

INFREQUENTLY AXED QUESTIONS (24 SEP 24)

1

What have you been working on for the last year ?

Synthesizing my influences, articulating phenomenalism /perspectivism.

Phenomenalism is perspectivism?

Yes.

Who are those influences ?

First I should mention Heidegger, Husserl, and Sartre. Much of what I'm doing is a footnote to early Heidegger. Do people call Heidegger a phenomenalist ? A perspectivist ? Not usually. But I see him as one.

Why ?

Phenomenalism — which is NOT subjective idealism — is the basis or foundation of phenomenology. Blouin discusses the “ontological phenomenism” at the basis of Husserl's work. So I'm not alone in this claim.

Which phenomenologists are influences ?

Ernst Mach: *The Analysis of Sensations*. J. S. Mill: *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*. William James: *Essays in Radical Empiricism*.

What about logical positivism ?

I claim that Wittgenstein was a perspectivist/phenomenalist in his *Tractatus*. Also Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic* is (more explicitly) phenomenalist.

How does this basis matter to phenomenology ?

Representationalism (also known as indirect realism) is the default inherited framework. Even for those who don't study philosophy seriously. Maybe especially for them. If you read phenomenology as a study of representational consciousness, then it can still be valuable, but you are missing out on its "ontological significance."

How so ?

The "Lifeworld" (also called the "manifest image") is the real world. It is not a representational crust on some elusive substrate. In short, phenomenology is ontology. It is an investigation of the world itself. Not of "consciousness."

2

How is perspectivism involved ?

What people mean by "consciousness" is the nondual phenomenal stream. The world is given *as if* the stream of experience of a sentient organism.

With a nose in the picture ?

Yes. A nose in the picture. And things in the phenomenal stream are typically close to the organism's body, which also appears in the phenomenal stream. The

world, or rather a small available piece of it, gathers around the sense organs of the “sentient” organism. That available piece of the world is organized in terms of that organism’s memory and culture. The phenomenal stream is a continuum. In humans especially it has an accumulating “meaning-structure.”

So the world only exists “for” this or that sentient organism ?

That’s the basic insight. When the idea first clicks, you have only the old terminology available. You say that the world is, for instance, “the sum of all experience.” You say that the world is “the-world-for-Jack, the-world-for-Jill, and so on.” I still use this last phrase, but only after differentiating the linguistic and the ontological ego.

What is the difference ?

The ontological ego is just a particular nondual phenomenal stream. Or neutral phenomenal field. Stream. Field. Two metaphors that point at the same idea. Nondual. Neutral. Two adjectives that emphasize that such a stream/field is NOT (really) “consciousness.”

Not really ?

I’ve met a few others who basically understand phenomenism-perspectivism. The terminology varies. We can speak of *ontological* consciousness. This “ontological consciousness” is the *being* of the world. Its only kind of being. We can all say that ontological consciousness is a “first-personal” streaming of time.

So the ontological ego is ontological consciousness ?

Yes. If all the terms are understood correctly. Though I like to “desubjectivize” my own own terminology. Phenomenalism is often misunderstood to be some kind of subjective idealism. Leaning on terms like “consciousness” and “experience” only encourages this misunderstanding.

Yet these words also help to communicate the idea ?

Yes. So phenomenism *evolves from* subject idealism. J. S. Mill *fixes* Berkeley. Mill sees what is powerful and successful in *Principles of Human Knowledge*. He takes that, expresses it more carefully, and jettisons the rest.

So consciousness talk is a disposable ladder?

Yes. I’ve noticed that many thinkers about “mind” and “matter” can only understand the rejection of mind/consciousness in physicalist terms. They are dogmatically certain about this “consciousness” stuff.

Why ?

Because they are up to their knees in the mud of an inherited dualism. The idea that there is consciousness stuff and “material” stuff. Mind and Matter.

Representationalism ?

Yes. Also called indirect realism. Mind represents Matter. Mind has Matter as a substrate. Though subjective idealists are half-way free when they see

that “Matter” is “made of” “Mind.”

Only half way ?

Yes. For Berkeley, *esse est percipi*. To be is to be perceived.

What’s wrong with that ?

It’s a reification of the form of the world into a subject that is not itself dissolved into neutral phenomenal streams. Berkeley called them “finite spirits.” Basically it’s the belief in souls.

You don’t believe in souls ?

I believe in empirical-linguistic egos. In persons. But I distinguish between the phenomenal field of a person and that person.

Between the ontological and the empirical ego ?

