

## An Essay Concerning the Possibility of a Unified Theory of Counseling

Lance Kair

*Regis University, Department of Counseling, Division of Counseling and Family Therapy, Rueckert-Hartman College of Health Professions, lkair@regis.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://epublications.regis.edu/cftsr>



Part of the [Counselor Education Commons](#), [Marriage and Family Therapy and Counseling Commons](#), and the [Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kair, Lance () "An Essay Concerning the Possibility of a Unified Theory of Counseling," *Counseling and Family Therapy Scholarship Review*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://epublications.regis.edu/cftsr/vol3/iss1/4>

This Clinical is brought to you for free and open access by ePublications at Regis University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Counseling and Family Therapy Scholarship Review by an authorized editor of ePublications at Regis University. For more information, please contact [epublications@regis.edu](mailto:epublications@regis.edu).

## **An Essay Concerning the Possibility of a Unified Theory of Counseling**

LANCE KAIR

*Department of Counseling, Division of Counseling and Family Therapy, Rueckert-Hartman  
College of Health Professions, Regis University, Thornton, CO*

The Object-Oriented Ontology of Graham Harman, also known as Object-Oriented Philosophy, presumes to describe an ontology of all objects, including human beings. This essay shows how the discipline of counseling can benefit from such an ontology of objects. To move into this particular case of an Object-Oriented Ontology of human beings, and to distinguish, initially, at least, between the object that we are now concerned with, or will be soon, and the universe of subjectivity, I propose that we refer to *universal* objects, which is to indicate objects that exist in the universe, however we might define it. In this universal sense, we must take a step into the object that is the subject by removing obstacles which will hinder discussion along object ontological lines. The epistemological obstacles which get in the way of a discussion of the object of the subject may include (1) the science of the mind, or psychology, and what I shall term (2) *conventional philosophy* under which a sort of regular understanding of phenomenology is organized, which is to say the general philosophical tradition which has developed around the ontology of the subject, the subject of reason, knowledge and discourse. We will see going forward, for a unified theory of counseling, though, that the phenomenology of mind is the most pertinent obstacle.

**KEYWORDS:** Counseling phenomenology, object-oriented ontology, conventional philosophy, the Two Routes

### **The Object of Counseling**

What is counseling? The subject of counseling is well known to trained counselors and philosophers alike. Counseling generally concerns the human being and its mental or psychic aspects and how these might appear to be involved with a person or persons in the world, and to help such people. Of course, definition of just what counseling might be involved with can be debated, but in a strict, open and obvious sense, the subject of counseling is what the counseling is about or for. This, however, does not get us very far. Counseling is often strongly associated with the discipline of psychology but, being still a young discipline, looks to its older siblings, which includes psychology, neurology, and social work, for its philosophical support. Nevertheless, counseling appears on the scene in its own right attempting to distinguish itself from these older family members. This essay is a part of that effort. The catalyzing issue on the table will be, what is counseling?

A primary issue addressed throughout this essay is the problem with a usual method of approach on all things counseling which supposes to grant credential to criterion to essays and proposals which best cite evidence-based research. Note, however, before reactions are engrained, I do not suggest that such an approach is inherently incorrect or misinformed. The ‘either/or’ polemic no longer central to our point, ‘and’ becomes operative. The view upon this paper which sees an argument toward how the just-mentioned method is incorrect is based in an incorrect manner of viewing the meaning of this paper. Nevertheless, counselors do often admit to a certain doubt around the scientific method; it is plain that scientific research is only capable of

encountering and making statements upon a minority of experiential impressions and outcomes; that the outcomes by which it is able to honestly comment truthfully amount to, again, only a portion of reason for why a person may or may not be behaving or expressing in the manner she does, and that such comments say even less about what solutions are effective, and should be applicable, than they do about the purpose of the experiment.

While those so scientifically faithful will shudder at such blasphemy, we need only point to the miserable statistics representing *any* approach to mental health, to the effervescence of new approaches and theories of the psyche, its various ideals and healths, to understand the poverty and basic depravity involved in the continual advocacy of an exclusive method called science upon a field which is so obviously resistant to its enforcements and lures. To answer this failure of myopic and stubborn assertion against the facts, this paper seeks to explore an opening; *the claim is that mental health will benefit more from a sure objective philosophical bedrock which allows for honest viewing of subjects and outcomes than it has from the relative and philosophically arbitrary methodological reduction, restriction, workings of closure and career that we know of under the rubric of empirical research science.*

### **The Empirical Problem**

The substance of various counseling theories and approaches which make arguments as their main support gives rise to two main modes of counseling: (1) strict training in specific application and knowledge of theories and their protocols (Cognitive and Behavioral Therapies; Gestalt; Existential; Psychodynamic; Dialectical Behavioral Therapy; Systems Theory; etc.), (2) integrative and/or eclectic approaches which suppose their validity in not limiting their approach to one specific theoretical protocol of intervention, which further propose to be able to understand to varying degrees and aptitudes the ideas behind the various interventions and thus use a variety of such ideas in session as the client might or might not respond to them. The disciplines of psychology, social work, and counseling have only some specificity—which each might be quick to point out *more than* some—and often claim the same work space and client involvement. Upon looking into the particular specificities of each, and upon analysis, often we can find only further theoretical, academic difference and capitalistic difference (names and titles), while the effort is already often integrated in actual practice. *Counseling appears to be involved in doing something different than its heirs, but actually is turning out to merely add more reason to not distinguish the various disciplines except in name.* It seems as though counseling is the place where the most vehement differences in theoretical belief are allowed to be held at bay *for the sake of having empathic kindness* to all human beings as well as allowing oneself and others to have a valid opinion about the truth of our situation as mental health practitioners.

One might begin to wonder what the relationship is between the actual state of mental health and the confusing discipline which proposes to address it. In this night of theoretical assertion, one might begin to see less a correlation in attempt to solve the growing problem by adding more and more theoretical approaches to address the increase in the amount of mental issues in society, and perhaps more correlation in the growing abundance of approaches contributing to increased need. People in their turning don't know where to turn, and where they turn could be said, if we were to ask even a few people, is already founded in a generalized ideological confusion. Indeed; if there is an actual and specific item called mental health, we should no longer assume it is similar to physical health. Despite the history of psychology which would presume to have established such a definite item, in close analysis it is not difficult to see

that the idea of such an equity between physical and mental health is itself most often an ideological construct, at that, inflated in its conceptual ability and effectiveness. Given an honest and introspective rigorous philosophical look into the ideas of mind and mental health, it becomes more sensible to understand those tenets of what we regularly and generally know as psychology as *specifically* ideological, in contrast and in distinction to a usual postmodern reductionism which might argue that *everything* is ideological. As we shall see in Triple-O, such ideals which come forth through ideological identities, e.g. mind and mental health, are at once *both* only ideological *and* actual - different in nature - without collapsing into, contradicting, or negating the other. Yet, by contrast, where each is understood to be able to nullify the other, say, because every statement is a subjective opinion, there is the possibility of theoretical solutions that arise *only* as or within mental constructions put forth in argument *or* as empirical constructions elicited by evidence-based research. If indeed there is an actual and specific item that we can truly identify as mental health, then it has only partially to do with such methods in as much as such methods are regularly understood to be sacrosanct in their ability to grant a truth of the human mental being in the world; we see an example of an implicit cognitive distortion working in such a reduction that would suggest that it is not partial but rather entirely actual (all or nothing thinking). We say partially because we must admit that indeed there is faulty thought at root in the effort that is supposed to be informing us about what is not faulty in every such proposal, even as we might call it empirical or scientific.

### **The Phenomenological Problem**

The issue that is drawn upon for this essay is a *logistical* one; namely, how is the subject-thinker *able* to get outside of itself sufficiently enough to find a true scientific object of mental health? How does thinking overcome its limitations to be able to consider what is not informed by that limitation? What is not only the elements which may constitute a thing, but what path do they take, and just how do such empirical elements traverse the mental barrier such that thought is able to have them in its domain? With this in mind we must then see that the seminal philosopher Immanuel Kant was actually showing how all and every human behavior (including thought, but every occurrence otherwise) merely occurs according to its own imperative; in our case, the Pure Reason. Then the problem he poses is how it may be the case that we think or believe that everything is *not* occurring according to some universal plan, that is, not determined in both cause and outcomes, which is, the hypothetical imperative or Practical Reason. Yet, without having to reference the whole virtual abyss of philosophical material, there is sufficient discussion about the history of psychology to now admit that such a science as presented above is at worst merely an ideological assertion and at best a theological assertion, developed by minds probably more interested in the establishment of their own names and projects than it is them actually having seen this actual scientific substance called at some times “the mind” and “mental illness” but most recently “mental health.”

