

P. Conrad Kotze
University of the Free State, South Africa

On the Nature of an Integral Sociology: An Exploration in Theory and Practice

Abstract This article is the first in a series of three installments representing a doctoral project carried out at the University of the Free State in South Africa. The aim of this article is to establish an apodictic ontic and epistemic foundation for the construction of an integral framework for sociological practice. To this end, manifest reality is meditated upon in a realist phenomenological manner, thus yielding an etiological framework aimed at reflecting reality in itself, and not as the object of a specific scientific paradigm. Situated against the backdrop of the ontological turn in the social sciences, the argument is developed that contemporary science represents an ill-founded attempt at empirically describing a reality that is fundamentally trans-empirical. It is posited that any scientific enterprise which is founded exclusively on an empirical analysis of “objective” reality can ultimately yield only partial truths. To remedy this situation, the role of intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks and subjectively constituted qualia of manifestation during the generation of reality are acknowledged, facilitating an account thereof that enlivens the positivistic “world-as-described” by integrating it with the hermeneutically navigable “world-as-agreed-upon” and the individually encountered/em-bodied “world-as-witnessed.” The resulting etiological framework facilitates a grasp of the higher order unity of these “worlds” by facilitating the emergence of an aperspectival mode of being that transcends the empirico-perspectival mental consciousness structure characteristic of modern and postmodern epistemologies. In so doing, a universally valid layer of knowledge is laid bare which can serve as a contextualizing point of reference for the continued perspectival exploration of particular conditioned aspects of reality.

Keywords Phenomenology; Transcendental Subjectivity; Aperspectivism; Etiology; Ontology; Epistemology; Integral Sociology; Consciousness Structures

P. Conrad Kotze is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of the Free State (Qwaqwa Campus), and a PhD candidate in the program *The Narrative Study of Lives*. He obtained his Master’s degree in this same program.

email address: kotzpec@ufs.ac.za

Preliminary Considerations

This article constitutes the first segment of a Doctoral thesis in three parts. The thesis is intended to investigate the nature of a social scientific practice which takes into account all aspects

of social reality in its analysis. This first article serves as an introduction to the guiding ideas that are at the foundation of the work carried out in the overarching thesis. It will specifically situate the ontological and epistemological foundation of the work relative to the ecology of contemporary science and philosophy. This article primarily encompasses an attempt to illustrate that the epistemic modes¹ utilized by various internally coherent epistemologies throughout the ages are in essence reconcilable with each other, as are the various paradigms of our science, though they often seem to be exclusive in their assumptions and conclusions regarding the nature of social reality. It will be argued that this apparent incompatibility of paradigms is rooted in a common impasse, namely, that of confounding a whole with one or more of its parts. The whole in this case is “social reality” and the various parts refer to those aspects or dimensions thereof which have variably been dealt with in isolation by sociological schools of either the “micro,” “meso,” or “macro” variety; analytical approaches rooted either in subjectivism or objectivism and theoretico-methodological frameworks aimed either at investigating social structure, action, or meaning in relative isolation.

The first section of this article explores the incapacity of contemporary science as a vehicle for exploring the fundamentally trans-empirical Kos-

¹ The term “epistemic modes” refers to the three clearly distinguishable means by which knowledge is generated, namely, subjective witnessing, intersubjective understanding, and objective description (Kotze et al. 2015). All human epistemologies necessarily make use of one or more of these epistemic modes.

mos² within/as which we exist, and reaches the conclusion that at the root of this incapacity there lies a crisis of consciousness. It also demarcates the area of enquiry fleshed out by the rest of the article. In the second section, mindfulness of the perspective of “Transcendental Subjectivity” is proposed as the only foundation upon which a re-invigorated and contextualized scientific program can be founded. The relation of this unconditioned state of being to the “Empirical Subject” operating from within the natural attitude is then explored in detail. In the third section, an integral etiological framework is discussed that is argued to represent the simplest, yet most complete and general, model of manifest reality that can currently be generated on the basis of available knowledge. An important characteristic of this first part of the thesis is its meta-scientific and, in comparison to contemporary standards within the scientific community, “radically” phenomenological character. This is because the description of reality encountered in this article is not limited by any scientific paradigm or philosophical school of thought, but is the result of an existential union with reality, one that has resulted in “self-acquired knowledge tending toward universality” (Husserl 1960:2). Thus, there are no sacred cows to be found here, no dogmas, and no overarching guiding precepts, save those of reality itself and my own meaningful interpretation thereof, which is, of course, systematically supported by the findings of other thinkers starting from

² I use the word “Kosmos” in line with its usage by Ken Wilber, the American philosopher who employs it in the classical Greek sense of referring not only to the empirically measurable “external” cosmos, but also the “internal” universe of meaningful symbols and intuitive experience (Visser 2003).

a similar realist phenomenological point of departure. As such, the various ideas referred to throughout the following sections do not represent any indication of the “situatedness” of the stream of thought reflected in this article within or in relation to any given tradition, but simply the inclusion of complementary fragments of the Perennial Philosophy³ that have been presented by various thinkers over the ages. Edmund Husserl (1960) summed up the spirit of this thesis when he said:

I, the solitary individual philosophizer, owe much to others; but what they accept as true, what they offer me as allegedly established by their insight, is for me at first only something they claim. If I am to accept it, I must justify it by a perfect insight on my own part. Therein consists my autonomy – mine and that of every genuine scientist. [p. 2]

The starting point of this thesis is thus a position of universal doubt (similar to but more complete than that of René Descartes⁴) which has as its aim the generation of a stock of absolutely self-evident knowledge. All that I know, even that part of my

³ The term “Perennial Philosophy” denotes that universally traceable subsection of human thought that, upon contemplation, is found to be in harmony with absolute reality (Quinn 1997; Nagler 2007). It refers especially to the singular ontic truth that gave rise to humanity’s various wisdom traditions and which, when isolated from historical and cultural particularities, is seen to transcend the ritualistic doctrines of any specific school (Huxley 1947).

⁴ Whereas Descartes maintained certain pre-reflexive assumptions throughout his meditations (which contributed to the development of the materialistic worldview that much of this article critiques), the culmination of the method of which he traced the outlines consists in radically embracing the spirit in which his experiment of doubting reality was acted out. This is done not in order to “adopt [the meditations’] content, but in not doing so, to renew with greater intensity the radicalness of their spirit, the radicalness of self-responsibility, to make that radicalness true for the first time by enhancing it to the last degree” (Husserl 1960:6).

stock of knowledge which is regarded as founded on scientific “fact,” is encountered by me from within a perspective that is radically my own, reflecting my existential embeddedness in a Holon⁵ without which scientific, religious, philosophical, cultural, and social symbols have no meaning to me. In as far as this internalized orienting matrix of perception is based in truth (the singular truth of being existing beyond all relativity and conditioning), it is universal.⁶ Science itself is erected on this imminent nexus of intellectual intuition⁷ (which is by no means subjective in the currently prevalent sense of the word, as it serves both to reify intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks and facilitate the existence of objectivity as a mutually understood notion), and if we “wish to think science rigorously, to appreciate precisely its sense and its scope, we must first awaken that experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression” (Merleau-Ponty 2012:lxvii). In order to “know about” the world, we thus must first “know” the

⁵ A “Holon” is a whole that simultaneously includes and transcends its parts. In classical Greek philosophy, the term was often used as a synonym for “Kosmos,” thus referring to the universe as an essentially ordered whole (Clay 2014).

