

WHY THE WORLD DOES NOT EXIST

MARKUS GABRIEL



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Why the World Does Not Exist

Markus Gabriel

Translated by Gregory S. Moss

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Thinking Philosophy Anew

Life, the universe, and everything else ... presumably everyone has asked themselves what it all means. Where do we find ourselves? Are we only an aggregation of elementary particles in a gigantic world receptacle? Or do our thoughts, wishes, and hopes have a distinct reality – and, if so, what? How can we understand our existence or even existence in general? And how far does our knowledge extend?

In this book I will develop the outlines of a new philosophy, which follows from a simple, basic thought, namely the idea that the world does not exist. As you will see, this does not mean that nothing exists at all. There are planets, my dreams, evolution, the toilet flush, hair loss, hopes, elementary particles, and even unicorns on the far side of the moon, to mention only a few examples. The principle that the world does not exist entails that everything else exists. For this reason, I can already announce that I will claim, as my first principle, that everything exists except one thing: the world.

The second principle of this book is NEW REALISM. New realism describes a philosophical stance that designates the era after so-called postmodernity (which I heralded in the summer of 2011 – strictly speaking, on 23 June 2011 around 1:30 p.m. – during a lunch in Naples with the Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris).¹ In the first instance, then, new realism is nothing more than the name for the age after postmodernity.

Postmodernity was the radical attempt to start afresh after all of humanity's great promises had failed: from religion to modern science and all the way to the excessively radical

ideas of left- and right-wing totalitarianism. Postmodernity wanted to consummate the break with tradition altogether and free us from the illusion that life has a specific meaning¹ after which we should all strive. In order to free us from this illusion, however, it merely fabricated new illusions – in particular the illusion that we are to a certain extent transfixed by our illusions. Postmodernity wanted to make us believe that, since prehistory, humanity has suffered from a gigantic collective hallucination – metaphysics.

Appearance and Being

One can define METAPHYSICS as the attempt to develop a theory of the world as such. Its aim is to describe how the world really is, not how the world seems to be or how it appears to us. In this way, metaphysics, to a certain extent, invented the world in the first place. When we speak about “the world,” we mean everything that actually is the case, or, put differently: actuality. At this point, it is tempting to eliminate human beings from the equation “the world = everything that is actually the case.” For one assumes that there is a difference between things as they appear to us and how they actually are. Thus, in order to find out how they really are, one must, so to speak, remove everything that is added by man in the process of knowing.

Metaphysics has been criticized and rejected by many thinkers over the last centuries. The most recent and radical attempt to get rid of it in one stroke was postmodernism – that is, essentially, the idea that we live in an entirely post-metaphysical age, an age defined by the alleged fact that we have given up believing in the idea of a reality hidden behind the appearances. One could say that postmodernism’s objection against metaphysics was that things exist only insofar as they appear to us. Accordingly,

there is absolutely nothing further behind the appearances, no world or actuality in itself. Some less radical postmodernists, such as the American philosopher Richard Rorty, thought that there might in fact still be something behind the world as it appears to us. However, he thought that this could play no role for us as human beings, so he instead suggested that we increase solidarity among human beings rather than look for ultimate Truth (with a capital T) or ultimate Reality (with a capital R).

However, postmodernism, arguably, was only yet another variation on the basic themes of metaphysics – in particular, because postmodernism was based on a very general form of constructivism. CONSTRUCTIVISM assumes that there are absolutely no facts in themselves and that we construct all facts through our multifaceted forms of discourse and scientific methods. There is no reality beyond our language games or discourses; they somehow do not really talk about anything, but only about themselves. The most important source and forefather of this tradition is Immanuel Kant. Kant indeed claimed that we could not know the world as it is in itself. No matter what we know, he thought that it would always in some respect have been made by human beings.