Nevertheless, as we will indeed see through a philosophical discussion about the nature of counseling as a discipline which will be distinguished from its forbearers and contemporaries, the question for counseling can no longer be suspended in an ‘unknown yet acknowledged’ relativity or mere argumentative practitioner’s opinion which we leave to the barer of subjectivity. If we are to attempt to get out of this ‘chicken or egg’ conundrum of mental health supply and demand, the significant issue now is not whether any particular method towards affecting or addressing mental health issues is better than any other, but whether we will still leave the responsibility of mental health in the hands of a theologically relative subject. In other words, can we as counselors take

the honest step to consider and accept the object of our effort, the thing that is counseling? Similar to an initial and basic therapeutic intervention where we may ask the client to slow down enough so to be able to ponder facts, the issue for a philosophical basis of counseling is: Can the counselor take a moment to stop reducing the therapeutic relation to a situation between subjects, *and that only*?

### The Real Problem

Though it might seem strange, the answer we are seeking is not a manner which disrupts or changes the individual's counselor's personal theoretical ideal. Thinking from the object will not change the actual therapeutic relationship, however it may be.

Another issue which an object ontology of counseling mends is if it is responsible for us who want to be able to help someone suffering from a mental health issue to offer them a general field of helpers who have little more common ground than that they want to help, express empathy and know how to actively listen? This effort, which I have identified here of counselors, who often have no more substantial philosophy under their efforts than, basically, selling the prospective client a 'mine is the best' theory of recovery, basically leaving the client to the chance of the draw to what is available or to what or who is referred, or, telling the client that there are hundreds of theoretical approaches and interventions and that you, the suffering client, just need to search and choose from the plethora of varying notions of what mental health is and how we treat it? Then to ultimately settle on what has been handed to them by cohort or Google or what counsellor they like the best? Can we not by now be honest and consider the possibility that the internal confusion involved in the effort to help (psychiatry, psychology, neurology, social work and counseling) could have something to do with exacerbating the explosion of mental health issues that we now face everywhere? If we include philosophy as indeed a valid way to discern knowledge and wisdom, we would do well as counselors to have a philosophy that is not mere "whatever you think"; this is to say, *some actual reflective and insightful reasoning could move counseling off from where it has been epistemologically beached.*

Again, this is *not* to suggest a new way to counsel. The point here is to develop a legitimate philosophical ground for counseling as a discipline that is more than just artistic, spiritual or scientific license upon evidence-based research; such methods amounts to no philosophy at all. Such a philosophy, if we must reduce and assign a philosophy to that kind of intentional myopia, is itself what we know as a conventionally informed phenomenism but without the actual knowledge of what phenomenism is. This doubly mistaken understanding of a phenomenology of mind is an insufficient philosophy to address real things; i.e. real things are intentional, neither real nor a thing beyond the thought involved in a discursive negotiation of them. I suggest presently psychology has no philosophy of reality because it draws upon a history of scientific truth, then as well, where the *assumption* is that true reality is accessible by the mind is not a philosophy either. They are merely examples of a reflexive method, or a philosophy of reflexivity, that is, *subjectivity without reflection.*

Perhaps it is not the creativity for coming up with ways to help presenting clients with their issues that is the true issue, but the philosophical platform upon which we are placing such theoretical givens toward praxis. It seems we need a philosophy which makes room for all such theoretical approaches, one which only disclaims those approaches which propose to be outside of its philosophical description. Our effort here then is like every good philosophical effort, which is, to be inclusive of what is most broad of the category given us, and this is to say, to allow counselors to *be* counselors, to do what they do, and allow counseling *to be*, without the interference of their

having to assert particular theoretical righteousness of effort amidst an ontological inconsistency or generalized ignorance. A philosophy of counseling would include all forms of counseling, their individual theories, methods, applications, ideals and interventions, and would present to us what the object of counseling is.

### The Two Basic Philosophical Questions

The Object-Oriented Ontology of Graham Harman is able to be viewed, like no other theory before and despite its specific argument, as evidencing an answer to two questions that plague philosophy at every turn. The first question: Is philosophy a name for what thoughts thinkers are able to do, as in thinkers are able to think thoughts? In other words, is philosophy confined to an approach upon things and the universe where one must and can only spend philosophical energy analyzing all the ways thoughts can fill or otherwise occupy thinking? Or, the second question: Does philosophy get to, address and then speak from what may or may not be essence itself, as they say, the thing *in-itself*? These questions revolve specifically and irrevocably around *thought* and nothing else, for the failure to address this phenomenon represents a decision that has already been made and assumed in the presentation of the philosophical position. Due to the nature of philosophy itself, then, because it indeed most often appears in some context of thought, it seems that it would be naturally subject to an effort which does not pull punches when it comes to what exactly is being done; the logic of the psyche makes its primary claims to the workings of thought. The issue thus falls plainly in the realm of the subject of psychology where the subject must become a philosophical issue. A psychology without a philosophy which informs its ontology is also primarily problematic philosophically; this is also the issue I hope to address and make some constructive suggestions upon.

Everything philosophical first must rely upon an answer to the questions above before anything else happens, at least as much as we might be thinking about it, or we are simply reiterating the post-modern theological mantra of the special human being suspended in new discourses—much of philosophy since the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be understood as the new kind of monotheistic religious apology for the modern human. By contrast, the maxim here, upon an object ontological ground, is a rose by any other name would smell as sweet *because it is a rose*. We are not quibbling about terms, meanings and definitions. It is becoming apparent that the various counseling and psychological theories are complimentary in practice despite their arguments of exclusivity. The philosophical approach which would problematize statements is always in large, phenomenological - which is to say, based in an unquestioned ability of a human thinking subject that is making meaning. Yet one is never dissuaded from asking the meaning of “stop,” for example, and never see that the meaning is different than the definition. The question which splits thought unto itself, though, to mark religion as a vital and inseparable element of the being of human in every arena is whether thoughts do anything or are anything *in-themselves*. The question is no longer either how to remove the religious component of all thinking, or what we mean by thought and thinking, that is, it is no longer what *is* thought and how to correct our conception of it. No longer is mere questioning itself automatically a credible method for finding out *what a thing is*: Such a method finds that a thing is always a thought or a definition that arises out of thought; altering the definition of the term does nothing to change the *fact* that we now have come across and are forced thus to admit.

The significant question is the relation of thought to its definition, or in other words, how we organize what thought actually is. To continue to proceed into thought by asking what it is

through the same method is a redundant operation. To reiterate; the deconstruction of words by reorganizing definitions assumes an ability that is left unquestioned, that is thinking. If we deconstruct the term ‘thinking’ by the same manner, we must deny whatever definition we come up for how we are to proceed to know the truth of things through definition. The issues for psychology in general then are whether we can indeed find a thing that we can identify as thought, and what does it do. However, it is a non sequitur to suggest that thought is the name for a conflation of neural processes, for again we are being philosophically loose in the estimation, relying upon a certain kind of ungrounded faith to overcome the redundancy which has been implemented. Likewise, sense, as a simple body action-stimulus, as the five senses, does not except in pain or extreme pleasure ever overcome sense as in the coming upon things of knowing, as something might make sense to us, and there is more going on than whether or not we consciously are actively noticing thoughts occurring.

The next question arises how we would know of something that is outside of the knowing of it? Traditionally, this is the phenomenological question of the thing in-itself, to which the answer has justified science to allow it to make its own claims upon a domain which is assumed to be particularly given to the human being. Science merely must rely upon a philosophy that it denies by its internal logic of method and operation, however, to thereby retroactively assert what it is *not*, e.g. not relying upon a philosophy which is never disclosed to thereby assert a philosophy of the activity that has already occurred. This is redundancy, *but this time a suspended judgement upon an inherent contradiction, that is, a judgement made to dispel the suspension*. Must we really simply redefine the parameters of thinking, at that, redefine what we mean by the word *thinking* in order to ‘not’ think something else, such as the given object of science? Are we really allowed to merely talk about what we speak of? Where does that leave thinking?

