his view in comparison to “bald naturalism.” Bald naturalism deals with the supposed duality by denying it, claiming that any normativity worth recognizing will be describable in terms of what is discoverable in the realm of law. For bald naturalism, then, “the task is to reduce the structure of the space of reasons to something that is already unproblematically natural on the relevant conception” (McDowell 1996, 73). As McDowell notes, bald naturalism simply rejects the idea that the space of reasons is properly conceived as *sui generis*, suggesting instead that “we can reconstruct the structure of the space of reasons out of conceptual materials that already belong in a natural-scientific depiction of nature” (1996, 73).

Since bald naturalism and McDowell’s naturalized platonism both offer to close the gap between reason and nature in a way that allows us to avoid rampant platonism, McDowell argues that his approach is more philosophically satisfying because it doesn’t take the very idea of integrating reason and nature to be a simple mistake. Bald naturalism suggests that we were simply wrong to suppose that there is a difference between the
space of reasons and the space of law, so it turns out that there never was a real problem regarding their integration in the first place. McDowell’s position is supposed to be superior because it acknowledges that there is some basis for the thought that there is a problem to be solved regarding reason and nature—that is, we were right that there is a difference between the space of reasons and the space of law, but wrong that nature must refer only to the space of law.

But unless one is already inclined to accept that the structure of reason is sui generis, bald naturalism’s attempts at reduction can easily seem a more promising way of avoiding rampant platonism than McDowell’s appeal to a quietist naturalism of second nature. We can accept that conceptual and nonconceptual forms of intelligibility belong to the same natural world, but still wonder how they fit together. Rather than providing a direct argument against bald naturalism, McDowell positions his naturalized platonism merely as a coherent alternative to it, one that we are free to take once we realize that we aren’t forced to equate nature with the target of natural science. As he writes:

I need not pretend to have an argument that the bald naturalist programme… cannot be executed. The point is just the availability of my alternative, and, I claim, more satisfying exorcism undercuts a philosophical motivation… for supposing that the programme must be feasible. (McDowell 1996, xxiii)

But bald naturalism isn’t appealing just because it claims to present the only way of accounting for the relationship between reason and nature—it is also appealing because of its systematic approach to ontology. Bald naturalism, whatever its other faults, can at least claim for itself a worked-out method for approaching positive ontology, a clear method for justifying ontological claims. To put the point in the words of one of McDowell’s heroes, the bald naturalist can say something positive regarding ontological methodology
instead of remaining silent, namely that “science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not” (Sellars 1997, 83).

As McDowell admits, if we allow ourselves to ask what constitutes the space of reasons, the “invocation of second nature, sketchy and unsystematic as it is, will seem at best a promissory note towards a proper response” (1996, 178). The crux of the issue, then, is why we should think that questions about constitution of the space of reasons can be shrugged off in the way that McDowell suggests. For philosophers concerned with clarity on matters of ontology, McDowell’s version of naturalized platonism leaves too many questions unanswered in its eagerness to follow Wittgenstein in pursuing a course of philosophical therapy that “leaves everything as it is” with respect to our understanding of the constitution of the space of reasons (Wittgenstein 1963, §124).

Rather than choose between bald naturalism and McDowell’s quietist naturalism, however, I suggest that a phenomenological naturalism can fill in the gaps left in McDowell’s account, while satisfying the desiderata of the “naturalized platonism” that McDowell recommends. The difference between McDowell and the phenomenologist is that the phenomenologist takes it as a legitimate task to answer the question of how the space of meaning gets to be the way that it is.

As Sebastian Gardner notes, “The key question is whether McDowell is entitled to turn his spade or shrug his shoulders at points where the transcendentalist rolls up his sleeves” (2013, 133). In his appeal to “natural history,” McDowell seems to help himself to descriptions of what we are doing from within our practices, without allowing that there is anything to be said about what makes those practices possible, beyond a few platitudes about the way that our ‘obvious’ animality allows for our enculturation into rational practices. But as Gardner puts it:
The classical transcendentalist will insist that in order to rationalize his position, McDowell needs at the very least to explain the general, principled basis on which the reach of transcendental explanation is, on his account, properly determined. (2013, 133)

In its Heideggerian or Merleau-Pontian form, phenomenology provides a method for positive ontological inquiry, allowing us to ground the space of reasons in human beings’ second nature, while also telling us what the nature of that nature is. Moreover, as Merleau-Ponty’s own work shows, phenomenology can provide a vantage point on nature that shows precisely how our capacities can be understood as natural ones, while also providing a philosophical rationale for accepting that ontology. Phenomenological naturalism provides us with a method, and a straight answer to the question what nature is, by situating the question of our openness to the world in relation to our bodies as both objects, and sites of lived experience. Thus, rather than being opposed to McDowell’s naturalized platonism, a phenomenological naturalism can be seen as a more thoroughgoing way of realizing it.
Chapter 5

How Nature Shows Itself

Nature at the Limits of Science and Phenomenology

Transcendental philosophy places limits on the explanatory scope of natural science. Transcendental philosophy, in turn, encounters its own limits in attempting to characterize the mode of being of the transcendental conditions of experience. In attempting to negotiate between these two limits, I argue that a phenomenological naturalism should conceive of nature as the origin of the structures that we find in both natural science and transcendental reflection. Crucially, however, the limits of natural science and transcendental philosophy jointly entail that nature cannot be conceived as a specific object nor as the totality of objects in the world. Nature, then, is not a being of the ordinary kind; nature is not identical to any object discoverable in either natural science or transcendental philosophy, but is instead the generative source from which the discovery of all phenomena proceeds.

How do the results of transcendental philosophy place limits on natural science? Both Kant and Heidegger take the domain of the natural to be opened to us in a way that enables natural scientific inquiry, but claim that the mode of being of that opening itself cannot be understood using the methods of natural science. Transcendental philosophy and phenomenology purport to explain the possibility of natural science in a way that the natural sciences are not equipped to do on their own.
But what makes this reflection on transcendental conditions of possibility itself possible? In asking this question, we reach another explanatory limit, a limitation on the ability of transcendental reflection to make phenomenally present its own conditions of possibility. Eugen Fink, Husserl’s student and collaborator, argued that reiterating transcendental reflection on conditions of possibility at the level of transcendental cognition pushes philosophy to the limit of what can be given phenomenally in experience. Fink argued that if transcendental conditions of possibility are prior to, and make possible our access to beings, then these conditions cannot themselves be beings, for then we would need further conditions of possibility in order to explain how we have access to them as the beings they are. This seems to leave transcendental philosophy with a methodological problem: how can it account for its own conditions of possibility if these conditions cannot show up in transcendental reflection as beings?