Exactly. The subject is not fundamental. The phenomenal stream should not “finally” be understood as a stream of some subject’s experience.

Elsewhere you wrote of “subject-like substance.”

Yes. The *plural* subject-like substance of the world. The world is the system of all ontological egos. Of all nondual phenomenal streamings.

3

How does an empirical-linguistic ego fit in to all of this ?

Such an ego is one more thing in the world. I play

a central role in “my” phenomenal stream. But I, as empirical ego, also appear in the streams associated with other empirical-linguistic egos. My empirical-linguistic ego appears (has its genuine being) in many ontological egos—in various streamings of (the) world.

Who are your influences on this point ?

Wittgenstein, Ayer, and Mach. They emphasize this point. The empirical ego is one more entity in the world.

How crucial is this point ?

Very. It’s the insight that allows for the transformation of subjective idealism into phenomenalism-perspectivism.

How do non-ego-like objects fit in with perspectivism’s conception of the world as the system of all phenomenal streams ?

A thing (or entity or object) has its genuine being “scattered” into “its” appearances in these streams. A thing is the logical synthesis of these “appearances.” A visual-spatial object is given, for instance, in adumbrations (sides, profiles, aspects.) These aspects are “perspectival parts” of that entity. The entity is constituted by these “aspects.”

What is a logical synthesis ?

It is a temporal and interpersonal synthesis. A thing is (roughly) the equivalence class of its aspects. The “sum” of all the “sides” it has or might show in various

“first-personal” streamings of the world.

So a flower “is” all its appearances ?

Yes. Though of course a flower is not just visual. It smells a certain way, feels a certain way. Can be chemically analyzed.

This is where we switch from aspects to moments ?

Right. Literally, aspects capture only the visual-spatial “channel” of things. We are visual creatures. It was Husserl’s “visual” analysis of spatial objects that helped me “get” what I have even called *aspect* phenomenalism. But this aspect phenomenalism is really just phenomenalism.

But the aspect metaphor is a key to understanding phenomenalism ?

Exactly. A disposable ladder. The “aspects” of music are really the *moments* of music. Only some things (those which are visual-spatial) are given in/as aspects. But all entities are given as moments.

So aspects are moments ?

Yes. A literal aspect is a kind of moment. If we use “aspect” as a metaphor and generalize the concept, we have the concept of a “moment.” A moment is the manifestation of a thing in a phenomenal field or stream.

Why are all entities given in or through moments ?

Time shows by hiding and hides by showing. Let's start with aspects. To see one side of the object is not to see all of its other sides. Each aspect of a thing occludes all the others. I "need time" in order to see an object "from every perspective." In fact, I am never finished seeing *all* of the "sides" of an object.

How does lighting and vision fit into this ?

Directly. Not only does the position relative to the thing matter. The lighting of the object matters. And I might be nearsighted, colorblind, etc. The red apple is "all the ways it might be seen." All *possible* "appearances."

This includes all the ways that others might see it ?

Yes. And, if we switch to moments, how others might smell it, touch it, think about it. The substance of an entity is logical. It is our "logic" that "glues" all of our phenomenal streams together. I intend the apple as an enduring entity that is also for others. Possible and actual. I intend the apple as something that I might remember. That I might put in the fridge and eat later.

The apple has all of its being in various streams ?

Exactly. The apple is "made of" possibility. In Mill's terminology, "Matter is the possibility of Sensation."

But this “Sensation” is nondual. Mill was using an old terminology to escape representationalism.

So Mill meant that the “Matter” of an entity was something like the logical possibility of its appearances ?

Yes. I’ve never been to Paris. I’ve seen movies filmed there. Pictures of the Eiffel Tower. I believe that I could go there and see it with my own eyes. Most of the world is like Paris for me. I know of it, but haven’t perceived it directly. It exists as possible perception. But I can talk about Paris with others who also haven’t been there. Paris exists “logically.”

An intentional object ?

Right. A logical-intentional object. A referent. Paris is a “node” in an inferential nexus. The “substance” of Paris is “logical.” Our logic “glues” “experiences of” Paris into a semantic clump, into a *thing*.

How does representationalism understand entities ?

For an indirect realist, there is Real thing that causes representations of that thing to appear in a consciousness stuff. The “being” of a such a thing is hidden from us. Our “consciousness” of the thing is not the thing itself.

What about those who take the scientific image to be the substrate ?

They are caught between dualism and phenomenalism. An incoherent position. They imply that part of experience is “real.” Our mathematical models, for

instance, touch or unveil the Real Thing.