Let us take an example that is often used in this context, namely colors. Ever since Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton, it has been suspected that colors do not actually exist. This assumption so exasperated colorful characters such as Goethe that he composed his own *Doctrine of Colors*. One might think that colors are only waves of a determinate length that strike our sensory receptors. The world in itself is actually completely without color, and it consists only of elementary particles which appear to us on a medium-sized scale where they somehow mutually stabilize one another into structures we perceive as bodies extended in space and time. It is exactly this thesis that is a widespread form

of metaphysics in our time. It claims that, in itself, the world is completely different than it appears to us. Now Kant was still much more radical. He claimed that even this assumption (or perhaps supposition?) – about particles in space-time – is only a way in which the world, as it is in itself, appears to us. How it actually is, that is something we could absolutely never discover. Everything that we know is made by us, and just because of this we are also able to know it. In a famous letter to his fiancée, Wilhelmine von Zenge, Heinrich von Kleist illustrates Kantian Constructivism in the following way:

If, instead of eyes, all men had green glasses they would have to conclude that the objects which they perceived through them were green; and they would never be able to decide whether their eyes were showing them the objects as they really existed or whether they were not adding something to those objects which did not belong to them but to their eyes. The same thing applies to the understanding. We cannot decide whether what we call truth really is truth or whether it only appears to us as such.²

Constructivism believes in Kant's "green glasses." To this, postmodernism added that we wear not only one but, rather, many glasses: science, politics, language games of love, poetry, various natural languages, social conventions, and so on. Everything is only a complicated play of illusions in which we mutually assign each other a place in the world, or, simply expressed: postmodernity deemed human existence to be a long French art-house film, in which all participants strive to seduce one another, to gain power over others, and to manipulate them. With clever irony this cliché is being called into question in contemporary French film. One thinks, for example, about Jean-Claude Brisseau's *Secret Games* or Catherine Breillat's *Anatomy of Hell*. This option is rejected, in a playful and amusing way, in David O.

Russell's film *I ♥ Huckabees*, a film which, next to classics such as *Magnolia*, bears one of the best witnesses for new realism.

But human existence and knowledge is not a collective hallucination, nor are we transfixed in any picture worlds or conceptual systems behind which the real world is located. New realism assumes that we recognize the world as it is in itself. Of course we can be mistaken, for in some situations we indeed find ourselves in an illusion. But it is simply not the case that we are always or almost always mistaken.

New Realism

In order to understand to what extent new realism engenders a new orientation to the world, let us choose a simple example: let us assume that Astrid is currently standing in Sorrento and sees Vesuvius, while we (that is you, dear reader, and I) are currently in Naples and are also viewing Vesuvius. In this scenario there is Vesuvius, Vesuvius seen by Astrid (that is, from Sorrento), and Vesuvius seen by us (that is, from Naples). Metaphysics claims that, in this scenario, there is only one real object, namely Vesuvius. It just so happens that Vesuvius is being viewed in one instance from Sorrento and in another instance from Naples, which hopefully leaves it cold. Whoever might be interested in this is of no concern to Vesuvius. That is metaphysics.

In contrast, constructivism assumes that there are three objects in this scenario: Astrid's Vesuvius, your Vesuvius, and my Vesuvius. Beyond that there is absolutely no object or thing in itself – at least, no object which we could ever hope to know – as all objects which we can know anything about are supposed to be constructed by us.

In contrast, new realism supposes that, in this scenario, there are at least four objects:

1. Vesuvius
2. Vesuvius viewed from Sorrento (Astrid's perspective)
3. Vesuvius viewed from Naples (your perspective)
4. Vesuvius viewed from Naples (my perspective).

