

RESPONSE TO TMOW

Here I respond to fascinating post by TMOW, who quotes Barad:

... phenomena constitute reality. That is, reality itself is material-cultural... We are in reality, we must be in our theories.

I agree. We find this in Kojève's Hegel. Our inquiry is within reality, even its evolving intelligible core. Dualism is instrumentally useful but ultimately incoherent. If one tries to think it through, it comes apart. But "scientistic" thinkers aren't that interested in this, and frankly they don't much need it. Though finally we see movements like QBism trying to account for this "entanglement." In short, the relative independence of medium sized dry goods from this or that particular observer is recklessly generalized so that such an object is vaguely and incoherently thought to be meaningful independent of all *possible* perception. The once-empirical object vanishes into the thin air of a kind of negative sentimentality. The lust for "objectivity" follows the siren call to fetishized X-under-erasure.

From now on, I'll quote only TMOW.

There is no basis to claim that the universe thus operates deterministically, for determinism is a descriptor applicable to our abstractions of reality, the epistemic, and not reality as a whole, the ontic, a whole that can never be reduced without loss.

I agree, and I connect this to Hegel's definition of idealism as a holism that calls out the fictionality or ideality of the disconnected entity. Finite entities are ideal (fictional.) I won't follow Hegel this far, but I think I know what he means. Determinism was vanquished by Wittgenstein and others. Scientific models encode our expectation. I've never heard Hume's plaint convincingly answered. Even Reichenbach and Ayer more or less dodge it, perhaps because they didn't have a good retort. It's a brute fact that we do expect this rather than that, but painting such expectation with iron necessity has not, to my knowledge, ever been justified. Or not beyond "everybody does it" and "what choice do we have?"

Our ability to imagine ourselves and contexts from "outside" give the impression that there is a single, objective world of facts that may be viewed from a vantage point of complete clarity, from which "objective" evaluations of the world may be carried out. But any such vantage point can only be constituted by another set of beliefs, and is as such another world view. There is neither a world nor a vantage point disconnected from experience, from a world view.

I agree. This is part of the reason I personally currently embrace an "unmitigated perspectivism." "Objective reality" boils down to beliefs that the "wise" tend to endorse. Objective is unbiased. Not that bias as perspective is avoidable. Instead "unbiased" hints at an *ideal* perspective. Basically something like Pop-

per's "rational tradition" is tacit invoked – if not is not talking the usual vague nonsense about an aperspectival reality that gets glued on to a plural solipsism (AKA indirect realism.) So "bias" is a pejorative term for an unbalanced or unsophisticated perspective. We might connect this to Berne's transactional analysis. To put "spin" on a story is to either be a "child" or to cynically manipulate the reader as a "child."

Rationality is (in my view) ultimately normative or ethical. So "ethics is first philosophy." This is clear enough in the pride that some take in being rational or scientific, and of course Science is quoted like a trustworthy god by those who don't bother to understand how the claim of this Authority was generated.

The vulgar concept of science is "technology that works whether or not the user believes in it." This is a collapse of objectivity into objects. From "knowledge is power" we get the basically irrationalist but potent "power is knowledge."

Any and all views of reality are not only embodied, they are at a more primordial level experienced.

Very well put ! 100 % agree. IMV, reality is a system of "monads" or "torrents" that are structured by belief. Analysis can peel apart this unity to some degree, but that "lived unity" is something like "primal fact." On the other hand, such an analysis is a genuine part of that primal fact. So the primal fact reflects on itself. Being is ontology.

Keep the people believing the world is separate from them, and we, the merchants of belief, can do our work without resistance. ... Enclosure is achieved chiefly by commodification and manipulation. It is by the power of a particular set of beliefs, a particular worldview, grounded in a metaphysics of separability (particularism, as it is designated throughout phase one), where we are independent of reality both ontologically and epistemologically, that we become complacent to what is going on and allow the commodification and enclosure of our psyche. It is on a view of reality where we are independent, where reality is a deterministic container of space, time and matter, separated from life and culture, that our own agency and our own part in the unfolding of reality vanishes.

A deep issue. Earlier in the paper you mention religion, which offered a spiritualized reality. In my view, the “political problem” is “deeper than” ontology. Indeed, it’s only the fancy thinking class — and only when they are in a theoretical mode — that cares about a materialistic ontology. In my view, people live *already* in a *social* reality. Not at all in atoms and void. Money, fame, title. Recognition and glory and prestige. We might say that disbelief in a punishing God, waiting in the afterlife, is a factor. Self-consciously mortal mammals view their time as a resource to milk for pleasure. The “problem” is the “Darwinian nightmare” discussed by David Pearce. We are wired to roll in this shit. Incentive struc-

ture. Dominate and replicate. Theory is a flower that grows in bloody manure. This is my “Schopenhauerian” take.

