30 JUNE 2025

NOTES

I respond to comments by R presented in italics.

1

I don't equate ontology with physics, but I don't see a hard line between investigating ontologies and the hard sciences.

*either takes the patterns we encounter in our own phenomenal stream as an exploding set of brute facts (which you have just labeled as "possibilities" but denied any way to **explain***

I'd say that a "regional" ontology would be part of this or that science.

To me we already do science (find explanations) in terms of Mill's conception of physical objects. A concept is empirical through its connection with first-person experience. *Anyone* should be able to test the prediction, with the aid of their functioning sense organs, if only to read a measurement device.

One of the things I like about phenomenalism as an explication is that it recovers a genuine empiricism and takes it back from philosophers who (as I see it) project a counter-empirical concept (the obscured Real Thing) "behind" or "under" the empirical object.

My work examines the different proposed relationships between our minds and the rest of the world as hypotheses which can be provided empirical evidence for. For example in my recent paper Qualia Natural Selection I derived a concrete limit on the relationships that would allow for natural selection to be effective in a qualitative domain (to select for qualitative experience). It doesn't give a single answer but it raises a condition that must be met by any theory of the relationship between my mind and the world as a whole

I have looked into that and I think it's a great topic. It sounds to my ears more like science than fundamental ontology. To me this or that science takes certain concepts for granted as established and safe. One can zoom out and theorize about constraints of more specific theories, as you seem to do.

My formal education was in math, and there we took an entire zoo of concepts for granted as safe. As Kline implies in the concluding joke of *The Loss of Certainty,* mathematicians can afford this carelessness, because the "foundations" of mathematics are **practical.** The edifice is built on mud. We trust what tends to help rather than harm us. This "us" includes our "going with the flow" as individuals. One does it this way. In ordinary language (ignoring ontological niceties) the world constrains our techniques. What I'm getting at is this : *it's technology that grounds the ideology, and not the other way around.*

For a while I was immersed in Darwin, Dawkins, and Dennett. Powerful stuff. Dawkins intensifies and demystifies Schopenhauer, but tends to ignore the existential payload of his "moist robots" metaphor, and his implicitly probabilistic-deterministic vision of the world. If the normative can be dissolved into selfish genes, then the theory of selfish genes is just another beautiful horror story. I tend to believe in Dawkins' theory, but I recognize the tension and emphasize it, while Dawkins probably considers that an issue for the philosophy department.

I admit that I didn't look too much in the details of the work you mention, because I wasn't sure what you meant by qualia or qualitative. This touches on the gap between pragmatic-red and my-red. To me qualia belong in an indirect realist theory, and indirect realism is an ontology that I take to be accidentally anti-empirical. But it's indeed *a difference that doesn't make a (practical) difference.*

For me "fundamental ontology" opened up as fundamentally anti-pragmatic or trans-pragmatic when (as I see it) I followed the pragmatic attitude to its terminus, which is something like a **radical instrumentalism.** My "piety" with respect to ontology is balanced on the other side by the unmitigated impiety

of what I'd call a *distilled* pragmatism, summed up as *power is knowledge.* Or by *war is the father of all things.*

I should say that my application of theological rhetoric to realism is not malicious. We dream of a speech that is not fundamentally manipulative. We want to articulate what is "real" for the sake of just knowing it together. But all of this is "holy" in relation to what "grounds" physics and math. The logical positivists, for all their atheism, were believers in Rationality. In our world, this is a holy foolishness, which I take to be virtuous and naive. This is part of what I mean when I claim that philosophy is "poetry." Polite and careful discussions about "the real" by sensitive, theoretical minds are the amusement perhaps for operators with bloody hands. I'm trying to contrast the "theoretically real" with the "pragmatic real." Recently some scientists were assassinated because they were needed to construct nuclear weapons. The scientists themselves were weapons.

The pious notion of proof or verification is far from the pragmatic notion. Yet I choose to pursue the foolishness of philosophy. Explication is "uselessly" beautiful. The mere *theorist* of pragmatism is incoherent, a vague performative contradiction. Note that I don't take you for a pragmatist. I'm trying to explain my own journey through philosophical positions. I continue to find radical instrumentalism worth thinking and writing about, and I emphasize it here because it functions in the background for me. Philosophy might as well abandon its pragmatic pretensions, because it's the playground of pious fools, among which I include myself, when I take the risk of a certain kind of speech.