One can easily clarify why this option is the best. It is not only a fact that Vesuvius is a volcano that is located at a particular place on the earth's surface, which presently belongs to Italy, but it is also just as much with the same right a fact that it looks a certain way from Sorrento and another way from Naples. Even my most secret feelings while looking at the volcano are facts (even though they remain a secret only until a futuristic App for the iPhone 1000 + manages to scan my thoughts and put them online). New realism assumes that thoughts about facts exist with the same right as the facts at which our thoughts are directed. Thoughts about facts are just more facts. There is no reason to disdain thought, mind, consciousness, or human existence in general on the basis of the notion that the world would be exactly the way it is regardless of our presence in it. The moon is not more real than my beliefs about it; it does not have more right to be treated as existing. It will exist for longer than I will, but that does not matter for the question whether or not something exists.

In contrast, both metaphysics and constructivism fail because of an unjustified simplification of reality, in which they understand reality unilaterally either as *the world without spectators* or, equally one-sided, as *the world of spectators*. The world which I know is but always a world with spectators, in which facts that have no interest in me exist together with my interests (and perceptions, feelings,

and so on). The world is neither exclusively the world without spectators nor the world of spectators. This is new realism. Old realism – that is, metaphysics – was only interested in the world without spectators, while constructivism quite narcissistically grounded the world and everything that is the case on our fantasies. Both theories lead to nothing.

Thus, one must explain how there can be spectators in a world in which spectators do not exist at all times and in all places – a problem that is solved in this book through the introduction of a new ontology. By ONTOLOGY one traditionally understands the “doctrine of being.” In English, the ancient Greek participle “*to on*” means “being,” and “*logos*” in this context simply means “doctrine.” Ontology ultimately concerns the meaning of existence. What are we actually claiming when we say, for example, that there are meerkats? Many people believe that this question is addressed to physicists or, more generally, to natural scientists. In the end, everything that exists could just be material. After all, we don’t seriously believe in ghosts, which can arbitrarily violate natural laws and unrecognizably whirl around us. (Well, most of us don’t believe this.) However, if for this reason we claim that only that which can be investigated by natural science exists and can be dissected, or pictured, by means of the scalpel, microscope, or brain scanner, we would have missed the mark by a long shot. For in this case the federal state of Germany would not exist, nor would the future, numbers, or my dreams. But, because they do, we justifiably hesitate to entrust the question of Being to physicists. As it will be shown, physics is, well, biased.

The Plurality of Worlds

Presumably, since the beginning of this book you have wanted to know exactly what it means to claim that the world does not exist. I don't want to keep you in suspense any longer, and for this reason I anticipate what will later be proven with the help of reproducible thought experiments, examples, and paradoxes. One might think that the world is the domain of all those things that simply exist without our assistance and that surround us in this way. Nowadays, for example, we speak meaningfully of "the universe," by which we mean that most likely infinite expanse in which countless suns and planets run their orbit and in which people, in a quiet arm of the Milky Way, have built up their civilization. In point of fact, the universe too exists. I will not claim that there are no galaxies or black holes. But I do claim that the universe is not the whole. Strictly speaking, the universe is somewhat provincial.

By the UNIVERSE, I understand the experimentally accessible OBJECT DOMAIN of the natural sciences. Yet the world is considerably bigger than the universe. If the world is really absolutely everything, then governments, dreams, unrealized possibilities, works of art, and notably our thoughts about the world also belong to it. Thus, a good number of objects exist which man cannot touch. Just now, as you comprehend the thoughts which I have introduced to you, you do not suddenly disappear and peer, so to speak, from the outside onto the world whole. Our thoughts about the world remain in the world, for unfortunately it is not so easy to escape from this mess through reflection alone!

But even if governments, dreams, unrealized possibilities, and most notably our thoughts about the world also belong to the world, they cannot be identical to the object domain of the natural sciences. In any case, I am not aware that physics or biology have recently integrated sociology, law, or German language and cultural studies. Nor have I heard

that the *Mona Lisa* has been taken apart in a chemistry lab. In any case, this would be quite expensive and also quite absurd. Hence, a first step in the right direction is to designate the world as all-encompassing, as the domain of all the domains mentioned above. Consequently, the world would be the domain in which there exist not only all things and facts which occur without us, but also all the things and facts which occur only with us. For ultimately it should be the domain that comprises everything – life, the universe, and everything else.

