

I largely follow Sellars on how meaning works, but ontocubism offers a concept of the empirical object that helps us understand signs in their “richness.”

I think we can be scientific without kneeling to the scientific image. Indeed, understanding the scientific image as a “true” reality is residually theological, because monotheistic. Not truth as justified “true” belief but no truth at all and only justified *belief*. *Whether* a belief is warranted or justified is always itself a *situated* judgement.

We *try* to come to an agreement with people we respect. I speculate that metaphysical realism is a misreading of this *hope*. In practical life, we have *seeing is believing*. Our beliefs tend to converge if they are minimally theoretical and the believers have perceptual access to the situation. “Look ! I told you the couch was red ! ”

So we get a pre-theoretical common-sense realism. I think a hazy version of this is presupposed by all philosophy, even those wild incoherent positions that refuse to consider the conditions for the possibility of communication.

So we presuppose that we share a world and many beliefs about the world, but we do not presuppose a *perfect* sharing of this world. Why engage in inquiry if everyone already has access to the final total “truth” ?

Avenarius decisively pointed at introjection as the basic mistake of “Cartesian” philosophy in general. Often tacitly, philosophers vaguely assume a plurality of internal private worlds and a single external or “true” world. This single “true” world is the foundation and “host” of the private worlds. If all the private worlds evaporate, the substrate “true” external world goes on.

Kant is flaky on the issue, but some passages bluntly invoke things as they “really” are as the “cause” of their internal representations. So the empirical thing, if considered as a system, includes both its “true being” in external reality and all of the representations it “causes” in various private internal worlds.

All of these representations or perceptions taken together are *other than* the “true” object. The “true” object has no qualities at all. Even its definite identity is illegitimate. To me it would be less absurd, if one insists on transcendental idealism, to discuss the *entire* “true” reality as an X. To think of it as a system of “true” objects is to assume too much.

But we can read Kant as following Locke’s approach to the point of absurdity. Why stop at color and taste ? Why not take the tactile shape of the object into the subject also ? Why not absorb space and time into the subject ?

Locke was misled by the important causal relationships between the nervous system and the sensuous manifestation of objects into *bifurcating* the object into its phantom-subjective and genuine-objective qualities. He contradicts himself immediately as he presents this theory. The eyes give shape correctly, he says. But then he explains vision in terms of particles *too small to see* that shoot off objects and knock on the eyes.

Perception understood in terms of introjection as private representation gives us the hard problem of the physical. As Avenarius saw, indirect realism relies on the very common-sense direct realism that it “refutes” or cancels. What interests me currently is how so many clever people could let this confusion pass ?

Naive realism is shrewder than indirect realism, but indirect realism *sounds* sophisticated. Here we have philosophers as pretentious buffoons. If just about everyone is blind together, then the absurdity is not noticed or repaired.

Phenomenalism and empiriocriticism tend to be misunderstood as idealism in the vague pejorative sense. Introjection is so habitual and automatic that it is not “seen” at all, so those caught in the representationalist assumption can’t “see” phenomenalism. Can only misread it as an excision of “true” reality.

Recall that the introjectionist “picture that held (holds ) us captive” goes like this : Each consciousness is the stuff of a private phantom world. The system of private ghost worlds is suspended

above and dependent upon a “true” non-ghost external reality.

So phenomenism tends to be misread as simply the removal of the non-ghost external reality. It is then understood as “idealism.” But what this tells us is that indirect realism is idealism with the *addition* of a true substrate reality.

This is how Kant defends himself from accusations that he’s an idealist. He insists that things in themselves cause the representations we live in. He glues on a substrate.

I’m not saying that Kant isn’t a great philosopher, but I am saying that on this issue he is another buffoon. On *this* issue, he is unambiguously inferior to Mach and Avenarius and J. S. Mill.

I confess to my tunnel vision. This issue is far from the only issue. But I currently think it is a crucial issue. What is a thing ? What exactly *is* an empirical object ?

