Existential Empiricism (Main Text)

Existential Empiricism: A Proposed Framework for the Science of Mind, Matter, and Anomalous Phenomena

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Prologemenon to any future science of the anomalous – philosophical rehearsals

In order to proceed with a systematic development and exposition of a methodological framework within which the presuppositions of a science guided by a materialist or physicalist metaphysics no longer apply, and which have altogether been abandoned, we find it necessary to first become oriented in thought by means of a standpoint that no longer is fettered by the demands of *any* metaphysic whatever. We may call this a zone of safety, from where we may undertake a survey of the passage of thought from metaphysics, which burdens thinking with the shadow of substances and universal forms and laws, to the freedom of thinking abandoned to the aleatory of difference which from itself determines by aggregation and association the 'universal' forms, and laws that provide the order which metaphysics has always gotten too cheaply.

Kant wished to save metaphysics by undertaking a radical transformation of the form it had taken: from the 'dogmatic' where the presuppositions (in the form of principles that might justify its basic notions: substance, necessity, etc.) of its thought remained unexamined and hence unconstrained (i.e., without a general understanding of how it was possible, its scope and limits could not indeed be determined, and so it too easily reached for the finality of closed truths, infinitely extendible and *forever speculative*), to the 'critical' in which it was understood, by grasping its conditions of possibility, what 'metaphysics' truly could be, given the laws of thought (or of 'mind') which it could never escape (but which it could never grasp as such, within its systems). Thus did Kant have recourse to a "transcendental" metaphysics: that is, a determination of the conditions of its possibility by understanding the extent to which the a priori structures of the mind are dialectically related to a world which supplies it with content out of which, in 'experience', a definite form is achieved.

However the ghost of a rationalist, and therefore distantly 'dogmatic', thinking persists in the Kantian Critique, insofar as the determining structure of what he had to designate 'mind' (that ground which must be presupposed even when reaching for a 'transcendental' determination, i.e., of the conditions of possibility for something) had to be posited in order for his thought to escape the dogmatism to which it had previously fallen victim. It is a mirror of the very same original sin committed by the radicalism of Descartes' universal Doubt, to which the Kantian philosophy makes essential reference. Descartes was led to the necessity of a grounding (pre-theoretic) 'ego' – Kant to an analogous ground whose nature itself cannot be subject to critique because it is the

ground, stable, that enables the Critique to specifically launch, and to which all of its activity must ultimately be referred (for which Kant had need, at a crucial point in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, to posit the "transcendental apperception of unity"). While Kant did surely escape the specific form of rationalism within which the Cartesian philosophy was trapped—dogmatic, ultimately, despite the radicalism of its initiating method of universal Doubt—the Kantian philosophy finds itself laboring under a similar original sin, the paradox of wanting an *absolute* critique, or at least a Critique that could be considered complete and systematic. Where is the error?

Surely it must be in the stasis of forms of 'intuition' which are supposed to structurally organize the 'sensuous' *so that experience itself is possible*, and the ensuing categories of the 'understanding' that, in turn, supply the concepts by which experience is further organized into universals that, given their *synthetic a priori* determination, *make it possible for there to be both mathematical and scientific-empirical truths* with a force of some form of necessity—not, indeed, the dogmatic form of necessity sought after by the (dogmatic) metaphysical systems, but the radically transformed "transcendental" necessity given by the dialectic of world-mind which the Kantian philosophy proposes to disclose by means of the *method* of the Critique. But, whence the forms, the categories? Indeed, what room for change—free *modulations* of the intuitive forms and categories of understanding? Here, such questions threaten to rupture the Kantian 'architechtonic' that attempts a satisfying dichotomy—ultimately untenable by the Kantian philosophy itself—between 'things' and 'appearances'. In fact, subsequent readers and philosophers who engaged the Kantian thought at some depth realized that in fact an *unbroken relation* exists (and must exist) between the elements Kant wishes to rend asunder (without being capable of supplying those principles systematically determined from a central logic that license the distinction itself), in order to preserve the 'transcendental' and even 'immanent' character of his thought.

We find, then, a very elementary, and ongoing, difficulty unaddressed in the Kantian philosophy, despite its character as a revolution in philosophy up to that point.[1] If we allow ourselves an inquiry into the forms and categories themselves, then we essentially are leaving the fixity of the Kantian transcendental logic behind, and must, it would seem, allow thought to be unfettered, free—but nevertheless subject to *some* force or principle or source of determination which moves

[1] This so-called "Copernican Revolution", which Kant himself seemed to recognize, was the basic insight that it is not the mind or concepts of the mind that conform to the way things are—the way that things are conforms to how it is that the mind and its concepts can think itself *into* that world, whatever it is that the latter may or may not 'ultimately' be. And indeed: there really *can be* no "ultimate way" that things truly *are* known to be, for the very idea presupposes, according to Kant's philosophy, a contradictory requirement that thought can never achieve: a reflection of a truth that is *absolutely outside of and therefore utterly independent from* any mind whatever. Surely if a requirement, then, of the independence of truth is that there be *no participation or relationship between the known and the knower*, then the twain never shall meet—except perhaps occasionally, randomly and unknowingly (hence, this leads to an unworkable radical skepticism). If, however, the knower and the known are not independent, but that some participation exists between them, then what it is that is known is to some extent a function of the knower(s), and the knowing is itself a dynamical process, an unbroken or inseparable relation with the concepts of mind relegated to the function of breaking the relation, and hence continually violating the flow of that this relation posits. Of course, this realization led to the complications of German Idealism, and other reactions to Kant motivated by some sense (or some intuition) of what was missing in the Kantian philosophy.

from this zone of indeterminacy, in which there are no forms of intuition or categories of understanding, to a standpoint from where we find that they are already in operation, because our experiences are already informed by them—and hence take a definite shape.[2] Kant, of course, was not a thinker who would be blinded by the power of the radical pivot (from the dogmatic to the critical) that he had achieved, who would then became enamored of the system following from his Critique of Reason, and thereafter unable to see the need to descend ever further into the depths from out of which truth emerges. In his Third Critique, somewhat awkwardly entitled *Critique of Judgement*, we do indeed find an indication of the territory to which this critique, if it is truly to attain the status of a radical critique that perturbs *its own foundations*, and leading on to a "critique of critique" (which is—to anticipate our thesis—simply an encounter with *radical difference*) must move. It is the territory of pure Art.[3]

Indeed now we see that instead of an essential antagonism between philosophy (that since Plato operates as "logos") and art or poetry (which was given the subordinate position as "mythos"), the latter is foundational to the former. Not, to be clear, the *specific* arts and their practices; keeping in conformity with the Kantian distinction between 'formal' v. 'empirical' where the former is given to disclose *conditions of possibility*, and the latter merely what has *historically come to be actual* but which knows no founding principles for its having come to be actual (which also marks the difference between the dogmatic and the critical: the latter is aware of its conditions of possibility, and therefore can grasp its extent and also its limits, that is: its *end*), we understand now that the

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[2] Of course, what I am describing is the basic structure of the Hegelian philosophy which, as we know, was a herculean effort to surpass without overturning the Kantian philosophy.