⁶ Husserl refers to this orienting matrix as “universal intersubjectivity” and describes it as the pre-socio-cultural collective of which human subjectivity is the individual case. This trans-individual subjectivity is both that “into which all objectivity, everything that exists at all, is resolved” and “undeniably a component part of the world” (Husserl 1960:183).

⁷ The “intuition” referred to here is not to be confused with either “pre-rational” forms of knowledge (that are rooted in “superstition” and “ignorance” from a mental-rational perspective) or Bergsonian intuition (which similarly refers to a pre-rational mode of consciousness characterized by pre-reflexive reaction to sensory inputs) (Guénon 2004a). The term rather signifies a continuum between subject and object that is thoroughly beyond description by means of our current scientific vocabulary, which is pre-reflexively founded on the dualism it inherited from Descartes. The second section and the third section explore this phenomenon in greater detail.

world. The development of modern science has, however, unfolded in such a way that this inherent connection to truth has largely been obscured, due to various factors that are explored in greater detail throughout the rest of this article. This impasse has landed humanity in the precarious position of knowing more and more, while understanding less and less. The following section entails an account of that trans-empirical, orienting knowledge of reality as a whole that should serve as a springboard for the various descriptive investigations that constitute science. As the reflexive possession of this knowledge is, however, dependent on “the suitability of the cognitive equipment to its task” (Nagler 2007:306), the following sections will deal not only with knowledge, but also explicitly with the knower. Before the subject is discussed, however, there is a need to evaluate contemporary science and the role it has come to play in our everyday lives.

The Incapacity of Contemporary Science to Engage a Trans-Empirical Reality

With scientific studies, like most human processes, we tend to focus disproportionately on the destination, to the neglect of both the point of departure and the process itself. In the special case of science, this finalizing tendency focuses on the generation of practically applicable data, on reaching pragmatic conclusions, and profitably applying these. Rarely do we thoroughly consider the starting point of investigation, the often unconscious assumptions that underlie the topics we choose to investigate, the way we choose to investigate them, and the conclusions we tend to make upon analyzing the results of our investigations. This is a tragic im-

passe, as it renders much of contemporary thought impotent as to a criticism of its own underlying assumptions, which is a criticism that it is in dire need of in this day and age. Allow me, then, to describe in advance the position from which we will set out on this journey and the route that I intend to follow in order to avoid similar confusion. The starting point is a thorough disenchantment with contemporary science and the globally standardizing patterns of interpretation, expression, and social organization increasingly founded upon its various applications. Along with a growing group of contemporary thinkers (cf. Phipps 2012; Eisenstein 2013), I have witnessed the devolution of the scientific program into a caricature stunted by the troubling proliferation of cults of personality and limited to a significant degree by the agenda of those fortunate few who find themselves behind the two-way glass wall of contemporary consumer society (a development that mirrors the unfolding of the global capitalist society). Science, in fact, has become every bit as dogmatic and prejudiced as the superstitions it once hoped to transcend (Sheldrake 2013) and, as a result, the time for its own transcending, or at least re-evaluation, is upon us. Indeed, time is running out. As the gap between our technological reach and philosophical grasp widens exponentially, we are eroding not only our own physical and mental health and undermining the cohesion of our social relationships and civil societies (Eisenstein 2013); we are threatening the very balance that has allowed life to flourish on this planet, in relationship to which we have taken on the role of a virus (Barnosky et al. 2011; Lewis and Maslin 2015). Our starting point, then, is the acknowledgement of a general malaise experienced

in relation to the state of the world we live in and our relationship to this world, with a particular focus on the incapacity of our systems of knowledge to meaningfully interpret this world and our place in it. This phenomenon has come to permeate our existence and can be traced psychologically, socially, politically, ecologically, and economically. It is reflected in and fed by the growing degree of destruction, alienation and negation of truth, beauty, and justice that we witness daily, no matter where on Earth we find ourselves.

It can be argued that the underlying reason for this dire planetary situation is the practically universal implementation of a worldview that is out of touch with reality (Phipps 2012). This worldview, which is characterized by an unswerving faith in technology as an omnipotent tool of control over the forces of nature and human nature, a hard-line materialism that reduces life to dust and the illogical claim of science to represent the one and only path to valid knowledge,⁸ is a direct result of the historical trajectory of modern science (Phipps 2012; Sheldrake 2013). In ascribing to itself a monopoly on knowledge, science raised its peculiar methodology, namely, the positivistic collection of empirically measurable “facts” concerning reality, to the status of the sole valid epistemic mode. Not only are alternative research methods frowned upon, but many inexplicable phenomena are simply ignored or swept aside during the construction of a view of reality that has become so entrenched in modern

consciousness that questioning thereof risks exclusion from the in-crowd of mainstream science and banishment to the fringes of academia, and even of society at large. One reaction to this state of affairs by those who choose not to ignore certain experiences that do not fit the dominant model of reality is that belief in the scientific project has begun to falter among many of the most promising contemporary thinkers, just as religious belief faded among the generations before them. This is due to the fact that, ungrounded by any guiding precepts, science has splintered into a cacophony of egoistically or politically driven and paradigmatically biased pseudo-reporting and criticizing, with minimal awareness of social or ecological responsibility and no orienting context.

Science, divided into numerous mutually exclusive specialist fields, lacks “the unity of a mental space in which [the various scientific disciplines] might exist for and act on one another” (Husserl 1960:5). There are various historical reasons for this proliferation of epistemologies. The first is the developmental trajectory of science itself. American systems theorist, Gregory Bateson (2000:274), approaching the topic from the perspective of the “natural” sciences, furnished us with the following description of adaptive change, which may also be seen as a description of the development of modern science:

There is needed not only that first-order change which suits the immediate environmental (or physiological) demand but also second-order changes which will reduce the amount of trial and error needed to achieve the first-order change...By super-

posing and interconnecting many feedback loops, we (and all other biological systems) not only solve particular problems but also form habits which we apply to the solution of classes of problems.

This process of “learning to learn” that underlies all method, and especially the scientific method as its most “refined” exemplar, is thus rooted in the natural evolutionary process. German philosopher, Jean Gebser, shed light on this evolutionary process by identifying various “structures of consciousness” that had historically informed the subjective life of *Homo sapiens*. The “mental” structure of consciousness that underlies the development of the scientific worldview is merely another temporarily ascendant emergent that builds on the structures preceding it, each of which historically generated the worldview of entire human populations (Gebser 1985). The emergence of this “mental” consciousness structure, becoming locally widespread starting about three centuries ago, is characterized by an increasing fixation on “space” and perspective and ever increasing individuation, or existential separation of the subject from the object(s) of its perception. This peculiar conscious orientation underlies the fixation with matter, or objectivity, which is characteristic of contemporary science. In turn, positivism as an epistemic orientation has led to the continuing diversification of science reflecting the increasingly perceived diversity of physical universe.

