

So much I agree on. I almost feel like you toe the line between a fully phenomenalist one where truly all that exists are the "faces" as you call them and a neutral monist position that I find more attractive. But those views also seem incompatible on a few claims, although they are very similar.

My only issue with neutral monism is the MONISM part. Radical pluralism "falls out" of a rejection of dualism, IMO. This word MONISM suggests a substance or ingredient ontology. "It's all one stuff." But I claim that "All is X" is basically an empty claim for every X.

I really like the sentence you have there, "If the world is identified with the qualitative presencing of its potential infinity of faces, then the entities of the world all have their being in such faces."

I share a strong intuition that all existence is in some way qualitative. I think that the qualitative is the "stuff" that gives structure its form. On an empty canvas without colors, there is no structure.

It's great that we agree here. I approach this in terms of my reading of Plato's esoteric doctrine. The basic kind of form, it seems to me, is the UNITY of the object as such. The "taking it to be" **that** enduring and interpersonal thing. We can step into the same river twice because we "grasp" that pattern of moving water as unified over time and perceiver. "Yeah, I used to swim in that river as a kid."

First, I need to clarify some terminology here. It sounds like you're saying that a "face" = "conscious entity". If you then say all that exists are conscious entities, that's where I step off the train.

No, sir. Definitely not. A "face" of the world is not a particular entity but the streaming presencing of the world from the "point of view" *of* an entity. Some thinkers have used "pure witness" for what I mean by "face." But the witness is given with the witnessed. Roughly, though, this "face" of the world is what people have *called* "phenomenal consciousness." The problem with this approach is that **it mistakes presence itself for something present**. This is why foregrounding the ontological difference is crucial for the move from monism to radical pluralism.

It seems to me a conscious entity is a pattern of activity in the world. A conscious "entity" is not strictly speaking separate

from the world, it's just convenient to group together particular patterns of coherent activity as "entities". But they are not fundamentally distinct from the rest of the world in any sense. The same subset of the world that make up the activity that is "me" at this moment is not the same as "me" 10 second from now, and even more divergent 10 days from now.

I'd call a conscious entity a "site" of/for the world's streaming. My own empirical ego, which people tend to regard as conscious, is PRESENT in the world, manifesting within a plurality of such streamings. The "site" is indeed a thing of this world. My own empirical ego is present "within" the "phenomenal stream" or "face of the world" that is *associated with it*. I have sometimes called this "face" an "ontological ego." Although it is a "chunk" of the world's primary being, it is "structured" by the belief of the empirical-linguistic associated with it. I "live in" my belief. I can "put into words" the way that world is manifested for me-as-empirical-linguistic-ego. But it is the world itself I put into words, albeit from a perspective.

But I think the evidence is that there is also activity of the world that is not conscious. (Tell me if you agree with this statement, because I'm not sure if you would or not.)

I don't think the fire hydrant in front of my house is conscious. But I think it has all of its "being" in the "faces of the world" associated with other such beings that *are* regarded as conscious.

I agree, I think it's perfectly valid to carve up the world into the set of qualities viewed from all potential perspectives. But there's the rub. If you are limiting the perspectives to only conscious beings, you have to include potential perspectives to fully capture the existence of the world, or you will be omitting the qualities that are not within conscious entities. The sum of conscious entities won't do it (and therefore, the sum of the "faces" as you would put it).

Yes, I explicitly include potential perspectives. Possibility plays a huge role in my ontology. But "limiting perspectives to conscious beings" is almost tautological for me. I claim that *all* "world manifestation" has a "from-a-point-of-view-ness." All perception, all belief is situated.

Now I wouldn't use the phrase, but I regard "qualities that are not within conscious beings" as a violation of sense. But that's

a result of how I understand the words, so no offense intended. First, the world is not WITHIN conscious beings. Subjects are turned inside out like old socks. Subjects are empty. The subject is better thought of as “in” the manifested worldly entity. If you mean that some qualities may become present, then I am OK with that. But I prefer to speak of the endless surprise of the future. The future is dangerously “open.” You might say that we “hide” from this open-ness. At the very least we tend to ignore it, immersed in our practical pursuits.

For me the ideal “sum” of faces is an expression of my understanding of quality as necessarily “present.” It’s not that I can prove the nonexistence of redness-from-no-perspective. It’s more like I’m a logical positivist who thinks the phrase is empty. Like a round square. The phrase is indeed an intentional object, just like “round square,” but it fails to “compute” or “resolve” into definite sense.

So to me that statement is the same as saying that the world is the set of all existent qualities. Period, no additional qualification needed. Epistemologically and as a matter of fact we must be embodied in some of those qualities—that’s what it is to exist. But I don’t think it makes any sense to privilege conscious perspectives vs qualitative existences which are likely unstructured and incoherent, like most inanimate systems.