I refer to this methodological redundancy as a *theological suspension* because it operates despite seeing it for what it is. Despite the conventional philosophical method which calls for changing anything which is noticed, this notice is just a notice for the purpose of being able to see and observe. Also, for the purpose of epistemological distinction as opposed to logical elimination, I call the approach that is not theologically suspended, *description*. Nevertheless, the method of theological suspension, and its modern correlate science, seems to be what the philosophy of at least the past couple hundred years would have us operate by; whether specifically stated or not, thoughts are assumed and implicitly rely upon a human ability to commune with transcendence, something ‘other’ which calls to the individual to action, albeit, immanently. *The question is about how we discern what action is to be taken*. Is the activity implicit to the scene, or is there some work to be done in order to be able to actually notice what is being presented at that moment? Simple philosophical definition, even a definition of thought or thinking, while evident in history, is revealed as a philosophically lazy method for the discerning of things, and probably a questionable means to discern a vector of action; philosophy and indeed science of mind would have it that we are able to define ourselves into a definite world, or at least have a definite world that we are defining. The problem of the chicken or the egg seems always best solved by an implicit theological faith; one wonders though, how a mind would be able to accomplish such a miracle, that is, believe something into existence, but even the science of neurology relies upon this ability.

Graham Harman refers to this general kind of ability or state of modern identity as *knowledge*; it works and gets things done, but it never achieves what the doing actually is while also positing what allows for the object of knowledge, and just as thoroughly and often never is able to find us the thing in-itself. The suggestion in this odd, believable and widely relatable suspension (modern knowledge) is that we should be cautious when we posit a phenomenology,

then, because the usual phenomenological arguments any graduate student knows stop holding all the water here. If we wish to get to something substantial, as opposed to something which just works at times but at all times, then we might wish to begin to apply what we know of mental health into the process of philosophical reckoning.

### **An Entrance into a New Teleology is a Closure of an Old Ontology**

The two questions now arrive at the beginning of philosophy, apparently assumed or missed in history. They were missed because the assumption is that a common reason can allow for a common ground amidst a field that is otherwise unknown yet knowable through the definition of a common ground (suspension). Yet these two questions go to the heart of what philosophy *is* as opposed to what philosophy means. If it means anything, then whenever we begin to say we are involved with philosophy we are allowed to play an old school game and feign one or the other depending on what is given us, what suits our need to be right and validated, to avoid claiming responsibility for our acts; we insinuate a vacant, or perhaps negative, phenomenology, what is known in Triple-O as the object that withdraws from view, but in other circles the result is the same; e.g., the indivisible remainder (Zizek) and even void (Badiou). Any consensus is merely an arbitrary stopping point – *faith* - but also one parameter of limit by which we can discern an object.

The notion of withdrawn object is relevant to counseling. Counselors are trained to suspend their own judgement and bias, to be curious into the client's phenomenology which appears in the discourse they use; counselors persistently poke holes in their own ideas (preconceptions and implicit biases) about the client by being aware upon multiple levels and often evoking responses from or outright asking the client about what she really means by any statement they make, though other kinds of involvement are also used. In short, the counselor must *be* and *not be* while the client is allowed to *be*, but the discipline regularly avoids this contradiction through having the client and counselor to *be together* or at least at the same time. We might be inclined to ask if they likewise be in the same space. From that kind of implicit denial, though, in counseling as well as philosophy, somehow, we are dissuaded from asking questions of that kind let alone about those three kinds of Being. *We are silently persuaded to uphold a faith.* Whether or not we find any actual substance in these methods, actually, does not matter because those methods *are* the way we avoid the issue at hand, which is the philosophical issue of method, for the sake of justifying the subject thinker to presence - not Being withdrawn - and their 'personal theory' which moves then toward a non-unified and idealistic discipline.

Further, the general way counselors approach the therapeutic relationship is through validating the client's experience - little concern is given to the counselor's experience - in the therapeutic encounter; the counselor may indeed grow from it, but by definition, it is about the client. In one light, we have the medical model, aka. neurology, psychiatry and often psychology (such as psychoanalysis and psychodynamic but also cognitive and behavioral therapies, and most likely others), and we have the blatant failure pointed out earlier of the orientation which supposes that the mind has a structure, can be diagnosed like a physical organ and that solutions can be organized and mapped in the same manner; these theories overtly present and rely upon an 'expert/patient' dichotomy. Here, the expert is 'absent' by definition of the relationship, his presence arriving through the reliance on the compendium of research, that is, what is not really there or there only by virtue the expert who is not unloading the theoretical postulates upon the client. Then in another light, a salient philosophical issue arises in the therapeutic theories which suppose, theoretically, the counselor and client to be involved with or otherwise co-create a

transparent therapeutic environment (such as Feminist theory) in a neutral therapeutic space. A philosophical problem appears because there is a contradiction founded in a space occupied by two people of unequal power (the counselor/therapist holds more power). Hence, there is no 'consensus' between the counselor and client, no 'agreement' on method. Thus, we can say that any agreement is already implicitly 'outside' of the client's ability to make an informed decision about any co-creation or transparency. It is the power that the counselor is already wielding (for ideological presence) which allows for the client to agree or for the two of them to come to a consensus.

One must continue to keep in mind, though, that this essay does not propose to negate by reduction of argument through the mere showing or revealing of the situation. We are involved with a description of the situation *as it is* philosophically - the object of counseling - while not necessarily suggesting a problem with any particular method of counseling or that an improvement can or should be made; any argument would be a part of the contradiction, a part of what we must allow to remain suspended. The two therapeutic examples above can characterize two extremes, or parameters, of possible professional psychotherapeutic involvements; though the format of the essay can convey an appearance of critique, the intention is involved with only the facts of situation. There is no ulterior meaning to glean from the situation at this point but that there are indeed these different manners of therapeutic approach and that these manners have good analogue for a segue into a philosophical consideration of the object of counseling.

The afore mentioned contradiction upheld by a methodologically withdrawn aspect is suspended in the following manner. If I am doing philosophy in an effort to get to something significantly essential (say, for counseling, a therapeutic consensus) or to say something about it and I find, in response to sustained barrage of questions about meaning and definition, that there is nothing essential that I can communicate, then I can revert to the argument that we are really only dealing with a multiplicity of thinking human beings who are all allowed (according to modern philosophy, at least) to see things differently, i.e. have different realities and worlds, and admitting that, we then move to find a reasonable common ground - which then is the phenomenological intentional consensus where what is absent is suspended. Then on the other hand, if philosophy is merely a name for what thought is capable of doing, and the arguments cycle down to suggest that thought is not doing anything, that indeed thought reflects, views and expresses *only* itself at all times in both perception and assertion, then I can take up an argument that there is something more essential than thought, or something *else* of which thought is but a weak reflection and retain the absence in presence, for example; again, the consensus. Where then are we finding a reasonable ground which conjoins these two manners of argument? In every case, the reduction must fall into a choice of subjective reason - what *can* we do - since there is no phenomenologically subjective manner which can objectively weight proof to either side. Any argument I would wish to propose merely relies upon one of those methods (truth procedures) which I have chosen in advance for any condition. In order to retain my subjective philosophical primacy, I will choose not to agree depending upon which condition arises: If thought has an essence, if thought is an object in-itself, then the argument will be that it has no essence, but if thought has no essence, then I will argue that I have subjective intentional primacy and privilege to create my own reality. The issue here is thus whether a common ground has any meaning, and this is to say, *what* ground are we speaking of? Hence, this last is the significance of the object: In terms of counseling, it is the therapeutic relationship at every instance, the consensus implied by the expert or made overt through transparency.

In the case of much of our current eclectic and integrative approach to counseling, that which appears as more essential are the products of science, neurology and supporting research-based results to which both client and counselor are subjects. Yet, as I have already submitted, this is only because counseling as a discipline has no overt substantial philosophical basis; its philosophy (if we can indeed generalize the multiplicity of theoretical approaches to counseling into one category) tends to develop in hindsight as a theological apology. Such vacillation (between assertion of the common science and the apology for the realization of nothing common) can be seen all through the ages of Western philosophy and its concurrent events and practices. The most infamous is (the conventional misreading that is) Kant's idealism, but the simplest example is in Jean-Paul Sartre's primacy of existence over essence. The contradiction of having the meaning of his proposals have no initiating essence, which is to say, having really nothing to be able to comprehend because everything merely exists, including the argument, demands a theological apology, which comes in the form of the given philosophical assumption of *thought* - which, rather un-ironically, itself is argued to be grounded in nothing. If everything is grounded only in thought, then what grounds thought? And what grounds nothing?