What's wrong with this approach ?

Several issues. First the *practically* motivated *choice* of merely part of experience to be Real. But this involves a conflation of the physical (in an innocent non-ontological sense) and the Physical (in a mystified ontological sense.) Then there's semantic holism. The interdependence of our concepts. It is literally nonsense to try and cherry pick a few nodes from the network. I might also mention Popper's basic statements here. But really those who haven't already discovered the problems with this approach are not in a position to enjoy/appreciate perspectivism as an elegant solution. They don't see the problem yet.

So you don't want to focus on criticizing representationalism ?

Only because it's already been done so well. For instance, Lee Braver's *A Thing of This World* is great book on anti-realism. Which is basically anti-representationalism. My work is basically a footnote to the anti-realist tradition. So I largely presuppose readers who have wrestled with representational realism and *tried* to make it make sense.

What does your work add to books like A Thing of This World ?

Even Braver doesn't *emphasize* that phenomenalism is perspectivism. Nor does he investigate thinkers like Mach and Mill. Husserl is only mentioned in passing. I understand why. I'm not complaining.

It's enough of a task to connect Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, pre-turn Heidegger, and post-turn Heidegger. It's hard to imagine someone doing a better job than he did. But I hope that I can add onto that book by compressing a "result." And what is maybe original in my approach is an emphasis of the metaphor/concept of aspect. Which I got from Husserl, Leibniz, and Schrödinger. But none of them, it seems to me, put everything together, as I like to think I have. Into a very secular "nondual" perspectivist ontology.

How does Nietzsche fit in ?

A crucial passage on perspectivism. He doesn't sufficiently elaborate. He doesn't *stick to* and emphasize the redundancy theory of truth which I think is necessary for overcoming representationalism. Probably because he is more interested in the psychology of philosophical beliefs. So he employs various rhetorical strategies that "shake the tree."

I take it that you are trying for a more neutral tone ? And a more consistent terminology ?

Exactly. Something closer to math. An explication of the world that tries to use the same jargon in the same consistent way. I guess I am trying to create a secondary source. I'm trying to fit together what I've learned from many philosophers. At the risk of being underestimated, I'm trying to write in honest English.

Why would you be underestimated ?

People enjoy being “in on” an intimidating jargon. Charismatic philosophers are basically treated like spiritual masters. For those caught in a relatively vain game, understanding is not the primary objective. Coming off a certain way is instead the primary objective. Fitting into the rituals of an esoteric club is the goal. And I don’t speak from outside of this motive. I think it’s something that philosophical writers have to wrestle with.

Their own vanity ?

Yes. Vanity. It hurts to admit that you don’t know exactly enough what so-and-so meant. But one can dodge this uncomfortableness by sticking to parroting in the original jargon and avoiding paraphrase. Paraphrase is a risk.

Do you have any models as far as paraphrasing goes ?

Lee Braver and Julian Young. Also maybe Richard Rorty, though he is too willing to distort or creatively misread in some cases. To me this willingness and ability to paraphrase is “real” philosophy.

As opposed to ?

Sci-fi, mysticism, cultish role-play.

Sci fi ?

Yeah. So indirect realism is great for Hollywood. It's great for conversations around the bong. For drug-centered "philosophy." Also for vague spiritualistic Nonduality. Donald Hoffman is selling something like this, getting Oohs and Aahs, during a Ted talk, from an audience that hasn't studied philosophy. So they are taken in by a Real Scientist ("with a credential and everything") giving them "mindblowing" nuggets of sci-fi speculation.

So you are a killjoy ?

Yeah. Though of course I prefer the "real thing" to sci-fi and spiritualistic speculations. But then I *enjoy* math. I love real analysis. A certain kind of person insists on fitting concepts together in just the right way. Very intricate. Not especially practical.

A form of art ?

In some sense. Belief synthesis. Belief construction. Creativity in a straight-jacket. The pieces have to all work together. To explicate the world we live in. To make sense of selves, perception, "consciousness", rationality, and so on. How can we understand these concepts "all at once" so that they fit together into a coherent story about how things basically are ?

What kind of investment is necessary to appreciate this kind of "art" ?

Some issues are more low-hanging than others. Just about everyone cares about politics. About ethics. So they can read Plato and get something right away.