I argue, following Merleau-Ponty, that the reflective limits of transcendental philosophy are the key to understanding what it means for nature to be the ontological ground of both natural science and transcendental reflection. Nature, as ontological condition of possibility, cannot be identified solely with what shows up in experience of the world, i.e., with beings present in either world-experience or in transcendental reflection. Nature is never simply coincident with what is present. It is, instead, a condition whose mode of being is to be identified with the process of phenomenal manifestation in general. The being of nature does not simply consist in what is present to consciousness—in some worldly being, in the totality of worldly beings, or even in a manifest “transcendental being”—rather, it consists in a coming to presence that simultaneously constitutes the domain of transcendental subjectivity and the world as a unified field of being. In this way, phe-
nomenology finds a place for nature as a principle of ontological grounding, allowing for
what I have been calling a phenomenological naturalism.

How does this form of naturalism compare to other, more standard forms of naturalism? To answer this question, I will begin by examining two exemplars of transcendental approaches to ontology. I argue that Kant and Heidegger must reject the thesis of metaphysical naturalism, which claims that both that the natural sciences themselves exhaustively determine the range of natural objects, and that these natural objects are the only ones that exist. Kant must reject this thesis because his transcendental idealism entails that we can have no theoretical justification for the denial of supernatural or supersensible things in themselves, although, by the same token, we also lack any theoretical justification for affirming their existence. Heidegger, too, must reject metaphysical naturalism because Dasein’s being-in-the-world constitutes a way of being which is not and cannot be discovered by any natural science.

How do things stand for these two figures with respect to methodological naturalism? Both Kant and Heidegger reject a Quinean understanding of naturalism, which would entail that philosophy limit itself to the justificatory methods of the natural sciences. If that is what “continuity” with the methods of natural science entails, then the justificatory methods of philosophy and natural science are discontinuous, and Kant and Heidegger are not methodological naturalists. However, if the “continuity” of philosophy and natural science means a logical compatibility of justificatory methods, then Kant and Heidegger aim at this and more. They aim at a complimentarity of methods, for they accept the validity of at least some natural scientific methods of justification, while also thinking that these methods themselves stand in need of a deeper justification, which only philosophy can provide.
To begin, however, let’s turn now to a closer examination of two areas in which both Kant and Heidegger rein in the metaphysical and methodological claims of naturalism: physics, and the study of subjectivity. Of these two, the second is of deeper significance, for it is the subjectivity involved in scientific practice that explains why natural science has limits: the limits of natural science, for Kant and Heidegger, correspond to a lacuna or blind spot of science with respect to the mode of being of the very subjectivity that makes scientific understanding possible in the first place.

**Kant on Physics**

In the *Prolegomena*, Kant distinguishes between two senses of ‘nature.’ In its first sense, ‘nature’ refers to the defining feature of a particular domain of existence, namely the feature of being *law-governed*, while in its second sense, ‘nature’ refers to the *totality of objects* circumscribed by the universal laws picked out in the first meaning.

As Kant tells us “Nature is the existence of things, insofar as that existence is determined according to universal laws” (2002, 4: 294). Nature, in this first sense, is *existence as cognized according to universal laws*, not existence in itself, for as Kant adds, “If nature meant the existence of things in themselves, we would never be able to cognize it, either a priori or a posteriori” (2002, 4: 294). If nature picked out the existence of things in themselves then we would be unable to know them, since our understanding lacks the power to determine the form of things in themselves, a power that it possesses only with respect to appearances.

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1 Heidegger’s development of the concept of being-in-the-world should be understood as both a *departure* from older conceptions of subjectivity, and as an existential phenomenological *development* of those conceptions.
What we study in the natural sciences, on the other hand, is ‘nature’ in the second, and related meaning:

The word nature assumes yet another meaning, namely one that determines the object, whereas in the above meaning it only signified the conformity to law of the determinations of the existence of things in general. Nature considered materialiter is the sum total of all objects of experience. (2002, 4: 295)

In the second sense, then, considered materially, nature signifies the “sum total of all objects of experience.” Since, as we saw above, the defining feature of nature is its law-governed existence as appearance, not existence in itself, it follows that the objects of study in natural science can only be investigated in the laws of their appearance, some of which we know a priori, and some a posteriori. Some laws concern inner experience, some concern outer experience, and some both. The laws of inner experience are those of empirical psychology, and those of outer experience are those of physics (and the sciences that depend on physics). Focusing on the content of physical science, we find impure laws, those which Kant agrees we can only come to know a posteriori, through experience, but also “a pure natural science, which, a priori and with all of the necessity required for apodictic propositions, propounds laws to which nature is subject” (2002, 4: 294–5). These necessary a priori laws apply to all natural objects whatsoever, inner or outer. Kant gives as examples “that substance remains and persists, that everything that happens always previously is determined by a cause according to constant laws, and so on” (2002, 4: 295). The second meaning of nature as the “sum total of all objects of experience,” then, necessarily presupposes these laws as the universal and a priori principles constituting “a system of nature, which precedes all empirical cognition of nature and first makes it possible” (2002, 4: 306).
As Kant argues in the Transcendental Deduction, this “system of nature” finds its source in the necessary unity of our conscious experience. Our experience, taking the form of objectively valid judgments, necessarily involves the deployment of certain concepts under which we bring our sensible intuitions: these are the pure concepts of the understanding. I will not go into the details of Kant’s Deduction here, nor seek to evaluate its success; I merely wish to call attention to one of its consequences, namely the dependence of the system of nature on the transcendental synthesis which unifies the manifold of sensible intuitions by bringing them under the pure concepts of the understanding. As Kant puts it towards the end of the Transcendental Deduction in the A-edition: “we ourselves bring into the appearances that order and regularity that we call nature, and moreover we would not be able to find it there if we, or the nature of our mind, had not originally put it there” (1998, A125). Continuing a little later on,

The understanding is thus not merely a faculty for making rules through the comparison of the appearances: it is itself the legislation for nature, i.e., without understanding there would not be any nature at all, [...] for appearances, as such, cannot occur outside us, but exist only in our sensibility. (1998, A126–7)

