

NOTES (26 SEP 24)

1

The “ontological ego” (or streaming phenomenal field) is a *liquid aspect* of the world. It is “liquid” because it is meaningfully structured by the imperfectly determinate beliefs of the linguistic-empirical ego associated with it. These beliefs also vary in intensity. Finally, metaphorical beliefs are included, so that this “liquid aspect” of the world is not only logically but also analogically structured. The rich structure of such a world-streaming phenomenal field is of course not exhausted by the momentary focus here on the role that belief plays in that structure. This focus on belief explains why a streaming liquid aspect of the world is called an “ontological ego.” While it is not generally ego-like, it is intimately related in structural terms to the empirical-linguistic ego at its center. It is our-world-from-that-ego’s-perspective.

2

Rorty’s essays on truth in *Objectivity, Relativity, and Truth* are too “gentle.” “Truth” is essentially no more than a convenient tool for talking about belief.

Belief is fundamental. Truth is derivative. Belief is always “perspectival” — always the “meaning form” of a particular “firstpersonal” streaming of The-world-for-a-believer.

Perspectivism and this deflationary redundancy theory of truth are almost equivalent.

3

Language often “pictures” a states of affairs or situation. This situation may be asserted in a direct way, as an articulation of belief. But language can also picture possible situations. This is a reasonable (successful) application of the representational or picturing metaphor, which is of course famously a part of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*.

A person can re-present what happened when I was not around —make the “meaning form” of that situation present for me. A person can “pre-present” what *might* happen, if I make this rather than that choice. In both cases, the situation isn’t “perceptually” present. Such “perceptual” presence is (original) presentation rather than re- or pre- presentation. The “meaning form” of the situation is found “directly” in the phenomenal field.

For Wittgenstein, this picturing function of language (which is not its only function) is “primordial.” Certain sounds and marks just do re-present situations to my “mind.” And I can “read off” the “meaning” of a situation and put it into words.

The problem with representation arises when the phenomenal field is *itself* understood to represent an obscure “substrate reality.”¹ What I call representationism often involves the metaphor that perception is representation. In this case, it’s imagined that “the (tickled) brain throws up an image.” This “image” is of course the phenomenal field itself. Since the world has all of its being in such streams, such representationalism is, for perspectivism, radically confused.

Why ? It tacitly relies on direct realism to argue against its own premise. I don’t see the real apple because my brain is locked in the vat of the skull. The brain generates an image of the apple, either from light waves or the obscure apple-in-itself. But of course the brain is in the same position as the apple. I’ve known one indirect realist (representationalist) try to save the theory by acknowledging that the familiar “brain of experience” is “projected” or manufactured by the “brain-in-itself.”²

But why should the obscure cause of “images” of apples and brains *be anything like* those apples and brains ?

¹I had Kant in mind, but we’ll see below the other common approach.

²A few months have passed, and now he’s crossed over to direct realism, or at least to an investigation of this serious plot-hole in indirect realism’s story.

Descartes long ago understood the nervous system enough to make this kind of case for indirect realism.

The perceptions we take to be perceptions of things outside us, namely of the objects of our senses, are caused by these objects, at least when we aren't wrong about them: the objects arouse movements in the sense-organs and, through the nerves, arouse other movements in the brain—which make the soul sense the objects. Thus, when we see the light of a torch and hear the sound of a bell, the sound and the light are two different actions which, simply by arousing two different movements in some of our nerves and through them in our brain, give the soul two different sensations. And we relate these sensations to the subjects we think caused them in such a way that we think we see the torch itself and hear the bell, and not that we merely sense movements coming from these objects. ... The little gland that is the principal seat of the soul is suspended within the cavities containing these spirits, so that it can be moved by them in as many different ways as there are perceptible differences in the objects. But it can also be moved in various different ways by the soul, whose nature is such that it receives as many different impressions—i.e. has as many different perceptions—as there occur different movements in this gland. And, the other way around,

the body's machine is so constructed that just by this gland's being moved in any way by the soul or by any other cause, it drives the surrounding spirits towards the pores of the brain, which direct them through the nerves to the muscles—which is how the gland makes them move the limbs.

If we see an animal approaching us, the light reflected from its body forms two images, one in each of our eyes; and these images form two others, by means of the optic nerves, on a surface in the brain facing in on its cavities. Then, by means of the spirits that fill these cavities, the images radiate towards the little gland that is surrounded by the spirits; the movement belonging to each point of one of the images tends towards the same point on the gland as the movement belonging to the corresponding point of the other image. . . . In this way, the two images in the brain create only one image on the gland, which acts directly on the soul and makes it see the shape of the animal.

