

Reddit for philosophy ? A wasteland. A few people who read. Fewer who can write. But just about everywhere is a wasteland for philosophy that isn't politics. Red meat tribalism. As we know. As Schopenhauer in his less efficient way knew. "Pure" science is a parasite. In game theoretical neo-Darwinian terms. "Pure" ontology is origami with concepts. Chess problems.

"The ontological forum." Or just "the forum." For common sense, it is more than obvious. No one from that meaty realm will hand me prize for what I do with this phrase. Common sense may be vaguely "guilty" of a forum-contradicting representationalism when it bothers to ontologize, but it is happily clueless about any ontology that isn't spiritual/political.

This is one reason I favor the word "ontology." My "aspect phenomenalism" (which is not really mine) is a way of solving of "problem" that most people will never have. And never give $\frac{1}{3}$ of a fuck about. Even on **r/consciousness**, a place where such a "solution" "ought" to be of interest, we find instead either sci-fi bong-hit daydreams or spiritualism in its a pseudo-scientific packaging. Not that it makes sense to complain. We know "game-theoretically" why this "has" to be the case.

It's the same reason that discussions of Hegel and Heidegger (within this Reddit wasteland) mostly insist on a *projected* profundity. Prayer wheels. The envelope is the letter. Of course I love Hegel and Heidegger. I think I understand (can paraphrase) what is impor-

tant in their work. But “unserious” people don’t want a demystified paraphrase in honest English. The point is precisely the gnomic mystique. The “difficulty.”

I think it’s safe to say that you and I had to wrestle against our own vanity to get to where we could see this from the outside. From above. From within Kafka’s Castle. And it’s not on the inside what it seems to be from the outside. There are solid reasons for academics to eschew this “I’m-an-insider” language, but I assume that the able academics know what I mean. We both surely agree that there’s plenty of faking it to go around, but I have greatly benefited from authors who work from within the academic system. But (1) I don’t think they can get away with being so blunt about the centrality of the vanity issue, and (2) I don’t think they mind this constraint much. I think it’s safe to assume that they enjoy private conversations on this sort of thing.

Back to the “forum.” Which is pretty much my metaphor, though the basic idea (of course) precedes me. It’s basically the same as the “metainstitution” discussed by Karl-Otto Apel. It’s what Husserl seems to be tiptoeing around in his *Prolegomena*. It’s largely what Brandom finds in Hegel. But my vanity has it that “forum” is an especially illuminating metaphor.

Last time we talked in person, I gave you a little of this. But the ontological forum is the “space of assembly” which is assumed by or implicit in ontology as a rational tradition. For instance, when Hume *argued* for his skepticism, he appealed (implicitly) to logical-semantic norms that he understood to bind others

and not just himself. Such norms are the *essence* of the “external” world, the world beyond just-me, the world that I am talking about when I ontologize. Wittgenstein seemed to be invoking this forum, though not explicitly, with his critique of private language.

And there’s Kant who thought it was a scandal that one could not *prove* the external world. Which is absurd, right ? Because proof is an “external” or “transpersonal” concept. Kant was trapped in a metaphor. It was, for many thinkers of his time, just “obvious” that perception was representation. Consciousness (in particular perception) was $f(X)$, where X was maybe “atoms and void” and maybe just left as an unpierceable darkness.

This representationalism leaves us, as individuals, as streams of experience-as-representation. Sci-fi loves this stuff. The “truly real” is scrolling source code, but we get the “illusion” of the lifeworld. Everyone lives in a private dream. If I see a cup of coffee, that’s a dream cooked up by my brain. (Even if brains are dreams cooked up in my brain.)

Because representationalists (indirect realists) don’t recognize the centrality of the ontological forum, they don’t see that the ontological assumption of a private representation of the world is a performative contradiction. Feuerbach, a demystified Hegelian, was way ahead of them. He understood that logic was “softwhere.” That the “substance” of the individual was social. It is (I shit you not) a performa-

tive contradiction to argue otherwise. There is nothing mystical here. In fact it's the representationalists who turn out to be mystified. Phenomenalism (anti-representationalism) involves a denial of consciousness. It denies "Mind" and "Matter" at the same time. Of course. Because it is anti-dualism. Where the dominant dualism is indirect realism or representationalism.