Clearly, this will place definite limits on the ambitions of natural scientific explanation. Because physics is the study of laws of appearance, and not the laws of what exists in itself, Kant must deny any attempt to identify fundamental physics (or any other natural science) with the study of the fundamental structure of reality in itself. Moreover, since the “system of nature,” of which empirical physics is a determination, itself requires the application of the pure concepts of the understanding, the justificatory practices of natural

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2 Why do these passages only appear in the A-edition? I would argue that it is not because Kant changed his view, but because he worried that his wording lent itself all too easily to an empirical idealist reading of his view, rather than the transcendental idealist reading he intended. The dependence of nature on the mind is not an empirical dependence, but a transcendental dependence. Kant’s removal of these passages (and the two quoted below) in the B-edition reflects a change in his mode of expression of the same view, not a change in the view itself.
science stand in need of supplementation by transcendental philosophy, since we would be unable to account for the lawfulness of experience, and *a fortiori*, the lawfulness of nature as “sum total of the objects of experience,” without a transcendental account of the operations of the understanding in transcendental synthesis. Thus as Kant puts it,

as exaggerated and contradictory as it may sound to say that the understanding is itself the source of the laws of nature, and thus of the formal unity of nature, such an assertion is nevertheless correct and appropriate to the object, namely experience. (1998, A127)

Nevertheless, Kant’s conception of physics is still open to empirical, and even experimental, methods. As he admits,

empirical laws, as such, can by no means derive their origin from the pure understanding… But all empirical laws are only particular determinations of the pure laws of the understanding, under which and in accordance with whose norm they are first possible… (1998, A127–8)

So, for example, as Kant notes in §15 of the *Prolegomena*, the concepts of motion, impenetrability and inertia, are subject to *a posteriori* determination by experience (2002, 4: 295). In spite of this, they remain determinations of a more general framework, the system of nature, brought to experience by the operations of the understanding.

Kant, then, must reject metaphysical naturalism regarding the objects of physics, since physics does not discover the natures of its objects through empirical inquiry alone, but requires further non-empirical support in the form of transcendental philosophy. Moreover, since the objects of physics are appearances, and not things in themselves, Kant lacks any justification for the metaphysical claim that physical objects are only ones that exist, since it is at least thinkable that there could be supersensible or supernatural entities, even if we are systematically unable to cognize them. Next, as I noted earlier, if continuity between philosophy and science requires the exclusion of any justificatory methods beyond those internal to science itself, then Kant fails to qualify as a methodological
naturalist. On the other hand, if continuity requires only logical compatibility, then Kant may still qualify, since none of his claims regarding nature are intended to conflict with those of physics, provided it is considered as the empirical study of the laws of outer appearance.\(^3\)

**Heidegger on Physics**

Summarizing Kant’s view of the relationship between the ego and the pure concepts of the understanding, Heidegger writes that,

> As ground of possibility of the “I think,” the ego is at the same time the ground and the condition of possibility of the forms of combination, the categories [i.e., the pure concepts of the understanding]. Since these categories are conditioned by the ego, they cannot be applied in turn again to the ego in order to apprehend it. That which conditions absolutely, the ego as the original synthetic unity of apperception, cannot be determined with the aid of what is conditioned by it. (1988, 144)

Heidegger is largely in agreement with Kant regarding the explanatory priority of subjectivity, taking it as a transcendental condition of the possibility of physical science. Like Kant, Heidegger takes physical science to be justified in its claims about the objects in its domain of inquiry, but incomplete as an account of how we have access to such objects in the first place: the justificatory methods of physics must be supplemented by an a priori examination of the knower and its relation to the world.

For Heidegger, our mode of being as Dasein is the condition of intelligibility for the understanding of being in general. This is to say that our access to beings, our open-

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\(^3\) More could be said about whether Kant’s a priori commitment to Euclidean spacetime makes his rehabilitation as methodological naturalist impossible, given the present consensus in physics (as I understand it) that spacetime is non-Euclidean. In my more charitable moments, I like to think that Kant would have allowed for a distinction between space and time as they are perceived, versus the spacetime of theoretical physics. I leave this question open, however, as a topic for better informed philosophers of science than myself.
ness to them—whatever makes beings intelligible in such a way that we can say that they are or are not, that they exist or not—is our mode of being as Dasein. As we discover in Division Two of Being and Time, Dasein’s being-in-the-world is constituted by temporality, the unity of temporal horizons through which we are ‘always already’ related to an interwoven past, present, and future. Since these temporal horizons form the ground and condition of intelligibility for anything whatsoever, the intelligibility of temporality itself cannot be explained on the basis of some further being standing outside of temporality, since such a being would be, ex hypothesi, unintelligible.

For the moment, however, let us return our focus to physics, in order to see how Heidegger understands the dependency of physics on Dasein, and how these details bear on the question of Heidegger’s naturalist credentials.

Pivotal to this question is Heidegger’s “existential conception of science,” which “understands science as a mode of existence and thus as a mode of being-in-the-world which discovers or discloses beings or being” (2010, 340). This view of science—as a way in which human beings come to inhabit their world—contrasts starkly with the much more familiar “logical” conception of science according to which science is conceived as a network of interconnected propositions that have been epistemologically validated (2010, 340). This logical conception, abstracts from the practice of science and its embeddedness in human life, focusing on its ‘products’—the results of science, conceived as observationally-validated and propositionally-structured theories.

What Heidegger wants to highlight in discussing the existential conception of science is that a philosophy of science that focuses only on theories and their validity is both (a) impoverished as a view of what science is, since it does not capture the full mode of being of the phenomenon of science as it is concretely practiced in the laboratory, but
also (b) misses the fact that the intelligibility of the theories themselves is dependent on the mode of being of Dasein through which all beings are discovered. Such a philosophy of science abstracts from scientific practice entirely, and in doing so leaves unexamined how such a practice could constitute a form of openness to empirical phenomena in the first place.