They can find Nietzsche interesting — and maybe offensive — right away. They can feel the pull of existentialism, pessimism, and so on. At least in vague but already inviting outline. But the “Mind/Matter” issue is, it seems to me, especially intricate and confusing. And boring too. Unless you are annoyed by contradictions and ambiguities. That annoyance — that sensitivity to logical-semantic norms — is probably what separates the “ontologist” or “phenomenologist” from the spiritual-political-ethical “tourist.” No offense intended by this “tourist” metaphor.

Why tourist then ?

Because the spiritual-political-ethical stuff is also in fiction, painting, music and so on. Not at all concentrated in philosophy. You can very much read Nietzsche and Dostoevsky and Kundera and not feel much of a gap. Shakespeare’s characters are powerful philosophers on this existential stuff. And I should emphasize that these are indeed the fundamental issues “existentially” speaking.

For you too then?

Yes. So phenomenology is of secondary relevance. If you pretty much figure out your “ethical pose”, then maybe you are interested in the “pure math” of phenomenology. Maybe you can spare attention for something intricate and difficult and not of much practical importance.

But some phenomenologists have insisted on its spiritual or political significance ?

Yes. Husserl's crisis lectures. Heidegger's later philosophy about us being gripped by our grip on technology. That stuff isn't boring to me, but I am pessimistic about the world actually being changed much by phenomenology. A person can of course be cheered up by the logical beauty of math or phenomenology. So that's a genuine change. But I'm skeptical about spiritual movements based on great phenomenological insights. What I think happens is just the watering down of an intricate conceptual labor into a mantra. For example, perspectivism (which is phenomenism) is indeed "nondual." It is a secular expression of the Nondual tradition. But it has little to do with the way that tradition functions for most of its consumers. You can see this on Reddit. "Nonduality" is just a mystified keyword. People use it without being able to make a case for nonduality. Because the industry is founded on a spiritual need, for some (more recently) imported non-Christian religion. Mindfulness. Etc. And people might really benefit from that approach. But it's not what I'm up to.

Is it safe to say that you look down on this stuff ?

It's not *that* so much as my insisting on the huge gap between "the labor of concept" and just adopting a feel-good mantra and forming a club around it. I relate to the spirit of logical positivism. Some of them were phenomenists. Very different tone or feel than you find with Spiritual conversations. Though even the logical positivists were of course "ethically" driven. But the ethic involved in scientific. Autonomous rationality.

So “your” phenomenism is scientific ?

In spirit yes. Though of course it has nothing to do with empirical claims. It’s an attempt to elucidate our most basic concepts. So that they fit together well. Like solving a jigsaw puzzle.

6

How do theories of truth connect to the two basic positions ?

The two basic positions are of course representationalism and phenomenism-perspectivism. In general, truth-as-correspondence goes with representationalism. The *deflation* of truth goes with phenomenism-perspectivism.

How important is the conception of truth to both positions ?

Central. Very important. Truth as correspondence usually comes with the postulation of truthmakers. A truth maker is “real.” True statements “correspond” to the Stuff that is represent-*ed*. As opposed to represent-*ing* consciousness. If you accept truthmakers, you are going to be very tempted to accept “things in themselves” that make assertions true somehow.

What about the relationship between truth and perspectivism ?

Perspectivism rejects the “world in itself” and so of course also the “things in themselves” that would pre-

sumably populate such a world. So how are beliefs made “true” ? *They aren’t.* Truth is nonsense. Or, more carefully, truth is just a way to talk about belief.

How so ?

Redundancy theory of truth. I say that “it is raining” is “true” if I *believe* that it is raining. Truth has some handy expression functions. It’s a convenient word. But at its basis it’s just a way to talk about belief. And belief is completely “fundamental.”

Does this connect to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus ?

Absolutely. An assertion “represents” a state of affairs. As, for instance, likely. Or unlikely. Or certain. This is the picture theory. There’s not much that can be said about the way this “picturing” works that doesn’t just muddy the water.

Can you say more ?

Belief is the “meaning structure” of a situation. Early Heidegger is helpful here. The world is “immediately” significant. A context of familiar tools. I can articulate this meaning structure. I can see that there’s a gallon of milk in the fridge. I don’t see colorful shapes that I have to take time to interpret as a gallon of milk in the fridge. I “live in” this gallon-of-milk-in-the-fridge-ness. The world-from-my-perspective (my phenomenal field) includes this gallon-of-milk-in-the-fridge-ness. I can put this “meaning structure” into words. Into an assertion. Somehow “there’s a gallon of milk in the fridge” “pictures” this gallon-of-milk-in-the-fridge-ness.

That feels tautological.