So I think my wife and my puppy are “conscious” (associated with a streaming or face of the world) BECAUSE of their qualitative presence for me. What I challenge is the implicit notion of some kind of “pseudo-presence” from “no perspective.” My claim is that skeptical physicalists are accidentally projecting a version of Berkeley’s “God,” as an omniscient 3rd person narrator. I know the fire hydrant transcends me. I know that others can see it when I am long gone. I can even extend my concept of qualitative presence ( vaguely) and imagine how alien archeologists might “have” it when our species is gone. <sup>1</sup>

If ants or even bacteria are “conscious” ( I am open to this), then I can only understand such “consciousness” in terms of a “presencing” or “having” of the world associated with those entities. Why would the ant itself be conscious if its associated face of the world wasn’t from ITS point-of-view ? As I see it, this “from-a-point-of-view-ness” is what “glues” the Face to its

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<sup>1</sup>The end of Spielberg’s *AI* is great, by the way. I love the aliens he creates, because they seem superior to us, as if what we might become in time, if we lived into our potential.

“host” or “site.” I think we agree that the face of the world associated with ant would be very different and perhaps much simpler than faces associated with humans or even cats.

RE perception, I don’t really see any issue with the idea that perception admits a world not encompassed by the perceiving system. To me, a perception is just pattern of activity in the world, within a conscious entity (as understood above) that holds some structural isomorphism to some other qualitative pattern in the world. I guess I just miss what the difficulty is with that picture.

The difficulty is that “perception” is a presencing of the world itself. To me, it seems that you take the “meaningful being” of these “patterns of activity” for granted. As if they weren’t precisely what we perceive in the world. To me (and I could be wrong), it seems that you are maybe missing the “hard problem of the physical.” The objects are “out there” independent of qualitative presencing. I consider that this is an unwarranted extension of misreading of the indeed individual-perciever transcendence of the object into an absolute transcendence.

I could be misreading you. But perhaps you are still (?) understanding perception as an entity INSIDE of the subject considered as a CONTAINER. These “jars or representations or perceptions” are tacitly suspended above a substrate reality. This substrate reality involves what I’d call a pseudo-presence. This is where “truthmakers” are thought to live. This is where I find Mill especially illuminating. The things of the world are “between us” and “beyond me”, but not beyond a ( generalized ) Us. This generalized Us is beyond humanity and beyond now. It involves a sense of an unpredictable future. For I all know, there are millions of “conscious” intelligent lifeforms beyond that even our experts can see now from our little planet. Voltaire’s early sci-fi features creatures with thousands of sense organs, who live for thousands of years. These creatures have humorous conversations with humans. “Human” rationality is not tied to human biology. In the next few hundred years, we might modify our genetic code, so that we are no longer official human, but we will still read Plato and Feuerbach. The FORUM is intrinsically “trans-human.” Our sci-fi sketches are our vague understanding of this already.

Now if you look on the other hand, and only admit conscious perspectives as all that exists, it sounds like a really attractive viewpoint, but there are just a variety of plain facts that it leaves unexplained (and possibly inexplicable, because it seems

to just deny any method of explaining them). They surround the regularities we encounter in our own experience.

Let's just take the example of an object we both perceive. If you say, "Nope! All there is is my perception of the object and your perception of the object. I will not allow for you to grant the object any existence of itself", now you seem to be jettisoning any method of explanation for that regularity between the perspectives. You can only take that correlation between the perspectives as a brute fact, because there is nothing but the perspectives. Add up all of those correlations we have in our everyday experience and scientific investigation, and you just have a giant pile of brute facts, and you've denied any way to explain them.

I don't resent attempts to explain, but ( following the logical positivists ) I don't don't ask fundamental ontology for explanation, only EXPLICATION. What do our most fundamental terms MEAN ? It perhaps just this eagerness to "explain" (motivated pragmatically) that "causes" (for instance) the "hard problem of the physical." Semantic research into the most fundamental concepts is difficult and not obviously "worth it." My "anti-pragmatism" is just anti-anti-ontology.

Keep in mind that I used to play the role on philosophy forums of a "radical instrumentalist" or a "radical pragmatist." I occasionally still write from perspective through a character named Mr. Horn.

Gellner's devastating critique of "late Wittgensteinianism" in *Words and Things* touches on what I mean. The problem is not Wittgenstein himself ( though at times he seems weary of all his hard conceptual work) but rather a vulgarization of his later work toward triviality. Rorty's two-faces are a great example.

What *is* explanation ? Is the point an increase in worldly power ? A greater "coping" ? Or do we want to further unveil reality ? To the degree that explanation "unveils," it is POIESIS. Popper and Einstein saw this. A theory is a vision, a creative leap. Theory *enables* observation in the first place. I have to "think" in terms of particles in order to "see" them in a bubble chamber.