Originally the concept “physics” referred to the investigation of nature as a unity, without the qualifications made by the various contemporary scientific disciplines (Guénon 2004a). The earliest natural

philosophers in the West understood this word to refer simply to the study of “becoming,” which was understood to be synonymous with “nature.” Reality was viewed as a whole, with the awareness that any differentiation and classification of its constituents originated in the discriminatory faculties of consciousness, and not in the given manifestation of nature. This unitary view of reality was echoed in the epistemologies of other cultures. The Upanishads,⁹ for instance, remind us time and again that all differentiation, even on empirical bases, has “speech alone” as its support (*Katha* I.3.15; *Brihadaranyaka* IV.4.5; *Chandogya* VI.1.6; *Shvetashvatara* II.16; *Mundaka* II.1.2; *Mandukya* 2; *Kena* I.2; *Prashna* VI.5; *Taittiriya* II.1.1; *Aitareya* III.1.3; *Tejobindu* 1; *Atma* 3; *Amritabindu* 12; *Paramahansa* 4 [in Easwaran 2007; Rangaswami 2012]), a statement that many social constructivists would readily agree with. In the philosophies of various classical civilizations, the exact nature of phenomenal reality was thus explicitly known to be determined by the perspective of the perceiving subject. The “One,” Plotinus’s term for Transcendental Subjectivity, thus perceives/is the whole of potential reality in itself, while each

⁹ References to existing epistemological traditions are not intended to somehow align this article to a given doctrine. What is corroborated here and in other places by referring to specific schools of thought is rather the existence of a stock of knowledge which transcends any given doctrine. In this case, the same insight can, for instance, be corroborated by Wittgenstein (2001:89), who saw that “what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence,” or any number of thinkers who have come to the same conclusion. Nowhere in this article, is a specific doctrine given primary importance, the aim is rather to transcend the need for dogma by unflinchingly analyzing, understanding, and manifesting reality. To avoid completely reinventing the wheel, however, emphatic reference is made throughout this article to various schools of thought that have already eloquently dealt with the various issues at hand, but have been neglected, ignored, or misunderstood by modern thinkers operating on the basis of an empirico-perspectival worldview.

⁸ This attitude, which holds that we should not understand science as merely representing one form of possible knowledge, but rather as identical to valid knowledge as such, is commonly referred to as “scientism” (Habermas 1972).

individual constituent of the “Many” (individualized, Empirical Subjects) perceives a relative reality conditioned by time and space, name and form (Atkinson 1985). The non-dualism of these classical ontologies, being in accordance with reality, historically gave rise to various practices by means of which this “great chain of being” may be traversed by the subject (cf. Phillips [2009] for a decent scholarly discussion of Yoga, which is one such practical philosophy). The ready availability of such practical knowledge tended to the development of an attitude towards reality that was occupied with issues of “being” more than it was with issues of “knowing.” With the subject at the center of analysis, there is little incentive to analyze the objects of perception in any greater detail than is necessary to understand their relative relationship to the Holon and their corollary role in the process of “Self-realization.”

This all changed relatively recently, when humanity, due to fundamental shifts in consciousness, began looking to the sensible world primarily as a depot of resources useful to a sensible being. The unavoidable result of this paradigm shift has been the differentiation of matter into various classes, along with the development of an increasing number of specialist fields of knowledge oriented towards each classification in turn. Scientists have responded to this diversification in the object of analysis by becoming “specialists,” extraordinarily knowledgeable in increasingly narrow fields of investigation. It was taken-for-granted that the scope of reality was simply too vast for any individual to analyze in its entirety. The integral knowledge of the ancients was thus cast

aside, while in its stead there arose a plethora of parallel enterprises aimed at uncovering detailed descriptive information about abstracted parts of reality. Eventually, this tendency towards separation of the individual subject from the Kosmos as a whole led to the contemporary scientific conception of the self, the ego, to be increasingly conceptualized as a distinct object with empirically identifiable characteristics. This relatively recently acquired ability to extricate the subject from descriptions of reality has brought about immense changes in self-conception and social structure. Losing sight of the whole also meant that the various sciences were usurped by modern humanity’s technological program. Now that the world had been bereft of its context, the only value uncovered knowledge had was in its utility. This mutation of empiricism from a method into a worldview underlies the increasingly anomic character of an increasingly glocalised way of life which is economically reflected in the currently culminating “monetization of life,” a process through which social, psychological, spiritual, and creative spheres of life are increasingly violated by the capitalist economy through commodification, further accelerating that depletion of non-empirical sources of value-orientation which seems to have become a distinguishing mark of late modern societies (Eisenstein 2013). Indeed, with industry increasingly serving as the fundamental justification for science instead of a largely coincidental field of its application, modern humans have not only “limited their intellectual ambition...to inventing and constructing machines, but they have ended by becoming in fact machines themselves” (Guénon 2004a:87).

Thus, the downside to this historical process of differentiation rests on the fact that, in line with the tenets of the neo-Darwinian perspective on evolution, this streamlined process of enquiry was, and continues to be, geared rather narrowly towards economy of scope and means, as well as utility in application. This arbitrary narrowing down of reality leads to the formation of unquestioned assumptions that, though based on a biased understanding of arbitrarily isolated parts of the object of analysis, are unproblematically taken to represent the nature of the whole, while truth and usefulness have been confounded to the extent that the former risks being devoid of any meaning unless it is reflexively redefined by contemporary thinkers. Interestingly, but quite unsurprisingly, this development of increasing specialization in science is mirrored by the ongoing process of individuation in the psychological realm. As our sciences identify/generate ever more minute details of objective reality, the perceiving subject itself is being extensively cordoned off from both its increasingly alien life-worldly consociates and the Transcendental Subject. In the social sciences, this process is currently generating artifacts such as the various theories of embodiment that include the vast sweep of gender and culture specific streams that have seen an increasingly frantic development since the turn of the millennium. These theories, though shedding light on topics that unquestionably play a role in the constitution of social reality, simultaneously fracture the Holon of reality by focusing exclusively on the most conditioned aspects of existence. Socially speaking, such a compartmentalization of the human experience tends to widen existing gaps between socio-economic, cultural, racial, re-

ligious, and gender-based collectivities, instead of facilitating conciliation (Taylor 2011).

A further way in which specialization and individuation have impacted science is through the gradual rise of the now almost taken-for-granted idea of “intellectual property.” Having one’s name attached to a given idea has become at least as important as the progress of science itself. This is another result of the estrangement from the truth of ontic unity which, in the same way that it allows utility to become the primary factor in the evaluation of knowledge, gives rise to the possibility of so-called “original” thought which may or may not in fact correspond with reality. This pervasive emphasis on ownership has given rise to a global scientific community in which a thinker’s “renown is increased more by inventing a new error than by repeating a truth that has already been expressed” (Guénon 2004a:56). The materialistic worldview that underlies these phenomena, and is in turn reified by their development, now so completely pervades the scientific community that even those scientists who would not claim themselves to be “materialists” nonetheless accept its tenets unquestionably, at least when they are going about scientific enquiry. Materialism, which was coined as a term as recently as the eighteenth century and was originally meant to indicate the possible existence of any “objective” reality removed from the subject whatsoever, has come to dominate our institutionalized epistemological projects in the form of a conception which denies the reality of anything but classically defined matter, and even nominally “religious” or “spiritual” scientists further this philosophy in most of their official work (Guénon 2004a:56).