It should. I had to use words to “summon” the hypothetical state of affairs. I had to use the phrase “gallon-of-milk-in-the-fridge-ness” in order to point out the meaning (tautologically) of “there’s a gallon of milk in the fridge.” You might say (almost) that reality is linguistically or conceptually organized. “The world is all that is the case.”

So picturing can't itself be pictured ?

Something like that. Wittgenstein was shrewder than Ayer on this point. I like Ayer. But verification tries and fails to say what picturing is. Ayer was deflationary about truth. Yet verification was expressed in terms of what makes a meaningful statement true. But this reduces to what makes us believe a statement. But that’s just psychology. Not phenomenology. Because belief must be understood in terms of perspective.

That's somewhat tangled.

Sorry about that. For perspectivism, the world is just the system of ontological egos or phenomenal fields/streams. Each field has a meaningful structure, an intelligible or conceptual structure. This is belief. Which can be “put into words.” But it doesn’t have to be.

So belief is reality ?

It is the “form” or “shape” of reality-from-a-perspective. This idea will offend those who demand objective truth

rather than just objective belief.

What's the difference ?

Objective truth is usually understood in terms of “things in themselves” that *make* assertions true or false. So the words “true” and “false” are deep ontological terms for the representationalist who embraces truth as correspondence. Even if we can't be *sure* that our beliefs are true or false, we (so they say) can be sure that they in fact *are* either true or false —if they are sufficiently determinate, etc. If we go back to the dualism of Democritus, then we have statements being made true by the configuration of atoms in the void. So there is a definite Reality “beyond” belief that makes some of these beliefs “true” in a deep sense. Objectively true. True in terms of objects usually.

And objective belief ?

Objective means unbiased. If belief is the meaning structure of an ontological ego or phenomenal field, how do we escape bias ? The best we can do, it seems to me, is participate in what Popper calls a “rational tradition.” We can learn from others, expose our beliefs to criticism. We can work together toward an educated consensus. Toward belief that is therefore less biased or more objective. You can find something like this in the work of C. S. Peirce. And also Hegel, though I'm not keen on wading into Hegel. Even if I think he's relevant here.

Why avoid Hegel ?

People get triggered and side-tracked. I don't care

in this context about charismatic personalities, idolized or hated thinkers. I can't help mentioning (early) Heidegger. He integrates the gist of Hegel, is free of the stuff that I can't use. Though of course people are triggered by Heidegger too. Positive or negative transference. Intellectual saint or the boogey man. But I'm trying to do "math" here, not get sidetracked by what are really sentimental issues.

So why mention any of this ?

I guess because phenomenology is "haunted" by attempts to twist it into spirituality or politics. And people love this stuff. The drama of this stuff. Heroic poses against various dragons. I'd even say that phenomenism (perspectivism) is largely neglected for irrational reasons. Science-identified types can only fret about subjective idealism. And all the ghosts and goblins that sneak in with that. Indirect realism appeals to people who identify with the physicist as the true ontologist. I think there's a "beyond good and evil" deism in this attachment. One that I even share. Because I relate to science-identified types. I am a "secular" thinker. But I've got to follow the logic away from the theory of "consciousness" stuff and some elusive substrate stuff.

So you almost "have to" include and counteract sentimental rhetoric ?

Yeah. But I shouldn't complain. I only get to enjoy a sense of belonging to a minority who "gets it" because others who are otherwise clever enough are too irrationally biased on this particular issue. They

are, as I see it, “taken in” by their contempt for the self-mystified spiritual types who are indeed relatively irrational. In other words, secular and “serious” phenomenism/perspectivism is overlooked as an elegant solution because it is prematurely associated with an always prevalent combination of spiritualism and idealism.

So lots of bad idealistic and spiritualist philosophy obscures something dry and secular ?

Yes. Bad indulgent reasoning that assumes its conclusion. Doesn't make a case. Basically defends a vague presupposition at all costs. Usually clings to a reified substantial subject. Finite spirits. Berkeley. Etc. I've debated with these types. I can understand the temptation to write off all immaterialisms as crypto-theistic, etc. But, like I said, the logic leads where it leads. And we have Mach and Schrödinger on the side of phenomenism-perspectivism. The rhetorical ploy of painting phenomenism as anti-scientific doesn't work. Phenomenism is a strong form of empiricism. It's anti-mystical. Anti-hand-waving. Mach is especially an intense student of what empiricism *means*. What is a measurement ? What is space ? Same with James in his *The Principles of Psychology*. But people don't much read Mach or James. They prefer the sci-fi offered by Kant, etc.