If we want to make sense of meaning, and we see that marks and noises are things in the world, then we need to get a grip on what marks and noises *are*.

Presumably the mark or noise is “meaningful” to me in terms of its manifestation. For an introjectionist or introjector, the mark-for-me is made of internal stuff. Typically qualia. Or consciousness as a ghost-like internal stuff constituting user-interface icons.

If people *live* non-theoretically in a direct realism or phenomenism, then incoherent theoretical explications of this life are basically harmless.

I suggest the prestige of natural science is grounded in reliable technology. Bad technology fails to give us what we want. It may give us what we don’t want. It may kill us. The theory that goes into the design and construction of such technology is therefore *intensely constrained*.

We are primarily practical animals. So what Whitehead calls “speculative philosophy” is like poetry or music, a luxury. Bad philosophy is bad poetry, bad music.

But “speculative philosophy” should be distinguished from basic orienting myths, which have also been called worldviews. For instance, religions offer worldviews. Such worldviews can indeed save souls. I’d class stoicism as a more rationalistic worldview. I’d class what I myself make of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as a worldview.

I see speculative philosophy as a “flower” that grows from the “soil” of a mostly settled life. If one’s worldview is functioning smoothly, then one can enjoy the *art* of speculative philosophy. Sellars writes of the attempt to explain how things generally hang together. This too is philosophy as an art.

The early work of Heidegger entangles existential worldview and explicative philosophy. I agree with him that the project of explicative philosophy is not generically worthwhile. To use an analogy, I don’t expect someone who doesn’t commit to music to be great composer. But this analogy breaks down in some ways. For the early Heidegger, philosophy demands a dangerous and radical self-honesty. The philosopher wills his or her own exposure to existence as a whole. “Anxiety in the face of relativism is anxiety in the face of philosophy.” This critique was aimed at his teacher Husserl. Heidegger realized the importance of history. We can’t see around our own inheritance. Instead we look through it. We can, however, be honest about this.

But then speculative philosophy is no longer impersonal and generic. Every explication is situated and finally personal, even as it strives toward a transpersonal validity. Indeed, the claim that we are all historically situated and constrained is itself a trans-historical statement. Like perhaps all philosophy, it aims at universal validity.

In my view, this structure is not to be evaded. Philosophers vary in what they hold fixed. Those sensitive to historicity hold only a minimal structure fixed. Those who ignore historicity more boldly impose the norms of the present on all places and times. I side with those who insist on our situatedness. But this relativism is neither irrationalist nor self-contradicting, if properly understood. *The belief that all belief is situated is*

*itself, of course, situated.*

Likewise the semantic critique of truth as the mirroring of an “objective reality” is not the presentation of the truth about truth. Is it *false* that green ideas sleep furiously ?

The type of the clumsy expression of this semantic critique is associated with logical positivism’s eagerness to call “metaphysical” claims NONSENSE.

The problem with this clumsy approach is the tacit *metaphysical* assumption of an objective criterion for whether some claim is nonsense. The arrogant stereotypical logical positivist is caught in a metaphysics of transpersonal logic.

In my attempt to sketch of situated logical positivism, I suggest that the positivist should confess: *I* can’t make sense of truth-as-mirroring, so frankly *I* can’t make sense of you making sense of it. I do, however, grasp that *seeing is believing*. Perhaps you are inflating this transformation of belief through perception into something grandiose and obscure ?

Schlick’s essay on (metaphysical) realism and positivism is excellent. *If* the reader is open in the first place to explicative philosophy. Why wouldn’t they be ? As I see it, the world-view culture war between atheistic humanism and the religious attitude tends to obscure the issue. Despite the secular intention in the phenomenism of some of the logical positivists and thinkers like Mach and Mill, all attempts to account for the “subjective component” of reality tend to get lumped into “idealism.” Many atheistic thinkers are caught in an inherited introjection without noticing it. Descartes has left such a residue that these atheists can’t help believing in philosophy’s dominant ghost story.