[3] Because Kant locked himself within the basic structures of *human* reason—or rather, bound by the reason of some (abstract) creature, a subject of some kind—he only seemed to have recourse to the concept 'judgment' (*Urteilskraft*) rather than its determinative ground, in Art or rather, *aesthetics*. And if we take this concept in its originary meaning as sense, then really this Critique ought to turn its attention more fundamentally to *sense* and its structure as dependent on sense-openings where a more intimate (and factice) relation between world and mind arises. Thus did I write earlier that the Kant's Critique of Judgement was somewhat awkwardly titled, given the necessity to turn to Art and offer a critique of its presuppositions. Thus, we might say that if the first Critique demonstrated two things: (a) how science (and mathematics) could be truth-making disciplines, and thereupon (b) how metaphysics could possibly be considered a 'science' (how metaphysics was possible and also necessary), which supplied the necessary justification for (a), then, if in order to complete the progression—from 'pure' reason and its conditions of possibility, to 'pure' experience and *its* conditions, which are not of mere possibility (that is only the first Critique)—then we must pass to the question of the conditions of the existence, the actuality, of experience as 'pure'. This is of course the progression of the Platonic triad: the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. As we noted previously, the latter has always troubled philosophy, and Plato's standpoint was not entirely wrong, of course: that Art is the gateway to the anarchy of difference, a perturbation of the statics of truth and morality established by imposition. Art, which creates the conditions under which we may have an experience of and with 'beauty', is more primal—even primary—in that it in fact is the originating condition of all reason, reflection, forms the ground of a truth that would find a 'form'. Plato as also with Kant (who basically follows him) wanted to *reconcile* truth and art, or the anarchy of the sensuous (which he consigned to the mere 'material' world)—but on the side of the Truth, through Logos (Reason). But what we are discovering here is that the gesture ought not be one of reconciliation, for there is in truth no break or divide whatsoever; rather the relation is one of *production*: of a form out of a *freedom* of forms and possibilities. Spinoza's formula was: Deus *siva* Natura à infinite attributes, or: Monism = Pluralism (to use Deleuze's formula for Spinozism).

territory into which the Kantian critique must necessarily move, if it would be complete, is the territory where Art rises to the level of *foundational* epistemological significance: that is, as an essential *condition* from out of which it is possible to determine the conditions of existence (the actuality) of the forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding to which Kant has occasion to find as the conditions for the possibility of an *experience* of anything. What it is that itself grounds the forms of intuition and the categories of understanding that then organizes experience with further (rational or ideational) structures is no longer the "conditions of possibility" but in fact the conditions for the *actuality* of those elements which supply an understanding of how experience is possible *in the ways that it typically arises* (i.e., under *definite conditions of existence*).

Here indeed we cross the sacred boundary that Kant erected as a propaedeutic to his Critique (that perhaps itself lacked a fully determined, systematic foundation—as we are suggesting here): the contingent and historical v. the necessary and the (synthetic) *a priori*. It is at this level (what some have perhaps mistakenly called the "pre-theoretic"—mistaken because it has not fully synthesized the conditions of existence, the actuality of the actual, and the conditions of possibility so that a recognition of the moment when the former arises, and when the latter—a specific determination of forms and categories—is needed and proceeds, as in the sciences which presuppose definite forms for intuition and categories of understanding[4]) where a kind of 'anarchy' works: the anarchy of difference which yet knows no synthesis, no principles. Yet, what flows comes to be systematic, organized, determinable by means of structures by which we think: mathematics, meaning. We cannot determine what this is *a priori* for there is a radical freedom in difference. Nevertheless, in the course of things there come to be forms, structures, and the representational apparatus to which we can associate this—in mathematics and meaning. It is on the basis of an experientially determined systematicity, that ever surprises (hence the indeterminacy at the level of history of the empirical sciences, which forever eludes the streams of philosophy deriving from Kant but which never seek to critique the transcendental critique therein laid down for one, by no means final, purpose), which we are justified in positing the fluidity or openness of the transcendental structures of the Kantian critique. But now we must find a means of articulating this more radical "critique of critique" in which difference, rather than a posited but unexamined (and therefore dogmatic) organizing principle of sameness or identity (i.e., the fixity of the Kantian forms of intuition and categories of understanding) rises to a place of absolute guiding importance. I claim that this is what Spinoza essentially discovered: a more radical *principle of difference*—hence Deleuze designates Spinoza's philosophy under the heading of "Expressionism In Philosophy".

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[4] I mean simply that while it is of course structurally true that there is a form of intuition operating within the knower-known dialectic, what forms they *actually take* is entirely open (indeterminate), and can indeed vary based on the variations of the *experiences* one undergoes. Thus, the existential conditions of actuality—the experiences—must be foundational. Saying that there is a form to space and a form to time is fine as far as it goes; but that abstract form must itself be subject to further specification, or else the critique and the analysis falls back to a kind of empty dogmatism. I am anticipating the major thesis of this essay: our "zone of safety" can only be a form of radical empiricism, in which experience rises to the level of an absolute (not to overstate our position).

What is 'expressionism'? It is a radical philosophy of difference, incompletely realized and therefore awkwardly disclosed, but radical, powerful and crucial all the same. It provides a key to solve the problem of difference and "otherness" while also allowing philosophy to reach again for actual experience—a standpoint we might call "existential empiricism". Surely Spinoza was 'rationalist'; but, I claim, the rationalist form by which his essential intuition was expressed belies an even more radical form of empiricism, which I call "existential" for it represents a pivot from struggling to operate from the standpoint of thinking about "conditions of possibility" to "conditions of existence" or, the conditions of thought that allow one to grasp the actual *as actual*. Thus, the arch-rationalist concept 'substance' is determined by means of an infinite number of *expressions*. And that it is associated with *Deus siva Natura*—God *or* Nature—is, we can now see, utterly significant, for God or Nature is the wellspring of the absolutely indeterminate freedom of coming-to-be whose law is only the law of expression itself, the range of outpouring of *differences* spilled along the landscape that is simultaneously determined in the expressions. It is an essential and primal *incompleteness* that pervades God/Nature that has tripped up philosophy, for if God/Nature is incomplete, *then a corresponding incompleteness and hence openness must persist in human reason, or for any rational being bound by sense and engaged in sense-making*.[5] For Spinoza, maximal freedom is secured for God or Nature in itself; but this unknowable zone of immanence yields the rich texture of experience that continually surprises, and that to which the human must respond with the "geometry" of determination that Spinoza reaches for when giving voice to his fundamental insight. The necessity is always too late for the kind of abstract freedom which dogmatic ethics wishes to achieve. Indeed, as perhaps Kant and then Schelling were the first to realize, and Heidegger to repeat, freedom is self-determination and thus God or Nature is precisely this expression of self-determination that, under the form of infinite expression (the infinite attributes), preserves creativity amidst the definiteness of the expressions as they arise. Here, though, Spinoza did not go far enough, and it was to be the later "monists" (James, Russell, etc.) who would pursue an inverted (or corrected) form of Spinozism, where experience and its unendingly surprising texture and reach (not a 'substance') is primary. Indeed, Spinoza captured 'experience' *as substance*, surrendering it to an absent and abstract God/Nature whose connection to the individual human being was again lost to the Judeo-Christian theology of separationism. If the human (if actually *experience*) is allowed to move to a position of fundamental concern, replacing God/Nature (and what explanatory power was purchased by this notion, we might wonder?), then Spinozism becomes radical empiricism and the positions of Spinoza's rationalism

[5] We note that Zizek, for example, has labored to interpret the entire Hegelian philosophy from the standpoint *ontological incompleteness*. We should also note that, from a different path that converges with our own, and includes the lines coming in from the German Idealist traditions, scholars (starting with Frege) are seeing the importance of 'meaning' as an ontologically significant component in the order of things. Atmanspacher, following the philosopher Gabriel Marcus, considers meaning as ontological. I mention this here simply because if 'meaning' *is* to be ontological, then there must necessarily be the kind of incompleteness Zizek, following Hegel, wants to theorize. 'Incompleteness' in ontology is anarchy by another name—what philosophy after Plato has always feared. Hence, Kant's inability to finalize his Third Critique squarely in the domain of experience, for it is bound up with the anarchy of incompleteness—the essential freedom of God/Nature—wherefrom definite, although variable, forms of intuition (space, time, etc.) and categories of understanding (substance, unity, etc.) arise as conditioned by the *specific character of experience*, which is free if God/Nature is.

finally melt away, leaving behind the infinity of the *attributes*, naked, without reference to the centrality of *substance*. A true, more radical 'Expressionism' is finally found in philosophy, and Spinoza can indeed be considered to be the "Prince of Philosophy" as Deleuze once famously designated him.

Our discovery of the nature of this "zone of safety" and that it consists in difference, freedom and experience, might seem anticlimactic since, of course, it is not new—or at least what is new is the path that we have taken in order to arrive at what is already accepted as the case. This finally, is a place that may operate free from metaphysics as such—that is, as delineated by the idealism/realism divide, and the many positions that occupy it (which take the form 'everything is basically X' where X is mind, matter, etc.). In order not to repeat the errors and foibles of others who have attempted a similar move, and found safety in empiricism, we should however first distinguish between metaphysics and ontology.

