

Q : Lately you seem reluctant to talk about philosophy.

A : I love talking about philosophy, but I am feeling how useless it is to just talk at some abstract consumer.

Q : Your YouTube channel is basically dead.

A : Yes. I annoyed some people who tuned in by being erratically personal, as in acting as if I owned my content. Lots of reasons, but Google making money with ads and me not seeing a penny.

Q : But it wasn't about the money. You never expected anyone really to notice your videos.

A : That's correct. I was delighted when a few videos all of the sudden got hundreds of views. I got better at sound, was proud of my visual effects. I had some good interactions with people. Keep in mind it was all new to me.

Q : And presumably you thought it would keep growing.

A : Yeah, I mean I thought it *might* keep growing. My Patreon was also growing. I thought "well maybe all the time I've put into these books will pay off." But I never banked on it. It seemed too good to be true, and I guess it was.

Q : And your post-game analysis is that people were projecting.

A : Most, yes. A few commenters were even a little flirty, both men and women, as far as I could tell. And, no, I didn't mind if men responded erotically to my voice, etc. Not my thing, but I wasn't bothered. Really I like being liked. That's not the issue.

Q : What was or is the issue ?

A : Well there's not really an issue. I don't have any complaints about the experiment.

Q : What is this reluctance then ?

A : So this reluctance is not about me, except that I am my own guinea pig. My little taste of attention helped me imagine how other people who had a "breakthrough" ended up handling it.

Q : What breakthrough ?

A : Basically I "understood phenomenism." Or, equivalently, I "appropriated" anti-representationalism. Made it my own. "All the pieces came together."

Q : So you saw the truth about reality ?

A : I know you are messing with me. Which I invite. No. I saw the meaninglessness or confusion in the vague but fetishized notion of "the truth about reality."

Q : You *saw* it. A mystical insight.

A : I see you are playing my foil. Keep going. But no. Not a mystical insight. More like an anti-mystical insight. A "dry" conceptual clarification. But it did *feel good*. Like watching a knot dissolve. A knot I had wrestled with. In my videos, I compared it to figuring out how to prove a proposition. In grad school, we'd get these homework problems. I'd spend hours

on some of them. But finally I'd try the right approach and the thing became easy.

Q : What was this right approach ?

A : Well the problem is that people are trapped in assumptions. And I'm talking about subliminal assumptions at the level of the framing of a situation.

Q : Things that are too "obvious" to see.

A : Like looking for the glasses on your nose. Which Heidegger talks about.

Q : I'm not surprised that Heidegger has arrived.

A : Well, yeah, he's a crucial influence. I mean the traces he left in various books were important for me.

Q : But you also like to distance yourself from fan-boys.

A : Yes. I mean Heidegger might be a mathematician or a physicist to me. I don't know if people believe me when I say that I'm a neo-positivist, but I'm serious. I "believe in" what some have called "scientific philosophy."

Q : But Carnap mocked Heidegger.

A : I know. And Heidegger was arguably annoying in the passage that Carnap mocked.

Q : You tend to defend or emphasize "the early stuff."

A : Yes. I don't think that Heidegger "forget" his earlier insights. I think his style changed as he found himself recognized.

Q : And you don't like the change ?

A : It's not that simple. I wouldn't have *heard* of Heidegger and discovered the early work if he hadn't been such a drama queen. It took me forever to discover Mach, because Mach was too rational, too *gimmick-free*.

Q : OK, so you "forgive" the "gimmick" because it got the "good stuff" out.

A : Something like that. It also takes a certain kind of personality to broadcast philosophy. I'm ambivalent about attention. Part of me wants it. Of course. But I also feel a distrust and even a contempt for people who will "never get it."

Q : Let's get into this. Why this distrust ?

A : Well positivism takes candy from a baby.

Q : I see. So you don't want that aggression returned ?

A : Well consider the situation. If you post on YouTube, you implicitly stand at some podium and offer yourself to anyone who passes by. This basic situation is already questionable. Critical philosophy is definitely not for everyone. It's a generalized atheism.

Q : So your problem would be finding the few who are in a position to be benefit from it, as opposed to being simple offended.

A : Yes.

Q : You could write papers, post on various subreddits.

A : Sure. I did that kind of thing first. I found a few traces of sociality, but Reddit is pretty trashy. Corporate waste-land. Not denying that some posters are decent, but it still sucks on the whole.

Q : Or on the hole.

A : Yes, it still sucks on the hole.

Q : But you did find a few people on your journey.

A : Yes. So the net result is positive. Is a win. And this fits my initial sense that “real philosophy” happens in the context of friendship.

Q : But maybe your ambition isn’t completely quenched.

A : Maybe not. But that’s a lingering infantile longing. I think I “understand” Heidegger and Wittgenstein better than most, let’s say. I sound arrogant, right ?