In the end, both conservative and integrative approaches to counseling merely refuse to attempt to say anything about an essential ground due to the implicit idealism inherent to a certain philosophical extension of phenomenology. I submit that the refusal is based in a theological ideal which inadvertently and ironically allows, on one hand, for a philosophically unsubstantiated recourse to the scientific 'evidence,' mentioned above, provided by technology but without, again, having a rigorous understanding of just what technology actually is in any sense that it can or should be applied to mental health in general but what could better be called the individual psychic manifestation. Then on the other hand, creative or artistic improvisation makes up for the implicit 'lack' of science. In short, counseling relies upon a sort of religious hope that its methods might work. However, far from suggesting a solution to this conundrum, as though we might be able to overcome this methodological issue, this essay will instead attempt to describe how such a conundrum forms the essence of a substantial theoretical ground for the collective effort of mental health counselors, that is, the object of counseling.

### **The General Theory**

This essay is an attempt to lay some groundwork toward a unified theory of counseling. The general topic proposes that an *orientation upon objects* is central to a philosophy of counseling. This philosophical approach arises in some coordination with Graham Harman's seminal treatise on objects called *Object Oriented Ontology*. This essay also describes how *essence* has been placed as further removed from knowledge, to be defined redundantly as an 'essential place' or thing in-itself that is out of reach, and how this situation reveals an actual truth which can serve as the substance from which counseling as a free, curious and creative effort toward solving problems of mentality and psychic forms, may derive a sure practical validity. Essence, in this case, is what we all know as essence, the essence of which is defined in whatever manner which stays consistent with what we already understand as essence before we apply the operation of philosophy; essence is foundational as definition is itself indeed defined without having to be defined. If the subject is Existential, then the object is essential. We concede the point that whatever we define as a specific essence is itself indicating an essence as we understand it regularly. As the anthropologist cum philosopher Bruno Latour might agree, we deal with what is in front of us before it is reduced to nothing by modern phenomenalist philosophies. While new

ideas and philosophies should and can arise, understanding where philosophy has brought us thus far, the task of philosophy as a category, the self-identity that is philosophy and nothing else, is in our case no longer to create new arguments toward reductive metaphysical truth or to support the assertions of subjective priority. The task now is to take responsibility for what we have before us, whether it be of the past, present or future, to organize the chaos which informs us to our phenomenological nothingness, our relative chaotic realities. In the words of mental health, as counselors, our task is to be able to present viable ground upon which the generally discomforted, disorganized or disordered mentality may find a certain reflexive solace, that is, a substantial ground upon which therapy may do its work. As witnessed by the overwhelming surge of mental health issues in our society, the present philosophical ground of an unknown and unknowable relative creative or scientific therapeutic license has proven to be insufficient.

Modern philosophy shows us that there is, at once, no one method by which to ascertain the truth of a situation in order to apply a solution, but also, no multiplicity of methods which likewise is able to address all problems with success; a *specific* set of determined values is required in order to arrive at *any* solution, and this involves a question of access to excess. Access never occurs *anywhere*; it always occurs at a specific place, even if that place is a multiplicity of places (the place *is* multiple). A case in point is the generally acknowledged failure of the ‘top down’ (which is actually redundant and retroactive) psychoanalytical manner of grafting a theoretical model of psychology (the excess that the theory relies upon) upon all human beings (the point of access). This assumption of a general but specific validation of methodological activity gives rise to the discipline of counseling acquiescing silently to a “whatever works” approach that encourages creativity, intuition and empathy that we call *integrative*. Every creative endeavor is accepted if it produces results (and no egregious complaint) and whether or not the results can be measured; this is what phenomenology is, the phenomenon always in the end avoids ‘the other’ and slips through our fingers, under or over our grasp; discursive, narrative and open. We thus teach and seek conceptual and practical flexibility over rigidity. Whether a theoretical system of counseling, or an improvisational approach, whether religious, spiritual, or scientific, each often achieves results (within particular social and ideological limits or circumstances). Definition, while useful to get things done, does not really tell us very much about the thing in question across theoretical paradigms; always there is some aspect of the thing which alludes our understanding, which exceeds knowledge. We may indeed have a theoretically closed explanation and correspondent application, but always some, if not many subjects do not respond. Always, some are left out, by definition, that is, *due* to definition. It seems any conventional method is actually only concerned with *most* and not *all* suffering human beings, and this is significant to the object of counseling as a whole, that is, in-itself.

In general, the role of the counselor is to allow the client, with some guidance, to fill out their own meaning and enact their own solution, or for any term, to become empowered to themselves in the world. Again, we are dealing with essence and not merely existential definitions, not merely argumentative or researched ‘proofs’ of effectiveness; no matter what terms we use to inscribe particular theoretical methods to effect outcomes, as counselors, we want people to be able to come to their own sense of ability in the world, a solution that they own, embody or otherwise *Be*, whatever that is. This essay is not attempting to argue a new way to counsel nor a new theoretical approach; we have enough of them, and people will undoubtedly come up with more. What we find, though, in the general effort of counseling, inscribed by postmodern ‘idealism’ and scientific empiricism, is that even as we encourage creative and integrative approaches, the allowance for multiple effective treatments is itself an existential contradiction in

terms solved by defining ‘universes of terms’ (the theory) and the conditions that must be enacted or brought about by both counselor and client. We find this everywhere in practitioners decrying other methods as well as adhering to their own ways despite the failures: Denial and assertion, or, reduction and assertion.

Indeed, the French philosopher François Laruelle describes for us this condition. That which is philosophically sufficient unto itself, i.e. the therapeutic approach which serves some issues but not all of them, necessarily denotes a common and unitive ‘non-philosophical’ solution outside of the particular therapy’s ability to reckon, outside of the theory’s accounting. This is to say, the contradiction involved in the general approach of counseling shows that *any* solution always arises in correlation, but as well as in the failures (contradiction of contradiction). In order to allow for the general effort of counseling in its own manner or manners, without negating any particular approach, while also accounting for the unique effectiveness of each under a common and specific conceptual paradigm, we call the therapeutic correlation which arises in existence, *an object*.

### Consistency and Cohesion

The genius of Graham Harman is that he simply told us that now, with his Object-Oriented Philosophy, we going to talk about objects; in this essay, Object Oriented *Philosophy* (O.O.P.) will necessarily be involved with and communicate Object Oriented *Ontology* (O.O.O., pronounced “Triple-O”). The problem of his philosophy, at least from the phenomenological standpoint, though, is that he didn’t give us a way there. One is simply supposed to understand the conversion involved without a philosophical path to get us there. How one gets from the centralized thinking *subject*, or in our case, the relation of subjects such as between the therapist and the client, each who is always involved with itself, *to* a consideration of an object in-itself that lay outside of the thinking subject’s purview, is never shown to us or explained; it is implied in his philosophy but the method of argumentation has often yet to succeed in pulling us out of our correlational subjectivity. This is to say that his philosophy behaves from the standpoint of the *not* correlational, i.e. a subject ultimately free in its phenomenological ability to make meaning. Nevertheless, the simplicity of finding this apparently esoteric path comes when we understand what Harman the philosopher is doing outside of the conceptual paradigm of his philosophical proposal; by simply moving to talk about objects, he implies that all along philosophy has been invested in and constructed by a generalizable human grounding essence called *thought*. Martin Heidegger could not even be so forthright in his discussion *What is it we call thinking?* So indeed, not so ironically, it is very possible that a certain general historical effort of philosophy has been more about the *doing* thinking, while psychology and counseling has been *upon* thought and thinking. The untying of the knot of eternal subjective relativity (the given of the subject of meaning, where psychology assumes; yet, philosophy assumes) is in order for an object to be truly known in-itself. We can begin to talk about the *being* of thinking.

The notion is nearly ridiculous when we think about it. Here, not only do we not need to go on to reference and compare voluminous lists of philosophers and theoreticians and their respective ideas, but if we were to do so then we would have to ask why we would need to take notice about *thought* in this way; because, the reference would be assuming a reflex that philosophy has the monopoly for designating everything that has to do with thought (which it indeed does argue through a whole lineage of ideas about language, discourse, text, sign, signifier, etcetera, the meanings of which get so convoluted, one has to wonder where one begins and one ends and if there is indeed a common thing that any discussion concerning those items really involves just

because they use the same terms) as *opposed to* or within a context of various disciplines, in which philosophy is but one. We have then to wonder if philosophy is able to suggest anything about anything if indeed its method will conveniently refer out an answer to another discipline which, at any moment, it does not wish to address.