The latter is a profounder inquiry, and it is one that takes us into the heart of the problem of the conditions of existence and of the actual, which attends to our notion 'experience' as a foundation. The metaphysical, despite the aspersions it would seem that we have cast on it, following the venerable line from Hume through the Kantian revolution, is indeed something that one cannot do without, and perhaps not something that one every truly escapes from; for it supplies a means of grasping what in pure experience is only given as experience. Kant was to a certain extent correct to defend the necessity of metaphysics in its drive to provide finality, closure—explanatory or epistemic closure. However, our passage to the zone of safety outside of the metaphysical with our new position ("existential empiricism") simultaneously affords us a proper perspective on what *use* (practical in the deployment in the realm of *empirical scientific theory*) there is for metaphysics (even in its classical, 'dogmatic') forms: and that is its use in theorizing nature. Indeed, metaphysics has always been an aid—and sometimes a hindrance—to the sciences which attempt to grasp the actual as actual, but by also offering a law in pursuit of the ancient Greek 'arche'. (Indeed our historical thesis here is that metaphysics is what resulted from the ancient Greek pursuit of this 'arche' in a proto-scientific vein that, later in the philosophy of Socrates, was conjugated—perhaps illegitimately—for ethics and morality and then re-transcribed as this pursuit of 'arche', now under the obscure notion of *ta kalon*, or the infamous 'Good' of Plato.[6])

[6] Philosophy almost immediately thereafter had to labor under this illegitimate and ultimately strained inversion accomplished by Plato. For example, Aristotle famously had to begin his own treatment of the question of ethics, of moral training, by first offering a trenchant critique of 'the good', removing it from the obscurity of Plato's 'forms' to the practice of *informing the soul (body/mind)* with a principle of reason, that is: Aristotelian ethics is the production of the relevant (ethical) forms *in time*, from out of the freedom of things as they are given. Thus, from this standpoint, all ethics is nothing but the creation of embedded or embodied forms by which to live—with, of course, the lingering Platonic difficulty, for Aristotle, of the nature and origins of the *ends* to which such specifically *ethical* forms are devoted. For Aristotle, it would seem that those ends are *already fixed* metaphysically, and hence discoverable by an act of theoretical reason that is no longer 'practical' in its concerns. To the extent to which *even the ends are open* is the absolute end of the Platonic-Aristotelian system, and indeed the end of philosophy *as such*. We are familiar with this thesis from Heidegger, but of course it was in essence the thesis pursued by Nietzsche–his greatest thought, for which Deleuze gave us the formula: "the being of becoming".

If we now understand that we can retreat to a standpoint of positional neutrality regarding the metaphysical posits which a scientific explanation has recourse to employ (either explicitly or not), we now see that the true revolution in science—possibly not yet fully recognized in philosophy, because of the failure to properly follow the Kantian critique to the standpoint of the "critique of critique" and finally to "existential empiricism" in which actuality is finally reached, even in the manner in which Kant arguably had first set out to discover—has always been to undertake a dialectic of confrontation between the metaphysically determined (or conditioned) posits of *theory* and the infinite expressive unfolding of the endlessly surprising world of *nature*—which is God, if you will, offering a continual *test* to a thought that would seek to find uniformity, categoriality, universality, and, in a word, *law*. Science from this standpoint is the discovery of the law of difference and freedom to which God/Nature subjects itself, to which we may also, when given definite form, be subjected in the form of *technology* (technology then is the 'ethical'[7] form given by a discovery of *a* conditioned form through which Nature/God comes to express itself, and to the extent to which there are an infinite number of attributions to be had here, technology, as for the science that conditions its discovery and specific form it takes, will be infinitely changeable; but then, we already know that both are *historically bound*). This pivot is made possible once we accept the distinction (first offered by Heidegger) between metaphysics and ontology. It was a failure to recognize this primary distinction that doom, for example, the various (would be) empiricists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the positivists, in their "logical" form under the Vienna Circle, for example, being perhaps the most infamous in the history of philosophy.

Empiricism received its more robustly honest foundations (if only they remain implicit as *systematic* foundations, following the Kantian directive articulated clearly in the latter's *Prolegomena*) in the work of James; but its more rigorous phenomenological form was explored by the positivist (so-called) Ernst Mach, whose philosophy seemed, unfortunately, to run aground on the problem of 'psychologism' to which many of the empiricists and phenomenologists of the time seem to fall victim (although the charge is really a form of 'subjectivism'; and so, if the rigorous foundations of critique after the fashion of Kant are pursued to the standpoint of the "critique of critique", we can see how 'subjectivism' or 'psychologism' really misses the more fundamental standpoint of experience as, e.g., we find it in the philosophy of James). The specific task here is to understand the structure of the 'phenomena' as a sensuous matter, that is: as a function of the perceptual apparatus and more generally the sensory systems of the specific human subject. It's this specificity that ruins, for the classical philosopher, the generality they are under the impression that they must achieve (even Kant here is guilty)—whence the 'psychologism', which is a cover for the classical philosopher's prejudices. As all specific sciences arise out of experience, it follows that (properly understood) all science is a form of "psychology" that is, the study of the structure of 'psyche'. Thus stated (we see psychologism directly now!) it makes science into a mere contingent affair—but what of the *universal* truths that it is supposed to discover, the 'mind-independence' of its discoveries, and so on? We see 'realism' creeping back into the question

[7] If 'ethics' is 'habit' then technology is the 'habit' of God/Nature as implicit in the scientific truth so far disclosed under the specific attributions to which that science attaches itself.

here. The reply: yes, but what about the possibility of scientific *change*? What under Aristotle was 'discovered' is no longer accepted; it was surpassed by Newton.

The Machian empiricist has a readymade answer: yes, but the phenomenological structure articulated by Aristotle isn't 'false'—it is simply limited and conditioned by particular features and assumptions we no longer hold. All science is thusly conditioned, which conditions also condition the perceptual context (the phenomenological context) within which the sciences produce their truth in relation to the becomings of nature, which we seek to see, encounter and then formally represent. That science has hitherto only sought to describe 'matter' forgetting both 'mind' and the cross-wise 'psychophysical' relations between the two domains (which are nothing but two among an infinity of attributions of God/Nature, according to the Spinozist standpoint) leads to the false impression (first critiqued by Kant) of its discovering supposed 'mind-independent' truths. Of course, isolating the attention of the theoretical and experimental sciences only to the domain of matter (i.e., "Nature" in its purely physical aspects) has led to centuries of overlooking not only 'mind' but the underlying psychophysical structure—neutral between matter and mind—of Nature, wherefrom we understand that mathematics and meaning are both part of that structure, sometimes in surprising ways. Mind (seen as 'meaning') determines a part of the structure of Nature; but so too does Matter (seen in mathematical terms) determine, for its side, a part of the structure of Nature. The crosswise (psychophysical) relations then determine a far wider and more comprehensive structure which neither the sciences of Matter nor those of Mind can individually grasp and hence represent. They are what we might call the 'excessive remainder' where mathematics and meaning correlate in surprising ways, and where, in particular, meaning plays an ontological and not just 'subjective' role in the overall structure of God/Nature. Insofar as meaning is actively ontological, the resulting participatory ontology, consonant with our thesis of ontological indeterminacy, evidently challenges the Spinozist trappings we have attempted to give this point of view. But, we have seen the progression of thought that may correct for what was missing in Spinoza; jettisoning the abstract form 'God/Nature' for the nakedness of the infinite attributes in themselves, finally freed from essential reference to the seeming central identity 'God/Nature' we find (by means of the concept 'difference' as Deleuze attempted to articulate it in his philosophy) nothing but the philosophy of radical empiricism, a "pluralistic universe" to borrow a formula from James.

We finally arrive at the basic standpoint that indeed allows us to return to the Kantian progression of Critiques, which is one of surprise and true discovery (perhaps 'disclosure' to gesture towards a Heideggerian notion). Scientific discovery, and change, are possible only if experience is fundamental to it, experiment in confrontation with theory drives the process in history, and ontological indeterminacy (incompleteness, more specifically) is the philosophical ground of its self-understanding (that is, its foundation). It needs metaphysics, but it is not itself metaphysical in any way; it is surely an ontological pursuit, bound up with the question of "being" whose experiential origins, and the conditions of its actuality in the subjects for whom it is a meaningful pursuit, have yet remained obscure (on account of which I once said that science is *in search of itself as a subject*, constituting in effect it's own "being-in-the-world" which in sometimes obscure ways contributes to its own knowledge production, for itself). Now, let us turn to the method itself.

