

29 JUNE 2025

NOTES

I respond to comments by R presented in italics.

1

In one sense, there is possibility in terms of an open future. You also noted what sounds like a “thick present” concept.

Not just an open future but also an open past, because I revise my beliefs about the past. I can be uncertain about the past, entertain possibilities in an attempt to weave a mostly coherent story. I can explore a particular possibility, a particular belief about the past, in terms of “implied” beliefs. “Well if (I believe) that X happened, then surely (I believe) Y happened too, and so on.” This “I believe” structure is not explicit, especially when we are raised and trained in the pragmatic regime of Truth.

On the thick present, from James, page 607 :

A simple sensation, as we shall hereafter see, is an abstraction, and all our concrete states of mind are representations of objects with some amount of complexity. Part of the complexity is the echo of the objects just past, and, in a less degree, perhaps, the foretaste of those just to arrive. Objects fade out of consciousness slowly. If the present thought is of ABCDEFG, the next one will be of BCDEFGH, and the one after that of CDEFGHI—the lingerings of the past dropping successively away, and the incomings of the future making up the loss. These lingerings of old objects, these incomings of new, are the germs of memory and expectation, the retrospective and the prospective sense of time. They give that continuity to consciousness without which it could not be called a stream. [...] In short, the practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we

look in two directions into time. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a duration, with a bow and a stern, as it were—a rearward- and a forward-looking end. It is only as parts of this duration-block that the relation of succession of one end to the other is perceived. We do not first feel one end and then feel the other after it, and from the perception of the succession infer an interval of time between, but we seem to feel the interval of time as a whole, with its two ends embedded in it. The experience is from the outset a synthetic datum, not a simple one; and to sensible perception its elements are inseparable, although attention looking back may easily decompose the experience, and distinguish its beginning from its end.

I'd count this as phenomenology. One checks whether this claim agrees with one's own stream, on whether it *is* a stream.

If one assumes that “true” reality is elsewhere, then such phenomenology is merely an investigation of $f(X)$ as an image of X .

As I understand indirect realism, an X is posited as always mediated through f or g and so on. Then somehow the “true” X is approximated with mediated clues.

But it seems to me that “visions” of the unmediated X (visions of “true” reality) are always situated as part of this or that believer's belief. Teams of believers can work together on a construction of X , and share such beliefs, but I can't find anything but situated belief, that gets *called* “true.” I can't see that calling something “true” is more than an expression of belief. Of course I can only coherently present this insight as my own situated belief that belief is fundamental, and that truth is a reification of such truth-talk into something more than and other than belief.

I'm agnostic on whether the universe is deterministic or whether it ontologically makes sense to talk about “instants” in time. I don't think we have enough info to make the deter-

mination, and I can see intuitive cases for every combination of answers.

I can understand why you'd offer such an answer, given what I take to be your assumptions. You speak of **the** universe. This is what I mean by *X*.

Perhaps the Universe is **Really** deterministic, even if you can't personally predict the future. You speak of whether **We** have enough information. As if ontology was more like physics than phenomenology. An "intuitive" case would seem to appeal to streams (persons) in their particularity. Like you, I also have a sense of what others will find plausible. So no complaint there.

I'm just trying to point out a fundamental difference in our approach. I use to share many of your assumptions. Now I focus on trying to *foreground* them. How is this **presupposed distance from reality** justified ?

I suggest that we humans, together in language, live in the transcendence of objects. But empiricism's appeal has been its reference to "personal" contact. Against scholastic verbiage, the empiricists insisted on experience, which is personal, yes, but also subject to revision through language. I can be convinced that what I saw "must have been a hallucination." But this is an exception to the rule or primacy of perception.

Above you write as if time was a distant, theoretical entity. But I insist that I intend time as it is "here" or "for me." I think you intend time as if it is the True time, what time Really Is. But I can't find meaning in that. If I try, I can translate "scientific truth" into "what a scientist with the relevant information *ought* to believe, *as* a genuine scientist." But this "ought" would itself be situated.

The sense of possibility that seems to me to be "ontologically extravagant" in some sense is the admission of every possible perspective of every object into your ontology....Even if you admit every possible future state of the object into your ontology, which I don't think is necessary even if you're not

*a determinist, it seems like you'd be still introducing an **additional** infinitude of possibilities*

I imagine that you imagine some substrate reality where all of these possibilities are somehow already present. As if I'm doing a kind of physics, projecting the infinitely rich Truth of the world elsewhere.

The fire-hydrant to my right, about 30 feet away. I don't know who will see it, how long it will be there, etc. Here I am referencing it now in conversation, intending *that very fire-hydrant*. As I see it, we are all rushing into an open future together, with countless me-transcending objects between us. It's not as if I'm a video game designer who has to program, ahead of time, every possible perception or reference. I am just trying to articulate a dangerously open future, which is an abyss, though it has some structure.

To me it's not strange at all that "logical possibility" is uncanny and rich. Indeed, I think we tend to wear blinders, intensely constrained by what is practical. It doesn't pay to contemplate the "infinity" that surrounds us, the terrible "depth" of even mundane objects. If there is intelligent life from other planets, how might things familiar to us manifest for them? Is the bug it hunts manifest for the bat's onboard sonar? If so, how? How many sentient creatures do I think there are? Or you? I almost said simple "how many are there?" — but that presupposes a "truth of the matter", as if some God above it all could offer the Official Count.