This belief is so established and subliminal that critics of this ghost story are misread as presenting its intensification. In fact, they are demolishing an inherited monotheistic prejudice and confusion. But I refuse to pretend that this is a socially important matter. I am merely trying to explain the dominion of ghost stories among the educated, who see a “hard problem of

consciousness” but don’t see the elusiveness of the concept of the physical.

In over-simplified terms, *consciousness is the presence or the being of the physical*. But being is not a thing or a stuff. And consciousness as being is not an internal stuff. Nor is it the ingredient that everything is made of. James is right : consciousness does not exist. But this means that “consciousness” does not refer to a thing, to a kind of stuff.

Elsewhere I tried to reduce *fundamental* ontology to a recognition of the ontological difference. I confess that the ontological difference is right on the edge of mysticism. Indeed, I think some spiritual traditions incorporate a recognition of this difference into a larger world-view philosophy.

As I look at presentations of Advaita Vedanta, I can’t help but think that the ontological difference is not usually understood. Thou art that. You are that. But this is just confusion unless the “you” here is carefully specified. Wittgenstein does this tersely in his *TLP*, but I don’t see this emphasized and explicated in secondary sources. I run the risk of sounding arrogant if I confess that I think the ontological difference is difficult to “see. ”

Douglas Harding’s metaphor of headlessness is excellent, but Harding primarily presents a worldview that merely incorporates the ontological difference. His folksy guru style is not ideal. But Ernst Mach’s self-portrait and his *The Analysis of Sensations* is as secular and dry as the most hardboiled cynic and atheist could desire. While phenomenology laid the groundwork, I was studying Mach when I finally grabbed it so that I could hold on to it.

I’ve had YouTube commenters note the “spiritual payload” of my content and be surprised or confused by my cautious conceptual presentation. Why such an atheistic *feel* ? Because, I gently answered them, I come from that side of the tracks. I find the spiritual industrial complex somewhat repulsive. I don’t hate them. I just love what I take to be the cumulative crystallized and definite accomplishments of explicative philosophy.

Gurus tend to reheat the same necessarily vague and incoherent product. What matters is perhaps the confidence and tone of the presentation. In retrospect, I surmise that many of my viewers enjoyed the “feel” of my videos without caring about or much noticing what I valued, which was the “technical” accomplishment. I don’t mean the graphics or sound, though I enjoyed this sensuous component. I mean the crystallized conceptual labor.

William James’ early psychology book is first-rate phenomenology. Both Husserl and Heidegger owe James a debt. J. S. Mill’s “psychological theory” of empirical objects was a breakthrough aligned with those of Mach and Avenarius. While Heidegger is a grand figure, and Husserl is a secondary grand figure, the others are not much discussed.

I rate Hegel highly. Kojève’s lectures on Hegel blew my mind. Plain and simple. I then read some of Hegel, especially the lectures, which I find relatively direct and clear.

So I think Heidegger and Hegel are well worth discussing, but I also notice that more efficient and focused thinkers are relatively neglected. Žižek leans on Hegel and Lacan, both famously obscure and profound.

I can relate all too well to this taste for the profound. Hegel and Heidegger provide “worldview” or “spirituality.” Because they are difficult, they also provide glamor to their expositors. Here comes the great Hegel whisperer ! For what it’s worth, I project a phenomenism on Hegel. And on Heidegger. If we ignore the “spiritual” surplus in both, we get the same post-dualism. Braver’s *A Thing of This World* offers a sober narrative of the evolution of what I’d call their secret phenomenalist basis.

So I’d suggest that someone invested in “speculative philosophy” without the spiritual frills is better served by thinkers who charge at the core of confusion. In language that is not obscure and evasive, because it wants to do too many things at once.