1. Introduction

The scientific method, founded upon a metaphysics that privileges the material, has achieved unparalleled success in describing the physical world. This very success, however, has been predicated on the power of **Constructive Theories**—explanations that derive phenomena from the causal mechanics of their micro-physical parts. This approach, while powerful, is rooted in a physicalist ontology that proves inadequate when confronted with domains of reality where efficient causation is not primary. Consequently, the nature of subjective experience, the structure of meaning, and the pervasive reports of exceptional or anomalous experiences have been relegated to a scientific netherworld, treated as epiphenomenal noise rather than fundamental data. Science therefore lacks an adequate framework for investigating the deeper nature of psychophysical relations, the structure of exceptional human experiences (EHEs), and the scientifically baffling "high strangeness" (so-called) associated with phenomena such as UAP. To make progress, these domains call for a different methodological approach—a **Principle Theory**—that does not begin by reducing them to their supposed parts.

This paper develops and proposes such a Principle Theory, which operates, as we will explain at length, under the heading of "**Existential Empiricism**." It is a philosophical and methodological standpoint grounded in a formal distinction between **Ontology**—the dynamic, pre-conceptual ground of lived, situated experience—and **Metaphysics**—the stable, formal structures we abstract from ontology to enable scientific inquiry. The framework's core metaphysical posit, which follows the pioneering work of Harald Atmanspacher and his colleagues over decades of philosophical, formal and scientific work, is a **Decompositional Dual-Aspect Monism**, in which Mind and Matter are co-equal aspects emerging from a psychophysically neutral reality. This structure allows us to formally account for the full spectrum of psychophysical relations, from the everyday to the anomalous manifestations of what I have elsewhere called the "**Excessive Remainder**" that (arguably at least) exceeds the mind-matter distinction itself.

To build this case, the paper proceeds as follows. It first establishes the philosophical necessity for our standpoint by tracing a critical path from the Kantian impasse to the synthesis of Existential Empiricism. It then systematically articulates the framework's formal and metaphysical components, including its dual-aspect ontology, its state-space representation, its typology of psychophysical correlations, and its placeholder for a dynamical law (that modulates or evolves the states in the relevant phase space). The framework's explanatory power is then demonstrated through a series of progressively challenging case studies analyzing the neuroscience of volition, the symbolic patterns in anomalistics, and the evidently more puzzling (possibly "high-strangeness") aspects of the now-famous 2004 Nimitz UAP encounter. Finally, it outlines the new scientific methodology that emerges from this work, distinguishing between forensic and proactive (i.e., stricter experimental and observational) modes of scientific inquiry and concluded by defining what we might consider to be the ultimate scientific challenge: what I will call the "Semiotic Challenge" posed by truly anomalous phenomena—some of which, we must consider, might be due (at least in part) to the operations of a nonhuman intelligence of unknown origin (a possibility about which, especially after decades of SETI research, we are increasingly challenged

to think carefully as more exoplanets present with the conditions for the formation of organic life).

2. The Philosophical Groundwork: From Kantian Critique to Existential Empiricism

2.1 The Kantian Impasse: The Limits of Transcendental Critique

Our analysis begins with Immanuel Kant, whose 'critical' project represented a necessary and revolutionary attempt to save metaphysics from its dogmatic slumber. Through his famed "Copernican Revolution," Kant proposed that our experience of the world necessarily conforms to the *a priori* structures of the mind, rather than the mind passively conforming to an transcendently unknowable external reality. This transcendental turn that Kant inaugurated philosophically was designed to rigorously determine the conditions of possibility for knowledge itself but rigorously understanding the nature and function of human experience, thereby defining the legitimate scope and limits of reason where speculation had previously run rampant.

Despite the power of this move, the Kantian philosophy contains its own unexamined ground, a limitation analogous to the pre-theoretic 'ego' in the Cartesian system it sought to overcome. The error lies in the posited stasis of the mind's organizing principles. The forms of intuition (space, time) and the categories of the understanding (causation, substance, unity, etc.) are presented as fixed and universal structures, yet the critique does not provide a principle that could account for their origin or, most importantly, the conditions and possibility of their change or alteration. This presupposed fixity creates an ultimately untenable dichotomy between 'things' and 'appearances' and leaves the framework unable to answer a crucial question: whence the forms of intuition themselves (the formative ground of experience itself, according to Kant)?

The path beyond this impasse, however, is suggested within Kant's own work, I argue, specifically in his *Critique of Judgement*. To complete its own project, the critique must become a "critique of critique"—an encounter with the generative domain of difference from which forms arise.[8] This is the territory of Art and aesthetics, which Kant's third Critique begins to explore. Here, the inquiry would seem to shift from the "conditions of possibility" for experience to the more primary "conditions of existence"—the conditions for the *actuality* of the very forms and categories that structure experience. In this, the aesthetic domain of sense (*aisthesis*) reveals itself as foundational to the philosophical domain of reason (*logos*), pointing toward a more primary, generative process that the static Kantian architectonic could not fully contain.

2.2 The Spinozist Turn: Difference, Expression, and Ontological Incompleteness

The generative process that remained outside the Kantian architectonic requires a philosophical

[8] The Japanese philosopher Tanabe was perhaps one of only a handful of philosophers to recognize the importance of this seemingly self-undermining standpoint of meta-critical reflexivity (something that perhaps achieved a pitch of absurdity during the so-called "postmodern turn" in philosophy and theory in the 1980s and 1990s).

framework grounded not in static identity but in radical difference. We find the key to such a framework in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, whose work, I argue, represents a more radical form of empiricism disguised in rationalist form. As Gilles Deleuze articulated, Spinoza's thought is best understood as a profound "Expressionism": a philosophy where Being is not a static noun but an active, expressive verb. This provides the conceptual tools to move beyond the fixed categories of the Kantian system.

From this standpoint, Spinoza's famous formula, *Deus sive Natura* (God or Nature), is not a reference to a fixed, self-identical 'substance' in the classical metaphysical sense. Rather, it must be understood as the wellspring of the absolutely indeterminate freedom of coming-to-be whose law is only the law of expression itself. The one substance does not exist prior to its expressions (the infinite attributes); it exists *in* and *as* its continuous, creative outpouring of difference. This recasts the Spinozist system from one of static necessity to one of dynamic, immanent creativity, where, as Deleuze states, "Monism = Pluralism".

This re-reading of Spinoza establishes the central principle for our framework: **Ontological Incompleteness**. If the ground of reality—God/Nature—is itself an incomplete and open process, then a corresponding incompleteness and hence openness must persist in human reason. This principle fundamentally subverts the classical philosophical quest for a final, closed system of truth. It posits that reality is a continual process of "the being of becoming," and therefore any scientific or metaphysical framework must also be constitutively open, provisional, and subject to revision in its encounter with the endlessly surprising world of nature. This ontological ground of openness is what makes scientific change possible and the appearance of anomalous phenomena an expected feature of reality, rather than a mere error to be dismissed.

2.3 The Pivot to Empiricism: From Abstract Substance to Lived Experience

While Spinoza's philosophy provides the crucial insight into a reality of expressive difference and ontological incompleteness, its rationalist formulation ultimately limits its reach. Spinoza did not go far enough. By capturing the radical freedom of experience within the abstract metaphysical concept of a single, unifying 'substance'—*Deus sive Natura*—his framework risked losing the connection to the individual human being, surrendering the immanence of experience to an absent and abstract God/Nature that echoes a theology of separationism. In this form, the creative, expressive power of Being remains problematically tethered to a central identity that stands apart from the lived reality of subjects.

The necessary correction, therefore, is to allow actual human experience to move to a position of fundamental concern, replacing the abstract notion of God/Nature as the philosophical starting point. This pivot transforms the entire system. When the focus shifts from the abstract unity of substance to the direct, lived reality of its expressions, Spinozism becomes radical empiricism. By jettisoning the central identity of 'God/Nature', we are left with the nakedness of the infinite attributes in themselves, freed from their subservience to any unifying principle. This is the "pluralistic universe" articulated by William James, a standpoint, I argue, of radical difference,

freedom *and* experience that operates free from the traditional metaphysical divide between idealism and realism. This direct encounter with the plurality of experience constitutes what we might call the "zone of safety" from which our own framework can be launched.