More to your point, Schroedinger already point out, in *My View of World*, that postulating something like a "world from no perspective" is a pseudo-explanation anyway. If I study your perception of the apple, then I must be talking about the lifeworld apple, the apple that is qualitatively present FOR ME. The apple-in-itself never comes into play, as I see it, except in what look to me like pseudo-explanations. In a kind

of metaphysical pseudo-psychology.

Again I refer to Mill. Any objects subject to scientific inquiry are interpersonal possibilities of “perceptual” presencing. More exactly, empirical science is typically more narrowly restricted to especially “public” entities. My daydream is in the world, but it is very hard to access in a way that generates consensus. Popper’s concept of “basic statement” is illuminating on this issue. This is where the rubber meets the road, where “from-a-point-of-view” qualitative presencing enters “the space of reasons.” Someone has to make the measurement. “Anyone” will do, but it has to *someone*.

This same objective applies to how new perspectives arise if there is nothing out side of perspectives, where they go when they disappear (when they die or fall asleep), why there seem to be regularities that predate and will post date conscious entities, etc, etc, etc.

I agree that there are regularities. But I take explanation to typically be the translation of one regularity that is unfamiliar into another that is familiar. As some point, we have this or that regularity (which may vary with the progress of science) that shines as a brute fact. Frankly, it’s fucking weird that there *is* a world in the first place. This or that onto-theology tries to hide from this weirdness, postulating a God or a Theory Of Everything as the Last Word. But then it’s just the presence of this Last Word that is the shining brute fact.

I suspect that it’s embarrassing to what James called the “tough-minded” persona to face the end of explanation. This is not directed at all at *you*. I just notice that what is awe-struck in Wittgenstein is filtered out by the people critiqued by Gellner. And of course Heidegger is an unspeakable charlatan, etc. It’s not just Heidegger’s political guilt. Frege was a notorious anti-semitic. It’s the embarrassing issue of brute presence. Of the limit of human explanation. Of the recognition of what is “prior” to any explanatory effort. Sartre put it beautifully as BENEATH all explanation.

But, along with Peirce, I do not want to block the road of inquiry.

So I discuss “brute facticity” as something disclosed through hard conceptual labor, not unlike the uncountability of all (infinite) sequences of bits. Of all functions  $f : \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ .

#### ADDITIONAL NOTES

*I actually wrote this first, but decided to respond piecemeal, as seen above.*

The ontological difference is the difference between being itself and entities that are. But lately I've been using the word "presence", which should not be confused with things that *are* present.

What people tend to *call* "consciousness" is, I claim, the PRESENCE of the world. This presence is "qualitative." Redness of the apple, sweetness of the sugar cube, the texture for the hand of sandpaper. The "feeling" of intense thirst. But *also* the different kind of presence of the daydream, which is there in its elusive way in a phenomenal field that might also include windshield wipers beating time. The presence of potential cryptosystems as they are imagined and investigated, without speech, without even a pen and a pad of paper. Presence and quality. Qualitative presence.

With help from Saussure, we can see that "meaning" isn't "really" a passenger that catches a ride in meaningless vehicles. Saussure wrote of THOUGHT-SOUND. Signs are qualitatively present events/entities. The "meaning" of a speech act is ( roughly ) the set of spoken paraphrases that "do the same job."

In my view, meaning-as-passenger is a useful but confusing metaphor. Great for practical life, but an obstacle for fundamental ontology.

I also have intuitionistic and maybe even finitist leaning in mathematics. But I see that classical logic is "harmless" — and math is mostly valuable to people as part of the technical process anyway. Yet, in fundamental ontology, this may be relevant. Here's the issue: *is the future already here ?*. We can pretend it is, and this can be useful. We can pretend that the "mind" is a "jar" of ethereal meaning stuff, hermetically sealed, etc. We can "pretend" that the transcendence of the fire-hydrant is "absolute," so that the REAL fire-hydrant is inaccessible in principle, a mere cipher in a metaphysical psychology.

## DISCLAIMER

Despite my passion for defending my thesis — as I joyfully compose this text — I do have a sense of humor about it. It's "only" "useless" ontology. But if one plays chess, one concentrates on the pieces, plays the game with passion. I'm also impressed by what Feyerabend writes in *Against Method*. Lots of rival theories are good. And theories aren't usually born with working wings. This or that person is delighted with a moment of vision of the world and tries to develop it, to make it manifest in the world for others too, subjecting it to that risky adventure away from its partial parent. For we all have our influences. We are thrown into a context of influences and perhaps find a new fusion, with enough novelty to seem worth sharing.

I'm grateful not only for this discussion of ontology but also for our discussion of cellular automata and cryptography. This is a great stuff, and it's a pleasure to share in it with others.