The question on the table is whether or not we are involved with philosophy itself or merely a definition of it. Triple-O refrains from reifying the centralized thinker, so many might reply, “of course Harman’s philosophy is involved with thinking, this notice merely shows the contradiction within Harman’s philosophy that makes his move weak”; or in the terms of counseling, “how could mental health *not* concern thought?” However, my point is that this contradiction allows for a *strong* move, a move which allows for a substantial ground of practice. In other words, a phenomenology of a subject never exceeds itself for anyone else to be able to apprehend or comprehend because always something is missed in the appropriation, and because any appropriation (comprehension, conceptualization, perception) is made by another subject of the same limit. Any difference, such as that posed by Jacques Derrida in his *grammatology*, is ultimately based in a contradiction of the phenomenal subject; this is point that Kierkegaard makes of Hegel and is also why what I shall generalize to call the Continental tradition of philosophy mainly concerns itself with the issue of transcendence or immanence: Because the contradiction that is come upon by an unproblematized given of thought and thinking (and its step-brother, reason) can only be solved by relying upon the *idea*, which is merely another name of *spirit*. Hence, phenomenological idealism and the *realist* counterpart Harman calls *Object Oriented Ontology*. Any subjective application of solution (totality) is therefore always denying the validity of the theoretical subject (definition), and that *this* is the significant theoretical feature that faces us for a philosophy of counseling. Harman, in effect, is saying that the *philosophy* which we call phenomenism describes a condition (a totality) whereby thought is contained by itself and thus never reaches the object in-itself, and that this philosophy is but a particular manner (a definition) of *thinking about things*. This is a radically different take than a philosophy which historically might have typically posited (or denied) a path of itself getting to essence, or even existence. This is the crucial and significant matter at hand, for philosophy and as well, as I propose, for a unified effort for counseling; an object-oriented foundation of counseling concerns the counselor herself - “in-herself,” so to speak, or the in-itself object that is her subjectivity - and not so much the theories or methods she employs. Less how a counselor ‘sees,’ but how that seeing might miss the object: Once a counselor is indeed a counselor, involved with the therapeutic relationship, she is concerned with how *the client sees* because the client is the object of the subject of the matter at hand.

### **The Object That is The Subject**

Because the distinction brought to light above is not usually made overt but is rather mixed within an idea of a common arena of philosophy, the insinuation by assumption - that a philosophy of counseling *must* and *can only* make a statement about what the therapeutic relationship is made of and or what it is supposed to do - works on our emotion, but which is here mainly our sense of want to be included in a valid community. The lack of clarity which is built into the idea of a common arena, whether we call it philosophy or counseling (the category ‘philosophy’ also speaks to a ‘philosophy of...’ counseling, in this case) is what calls for a conversion, or a change in view or orientation upon objects, for it to have any weight. By the conveying of a sense accompanying or beside what we are actually doing in philosophy (or counseling), Harman’s move communicates a norm that we did not know was in operation, which is that in the actuality of philosophy we had

been dealing *only* with thought and thinking the whole time and nothing else. Thought is assumed so common that no discussion about it is even suggested outside of the traditional philosophical lineage; we find the only avenues into discussing thought is by avoiding it through speaking of where it is located or what it is made of (neurons, brain) or what it does (traditional psychology and the various theories of counseling). The significance of O.O.P. is that Harman holds this up in front of our face and defines for us this tradition *by relying upon it without our explicit consent. We are thus shocked out of the love of wisdom every time we rely upon thought as an assumed philosophical given.*

The confusion persists paired with this silent influence and is noticed as the assumption that we have been actually and indeed dealing with a certain kind of phenomenism but which we did not fully acknowledge or realize we were involved with. We are hit below the belt, not only because as avowed phenomenologists we figured we did not have to be explicit in this (it was assumed a common knowledge by the term), but also because the practitioners of this system, such as within Harman's brand of philosophy, a species of (speculative) realism as we stay in modern knowledge-cognition, we find a secret motor that reveals Object Oriented *Philosophy* as another name for a confused stratagem that we have come to know as *postmodernism*. Despite what Jean-François Lyotard, who is noted for the term, may have indicated by incredulity toward metanarratives, it is possible to view speculative realism and O.O.P. more clearly through the lens of a postmodern rehashing of phenomenism rewritten in different terms, a central thinking subject secreted into an absolute realism by the magic of misdirection. This is all to say that this is speculative only where everything arises *as* a type of thought.

Further, a very short version of postmodernism allows for a ground of a thinking subject in her world justified through the ability to manipulate discourse. Harman relies upon a decried yet strangely involved speculative realist interpretation of this ability for intentional manipulation and proclaims it through the assumption as the fair game. In other words, orientation upon knowledge-cognition by simply using different words and a different palate of terms, Harman understands his playing of the game is entirely justified by the arguments that he is able to make, the main or pivotal argument of his Object Oriented Philosophy being the one that he decides needs not to be made; that is, the thinker using discourse gets to choose his topic and thereby intentionally talk about anything one wants by changing the foundational or central term around which a constellation of terms orbit; the center of gravity shifted, the map of the universe and each body within it likewise shifts; the definitional center changed, the definitions of the objects change such that they appear thus different or in a different light; the whole universe changes.

This then goes back to the gut punch which communicates that philosophy was never really about what we think it was, because in a semantic universe terms can be changed arbitrarily and at random. This is the question that Quentin Meillassoux voices concerning how if the universe is indeed discursive, or is merely a phenomenological correlation, then how there is any consistency at all? As he writes: We should then be prepared for waking up one day, or even walking to dinner one evening, to the universe suddenly having completely changed beyond recognition or totally fallen apart. In this light, we might begin to entertain what Cedric Nathaniel ponders of Slavoj Žižek's exercise; namely, if we are able to change the basis upon which the very notion of change is understood and yet *notice* this change, then the very discussion of an idea of a universe is found to be about *nothing*, which is to say, that the only continuity in philosophy is in the argument that one is able to construct successfully. *Hence*, no one *could* have thought differently *because* we are dealing with a ubiquitous essence that we call *thought* which is able to notice this kind of change. Harman takes what was at one time (note Heidegger) *only* implicit and makes it explicit as though

it was always, or should have been, obvious: We are dealing *only* with thought *and not merely its contents*. This is the significance of Harman's extended argument presented in his book "*Tool Being*." However, because Harman makes the move there to speak only about the possibility of conceptualizing thought's contents (in this case, objects) which lay outside of phenomenological omnipresence and omnipotence, through approaching things in opposition to the phenomenological approach which analyzed the inclusivity and correspondence of thinking, he thus left a gaping hole - a conceptual vacuum - into which philosophy disappears (as we see in the recent issues of the end of philosophy, end of history, post-humanism, post-capitalism, etc., which arise after nothing, or after brute existence or after finitude) to thus leave us with the issue of how philosophy is ever suspended as an epistemological foundation by which to look into every activity, event or object that could be or have been, in the first place. This resultant conceptual force arises outside of the phenomenological primacy to point our concern directly toward what is left: Objects in general, but the specific object at the heart of the great philosophical hole, *thought* itself. It is this philosophical vacancy which brings about the occasion for a new psychological intervention called the discipline of *counseling*.

### **Nothing is Substantial to the Universal Object**

Nihilism, or the act based in nothing and hence the act which is likewise ontologically empty, the result that is the reduction to absurdity that is called 'nothing,' the unproblematized given located at the center of every conventional philosophical issue, is that which is actively and intentionally denied, that which shall not be spoken of due to the embarrassment implemented by someone else making a definitive move upon a meaning which no one wanted to (really) know themselves. When nihilism is spoken, the term is itself is split into either a meaning of something that it is not, i.e. the talk about nihilism, or the embodiment of the 'tremendous mystery', the object by which nihilism is knowable. It is the emperor's new clothes either upheld by the most beautiful outfit that has been made, or revealed for what they are: The new clothes allow Being to be denied through reference to something that we are able to have opinions upon but is not really there, or to be finally admitted, and thus viewable, for what it *is*.

We call the embarrassment which accompanies the revealing of the truth which lay at the heart of nihilism, *offense*. We do not *know* nothing even as we might know *of* nothing; the embarrassment is shown not by the intellectual argument around embarrassment, but by the reaction that is the intellectualism - because the intellectualized act would always wish to have nothing identify a particular essence which is not itself - to refer out to something else, instead of what it is. The discussion which continues around the topic of nothing is itself an intellectualization of a basic offense in the thinking itself and a quick move to pave over it, to act - ironically - like the problem is moot, like it is nothing. Zizek references this kind of response to the Vichy Government in World War Two; namely, a government in name only which functions but has no effective power. Similarly, philosophy, left in shambles to be a fractured ideal by the foreclosure of Laruelle's *Non-philosophy* and powerless to hold itself together on its own, can only be resurrected through the act that disregards the rule which no longer has teeth. No rational act can arise except to act outside of what the argument would denote, and no argument can piece back together what has been torn asunder; the only way to hold it together is to deny that the rational act is something that arises outside of the argument, behave then as though it is inherent and within it, and to assert itself as indeed implicit to the argument. Yet by this notice, the rift is already apparent. Philosophy thereby becomes something other than what we *thought* it was.