What does understanding science as a mode of being of Dasein entail? To answer this question, Heidegger turns in *Being and Time* to mathematical physics:

The classic example for the historical development of a science, and even for its ontological genesis, is the origin of mathematical physics. What is decisive for its development lies neither in its higher evaluation of the observation of “facts,” nor in the “application” of mathematics in determining events of nature, but the mathematical project of nature itself. (2010, 345)

For Heidegger, then, the key features that lead to the development of mathematical physics are neither its focus on empirical observations rather than a priori reasoning, nor its efforts to predict events with ever-greater precision. Rather, what is decisive is the ontological understanding of nature embodied in such scientific practice:

This project discovers in advance something constantly objectively present (matter) and opens the horizon for the guiding perspective on its quantitatively definable constitutive moments (motion, force, location, and time). Only “in the light of” a nature thus projected can something like a “fact” be found and be taken in as a point of departure for an experiment defined and regulated in terms of this project. [...] What is decisive about the mathematical project of nature is again not primarily the mathematical element as such, but the fact that this project discloses a priori. (2010, 345)

Heidegger says here that the *a priori* condition for mathematical physics is a ‘project’ of Dasein, a project in virtue of which beings can be accessed in the familiar terms of physical theory. This projection of nature is not a mere imposition on reality, but a form of *transcendence*, a form of openness to the world, a phenomenological disclosure that
makes objects available in terms of quantitative and qualitative determinations, which they really, and in themselves, possess.

Heidegger describes the upshot of Kant’s conception of nature in similar terms in the ‘Kantbuch,’ Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics:

… the “previously projected plan” of one nature in general determines in advance the constitution of the being of beings, to which all questions that are investigated should be capable of being related. This preliminary plan of the being of beings is inscribed within the basic concepts and principles of the science of nature to which we already referred. Hence, what makes the comporting towards beings (ontic knowledge) possible is the preliminary understanding of the constitution of being, ontological knowledge. (1997, 7)

It is ontological understanding—an a priori understanding of the being of beings—which makes the ontic understanding of beings in their various determinations possible.

For Heidegger, the possessor of this ontological knowledge is Dasein. Now, given the place of Dasein in the order of explanation, this entails that the “mathematical project of nature” will be beholden to the mode of being of Dasein as its condition of possibility. As Heidegger puts it,

In whatever way one interprets this being of “nature,” all modes of being of innerworldly beings are ontologically founded in the worldliness of the world, and thus in the phenomenon of being-in-the-world. From this there arises the insight that neither does reality have priority within the modes of being of innerworldly beings nor can this mode of being even characterize something like world and Dasein in an ontologically adequate way. (2010, 203)

The intelligibility of the notion of ‘reality’ as it is applied to the things of nature—‘reality’ as the mode of being of natural things—is beholden, explanatorily, to Dasein’s mode of being as being-in-the-world. Because of this, ‘reality’ cannot adequately characterize Dasein’s own condition of possibility. It cannot be applied in determining either the mode of being of Dasein’s world or the ‘being-in,’ which together constitute the mode of being of Dasein.
None of this is to say that Heidegger disputes the findings of physics. Heidegger writes in the essay, “The Thing” that, “The statements of physics are correct. By means of them, science represents something real, by which it is objectively controlled.” However, “Science always encounters only what its kind of representation has admitted beforehand as an object possible for science” (1971, 170).

This puts Heidegger in roughly the same position as Kant with respect to naturalism. He cannot be a metaphysical naturalist given that he takes there to be beings that exist in ways that are not countenanced by the natural sciences. For example, the scientific instrument shows up in the physics laboratory as something handy [zuhanden]. It is a piece of equipment [Zeug] constituted within a referential totality [Verweisungsganzheit], and its role is precisely to facilitate theoretical engagement with objectively present [vorhanden] things.4 However the instrument’s being as something handy, its showing up as equipment, is not what mathematical physics is aimed at discovering. Indeed, this mode of being as handy, as equipment, is generally ‘covered over’ by a theoretical understanding of things, in favor of their discovery as objectively present. Most crucially, however, and analogous to Kant’s ‘transcendental principles’, the mode of being of Dasein—the mode of being which makes it possible for equipment to show up in its being, and which makes possible the actual practice of science, generally—is not discoverable by the methods of natural science, and is, likewise, usually covered over by it. Thus, Heidegger, like Kant,

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4 David Cerbone (1999) and Kris McDaniel (2013) defend the view that, for Heidegger, the distinction between handiness and the objective presence represents not just a cognitive or epistemic difference which is relative to our mode of engagement with a thing, but rather a metaphysical or ontological difference belonging to the thing itself, such that the hammer as a handy piece of equipment is numerically distinct from the hammer as objectively present physical stuff.
makes the justificatory practices of physics dependent on a being that is not itself known through scientific methods: Dasein.

Kant and Heidegger on Subjectivity

Heidegger argues in *Being and Time* that Kant’s way of articulating the dependency of physical science on subjectivity is “methodologically naïve.” Kant’s transcendental idealism gets something right in that it understands “the fact that being is never explicable by beings,” but,

If idealism means the reduction of all beings to a subject or a consciousness which are only distinguished by the fact that they remain undetermined in their being and are characterized at best negatively as ‘unthinglike’, then this idealism is methodologically no less naïve than the grossest realism… (2010, 200)

Why does Heidegger say this? What is it, in particular, that Kant’s idealism remains naïve about?

To understand this claim, we need to examine Kant’s views on the self and self-knowledge. Recall that in the First Critique, in the “Paralogisms” chapter, Kant argues that, as thinkers, we are given to ourselves as temporally-structured objects of inner sense—that is, as appearances, not as things in themselves. So while he acknowledges that we necessarily show up to ourselves as thinking, he argues that it does not follow from this that what does the thinking—call it ‘the soul’—is in itself a simple, unified, and immaterial thinking substance related to the body. To draw this conclusion would be to assume that what goes for appearances goes for things in themselves; a fallacy that gets us lost in the transcendental illusion to which rationalist metaphysics is always vulnerable. Rather, Kant says,
Through this I, or He, or It (the thing), which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts which is recognized only through the thoughts that are its predicates... (1998, A346/B404)

But in addition to showing up to ourselves, as it were, passively, as witnesses of our own thoughts passing in time, we are also immediately aware of ourselves actively and as active through what Kant calls “pure apperception.” As Kant puts it in his discussion of the antinomies:

The human being is one of the appearances in the world of sense[...] As such he must accordingly also have an empirical character, just like all other natural things. [...] Yet the human being, who is otherwise acquainted with the whole of nature solely through sense, knows himself also through pure apperception, and indeed in actions and inner determinations which cannot be accounted at all among impressions of sense; he obviously is in one part phenomenon, but in another part, namely in regard to certain faculties, he is a merely intelligible object, because the actions of this object cannot at all be ascribed to the receptivity of sensibility. We call these faculties understanding and reason... (1998, A546–7/B574–5)