2.4 Synthesis: Existential Empiricism

Our passage to a standpoint of positional neutrality grounded in experience—a "zone of safety"—might seem to risk the same charge of "psychologism" or "subjectivism" that plagued earlier empiricists like Ernst Mach. The various positivist-empiricist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries failed because they could not escape this charge. The key to avoiding their errors, and to properly founding our own framework, lies in making a crucial distinction first offered by Martin Heidegger: the distinction between **ontology** and **metaphysics**.

We define **ontology** as the profounder inquiry into the conditions of existence and of the actual, which takes our direct, lived experience as its foundation. It is the pre-theoretic, dynamic, and embodied engagement with the "being of becoming." **Metaphysics**, in contrast, is the necessary intellectual move that supplies a means of grasping what in pure experience is only given as experience. It provides the stable structures, universal forms, and conceptual closures that scientific theories require to make sense of the world and to achieve explanatory power. Metaphysics is the tool we use to build models of the world; ontology is the world's lived reality with which those models are in a constant, dialectical confrontation.

This distinction allows us to formally define our standpoint. **Existential Empiricism** is the synthesis of William James's radical empiricism, which provides the **ontological** foundation in the primacy of lived experience, with the existential insight of Heidegger, which provides the understanding of the scientist as a situated, meaning-making **being-in-the-world**. This synthesis avoids subjectivism because it recognizes the vital role of **metaphysics**. Science is not merely subjective psychology; it achieves stability and intersubjectivity through its metaphysical posits. However, because its ground is ontological and existential, it is always open to radical change when its metaphysical models fail in their encounter with the endlessly surprising expressions of Nature. This new standpoint allows us to finally construct a more adequate metaphysics—one that goes beyond the exclusive focus on 'matter' to include 'mind' and, most importantly, the crosswise psychophysical relations that determine the "excessive remainder," where mathematics and meaning correlate in surprising ways.

3. The Metaphysics and Formalism of Existential Empiricism

3.1 The Core Postulate: Decompositional Dual-Aspect Monism

The metaphysical framework of Existential Empiricism is a form of **dual-aspect monism**. This position considers the mental and physical domains of reality not as two interacting substances (as in Cartesian dualism) nor as a primary substance and its derivative (as in physicalism or idealism),

but as two fundamental, irreducible **aspects** of a single, underlying reality that is in itself neither mental nor physical.

Crucially, following Atmanspacher we adopt the **decompositional** variety of dual-aspect monism, which is conceptually inspired by the holism of quantum theory. In this view, the underlying reality is conceived as a radically holistic and undivided whole. The mental and physical aspects are not pre-existing elements that are composed into larger aggregates; rather, they emerge through a process of **decomposition** or differentiation of this primary whole. This stands in direct contrast to compositional "neutral monism," which posits psychophysically neutral *elements* that are built up into mental or physical configurations.

The primary advantage of a decompositional framework is that it provides a natural and elegant explanation for the existence of mind-matter correlations. When an undivided whole is decomposed into parts, correlations between those parts are a necessary and generic consequence; they are remnants of the wholeness that is lost in the process of distinction. This model, therefore, does not need to awkwardly insert psychophysical connections as a secondary step; it predicts them from its most basic premise.

3.2 The Spinozist Ontology: Substance, Attributes, and Modes

To add formal rigor to our dual-aspect model, we adopt the specific ontological terminology of Baruch Spinoza. This allows us to move beyond a simple mind-matter duality and conceptualize a reality of infinite expressive potential.[9] The key terms we have are:

- **Substance:** We equate Spinoza's concept of a single, infinite, and self-caused **Substance**—which he identified as *Deus sive Natura* (God or Nature)—with our ontic, psychophysically neutral (PPN) domain, the *unus mundus*. It is the singular, underlying reality from which all else is expressed.
- **Attributes:** The PPN is knowable only through its **Attributes**, which are what the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of Substance. Spinoza posits that Substance has infinite Attributes, but that only two are typically accessible to the human intellect: **Thought** (our Mental aspect, M) and **Extension** (our Physical aspect, P).
- **Modes:** All particular, finite things that exist are **Modes**. They are the specific modifications or expressions of Substance under a given Attribute. For example, a particular idea is a finite mode of the Attribute of Thought, while a particular rock is a finite mode of the Attribute of Extension.

In this Spinozist ontology, our familiar reality of minds and physical objects consists of the finite

[9] Although we should pause to not that if we were to be strictly accurate in describing our metaphysical stance, we should not call it "dual-aspect monism" at all: as Spinoza himself argued, there are (at least in principle) an *infinite number of attributes* by which the "one" substance is accessed through the "modes" that finite things express under a given attribute (from among the infinite number of them). Hence a better term perhaps is "pluralistic monism" or "infinite-aspects monism".

modes of *just two* of an infinite number of Attributes. This immediately raises the question of the nature of these other Attributes and the possibility of their manifestation. This extra conceptual apparatus, as we will see in a moment, is a powerful and heretofore underutilized conceptual resource in the Spinoza philosophy which we aim to deploy.

3.3 A Formalism for Infinite Attributes and the "Excessive Remainder"

Our initial state-space analogy must be generalized to accommodate the infinite attributes of the one Substance. The full space of epistemic aspects is represented not merely by the combination of Mind (M) and Matter (P), but by an infinite tensor product space composed of all possible attributes: M ⊗ P ⊗ X ⊗ Y ⊗ ..., where {X, Y, ...} represents the infinite set of other possible attributes by which to access Nature (or "God" if you prefer).

Within this generalized structure, the state of the psychophysically neutral (PPN) Substance, $|\Psi_{PPN}\rangle$ remains a holistic, non-product state. It cannot be factored into independent states corresponding to each attribute:

$$|\Psi_{PPN}\rangle \neq |\phi_M\rangle \otimes |\psi_P\rangle$$

or in general, for the more complex Spinozean space, we should have:

$$|\Psi_{PPN}\rangle \neq |\phi_M\rangle \otimes |\psi_P\rangle \otimes |\chi_X\rangle \otimes |\upsilon_Y\rangle \otimes \dots$$

This non-separability is the formal expression of ontological incompleteness and the "entangled" nature of the one Substance, that is: a formal expression of the "monism" or basic undivided wholeness of reality (which nevertheless implicitly "contains" as possible decompositional subspaces an infinitely rich landscape of expressive attributions by which to access—and hence understand—Nature (or, again, "God" if you prefer).

We can now formally define the **"Excessive Remainder"** as the set of all attributes {X, Y, Z, ...} that are not our familiar M or P or do not correspond to their typical or "stable" patterns of behavior and activity. The question of epistemic access to this Remainder is central. Our framework proposes that we can access these other attributes when their manifestations "intersect" or mix with those of those to which we do have access, following Spinoza: Mind and Matter. An exceptional experience, or Induced Correlation, can be modeled as a projection of $|\Psi_{PPN}\rangle$ into a mixed state. For example, a projection could yield a state of the form $|\phi_M\rangle \otimes |\chi_X\rangle$. Such an event would be experienced by a human subject primarily as a mental phenomenon (due to the $|\phi_M\rangle$ component), but one possessing a strange, irreducible, and anomalous quality imparted by the $|\chi_X\rangle$ component. This provides a formal mechanism for how a new "order of being" can become manifest within our familiar experiential domains.

3.4 The Postulate of Universal Access and Non-Categorial Experience

The existence of infinite other attributes beyond Mind and Matter raises a profound epistemic

challenge. If these "orders of being" are absolutely inaccessible, then they can do no explanatory work. To resolve this, our framework adopts a bold but necessary postulate: **we assume that all attributes are, in principle, accessible to any intelligent agency**, regardless of its specific form or origin.

The immediate and radical consequence of this postulate is that there must exist **modes of experience for a subject that are neither mental nor physical**, nor even mixtures thereof. These are experiences in another sense altogether, corresponding to a direct manifestation of a "pure" X, Y, or Z attribute. Our framework identifies the vast and historically persistent data of what is traditionally called **mystical experiences** (of the sort, e..g., James famously examined) as primary *phenomenological evidence* for these non-categorial states of being. An Existential Empiricist, committed to taking all forms of experience as primary data, must treat these accounts not as delusion or anti-scientific religion, but as potential encounters with other modes of being that are disruptive of the stable forms that underwrite, e.g., the traditional Kantian forms of intuition and categories of understanding.