If I joke that the realist is entangled with an implicit theology, this is true for the situated ontologist as well. *How* incarnate is your "God" ? That's the issue. I open myself to misunderstanding perhaps by employing theological metaphors so freely. In ordinary language terms, I'm a total atheist, but well beyond the optimistic world-saving atheism that was popular at one time. Secular humanism in its optimistic mode is one more faith, based on ideal entities like the rest. Some last ember burns even in my existentialism, but it's a muted post horn, nothing more. FOR

MADMEN ONLY. (A joke referencing *Steppenwolf.*)

As you see no strict boundary between physics and ontology, I see know strict boundary between existentialism and fundamental ontology. Since I don't take reality to be a cold mathematizable something hidden away from me (not saying that you do, but many other do), my entire existence is the object of inquiry. We who do philosophy are entire personalities. A mood, for instance, is not "in" the emptied subject but suffuses the world that encloses that subject. Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder. The same object — the same human face perhaps — radiates beauty for me but not for you. Or the reverse. It's useful in some contexts to treat the face as X and the face for me as $f(X)$. Not that you do this, but some do. The problem is that anyone who talks this way just has that face as it is for them. There is only $f(X)$ and $g(X)$ and so on.

When people tell me what is "true," they tell me what they believe. This I tell you, so I tell you not the Truth but what I believe, the world as I live in it. This is why my ontology is "owned" or "confessed" or "authentic." I am self-consciously not in a position to say how the object may manifest for others. But I can say that my understanding radiates outward from my own personal situation. I can guess at the love that dogs feel, etc. But my belief is more confident the more it pertains to others in the forum, simply because I can compare my beliefs with theirs.

And I continue to be a bit confused by the omniscient God point. My position is one that requires no receivers. The world exists independently of me or any other perceiver. So I have no need for an omniscient god. It's the phenomena list perspective that would benefit from a god. Not that you've ever invoked one but it solves a problem for you I just don't have.

I appreciate the honest response. But I can't help but think that you don't see what I'm getting at. You yourself express a belief above. I am questioning something like a believer-less belief. A belief without a believer.

Here we are in the forum right now, comparing and discussing beliefs. I understand you to tell me that you believe in a world without receivers or believers. Of course I am familiar with this belief. One imagines a Universe that did not create sentient lifeforms. This contingent sentience is implicitly a secondary kind of stuff that happened to not emerge in this case from a more primordial kind of stuff. Please correct me if I am wrong here.

Once sentient creatures emerge somehow, a new kind of stuff, which is real enough if emergent, complicates the picture. From within this sentience stuff, philosophers can tell a story like the one I'm telling now.

Other philosophers like transcendental idealists or phenomenalists (correlationists) question this story, for various reasons.

If "consciousness" is understood as a synonym for presence or being, then it is not a kind of stuff. So it does not "emerge." But such a view complicates our interpretation of claims about the past. Indeed. Not only about the distant past but even about 10 years ago. The issue raised in *After Finitude* cuts both ways. Its author, basically repeating Locke, projects *mathematizable* quality as primary. *How* did the "pre-sentience" past exist ? Again, repeating Locke, in terms of a selected part of the current human articulation of the world. So the world back then is an X-ray of the world now. Expert consensus is projected backwards.

Meillassoux, a communist who argues for the resurrection of the flesh in other works, tacitly leans on the prestige of technology to make his point. He invokes the specter of fideism. Correlationists are crypto-theists, counter-revolutionaries. This is the amusing dirty secret of the book, which is very much worth reading, after all.

Living humans *talking* within an articulated-qualitative-present world about a non-articulated, non-qualitative, non-present world are almost talking about death. What meaning can we give to this world before the world ? Within the world, while living in it, we can derive implications from hypotheses about the past. We

can check for these implications with measurements. But we can even question the assumption that there is a definite, singular past in the first place. We can question this word "truth" that we pass around so carelessly in practical life.

In my view, we have situated belief. We tend to arrange systems of shared beliefs. We *create* an official singular past as a work always still in progress. This singular past is perhaps a limit point not in the sequence, the expression of a project. In more careful words, I personally believe that we only have situated belief, and that "objective reality" and "the singular past" are useful devices. We forgive them their faults for their utility. We were blinders even and ignore these faults. Only "fools" question such useful tools.

I just don't accept the inference that because the part of the world we have direct access to is patterned in the form of a coherent stream of with structured sensations, etc, that therefore the rest of the world must posses its sole being scattered among those streams which have like sensations

Fair enough. I should soften my thesis or express it more carefully. I offer my ontology to others in the forum. So I'm incoherent if I don't acknowledge these others. One of main ideas I try to share is the ontological difference. I can't imagine this difference being accessible to others without rich "streams". This is the core of the system. But I think my pets have the world. I don't see why spiders wouldn't, even if I also don't expect to have conversations with them. I am vaguely open to trees or maybe even non-living objects having associated streams.

But my idea is something like **being is presence is quality.** What does it mean to me for something to "be" ? To be present, at least potentially. And that possible presence is indeed already present in its own way.