Heidegger’s complaint focuses on this last point. What are the faculties? Or, as Heidegger himself asks, echoing a question Kant explicitly sets aside in the preface to the First Critique, “How is the faculty of thinking itself possible?” (Heidegger 1997, 150; Kant 1998, Axxvii). Heidegger’s claim is that Kant doesn’t allow himself the means to answer this question, with the result that his transcendental idealism must remain methodologically naïve regarding the ontological status of the subjectivity resting at its foundations. Kant fails to give any ontological determination of the faculties (except, perhaps, in the barest profile as functionally and teleologically structured). Kant doesn’t offer such a characterization, and in fact, Heidegger argues, he can’t. Kant cannot answer the question because, as Heidegger points out, Kant “tries to show quite explicitly that and why the ego’s existence, its mode of being, cannot be elucidated” (1988, 142).
The point here is a delicate one. While Kant does acknowledge that we have immediate knowledge of ourselves as agents of both thinking and doing, this knowledge does not tell us what entity grounds such activities, what entity acts, what entity grounds knowledge of the self. This was the key result of Kant’s arguments against rational psychology in the “Paralogisms” chapter. As Heidegger reads this section, Kant’s conclusion is that:

The pure ego itself is never given to me as a determinable for determination, for applying the categories. For that reason an ontical knowledge of the ego and, consequently, an ontological determination of it is impossible. The only thing that can be said is that the ego is an “I-am-acting.” (1988, 144–5)

Heidegger’s point here is that, on Kant’s view, if I am to have theoretical knowledge of myself, I must have it in the form of a determinate spatiotemporal cognition. But, as we all know, such cognitions depend on receptivity for their intuitive matter. Now, since I am not given to myself, as pure ego, through receptivity, but through pure apperception, a form of spontaneity, I will be unable to cognize myself as a thinker in a determinate, spatiotemporal way, and Kant concludes that “I therefore have no cognition of myself as I am, but only as I appear to myself” (1998, B158). All that I can say about myself with any certainty, is ‘I think,’ or more generally, ‘I act.’

Now, Heidegger agrees with Kant that it is correct to think that the categories constituting the ‘system of nature’ are the wrong conceptual tools to characterize our mode of being as Dasein:

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5 This reading of Kant is echoed by Wilfred Sellars in his essay, “...This I or He or It (The Thing) Which Thinks...” Sellars writes that “The idea that concepts pertaining to thinking are essentially functional in character raises the question: What non-functional characterization can be given of the processes which embody these functions. To answer ‘They are thoughts’ is to move in a circle. Kant’s answer is, essentially, that we are not able to give a non-functional characterization. We don’t know these processes save as processes which embody these functions” (1970, 11).
Kant is wholly right when he declares the categories, as fundamental concepts of nature, unsuitable for determining the ego. But in that way he has only shown negatively that the categories, which were tailored to fit other beings, nature, break down here. He has not shown that the “I act” itself cannot be interpreted in the way which it gives itself, in this self-manifesting ontological constitution. (1988, 145)

That is,

It does not follow from the inadequacy of the categories of nature that every ontological interpretation whatever of the ego is impossible. That follows only on the presupposition that the same type of knowledge which is valid for nature is taken as the sole possible basis for knowledge of the ego. (1988, 146)

Kant assumes that the ego must be known according to the very same system of determinations that apply to nature. But against this assumption, Heidegger claims that Dasein is given to itself in a distinct way. Although Dasein is not given to itself as a natural being in Kant’s sense, we can still specify, phenomenologically, the way that it shows up to itself as existing. So, for Heidegger, although we are not given to ourselves as nature is given to us, our being-in-the-world nevertheless discloses a unique and determinate mode of factical existence, not merely an indeterminate ‘activity’ as Kant would have it.

Thus for Heidegger, our subjectivity—our mode of being of Dasein—is, despite its world-embedded existence, nevertheless not wholly natural. As Heidegger states in the heading of §10 of Being and Time, the study of Dasein is not “anthropology, psychology, [or] biology,” and while Dasein, “can be understood within certain limits and with a certain justification as something merely present,” it remains the case that “[t]o do this, one must completely disregard or just not see the existential constitution of being-in” (2010, 56). That is, in order to understand Dasein as natural in the restricted sense of the natural sciences, we must remain naïve to what fundamentally characterizes Dasein: the openness to the world and to phenomena that is its being-in-the-world. For Heidegger, then, just as for Kant, the necessity of understanding subjectivity through non-scientific means pre-
sents an insuperable barrier to a thoroughgoing naturalism of the standard metaphysical and methodological kinds.

**Is a Heideggerian Naturalism Possible?**

While Heidegger most often identifies the term ‘nature’ with the totality of objectively present *[vorhandene]* physical objects, he occasionally admits that there are other equally valid senses of the term. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger acknowledges that nature can also show up for us in relation to our projects as resource or obstacle: the tree as timber, the river as water power, the wind as filling a sail (2010, 70). It can also show up in “the Romantic concept” (2010, 65) as a nature that “stirs and strives,” (2010, 70) behind and beyond any particular existence. According to this more expansive understanding, nature manifests itself not just in physics, but pre-theoretically as well. Indeed, according to Heidegger, we arrive at the physical conception of nature—at the conception of nature as the totality of objectively present *[vorhandene]* physical stuff—through a historical process of “de-worlding,” which emerges as a disciplined way of dealing with breakdowns in our prior pre-theoretical engagements with nature.

This suggests that there may be a way to understand Dasein as a natural being without succumbing to the ontological naïveté Heidegger associates with attempts at physicalistic reduction. In his essay “Science and Reflection,” Heidegger suggests a possible understanding of nature, or *physis*, as encompassing more than what is made available by contemporary physics:

Physics may well represent the most general and pervasive lawfulness of nature in terms of the identity of matter and energy; and what is represented by physics is indeed nature itself, but undeniably it is only nature as the object-area, whose objectness is first defined and determined through the refining that is characteristic of physics and is expressly set forth in that refining. Nature, in its objectness for
modern physical science, is only one way in which what presences—which from of old has been named *physis*—reveals itself and sets itself in position for the refining characteristic of science. (1977, 173–4)

A Heideggerian naturalist can understand nature as that “which from of old has been named *physis,*” that which brings itself to presence in *all* the various ways that this can happen. Nature, for this naturalism would not be restricted to the domain of the physical, but would amount to that which shows itself *both* in the natural sciences, *and* in Dasein’s grasp of itself as the being concerned with its own being.⁶ Raoni Padui (2013) argues that understanding nature in this way as encompassing a *plurality* of modes of being opens up the possibility of understanding Dasein itself as a natural being, without conceiving of it, in reductive fashion, as an objectively present physical thing.