What is a “physical” thing ? What is language ? What is a “mind” ? Ayer wrote of “the problem of perception.” Is a

perception an internal icon ? But what then is the “true” object ? The bifurcation of the object into primary and secondary qualities fails. Is a disaster. The conception of the mind as a container of consciousness as a stuff is a disaster. A harmless disaster, since nobody lives such nonsense.

In a conversation with friends, I mentioned the dominance of indirect realism. What I had in mind was not this or that philosophy department. I wasn’t focused on academic philosophy. I meant instead the default educated view. Above I mentioned Braver’s book, which I think is quietly built on an unemphasized and unclarified phenomenism. Indeed, I have mentioned elsewhere that Heidegger compares Dasein to Monad, basically indicates that he is fixing Leibniz. And phenomenism is “ontoperspectivism.” I use ontocubism to try to fuse these two labels. The “physical” thing is the logical synthesis of its qualitative manifestations.

So some philosophers are critics of indirect realism. Even if they don’t attack the issue as directly as I try to.

Anecdotally, I find that fans of Wittgenstein *evade* the issue. I confess that I too shrugged it off as boring and useless metaphysics. Now I’d say that it’s still useless but not necessarily boring. Ignoring a knot is not the untying of that knot. Gellner’s devastating critique of the dark side of the Wittgenstein cult remains valid for me. To cast technical explicative philosophy as a disease and still hang around to play therapist is repulsively incoherent, in my view. It’s a bogus pseudo-solution.

But I rate Wittgenstein highly. I also rate Sellars and Brandom highly, and they add necessary structure to the often amorphous insights of the great “therapeutic” hero. As I see it, the therapeutic pose is the adoption of Wittgenstein’s *personal problem* as a virtue. He may have been exhausted at times by his muse. If he had trouble turning it off, some of his imitators adopt to pose to avoid turning it on in the first place.

But I could also talk about parrots of postmodern jargon, who understand *something* but look more obsolete with the rise of



chatbots. I reckon that we all learn by trying on Daddy's clothes. So it's indulgent and uncharitable of me to dwell on the vanity that each of us has to wrestle against. But I'll leave in this as a record of all my all too human bitchiness. As I see it, artists are bitchy, even if they are mostly kind enough to suppress their irritability, so that a serene persona can be foremost. What if beauty in the work depends on an aggression directed at all the wrong ways to do it ? Of course I am not trying to justify bad manners. But perhaps I'm emphasizing the gap between the work and complex and imperfect human being who gives us the work.

I see the "speculative philosopher" as a sensitive consumer and investigator of the work of other such philosophers. The enterprise is cumulative. Ideally such a critic is not distracted from genuine technical accomplishment by what may surround it. Harman writes that he has friends who won't read Heidegger because they find repulsive those who do read Heidegger. I was ambivalent about Heidegger myself for similar reasons. But this kind of personal bias gets in the way of synthesizing a worthy next step in the cumulative project. So ambition, with help from curiosity, pushes us toward that which we also have cause to suspect.

But as a writer, I intermittently aspire to be digestible. The risk of writing unpretentiously is that the pretentious are not fascinated. But I only believe in an easy presentation for my work on phenomenism. Conversations about the depths in Nietzsche are intrinsically "esoteric." In other words, "worldview" or "spiritual" philosophy is generally esoteric. Yes, people often try to present them as if exoteric, but I think this has to involve a trivialization. We get "profound" questions like: "Was Nietzsche woke ?" Everything profound loves the mask because it needs the mask. It deserves the mask. The popularized is a realm of embarrassing cartoons. If I said something dramatic like this as a semi-famous person, I'd be verging on performative contradiction. Nietzsche himself was born posthumously. But he's often digested as a podium man. In his weaker moments, he becomes a mere podium man. But this is what many *want* from him and

from thinkers in general. A father figure. Not a researcher whose results might be woven into something even better.

On the other hand, Nietzsche's best lines contribute to a relatively timeless tradition with no center and ( necessarily ) no father figure or prophet.