It seems to me that your philosophy "leaps out" of first-person existence. To me this is a projection. An embodied believer imagines a balcony seat, from which objects can be seen as not-seeable.

Now I very grant that I can be terrible surprised. If a new lifeform is discovered on Pluto, we will all rethink the past in terms of that lifeform as already-having-been-there. I think we revise the past like this all the time. (I know I use the usual language of THE past, but things will get messy fast if I avoid conveniences like this.)

I'm inclined to think that you aren't appreciating the role that the ontological difference plays in my phenomenalism. Presence is not a stuff. "Consciousness" is not a stuff. My "experience" is not a stuff inside some object. It is the world-for-me that encloses the body associated with this virtual-conventional ideal unity that is tagged with my proper name.

I don't think the forum can be legitimately abstracted away or ignored. I think this forum is taken for granted even in attempts to reduce or minimize it. It's as if those engaged in inquiry "forget" their immersion in the forum, as they dream of a view from outside it. A world before quality and articulation, this is what they articulate, with signs that are qualitative and between-us.

It's the phenomena list perspective that would benefit from a god.

Well, I have to disagree. I believe that all belief is situated. There is world-for-me, world-for-you, world-for-Jack, world-for-Jill, and so on. The world-for-me is articulated by my own situated belief. An important part of this belief is that I share "my" fire-hydrant with others. I can talk with Jill about it. We just find ourselves sharing this world, sharing in English.

The idea of truth-as-correspondence seems to involve the projection of a truth-making substrate that transcends **all of us at the same time.** Now I think you and me and Jill are all in immediate "contact" with the world. World-for-Jill is a "face" of world. To say this is express my trust in the significance of the signs I share. These "faces" of world are fused logically. By my trust in the general success of reference. I believe in the beliefs of my fellow mortals. I may have different beliefs. Jill may as-

sociate the intentional object of God with infinite power. To me it's "just a myth," something like the projection of the species essence (Feuerbach). Jack believes that the handkerchief that's been prayed over might help with his mother's cancer. I don't share that belief, but I can make sense of Jack's actions in terms of what I believe he believes. I believe that I can't see around my own beliefs. Yes, I can change them. Or I can find them changed. But I live in my beliefs as the structure of the world. I could say "structure of the world for me," but this comes only with the study of philosophy, and it's something we have to remind ourselves. So I tend to believe.

I say that we "live in" our situated beliefs. Others have understood belief in terms of "taking to be true." But I believe they overlooked the nullity of this phrase. We call our own beliefs "true." Yes. But "truth" is the derivative concept, not belief. So I believe. And I try to explain this belief. But, as I see it, I am up against a strong tradition of The Truth and Objective Reality. In the past, God was associated with this Objective Reality. Today it's primarily the ideology associated with technology. As I indicated above, the *better* explication of technology, because it is more "honest," is radical instrumentalism. Am I offering the truth here ? No. Just the belief I currently live in.

As I see it, the fact that you don't find my phenomenalism convincing even supports my point in this context. It should be especially visible *as* belief precisely because you don't share it. Conversation reveals how differently the same world manifests to each of us. Yet we dream of and insist on Objective Reality, the world as the ideal believer believes it to be. It is what it is, they say, apart from all belief. Yet the possibility of finding and speaking and sharing this truth implies that it is already somehow in the form of belief — pre-articulated by the Mind of God.

Now I should stress that I don't pretend this is a political important issue. The world won't be saved when all the sinner renounce the sin of belief in truth. To me it's fascinating theoretical issue. *What happens to philosophy if one operates*

without this assumption ?

While I am sharing my actual current beliefs, I could also defend what I'm doing in terms of a **more exciting** research possibility. I see indirect realism as already thoroughly dominant. It doesn't need another apologist. Phenomenalism, on the other hand, is largely forgotten, though I claim it lives on implicitly in continental antirealism. Braver's *A Thing of This World* doesn't touch on phenomenalism, even though I see thinkers like Mach as unjustly forgotten pioneers.

One of the reasons I started my YT channel was to see if I could find others who were working in a phenomenalist framework. Did anyone else see the connection between Heidegger and Mach, for instance ? For me the "total picture" of a coherent alternative came together when I saw that redundancy theory of truth, applied radically, gelled perfectly with perspectivism/phenomenalism — in the context of a completely emptied subject. Such a "vision" is incoherent if presented as Objective Truth. So it is self-consciously presented as a situated system of situated beliefs.

Personally I don't see how it can even be understood unless one at least temporality suspends faith in some kind of Truth Stuff that is *more than* belief. Braver's excellent book didn't sit right with me till I resolved this issue on my own. The redundancy (anti-)theory is the gate to a "post-theological" philosophy. There's just us down here, as I see it, with no truth-maker under or above us all.