

## LETTER

So the connection with Sellars and ( indirectly ) Wittgenstein. Zweikoff adopts a pragmatic role-approach to meaning but adds some early Heidegger. *All* entities are “significant” in a generalized sense. The stormclouds, the barking dog, the drone of someone’s lawnmower outside. For early Heidegger this original significance of the lifeworld is prior to *conventional* signs. Meaning is not something invented with signs but is already there, making conventional signification possible as an addition to the signification of all events/things in the lifeworld.

With Sellars you get a fusion of naturalism and normativity. Or an enriched naturalism that can include normativity. Rule-following, etc. This shape they call an arrow. I use it to choose with fork in the path to take to get back to my car for a snack. The arrow isn’t a vehicle or container of an immaterial meaning stuff. That old dualist notion starts with a meaningless material world and then paints on mentalstuff here and there. Or stuffs mentalstuff as signifieds inside signifiers.

Zweikoff, following Sellars, just thinks of blurry equivalence classes of one-ply *signs*. The sign is not a two-ply stack of passenger meaning and vehicle material. The postulation of meaning is a misreading of equivalence. To paraphrase is to pair an equivalent phrase. Pragmatics. What are you trying to *do* with the sign ? Show someone their shoe is untied. Or get them to back the fuck off. Or charm them, make them smile. And so on. Embedded agents sharing a world, cooperating in some cases but opposed in others. So we get an originally significant world that includes the arbitrary signs that nevertheless we depend on for their relatively stable role in social life. The sound of saying HELLO is nothing special, except that it’s the sound that we all use to greet one another, more formal than HI.

I don’t know Sellars well enough to be sure, I suspect he doesn’t dig into to empirical objects as systems of faces or aspects. For Zweikoff, *all* objects are such systems. The more technical name for these aspects ( a visually biased metaphor, after all ) is *mo-*

*ments.*

This is where Zweikoff's "empiriocriticism" becomes relevant. So a detour is appropriate. We must distinguish between the consciousness associated with a person and that person who is "had" by that consciousness. In ordinary language, they have the consciousness instead of "it" having them. But for Zweikoff this "consciousness" is the being or streaming presence of moments or "faces" of objects, including those objects we classify as signs, because their significance is conventional.

It helps if you've studied empiriocriticism ( Mach and Avenarius ) or phenomenism. It's important to forget every assumption that you might have about consciousness being an internal stuff. What Zweikoff is saying diverges from every kind of indirect realism, which most people seem to take for granted. Norman Smith's paper on Avenarius, discussing the concept of introjection, is enough background to start to feel your way into this. If you like Heidegger and feel comfortable with the ontological difference, then Zweikoff basically applies the ontological difference to the issue of consciousness. Another source is James' essay "Does Consciousness Exist ?" The answer is NO. It does not exist as a thing or a stuff. Instead it is the "being" or "presence" of every kind of thing. So this is not neutral monism but really a wild pluralism. He's called this way of thinking by various names. Ontocubism, ontoperspectivism, phenomenism, aspect theory. But he's been elaborating the same basic vision for 2 years now. No change to the fundamentals, except he's closed in on the importance of the ontological difference and no longer uses "neutral monism." As this, he says, is still just "ingredient ontology." As opposed to the "formal" or "structural" ontology that he offers.

A first approximation is novel like *As I Lay Dying*. The world of that novel is always world from this or that point of view. No omniscient narrator. No "official" version of reality. No truth-makers and no truth as correspondence. But only ( metaphorically speaking ) "seeing is believing." This is not irrationalism though. Some beliefs are better than others, though all belief

is situated and the judgement that a belief is better is likewise situated. The entire theory ( which avoids performative contradiction ) is itself present as situated. Not as truth. And not as the truth about truth that there is no truth. Instead it's a semantic critique of truth as correspondence. A rejection of the concept of truth as a mystified inflation of what we really have, which is just relatively warranted belief. Again, which beliefs are warranted is itself a matter of situated or personal belief.

The vibe of his philosophy is pretty close to the vibe of Sellars. He takes from Heidegger but his attitude reminds me of James or Mach. Not the kind of guy who likes quantum mechanics mysticism. Though he does like QBism and De Finetti's subjective understanding of probability. He's something like an anti-realist Harman. He's called his stuff an object *splintered* ontology. But his understanding of consciousness would make him some kind of correlationist. If consciousness as temporality is the play of presence and absence, then presence is still fundamental. The absence of objects has no meaning without some kind of presentation. I can realize and ponder the absence of something because it has been perceptually present and is currently "signitively" or "imaginatively" present. I can likewise understand the object to have a broken-open future because it has a present and maybe an elaborate past.

Some will find the rampant truth-rejecting empiricism too skeptical or relativistic. Others will be suspicious of consciousness as being. Indeed, the ontological difference is right next to mysticism. Zweikoff does about as much as he can to avoid being taken this way, but frankly the concept of being is *weird*. Yet, in my opinion, it is indeed conceptually necessary.