Q : Well philosophers tend to be arrogant.

A : Even the good ones. But I’d like to specify the arrogance of a “good” philosopher as inclusive. Heidegger and Wittgenstein interests me most as critical or anti-metaphysical philosophers.

Q : Meaning what, exactly ?

A : Meaning a return to direct visceral experience, but not in a mystified sense.

Q : You are fond of the word “mystified.”

A : Yes. But it’s the right word. Projection, mystification, alienation.

Q : But you are authentic ?

A : Yes, in the proper or authentic understanding of authenticity. Yes.

Q : Well I appreciate your shamelessness.

A : Thank you.

Q : What is this authenticity then ?

A : It’s basically all there in another keyword. Belief and perception are situated. Owned. Mine or yours or his or hers.

Q : And that’s it ?

A : Well I think that one can pull that thread, yes, and get the rest.

Q : Forgive me, but I don’t see it.

A : Well situated perception is another way to approach the for-me-ness of the empirical object. Situated belief, recognized as such, gets us out of all the confusing representational talk about “truth.”

Q : So there is no truth ?

A : There’s a sloppy way to say it and a careful way to say it. The vague and often unquestioned understanding of truth as a representation of some “external” reality is nonobviously empty nonsense.

Q : Nonobviously ?

A : Sure. I mean the joy that I felt when I had my conceptual breakthrough was because I had spent years trapped in an assumption, talking with others on philosophy forums who were also trapped in this assumption.

Q : So you were lost in a maze with others and found an exit.

A : Yes. We were ringing changes on the same inherited confusion. Repeating partial insights against one another.

Q : And you had your “zen” moment ?

A : I know you are poking me, but I think some of the “zen” thinkers and other “mystics” were maybe philosophers who grasped the futility of a certain game but ended up avatars for the mystified.

Q : Heidegger ?

A : Sure. But Heidegger encouraged this mystification, consciously or not. His grandiose style. I think Feuerbach is a “better” Heidegger in some ways, on some issues, but Feuerbach didn’t have the same scope.

Q : Nobody talks about Feuerbach.

A : I know. And nobody talks about Mach. Or J. S. Mill. Or even A. J. Ayer, whose *LTL* was pretty great, even if it needs some updating.

Q : Do you worry you are a crank ?

A : Not really. But I have reflected, believe me, on what it means to be an unfamous philosopher.

Q : How so ?

A : Well people project lots of things on “philosophers.” From my POV, most of them don’t know what philosophy “is.” I mean they haven’t really grasped even the concept of “scientific” or “critical” philosophy.

Q : What do they grasp ?

A : Cults of personality, spiritual gurus, world-view metaphysical grand narratives.

Q : OK, well that I agree with. And this connects to fame or the lack of it how ?

A : It's pretty simple. Someone who is "scientifically awakened" considers the case you make. But "children" want credentials. They want some connection to something that is publicly recognized.

Q : So you don't think your case is heard ?

A : By a few, yes. So I'm talking about the general passing consumer, who purchases personality. And you come off as making this about me, but I find myself continually reflecting on how my particular situation illuminates the general situation of any "serious" philosopher.

Q : It sounds like you are complaining.

A : I don't see it that way, but I get it. But this feeds into my point. Every thing is hyper-personalized. As if the important matter is classifying me, a particular ephemeral human being, socially. It goes with "but Heidegger was a nazi" and so on. People think magically and narratively. Good guys and bad guys. You don't get much of this in math, but people know of John Nash because of that movie. They know of Turing because of the movie. They mostly don't give a fuck about the work.

Q : But you do.

A : Well, yes. The "technical" work of philosophy. For instance, I expect the passing groundling to interpret my technical criticism of truth as some kind of pomo blah blah blah. *They* are stuck in political posturing and project this on everyone. I don't like pomo windbags as a type. In some ways I am, surprisingly, an analytic philosopher. But only if you go back to the roots. Ayer's phenomenism was bold and not so far from my own current view. Or so far from my interpretation of Hegel and Heidegger.

Q : Well I agree that makes you harder to classify. I've also been on forums, and the stereotypical Wittgenstein-fanboy "analytic" type is definitely allergic to phenomenism.

A : That's my experience. Which is anecdotal. But Gellner was significant for me. His "Words and Things" was a great demystification of a certain vulgarization or trivialization of Wittgenstein.

Q : But you are also against mystification and fetishization.

A : Yes. So it's matter of explicating *why* Wittgenstein, for instance, "really was" a great scientific philosopher. For instance, how is his critical philosophy of mathematics related to his other work ?

Q : You tell me.

A : Constructivism, finitism. But not as some calcified, finalized ism. Because that misses the point.

Q : Which is ?

A : Formal systems are beautiful. But big-picture philosophical thinking cannot be formalized. A rejection of mathematical platonism is related to a similar fantasy that words are "labels" for "eternal essences."