This Heideggerian determination of Dasein as a ‘natural’ being in virtue of its coming to presence raises a puzzling question: is it coherent to take Dasein—insofar as it is the condition of the intelligibility of beings—to be a being, even if one of a special kind? In trying to understand the condition of the intelligibility of the world as a worldly being aren’t we making the mistake of objectifying transcendental subjectivity?

Eugen Fink, Husserl’s student and eventual collaborator, pressed precisely this concern regarding the coherence of conceiving transcendental subjectivity as a being in his *Sixth Cartesian Meditation,* which was written as a methodological addendum to Husserl’s five-part *Cartesian Meditations.* Fink’s criticisms of Heideggerian existential phenomenology parallel Heidegger’s criticism of Kant’s transcendental idealism as being “methodologically naïve.” Fink accuses Heidegger of naïveté in attempting to move directly from *phenomenological* reflection on the conditions of possibility of world-experience.

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to positive ontological determination of those very conditions. Fink complains that “Having overcome world naiveté we stand now in a new naiveté, a transcendental naiveté” (1995, 5).

Fink’s worry iterates the impulse of transcendental philosophy to seek the conditions of possibility for all our cognitions, this time with respect to the cognition of transcendental structures that transcendental philosophy itself provides. Fink argues that the phenomenological understanding of transcendental subjectivity has not itself been adequately scrutinized with respect to its conditions of possibility. This is to say that beyond explaining how it is possible for beings to be given to us, phenomenology owes us an explanation of how it is possible for transcendental subjectivity to be given to us. As Fink writes in the Sixth Cartesian Meditation:

It is the proper task of the transcendental theory of method to make phenomenologically understandable the whole systematic of phenomenological inquiry, the structure of methodological procedure, the rank and style of transcendental cognition and “science.” Its task, therefore, is to submit the phenomenologizing thought and theory-formation [...] to a proper transcendental analytic, and thus to complete phenomenology in ultimate transcendental self-understanding about itself. In other words, the transcendental theory of method intends nothing other than a phenomenology of phenomenology. (1995, 8)

The task then, is to provide a phenomenological account of the conditions of possibility of phenomenology.

Fink sides with Kant against Heidegger in thinking that the transcendental subjectivity that makes both world-experience and phenomenology possible cannot be manifest to itself in a way that allows for conclusive ontological determination of its mode of being. Like Kant, Fink argues that theoretical cognition is limited to objects given to us as existent beings: “All natural cognition is cognition of what is existent, all experience is

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7 See Ronald Bruzina (2004, chap. 3) for an exceedingly thorough reconstruction of Fink’s criticisms of Heidegger.
experience of what is existent. [...] There can in principle be no other object of cognition than what is existent” (Fink 1995, 70–1). Given this limitation, if transcendental cognition is to be a valid form of theoretical cognition, then it too must have an existent for its object. Fink argues, however, that in transcendental cognition we are not given to ourselves as existent. Why not? Because “What is ‘existent’ in the natural and thus in the original sense is the existent which is to be met with in the horizon and circuit of the natural attitude: that which is existent in the world” (Fink 1995, 72). The notion of the existent applies only to we find in the world, to mundane existence, and for this reason, it cannot be applied, strictly speaking, to the world-constituting transcendental structures of subjectivity that we discover in phenomenology. Because the concept of existence originates in the natural attitude, Fink concludes that the concept of existence is properly applied only to what is constituted for the subject in the natural attitude, i.e., what shows up in mundane world-experience.

But if transcendental cognition does not have an existent for its object, how can it provide us with knowledge? In order to explain this, Fink argues that in phenomenological reflection, transcendental subjectivity produces an ‘appearance’ of itself as existent, without being strictly identical to this appearance. Transcendental cognition is cognition of transcendental appearance, but transcendental appearance is not identical with transcendental subjectivity itself.

According to Fink, in ordinary world-experience—experience in the natural attitude—the world is given as a totality of constituted beings through the “primary” or “proper enworlding” of transcendental subjectivity (1995, 99). Through this enworlding, the transcendental subject, “spellbound” and “captivated” by mundane being, identifies itself with the empirical ego, or human being, thereby “imprisoning” itself in the consti-
tuted world of the existent. In phenomenological reflection, however, by means of the transcendental epochē and reduction, we are able to “transcend” our merely human existence, transforming the captivated experience of existent beings in the natural attitude into awareness of existent beings as constituted for the transcendental ego. This phenomenological reflection involves a “secondary” or “improper enworlding,” which “places phenomenologizing itself into the world, that is, into the natural attitude, it ‘localizes’ and ‘temporalizes’ it there; in other words, it makes it ‘appear’ in the world” (1995, 99). In this secondary and “improper” enworlding, the transcendental subject brings its constituting activity into the world by producing an appearance of itself as constituting.

To whom is this appearance given? Fink argues that in the “improper” enworlding that is constitutive of phenomenological reflection, we take on the role of transcendental or phenomenological “onlooker” with respect to the constituting transcendental ego. Thus, the structure of transcendental subjectivity involves not just a constituting transcendental ego and a constituted empirical ego, but a “transcendental onlooker” as well, for whom the transcendental ego as constituting can appear. These three egos together, constitute the structure of the transcendental subjectivity which makes possible phenomenological reflection.

