

What do our claims about the past mean ? My mother was a little girl before I was born. I've seen pictures. I take it for granted that world contained an "ocean" of perceptual presence at that time. A vanished ocean. An imagined-by-me-ocean. But I will still explain my own presence, for instance, in terms of that vanished past.

It's not just the arche-fossil. Perhaps yesterday is strange enough. Where are the snows of yesteryear ? I believe there was a man named Lincoln. Where is the being of Lincoln now ? In our memory, yes. Our signs refer to the long dead Lincoln. What I expect from the future is a complicated function of what I project on the past.

How does the Big Bang exist now ? As a likely hypothesis. Not that I'm qualified to do more than trust the experts as such. How do I *visualize* the Big Bang ? This event before sentience. But what is sentience ? What do we really mean by this sentience, by this "consciousness" ?

Some, understandably, think of it as a present-at-hand process. Like the "sewing" of a Turing machine, but messier, gooier. Or perhaps a molecular game of Scrabble. Or perhaps in terms of adaptive behavior on the part of an embedded self-preserving system.

I don't object to this on sentimental grounds. Schopenhauer is too sweet for me. I will contemplate Dawkins' moist robots as carriers of an idiotically selfish code.¹

As I see it, thinkers forget that the world is THERE in the first place. You, dear reader, see one "face" of your bookshelf right now and not the others. Let's be reductive and explore the idea of "consciousness" as just the "being" or presence of this "face" of the bookshelf. "Consciousness" is not "inside" but the **presence** of my bookshelf now, to my right, beside my desk. I can also stare at my hand, with my fingernails clipped neurotically to the nub. My "consciousness" is not a thing but the presence of all other things.²

Philosophers (some of them ancient) have spoke of "witness consciousness." But the only witness involved is the flesh-and-blood person, who is finally just one more entity that is present. As empirical ego, I am manifest in the world, like other things. But my "empirical ego" is special in its own way. Its beliefs (my beliefs) are also the speakable

¹Note that the moist robots are altruistic sometimes, but this is an expression of the (blind) "selfishness" of the code.

²Note that "consciousness" and "presence" are indeed nouns. They are "things" in the sense of concepts. My point is that these particular concepts are indeed special.

structure, the “logic”, of the world. From my point of view, I might add. Does this *need* to be added ? Do you, dear reader, endow me with the power to see around my point of view ? But what *is* “point of view” ?

Elusive, fundamental, “familiar” concepts. Hegel is helpful here.³

What is “familiarily known” is not properly known, just for the reason that it is “familiar”. When engaged in the process of knowing, it is the commonest form of self-deception, and a deception of other people as well, to assume something to be familiar, and give assent to it on that very account. Knowledge of that sort, with all its talk, never gets from the spot, but has no idea that this is the case. Subject and object, and so on, God, nature, understanding, sensibility, etc., are uncritically presupposed as familiar and something valid, and become fixed points from which to start and to which to return. The process of knowing flits between these secure points, and in consequence goes on merely along the surface. Apprehending and proving consist similarly in seeing whether every one finds what is said corresponding to his idea too, whether it is familiar and seems to him so and so or not.

2

I believe that *both perception and belief are **situated***. Someone’s perception. Someone’s belief. I include rodents and little green men from outer space. I won’t rule out some computer becoming a site for a streaming of the world.

Is it not indeed this located-ness or situatedness of “consciousness” that tempts us to understand it as a stuff or present-at-hand process in the brain ?

Of course first-person manifestation of the world is functionally related to the state of the associated nervous system. We can even be knocked out, by drugs or head injury. A particular streaming of the world switches off. Or that’s what our memory and the reports of others suggest (and I believe them, yet sometimes we remember dreams only in the afternoon.)

Others die. We go to their funeral perhaps. The world remains, continues to present itself, for *us*. *For us*. What if all “consciousness” ceased

³This is from the famous preface, and fans of Kaufmann’s treatment of Nietzsche might enjoy Kaufman’s careful translation of this preface, presented with a compact commentary.

forever ? Can we think this thought “honestly” ? What does honesty mean here ? To me, if I imagine the world that persists, I imagine the world as it was perceived and understood. I “cheat” in that sense. Yet it’s violation of intuition perhaps to suggest that the world “depends” on perception in general, if indeed on no *particular* perceiver.⁴

I prefer correlationism to speculative realism. Especially as a gallows-humor atheist, this decision is not practically relevant in the mundane sense.⁵

To put it in other words: for the correlationist, in order to grasp the profound meaning of the fossil datum, one should not proceed from the ancestral past, but from the correlational present. This means that we have to carry out a retrojection of the past on the basis of the present. What is given to us, in effect, is not something that is anterior to givenness, but merely something that is given in the present but gives itself as anterior to givenness. The logical (constitutive, originary) anteriority of givenness over the being of the given therefore enjoins us to subordinate the apparent sense of the ancestral statement to a more profound counter-sense, which is alone capable of delivering its meaning: it is not ancestrality which precedes givenness, but that which is given in the present which retrojects a seemingly ancestral past. To understand the fossil, it is necessary to proceed from the present to the past, following a logical order, rather than from the past to the present, following a chronological order. [...] Now, why is this interpretation of ancestrality obviously insupportable? Well, to understand why, all we have to do is ask the correlationist the following question: *what is it that happened 4.56 billion years ago ?* Did the accretion of the earth happen, *yes or no* ?