What is immaterialism ?

It's just the rejection of Matter as an ontological primary. Not a rejection of the mundane vague distinction between the physical and mental.

What is the ontological horizon ?

I also call it the ontological forum. It's basically the world. A minimal concept of the world which is presupposed by ontology — or by any *rational* discussion — as a condition for its possibility.

Can you elaborate ?

Sure. If we hope to synthesize rational beliefs together, then we have to be able to talk about the same world. So we have to share in the meaning or logic of our language. We have to be *in* the same world together. Maybe the world is made of cheese. We can debate that. But there's no point in debating whether there *is* a world. Or whether communication is possible. To debate or discuss in an earnest way is to presuppose the world. And to presuppose logical norms. Which are really part of this world.

How is this world connected to the “External world” of representationalism ?

Kant thought it was a scandal that philosophy could not prove the External World. His representational presupposition — that perception was representation rather than “original” presentation — made such a proof difficult. Impossible even. But what he missed was that the very notion of proof presupposed the “essence” of that which was “external” to the empirical-linguistic ego.

How so ?

To prove something — to make a case for a belief — already presupposes the ontological horizon. One has to already *be* in the “external world” for such a proof to even make sense. Representationalism goes with truth as correspondence. That we’ve covered. But it also goes with a mistaken understanding of logic as something private or internal.

Does this connect with Wittgenstein’s attack on the idea of a private language ?

Yes. Though Feuerbach worked this out long before, in his demystifying appropriation of Hegel. Thinking is fundamentally “transpersonal” or “trans-perspectival.” My ability to think may *depend* on my mortal body as a kind of “host,” but thinking is the application of inherited semantic and inferential norms. So the thinker as thinker is not primarily an atomic individual.

How does this connect to Heidegger’s “being-with-others ?”

That’s it. Heidegger adds to Feuerbach. Being-with-others has nothing to do with my body being near another person’s body. Instead the empirical-linguistic ego is a “thin client” for the “software” of a community. I am an “idiolect” of the “tribal operating system.”

Does this view allow for personal creativity ?

Yes. Individuals matter. But their creations, emerging from their idiolect, can be assimilated by other idiolects. So you end up with the rational tradition of

ontology. This amounts to a time-binding Conversation. You can think of individual mortal philosophers as vessels for or cells of a relatively immortal Philosopher.

The Conversation.

Yes. A rational tradition has a memory. Beliefs that have mattered and might matter again. And such a tradition includes a system of currently dominant/central beliefs.

State-of-the-art beliefs.

Right. And this interview-style exposition is an attempt to contribute to that tradition. An attempt to elucidate “state of the art” ontology. Of course I *hope* that my beliefs — those I share here — are “caught up with” the Conversation. I hope that my idiolect has assimilated the best beliefs so far in this field. This is of course an endless project. But one hopes to catch up with the gist.

Even though it's not really a practical enterprise ?

Yes. Imagine a math researcher hoping that his or her exciting results are new. Not already discovered and expressed. Even though only a few people are in a position to appreciate such results. Even if they are only logically beautiful and not applicable. Not obviously connected to ever-prestigious technology.

I should ask. How does the ontological forum connect to the claim that the substance of a thing is logical ?

Excellent question. In what sense are objects “transcendent ”? For representationalism, the real object is entirely outside of representational consciousness. Somehow (furious handwaving) our assertions refer to the atoms-and-void or who-knows-what of the “real” object. This completely transcendent real object makes that assertion true or false. Even if we can’t check. Kant at least saw that the scientific image was “inside” representational consciousness. Others insist on primary qualities, not seeing what Berkeley pointed out, that certain qualities are only “primary” in terms of their practical relevance. No deep logical reason.

So representational transcendence is total. And maybe paradoxical or nonsensical. What’s another way to understand the transcendence of a thing ?

I *mostly* follow Husserl and Sartre. We grasp, for instance, the visual-spatial object as a system of adumbrations. We cluster the adumbrations together *as* the object. So the object is given “over time.” Roughly speaking, the object is all of its actual and possible appearances.

And?

So that’s the thing as the temporal synthesis of its aspects. Its moments, to be more general. But in the ontological horizon or forum, we discuss the things of the world. So the object is always already also-for-others. We are “idiolects” of the “tribal software.” Thinking is not primarily personal. To intend an object — to refer to an object — is always to refer beyond my own current understanding of the object. Beyond

what I've seen of the object so far. Beyond even what I personally am able to see or understand.

