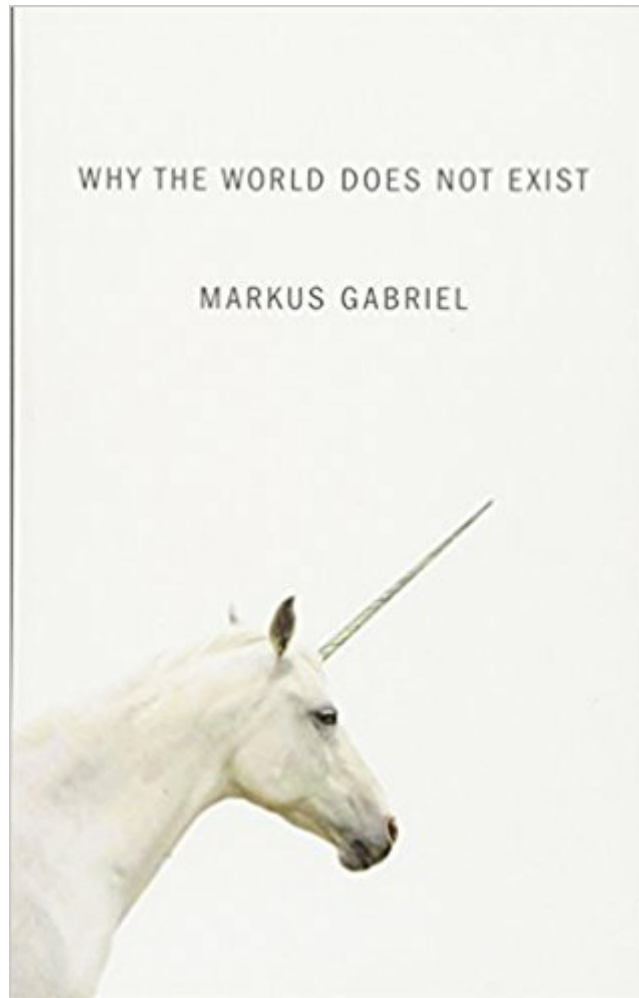




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Why The World Does Not Exist



Synopsis

Where do we come from? Are we merely a cluster of elementary particles in a gigantic world receptacle? And what does it all mean? In this highly original new book, the philosopher Markus Gabriel challenges our notion of what exists and what it means to exist. He questions the idea that there is a world that encompasses everything like a container life, the universe, and everything else. This all-inclusive being does not exist and cannot exist. For the world itself is not found in 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, as we are thinking about the world, this is only a very small event in the world. Besides this, there are still innumerable other objects and events: rain showers, toothaches and the World Cup. Drawing on the recent history of philosophy, Gabriel asserts that the world cannot exist at all, because it is not found in the world. Yet with the exception of the world, everything else exists; even unicorns on the far side of the moon wearing police uniforms. Revelling in witty thought experiments, word play, and the courage of provocation, Markus Gabriel demonstrates the necessity of a questioning mind and the role that humour can play in coming to terms with the abyss of human existence.

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Customer Reviews

"A majestic thought experiment." - Slavoj Zizek "it is a rare gift to be able to philosophize from the first principles in a way that is neither patronizingly derivative nor technically arcane and in a manner that is accessible to the general reader. But Gabriel possesses that gift in bucketloads." - Simon Critchley, New School for Social Research "Imagine a philosopher. This philosopher has the verve

and pop-culture curiosity of Slavoj Žižek; Graham Priest's comfort with unresolved ambiguity; the transparent prose of John Gray; and Martin Heidegger's nose for the faint scent of being. Your imagined thinker is Markus Gabriel, and his book is *Why the World Does Not Exist*." - Sydney Morning Herald
 "This delightful book, translated by Gregory Moss, upholds Wittgenstein's remark that 'whatever can be said at all can be said clearly'." - The Guardian
 "Gabriel has written a gripping thriller, which is of course what all good philosophy should be." - Die Literarische Welt
 "Markus Gabriel shows with great verve how to tackle fundamental philosophical questions, without being overly academic or dumbing down his subject matter." - Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
 "With great wit and intellectual provocation, Markus Gabriel explores the perennial questions of humanity." - Der Spiegel
 "Why the World Does Not Exist, is confirmation that modern works of German philosophy can be both profound and successful." Foreign Policy

Markus Gabriel was born in 1980 and studied in Heidelberg, Lisbon and New York. Since 2009 he has held the chair for Epistemology at the University of Bonn and with that is Germany's youngest philosophy professor. He is also the director of the International Center for Philosophy in Bonn.