I still see my own approach in terms of a "minimal rational assumption." As a mitigated skepticism, even. I believe that I don't know. But I believe that I might as well confess a few assumptions that seem implied by my attempt to share my beliefs. I assume that others — likely but not necessarily — other humans will "find their own existence" somehow in descriptions of my own. Because we share a world. Or who am I trying to talk to? And about what?

I used to think that conversation sought Truth, some X between $f(X)$ and $g(X)$. But now I lean toward something like

X_1, X_2, \dots . Which is “faces of world,” strangely situated in bodies that can speak to one another in the most relevant cases. Relevant because I speak to others who can — I trust and hope — understand and answer.

I just can't avoid the thought that it seems like a very large theoretical cost to assume just to avoid the straightforward idea that the objects are independent of phenomenal perception.

Well I do insist that objects are indeed subject-transcendent. It would be incoherent of me to do otherwise. I speak of **the** fire-hydrant.

To me, the “absolute” fire-hydrant — the substrate fire-hydrant — only makes sense in terms adding one more perceiver, some kind of god or omniscient narrator.

I continue to suspect that relative independence from this or that particular witness gets conveniently exaggerated into a Total Independence. I see this as harmless and maybe even useful in practice. A quote from Mill :

The sensations, though the original foundation of the whole, come to be looked upon as a sort of accident depending on us, and the possibilities as much more real than the actual sensations, nay, as the very realities of which these are only the representations, appearances, or effects. When this state of mind has been arrived at, then, and from that time forward, we are never conscious of a present sensation without instantaneously referring it to some one of the groups of possibilities into which a sensation of that particular description enters; and if we do not yet know to what group to refer it, we at least feel an irresistible conviction that it must belong to some group or other; i.e. that its presence proves the existence, here and now, of a great number and variety of possibilities of sensation, without which it would not have been. The whole set of sensations as possible, form a permanent background to any one or more of them that are,

at a given moment, actual; and the possibilities are conceived as standing to the actual sensations in the relation of a cause to its effects, or of canvas to the figures painted on it, or of a root to the trunk, leaves, and flowers, or of a substratum to that which is spread over it, or, in transcendental language, of Matter to Form.

When this point has been reached, the Permanent Possibilities in question have assumed such unlikeness of aspect, and such difference of apparent relation to us, from any sensations, that it would be contrary to all we know of the constitution of human nature that they should not be conceived as, and believed to be, at least as different from sensations as sensations are from one another. Their groundwork in sensation is forgotten, and they are supposed to be something intrinsically distinct from it.

We can withdraw ourselves from any of our (external) sensations, or we can be withdrawn from them by some other agency. But though the sensations cease, the possibilities remain in existence; they are independent of our will, our presence, and everything which belongs to us. **We find, too, that they belong as much to other human or sentient beings as to ourselves. We find other people grounding their expectations and conduct upon the same permanent possibilities on which we ground ours.** But we do not find them experiencing the same actual sensations. Other people do not have our sensations exactly when and as we have them: but they have our possibilities of sensation; whatever indicates a present possibility of sensations to ourselves, indicates a present possibility of similar sensations to them, except so far as their organs of sensation may vary from the type of ours. **This puts the final seal to our conception of the groups of possibilities as the fundamental reality in Nature. The permanent possibilities are common to us and to our fellow-creatures; the actual sensations are not. That which other people become aware**

of when, and on the same grounds, as I do, seems more real to me than that which they do not know of unless I tell them. The world of Possible Sensations succeeding one another according to laws, is as much in other beings as it is in me; it has therefore an existence outside me; it is an External World.

I take the end to be Mill making the same point. The Between-us is misread as The External. Now the fire-hydrant is “external” to me **if** I am a “container” of **re-presentational** *images* of things.

But I prefer to interpret “perception” as the partial being or “actualization” of the object. Consciousness is not an internal stuff but the situated manifestation of entities that I take to be B E T W E E N myself and others and not beyond and outside the forum that nevertheless depends on them for intelligibility. I wouldn’t trust that I was communicating with others if I didn’t think we “shared” in the same objects.

Yet I am also confident that I am talking about the same fire-hydrant that is THERE before me, as I watch my dog sniff it, with its orange-yellow wearing off after many decades. That’s what I mean by “quality” or “presence.” Or rather that would be the perceptual *variety* of such presence. What I daydream about is present in its own way.

2

What are my issues with truth ?

Let me head off possible misunderstandings (not attributed to anyone in particular.)

I do not claim that : *the truth is there is no truth.*

I am instead a deflationist who thinks (believes) the word “truth” merely indicates situated belief. My situated belief is that it all

boils down to situated belief. But that people forget this. They project themselves to a god's POV.

Truth-as-correspondence seems to require a True Reality, a Substrate, traditionally Matter, such as Atoms And Void. These days it's maybe The Physical. Or perhaps The Source Code.

The truthmaker has to be in the form of belief for belief to mirror it or correspond to it. This is why I call such a projected substrate "pre-articulated." Truth-as-correspondence is tacitly idealist, via its tacit equation of thought and being.

I myself believe that streams are articulated by belief. My stream is, and I can't imagine anyone understanding me — or me understanding them — whose stream or world-from-POV is not articulated. As in they "put into words" how the world is "for" them. Like "I used to get these terrible headaches." Or "I hate the sound of other people brushing their teeth." Or "I grew up in Paris." Or : "I can't see how the use of 'true' isn't just the disavowed expression of situated belief."