For Descartes, only matter in motion is Real. The “de-worlding” X-ray of a crude scientific image —derived of course from a richer lifeworld-from-perspective or phenomenal field that includes things in motion — is made the “substrate” that the brain processes and represents perceptually in terms of color, sound, scent, and so on. These varying motions or wiggings or ticklings (all fundamentally just matter in motion of different frequency or intensity perhaps) somehow cause

the brain to generate a much richer phenomenal field. For Descartes, the brain-in-itself is the relatively plausible “X-ray” brain that at least keeps its location and extension. This brain-in-itself is at least an “abbreviation” of the “brain of experience” or the “lifeworld brain.”

One might ask though why the brain “happens to get extension right.” It paints the real *shapes* of things but *lies about their color*. Presumably they don’t have a color. Shades of gray ? Invisible motion in the dark ? It transforms extension-in-motion into sound, hunger, thirst, pain. One “channel” of the rich perceptual phenomenal field is made the Cause of all the others. Descartes “got lucky” that he could still “find” the brain-in-itself conveniently in the same place as the lifeworld brain. The eyes-in-themselves were of course conveniently located in the appropriate place too.

6

How is this view still so tempting ? How was the brilliant Eddington fooled into thinking that one table was two tables ?

In short, people tacitly accept a dualism that involves a radically independent Matter. They misinterpret the genuine but mitigated interpersonal transcendence of objects as an absolute transcendence of all possible experience.

As a rational agent I am “transhuman” as far as my contingent biology is concerned. I can hypothesize that I am not human without performative contradiction. Such a hypothesis becomes more plausible of course in the world of *Star Trek*. But Husserl and Kant both occasionally invoke the possibility of alien perception and rationality.

Let us imagine that flesh-covered cyborgs are common in 2084. A human-looking rational agent might not be sure whether he is a human or a cyborg. He might not be eager to check with a scalpel by digging through the surface flesh, so he discusses his uncertainty with others, both cyborg and human.

This connects to the idea of God as a disembodied rational agent. As Feuerbach saw, God is a projection of the human essence. This human essence is “transhuman” with respect to its biological “host.” This is why it’s so easy to enjoy *Star Trek*, relating for instance to Klingons as humans with funny foreheads. From *Principles of a Philosophy of the Future*.

Taken as an intelligible (geistig) or an abstract being, that is, regarded neither as human nor as sensuous, but rather as one that is an object for and accessible only to reason or intelligence, God qua God is nothing but the essence of reason itself. But, basing themselves rather on imagination, ordinary theology and Theism regard him as an independent being existing sepa-

rately from reason. Under these circumstances, it is an inner, a sacred necessity that the essence of reason as distinguished from reason itself be at last identified with it and the divine being thus be apprehended, realised, as the essence of reason. It is on this necessity that the great historical significance of speculative philosophy rests. The proof of the proposition that the divine essence is the essence of reason or intelligence lies in the fact that the determinations or qualities of God, in so far as they are rational or intelligible and not determinations of sensuousness or imagination, are, in fact, qualities of reason.

“God” is “human essence” is “software” — the “tribal OS,” its logical and semantic norms. These are the enabling horizon of the relatively immortal self-explicating ontological Conversation. To assimilate or download the tradition in order to push it forward is to participate in “God” — to be a rational entity, “essentially” human, Klingon or not.

Kant speculates about aliens having other senses and therefore other “channels” in their phenomenal fields. The analogy here is obvious: a person with sight among the blind. I can intend the same apple that the blind person intends. The alien (essentially human) can intend the same apple that I do, though I am “blind” relative to any extra sensory access the alien may have with respect to that apple.

We might think of the “apple in itself” as a “core” that remains once we’ve abstracted away any contin-

gent mode of sensory access to that apple. All that really matters is that rational agents are satisfied that they are discussing the same apple. So the “apple in itself” (its “substance”) is “logical.” But this “logical substance” is often understood in terms of some obscure stuff, as “Matter.”

This is where Descartes sneaks back in. In order to preserve a plausible logical substance, visual and tactile sensory access is *privileged*. It’s hard to take seriously something like delocalized Information playing the role of the “real” apple. So the shape and location of the apple are smuggled through security without any logical justification.

Let us imagine, if we can, aliens lacking either a visual or a tactile sense of space. They might somehow convince themselves and us that they are intending *that apple* nevertheless. We ask them how. They try to explain a sensory access that just makes no sense to us. Perhaps they can eventually learn to approximately model what we mean by space, through mathematical models. The point is of course that Matter as extended located “thing-in-itself” stuff is anthropomorphic, derived as a mere monochrome X-ray of the (biologically) *human* phenomenal field.

Another point: in 3045 the neohuman movement takes off. Genetic self-modification is so easy that “humans” are no longer a species in the biological sense. They don’t reproduce sexually, etc. But they still talk, with brains typically much larger than ours. Though they have made themselves into a host various “aliens,”

they still read and discuss Hegel.