The argument that Harman successfully makes, in as much that it was the only one that *has* to be made for his philosophy to meet success, is that no one is able to call him out on the argument that he feels he does not have to make: It is the argument that he makes anyways, it is the O.O.P. argument. This behavior (in contrast to what it likes to make believe of itself in rationality) then agrees with Victor Frankl's logotherapeutic assertion that meaning is that capacity of the human being which arises out of situations wherein the human being is subject to determinative powers against which she is completely powerless. Incidentally, it is possible to read Harman's *ontology* as the determinative aspect of love involved with gaining wisdom.

This argument, as mentioned a couple times already, is the essence of phenomenological irony; namely, the philosopher is signaled to the embarrassment that she thought philosophy was concerned with something more than asserting the power of thinking and manipulating discourse, and due to this emotional reaction, that which is argumentatively consistent, or, that which we might enjoy seeing in the history of philosophy or the intellectual lineage that can be associated with all things philosophical, must turn to some other manner to uphold its cogency. For Harman, it is simply objects. A discussion of objects which includes the human being as an object has no direct link, as yet, no bridge which connects the subject-thinker to the object outside of its thoughtful and reasonable domain. Such a move has relied upon something that exists outside of the traditional or conventional phenomenological method of coming upon the world. Indeed, Harman gives us entrance into a new world.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with having conversations or changing the topic; it happens all the time and wonderful ideas arise from them. One of the things Harman has done, though, is put that orientation upon things which I am calling conventional philosophy on notice that it no longer holds a special place for doing anything; his O.O.P. is the perfect example, i.e., it does *nothing*: The nothing it does *is* the conversion. Instead, as Harman suggests here and there, his philosophy, as well as any philosophy – now - *can be put* to use. Philosophers are historically in the middle of thought that is using things, such as, the use of finding out what a thing is made of or what it does; now we move into how philosophy itself is being used. Nothing, as opposed to another philosophical idea to play with, becomes a foundational substance of things and thus allows for a different kind of view upon the universe—because it is nothing to be concerned with.

Another thing Triple-O does nothing for is modernity and progress. Following Bruno Latour into his networks and time, the drum major Harman with his object-oriented ontology has signaled philosophy to 'mark time', or march in place, despite itself, still keeping the locked and stable tempo, but moving nowhere. The philosophical tune still plays, the drums create a sound like the band is moving, the people further along the parade route can hear the band, but the band is not coming. By now, some have gone home, but many of the people just started entertaining themselves, and we can still hear them humming the phenomenological, intentional, speculative philosophical tune with a nice motif of realism. No longer following the band into the center of town, people are forced to do their own thing. The irony inherent to this kind of philosophical presence, as well and thus the postmodern brand of phenomenism embedded in an Object Ontology, thus allows for some reorganization, albeit vicariously caused, a building of a sort of kinetic energy, but a new *kind* of energy. The tumbleweeds blow down the street, the children lap their lollipops, the parade parishioners cool themselves with ornate as well as newspaper-folded and handy battery fans while leaning on street signs and light posts glancing at smartphones; some people are happy, some curious, others sad and anxious, some are mad. As well, there is people, there is happiness, there is sadness, there is curiosity, anxiety and madness. Objects begin to appear as if out of nowhere, such as the color of the street and sky, the echoes of the band around the

corner, the scent of one's neighbor standing there on the hot day, and the feelings of hope, as well as annoyance and irritation—a whole field of objects never encountered before. All the while the band still marks time, playing the real tune, but not moving, or as Latour might say, standing in still time. All this time, created by the move into *realism*, allows for things to get done, or, as might be better described, allows for things to fill out the subject that is based, now, on nothing, that is, the subject of Object-Oriented Philosophy, to its objectivity. The subject is brought out of time to be what it is as an object of the universe, or as I say, a universal object.

### **The Object is Substantial where The Subject is Correlational**

We find significance with Harman's ideas, even if we might disagree with his arguments, for now the question that faces philosophy has to do with how such a simple assumption disrupts what we know to call history. As discussed by Nathaniel, the problem becomes noticeable as realism just before Harman's proposals appear, concerned with the assumed general philosophical method (the ubiquity, as philosophy is automatically assumed to be inseparable from a particular method) and not so much with any particular arguments, philosophy (the object we can call philosophy) would appear to make. In fact, as we see with Laruelle's Non-philosophy, it is the method of argument, that which is assumed inherent to *the* or *a* ubiquitous method, through which the problem of philosophy itself arises. This is the problem of irony, but the more specific and true manner of discerning a problem located also by Latour, which is, reductionism, the flipside or mirror image of correlationalism; once the last reduction is understood we are left with a vision arising from impasse. In his book *Beyond Finitude* Quentin Meillassoux coined the term *correlationalism* to indicate the problem of how philosophy might be able to get outside of its own subjective limits.

The issue that Harman then shows us in relief of his own work is in his attempts to argue (reduce) that we are able to get outside of philosophical correlationalism by simply using different words and phrases. For example, instead of philosophy being at all times an application of the intellect to discern and solve problems of reason, philosophy is now and again the love of wisdom. However, we can also surmise why or how he came to such a solution: Less that he was dissatisfied with so many arguments and more that he was bored with the usual post-modern phenomenological developments, which is to say that he was already *in love*, so to speak, not alienated from it. Yet the formulation of how he was able to make such a big splash in the philosophical world now should be obvious. Thought is determined in knowledge understood as sacrosanct to philosophy and unimpeachable, and the discourse apparent to thought is allowed to be manipulated by a withdrawn aspect (the thinker) which is the subject inspired through intuition. The key to this kind of magic which occurs right in front of us is found when we understand that philosophy is addressing that which is outside of it *already*, which is *reality itself*. Hence, Harman's philosophical position arises within and without the postmodern phenomenism; to a fish in water swimming in a medium it cannot discern which is its natural and obvious universe, Triple-O is like a bubble floating up from some never before known 'beneath' to a never imagined surface beyond which a new medium can be found; Triple-O reveals not only the water to its being, but also the water to its actual universality, which is to say, as water with a threshold beyond which is air, for example.

Those Speculative philosophers in general, and Harman in particular with his Object-Oriented Philosophy, make their whole claim upon a thought that is able to address things that are not thought, not bound by thoughtful intensions; hence the *speculative* disclaimer. However,

where Harman shows himself is in his rejection of what some philosophers have been noticing is more theological than philosophical; that is, in the doubling-down and raising the phenomenological stakes to its spiritual (in the local) sense and religious (in the global) sense. This downplaying of the theological reason to thus make what is ‘other than’ a philosophy appears to restate that reality has to do with communing with a transcendent, and appears rather myopic as much as it might take the theological tact in this way, for it tends toward an advocacy of thought that misses the responsibility to the world it inhabits and makes claims to for the sake of ontological authenticity as it appears to only restate postmodern phenomenism in new clothes, or new terms, as the case may be. This faux pas is due to the implicit assumption of thought as it is conveyed into history accompanied by a philosophically proper manner of understanding the world. Harman proposes to avoid this fall into transcendence by speaking of objects that are defined as not subject to the thinker of thoughts; though beyond the scope of this essay, where Harman closes off that connection, interestingly enough at least one philosopher, Adam Miller, in his book *Speculative Grace*, has attempted, with some success, at opening wide this unavoidable conflation of elements.

Harman thus is involved with an intentional denial of the philosophy with which he is implicit for the sake of speaking about objects, and not subjects, and counseling typically does the same thing but subjects not objects. This is the irony at the heart of his move: There is no intellectual argumentative justification for his move beyond the actuality of the move itself. This is to say, the move is determined by emotion, or rather, love; counseling could do as well by getting out of the intellectual justification of the emotional task which is the therapeutic encounter. The intellectualization would then be left to the subject of the particular psychotherapeutic theory, whether it be for the counselor or the client. Perhaps psychology is motivated by the intellect, but we could hope that the desire to help is more motivated by love for the client, or people in general. So, by his decisive move, Harman thus is able to indeed address objects—objects that are typically and regularly understood as common, empirical, physical, “out-there”, non-subjective objects, as well as the object that has been typically assumed in the term *subject*, i.e. the human being. The problem highlighted by Harman’s move for us is thus indeed *the subject*. Yet, because Harman, in his career, is involved with a more architectural project of how objects might inscribe spaces of knowing, or how this might be the case, I take up the yoke of the object that we call the subject, or in our case, the object of counseling which is the therapeutic relationship itself.