It remains, however, that the constituting transcendental ego which appears in the experience of the transcendental onlooker is not a worldly being, a thing existent in the world. The secondary enworlding of the transcendental subject remains “improper.” To say that the transcendental ego exists in some way, that it exhibits a mode of being, would be,

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As Steven Crowell (2001) notes, Fink’s understanding of transcendental subjectivity has a deeply Gnostic cast to it, making human existence into a ‘prison,’ from which we can escape only through the “dehumanizing” enaction of the transcendental epochē. This epochē reveals our true nature, as transcendental subjects, to be fundamentally inhuman.
strictly speaking, inaccurate: “We have to make clear to ourselves that ‘transcendental being,’ as a counter-concept to ‘natural’ or ‘worldly being,’ is not a kind of being at all” (1995, 72). For Fink, the notion of “transcendental being” is dangerously equivocal because the appearance of the transcendental ego remains conditioned by the “mundane idea of being”—the idea of being as what exists in the world. Even after the transcendental epochē,

we have not for the most part got beyond captivation in the mundane Idea of being. Ensnared in it we interpret what comes to givenness for us through the phenomenological reduction [...] as a sphere of “transcendental” being. Although necessary, this is a phenomenological naïveté insofar as, under the covert guidance of the natural concept of being not yet properly overcome, we at first seek to grasp transcendental being as an autonomous dimension of the existent which as such represents the substrate of our theoretical-phenomenologizing experience. We are caught in the quite obvious belief that transcendental being would be a new mode of being discovered precisely by the reduction, one now to be set alongside the mode of being of mundane being. (Fink 1995, 72)

Fink admits that while the constituting transcendental ego certainly appears to us by means of the reduction, the thought that it must exist in some way, must possess a unique mode of “transcendental being,” results from an interpretation of phenomenological experience in terms of, and by analogy with, mundane being, the mode of being of what is existent in the world. But while this analogical way of understanding transcendental subjectivity is ultimately inadequate to determine its object, we nevertheless have no alternative to it: “we must posit transcendental subjectivity just as if it were something existent. We have no other possibility for disclosing and explicating it, if we do not thematize it following the guidance through analogy of the Idea of being” (Fink 1995, 74).

Fink’s transcendental theory of method is thoroughly determined by his delimitation of the concept of being according to the mundane mode of being discovered in the natural attitude. Since transcendental cognition is not knowledge of that kind of being,
Fink is forced to create a new conceptual category for the proper ‘object’ of phenomenological reflection. Fink’s proposal is that transcendental cognition is concerned with something altogether different from being: it is concerned with processes of “pre-being,” rather than being. What makes possible both the constitution of the world and the awareness of this constitution is not itself a being, but a “pre-being.” Pre-being, while not an existent being, must be thought analogously to existent being. This, however, does not give pre-being as it ‘is’ in itself. Caught between the imperative to cognize transcendental subjectivity as world-constituting, but knowing that our cognition can only make the constituting transcendental ego available on the basis of a faulty analogy with mundane being, Fink concludes that:

phenomenological experience does not cognize something which is already existent, as what and how it is; it cognizes the sort of thing which is “in itself” not existent; in cognizing it it objectifies it into something that is (transcendently) “existent,” it lifts the constitutive construction-processes [DS: i.e., the processes that constitute mundane existence] out of the condition of “pre-being” proper to them and for the very first time in a certain sense objectivates them. In other words, the theoretical experience of the phenomenological onlooker ontifies the “pre-existent” life-processes\(^9\) of transcendental subjectivity… (1995, 76)

Just as in Kant’s transcendental dialectic, the attempt to think the ultimate conditions of the possibility of experience as beings leads us to deploy concepts that “objectivate” and “ontify” those conditions, circumscribing them in ways that are ultimately inappropriate and misleading since they do not and cannot properly belong to their objects. Nevertheless, Fink thinks, as Kant does, that we cannot eliminate this kind of thinking since we cannot rationally give up the aim of trying to cognize the unconditioned conditions of our experience.

\(^9\) I.e., the processes involved in experiential life, not biological life-processes.
While Kant stops at this point, thinking that any further move to characterize the unconditioned can lead only to dialectical illusion, Fink argues that we can surpass the Kantian predicament by embracing a “constructive” resolution of the impasse. Our thinking does not and cannot give us intuitively grounded knowledge of the unconditioned conditions of phenomenological experience. Fink’s proposal, then, is that we can generate positive knowledge of the absolute ground of phenomenological experience, despite its lack of intuitive givenness, through what he calls a “constructive phenomenology”:

What is required here is rather a whole movement out beyond the reductive givenness of transcendental life, what is required is an examination of the “external horizon of the reductive givenness” of transcendental life[...] An examination of this kind, however, insofar as it abandons the basis of transcendental “givenness,” no longer exhibits things intuitively, but necessarily proceeds constructively. (Fink 1995, 7)

In constructing a concept of the absolute, we come to see the constituted being of the existent, as well as the appearance of constituting subjectivity for the transcendental onlooker, as two necessary components, or interdependent ‘moments,’ in the realization of an absolute condition which encompasses both:

the Absolute is precisely the unity of transcendental constitution and the transcendental process of phenomenologizing. That is, the Absolute is the overarching total unity of transcendental life as a whole, which in itself is articulated into opposites. This division between constituting and phenomenologizing life determines now the concept of the Absolute: the Absolute is the synthetic unity of antithetic moments. (Fink 1995, 142)

In phenomenology, Fink argues, the Absolute, is knowable precisely as the inexperienciable external horizon of all experience. The Absolute is the root of both our awareness of constituted mundane existence and our awareness of the constituting transcendental ego.
Thinking Nature as the Ground of Subjectivity

Is it really the case that because the concept of being finds its original home in the world of mundane existence that this must remain its proper home? Do we really need a novel concept of “pre-being” to account for the origins of our experience, or does the concept of being already extend to the original ground of phenomenological experience?

The beginning of a Heideggerian response to Fink’s challenge lies in Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein’s relationship to beings as a form of transcendence. For Fink just as much as for Husserl, beings only show up in virtue of their ability to be ‘contained’ immanently in transcendental consciousness, the experiential field of the transcendental subject. For Heidegger, by contrast, it is not immanence to transcendental subjectivity which characterizes the givenness of beings, but the being of subjectivity as a transcendence to what it is not. Dasein is a mode of being which is always already “outside of itself” (2010, 314) in its encounters with objects, objects whose very independence and externality from subjectivity are constitutive of Dasein’s own finite and dependent mode of being-in-the-world. Dasein constitutes the world from within the world, and in necessary dependence upon it.

Fink locates the original unity-in-difference that makes possible the relation of subject and world in a “pre-being” which produces that opposition. From a Heideggerian point of view, however, the introduction of the concept of “pre-being,” is unnecessary. In being what it is, Dasein is not simply itself, but already involves, in its very mode of being, a relation to what is other than itself.

But what about the original productivity, the temporalizing of temporality, which Heidegger takes to be the ontological ground of Dasein’s being-in-the-world? In attempt-
ing to understand this productivity we come once again to the very limits of phenomenological method.