Meillassoux demands a Yes or No, from philosophers no less. Have you stopped beating your wife ? Yes or no ? The ideal answer would be “no,” because I never started and was therefore never in a position to stop. The past is not “seemingly” ancestral. Nor is a careful interpretation of what looks like a “glitch” in our way of talking a “counter sense.”

⁴My recurrent talk of aliens is motivated by a generalization of the concept of the empirical. I don’t really care about aliens except as useful examples that exaggerate variations among humans, such as the blindness and deafness of some of them. Should a philosopher born blind refuse to admit the visual component of the world’s manifestation, just because they are personally excluded from it ? In the other direction, perhaps the great painter is more sensitive to color than me. As a nearsighted person, I also accept that many others can see objects better than me if I don’t have my glasses. What does the object “really” look like ? Does a nearsighted person see only a fake apple ? To be sure, we tend to think the apple is as determinate as *can* be seen. This makes sense. But a “better” aspect is not necessarily a “truer” aspect.

⁵It’s an aesthetic-logical choice, so it is “practical” in an extended sense, but what isn’t ? Hence the nullity of the crude pragmatism I eventually abandoned.

Meillassoux emphasizes the (fleeting) present, ignoring that empirical claims are ground on the future, tacitly about what we *should* expect, to the degree that such claims are scientific. I'm not deaf to the intuitions that he invokes. We expect the world to go on after our own "window" on this world closes. But are the past and the future "symmetrical" ? Or do we lean toward or rather "into" the future ?

Confronted with the arche-fossil, every variety of idealism converges and becomes equally extraordinary – every variety of correlationism is exposed as an extreme idealism, one that is incapable of admitting that what science tells us about these occurrences of matter independent of humanity effectively occurred as described by science.

Science *tells* us. Science ARTICULATES "these occurrences of matter independent of humanity" Even in speculative realism, we get Berkeley's God, disavowed, yes, but simplified and functional. Reality, apart from all human access, is conveniently an X-ray residue of just that access. The tacit dependence on an omniscient 3rd person narrator is easy to overlook here. Grand words like "science." But what "experience" of the world (what *manifestation* or "presencing" of the world) lacks "from-a-point-of-view-ness" ?

3

I continue to believe that "truth" and "true" are (essentially) handy tools for talking about what is fundamental, namely always situated belief. Truth is the unicorn. Belief is the horse.

But I don't expect us to just drop such convenient tools. I will still use "truth" and "true," pretty much automatically, especially in ordinary conversation.

I think my point is only possibly interesting to others like myself who are trying to explicate our basic situation. For me, this is largely of matter of digging in to what we mean or "should" mean by our most fundamental terms.

Is belief "taking to be true" ? Or is this approach like walking on our hands ?

Can we leap out of our own situated belief ? See around our own eyes ?

Talk of "true" and "false" is convenient. But is it more economical and less confusing to think in terms of the transformation of belief alone ?

If you say that my beliefs correspond with reality, is this more than saying that my beliefs agree with your own ? If you say that my beliefs are “false,” is this more than saying that my beliefs agree with your own ? I am not of course opposed to preferring one’s own beliefs to those of others. Indeed, belief is especially visible, as such, when it is the belief of others that is “false” or at least unwarranted, from *our* point of view anyway.

This analysis of the concept of truth is not intended as a sermon. No purification of souls. Of course I suggest that we might get a more coherent story. If we think of knowledge as warranted belief. Of course I wouldn’t say (typically) that Joe “knows” **P** even if Joe’s claim is justified, if I also believe the negation of **P**. Justified “true” belief can be demystified in this way : We don’t call “knowledge” what we don’t believe ourselves.

Note that meaning is *not* use, not for the philosopher. What is the *best* way to understand and employ our signs ? What is the most precise and compact grasp of the issue ?

I suggest that correspondence approaches laudably capture our common sense psychology of belief. Yes, seeing is believing. More importantly, we consider beliefs founded on perceptual experience to be *warranted*. But observation statements are theory laden, and beliefs grounded in remembered perceptual experience are sometimes in conflict. In ordinary language, discordant eye-witnesses can’t both be “right.” I’d say that it’s hard to believe them both, since contradictory beliefs violate the coherence norm discussed by Brandom. One is one around here. Yet one can be a state of doubt, as if torn between two beliefs. Or uncertain of the “meaning” of a claim, etc.

We tend to think that the world is an a determinate state, independent of any grasp of this state. Perhaps because situations involving mundane dry goods, if examined closely, tend to give rise to strong, settled beliefs. At first, I saw a jar of pennies. Turns out there were 319 pennies in the jar. Which I won’t recount unless I think someone has messed with the jar. Because pennies “don’t just disappear.” In easy cases like these, it’s tempting to talk about the “truth” of the situation. Until, for instance, others count 314 or 320 pennies in the jar. When is the count final ? When everyone agrees ? When most people agree ?