I call this grim view “the secret that keeps itself.” Is it a matter of temperament ? Some thinkers see “The Wheel.” Let’s call them “Hellenistic” thinkers, like the stoics and skeptics. Others are “optimists.” Even if they don’t expect the change they hope for, they articulate that hope through a diagnosis that insists that the problem is not quite so deep as the human nature itself. They tend to be “public intellectuals.” Spengler might classify them as “ethical socialists”, though his use of “socialist” is eccentric. In short, you have those who share counsel in a peer-to-peer way (like Epicurus) and those who aim their discourse at civic life, embracing the role as potential thought leader. Such a leader offers a diagnosis and perhaps a cure.

For the “optimist”, what I call “world-transcending pessimism” is selfish and irresponsible. For the “pessimist,” the latest shiny version of optimism is a “summer child.” The optimist brews a public cure, the pessimist a private. The optimist tends to be more dogmatic and insistent. The pessimist (speaking for myself) understands that his “solution” is not something that can or even should be universalized. The “black flower of transcendence” is a “parasite.” The earnest anti-natalist forgets this. My critique of such optimism is close to what might be found in the better pages of Nietzsche. We might also consider Stirner (ignoring his awkwardness) in relation to Feuerbach.

I think Feuerbach was the better philosopher, but Stirner (nevermind the crude memes) was aiming at the ecstasy of a private irony, not unlike that discussed by Richard Rorty.

Tribal politics is founded upon opposed versions of “public earnestness.” The “progressive” brand dominates universities. A different brand dominates the excluded and their demagogic representatives. The “pessimist” doesn’t condemn civic life or politics in general by any means. One lives as a creature of one’s time, and navigates the tumult. One may have relatively earnest positions. But “private irony” is ultimately detached and transcendent, affirming the shit as the condition for the possibility of the black flower. In other words, the pessimist grasps that “the fire and the rose are one.” And, facing a private death, with help from a sense of being a mere vessel for universal content, that “the fire and the rose are gone.”

This escalatory logic comes about as a consequence of the incessant stabilization (through new growth) needed to keep up with old growth, a dependence on acceleration “in order to maintain and reproduce its structure.” Envisioning a societal mode that breaks with this logic, Rosa outlines that “the quality of our relationship to the world should become the measuring stick for political and individual action. In turn, not escalation, but the capacity for and possibility of establishing and maintaining axes of resonance should serve as the measure of quality,

while alienation (on the side of subjects) and reification (on the side of objects) can function as seismographs of critique... a more resonant form of modernity's institutionalized relationship to the world cannot be realized unless we tame, or rather replace, the "blind" machinery of capitalist exploitation with economically democratic institutions capable of tying decisions about the form, means, and goals of production back to the criteria of successful life." 18 When all spheres of life are appropriated by blind growth there is little wonder we have a hard time seeing past this paradigm to gain a view of other possible worlds, of other possible ways of being.

Reminds me of Young's book on the later Heidegger. But I think "only a god can save us" — and that "god" will not arrive. I'm also impressed by the "Moloch" metaphor. The world is a machine that is out-of-control and accelerating. The incentive structure indeed demands that MacBeth let the firstlings of his heart be the firstlings of his bloody hands. See Harold Bloom's chilling analysis of MacBeth. The same old story, the Grand Olde Wheel, which presumably inspired Joyce to carve his weeping-laughing-bleeding-breeding Symbol.

OK, one more Barad quote:

A delicate tissue of ethicality runs through the marrow of being. There is no getting away from ethics —mattering is an integral part of the on-

tology of the world in its dynamic presencing. Not even a moment exists on its own. "This" and "that," "here" and "now," don't preexist what happens but come alive with each meeting. The world and its possibilities for becoming are remade with each moment. If we hold on to the belief that the world is made of individual entities, it is hard to see how even our best, most well-intentioned calculations for right action can avoid tearing holes in the delicate tissue structure of entanglements that the lifeblood of the world runs through. Intra-acting responsibly as part of the world means taking account of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to the world's vitality and being responsive to the possibilities that might help us flourish. Meeting each moment, being alive to the possibilities of becoming, is an ethical call, an invitation that is written into the very matter of all being and becoming. We need to meet the universe halfway, to take responsibility for the role that we play in the world's differential becoming.

This is seductive poetry. A less academic version would be less impressive and more familiar. The last line could be expressed in terms of "the power of positive thinking." I don't mean that as an insult. We *do* (largely) create our own reality as mortal beings. But in the political realm we wash our underwear. See how the puppets fight. To experience community seems always to involve the projection of evil and inferiority on an out group. More concretely, I see both parties in the US, for instance, indulging in their pre-

ferred form of irrationalism. Both feature a prototypical monster and hero. Kundera writes of “imagology.” What he means is the deep mythic identity-belonging that cloaks itself in rhetoric. Greed and fear and vain-glory. A familiar story. My grim analysis is not at all intended as a justification for private malice or even for private irresponsibility. We might even emphasize the difference between a stage of personality that has become instantaneously global and what people “really” do in their personal lives. To be sure, many will celebrate civil-public performances as those with the most weight. I don’t say they are wrong, but I tend to see “opposed” figures as sustaining the system. I still bother to vote for the lesser evil, but it’s hard to get excited when (to me anyway) a general corruption at the highest levels is conspicuous. And, worse, “necessary” in terms of the incentive structure of Moloch and the Darwinian Nightmare. “Worse” and yet the world was always so.