How can this be? How can Harman actually be talking about the subject? His is called *Object Ontology*, the being of objects; how can I now say that the significant issue at the heart of his work is the subject? We have already been over this earlier in this essay. It is here that we find the real significance of his move: The object of his object-oriented ontology is the subject of his philosophy. In the final analysis, the analysis which once took philosophical knowledge as getting to something essential, phenomenology was found to be insoluble, which is to say, contradictory to its effort, or as I will say, contradictory to a *particular manner of viewing* philosophy’s (world-) historical effort. This conclusion, or the conclusions, of phenomenological investigation such as with Alfred Whitehead, Henri Bergson, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, and what can be understood as phenomenological political extensions as we find with Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, was that the phenomenon often enough is a self-justifying effort, and that this kind of philosophical justification is located in the power of the argument to concord with reason as a world-invested manifestation. Not one conventionally understood philosophy that we can label phenomenological has at its root a non-insular, expansive or inclusive justification of the subject itself, whatever that may be. The subject is routinely understood to be infinitely justified by itself including what is knowable of any ‘other’, because, as well, any ‘other-ness’ is mediated

by the subject. This is the whole of intentional phenomenology and this is why, often enough, any example categorized as phenomenological will do to indicate a belief system, worldview, or rationale of the speaking person for any instance or circumstance. The contradiction though, again as we already have noted, is that somehow every ‘other’ gets to do the same thing. The common theoretical use of phenomenology, or the idea of it, no matter how philosophically imprecise or incorrect in its rendering, means the meaning that an individual person attests to, but without accounting for the contradiction involved in knowing phenomenologically what the other phenomenal subject is meaning; hence the speculative theological gap-stop of theology, spirituality and religion. For how could a subject have a universe of meaning into which everything is mediated and still be able to comprehend or even come across a meaning which is not that subjective meaning? It is a phenomenon, an unexplainable feature that this essay highlights. To recoup the proper phenomenology to the various authors and their own particular arguments is therefore merely to point out the proof of my assertion here; namely that phenomenology as a philosophical foundation has no actual common foundation; before the late 20<sup>th</sup> century it was called irony, but in truth it is contradictory to the nature of a certain manner of viewing objects. Phenomenology is, most regularly, the analytical attempt to reduce an inherently contradictory condition to something non-contradictory: An idea which then posits itself as involved with something that is the not itself which we regularly call ideology. It is thus by this contradiction that the subject is able to be found in-itself, which is to say, as an object, albeit, irregular to the modern conventional understanding. Triple-O accounts for the contradiction of phenomenology as contradiction itself; in Kierkegaardian terms, the thing in-itself which arises outside of the phenomenological reduction is contradiction cannot be gained through a qualitative leap.

To round back to a philosophy of counseling: The point to be gleaned here is that it is not incumbent upon the *client* to know about or have any access whatsoever to such philosophical gradations of argument such as their status as a human Being. The point, thus, is exactly a Non-philosophical maxim: The potential of the phenomenological manifestation of any individual, what we could call ‘soul’, is intact and not impinged upon even as conventional philosophical arguments might leave such phenomenology as an ideological residue, a contradiction and its qualia which lay at the heart of a modern ideological subject or what can be correctly called a theological, ideal spirit. In other words, the subject that is a philosophical object is indeed a subject of counseling, however the activity of counseling might proceed into its efforts. We are able to allow what is of spirit (see Derrida’s article on Heidegger called “*Of Spirit*”) to retain its spirituality without being engulfed by a phenomenological theoretical universe. An object-oriented approach to counseling does not say anything about how such therapy is allowed to occur or what a counselor is supposed to do—what counseling *does*— within that therapeutic involvement with a client; in this way, every conventionally permitted theoretical activity is not negated but only explained as to a common thing that is the therapeutic relationship.

Phenomenology identifies the space characterized by an inability to come upon the ends of thinking reasonably or even philosophically - phenomenology *is* the space - and amounts to the conceptual basis for why a philosophical foundation of counseling as an effort or discipline need not pry into the rooms where help can occur. Instead, the object that is counseling is more definitely outlined for what it *is* (a universal real object) even while it is *also* able to be understood *only* as what it is made out of or what it does (a subject of an all-encompassing universe). So far in modern philosophy, we have only entertained the subject of a ubiquitous semantic universe grounded in nothing; this could be contributing to why counseling, psychiatry, psychology, and social work - the disciplines of mental health - and all the various theories have not, in large portion, helped.

Individual theory addresses *particular instances of problem*, but we are implicitly confirmed in our (post-)modern phenomenal subjectivity that our inspiration, reason and sense should allow us to apply a particular theory to every issue of mental health that arises.

The short answer to the question of how the subject is an object is usually not realized for what it means, so the long answer is found in the myriads of voluminous treatise of past authors who were concerned with the subject of the universe: The object that is typically called the subject that is regularly associated with the human being is conveyed in those works; the parameters of the subject, its limits and constitution, have been laid before us. Anything further philosophy might propose as to the constitution of the human being as a subject, such as various ways humans deal with any current real manifestation of world, biology, politics, economics, etcetera—what it is through what it is made of or what it does—ultimately has already been outlined to the philosophical possibility of how such doing does. Human creativity is endless. We will always have to deal with ideological ramifications of the subject coming up against oppressive limits, no matter what discourse appears to account for them, or vice-versa; hence the need for counseling but as well a substantial ideal for what it might be. In the end, the call for Harman's work is the realization of the last instance of subjectivity, where, begun with Ludwig Wittgenstein, as Nathaniel describes, the subject is to be found a universal object. Once the long and the short answers have been taken, the simple answer is the term 'subject' is already taken. The subject is found to be contradictory in its essence, which is to say, the philosophical investigation into the essence of the subject showed only the subject and *nothing* else.

This conclusion of only nothing is intolerable to the knowledge understood by conventional philosophy because it means that any proposal is ultimately self-referential absolutely; as Harman has noted, it does not account for or allow room for change. The philosophical recourse to the finding of this end, then, was historically to typically and simply deny that the investigation was investigating something essential. This was the move Jean-Paul Sartre made. Sartre gave philosophy an essential justification to a subject which is ultimately self-referential, a subject which finds at its ends a freedom which extends into nothingness, into an abyss of limitlessness. His solution was that the individual must then simply deny the truth of the analysis, revolt from it, and assert its own idea of sense *within the renewed limits of the common existence* as though freedom itself can be redefined in its essence. We find then that the core of subsequent French philosophy simply followed suit by remaining in a silent Hegelian universe of phenomenal synthesis, which is to say, synthesizing what is able to come to mind as though what comes to mind is justified in-itself, but in a manner where the 'in-itself' mind stays out of the picture for the purpose of justifying its own inspired intuition, or, something that arises from nothing. With Harman's move, the conventional philosophical method arises in opposition to *staying with* the limit that had already proven itself by that mind and its ways; with his move objects are allowed to be various 'in-itself' objects, and the human being is allowed to retain the character its philosophy may have argued for the category of the subject to become an object in-itself *as well*, albeit, a universal object that we can now identify as the human being. Hence, the identity we call human correlates with the condition that Meillassoux coined *correlationalism*, but also the sure way out of it that no conventional philosophical subject seems to want to grant credence or even notice.

### Coming to Present

We have only what is presented before us, obviously and apparently. For a thing to be true, to be found in-itself, we do not have to find predecessors nor make an argument of how this may

be the case for it indeed to be the case. The argument (any argument) that is made in this regard (that no one else, including myself in the debate, has formulated or is able to formulate a reason which proves that what is before us is universally accessible) arises in the conditions available to everyone under particular conditions; the phenomenal subject with its various personal constructions, representations and qualia of worlds and realities need only to look at the fact of its own world-constructing ability and limit to understand the subject as an object, hence, where the therapeutic relationship is the object that arises of the subject in a direct encounter with itself thus the other.