This encounter with a new, non-categorial order of being is best understood as an experience of the **Kantian sublime**. It is a profoundly existential moment that shatters the subject's established metaphysical framework (and importantly: the metaphysical framework of the *practitioners of the sciences*); the familiar forms of intuition and categories of understanding, including the fundamental distinction between mind and matter, are rendered inadequate. This "sublime rupture" is not a mere failure of cognition, or (worse) a derangement of mind, but a **creative opportunity**, forcing a radical disruption that can call forth new concepts and thus new sciences.

Crucially, this encounter with radical "alterity" or **Deleuzean difference** need not be external or agential. Before it is recognized as operating within other non-human forms of intelligence, it can form right within the human itself. The "alien" is first an encounter with another mode of one's *own being*. While a full exegesis of this profound implication is beyond our current scope, it establishes that the potential for new knowledge and new science is grounded in the infinite, creative capacity of Being itself, to which we are always, in principle, open.

3.5 System Dynamics and Stability

To describe the dynamics of the psychophysical system, we first model the landscape upon which its evolution occurs. Following Atmanspacher, we adopt a state-space approach wherein a generalized potential function, V, governs the stability of any given state. Within this landscape, we can systematically characterize three major classes of mental states based on their stability against perturbations, which correspond directly to different modes of experience.

1. **Categorial States:** These are **asymptotically stable states** located in the minima of the potential V. They correspond to activated and actualized mental representations with definite intentional and phenomenal content. These stable states, or "attractors," form the basis of ordinary, structured experience.
2. **Non-Categorial States:** These are **marginally stable states** existing where the potential V is flat. In these states, no specific representation is activated, corresponding to unstructured

experiences like “pure presence.”

3. **Acategorial States:** These are **unstable states** located at the maxima or saddle points of the potential V, between stable categorial states. It is precisely at these points of instability that creative leaps and the manifestation of **induced correlations** become possible.

To model the evolution of states within this landscape, we postulate an abstract dynamical law for the underlying ontic (PPN) domain. This law is a **formal placeholder** whose specific structure must be derived from future empirical inquiry. Drawing on the formal analogy with quantum theory, we postulate a Schrödinger-like equation for the evolution of the state vector with respect to a pre-temporal evolution parameter, τ:

$$i\hbar\frac{d}{d\tau}|\Psi_{PPN}(\tau)\rangle = \hat{H}_{PPN}|\Psi_{PPN}(\tau)\rangle$$

Here, $|\Psi_{PPN}\rangle$ is the state vector in the ontic domain; τ is an abstract evolution parameter in the atemporal state space; and $\hat{H}_{PPN}$ is a generalized “**evolution operator**” whose structure determines the potential landscape V; and ħ is a constant analogous to Planck’s constant, representing a fundamental scale of “psychophysical action”. This law provides a formal language for describing the dynamics of the *unus mundus* itself.

3.6 The Observer Effect and Contextual Projection

The evolution of the state vector $|\Psi_{PPN}\rangle$ as governed by the evolution operator $\hat{H}_{PPN}$ describes the unfolding of potentiality in the ontic domain. However, this evolution does not, by itself, determine the actual events experienced in the epistemic aspects of mind and matter. The decomposition of the holistic PPN state into specific mental and physical states requires a measurement-like act, and this act brings the context of the observer to the forefront.

In our framework, the context provided by the observer—their intentions, assumptions, experimental apparatus, and adopted reality model—serves to select a specific **measurement basis** for the projection. The choice of basis is what poses a specific “question” to reality. The underlying PPN dynamics governs the probabilities of the possible answers, but it is the observer’s contextual framing that determines which questions can be asked.

Therefore, the deterministic evolution $|\Psi_{PPN}(\tau)\rangle$ is linked to the phenomenal world probabilistically. The dynamical law determines the likelihood of projecting into a particular pair of M-P eigenstates at a given “moment” τ, but the actual decomposition is a contextual event. This is where the observer’s meaning-attribution enters the formal picture: the selection of a basis is itself an act of imposing a meaningful structure on reality, and the resulting projection is the co-created answer to that meaningfully posed question.

4. A Typology of Psychophysical Correlations

4.1 The Substantiation of Correlation: Meaning

The decompositional nature of our framework guarantees that acausal correlations between the mental (M) and physical (P) aspects must exist. The crucial question then becomes: what substantiates this connection? If it is neither efficient causation nor pure chance, what is its nature? This framework posits that the substantiating principle for all psychophysical correlations is **meaning**.

To move beyond a purely intuitive notion, we adopt a distinction inspired by Gottlob Frege and applied to this context by Atmanspacher and Prentner. We unpack the concept of meaning into two distinct but related layers:

1. **Reference (Intentionality):** This refers to the surface-level "aboutness" of a mental state. It is the direct, phenomenal experience of a mental representation referring to an object or event in the world-model. This is the aspect of meaning most accessible to experience.
2. **Sense:** This refers to the deeper structure, the "mode of presentation" or the way in which a reference relation is given. In our framework, Sense is not arbitrary but is grounded in the implicit, archetypal patterns of the ontic PPN domain. The Sense of a correlation constrains the range of possible referential meanings an observer can experience.

Therefore, every psychophysical correlation—from the most mundane to the most exceptional—is a meaningful event. The difference between them lies in the *type* of correlation and the *degree* to which its underlying Sense becomes explicitly experienced.

4.2 Structural Correlations: The Baseline of Reality

The first and most pervasive type of psychophysical correlation is **structural**. Structural correlations are the stable, persistent, and reproducible connections between the mental and physical aspects that constitute the baseline of our ordinary experience. These are the everyday mind-matter relations that we take for granted, such as standard psychosomatic correlations and the widely studied neural correlates of consciousness. These correlations are so robust and reliable that they form the very fabric of our subjective reality model.

A defining feature of structural correlations is that they are typically experienced with little to no attributed **meaning**. They are so ubiquitous and predictable that they become phenomenologically transparent. We do not marvel at the meaningful connection between our intention to move a limb and the limb's movement; it is simply an expected feature of reality. Heuristically, we can characterize these baseline correlations as having a vanishing deviation from the ordinary, or $\Delta(M - P) = 0$.

Within our framework, these stable and reproducible correlations are understood as manifestations of the most fundamental and universally active archetypal patterns within the ontic PPN domain. Archetypes corresponding to basic epistemic principles such as unity and duality are always and everywhere constellated, giving rise to the stable, structural correlations that form the predictable world of our everyday lives.

4.3 Induced Correlations as New Orders of Being

That an exceptional experience is given to us in experience—that it is *actual*—implies it must be *possible*. There must, therefore, exist some dynamical law that could potentially explain its coming to be what it is. **Induced correlations**, which constitute these exceptional experiences, can be understood as novel "orders of being" wherein the ordinary distinctions between mind and matter no longer "behave" as expected. The more that aspects of mind and matter seem bound or caught up with each other in a phenomenon, the more that phenomenon exceeds their typical boundaries and appears as a direct manifestation of the PPN domain itself.

In Spinozist terms, these new orders of being inhabit the much more expansive domain of the infinite attributes of the "one substance." They are the expression of the **Excessive Remainder**—that which is irreducible to either Mind (Thought) or Matter (Extension). The classical error when encountering this Excessive Remainder has been to posit new metaphysical realms, or new "dimensions" of the specifically physical world. Such moves are misguided. Our framework avoids this by keeping the metaphysics tempered by the Spinozist simplicity of one substance, while allowing the expressions of its infinite attributes to be an exhibition of the fundamental incompleteness of Nature/God. This necessitates new concepts and sciences unique to these domains, just as physics operates within the closure of the material and psychology within the closure of the mental.

4.4 The Dynamics of Scientific Discovery: From the Sublime to a New Paradigm

The emergence of these new sciences is driven by a profound existential dynamic. The encounter with a new order of being—the Excessive Remainder—is an encounter with the **sublime**, as Kant realized in his Third Critique. It is a profoundly existential encounter with the openness of nature sufficient to produce a moment of creative becoming of the concepts, categories, and forms of intuition we need to domesticate this sublime rupture of the known and familiar.

