

8 SEP 2025

LETTER

1

I love the opening of *Process and Reality*. Speculative philosophy is the art of the synoptic vision. We could call this “speculation” or “ontology.” Or “metaphysics.” I’d like a word that isn’t too exotic. Because I imagine most thoughtful people spend some of their time trying to synthesize a satisfying synoptic vision.

This quest for a synoptic vision is entangled with religion. With politics. With identity. Perhaps especially with *ideal* identity. The person I want to be, which is often what I take myself to be, against the judgement of others perhaps.

Confessing my bias, I think speculation tends to be technically plausible or logically coherent when such speculation is understood as *art*. This happens when the operative myth of the speculator is “under” the speculative system. For instance, I am a gallows humor pessimist. Or something like that. So I don’t have to weave a personal god or a optimistic secret logic of history into my speculation.

Indeed, I tend to prefer “explication.” This explication is speculative in the sense that it is creative. I have to invent formal indications. Or transform those I inherit.

Some philosophers “fix” others by chopping away the part they don’t like. And/or changing the style, the tone. For instance, I like a “purified” Schopenhauer. Get rid of the Kantian pretense. Work in Darwin. Add gallows humor.

This kind of editing is what we do anyway when we assimilate. We tolerate weak moments in a great philosopher. Of course these weak moments are weak in *our* situated estimation.

We can also edit Nietzsche, removing the screech.

Of course I don't mean mutilating the original texts.

Speculation as art is self-consciously creative. As an ontologist, I make a collage, perhaps including something that I can claim as my own. Mostly curation, but maybe a little invention.

## 2

Panenexperientialism is phenomenism is ontological perspectivism. It is "always" misunderstood. At first. Because representational realism is the inherited default position. For us. Experience is "inside" the skull. Right ? Wrong.

Perception is functionally/causally related to the state and location sense organs, to oversimplify. This confused certain philosophers. And a belief in God and the immortal soul had to be fit in to the picture. Last but not least, we are secretive creatures. The container metaphor is perfect for aspects of human existence. The subject *is* a container if we focus on what people hide with shame and show with pride.

The world is not made of selves. Selves are made of world. Panexperientialism involves something like the Buddhist decomposition of the self. The self is "real" and yet — like everything else — "virtual." We can't cut "Nature" at the joints. Because our cuts always *are* the labile joints.

This offends the prejudice that thought is an internal mystical mental stuff. This prejudice is understandable. We expect to find milk in the fridge. But it's not there as expected when we check. We are surprised. Our sense of the world is jarred. It is "corrected." We were wrong. But now we are right. Until we are jarred again.

Our new belief is the "truth" just as we called our old belief "the truth." We live in our belief as long as we can manage. This belief is personal or situated but not internal. Because our belief is the way the threatening and promising world "signifies" for us.

I don't reject truth as a deep property because I want to wallow in irrationalism. I reject it as an "artist" because it's not needed and almost forces one toward a long "refuted" indirect realism. When I say "refuted," I just mean decisively criticized. I express a personal judgement. That approach does not work. Is nonsense.

But I'm aware that others don't see the problem. Or *want* the problem.

I'm reading Adorno's lectures on Kant's famous first critique. Kant gives us a psychedelic tacitly mystical indirect realism. He is solving a spiritual problem. He wants God and personal immortality but also wants Newton and determinism. He compartmentalizes. Hoffman offers a new version for an age with a different spiritual taste. Hoffman appeals to "hallucinogenic" mystics. Conspiracy theory mystics. On the consciousness subreddit, I see guys who piss neon yellow on "left brain" theoretical types. You don't need books. You need LSD and a vague but intoxicating gnosis.

This mystic irrationalism has its charms. The arrogance is even laudable. It's the kernel of Emerson and Whitman. But its self-presentation is of course crude. It's the pose of someone who only recently discovered the sense of autonomy that is *presupposed* by those who go on to strengthen this sense of autonomy by piecing together a synoptic system.

When I first jumped onto online philosophy forums, I had ready Rorty and Nietzsche and other "beyond it all" or "post-everything" thinkers. I was never as bad as the reddit guy, because I loved reading. But I saw, even then, that the essence of this "post-everything" pose was a "mystical" sense of autonomy. Stirner is inferior to Nietzsche on the whole, but his work concentrates on this personal transcendence of talk. Of case-making that is always "theological." Because it is case making. Because it stoops to make a case. From the indeterminate heights of cosmic irony.

The problem with our reddit guy, who vaguely gestures toward hallucinogens, is that he isn't solving the conceptual problem at all. He is offering *spiritual* counsel. Those who try to solve

conceptual problems in a definite way are false prophets, distractions. To this guy. Because he perhaps hasn't even "seen" serious work toward a synoptic vision. Philosophy "is" ( just ) spirituality shit. Feuerbach wrote long ago that "the true philosophy is no philosophy." If you are content with a bumper sticker synopsis, you could do worse.

But then you find yourself wanting to talk about philosophy after all. This hazy negation isn't enough. It's beginning and the not the end. But this beginning haunts the evolving process. We don't forget for long that "ontology" is still "just art." Of course I assuming a non-religious approach. For the majority of people ( definitely including my younger self), ontology is far more serious.

Ontology is "just art" only for skeptics, stoics, ironists, epicureans. I exclude completely earnest pessimism in its anti-natalist evangelic mode. But of course I include an ironic or gallows humor pessimism. The tragic view of existence. Which is not a negative view or a positive view but something self-consciously ambivalent. So I would also exclude those pesky evangelical positronic Nietzsche boys. Who echo what is cringe in Nietzsche.

If a certain arrogance is associated with the necessary sense of autonomy, its early expressions are repulsive. I recall exhibiting these repulsive tendencies myself. Not that I don't still do sometimes. But I remember being worse. Now I see the same bad manners in the Nietzsche boy that come and go on forums. I don't hate them. I can't. They just need to ripen. I'd bet on a rude Nietzsche boy or a scientistic dogmatist before I'd bet on an old man trapped in the spirituality pose. Some positions are inherently dynamic. The egoistic Nietzsche boys will keep reading and thinking. Facing difference. Trying to conquer it. They will have to change to assimilate it. The scientistic types, who are bad a foolosophy, are at least invested in critical rationality.

And phenomenalism tends to be misunderstood by scientism as an idealism. If idealism fetishizes the mystic subject, then scientism fetishizes the mystical object. Both positions tend to get

distracted by the culture war, defining themselves as the adequate critique of the other. Both still caught in a boring game.

Boring as far as the unseriously serious construction of a synoptic vision goes. Vague spirituality-tinged idealism versus a naive anti-spirituality tinged materialism.

Phenomenalism ( panenexperientialism ) has no trouble emphasizing the “transcendence” of the world. A “subject” is indeed *subjected* to a world that exceeds him and threatens him and even constitutes him.

QBism is good. Tho I will say that some of the videos made lean too much on the usual taste for the mystical. QM is an accidental mysticism factory. But phenomenism demystifies mathematical models. No weird collapse of the wave function. No need for mathematical platonism, which is often the disavowed mysticism of the metaphysical realist who declares the physical ( mathematically conceived) as the “true” or “substrate” reality. Which can function as truthmaker. Even this assumption that truth is a deep and meaningful concept, something other than belief, is already monotheistic.