Along with the splintering and ossification of science, the resulting lack of any meaningful integration of knowledge generated by these isolated scientific fields, and the dogmatic imposition of a crude materialism over all theorization, another pressing problem that has arisen is the exclusion of vast areas of reality from any scientific consideration whatsoever. Apart from the splintering of science resulting in an overload of meaningless information, its narrow view means that serious investigation is only geared towards those aspects of reality that can be empirically measured. As the aim of all science is to generate, by means of methodical experimentation and analysis, a widely generalizable model of supposedly objective reality (Braaten 1991), an undue emphasis is placed on those aspects of reality that are held to be “objective.” This *modus operandi* explicitly excludes the bulk of reality, which is informed by subjective experience and intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks, from consideration, simply because these phenomena cannot be made the object of empirical investigation by means of any currently accepted method. Thus, by “promoting their methodological ineptitude to the rank of a criterion of truth” (Huxley 1947:36), empiricists tend to label any and all phenomena that cannot be subjected to their limited brand of investigation as unreal, or even impossible. In this way, many phenomena, though they may be widely attested to anecdotally, are summarily cast aside as illusory because of the simple fact that they are not readily describable by modern science (Sheldrake 2013). However, many of these phenomena which our contemporary scientific paradigms are not capable of explaining, though they have become

quite adept at explaining them away, historically “boasted a science *sui generis*, of which many, although fragmentary, traces still remain” (Evola 1996:183). These phenomena are often situated in the realms of intersubjective meaning and subjective experience which, though concrete in their implications for everyday life, are neither physically locatable in the material world nor able to be subjected to the techniques of measurement which evolved into the scientific method over the course of time. They represent the objects comprising the subjectively constituted “world-as-witnessed” and the intersubjectively constructed “world-as-agreed-upon,” those closely intertwined realms which are the primary field of meaningful experience and of which the empirical “world-as-described” is but a momentarily useful snapshot or spatio-temporally specific shadow. These existentially significant and hermeneutically decipherable ontic dimensions are completely ignored by the materialistic paradigm during its deconstruction of reality, and what is worse, they are often diminished in the process. This can clearly be seen in the fact that though the materialistic paradigm has generated vast amounts of information, it has simultaneously greatly eroded our ability to meaningfully interpret all this information. The result has been a world over which we (supposedly) have greater technical control, but that we understand and relate to less and less.

People living in pre-“mental” societies, on the other hand, are limited in the degree of control they exert over their environments (measured by empirical standards), but functionally “know” their place within the Kosmos, as well as the not

necessarily empirical laws that govern it (Radin 2002). The “value freedom” which is often touted as the hallmark of science signifies the expunging from the modern stock of knowledge of any such non-empirical aspects of, and means towards grasping, reality. This historical dissociation of value from fact has resulted in the displacement of pure “being” by an abstract “ought” as the object of scientific descriptions of the Kosmos (Habermas 1972). The resulting fracture of the Holon of reality into “fact” and “fiction” represents a historical impasse generated by the ascendancy of the mental structure of consciousness. The construction of the illusion of pure theory was a necessary step in the evolution of consciousness which allowed for the development of discursive thought and freed humanity from many of the irrationalities and instincts characteristic of preceding consciousness structures (Habermas 1972). The potential of this development was, however, largely missed, as the meaningfully experienced realm of the subject ontologically devolved into playing an increasingly marginalized role in relationship to the abstracted world of reality as described when severed from interpretation. Science thus more or less accidentally replaced the real world of our direct experience with an abstract model that does not even exist in any meaningful sense, and what is worse, it has claimed pontifical authority in maintaining that the former be ordered on the basis of the latter. This development has led us to the present position, in which we are saturated by meaningless information on a daily basis, with no foundation to make sense of it all, because “only as cosmology was *theoria* capable of orienting human action” (Habermas 1972).

After “freeing” knowledge from interest, the former has little to no cultural value. Increasingly school-children and students do not learn anything meaningful, but are trained from an ever younger age to carry out mechanistically defined roles. What is worse is that this course of events seems to be irreversible by any existing societal factor because of the fact that the forgotten “world of traditional meaning discloses itself to the interpreter only to the extent that his own world becomes clarified” (Habermas 1972:309-310), while the contemporary interpreter has been born into a world largely devoid of the means by which valid self-knowledge can readily be gained. The societal structures that served to carry out this role (self-organizing conglomerates reflecting existential and teleological relatedness, such as the ideal types of “family,” “church,” and “community”) have all but vanished from the West, and the result is all-out Durkheimian anomie hidden behind a thin veneer of meaningless distractions. This orienting knowledge has been lost in modern societies largely due to the effect that the scientific revolution has had on the human psyche. The internalization of this historical process, the tyranny of the mental structure of consciousness, has had the effect of transforming modern Western culture, which is exerting an increasingly global influence, into “a monstrous accumulation of facts and details incapable of proving or signifying anything” (Guénon 2004a:39). Indeed, the loss or neglect of knowledge of principles that characterizes modern science has resulted in both an epistemological and an axiological impasse. Epistemologically science, through its striving after value-freedom, is now completely incapable of rendering anything but relative truths, while

axiologically our culture has insincerely promoted a single relatively valid stock of knowledge, namely, that of positivistic scientism, to the status of an absolute truth.

As noted earlier, this objectification of reality has been psychologically reflected by an increasing ontic isolation of the subject. This “unavoidable hypertrophy of the ‘I,’ which is in confrontation with the external world” (Gebser 1985:22) has likewise had an impact on societal structure. Since the time of the European Enlightenment, most individuals living in Western societies (and, more recently, worldwide) have been undergoing an increasingly intensifying process of conscious individuation, as what Gebser (1985) called the “mental” structure historically emerged as a factor in human consciousness. Describing the historical evolution of human consciousness, Gebser identified four major “structures of consciousness” through which our species has developed. These structures of consciousness determine the worldview of the people operating within them, giving rise to powerful pre-reflexive onto-epistemological assumptions. These assumptions are intersubjectively reified to a degree that coagulates a specific manifestation of reality itself. In this way, the subject-object relationship between human consciousness and the world it perceives has seen extraordinary changes throughout history. The oldest consciousness structures, the “archaic” and the “magic,” reflect an unaperspectival world where the unity of nature is a lived experience, while there is little awareness of a separate, individuated self. The “mythic” worldview, arising during the so-called axial age (cf. Black 2008; Jaspers 2014), brought about the be-

ginnings of a reality experienced as perspectival. One’s perspective of reality in mythic cultures depends on one’s position within a highly polarized mythological system of symbols which coordinate the material world with subjectively constituted and intersubjectively constructed meaning-frames. From this seed of perspectivism sprouted the mental structure which prides itself on analyzing reality objectively, thus attaining the supreme perspective of absolute truth.

This venture, however, negates its own situatedness within a given cultural context by severing from admitted reality all that is not empirically measurable. The very nexus of subjective insight and intersubjective understanding that could alone give rise to and contextualize the search for “value-free” knowledge is cast aside in favor of a hermeneutically ungrounded abstraction. Yet this abstracted worldview, though supposedly isolated from mythological (that is meaningful) accounts of reality, does not itself represent a higher order of cognition, but merely the reactionary intensification of the perspectival world-experience that originated with the mythic structure of consciousness. By fabricating measurement and succession, causation and reciprocity, and introducing “this world of symbols into things and ming[ling] it with them as though the symbol world were an ‘in itself’” (Nietzsche 2014:33), we have accomplished nothing more than creating another mythos, one which has rendered described (and increasingly lived) reality meaningless.

The etiological framework discussed in the third section is not intended to merely supplant em-

pirical science in the same way that positivism once replaced the mythological systems that held currency before it through an essentially political process of change. As the current ontological reevaluation of the sciences takes place, our current state of consciousness, the very matrix of interpretation through which we interact with the objectified, is also evolving. Thus, an integral approach to scientific practice does not simply rest on the acceptance of a new conception or image of reality rooted in the logic of the mental structure of consciousness. Such a development would do nothing but replace the current worldview with one characterized by radically different contents and orientations, but an equally limited perspective which could only produce equally partial insights leading to equally dysfunctional implementations. A new interpretation of the same perspectival reality would, as all previous perspectival interpretations, be “no more than the creation of a myth, since all imagery has a predominantly mythical nature” (Gebser 1985:7).