So we always intend the interpersonal object?

Exactly. Logic or reason or language is "immediately social." So a thing is also the *interpersonal* synthesis of its aspects or moments. That's why its "substance" is "logical."

Does this connect to Wittgenstein's picture theory and Ayer's verification principle ?

Yes. We are "immediately social" beings. I see the apple as enduring and also-for-others. It might taste differently to me than it does to others. It might have a different symbolic significance. Maybe it is Turing's apple. But we can all intend *that same apple*.

What is intending though ?

I think we hit bedrock here. As Wittgenstein saw and Ayer did not see. As Wittgenstein put it, to understand logic is something like wondering at a tautology. We are thrown into a significant world, thrown into language. I'm all for further explicating intention or reference if possible. But we see in Ayer's mistake what can go wrong.

We can't say really what meaning is ?

Something like that. Yes. We live in meaning. We "are" meaning.

What do you make of Wittgenstein's mysticism in the Tractatus ?

I don't think it's exactly mysticism. It's more like wonder. It's a logical realization that the world as total meaningful context is beyond explanation. For logical reasons. Not for empirical reasons. I think Heidegger is making a similar point with his ontological difference.

Can you elaborate ?

Why is there something rather than nothing ? This is not intended as an empirical question. It is a lyrical cry of wonder. Any attempt to explain one state of affairs with yet another state of affairs misses the point.

Is this a spiritual thing ?

Maybe. But it's the opposite of ontotheology. You can't do anything with it. As soon as you drag into God or some physical theory you have forgotten the point. These are just more entities that "are." The point is the wonder involved with realizing that something — anything at all — just *is* in the first place. I don't see how one could "sell" this stuff. To drag in a special entity is to lose the thread.

How important is this theme for phenomenalist-perspectivism ?

Not important really. Existentially important or fascinating. Very important in the context of philosophy.

But phenomenism-perspectivism is an elegant solution to a conceptual problem. For the making sense of Mind and Matter. Really for cutting through the inherited confusion of representationalism.

What do you make of anti-philosophy ?

The anti-philosophy that wears the jargon of philosophy is usually confused and ambivalent. It wants to be profound, but it ends up with the most anti-profound thesis of common sense. With conformist materialist practicality. I've seen people who went to grad school for analytic philosophy rage against the uselessness of their education. But they were clearly still proud to be in a position to justify that claim. Internal critics. Who still turned up their noses to the usual anti-intellectual types who have always agreed with them. Who never would have went to grad school for philosophy in the first place. Who have never been much impressed with the jargon of philosophers.

Hence the ambivalence. Really a love/hate relationship.

Yes. They were doing "real" philosophy (at least some pastel version of cultural politics) by calling out "useless" or "fake" philosophy.

How do you feel about analytic philosophy ?

I don't think we have the same isolation as before. I can say that I have tended to find continental philosophers more interesting. Of course, right ? But I love logical positivism. So what happened ? I'm no expert on analytic philosophy, but I think the reaction

against Hegel was of course an overreaction. So AP lost their grasp of the essential sociality of reason. But maybe even worse they lost the phenomenism of some of the logical positivists. So my gripe would be that many of their followers (people who went to grad school under that “dispensation of grace”) came out to make very boring and conformist points. Gellner’s *Words and Things* discusses how Wittgenstein—who I take to be a profound phenomenist – got repurposed by a certain type of person as a justification for intellectual complacency. As an avatar for anti-philosophy.

What about physics envy ?

The logical positivists loved physics, but they strike me as courageous. As still interested in fundamental issues. Ayer’s phenomenism is exciting, offensive to common sense. It takes guts to be an immaterialist just because that’s where the logic leads. Because that’s what empiricism demands. It takes no guts to lick the boots of the wizards who provide us with nuclear weapons. People like Sellars and Brandom are great, but they are demystifying Hegel, right ? Wittgenstein was really a “continental” philosopher, who just happened to be vacuumed up. But you can see that his *Tractatus* is now downplayed. *Because* it is profound and therefore embarrassing.

Profound is embarrassing ?

Yes. For those with physics envy. For those who prioritize a certain kind of safe respectability. But

that's maybe just the dark side of philosophy being (mostly) taken over by the middle class. By academic institutions. Same problem that Schopenhauer had long ago.

How does this connect to you personally ?