This is a pretty demanding book. It's written with wit and in a rather engaging style, but it's still a tough intellectual work-out. On the whole I think it's worth the effort, but it's not an unmitigated intellectual treat by any means. I am not a philosopher, although I have studied Philosophy of Science and it's an interest which I have kept up. Markus Gabriel makes a decent stab at moving on from the sort of postmodern nonsense we've been subjected to of "our internal view of the world cannot be the world itself, so therefore (!) anyone's internal view is equally valid." He does it with wit and verve and makes a decent case for his "New Realism." It's not really for an amateur like me in a place like this to attempt to assess how valid Gabriel's ideas may be. However, with his admittedly slightly playful assertion in the title that the world as an entirety is not to be found within the world and therefore (!) cannot exist, he seems to me to be on some very thin philosophical ice.

Philosophers do like to play fast and loose with logical operators like "therefore" and "because" and Gabriel isn't immune from this. For what it's worth, this just reads to me as a simple category error, like, "Here we have a pair of gloves. However, the *pair* is not contained within the gloves, so therefore (!) the pair cannot exist." The physical gloves and the concept of a pair are not of the same category, so this is plainly logical nonsense, and Gabriel seems to me to be making the same error about the world. I had a similar sense in a number of places, but it's reasonably cogent and

sound enough to be stimulating rather than just infuriating. (This is a considerable relief to someone who has actually read the whole of Baudrillard's *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, for example.) There is sometimes the slightly arrogant feel which seems to occur in a lot of philosophical writing where authors adopt an "anyone who doesn't agree is too stupid to understand" tone. It's not as bad here as in some I've read, though, and at least the writing is largely comprehensible. I'd say this is well worth a go if you're interested in this sort of thing. It is decently written, has some stimulating stuff in it and did make me think, which is, I suppose, what I'm looking for in a book like this. I can recommend it on that basis.

We should learn lessons from the history... According to Markus Gabriel, however, "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." In other words, the thoughts about histories (or historiographies) do "exist" as well and so powerful to make people act. They could be even disruptive to create various divisions and hatreds. Gabriel's efforts to overcome both postmodernism and constructivism -- his efforts of "post postmodernism" and "meta metaphysics" have ironically proved that "everything exists except the world." This is supposed to be the philosophy (New Realism) to embrace all what we and they see. And yet, it has also ironically proven how we "act" based on what we see, so do they. I think it could be also rephrased as "all gods exist except God." This means that the domain of all the domains can't exist in the same mode. For example, what is called "the absolutely largest number" cannot exist as it is a sort of antinomy. Merely adding 1 to it proves its impossibility. The way we see God, the World, or the Domain of all domains (or theologically speaking, "King of kings") is totally and ontologically different from the way we see gods, facts, and everything in the universe. This is why, the title is "Why the World Does Not Exist." Then, again, everything else does exist and we act because of them...

Gabriel (professor of philosophy at the University of Bonn) has tried to do one of the hardest tasks around for a serious academic: write a serious book on a complicated topic but in a style that will prove attractive to (intelligent) non-academics as well as his peers in his own specialized field of study, which on the basis of this book and references to his earlier published work, seems to be ontology, the puzzling out of existence: of what does it consist, why is it? His intent is to show that previous approaches to the question mislead us, or at best, provide partial (and still misleading) answers. This is not an easy subject to explain simply, much less popularize, but Gabriel has made a yeoman's effort at doing it, and for that, he deserves kudos.

He labels his philosophical stance "New Realism," by which he means two things. 1. that we can know things in (for?) themselves, that perceptions and thoughts are not automatically illusions; and 2. That things, facts in themselves *(as opposed to perceptions of facts) do not fall in (belong to) one single domain of objects (and that's it for you, Spinoza!). The argument by which he proves this is long and complicated, and takes on many other philosophers and philosophies. I did not find it sufficiently rigorous to convince me but the problem may be me, not the book in this case. I felt at times that Gabriel was building further proof on the grounds of statements he'd made, not proved. I may easily be wrong, but that doesn't change that I found his proof muddy and hard to follow. When I read Bernhard Williams, for instance, or Isaiah Berlin or Thomas Nagel or Eric Dodds on the irrational and Greek thought or Martha Nussbaum on moral luck, I don't have this problem: it's work reading them but I leave convinced of their reasoning and in Gabriel's case, I'm not, even though I generally agree with his position. What he's saying, if I have it straight, is that different parts of the world organize in different ways, using different organizing principles and criteria, thus creating what may appear to be mutually exclusive orderings of meaning: you don't find beauty next to science, nor an actual physical creature next to a troll or hippogriff, but all of these things/qualities exist just in different parts of what we can know. My biggest objection to this otherwise acceptable book is the author's too frequent attempts to make it hip by referring to artifacts of contemporary culture - movies and television shows a lot. These references will inevitably date the book, no matter how relevant they seem today. Though he says many good things in his chapter on "The Meaning of Religion," I found the overarching argument in the chapter fuzzy. Still, his main point is well stated: religion is, or should be, more about why things are than what they are, and rule-bound religion is the wrong path to take. So ultimately, religion is one of the ways we situate and try to remake (improve) ourselves. (At this point, he writes a lovely sentence: "No one is simply a self in the way that a stone remains a stone.") The concluding chapters on the meaning of art and on what television shows us about ourselves did little for me.

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