Let me try to explain why such (aspect) phenomenalism is "non-ideological" or in the spirit of logical positivism. That includes explaining why phenomenalism is misunderstood.

If you grant that "serious" philosophers often criticize representationalism, I can agree. But many of them are physicalists. They want to reduce "mind" to "matter." I'm not against this on principle. I'm as atheistic as any of them. *And* all monisms have to be "same" in some sense. Finally, I can imagine mostly agreeing with an especially sophisticated physicalist. Though I don't think much of the ones I've seen so far.

All monisms reacting to dualism are likely to claim that matter is mind-like or that mind is matter-like. I myself, playing on Hegel, use the phrase "subjectlike substance." My bias against most physicalism is that it is blind to the ontological forum. Ontology is "made of" meaning, of logical-semantic norms. Causality cannot replace normativity. Husserl famously took the paddle to psychologism long ago, not that many are aware of that. Some of these physicalists are just the type to mock "pomo" relativism. And I too mock

pomo relativism. But psychology is pomo classic. Is irony the right word here ?

Feuerbach, long ago, had already demystified Hegel without throwing away Hegel's crucial realization that the individual is a "thin client." Many physicalists seem to cling to a crude representationalism that goes back to Descartes. Though the *goal* is of course to reduce consciousness to the scientific image. I am arguable judging physicalism unfairly by recalling the online "physicalists" who mislabel themselves in order to position themselves in the miniature culture war between scientistic atheism and scientistic spiritualism. I'm not an expert on Sellars, but he's an example of a very sophisticated thinker who (if I recall correctly) gave more weight to the scientific image than to the manifest image or lifeworld. He (I should have mentioned earlier) "saw the forum." His "space of reasons" is basically the ontological forum. He (if memory serves) wanted to explain how such space of reasons could emerge from stuff featured in the scientific image.

Which is fine but secondary. As a "(neo) logical positivist," I prefer explication to speculation. I want to articulate our basic/general situation. Tell how it is. To be an ontologist, to put on that costume, is to "assume" the ontological forum. Which is a "realm of meaning." No fairies or ghosts or Jehovah required. This "realm" includes active or binding logical norms. To argue otherwise is a performative contradiction. So the issue for physicalism is "reducing" this fundamen-

tal normativity to the scientific image. Somehow logic and meaning have to be squeezed out of neutrinos and neurons.

You can see why psychologism is so tempting for such a project. And you can see why “artificial intelligence” is so alluring. Mind as computer. This metaphor misses the crucial normativity of “mind.” The prestige of technology, a pied piper. The accidental pomo of brass-tacks materialism.

This is what fuels the misunderstanding of phenomenism. Like that found in Mach and Mill. I don’t pretend that either Mach or Mill had perfected phenomenism. Heidegger is far richer. But the nice thing about Mach and Mill is their tight focus on one issue. They both saw that representationism didn’t work.

The world is “given” or (seems to) “exist” in a “first-personal” way. I see it through my eyes, but only the tiny bit of it around my body. As Mill puts it, I believe that I *could* go to Calcutta and see Calcutta. But I can’t see it from here. So Mill says that Matter is the *possibility* of Sensation. Not “actual” sensation alone, but especially the possibility of it. These days, having learned from phenomenology, we’d speak of the possibility of *perception*. And that perception would be understood to include our awareness that experience is conceptually structured, which is to say immediately significant. Sensation is a late product of theory. What is given or just there is the meaningful lifeworld.

But representationalism was/is stuck on the idea that

each individual brain creates a private representation of the world. A “dream” *caused* by some otherwise inaccessible Reality. They misread the fact that perception depends on a working nervous system to imply that perception is “internal.” You can see this in Descartes, who understood well enough that a pain experienced in the foot depended on messages being sent to and fro through nerves connecting the foot and the brain.

I don’t at all deny that our nervous systems are causally related to perceiving. I’d just emphasize that we are implicitly *direct* realists to be in a position to make this point. We trust our perceptions to *present* reality directly in order to “believe in” the existence of the brain and the way it enables perception. The indirect realist tends to make the brain “ontologically absolute,” and then, in a self-contradicting way, use this brain-as-fulcrum to dislodge perception from reality. Brains in vats. *The Matrix*. Lately there’s Hoffman with *his* sci-fi offering, squeezing oohs and aahs from the groundlings. And you don’t have to be stupid to be one of these groundlings.