Still, to be precise, this all-inclusive being, the world, does not exist and cannot exist. With this main thesis, not only should the illusion that there is a world, to which humanity quite obstinately adheres, be destroyed, but at the same time I wish to use this in order to win positive knowledge from it. For I claim not only that the world does not exist but also that everything exists except the world.

That might sound a bit strange, but it can be easily illustrated, perhaps surprisingly, with the help of our everyday experiences. Let us imagine that we meet friends for dinner at a restaurant. Is there a domain here that encompasses all other domains? Can we, so to speak, draw a circle around everything that belongs to our visit to the restaurant? Now, take a look: we are presumably not the only ones in the restaurant. There are, as it turns out, several customers at the tables, with different group dynamics, preferences, and so on. In addition, there is the world of the employees, the restaurant owner, the cooks, as well as the world of the insects and spiders and the invisible bacteria that live in the restaurant. What is more, there are events at the subatomic level such as cell divisions, indigestion, and hormonal fluctuations. Some of these events and objects hang together, others not at all. What does the spider in the roof beams, unnoticed by all, know about my good mood or my eating preferences? And

still the spider is a component of my visit to the restaurant, even if it mostly goes unnoticed. The same applies to digestion problems unless they are the center of attention.

There are also at the restaurant many domains of objects, small isolated worlds, as it were, that exist next to each other without really finding common ground. Thus, there are many small worlds, but not the one world to which they all belong. This does not mean that the many small worlds are only perspectives on one world, but that only the many small worlds exist. They actually exist, not merely in my imagination.

One can understand the claim that the world does not exist precisely in this sense. It is simply false that everything is connected. The popular claim that the fluttering of a butterfly's wings in Brazil, under certain circumstances, may cause a tornado in Texas is just untrue. Many things are connected with many other things, but it is false (in the strict sense, actually impossible!) that everything is connected. Of course every single one of us makes enduring connections. We produce images of ourselves and our surroundings, and we situate our interests in our environment. When, for example, we are hungry, we create a dinner menu out of our environment – the world becomes a feeding trough. At other moments we attentively follow a train of thought (I hope that this is just such a moment). Again, at other times we have completely different goals. In the process we tell ourselves that we always move in the same world, for which it is a prerequisite that we take ourselves to be sufficiently important. Our everyday business dealings seem to us, in the same way as it is for toddlers, infinitely important, and in a certain way they are. For we have only one life, which is taking place in a very short time span. Still, we can remember how things which today we take to be trifles – dandelions, for example – were infinitely important when we were children. In our own life,

too, the connections are constantly dislocated. We change our self-image and the image of our surroundings and adapt at each moment to a situation that has not previously been there.

By analogy, so it is with the world as a whole. This exists just as little as a connection which encompasses all connections. There is simply no rule or world formula that describes everything. This is not contingent on the fact that we have not yet found it, but on the fact that it cannot exist at all.

Less than Nothing

Here we return to the difference between metaphysics, constructivism and new realism. The metaphysicians claim there is an all-encompassing rule, and the more courageous among them also claim they have finally found it.

Accordingly, in the history of Occidental thought, one explorer of an alleged world formula has followed the next for almost three thousand years: from Thales of Miletus to Karl Marx and Stephen Hawking.

Constructivism, to the contrary, claims that we cannot know the rule. In its eyes, while we attempt to reach an agreement about which illusion we want to be applied, we find ourselves entangled in power struggles or communicative actions.

New realism, in contrast, attempts consistently and seriously to answer the question whether, in principle, such a rule could exist. The answer to this question is thereby not merely a further construction. Instead it demands – as does every answer to every ordinary, serious, and well-meant question – to ascertain what the situation is. It would be odd if someone, in response to the question “Is there still some butter in the fridge?,” answered you by saying:

“Yes, but the butter and the fridge are actually only an illusion, a human construction. In truth neither the butter nor the fridge exists. At the very least, we don’t know whether they exist. Nevertheless, enjoy your meal!”