The historical impasse of science, which has resulted in the reification of a meaningless myth with catastrophic social, ecological, and psychological consequences, can be summed up as the failure to integrate previously existing latent consciousness structures characterized by epistemic modes aimed at exploring the constant aspects of reality (i.e., the ever-present “ground” of consciousness itself, as well as the eternally valid hermeneutic truths encapsulated in mythological frameworks) with the new realm of “value-free” knowledge made accessible by the mental consciousness structure. As the resulting worldview has, howev-

er, outlived its relevance and threatens to self-destruct on an unprecedented scale, any attempt at formally reintegrating the various contextually valid epistemic modes that still largely underlie our everyday experience needs to be founded on a higher order of consciousness, which various thinkers have identified as currently emerging in our world (cf. Lazslo 2007; Wilber 2007; Nietzsche 2012a; Phipps 2012; Eisenstein 2013; Jaspers 2014). This thesis thus represents an attempt to transcend this incapacity of empirical science as an analytical tool applied to a trans-empirical reality, not by developing a new dualistically perspectival myth, but through highlighting the relative reality of the experienced duality of everyday life. It also serves as an instrument for the development of an onto-epistemological framework that is congruent with the “integral” structure of consciousness which is currently emerging in our collective experience of reality. Contributing to the current debate regarding the “ontological turn” in the sciences, the following sections explore the characteristics of an epistemological endeavor suitable to an aperspectival experience of reality, where “ego-consciousness” is replaced by “Itself-consciousness,” which is related to the former as waking is to dreaming (Gebser 1985). The new worldview reflected in such an integral approach retains the insights generated by our collective historical foray into objectivity, while reclaiming the meaningful knowledge of ourselves and our relationship to the Kosmos that has systemically been neglected over the last few centuries. Given the centrality of consciousness in such an endeavor, the next section explores the subject in greater detail.

The Nature of the Subject

In order to meet the requirements of accountability and reflexivity laid down earlier, it is necessary that I thoroughly describe the position from which I (the subject within the context of this thesis) myself departed upon carrying out this work. In doing so, it becomes necessary to clarify certain ideas pertaining to the notion of levels, or states of consciousness open to experience by human beings, which is what this section is intended to accomplish. During my own investigations into reality I have always felt it is most natural to adopt a “phenomenological” attitude; that is, to analyze experienced reality as removed from any “outside” judgments regarding the ontic status thereof. This is the monadic starting point for all the arguments developed throughout the body of this thesis and, as such, it would be illogical to claim their generalizability in the empirical sense. A crucial point to keep in mind, however, is that the perceptions conveyed throughout this article are rooted in what Husserl (1960) referred to as “Transcendental Subjectivity” and, as such, do not represent the perspective of *a* monad, but of *the* monad.¹⁰ The experiential data on which my conclusions are based are thus in principle accessible to any who would confirm or deny these conclusions, and therefore quite straightforwardly verifiable. I do not put forth the framework discussed in the fourth section as a phantasm generated by the isolated daydreaming of a single ego, but as the result of an

¹⁰ Though this statement may seem understandably contentious to some, it is not meant to invoke an ungrounded metaphysical ideal, but represents the fundamental fact of the universal unity of unconditioned consciousness, a topic explored in greater detail throughout this section and the next.

analysis of the Transcendental Object of awareness (the Kosmos, or reality as a whole) from the *aper-*spective¹¹ of the Transcendental Subject, which represents a verifiable step on the true phenomenological road to “the real positive outcome of the philosophical efforts of the centuries” (Farber 1968:3).

I speak here of “true” phenomenology due to the simple fact that the process of *epoché*, or “bracketing,” that leads one to the state of Transcendental Subjectivity can never merely be “subsumed under the genus of method” (Farber 1968:VI), as most “phenomenological sociologists” have attempted to do (cf. Dreher 2012a; 2012b), thus replacing Husserl’s lofty aim of true objectivity with a kind of half-hearted detachment. Simply put, even though phenomenology has historically been used as a scientific (and specifically sociological) paradigm and a procedure for qualitative research, the fact of the matter is that phenomenological analysis begins before the constitution of empirical data (Eberle 2014). Phenomenological analysis therefore occupies an epistemological position of preceding order to that of empirical analysis, due to the fact that the former is occupied with an investigation of the pre-reflexive constitution of objects that are taken-for-granted as given by the latter. I use the word “preceding” instead of “higher” in order to avoid creating the mistaken impression that I mean phe-

¹¹ The relationship “between” the Transcendental Subject and the phenomenal world is one not easily translated into any current language. However, the doctrines of the Perennial Philosophy, the tenets of quantum physics, and direct experience serve to shed light on the fact that it is not describable in terms of “perspectivism,” as we generally understand the concept, nor is it simply “unperspectival” (Mohrhoff 2008).

nomenological analysis to be somehow “superior” to empirical analysis. We are, in fact, confronted on a daily basis with a phenomenal field¹² populated by objects that appear to exist independently of the perceiving subject (Habermas 1972), and denying this would necessitate the expounding of a dogmatically monistic theory of reality that would make little sense from the perspective of the natural attitude.

The phenomenal field to which science (and the social sciences in particular) is applied is that of naively lived everyday life, and this realm is experienced as inherently dualistic due to the seeming existence of multiple ontically isolated subjects. That this multiplicity of subjects is rooted in a unitary source, as becomes obvious during meditation,¹³ is currently of little consequence to their continued existence as individual nodes of consciousness on the plane of their everyday experience. Whether this pre-reflexive experience of the multiplicity of subjects and the resulting dualistic nature of everyday life is seen to be a result of ignorance concerning absolute reality, the outcome of a more or less conscious will towards individuation, or simply the median conscious experience correlating to the contemporary evolutionary state of *Homo sapiens* changes little to the fact that it represents, at least at this point in time

¹² The term “phenomenal field” is used to indicate especially the contents of awareness, in contrast to the more frequently used term “states of consciousness,” in cases where the inherent characteristics of consciousness itself do not seem to be affected (Rock and Krippner 2007).

¹³ Meditation as used here should not be confused with any trademarked or codified method of mind expansion, but simply refers to the natural penetration of ever more subtle and universal phenomenal fields by means of stillness, awareness, and acceptance.

and space, the universal human experience of paramount, or conventional, reality. The relationship between this specifically human reality (being paramount due to the fact that it is shared by, or accessible to, all human beings) and absolute (or unconditioned) reality, and more specifically the repercussions thereof for the practice of social scientific research, constitutes the subject matter of the rest of this section.