Why ? Well those who want to eliminate consciousness are very accidentally on the edge of mysticism themselves. Mach and James would maybe agree with them. Except it's all nonsense and confusion if there's not an acknowledgement of what Feuerbach called sensuousness. Physical objects are empirical or *perceivable* objects. Ayer described them as logical constructions from sense-data. But what "sense-data" is trying to say is the

“personal given-ness” of “sensation.” The “there-ness” of “quality.”

This tempts some thinkers, typically those who think of consciousness as a *stuff* to posit qualia. Critical-reductive thinkers are basically correct to challenge this concept. But a naive notion of the physical is worse. Because the physical is evaporated in a tacit mathematical mysticism. The worst version of this is the vague idea that only the source code is real. Which is like metaphysical realism without the reality please. This is the idea that only “objective reality” is even “really” *there*. But for Zweikoff this phrase “objective reality” is confused nonsense except as a kind of cooperatively synthesized map that is more soberly called the tentative scientific image.

I sometimes annoy Zweikoff with reminders that he sometimes targets caricatures. How many serious philosophers are so naive ? He hits back, jokingly, with a reminder that I focus too much on academic philosophers. He’s thinking of metaphysical talk in general, and he includes “gurus” like Hoffman who use their STEM background to get their metaphysical adventures taken more seriously by those who aren’t that serious about philosophy. And he’ll send me links to academics who fit the caricature. I have to grant that even the philosophers vaguely adjacent to his approach don’t attack his pet issue. Or not directly. He’s mostly convinced me that Heidegger is a “phenomenalist.” And this indeed is not much discussed. The word “consciousness” makes Heidegger people nervous. But that *is* the issue. At least a “big picture” view of reality “should” deal with this issue.

I say that now, but even Lee wasn’t paying attention to this issue a few years ago. If you google this stuff, you don’t find much. Wolfgang Fasching is one exception. Phenomenalism and empiriocriticism are presented as museum curiosities. Logical positivism is likewise treated as dead and buried. A. J. Ayer’s compact adaptation of J. S. Mill’s phenomenalism is great, but his *LTL* is generally neglected. Logical positivism is largely remembered for being anti-metaphysical, which misses how ontologically radical and even psychedelic its phenomenalist moments

were.<sup>1</sup>

But I return to the issue of signs. Because the sign manifests as a “face” “for” this or that embedded person, its “radiance” or “significance” is temporally or historically situated. For instance, you have to know English for these signs to be substantially or usefully meaningful to you. You have to have studied math for a math paper to be substantially significant or relevant to you. You need to know who I am talking about to get what’s funny about the situation I describe. To grok a philosopher, you have to put in time with their particular lingo, so that what *they* mean by the words employed become less ambiguous. But we could also talk about roadsigns or symptoms of an illness that an experienced doctor “knows what to make of.” We might also discuss the conventions of film, which we take for granted with practice. “Now we are on the other side of town, or back in the future.” We humans are apparently the most “temporally individual” creatures around. Locke already emphasized the importance of memory for personal identity.

Zweikoff also celebrates Gadamer, in which he finds a sober application of Heidegger’s thought to making sense of texts and finally of life or existence in general. I’m not prepared to go into that here, because I have not yet studied Heidegger or Gadamer with any seriousness. So in this informal paper-like chain of signs, I’ve tried to stay in the intersection of my work<sup>2</sup> and Zweikoff’s, which is a kind of personal or situated empiricism.

I mostly endorse the views I paraphrase here, so I and Zweikoff both win if these ideas “register” for others, or even if our forgotten mutual influences recover some traction. One way to summarize the approach here is as rescue of empirical objects *as* empirical. As opposed to mystified and forgotten. Transformed into fetishized phantoms. Unlike Zweikoff, I’m not trained in

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<sup>1</sup>I first got in touch with Lee ( Zweikoff ) after seeing one of his informal videos on Ayer. I was, like him, identified with the scientific spirit but repulsed by the “elision of the subject.” And, just as much, by the reckless *inflation* of the subject. For better or worse, I was more interested in the philosophy of science than mastery of the formalisms. I trusted the professionals to be great at that part, but not to give an account of what they were doing in the larger context. Of course I allow for exceptions, and they are out there.

<sup>2</sup>I’m working on a book. This informal spiel is not my thing usually, but it’s anonymous ( for now ) so I can relax and just say stuff.

math. But I dirty my hands with sculpture and pollute my ears with art noise. So the “quality” of empirical objects matters to me. I’m like Sartre when he was told about Husserl. So a philosopher has finally talked about this beer glass in my hand ? About the awful but overwhelming and even glorious smell of garbage truck juice ? The empirical without “sensation” is a bad joke. And philosophers who puts objects “inside” us are wacky. The common mistake is to misread the person-ness of sensation for its internality. But Ayer and Schlick and *even Einstein* knew better.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Check out “Physics and Reality” for what I’d call the healthy influence of Mach on Einstein.