Q : Connect this is dualism for me, if you can.

A : “Experience is world.” Wittgenstein had that figured out in his early notebooks. Maybe he read Mach. We know he read Schopenhauer. We can imagine him learning from Schopenhauer but seeing through the residual Kantian dualism.

Q : Nonduality.

A : Well, yes, but that term is ruined by oceans of babble. To keep things hygienic, we can talk about anti-Cartesian or post-Cartesian philosophy.

Q : Is this a sensitive issue ?

A : Well serious or technical philosophy doesn’t jump into mantras. It makes a case. And every case it makes is situated in a worldly context. Here and now the word “nonduality” is contaminated garbage. But in a particular conversation with a person who “gets it” I can “safely” talk about “zen” or “nonduality.”

Q : Safe in what way ?

A : Safe from a fundamental misunderstanding. That *last* thing I want to do is dissolve the result of hard work into a cheap pseudo-profoundity.

Q : Is what you are doing spiritual or not ?

A : I dislike the word “spiritual” personally, because I find it pretentious. Philosophy is always motivated. To be a critical philosopher is to express something like “the scientific spirit.” Even that sounds pretentious. You might say the goal is to leave everything pretentious and “fake” behind. There’s some kind of “ethical” motive, sure. But it’s away from lazy slogans. It’s the opposite of any kind of cult of personality.

Q : Generalized atheism.

A : Yes. Though really I don’t mind metaphorical uses of “God.” It’s all about who you are talking with. As I said, there is no formal system. I’m not clutching my rosary beads, bringing commandments down from the mountain. I’m “just a guy” who doesn’t like empty talk, which doesn’t mean I’ve never been lost in it, without realizing it.

Q : How do you avoid some kind of grandiose narrative ? You question truth but you use phrases like “empty talk” as if there were a universal criterion.

A : No. That’s the mistake that some of the logical positivists made. Carnap, for instance. Whether talk is empty is always a situated judgement. He or she believes that X is an example of empty talk. But even Ayer, pretty great on the whole, didn’t think to clarify this issue. What the fuck was the status of *his own work* ?

Q : So your work isn’t making a universal claim ?

A : Explicitly it is not. But the “average” philosopher hasn’t yet *conceived* of a kind of philosophy that doesn’t do that. So the average philosopher misunderstands relativism completely. Is deaf to it.

Q : I will grant that most people, when they play philosopher, presuppose that “someone is right.”

A : Exactly. They may be sort-of-humble and say “we can’t be sure.” But they will also say

things like “we can’t both be right.”

Q : You are saying that both can be right ?

A : No. I’m saying the whole idea of “right” is questionable. The tacit assumption is the existence of an “external” truthmaker. If you assume this magical external truth-maker, then of course two opposed claims can’t “mirror” this single determinate “true reality.”

Q : But you insist that we live in the same world ?

A : Yes. But not that has to show us all the same “face.” Or that the “faces” it shows have to be “harmonious.” Indeed, experience teaches us otherwise. People *don’t* agree about the world, though their disagreement presupposes a certain amount of agreement for that disagreement to be intelligible in the first place.

Q : “Discordant ontological perspectivism.”

A : Yes. That old phrase gets it, but I’m iffy at the moment about any *ism* talk. It comes off too cute, too resolved and systematic.

Q : I suppose “ontocubism” is also iffy ?

A : I had fun with the term. I actually still like it. But I doubt it “rings” correctly for others. Frankly it’s “too good.” I’m joking and yet serious. It has a “gimmick” value.

Q : Well that’s confusing.

A : I may bother to write up “my philosophy” in my own name one day, and I won’t drag any of this baggage along with me. At least I’m tempted to try yet another approach in terms of style.

Q : But your content is fixed ?

A : The content is “stable.” I am arrogantly confident about the content, but I’m also aware of its limited originality. And if people ignored Mach, who was at least a famous physicist, I should also expect to be ignored. Unless I descend into culture-war triviality.

Q : Oh but would you stoop to such a thing ?

A : I’ve asked myself if I would write a bad novel, for the money. I think I might if the money was a sure thing. But the money is not a sure thing. And now we have A. I. to write bad novels for us. Would I use a gimmick to get the “good part” of my philosophy heard ? I don’t think so. My philosophy is just a paraphrase of my influences. Yet another recovery. That’s it.

Q : So it’s not important enough ?

A : That’s correct. And I say that with a sense of its quality. I mean I won’t pretend like I don’t enjoy a sense of having figured some stuff out. But that stuff is largely “technical.” On the other hand, as Heidegger emphasized in *Being and Time*, it is “opened up” by a certain kind of “authenticity.” What does that mean ?

Q : What does that mean ?