Wherever physical, psychological, socio-cultural, and historical conditioning of the subject comes into play, the experiencing datum should aptly be referred to as Empirical Subjectivity, as the experience of the subject is then in some way conditioned by readily identifiable pre-reflexively existing factors which give rise to the possibility of approaching this order of subjectivity as an “object” of analysis.¹⁴ This powerful nexus of self-experience constitutes the paramount experience of “I” in everyday life and stands in stark contrast to the universal experience of the unconditioned Transcendental Subject. Its nature is, in fact, so total that the Empirical Subject very rarely has access to the pre-conditioned point of view, and most people struggle to even make logical sense of the concept of Transcendental Subjectivity (an I that is not me?!). The perspective of Transcendental Subjectivity is, however, attainable by any human being,

¹⁴ The “ontological discontinuity” that arises when one subject’s “world-as-experienced” is reflexively translated into a “world-as-described” by a second subject makes clearly visible to the latter certain phenomena that go unnoticed by the former, while conditioning his/her experience of reality (Kotze et al. 2015). A similar process of uncovering the latent constituents of one’s own being underlies the initial stages of the emancipatory process of self-realization (the gradual shift in self-identification from ego-consciousness to Itself-consciousness, or from existence primarily as an Empirical Subject to existence as the Transcendental Subject).

and in theory, by any consciously experiencing being, although it is a few orders removed from the “I” that experiences itself as a skin-encapsulated ego. It is also necessary to note that the attainment of this perspective requires a negation of physical, psychological, and socio-historical conditioning and the cultivation of a sustained level of awareness that is usually only permanently attained after years of meditative practice¹⁵ (Böhme 2014). Regardless of the specific characteristics of these orders of subjectivity, it is clear that various loci of “I” exist and are readily available to perceptual experience (Wilber 2007). An integral ontology that incorporates this fact posits the only viable alternative to the dichotomy of idealistic disembodied consciousness, on the one hand, and the overly reductionist position of the new materialists (and others who see agency as purely residing in matter, and by social implication the body [cf. Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012]), on the other hand. The fact is that both extremes are true, verifiable aspects of reality; their relative validity merely depends on the momentary perspective of the subject.

Thus, the following section does not conceptualize the subject as the object of a given science, or even as the object of a holistically constructed multi-scientific epistemological nexus, but as the absolute “source” of reality. As the experiencing subject’s existence “does not come from [its] antecedents,

¹⁵ Interestingly, various studies indicate that similar modifications of consciousness and phenomenal fields may be temporarily facilitated by near death experiences, certain kinetic techniques, and the incorporation of a multitude of naturally occurring substances and synthesized analogues (Stolaroff 1999; Strassman 2001; Walsh 2001; Sessa 2005).

nor from [its] physical and social surroundings [but] moves out toward them and sustains them” (Merleau-Ponty 2012:lxvii), we will not limit the possibilities of our investigation with scientifically specific signifiers, but depart from the kernel of the subject, that nucleus which claims to be “I,” and label the encountered phenomena in ways that conform to the experience that “I” have of them. Of course, given that the term “I” can signify various loci of consciousness, we will have to deal separately with the two clearly differentiated perspectives defined in this thesis, namely, Empirical Subjectivity and Transcendental Subjectivity. The former represents, in the present context, the individuated experience of life as a member of the species *Homo sapiens* and the latter the undifferentiated state of being underlying and enfolding all manifestation and experience. The realities reflected by each differ quite markedly from that experienced by the other and, as such, each of these types of subjectivity, as representing ontically differentiated loci of self-identification along a continuum available to subjective experience, needs to be treated in detail. We will start off with Empirical Subjectivity, as this form of “I” has been most widely explored by contemporary science and also represents the everyday experience of reality from within the natural attitude.

The term “Empirical Subject” is used throughout this thesis to refer to any conditioned subject in general, and specifically to that state of consciousness which corresponds to the natural attitude, that pre-reflexive mode of going about our daily lives that characterizes the everyday experience of paramount reality (Schütz and Luckmann 1974). It

refers to the default experience of “myself” as an embodied subject, or what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls a “body-subject” (Keat 1982). In contrast to the undifferentiated state of Transcendental Subjectivity, the Empirical Subject’s experience of the world in which it lives is mediated by individual psychological and biographical factors, as well as socio-culturally and historically contextualized meaning-frameworks that are intersubjectively constructed, maintained, and transformed (Dillon 1997). The realm of Empirical Subjectivity is thus the intersubjective realm of everyday life, of the lifeworld in so far as it comprises the “foundational structures of what is prescientific” (Schütz and Luckmann 1974:3) or the self-evident shared reality of our existence in the waking state. It is thus fundamentally the realm of “We,” the intersubjectively constructed “world-as-agreed-upon,” and as such that aspect of reality towards which sociology as a science is oriented, that is the abode of the Empirical Subject. It is important to keep in mind that the term Empirical Subject does not refer to a fixed class of differentiated subjectivity, but to any conditioned subject in general. As such, the concepts dealt with in this section (especially the terms of body and environment as fixed signifiers of meaning) do not rigidly represent the same phenomena in all cases of Empirical Subjectivity. As stated earlier, from a dualistic perspective, there exists a continuum of possible self-identification from the transcendent to the immanent, which means that what is experienced as “body” by a given subject, may well be experienced as “environment” by another, what is obviously “interior” to one, may be experienced as “exterior” by a second, and so forth. Because we are to look at

the constitution of the Empirical Subject in a phenomenological way, or in a manner that radiates outward from the central point of “I-amness,” it would be a mistake to conceive of the various parts of the embodied human being in terms of multiple intertwining causalities (Merleau-Ponty 2012), as this would result in the digressing dissection of an illogically conceived object by means of the tools of various, often mutually exclusive, scientific frameworks, such as psychology, biology, and so forth. Thus, we do not analyze phenomena such as the human body and mind as objects of biology or psychology, but as pre-scientific constituents of the “world-as-witnessed,” or the subjectively constituted aspects of reality. This fundamentally phenomenological turn “to the things themselves” represents the only way in which we can move beyond a scientific paradigm that tends to isolate a certain aspect of being, towards a mode of enquiry that, in lieu of investigating being qua being, transcends these limited perspectives and embeds them within anaperspectival matrix of universally valid “self”-knowledge (Atkinson 1985).

For most people, the default experience of I is that of being conflated with the physical body.¹⁶ “I” experiences myself as being somehow situated in a certain part of a specific physical object over which I seems to have a certain degree of control and which seems to be surrounded by various other more or less similar objects and able to act upon, and be acted upon by, these other objects. This thesis

¹⁶ While it is quite possible to consciously transfer one’s locus of consciousness to “subtler bodies,” the physical sheath remains the one in which, as human beings operating from within the natural attitude, “our ‘I-feeling’ throbs” (Salagame 2013:377).

argues, in agreement with *Sanatana Dharma*,¹⁷ that, apart from the physical body, there exist increasingly subtle “sheaths” that enclose the Transcendental Subject and in effect give rise to Empirical Subjectivity (Rao 1970; Ashok and Thimmappa 2006). In order to make sense to the contemporary scientific reader, these bodies may be illustrated (from gross to subtle/individual to universal) as follows (Salagame 2013)¹⁸:

1. Body of matter: The bio-physical body.
2. Body of energy: The matrix of vitality which is emotionally experienced, and which links the out-

¹⁷ This is the name the Sanskrit-speaking Indo-Europeans gave to their worldview, which is rather misleadingly referred to as Hinduism in the English speaking world. The Sanskrit phrase is, however, of more value, as the directly translated “eternal law” emphasizes the trans-contextual, universal nature of the body of knowledge at its core (Rao 2009). The term should definitely not be understood as referring to a specific religion.

¹⁸ Again, in this reference to “Hinduism,” as to all epistemological systems referred to throughout this article, the aim is not to overlay a single culturally contextualized tradition onto a sphere that is beyond its legitimate scope. Contextualized analyses of the continuum of being, rendering it an object of the second order (as conditioned both by subjectively constituted and inter-subjectively constructed meaning-frameworks [Bourdieu 1990]), are found in a temporally, geographically, and ethno-culturally diverse range of wisdom traditions, the most well-known of which include Buddhism (from the individual, sensory *nirmanakaya* [body of manifestation] through the universal “Buddha-nature” of the *dharmakaya* [body of law]) (Williams 2007), Jewish Cabbala (the *sefirot*, or continua of manifestation from the *en-sof* [the infinite] to the world of manifest action) (Scholem 1969), Taoism (from the “10 000 things” of manifest reality through the unity of the “unspeakable Tao”) (Waley 1997), and Christianity (from “nature” to the “Godhead”) (Colledge and McGinn 1981). Corollary phenomena have been empirically observed, described by some as “subtle energy fields” which vary significantly between individuals (Wilber 2006; Sheldrake 2013). The inclusion of these divergent perspectival accounts of the “object” of analysis is intended to facilitate an integral, aperspectival analysis of the phenomenon as an object of the first order (free from the molding impressions of personal opinion and social understanding [Wacquant 1992]), thus facilitating access to a store of knowledge that is fundamentally more “objective” than any provisional empirical conclusion, while simultaneously being universally communicable and existentially transparent.

er sheaths (oriented towards sensing the “outer” world of manifestation) with the inner sheaths (oriented towards sensing the “inner” world of meaning).