Merleau-Ponty, in his later work, wrestled with these limits, attempting to bring to them some coherent articulation. Merleau-Ponty argues that at this limit, we discover \textit{nature} as the ultimate ontological ground of phenomenological experience. In “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” a late commentary on Husserl, Merleau-Ponty writes,

\begin{quote}
the ultimate task of phenomenology as philosophy of consciousness is to understand its relationship to non-phenomenology. What resists phenomenology in us—natural being, the “barbarous” source Schelling spoke of—cannot remain outside phenomenology and should have its place within it. (1964, 178)
\end{quote}

Here, Merleau-Ponty calls that which exceeds phenomenology, “natural being.” Rather than privileging the world-constituting activity of transcendental subjectivity as the precondition for natural being, Merleau-Ponty sides with Schelling in privileging nature as the necessary ground of the transcendental subjectivity that comes to know it. As Schelling puts the point, “It is not… that \textit{we know} Nature as a priori, but Nature \textit{is} a priori” (2004, 198). Nature thus grounds everything ontologically in a way that inflects investigations into the origins of phenomenological experience in a novel fashion. It is not our knowledge of nature which must come first in the order of explanation, rather it is nature which is \textit{first} in the order of being. Nature is not just an explanatory presupposition, but the ontological origin of world-experience. This nature is not the nature of natural science, and neither is it the constituted nature that is product and correlate of the activities of the transcendental subject. The attempt to understand nature as the “barbarous source” is “neither simple reflection on the immanent rules of the science of Nature, nor recourse to Nature as to one separated and explanatory Being, but rather explicitation of what being-natural or being naturally means” (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 206). This is to say that Mer-
leau-Ponty’s phenomenological naturalism is not merely a Kantian reflection on the conditions of possibility of natural science, nor a post-Kantian attempt to demonstrate that the phenomenal world is produced from a nature that is its ‘absolute’ metaphysical ground. Rather, the investigation of nature is, as Merleau-Ponty says, an “explicitation” of a natural productivity that is never simply identical with its product, a drawing out of the various ways in which nature manifests itself to itself. As Merleau-Ponty says in the *Nature Course*: “the Nature within us must have some relation to Nature outside of us; moreover, Nature outside of us must be unveiled to us by the Nature that we are” (2003, 206). In rediscovering nature outside of science and outside of phenomenology as the phenomenologically-unavailable ontological ground of all phenomena, nature shrinks to a vanishing point at the origin of both the experience of the manifest world and the experience of phenomenological reflection.\(^\text{10}\)

This allows for a new understanding of nature as the ground of subjectivity. Instead of taking ‘naturalistic’ research in the philosophy of mind to consist in the attempt to articulate the way that minds are *metaphysically* grounded in a pre-existing world of scientifically-recognized properties, we can see phenomenological naturalism as committed to an understanding of subjectivity and mental life as a complex and highly organized process of phenomenal manifestation. Drawing out these interconnections, empirically and phenomenologically, *is* the explicitation of natural being, the project of a phenomenological naturalism. Naturalistic explanation becomes the attempt to explicate how nature manifests itself, in physics as much as in phenomenology, according to laws of phenomenal manifestation.

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\(^{10}\) See Ted Toadvine (2014) for a discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s view of nature as an inexpericeable “elemental past.”
Conclusion

I've argued that understanding subjectivity requires consideration of its role as the transcendental condition of the possibility of phenomenal manifestation. Subjectivity is an openness to the world that cannot be identified with any of the entities that are encountered in the world. Nevertheless, the transcendental structure of subjectivity can be understood as a natural phenomenon. This requires us to reject the conception of nature that falls out of scientific naturalism, and to conceive of nature, instead, as the ontological ground of a field of phenomena. For the phenomenological naturalism which I've proposed, the study of nature is the study of the phenomenally manifest world in both its empirical and transcendental structure.

Phenomenological naturalism allows for a more thoroughgoing integration of phenomenology with the natural sciences than the confused attempt to ‘naturalize’ phenomenology by reinterpreting its claims about the structure of subjectivity in terms of a restricted ontology dictated by the natural sciences. Subjectivity is a system of phenomenal manifestations whose manifestation of itself to itself involves the manifestation of a body that is systematically related to the manifestation of other things. It remains, however, that subjectivity itself is not a thing. Instead of taking the existence of objects in the world to be the metaphysical ground of subjectivity, we should take the existence of subjectivity to be the transcendental ground of the manifestation of objects.

Consideration of the necessary unity of transcendental structures of subjectivity allows us to explain the underlying unity and interconnection of different forms of experience. So, for example, the structures of subjectivity involved in nonconceptual
coping and conceptual thought are both ‘always already’ at work in our being-in-the-world, situating all of our experiences in a unified horizon of horizons that stretches out toward possibilities for both bodily engagement and thought.

The methodological considerations that underwrite a phenomenological approach to subjectivity provide the grounds for rejecting both scientific naturalism and ontological quietism about nature. In order to avoid transgressing the inherent limits of scientific and phenomenological understanding, however, we should conceive of nature not as a specific object, nor as the totality of objects in the world, but as the ontological ground of phenomenal manifestation in general. Nature shouldn’t be identified with the physical cosmos, but with the origin of the system of phenomena that manifests itself through our subjectivity.

While I hope that my work here will be useful in charting a future course for phenomenologically-informed approaches to the philosophy of mind, I realize that much of the discussion here has taken place at very high level of abstraction. More remains to be done, both in fleshing out phenomenological naturalism’s specific commitments, and in following out its consequences. In future work, I intend to look more closely at how phenomenological naturalism can be applied in the interpretation of scientific findings in the cognitive sciences and biology. In particular, I intend to explore in greater detail how phenomenological naturalism can inform our understanding of our own animality, and that of other, non-human, forms of life. I believe that taking a phenomenological approach to our embodiment and sense-making has the potential to transform our understanding of our own animality, as well as that of other creatures.

In rushing ahead to present conclusions with immediate bearing on the scientific study of the mind, much of what is unique and valuable about phenomenology has often
been left behind by those who purport to be sympathetic to it. Those of us who would like to see phenomenology make a lasting impact on the philosophy of mind ought to slow down so that we can properly assess whether a more full-blooded endorsement of phenomenological arguments and methods can present challenges and viable alternatives to our current ways of thinking about the mind and nature. I have tried to show how phenomenological naturalism stands alongside other theories in the philosophy of mind, not as an obscure and mystical pretender, but as a serious rival to other forms of naturalism in regards to its methodological rigor.
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