This process *is* the production and formation of **science itself**. The creative moment, born from the sublime encounter, calls forth a new paradigm. This new paradigm establishes the conditions of explanatory closure and the potential for technological appropriation of the new order of being that was disclosed by the exceptional experience. Our framework, therefore, is not merely descriptive; it is a meta-theory of scientific change. It predicts that encounters with truly anomalous phenomena, such as UAP, are not simply data points to be rejected by old frameworks, but are catalysts for the necessary evolution of science itself, demanding the creation of new disciplines adequate to their nature.

5. System Dynamics and Evolution

5.1 Stability and State-Space Dynamics

To describe the dynamics of the psychophysical system, we first model the landscape upon which its evolution occurs. We adopt a state-space approach wherein a generalized potential function, V,

governs the stability of any given state. Within this landscape, we can systematically characterize three major classes of mental states based on their stability against perturbations, which correspond directly to different modes of experience.

1. **Categorial States:** These are **asymptotically stable states** located in the minima of the potential V. They correspond to activated and actualized mental representations with definite intentional and phenomenal content. These stable states, or "attractors," form the basis of ordinary, structured experience.
2. **Non-Categorial States:** These are **marginally stable states** existing where the potential V is flat. In these states, no specific representation is activated, corresponding to unstructured experiences like "pure presence" or the direct manifestation of an attribute from the Excessive Remainder.
3. **Acategorial States:** These are **unstable states** located at the maxima or saddle points of the potential V, between stable categorial states. It is precisely at these points of instability that creative leaps and the manifestation of **induced correlations** become possible.

[Figure 3: A generalized potential landscape illustrating the stability of different classes of mental states.]

5.2 A Placeholder for a Dynamical Law

To model the evolution of states within this landscape, we postulate an abstract dynamical law for the underlying ontic PPN domain. It is crucial to emphasize that this law is a **formal placeholder** whose specific structure must be derived from future empirical inquiry. Drawing on the formal analogy with quantum theory, we postulate a Schrödinger-like equation for the evolution of the state vector $|\Psi_{PPN}(\tau)\rangle$ with respect to a pre-temporal evolution parameter, τ:

$$i\hbar\frac{d}{d\tau}|\Psi_{PPN}(\tau)\rangle = \hat{H}_{PPN}|\Psi_{PPN}(\tau)\rangle$$

Here, $|\Psi_{PPN}(\tau)\rangle$ is the state vector in the ontic domain; τ is an abstract evolution parameter in the atemporal state space, $\hat{H}_{PPN}$ is a generalized "evolution operator" whose structure determines the potential landscape V and $\hbar$ is a constant analogous to Planck's constant, representing a fundamental scale of psychophysical action. This law provides a formal language for describing the dynamics of the *unus mundus* itself. A core desideratum for any future elaboration of this law is that it must obey a **correspondence principle**: when projected into the physical aspect, it must reproduce the known laws of physics, such as quantum theory and general relativity, in their appropriate domains of validity.

5.3 The Observer Effect and Contextual Projection

The evolution of the state vector $|\Psi_{PPN}\rangle$ as governed by the evolution operator $\hat{H}_{PPN}$ describes the unfolding of potentiality in the ontic domain. However, this evolution does not, by itself,

determine the actual events experienced in the epistemic aspects of mind and matter. The decomposition of the holistic PPN state into specific mental and physical states requires a measurement-like act, and this act brings the context of the observer to the forefront.

In our framework, the context provided by the observer—their intentions, assumptions, experimental apparatus, and adopted reality model—serves to select a specific **measurement basis** for the projection. The choice of basis is what poses a specific "question" to reality. The underlying PPN dynamics governs the probabilities of the possible answers, but it is the observer's contextual framing that determines which questions can be asked. The deterministic evolution of $|\Psi_{PPN}(\tau)\rangle$ is thus linked to the phenomenal world *probabilistically*; the actual decomposition is a contextual event. This is where the observer's meaning-attribution enters the formal picture: the selection of a basis is itself an act of imposing a meaningful structure on reality, and the resulting projection is the co-created answer to that meaningfully posed question.

6. Case Study I: Correspondence with Conventional Science (Volition)

6.1 The Phenomenon: Intentional Action and Its Puzzles

The experience of intentional action—willing a bodily movement and seeing it occur—represents the paradigm case of a **local** mind-body correlation, a stabilized and habituated instance of the broader, non-local psychophysical reality. When this seemingly simple phenomenon is placed under the microscope of neuroscience, its supposed simplicity dissolves. The landmark experiments conducted by Benjamin Libet and replicated since have demonstrated that a distinct pattern of neural activity, known as the "readiness potential" (*Bereitschaftspotential*), can be detected in the brain several hundred milliseconds *before* an individual reports having the conscious awareness or intention to act. This finding creates a profound puzzle: if the neural precursors for an action exist before the conscious will to act, what role does consciousness play?

6.2 Conventional Interpretations and Their Limits

The temporal discrepancy between the onset of the readiness potential and the subject's reported awareness of intention presents a profound challenge to conventional scientific models. Operating within a physicalist metaphysics and adhering to the doctrine of the **causal closure of the physical**, these models are compelled to interpret the temporal sequence as a linear causal chain. If a physical event (the readiness potential) reliably precedes the mental event (the conscious intention), then the mental event cannot be the cause of the subsequent physical action. The most common interpretation is a form of **epiphenomenalism**, which posits that conscious will is not a true cause of action, but is merely an illusory byproduct of brain processes already underway. This conclusion demonstrates the severe explanatory limits of a framework that lacks the resources to conceive of acausal or non-local relationships.

6.3 An Existential Empiricist Interpretation

Our framework dissolves the puzzle of volition by rejecting its core premise: the assumption of a

linear, efficient causal chain between the mental and physical domains. Instead of asking whether the brain causes the will or the will causes the brain, we posit that both are co-emergent aspects of a single, underlying process originating in the ontic, psychophysically neutral (PPN) domain.

The process of intentional action begins as a dynamic unfolding of the state vector $|\Psi_{PPN}\rangle$ in the atemporal PPN domain. This unfolding then projects into the two epistemic aspects:

1. Its projection into the **Physical** (P) aspect manifests as the observable neurophysiological activity, including the readiness potential.
2. Its projection into the **Mental** (M) aspect manifests as the subjective, conscious awareness of the intention to act.

The observed temporal gap is not a causal sequence but an artifact of projecting a single ontic event into the different temporal structures of the physical and mental domains. The subjective experience of agency is therefore not an illusion to be dismissed. It is the direct, phenomenal perception of this stable **Structural Correlation**—the lived awareness of the two sides of a single, unified event unfolding in concert.

7. Case Study II: Analyzing Exceptional Experience

7.1 The Phenomenon: Meaningful Anomalies in Context

We now turn to a class of exceptional experiences (EHEs) defined by a meaningful, acausal correlation between an internal psychological state and an external physical anomaly. A classic example is the poltergeist phenomenon. Conventional analysis treats these as reports of physical anomalies (e.g., unexplained object movements) to be dismissed as fraud or misperception. Our framework, however, demands an analysis of the full **psychophysical context**. Case documentation reveals a recurring pattern where these physical events occur within social systems characterized by intense, unexpressed internal conflict. Often, a "focus person" experiences a repressed struggle between the need for autonomy and the desire for social binding, and the physical anomalies appear to be a symbolic externalization of this conflict.

This pattern of a meaningful, symbolic link between a physical manifestation and a specific psycho-social context is not unique to poltergeist cases. It is powerfully illustrated in other phenomena, such as the "Gold Leaf Lady" case documented by investigator Stephen Braude. In this case, the subject, who was in an abusive relationship centered on conflicts over money and finances, manifested flecks of "fool's gold" (a zinc amalgam) from her skin. An explanation by efficient causation was deemed medically and physically untenable. In both cases, the phenomenon to be explained is not the physical anomaly in isolation, but the profound and specific **meaningful correlation** it holds with the lived experience of the subject.

7.2 A Principled Interpretation: Induced Correlations as Symbolic Manifestation

As a **Principle Theory**, our framework explains these phenomena by positing that the

psychophysical system allows for meaningful, acausal **Induced Correlations** to manifest from the PPN domain under conditions of instability. In the poltergeist case, the intense, repressed conflict in the mental aspect (M) acts as a perturbation. Via a **back-reaction**, this influences the underlying PPN state, activating an archetypal pattern related to the conflict's theme. This PPN state, charged with a specific "Sense," then manifests in the physical aspect (P) as the anomalous events. The physical manifestation (objects acting "autonomously") is a direct symbolic **Reference** to the repressed mental content (the need for autonomy).