3. Body of mind: The various potentia enclosed within consciousness and its more or less conscious and individuated vortices of recollection and intentionality.
4. Body of knowledge: The universal instrumental matrix of wisdom, the activation of which engenders insight into the relationships of causality and correlation underlying the operation of the previous sheaths.
5. Body of bliss: The most subtly dualistic state of being in which the Transcendental Subject is conscious of itself as aperspectival totality. In *Vedanta*, this state of being is indicated by the linguistic conglomerate *saccidānanda*, or “being-knowing-bliss” (Rangaswami 2012).

The subjectively constituted aspects of my experience thus arise primarily within the context of an existentially unique intertwining of these various modalities. The default orientation of the Empirical Subject to its world is thus an exclusively personal one. My earliest experiences of reality generate a concept of the world as “mine,” as the various phenomena encountered are made sense of primarily in terms of their relationship to “me.” Soon it becomes apparent that certain experienced phenomena resist simple categorization in this highly subjective way. Experience teaches us that certain aspects of the world lie beyond our control, and some

even seem to delimit our existential possibilities (Guénon 2004b). Thus, the “world-as-described,” a relatively “objective” reality that stands as exterior to and unaffected by my directing mind, gradually comes to be as a complementary source of orientation and meaning-making made use of during my everyday existence. While the earliest years of my experience as an embodied being are characterized by a certain fluidity, or absence, of discrete self-identification as consciousness is focused on the “world-as-witnessed,” by the time adulthood is reached, I have usually been socialized into accepting a certain interpretation of the relationship between “I,” me,¹⁹ my body, and the world around me. The socially shared “world-as-agreed-upon” thus starts to take the ontological precedence over both the subjectively unique “world-as-witnessed” and the objectively universal “world-as-described” that it necessarily would in the experience of a fundamentally social being. Indeed, in everyday life, intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks tend to play a foundational role in our understanding of ourselves and our world. As these socially agreed upon interpretations of reality tend to trump both individual interpretation and factual data when it comes to the social construction of reality on an everyday basis, there is a pressing need to include a hermeneutic understanding of the lifeworlds one traverses when engaged in social research. The fostering of such understanding, along with an acknowledgement of the empirical

¹⁹ This article accepts the ego of Western psychology to be merely the product of pre-reflexive identification with an object of awareness, and not the source of consciousness itself (Rangaswami 2012). The unobjectifiable nature of “I” must never be lost sight of when interpreting the stream of thought reflected in this article.

quanta present during the manifestation of any phenomenon and a reflexive awareness of one’s own agential role during the research process, is only possible by generating an integral etiological framework that makes explicit reference to all the modes of interplay between reality and the observing subject. The next section explores such a framework in greater detail.

Towards an Integral Framework for the Study of a Trans-Empirical Reality

Though the social sciences have managed to stem the prevailing tide of objectivism described in the second section significantly by highlighting the social construction of reality and the relative nature of certain “truths,” for example (cf. Bourdieu 1990; Giddens 2011), the lack of both a clear situating of these sciences in relationship to other epistemological projects (such as the natural sciences, philosophy, and religion), along with an awareness of the modern social sciences themselves as being primarily European cultural artefacts, only causes further confusion. Even as the focus of social research has consistently shifted from structures to narratives in recent decades, its underlying onto-epistemological foundations have remained largely unchanged. The fact that the social sciences remain (or still strive to be) largely predictive and instrumental in nature²⁰ actually compounds the problems raised in the second section, as advocates of sweeping social change largely base their arguments on an approach that,

²⁰ Hypotheses that are currently socially applied represent the full spectrum of paradigmatically limited sociological theories (cf. Zevallos 2009).

though being explicitly interventionist and manipulative in nature, does not take into consideration the full spectrum of human interests (Braaten 1991). Thus, the social sciences in general, and sociology in particular (especially due to the fact that at least some of its practitioners aim at impacting public policy), stand in even greater need of an integrated contextualization. This section aims to trace the outlines of such a holistic refunding of the social scientific project rooted in the phenomenological description discussed in the previous section by identifying certain essential principles that need to be taken into account wherever social reality is analyzed. By clearly identifying the principles on which the manifestation of social reality rests, it becomes possible to transcend the contemporary conflictual relationships between the various sociological paradigms. Knowledge of principles will finally allow sociologists to truly understand social reality, whereas most contemporary agreement, falling outside the realm of principles, are “unstable and precarious and much more like a diplomatic arrangement than a true understanding” (Guénon 2004a:30).

Conceptualized in order to facilitate access to the apodictic strata of reality represented by such principles, this framework does not represent a middle way or another dividing alternative to the various limited scientific paradigms, but instead is meant to draw together holistically any and all partially true theories that “in their very conflict, demonstrate the intimacy with which they belong together, the commonness of their underlying convictions, and an unswerving belief in a true philosophy” (Husserl 1960:5). This true philosophy is not to be haphazardly concocted from the limited paradigmatic

perspective of any isolated school of thought, but instead is to be distilled from the various sources that have reflected various aspects thereof during the history of human thought. As such, it is also not presented as being my “intellectual property,” as this claim would deprive it of any validity. The integral etiological framework presented in this section is not “new” in the sense of being invented, but represents an utterly real and true idea that belongs to all who can understand/manifest it. It thus has an existence independent of contextualized interpretation, and is variously verifiable phenomenologically, hermeneutically, and empirically (Guénon 2004a). The project of uncovering this essential foundation of reality entails putting the sum total of our collective knowledge on the table, purging ourselves of any tendency towards arbitrary categorization and expunging from our minds any socio-cultural, psychological, historical, and physical conditioning, as well as all ungrounded biases rooted in egoism, ethnocentrism, and intellectual fundamentalism. The integral etiological framework discussed over the course of the following pages is thus argued to be trans-empirical, post-metaphysical, and beyond the misleading dichotomies of science and spirituality, East and West, male and female, objectivity and subjectivity, relativity and universality, and so forth, which have hindered the evolution of our understanding of ourselves, our world, and our relationship to it for centuries. Indeed, once the principles of reality are understood as independent of and prior to all relative contingencies, there will no longer be scientifically valid disagreement regarding the nature of the structures and processes that flow from them (Guénon 2004a). Indeed, reality grasped in-