A : Scientific philosophy is *not interesting* to those who don't "live" science as something personal. And Heidegger is mostly interesting to the passing consumer as "the great wizard." Same with Hegel. Opportunities to smell educated and profound, both of them, for most people.

Q : But not for you ?

A : For me too, initially. It's a bit like a young pretentious student of zen hanging around a charismatic master until they dissolve the entire projection. You might say that victims of their own pretentiousness sometimes finally "hear" what the mystified philosopher was actually saying, or at least said in their strongest moments.

Q : Then what ?

A : Then Nietzsche and Heidegger, for instance, are just assholes. Just dudes. But also dudes who expressed a freedom or surpassing of mystification in their strongest moments. But also, both of them, falling back into encouraging mystification at times. Big egos. That sense of transcendence or surpassing is dangerous. You drink your own koolaid, forget that the "liberation" was never about you as a particular meatwagon.

Q: Liberation. A dramatic word.

A : Yes. But only a theoretical liberation. Facing one's "thrown-ness" and "helpless incarnation" and general complicity is the hard part. A brutal self-honesty is involved. Not truth but honesty. Different thing.

Q : A display of virtue.

A : Of Fucking Course. Like art and music are "displays of virtue." Labors of love. The pursuit of the excellent and difficult. Do you imagine I'm "for" sentimentality ?

Q : I touched a nerve.

A : Yes. It's annoying to be misunderstood. This is part of my reluctance to be a "public" philosopher. But I enjoy friendship. So it's a matter of finding the right approach, the right harmonization of these opposed motives. As I see it, scientific philosophy is *harsh*. It takes candy from the baby, like I said. Scientific belief is more than a fart on the couch.

Q: May I quote you on that ?

A : Please do. Please do.

Q : Where does science come into all of this ?

A : Positivism is largely negative. It's a blowtorch. But the philosophers I try to extend basically save the empirical object as *empirical*. So the painting or the music or the messy human relationship is not mutilated and reduced in terms of some little boy theology, no matter how "materialistic" it's supposed to be. Things are understood in their "wholeness." The map is never the territory. The "territory" is *all* of "experience." But experience is not some internal illusion stuff. Experience is world-from-POV, to at least hint in the proper direction.

Q : I know you like the word "quality."

A : Actually I'd prefer a better word. That one is contaminated by that book about motorcycle maintenance, right ? I actually largely like Pirsig's book, but even in that book we see Pirsig's desire to play the prophet. He made too big a deal of his insight. He framed the situation as if the academics were important. As if he might be a world-historical figure. I've seen this before. Wannabe Kastrup-types pontificating childishly about "the spiritual crisis." As if the "problem" with the world could be fixed with untying of a theoretical knot. Fuck no. I find that laughable. Forgivable, maybe, but laughable. It's stuff that seminarians say when they've had too much wine.

Q : OK, I can even relate. But let's talk about quality anyway.

A : I mean the "sensory character" of the world. The smell of it, taste of it, color of it. The pain when you bang your elbow. I mean the "visceral presence" of the world. Huxley called it "suchness," which is right maybe but smacks of "spirituality."

Q : The animus toward spirituality is noted.

A : It's important to me. I tend to bring up Mach in order to express the tone of my philosophy. I love some of Heidegger's work, but I definitely want to avoid the tricks he pulled as he became self-consciously world-historical. To me he's an important continuation of Mach and Feuerbach, to name just two. Also Nietzsche. But no one is all *that* original. In my experience, you see this the more you spend time digging through old books.

Q: Ok. So "quality" is "visceral."

A : Yes, and emotive. Basically the entire rich texture of experience. Which is world. From an organism's "point of view."

Q : But no POV exhausts the world ?

A : Correct. Other humans, other animals. My edgy point is that talk of some "true world" outside of all possible experience is just "non operational" nonsense. A check that can't be cashed. But seductive.

Q : OK. So a "Cartesian" would see the "quality" of experience as a kind of brain-generated illusion.

A : Yes. But incoherently they don't see the brain itself as part of this illusion. Which goes back to Locke's incoherent view and gets radicalized in Kant. Till the children gather round the famous mystifiers *because* they are famous. Unable at first to simply examine the case and see the incoherence.

Q : OK. I see how the fame thing matters here. Unfamous Mach, in your view, gets beyond all this confusion. But people don't even know of Mach. But they hear about the difficult and profound Mr. Kant. And want in on that mysterious difficulty.

A : There you go. A pyramid scheme of mystification. Kant has his moments, but he's more confused than otherwise. And if you just look at what Kastrup and Hoffman offer the passing consumer, it's not hard to understand the "promise." Pretentious metaphysical quasi-religious what-not. Which is harsh, because I should acknowledge that their customers react to the STEM credentials. There's some itch for rationality mixed in, but of course these consumers haven't distinguished between packaging and product.