In order to understand why the world does not exist, one must first understand what it means for something to exist at all. The apparently obvious answer is that something exists only when it is found in the world. Where should anything exist, if not in the world, when by this we understand the whole, the domain, in which everything takes place, whatever happens. That said, the world itself is not found in the world. At least I have never yet seen, tasted, or felt the world. And even when we think about the world, the world *about which* we think is obviously not identical with the world *in which* we think. For, while I think about the world right now, for example, this is merely a small event in the world, my little world-thought. Next to this there are still innumerable other objects and events: rain showers, toothaches, and the Federal Republic of Germany.

Thus, if we think about the world, what we grasp is something different than what we want to grasp. We can never grasp the whole. It is in principle too big for any thought. But this is not some defect of our capacity to know, neither is it immediately connected to the fact that the world is infinite (we can partially encompass the infinite, for example, in the form of calculus or set theory). Rather, the world cannot in principle exist because it is not found in the world.

On the one hand, therefore, I claim that less exists than one would have expected, for the world does not exist. It does not exist and cannot exist. From this I will draw important consequences which, among other things, speak against the scientific worldview² in its contemporary, medial, and

widespread socio-political version. I will argue against that worldview on the basis that one cannot produce a picture of the world, because it does not exist. All worldviews are equally misguided insofar as they ground our beliefs in a commitment to an overall world that already settles all big questions behind our backs. It does not matter whether one defers to God or to science when it comes to one's worldview. The problem is that one holds a worldview at all.

On the other hand, I also claim that considerably more exists than one would have expected – namely, everything else except the world. I claim that there are unicorns on the far side of the moon that are wearing police uniforms. For this thought exists in the world and with it the unicorns that are wearing police uniforms. To my knowledge, in contrast, they are not found in the universe. One does not find the aforementioned unicorns by booking a trip to the moon with NASA in order to photograph them.

Nevertheless, how does it stand regarding all of the other things that allegedly do not exist: elves, witches, weapons of mass destruction in Luxembourg, and so on? Yes, these are also found in the world, for example in fairy tales, but not in Hamburg. Weapons of mass destruction do exist in the USA, but – as far as I know – not in Luxembourg. The question is never simply whether something exists but always *where* something exists. For everything that exists, exists somewhere – even if it is only in our imagination.

Again, the one exception is the world. This we cannot imagine at all. What we imagine when we believe in the world is, as in the apt title of a recent book by the star philosopher Slavoj Žižek, so to speak, “less than nothing.”³

In this book I would like to present the main features of a new, realistic ontology. Thus, it does not primarily concern other theories – I will introduce these only in places where some background may be helpful for greater

understanding. It is thus not a general introduction to philosophy or a history of epistemology but an attempt to develop the outlines of a new philosophy in a way that is intelligible to readers who are interested in the questions dealt with, regardless of whether they might have a philosophical training. One need not first struggle through virtually unintelligible classics of philosophy in order to understand what is going on here. My aim is to write this book in such a way that it is readable without presuppositions.

It begins, like every philosophy, at the beginning. For this reason, the most important concepts, among other things, I employ will be as clearly defined as possible. The most important concepts are set in capital letters, and their meaning can be looked up in the glossary. I promise you that presumptuous philosophical monstrosities such as “the transcendental synthesis of apperception” will only show up in those sentences in which I promise you that they do not show up in this book.

Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that “What can be said at all can be said clearly.”⁴ I subscribe to this ideal, for philosophy should be not an elite esoteric science but, to a large extent, a public business even when it is sometimes quite long-winded. For this reason I confine myself to the following: to offer you a truly original path (as I see it) through the labyrinth of perhaps the greatest philosophical questions: Where do we come from? Where do we find ourselves? And what does it all mean?

