

## 1

When I say that TLP-era Wittgenstein was a phenomenalist, I mean that that's a strong interpretation of the book. If we are serious about ontology, as opposed to biography, what really matters is the strength of such perspectival phenomenism as position. One way to get people to even remember phenomenism is to say that it's the essence of a famous book. If you talk about Mill or Mach, you are ignored altogether. So here I use Wittgenstein.

Yet I do think Wittgenstein *was* phenomenist, and his redundancy theory of truth even hints at a perspectival component in this phenomenism. I was even inspired by thinkers like Wittgenstein and Mach whose phenomenism *needed* the explicit addition of a perspectival component. It seemed to me that their work implied it, and it's possible that they left it unsaid as an obvious corollary.

## 2

But we've seen how people have preferred to turn Wittgenstein into a relatively boring linguistic philosopher. Mach is almost ignored altogether, just like Mill. James, another phenomenist, is primarily interesting to casual readers as a pragmatist. I like the pragmatism that is genuinely ontological. But that's the stuff that's basically a flavor of phenomenism.

But phenomenism is not popular, except as part of

a larger *phenomenological* tradition that I'd say is built on the chassis of phenomenism. People do obsess over Heidegger (and to a lesser degree Husserl), but it's easy to ignore the phenomenism at the core of it and appreciate it instead as a focus on representational consciousness. In this case, bracketing just means accepting indirect realism — then just ignoring the “cause” of the representation. Not caring if there is one. The problem is that the “meaning” of the object is “worldly” or “interpersonal.” So the tacit assumption of indirect realism, which insists on a private representation, already “ruins” the object.

### 3

It's one of Husserl's passages that most inspired me. He's talking here about any ordinary extended object.

[I]t transcends experience not only in the sense that it is not absolutely given, but also in the sense that, in principle, it *cannot* be absolutely given, because it is necessarily given through presentations, through profiles.

...  
The thing is given in experiences, and yet, it is not given; that is to say, the experience of it is givenness through presentations, through “appearings.” Each particular experience and similarly each connected, eventually closed sequence of experiences gives the experienced object in an essentially incomplete appearing, which is one-sided, many-sided, yet not all-sided, in ac-

cordance with everything that the thing “is.”  
Complete experience is something infinite.<sup>1</sup>

I use/used the word “aspect” (and eventually “moment”) for one of these appearances, primarily to avoid tendencies to understand such appearances as subjective or representational. Appearings are “perspectival,” but they are *not* representational. Indeed, that was the mistake made by Locke and others. It just didn’t occur to them that aspects could be “real.”

Why not ? Because, for one thing, philosophers prioritized the tactile. The object “looks” larger or smaller as you move toward or away from it. But when you *touch* it, you get the “real” size. This means that “visual extension” was not enough. Only “tactile extension” gave the “real” size. The “real” is what *resists our will*.

#### 4

It’s been said that philosophy has a visual bias, and that may be correct in general, but here we see vision recognized as not exactly trustworthy. It tells us that big things are small. The moon fits between my finger and my thumb. We don’t think that our own fingers and thumbs change sizes, but they are always close to us, and we can touch one hand with the other.

I don’t think it’s a coincidence that Mach, the great phenomenalist, wrote books on the complexities of

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<sup>1</sup>from Husserl’s *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*

measurement and our experience of space. James too in his *Principles of Psychology* (a great work of phenomenology) gives careful analyses of perception in its various forms. James, probably inspiring Husserl, wrote that we tend to take one especially useful appearing of the object to *be* the object. For instance, a table is square because it looks square from directly above. That square aspect or appearing “is” the “real” table.

This is the “tacit phenomenalism” of everyday life. The indirect realist, when he’s not arguing philosophy, is lost like the rest of us among objects and not what he claims are merely their private representations. This “tacit phenomenalism” is also called “naive realism,” and I will happily grant that perspectival phenomenalism is a parsimonious extension of this “naive” realism — one that gels with what philosophers *do*.<sup>2</sup>

## 5

Let’s get back to Husserl. His Thing and Space lectures are not especially user-friendly, but we can find the “aspect theory” there. In this context, a “perception” is (basically) an “aspect” or a “moment” of the thing.

We said that in perceptions, by their very sense, their object is one and the same. What does the sense, the essence, of the perceptions have to do

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<sup>2</sup>I agree with phenomenology and logical positivism that the point is to explicate rather than speculate.

here? Let us reflect; the datum is this: the perceptions stand in the synthesis of identification, the unity of the identity-consciousness encompasses them.

[P]erceptions, insofar as they in general, through their sense, through their essence, enter into such a consciousness of selfsameness, are called for that reason perceptions of the same object.

[P]erceptions, as we grasp them in self-posing evidence, are in fact connected through an identity-consciousness, so that if we now speak of this connection, it is not mere talk, it is not merely accepted in an empty intention of such a kind, but instead the talk simply brings to expression the identity-connection as it is absolutely given in the self-posing.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the entity is an “intentional” or “logical” *synthesis* of such “perceptions.” This logical synthesis is also a temporal synthesis, because the perceptions do not occur at the same time.

I think, though, that it’s better to avoid talk of “consciousness” and “perception” as tending to dilute our friend phenomenism with traditionally representational terms. While aspects or moments (“perceptions”) remain, as in Husserl, *immanent*, they are immanent with respect to a *neutral* phenomenal stream. The point is to *replace* talk of “consciousness” with a terminology that evades our entrenched foe, which

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<sup>3</sup>page 24

is of course a dualism of consciousness and something else.

Husserl actually uses a word which is translated as “moments” for such perceptions, as he explores the character of this synthesis.

The perception which stands before my eyes, and on which I exercise phenomenological reduction, is an absolute givenness; I possess it, as it were, for itself, with all that essentially makes it up. It is “immanent.” The intentional object, however, is precisely “transcendent.” Indeed the latter appears in the flesh, and it is essential to perception to present it in the flesh. But do I actually possess it itself, given along with moments that really constitute it?

Even though the intentional object is constituted by its moments, it transcends any subset of those moments “disclosed” so far. The object is “ajar,” in that moments not yet and even only *possibly* disclosed are also “parts” of it. So the object is *temporally* “ajar.” But it is no less important that the object also “collects” the “perceptions” that other have had or might have of it. In other words, the object “scatters” its actual and possible aspects or moments over the plurality of *all* phenomenal streams. So the object is *interpersonally* ajar.<sup>4</sup>

I’ve gone into detail elsewhere, so I’ll stop here.

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<sup>4</sup>Even “interpersonal” is slightly misleading, in that it encourages a conflation of a phenomenal stream and the person at the center of it, but I couldn’t think of an alternative that wasn’t distractingly clunky.