

## LETTER

As requestified, notes on Zweikoff, the sort-of philosopher, wherein I'll try for the big picture.

His “ontocubism” or phenomenism “snaps off” from the “existential” soil of his total pose or self-conception. This is not just my opinion but his. He was frankly ambivalent. Should he present the ontocubism by itself ? Because his “existentialism” was — again in his own words — not for everyone. This “total understanding of the world” was “necessarily marginal.” It involved a foregrounding of the “podium man” or the “podium manner” that functioned as its foil.

The ontocubism was, in contrast, exoteric, basically bright and innocent and a technical achievement, an arrangement of concepts. It was an enrichment and synthesis of phenomenism, empiriocriticism, phenomenology, and logical positivism. The main point ? A rejection of dualist indirect realism. And an alternative that makes sense. In short, it's an approach to the old mind-matter issue. Zweikoff applied Heidegger's ontological difference by equating consciousness with the presence or being of the world. So consciousness is no thing, no stuff, but the “presence” or “being” of every kind of stuff. The result is a pluralism. Instead of “ingredient ontology” we get a “formal ontology.” Form as in structure. No pair of primary ingredients ( the mental and the physical ) and not even a single primary stuff ( no neutral monism. ) Subjectivity is accounted for in terms of an unusual understanding of objects in the world we share.

Unusual but not unprecedented. Indeed, Sartre presents an ontocubic understanding of objects, adapted from Husserl, near the beginning of *Being and Nothingness*. Leibniz gives an “aspect” understanding of reality as a whole in his monadology. But Sartre's few paragraphs aren't developed further. And Leibniz blunts his point with talk of pre-established harmony. Heidegger was a key influence for Leibniz, and Heidegger associates Dasein with monad in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. But ( to my knowledge ) this was not noticed or developed by Heidegger

people.

So we can credit Zweikoff for emphasis and synthesis and — not to be underrated — omission. As in not many wade through Sartre's big book these days. Zweikoff never got around to writing even a short book, though he claimed to want to write a book like Ayer's *LTL*. Which he thought was mostly great, just needed a fix here and there.

We might say that Zweikoff was a “jazz” philosopher. Both the exoteric ontocubism and the recessive-marginal “existentialism” had a relatively stable or fixed content. But he was always experimenting with different terms, different tones, styles, etc. If we zoom in on the phenomenism, then we might say that he included what was good in Mill and Mach and solidified and enriched it by emphasizing “aspects.”

For Mill, empirical objects are interpersonal possibilities of sensation. So objects are “made of” experience. But experience is therefore not internal. You might say that objects are “made of” perceptions. But perceptions are no more “psychical” than “physical.” The “physical” thing is just the localized enduring possibility of manifesting itself, if someone is around and looking, hearing, smelling, etc. So the chair remains in the room without the help of witnesses. But it's being there is our expectation that we will perceive it again when we return. And more complicated stuff. Like I can leave books on the chair, and the chair will hold up those books. No witnesses required. As Zweikoff emphasized, Mill was unequivocal that this covered (accounted for) all mundane understanding of the physical. But without the added and basically confused and senseless postulation of a “matter” or “substance.” That somehow hid behind every manifestation. So we might say that Mill foregrounded the mystification or misreading of this possibility as something Obscure and Beyond.

Mill didn't emphasize that streams of consciousness are therefore “made of” the pieces of these objects that get called “perceptions.” Mill didn't develop his breakthrough as much as it

deserved. Zweikoff took from Mill but emphasized that empirical objects have to have their empirical being “in” these perceptions. The “quality” of the object is in the perception. So he doesn’t exactly adopt Mill’s idea but transform it. The empirical object is a “blurry equivalence class” of its manifestations or moments. These manifestations are condition and doubly located. Located spatially as in the object is somewhere in the world. But located also in that its manifestation is associated with a perceiver’s body also. To perceive or contribute to the manifestation of the object is a personal event. As in I can’t see through your eyes or smell with your nose.

Zweikoff called this an “object *splintered* ontology.” And he’s not far from an anti-realist minimally correlationist Harman. But of course this residue of correlationism is a huge difference for some. Including me. As I see it, he was trying to acknowledge the stubborn embarrassing fact that ( in crude terms ) world is already world-*for*. On the other hand, he emphasized ( within this constraint ) the dangerous transcendence of objects. The object had infinite depth, through the darkness of its future. It could surprise us. Would continue to reveal new “faces” to us. And the subject, properly understood, was “empty.”

In other words, as “consciousness” the “formal subject” was nothing but the presence of a streaming of the shared world. The empirical ego ( the witness ) was one more in-the-world thing.

Zweikoff also wrote about signs and meaning. His basic idea ( with help from Sellars and Derrida and Saussure and Heidegger ) was that meaning was a mystification of blurry equivalence classes of practically interchangeable qualitative events. In other words, he rejected the dualism of pure meaning and pure non-meaning. He rejected the idea of the signifier as a vehicle for the signified. Put crudely, all experience is “significant.” Some of this significance is conventional. The center of “meaning mysticism” is basically mathematical platonism. You may notice that the equivalence class metaphor plays several important roles in

his philosophy. But ( as he emphasizes himself ) this is also just a metaphor, just another sign whose “meaning” is its interchangeability with other signs. So you might say there’s no pretense of exactitude. The notion of exactitude would come from the fantasy that ontology could be like arithmetic.

Crucial point. If signs are objects in the world, then they too are given in aspects or moments. So I read a sentence and it “radiates” for me in a particular way. For you in some other way. No God around to read it “correctly.” So it’s basically only our sociality and good will toward one another that pushes us toward agreeing on a best interpretation. And all of this happens in a fuzziness that can’t be eliminated but only reduced.