The hope of being able to say something really new about these questions of humanity may appear a bit naïve, but, then again, the questions *are* themselves naïve. Not infrequently it is children who pose these – and hopefully will never stop asking them. The first two philosophical questions I asked myself both occurred to me on the way

home from elementary school, and they have never let go of me. Once when a raindrop fell in my eye I saw through it a lantern doubled. Thus, I asked myself the question whether I was actually seeing one lantern or two, and how and to what extent I could trust my senses. The second question occurred to me when all of a sudden I realized that time passes, and that I could identify completely different situations with the word “now.” At that moment I came upon the idea that the world does not exist. I have needed a good twenty years to penetrate this idea philosophically and to differentiate it from the idea that everything is only an illusion, or that life is nothing but a dream.

In the meanwhile, for a few years I have been teaching the discipline of philosophy at various universities, and on innumerable occasions I have argued about the problems of epistemology and philosophical skepticism (my area of specialty) with researchers from around the world. It may hardly surprise you that I have pretty much doubted everything that I have encountered (perhaps most frequently my own convictions). But in the process one thing has become clearer to me: the task of philosophy is to start over from the beginning time and time again.

1. The original German is “einen Sinn des Lebens.”

Literally, one could take this as “the sense of life.”

Gabriel employs the same term, “Sinn,” in his discussion of fields of sense and the senses. However, in this context, he is referring to what in English is usually spoken of as “the meaning of life” in philosophical contexts. For this reason, “Sinn” is taken as “meaning” in contexts where this is the more natural translation, such as in the “meaning of art” or the “meaning of religion.” Throughout the book Gabriel plays on various senses of “sense” or “Sinn.”

[2.](#) The term that translated as “worldview” is “Weltbild,” not “Weltanschauung,” though more literally it is “world picture.” The German echoes Heidegger’s use of the term in *Die Zeit des Weltbildes*. Because it is the more common way of discussing what Gabriel is addressing, in addition to the fact that he is addressing those who explicitly appeal to “views” of the world, “worldview” is preferred over “world picture.” Besides this, “worldview” reads more naturally.

Notes

- [1.](#) For these “historical” details, see also Maurizio Ferraris, *Introduction to the New Realism*, trans. Sarah de Sanctis. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
- [2.](#) Heinrich von Kleist, letter of 22 March 1801 to Wilhelmine von Zenge, in *The Broken Jug*, trans. Roger Jones. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977, p. vi.
- [3.](#) Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. London: Verso, 2012.
- [4.](#) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999, p. 27.

I

What is this Actually: the World?

So, let us start over again! What does it all mean? This is the fundamental philosophical question per se. One day we came into a world without knowing where we came from or where we were going. Then, through upbringing and habituation, we found our way in our world. And as soon as we had become accustomed to this situation we mostly forgot to ask what it all means. What is this actually, the world?

In our life, our interactions, hopes, and wishes, as a rule, make sense. For example, as I write these words I am sitting in the carriage of a train in Denmark. Someone next to me is writing a text message, the train attendant is walking back and forth, and now and again I hear an announcement in Danish. All of this makes sense, since I am traveling to Aarhus, a city in northern Denmark, for which I am using a train, and on the trip I am experiencing what usually pertains to a train ride. Now let us imagine an alien being that is 88 feet tall and consists of a green liquid substance who comes to earth and gets on board the same train. To this being, everything would appear quite remarkable, maybe even completely unintelligible. It crawls through the narrow passages of my carriage and is astonished by all the new impressions (and especially by the hairy animals which sit in the compartments and tap a small screen frantically with their fingers).

