

Physical “external” existence *is* a predicate. Bigfoot may or may not “exist” in a typical use of “exist” that I consider fundamentally misleading. In the typical usage, “Bigfoot exists” is an *empirical* claim.

But Bigfoot as entity has to be meaningful for this empirical claim to be meaningful. Enter Meinong. Or at least a thinking similar to Meinong’s.

What kind of existence is indeed *not* a predicate ? As a first attempt, we might talk of the “signitive presence” of an entity which *makes possible* empirical claims involving that entity. Unicorns have to “exist” in the sense of their signitive presence in order for their empirical “existence” to be denied.

But what is it exactly to signify ? For “unicorn” to be “meaningful” ?

The world is fundamentally “significant.” It is “structure” by “belief.” “I put a couple of potatoes in the oven.” I “understand.” So I agree to cook the steak when they are done.

Concepts are not (primarily) psychological, not internal. Perhaps “concept” is not the best word, precisely because of speculative-metaphysical bias that would insist on internalizing such concepts in subjects understood to be containers.

The “substance” of an entity is “logical”, which is to say “conceptual.” I see a particular tree in the woods. *As* that particular tree. This tree is a “unity.” It is “a” tree, *that* tree. What *is* this *that-tree-there-ness* ? The tree that is there includes a “qualitative” component. Traditionally, the tree is concept-organized sensation. But this separating of bounding concept and bounded sensation is constructive in the pejorative sense. Philosophers have analyzed (split) the “lifeworld” (given) tree into imaginary, theoretical “ingredients.” The philosophers who do this tend to wade in a speculative psychology. The soul or brain is imagined as a machine that receives “information” and then “projects” the “experienced” tree as a utility-maximizing “illusion.” The tree-of-experience is “really” an “internal” representation of this

“information” from “True Reality.”

Tellers of this story don’t consider the status of the *being* of this postulated “information” and of the postulated external source. They don’t consider the problem of the “intelligibility” of their own claims.

I put so many words in quotes because the fundamental issues — the basic concepts — are the most difficult and the most important. Is ontology something like getting a better grip on our most basic concepts ? A better grip on our grip on the world ?

Dualism, representationalism. A belief in “consciousness” as a weird stuff that is “other than” what “really” exist. What “really exists” is “physical” or (more obscurely) unspeakable things-in-themselves. A questionable *myth* that is touted as if the essence of demystification. Or as the great de-myth-ing.

The insistence on a Realm that is External To Consciousness, supposedly anti-idealistic, condemns our mundane sharing of the world to the status of a useful illusion. Note that it is *every bit as important* to deny this Consciousness stuff as it is to deny this External Stuff. This dominant vision of our situation is a coin with two sides.

The “hard problem of the physical” is not even *seen*. “Primary qualities” are tacitly projected away from “secondary qualities.” One part of “consciousness” is tacitly divorced from another, and projected as something obscure and external. The situation is of course more complicated than this, but this complexity obscures the absurdity of the construction while inspiring its continuation.

Concepts are seen as “psychological”, as “inside” *ghosts* that float like smoke above a substrate reality that they cannot touch but somehow mediate or translate.

The “external reality” is projected as a *single* reality. A plurality of illusory representational streams are “generated” or “caused” by this substrate.

The steaming baked potato offers itself in “aspects.” I know what

it's like to see one, and so do you. We agree that someone else might walk into the room and see the same baked potato. Fair enough. The potato is at least "between us" in this sense. We trust that we are talking *about* that same potato that is *there*, though it shows itself differently as a function of the position of perceiver, etc.

We step outside to investigate some commotion. We can still discuss the potato in its absence. How absent is it then ? It is "perceptually" absent but "signitively" or "intelligibly" *present*, as we discuss it. And note that we are discussing *it*, the potato in the kitchen, and our intending of it. We can of course thematize this intending, as a *new* entity with *only* a signitive presence. We can thematize the idea of signitive presence, even if only to reject it as inappropriate.

Perhaps it is our practical bias that obscures the kind of existence which is *not* a predicate. The intelligibility of the world is typically "transparent" for us, even as we enact it and depend upon it. We worry about *whether* there's a potato that we can eat, so we don't notice that this worry is enabled in the first place by the "concept" of a potato.

Ontology is a luxury, something you do when you have ( or at least have had ) plenty of potatoes, etc. But this does not excuse the continuing dominance of a "shallow" understanding of existence in terms of practically available. Of course I don't expect the practical ( non-theoretical ) use of "exist" to go away. But I do object to Russell's criticism of Meinong as lacking a sense of reality. For an appropriate *sense* of reality is exactly what Meinong had, at least on this crucial issue.

The stubborn "first-person-ness" of the world is uncanny, embarrassing. Physical things, because they are relatively independent of particular perceivers, have been understood by most to be independent of *all perception whatsoever*, actual and possible.

A perceiver-external substrate is invented, where these perception-independent things live. Or where there even more obscure

Causes live.

Perception has itself been understood as internal representation by a “container subject.” This container is a jar full of “consciousness.” Perceptions are “made of” this “consciousness” stuff. Concepts are “made of” this “consciousness” stuff.

Yet somehow we can talk. So presumably a “meaning” leaves the jar of consciousness, enters the substrate, and crawls into another jar of consciousness.

It’s understandable that some thinkers, who feel the ridiculousness of this dualism, claim that there is *only* substrate, that all is “physical” in some necessarily elusive sense.

But “experience” is qualitative, conceptual, and first-person. The position of physicalism is itself presumably “intelligible” or “meaningful.”

I’m also anti-dualist. I don’t insist on a “mind stuff” as the one fundamental stuff. I argue for the priority of the “lifeworld” and its many kinds of entities. For radical pluralism. But also for “radical perspectivism.” “Physical” entities are “systems of aspects.” Perspective goes all the way down. There is no substrate. There is no primal clay, be it “consciousness” or “the physical.”

I offer my view as an *anti*-speculative **explication**. I believe that others see the same world I do *from* a different “point of view.” I can understand the potato as an enduring interpersonal possibility of its manifestation. As a thing that is independent of whether I can see it, touch it, smell it. But I don’t understand the potato apart from all possible manifestation, including the signitive presentation of the object as a topic for discussion, including conjecture. “I bet there are some potatoes in the cabinet to go with this steak I’m bringing home.”

Or, less typically, “Maybe there’s an invisible alien with X-ray vision who can see *from here* whether or not there are potatoes in that cabinet.” What does a potato look like to a creature with seven X-ray eyes ? If I could establish conversation with such a being, then perhaps we’d both agree that we were indeed dis-

cussing a varying qualitative “sensory” manifestation the *same* potato. We believe (or I’d believe that we both believe) that we were indeed “co-intending” that potato. *This* is what I mean by the “logical substance” of the entity. What is the thread that runs through the various “aspects” or “faces” that an entity shows ? That an entity *is* ? At least if we include this “constituting ideality” that glues or strings those manifestations together into manifestations *of*.