Because it’s a seductive brew. You get to be a sophisticated ontologist, seeing through the credulousness of others, while also enjoying yourself as a Socratic hero who knows that he or she doesn’t know. Of course the problem is that this “hero” knows that *you and I* don’t get to know. They understand their ontology to be valid beyond the dream created by their own little brain. Even though that ontology is the theory that we are all trapped in such a dream. Even though

that theory seems to imply that logic is private, and therefore not really logic.

I'm not saying that most representationalists *notice* these implications. If ontology was important in practical life, I'd don't think there would "be" any representationalists. What happens is that people who argue this in the game-version of ontology just drop it when they return to ordinary life, not noticing or minding the contradiction. Hume says something like this. What he should have done is go back to the drawing board. If your assumptions lead to nonsense, it's time to doubt them.

If you ever debate this stuff with "online philosophers," you'll find that they think the self is a thing, the brain. So their dualism leans toward the priority of the physical. The "real" self has to be a spatial object like the brain. But just as they miss the forum, don't even see it, they also miss what they themselves are doing in order to say so. The self is, among other things, an avatar within a regime of "scorekeeping" (Robert Brandom.) To be a "linguistic" or "rational" self is to be fundamentally a temporal entity, stretched out over time. A locus of responsibility. I am the kind of thing that can make promises. And I am expected to explain and justify my actions and my beliefs. This is where Feuerbach's demystified Hegelianism is especially helpful. The self is primarily a "thin client" running the "tribal OS." To "speak a language" is to be very unlike a potato or a proton or even a brain. Even if the brain is necessary for such self-hood to emerge.

So those who argue that the self is “really” (just) a brain are seriously confused. They want to be scientific. Hence their leaning toward the physical. But they end up being irrational. They can’t even account for the reality of their argument. Of themselves as a maker of cases within the space of reasons, the forum. And these are people who pride themselves on their critical thinking, on their scientificity, their empiricism. And yet they are “sleepwalking.” They know not what they do.

It’s frustrating to watch this kind of confused person talk down to the direct realist. They assume that the direct realist somehow hasn’t noticed that the brain enables perception. Is apparently a *sine qua non* for perception. Since they *automatically* interpret this triviality as implying indirect realism, it’s the only way they can make sense of the direct realist. Hence “naive” realism.

But I’m saying that indirect realism is the naive position. Which is naively assured of its sophistication. This indirect realism is very old. It goes back to Descartes and others. And the phenomenologists who saw around it stem from Berkeley. Though Berkeley himself was still entangled in religion, still taking God as substance. So I’d recommend looking at Mill and Mach as two thinkers who were decisively post-representational. With Husserl and especially Heidegger we get the “Hegelian” enrichment of these two pioneers. And Sartre emphasizes the aspect theme as I do. I’m not sure how to classify Feuerbach. He is better than Mill and Mach on the forum issue. He

anticipates Heidegger.

I'll finally give you "aspect phenomenism" or "perspectival phenomenism" or whatever you want to call it. It involves a "denial" of "consciousness" and yet affirms the existence of daydreams and toothaches. It also involves a denial of "matter" understood as a "Reality" hidden away from "consciousness." Of course. Because it rejects the representationalist assumption. It takes what others would call the "stream of consciousness" or "stream of experience" to be a direct streaming of *the world*. The world is given or exists as the plurality of all such streams.

To representationalists ears, this is going to sound like subjective idealism. But this is why consciousness needs to be explicitly rejected by phenomenism. At the same time, we have to grant that such streamings of the world are "subject-centered." These neutral phenomenal streams are associated with organisms we therefore call "sentient." The world streams "through" the eyes and ears and skin of a sentient organism.

In the human case, the stream is centered by a language-wielding locus of responsibility. This is why it is so tempting to understand this streaming of the world as a stream of that person's experience. It's not even wrong to do so. I'd even say that people tend to "climb the ladder" this way. They end up wanting to say that "experience is all of reality." And that is a crude expression of phenomenism. But the experienter is part of the experience. And logic intends the transpersonal world. So it's crucial to push away from

any kind of subjective idealism.

I've already presented my “aspect” approach to spelling this out in other papers. So this paper is a kind of contextualizing preface.