Philosophers view the world to a certain extent in the same way as do alien beings or children. Everything is always completely new. They mistrust strongly ingrained judgments, and, yes, they even mistrust the scientific

claims of experts. For starters, philosophers believe just about nothing at all. Accordingly, let us follow the model of a great philosophical hero: Socrates. In his famous defense before the Athenian court Socrates asserts: "I know that I know nothing."⁵ In this respect, at least, nothing has changed for philosophers.

All the same, one can still learn a lot from philosophy; in particular one can learn never to forget that things could be very different from how they appear to us. Philosophy incessantly calls everything into question, even philosophy itself. And only in this way is it possible to understand what it all actually means. If one occupies oneself intensely with philosophy and its big questions, then one learns to scrutinize what is allegedly self-evident – an approach which, by the way, stands behind all the great accomplishments of humanity. If no one had ever posed the question "How should we live together?," then democracy and the idea of the free community would never have developed. If no one had ever posed the question "Where are we actually?," then we would still not yet know that the earth is round and the moon is only a revolving rock. On account of this claim, the philosopher Anaxagoras was charged with blasphemy. And Giordano Bruno, the great Italian philosopher, was condemned as a heretic because he was of the opinion that extra-terrestrial life exists and that the universe is infinite. This appeared irreconcilable with Christian theology, which assumed that the human being and the earth were the focus of God's interest, and God created the world at a particular moment in time (on account of which it was not allowed to be infinite).

Thus, the leading question of this book is What does it all mean? Does human life, human history, and human knowledge have any meaning at all? Are we only animals on some planet – cosmic ants or pigs in outer space? Are we simply very strange beings, who are just as alarming to

strange aliens as the aliens (in the film with the same name) are to us?

If we want to find out what it all means we must first of all not forget what we believe we know, and begin afresh. The great French philosopher and scientist René Descartes rightly characterized the basic philosophical approach that at least once in one's life one ought to call into question everything that one has believed. At least once, we should put aside our usual convictions and ask – like aliens or children – where we actually find ourselves. For, before we ask ourselves the question “What does it all *mean*?,” it seems sensible to answer the question concerning what the whole actually *is*.

In *Buddha's Little Finger* (2009), a popular contemporary Russian novel, a character with the significant name “Pjotr Pustota” (in English, “Peter Emptiness”) makes the following observation: Moscow is located in Russia; Russia is located on two continents; the continents are located on the earth; the earth is located in the Milky Way; and the Milky Way is located in the universe. But where is the universe located? Where is the domain in which all of the entities mentioned above are located? Is it located, perhaps, only in our thoughts which contemplate this domain? But where are our thoughts located? If the universe is located in our thoughts, these cannot be located in the universe. Or is this not the case? Let us take heed of the two protagonists in their Socratic conversation:

We clinked glasses and drank.

"And where is the Earth?"

"In the Universe."

"And where is the Universe?"

I thought for a second. "In itself."

"And where is this in itself?"

"In my consciousness."

"Well then, Petka, that means your consciousness is in your consciousness, doesn't it?"

"It seems so."

"Right," said Chapaev, straightening his moustache.

"Now listen to me carefully. Tell me, what place is it in?"

"I do not understand, Vasily Ivanovich ... The concept of place is one of the categories of consciousness, and so ..."

"Where is this place? In what place is this concept of place located?"

"Well now, let us say that it is not really a place. We could call it a real ..."

I stopped dead. Yes, I thought, that is where he is leading me. If I use the word "reality", he will reduce everything to my own thoughts once again. And then he will ask where they are located. I will tell him they are in my head, and then ... A good gambit.⁶

With that Peter grasped the dizzying thought that the world does not exist. In the end, everything takes place in a great nowhere. In this novel, the title of which is *Chapayev and the Void*, its famous author, the Russian novelist Viktor Olegovich Pelevin, gives us an answer to our question "Where are we?": we are located in the universe, and this is located in emptiness, in nowhere. Everything is surrounded by a great emptiness, which reminds us of *The Neverending Story* by Michael Ende, in which the childish world of fantasy, Fantastica, is constantly threatened with