

## LETTER

I love Harman. Doesn't matter that he doesn't 100% convince me.

His creative assimilation of Heidegger is inspired. He assigns Heidegger one blazing insight. Heidegger is a monotoniac, saying the same one thing over thousands of pages. Is that "true"? Doesn't matter. It's an aspect or moment of Heidegger. It's Heidegger-for-Harman.

I don't pretend to have mastered Harman's approach, but Harman is direct. I think I get it, well enough at least to begin to comment.

To me Harman is a poet of the intense transcendence of objects. IMO, what people call consciousness is "time" as the play of presence and absence.

Things are syntheses or unities or systems of their "moments" or "aspects" or "manifestations."

What am I getting at ? *A perception is a piece of the object itself.*

We can, for certain purposes, think of this piece of the object as part of a psychical stream. But this same event is also a "face" or "moment" of the perceived object.

Consciousness, as "local" or "personal" "time", is the presence of a stream of "faces" or "moments" of things. Perhaps it's better to talk of consciousness as the presencing of a stream of (faces of ) situations in which faces of things are embedded.

The phenomenalist's point is that we don't have inner representations of external objects. We have "events" — the manifestations of entities — that never *exhaustively* manifest the entity.

We treat and talk about things *as* things, which is to say as enduring things that are *between us*. I like to use "between-usness" for what phenomenology calls "transcendence."

Time or consciousness only shows by hiding because every fugi-

tive manifestation is merely a piece of the entity, which is fundamentally “open” to the future. We act in expectation. For Mill, the empirical thing is a conditional “possibility.” That chair in the other room is just waiting for me, dormant. If I walk in the room, I see *it* again. I can move it around, stand on it to change a lightbulb. When the chair is far away, I can still intend *that very chair*. So the chair sometimes has a “signitive” presence in its empirical absence.

I can also leave a stack of books on the chair. I expect the chair to keep holding up those books, even when I’m not looking.

This is an unglamorous but I think accurate example of what Harman is talking about. Things do what they do, even when we have forgotten about them. Even ( in retrospect ) when we didn’t know they existed at all.

Things impose on one another, work on one another. The jug holds wine without our help, without our noticing it. We can come to understand, as we tend to see it, better and better *how* the jug holds wine. But the brute fact of the jug’s holding wine is just there.

“Just there” I say. But, as a phenomenalist, I understand the jug’s being as a system of moments. So I’m a correlationist. Not a dualist. Not someone who believes in internal representation icons. The jug itself is “splintered.”

I should stress that I do think entities are intensely transcendent. Every object has its “darkness.” It holds faces in reserve. I never entirely consume it. All perception and belief is situated, which is to say “from-a-point-of-view” or “aspectual.”

The world is full of shadows. And corners to turn. I like to walk in the woods at night. My flashlight gives me a “vignette” of the woods. Mill saw that we only have a tiny piece of the world in perceptual terms in any given moment. But we believe ( have a sense of ) a vast world that could *become* perceptually present. To fear a killer in the dark is to fear the “eruption” of that killer into perceptual presence. Even if it’s the helpless perception of

the pain of a knife in the back.

We can vaguely imagine and fear being killed instantly, by a satellite falling from the sky, that smashes our spinal cord. The fear of being dead, as opposed to the pain of dying, is ( to some degree perhaps ) a strange fear of the absence of perception. At least to those, like myself, who do not anticipate an afterlife.

But I think fear of death is also a fear of the pain of those left behind. We fear the impotence brought on with death. We can no longer protect them, nurture them. We may reason that we won't know then, while dead, of our impotence. But we fear and anticipate it now, and make decisions, usually, that make our survival — for now, at least — more probable.

Here we see the “future” of objects play a role in the present. As Heidegger emphasizes, the future has primacy for human beings. The more we know, the platitude goes, the more we know that we don't know. Is this liquid flammable ? Hand me a match. Let's *find out*. We find out because these objects are projected into the future. Maybe we'll get a fizzle and purple smoke, and this totally surprises us. Why is the smoke purple ? Maybe the liquid will vanish without giving off heat or smoke, and the match will stay lit.

What will Mary say if I ask her out ? What will my boss say if I ask for a raise ? We have hopes and fears. We have expectations. But suspense depends on our uncertainty. On our sense that objects can surprise us.

We make a new friend. A stranger becomes a new friend, and ( hopefully ) the further manifestation of this new person continues. We also manifest ourselves *to ourselves*. As an empirical person, I am as transcendent for me-as-consciousness as any other entity. This “me-as-consciousness” is “being” or “presencing” or “time” and nothing personal. And yet I've called it the “ontological ego” because what is perceptually present is strongly determined by the position of the empirical body associated with that “consciousness” or “presencing.”

Harman emphasizes the work that things do when they are not present to us in any way whatsoever. I take him to be projecting the being of objects into this “darkness.” For him, it’s as if presence is an exception. I can even agree with him that presence is an exception, but I think that absence depends on presence. The object is only *the* object because it manifests as an “intelligible” unity. It’s that old hat that you got from your grandpa. That I understand to be in the world that we share. The one I can point at. The one that you can include in an anecdote about that time you had with Bill in Cincinnati.

I agree with Harman, very much, that Cincinnati is a first-class object. As “real” as a quark. As “real” as a baseball bat. Promises and puppies and protons. Equally “real.” Equally “between us” or “transcendent.”

But I can’t currently make sense of objects in themselves being objects in the sense of unities. I haven’t read enough to be sure, but I think Harman understands objects have crisp, secure identities in their interactions with one another. Which are completely independent of consciousness. To this is like one understanding ( however questionable) of Kant’s “things in themselves.” Why should such things in themselves be plural ? Or singular for that matter ?

I reject Kant’s dualism completely. Perceptions are not representations but (original) *presentations* and even genuine “pieces” or “moments” of the presented object.

The object has *its* dark side because it presents itself as a particular between-us unity. So I love Harman’s emphasis of the transcendence of objects, and of how they function and work on one another in our absence. But, for me, this only makes sense because they are occasionally and recognizably *present*.

Just as Harman brilliantly twists Heidegger into a fascinating shape, I am happy to incorporate Harman’s work ( as I only begin to assimilate it ) into an enriched phenomenism that makes due with a minimal correlationism that I don’t think can be scrubbed off.

I realize that phenomenism tends to be misunderstood ( by those who haven't read the sources ) in the direction of subjective idealism. As if the world is "really" just internal representation. But this is way off. Mill found, basically, the minimal explication of the empirical object. A demystified transcendence. That acknowledged the "situatedness" of perception. Mill's approach is implicitly an ontological perspectivism. Not so far from Leibniz, but less theological and representational. This is how I read Heidegger too.

Is "phenomenism" the best name for my approach ? Hard to say. But I want to credit my influences. And this is one of several labels assigned to Mill and Mach, etc.