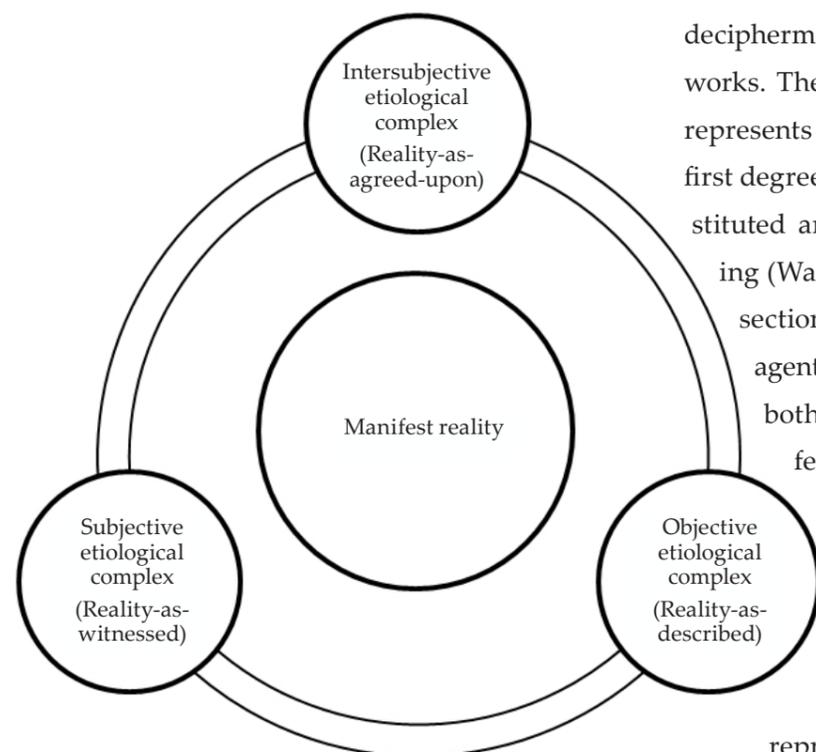
tegrally “is the world’s transparency, a perceiving of the world as truth; a mutual perceiving and imparting of truth of the world and of man and of all that transluces both” (Gebser 1985:7).

This is the case because absolute reality is non-dual, though any Empirical Subject necessarily perceives reality as relatively dualistic, as illustrated in the third section. The exact nature of the relationship between subject and object is thus provisionally informed by the momentary existential “distance” between the self and the other. As this variable may range from complete novelty and alienation to unity and various degrees of interpenetration, it becomes clear that the very nature of *ontos* and *episteme* is determined by the perspective of the subject, a cognition that is systemically relevant to the subject that enacts it. It now becomes atavistic (or at best *interesting*) to analyze a given object (or subject) as if they are ontically isolated things-in-themselves. In fact, their seeming polarity from within the perspectival worldview of the fundamentally dualistic mental consciousness structure, rather than giving rise to contesting explanations of what is evidently a harmonious whole, intimates the reality of a more fundamental unity observed from within the aperspectival integral consciousness structure. The only way to redefine the terms of our analysis of reality in a way that reflects the wider and deeper perception made possible by the ascendancy of the integral consciousness structure, and to move towards a truly aperspectival analysis of reality, is thus to recognize the fundamentally relative nature of all ontology and epistemology, and to transcend the now “primitive” perspectivism/dualism that was the hallmark of the mental consciousness structure

that came to fruition over the past few centuries. An aperspectival consciousness does not witness the world in the same dualistic way as its precursory structures. It does not stand apart from “objects of perception,” but “is” itself the imminent process of becoming which was previously dissected into subject and object (Guénon 2004a; Cheng 2008). Ontology and epistemology are thus seen to be perspectively relevant abstractions, and the core analytical process becomes etiology, or an integral knowledge of becoming, which includes origin, manifestation, and teleology (Gebser 1985).

We thus have to consider manifest reality as neither exclusively an object nor a state of consciousness, but as a teleologically unfolding “presentation,” the contents, structure, and perspective of which are constantly regenerating in every etiological unique moment, while retaining the singular origin of all phenomena “as an ineradicable present” (Gebser 1985:294). An integral framework for scientific practice thus needs to be sensitive to the relationship between subject and object rather than either the subject or object in isolation. When analyzed in such a way, everyday reality is seen to manifest as a Holon constituted of three inter-related etiological complexes, each characterized by the unique ontic, epistemic, and spatio-temporal character of its constituents. This Holon underlies the existence of various kinds of knowledge and means to knowledge, which are alternately pursued and perused based on whether the act of perception is “oriented toward technical control, toward mutual understanding in the conduct of life, [or] toward emancipation from seemingly ‘natural’ constraints” (Habermas 1972:311).

Figure 1: The three etiological complexes.



Source: Self-elaboration.

The reality that we, as Empirical Subjects, naively experience as a unitary stream of manifestation thus comprises three interrelated, but individually signifiable etiological complexes, or matrices of manifestation and perception, each of which gives rise to an experientially and ontically distinct dimension of reality. The subjective etiological complex is represented by the existentially constituted and biographically accumulated aspects of experience which make up the “I-feeling” of the Empirical Subject, and is alternatively referred to throughout this thesis as the “world-as-witnessed,” that individually unique well of subjective perception from which an individual draws more or less consciously in daily life (Nietzsche 2012b). The intersubjective etiological complex represents that aspect of

reality that is intersubjectively constructed, and which is accessed by means of the interpretive decipherment of socially shared meaning-frameworks. The objective etiological complex, in turn, represents the empirical analysis of objects of the first degree, as isolated from both subjectively constituted and intersubjectively constructed meaning (Wacquant 1992). As mentioned in the third section, the Transcendental Subject does not agentially participate in this Holon, but is both the ground and the *telos* of its manifestation. As the singular “I” itself is empirically quite ungraspable, meaning that it is impossible to constitute an object that can serve as referent to the totality of what is meant by the word “I,” the Transcendental Subject is represented in the figure above by the totality of the matrix and the medium in which the figure is rendered. Thus, an analysis of reality can only be an analysis of that which “encloses,” is perceived by, and which is in varying degrees (based on the nature of momentary experience) partially conflatable with the Transcendental Subject, which act of conflation creates the relatively existent Empirical Subject and its experiential perspective, as described in the previous section.

In this way, reality can be grasped as an *ontos* of standpoints, with absolute reality (the “I” experience of the enfolding Transcendental Subject) being monistic, while the relative everyday reality (the “I” experience of the embedded Empirical Subject) is experienced as being dualistic. The relative reality of the dualistically perceived world thus remains the object of investigation of a scientific pursuit

that seeks progress and utilitarianism of a higher order than hitherto conceived of, while the apodictic knowledge of its principles, which can be conceived of as omnipresent etiological laws of nature of a different order than the spatio-temporally contingent empirical laws of physics (or any science), is kept in mind. In this way, any given phenomenon can be analyzed in terms of its most minutely specific empirical, hermeneutic, and existential quanta and qualia, situating it transparently against the continually unfolding meta-narrative represented by bio-physical manifestation, collective history, and personal biography, while simultaneously “all nature, every perception, every phenomenon, the entirety [of] ‘internal experience’, the ‘content of the psyche’, [is] freed from ‘subjectivity’, separated from what is ‘human’” (Evola 1996:214). Thus, a truly integral analysis of reality furnishes us not only with

a deeply personal, socially relevant, and empirically sound account of specific phenomena, but simultaneously allows for insight into the same phenomena as free from subjective interpretation, socio-cultural bias, and the dogma of essentially arbitrary standards of measurement and description. One of the characteristics of this integral etiological framework is that its implementation is not dependent on the elaboration of new theoretical or methodological systems. Various schools of thought have produced such systems in abundance, albeit always operating exclusively within a single etiological complex. In the next article constituting this thesis, we will investigate the ways in which an integral sociological practice can be operationalized at the theoretical and methodological levels by making integrally reflexive use of the vast array of existing sociological theories and methods.

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