This same explanatory logic applies to the Gold Leaf Lady. The intense distress related to the financial and emotional conflict (M) induces a back-reaction on the PPN domain, which in turn manifests a physical phenomenon (P) whose form is a literal, symbolic expression of the conflict's "Sense." The production of "fool's gold" is a physical materialization of the theme of false value at the heart of the relationship. For the harder cases, where the physical events bear no obvious symbolic meaning, our framework suggests these may be manifestations of the **Excessive Remainder.** In these instances, the phenomenon may be an expression of other "orders of attribution", possessing a "Sense" grounded in a potentially non-human order of being, thus appearing meaningless to us.

8. Conclusion and Future Directions

The scientific study of anomalous phenomena has been constrained by a physicalist metaphysics structurally blind to the reality of subjective experience and its profound correlation with the physical world. This paper breaks this impasse by developing and articulating **Existential Empiricism**, a framework grounded in a crucial distinction between a dynamic **Ontology** of lived experience and the stable **Metaphysics** abstracted from it for scientific inquiry. By synthesizing insights from dual-aspect monism, Spinozist expressionism, and existential philosophy, we have constructed a **Principle Theory** that accounts for the full spectrum of psychophysical experience, from the habituated, local correlations of everyday agency to the non-local, induced correlations that constitute anomalous events.

Our argument first established the philosophical necessity for this new standpoint by tracing a critical path from the **Kantian impasse**, through a **Spinozist re-reading of reality as expressive and ontologically incomplete**, to the radical empiricism of William James. We then articulated the framework's core components: a dual-aspect metaphysics of a holistic PPN reality; a formal state-space analogy; and a typology of correlations substantiated by meaning. This culminated in our analysis of the **"Excessive Remainder"**—anomalous manifestations of additional Spinozean "attributes"—and its application to case studies from the neuroscience of volition, the symbolic patterns in anomalistics, and the high-strangeness phenomena of the 2004 Nimitz UAP encounter.

The future research program enabled by our framework operates in two complementary modes. It provides a new context for a rigorous **forensic analysis** of historical cases, re-examining the work of researchers like Jacques Vallée through a new lens that values symbolic patterns over simple

physical evidence. Crucially, however, it calls for a proactive science that moves beyond analyzing the past to forge the future, developing novel observational protocols and experimental designs aimed at detecting manifestations of the Excessive Remainder in an ongoing way. The ultimate task of this new science will be to confront the **Semiotic Challenge**—to develop the tools of a potential xenosemiotics capable of decoding the meaningful expressions of other orders of (nonhuman) being. In doing so, we move beyond simply asking "what are they?" and toward a more profound inquiry into the nature of reality, meaning, and the manifold forms of intelligence with which we may share the universe.

References (Preliminary)

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AI Use Disclosure Protocol

Disclosure Protocol: Collaborative Development of “Existential Empiricism”

This document provides a detailed, chronological account of the collaborative process between the author (M. Cifone, Ph.D.) and the AI language model Gemini, which resulted in the manuscript "Existential Empiricism: A New Framework for the Science of Mind, Matter, and Anomalous Phenomena." Its purpose is to ensure full transparency regarding the intellectual contributions at each stage of the project.

Phase 1: Initial Problem Formulation and Framework Sketch

- **User Input:** The collaboration began with the user outlining a critique of conventional methods for calibrating a human observer. The user introduced the core concepts of a "coarse-grained" vs. "fine-grained" analysis, the "black box" problem of the human perceiver, and the central thesis of a **"propagated error" (E)** dependent on the observer's unmodeled internal structure, S(h). The user also introduced the work of Harald Atmanspacher as a potential theoretical resource.
- **Gemini's Role:** Gemini's role was to act as a sounding board, summarizing and structuring the user's initial argument to confirm understanding.
- **User Refinement:** The user then introduced a key complication: the possibility of a direct, non-normal **psycho-physical connection** that would violate the principle of instrument independence, making calibration logically inapplicable in some contexts.
- **Gemini's Role:** Gemini integrated this complication into the framework, articulating how it would amplify the different tiers of error previously discussed.

> **Attribution:** The foundational problem, the concept of propagated error, the critique of calibration, and the psycho-physical complication were entirely conceived and provided by the user. Gemini's function was organizational and clarificatory.

Phase 2: Development of the Core Philosophical Standpoint

- **User Input:** The user provided a rich, detailed essay ("Systematic pathway beyond current scientific frameworks.pdf") and a series of complex prompts to transform the initial framework into a comprehensive philosophical standpoint. Key contributions from the user at this stage included:
    - The term **"Existential Empiricism"** to name the framework.
    - The crucial distinction between **Metaphysics** and **Ontology**, inspired by Martin Heidegger.
    - The re-reading of **Spinoza's philosophy** as a dynamic "Expressionism" and

the grounding of the framework in **Ontological Incompleteness**.
    - The concept of the **"Excessive Remainder"** to formally account for anomalous phenomena as manifestations of Spinoza's "other attributes."
    - The distinction between **local** and **non-local** psychophysical correlations.
- **Gemini's Role:** Gemini's task was to synthesize these disparate but powerful philosophical points into a single, coherent, and structured argument. This involved:
    - Proposing a section-by-section structure for the essay's philosophical groundwork.
    - Drafting the text for these sections by **seamlessly integrating the user's own unique and powerful wording** from the provided essay and prompts, as explicitly directed.
    - Ensuring the final text accurately reflected the user's complex philosophical reasoning.

  Attribution: The entire philosophical architecture of Existential Empiricism, including its name, its core distinctions (Metaphysics/Ontology), and its central concepts (Excessive Remainder, Spinozist generalization), was provided by the user. The text of Section 2 of the final manuscript is a direct and lightly edited integration of the user's provided essay. Gemini's role was that of a structural editor and synthesizer.

Phase 3: Formalism and Application

- **User Input:** The user directed the development of the formal aspects of the framework, specifying the use of **vector mechanics and a quantum analogy** as a formal placeholder. The user also proposed the three-tiered case study structure (Volition, Poltergeist, UAP) to demonstrate the framework's escalating power. The user introduced the **Universal Agency Principle** and the **Semiotic Challenge** as the framework's most advanced methodological tools.
- **Gemini's Role:** Gemini generated the drafts for the formal and application sections of the paper, adhering to the user's specifications. This included:
    - Articulating the state-space formalism ($|\Psi_{PPN}\rangle \neq |\phi_M\rangle \otimes |\psi_P\rangle$) based on the user's directive.
    - Drafting the placeholder dynamical law ($i\hbar(d/d\tau)|\Psi\rangle = \hat{H}|\Psi\rangle$).
    - Creating simple SVG diagrams to visually represent the formal concepts.
    - Applying the framework to the three case studies, drawing on the provided SCU Nimitz report for the final case.
- **User Refinement:** Throughout this phase, the user provided crucial refinements, such as the distinction between **Principle vs. Constructive theories** and

between **Forensic vs. Proactive science**.

Attribution: The direction to use a quantum formalism, the selection of case studies, and the core concepts of Universal Agency and the Semiotic Challenge were provided by the user. The specific articulation of the mathematical expressions and the drafting of the case study analyses were performed by Gemini, based on the user's explicit instructions and conceptual guidance.

Phase 4: Finalization and Review

- **User Input:** The user directed the final workflow, including the systematic, section-by-section review of the integrated manuscript and the final revisions of the introduction and conclusion. The user also gave the final directive to refine the manuscript's style to better match their characteristic authorial voice. The “Prologemenon” was only lightly edited.
- **Gemini's Role:** Gemini executed the final revisions, performed the global stylistic edit based on the model of the user's voice, assembled the final manuscript, and generated this disclosure document.

Overall Attribution Summary: This project represents a deep collaboration. The foundational concepts, the core philosophical argument, the central terminology, and the overall intellectual direction of the manuscript were provided by the author, M. Cifone, Ph.D. The AI model Gemini served as a structural tool for organization, synthesis, drafting, and stylistic refinement under the author's explicit and detailed guidance. The resulting manuscript is a product of the author's original thought, structured and articulated with the assistance of an AI writing partner.