The object that is a tree is always a tree no matter what meaning we attach to it or term we use to designate it; the bat made from its wood still will break noses, the noses will always be noses and blood will spill. The meaning we make from such objects, that is, the subject, is some *thing* different; in coming upon this difference one either revolts or accepts, there is no middle ground. One either changes or not. Yet, the stranglehold of the existential revolt of the modern individual into a theology of subjective correlational and conventional phenomenological ubiquity can be loosened by an empathic view of one's self. The self is where all subjects and objects reside exclusive from one another. The issue, then, is less how to get out of the infinite regression of subjective meaning, the philosophical condition wherein a counselor will never be able to encounter a client or vice versa and where theory is hopefully applied, and more to simply to see that meaning itself grants an egress by the fact that there is a specific instance of meaning which understands itself through contradiction, as contradiction, which is, that there is another subject which is doing the same thing of being eternally correlated to its own semantics (aka, Derrida's *différance*). The relation to be noticed then less concerns knowledge than emotion. Rather than a soft plying of phenomenological community upon either/or reductionism and denied contradiction, the significance here is a hardline philosophical conversion; the universe fills what ideology flattens. The universe is not simply *meaning made* from the intentional subject, but also the *meaning gained* through intention offered through the universal object, which Alphonso Lingis may have liked to call a universal imperative. In session, by ethical definition, the opening is made by the counselor just as it is the counselor who establishes the therapeutic environment; the confidence implied of the encounter now gains an added measure of integrity because the counselor's activity is grounded in a universal philosophical substance which *supports* her own theory of knowing, being and intervening, in contrast to a mere intellectual assertion that every Being be subject to an exclusive practical theory.

Plurality is now epistemologically permitted to actually be plural, for Being to be in its plurality considerate of multiplicity. Now open and expanding, one simply draws upon the network of objects which occur regardless of what argument one would want to make; subjective relativity now adheres to the rules which have established its justification for sensible pell-mell meaning-making instead of reifying the simple intuitive capriciousness by which it justifies the random pulling of reasonable meaning out of a transcendently justified magic hat. The argument, instead of witnessing an eternally inspired phenomenal subjectivity, now becomes the transparent *evidence* of its own objectivity. This is the move from a hypothetically suspended justification of universal subjective semantic relativity (subjective praxis suspended in an essential unknown) into a substantial and categorically philosophical ground for such relation (a ground of praxis from which unknowns may be encountered in-themselves and the subject thus investigated).

### **Moving Forward: Intension Evidences the Orientation of Sense**

Within this field, now defined, we have the condition described so far, of Harman's business, the reasons for it, the repercussions of it, the ontological basis for it, as well a basis for its practical application to the discipline of counseling; i.e. an object-oriented ontology of counseling. Yet, it is this last which shows that the argument that Harman is making does and does not follow his intension. It follows his intension in as much as he mainly uses arguments to establish a cognitive position for himself in a field of objects which have nothing to do with subjects except as a philosophical counterpart and platform from which to move onward to assert the ideas of his mind. He is able to do this and we are able to understand intuitively what he is doing due to a view upon philosophy which has *thought* as its impetus and foundation, a view which holds history in place and the thinker as central such that the thinker is able and validated in redefining terms and discourse to his liking, even to the extent that the thinker need no longer be confined by that historical lineage but can indeed use it to justify a flight from it, all the while remaining true to such lineage.

Strangely enough, the intention appearing above makes no room for a commonality of human interaction called counseling because the ontological basis of counseling and Harman's philosophical intention are thus equivocal, that is, both arise as phenomenologically real items (subjects of ideology and therefore argumentative); the ground is lifted again. Nevertheless, the ability to locate and describe what Harman is doing phenomenologically thus allows us to identify the objectivity involved and say that it reflects a particular *orientation* upon things; I submit that where Harman's O.O.P. argues and deals with a particular and real ontology of objects, by contrast, a true philosophical effort as might imply activity (in-itself) in contrast to having been derived from activity (philosophical or phenomenological reason) *concerns orientation* upon objects. This concern is quantitative in the Kierkegaardian sense (faith is that which is already a leap, as opposed to the basis from which we leap in hoping); from this position we now move into an object orientation of counseling. It is a true effort because the effort does not attempt to isolate intension to a singular thinker or thought such as concerns real agency. Rather, the effort merely moves to describe the sensible situation of a particular object, albeit, one that is doing its ontological activity, or its teleology, such as the object of the therapeutic encounter. The truth of this effort allows for the objects of philosophy, which are, the central thinking subject of mind and or spirit (phenomenological, ideological or power derived, narrative, existential, cognitive, and neurological, amongst others), and the object of the subject, to rest together with equity in a very real and responsive non-philosophical, unilaterally dual space and which occur together and simultaneously, interactively and intentionally of a universe, while not necessarily reducing to one or the other, not making claims upon the other's veracity and effectiveness, in what can be called an asymmetrical, non-zero-sum, ontological state. Here, on one hand, phenomenological Being must by its analytically synthetical (or synthetically analytical) nature, begin in knowledge to reduce all phenomenon to contradiction, and then in order to retain its real identity, anticipatorily revolt from the ideological collapse which would develop if it were not for the premature rejection/revolt: This is the subject retained in its ontological activity, of intuitively generating meaning and intentionality enacting its world through it, which is, of the subject finding itself in a meaningful field of subjects of that meaning (correlation).

Then also, yet on the other hand, there is the Being which is involved with the integrity of, what Harman calls *real objects*, which includes the subject itself without falling into its dominion, without reducing to a totalizing subjective semantic (which is contradictory when coupled with

another subject). In other words, allowing for the conventional philosophical or cognitive center and the intentional subject, and due to the noticeable limits which constrain the subject as well as nullify its own essential substance (alienation), the object which arises as the subject of intension is able to be viewed, understood, analyzed and put to use without having to answer to the contradiction of reduction toward ideological unity into which its phenomenon perpetually falls and out of which the existential revolt conveniently saves. I call this the situation wherein the phenomenology of the subject is able to be an object the *Two Routes* upon things.

We should be careful to note such *routes* do not fall neatly into conventional categories of scientific and phenomenological; rather the *two routes* allow for the infinitely inclusive phenomenological subject of story and meaning to be retained while a multiplicity of such subjects likewise remain real and individual things to be encountered in-themselves. Before this distinction, philosophy and science were at odds, counted up as two of a number of human abilities, thoughts or cognitions that stem, we are to suppose, from some unknowable but arguable difference which arises spontaneously in the universe through the human being. The model of the Two Routes is suited to philosophically ground the practice of counseling in the reality of both a specific theoretical conservative ideal, such as the science of psychology, as well as a liberal integrative approach, which can likewise adhere or otherwise appropriate to various degrees—or not—scientific ideals. For example; the medical-scientific disease model which sees the psyche and mental health as a problem contained entirely by empirical science (the brain and body), the various systematic theories which suppose to explain an inclusive universe of therapeutic praxis (examples such as Psychodynamic, Cognitive and Behavioral therapies, Systems theory as well as Gestalt therapy) , and the integrative approach which tends to issues with solutions which accord with various minutiae of the therapeutic encounter, all can be specifically accounted for and retained in their unique validity through the ontological concern founded in the Two Routes, or an object oriented ontology for the discipline of counseling.

### Bibliography

- Badiou, A. (2007). *Being and event*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Derrida, J. (1976). *On grammatology*. (G.C. Spivak, trans.). Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1987). *Of spirit: Heidegger and the question*. (G. Bennington & R. Bowlby, trans.) Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Frankl, V. E. (1992). *Man's search for meaning*. (I. Lasche, trans.) Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.
- Harman, G. (2002). *Tool-being*. Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.
- Harman, G. (2005). *Guerrilla metaphysics*. Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.
- Harman, G. (2007). On Vicarious causation. *Collapse*, 2. 171-206
- Heidegger, M. (1968). *What is called thinking*. (J.G. Gray trans.) New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.
- Kant, I. (1998). *The critique of pure reason*. (P. Guyer & A.W. Woods, eds. and Trans.) Cambridge University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1983). *Fear and trembling; repetition*. (H. Hong & E. Hong, eds. and Trans.) Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1989). *The concept of irony*. (H. Hong & E. Hong, eds. and trans.) Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

- Laruelle, F. (2013). *Principles of nonphilosophy*. (N. Rubczak & A.P. Smith, eds. and trans.) Harvard University Press.
- Latour, B. (1988). *The pasteurization of France*. President and Fellows of Harvard College.
- Lingis, A. (1998). *The imperative*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Lyotard, J.F. (1984). *The postmodern condition*. Minnesota University Press.
- Meillassoux, Q. (2008) *After finitude: an essay on the necessity of contingency*. (R. Brassier, trans.) London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic,
- Miller, A. S. (2013). *Speculative grace*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Nathaniel, C. (2018). *The philosophical hack: the concluding unscientific postscript to event*. Boulder, Colorado: Od Parcel.
- Sartre, J. (1978). *Being and nothingness: a phenomenological essay on ontology*. (H. E. Barnes, trans.) Pocket Books.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1999). *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. (C.K. Ogden, trans.) Mineola and New York: Dover Publications, Inc.,
- Zizek, Slavoj (2014). *Event: a philosophical journey through a concept*. Brooklyn and London: Melville House.