I went to grad school for math. I was good at math, but I could never stop obsessing over the philosophy of math and philosophy in general. So I relate to Husserl. In a different life, I can imagine just sticking to math. But in this life it's just not my dominant project. For better or worse. Anyway, there was mostly an anti-philosophy feeling in the mathematicians I talked with. But this means a relatively safe and boring retreat to formalism. I'm sure that math "meant something" to them. Maybe they were platonists in some vague way, but they were less interested, as far as I could tell, in elucidating how math fit in with the rest of the world than they were in getting on with the math. Which of course makes sense for a professional mathematician. But I caught the virus of philosophy. So I always want to know what things *mean*. To know better than I currently know. Because I don't believe in some final and perfect knowledge of what one means.

So the goal is to talk less nonsense ?

Yes. To know that one doesn't know (very well) what one is talking about. And to try to remedy that situation. Just because. An internal itch for elucidation. To resolve the blur, at least a little.

Topic change. What philosophers does your work take for granted ? Should people have already read ?

Heidegger and Brandom.

That was quick.

Yeah. So Heidegger is of course already legendary. Difficult really, but celebrated. Brandom is still working and not as known. But reading him helped me put everything else together. What is an empirical-linguistic ego ? How does normativity play a central role ? Many others are worth mentioning. But those two are probably sufficient.

Why is Heidegger valuable ?

He is better than anyone I can think of at articulating the structure of the phenomenal stream. Which is also being-in-the-world. Which is also being-with-others. He has his own lingo, which I try to translate. The equipmental nexus. His critique in very early lectures of the way that science “deworlds” the lifeworld, strategically strips away the normative and the practical. So the scientific image is seen as an X-ray of the lifeworld. Not at all a substrate. But it’s misunderstood by green philosophers as a substrate. And as a child who loved physics and biology, I absorbed the usual bad ontology that tends to go with that.

What about Brandom ?

Normativity. We live in it. We “are” it. To be a

person is to be a locus of responsibility. A process of maintaining a coherent set of beliefs. Of explaining one's actions. And so on. An intensely temporal entity. Hence *linguistic*-empirical ego. Human existence is responsible and linguistic. Conceptuality is normative. Rationality is of course normative. So one can't sweep away the ethical dimension from ontology. But many a green philosopher is tempted by the usual atoms-and-void nihilism, which (in the usual performative contradiction) they want to *argue for* as the Truth.

So the ontological horizon comes from Brandom ?

From both. Heidegger's "being-with-others" and "interpretedness" is already there. But Brandom is very good at zeroing in on the structure of this being-with-others. On rationality. So Brandom is a very rich footnote to the Heidegger and Wittgenstein. But the tradition is a sequence of chained footnotes. Brandom is great. You might say that Heidegger is a footnote to Feuerbach. But that's not quite justified. Because the emphasis on the ready-to-hand mode of being is powerful. Still, Feuerbach is not sufficiently appreciated. The ontological horizon is basically already in Feuerbach, who got it from Hegel.

What do you value in Feuerbach ?

I can start by saying that he understood phenomenal streams as the fusion of a personal part and a transpersonal part. The personal or perspectival part is sensation or perception. This is located, a function in a direct way of that person's sense organs. The stuff

that's around them. The impersonal part is conceptual. The "idiolect" I mentioned earlier. He saw that thinking was primarily impersonal or transpersonal. This, by the way, is one of those profound insights that embarrasses scientific types. Because it sounds mystical. Betraying their attachment to an accidentally mystical ghost-in-the-machine methodological solipsism. Dualism and the isolated soul, which "ought" to be nightmarish, is comforting. Because at least it offers truth as correspondence. A definite External reality. Which I'd say functions like Deism's apathetic God. Rorty is good on this issue.

How is an external world comforting ?

A flight from autonomy. Bad faith. The scientist-philosopher has a clear mission, to mirror (somehow) this definite External reality. A "god" in the sense of something beyond everything human (somehow). It's always so difficult to talk about nonsense. It's like a proof by contradiction.

Nonsense ?

Yeah. To me representationalism is nonsense. I mean the pieces do not cohere. So I have to talk nonsense to define it. Truths beyond language. Reality beyond all possible experience. So "truth" and "reality" are "round squares." When used as representationalists use them.

So a large part of the ontological tradition just wandered off into nonsense ?

Yes. Mislead by misinterpretations of the physiology

of perception. Seduced by sci-fi esoteric platonic caves and simulation hypotheses. Seduced by the beauty of math. Confused by the perspectival nature of perception. Seduced by the utility of mathematical models. Confused also by the legitimate use of the representational metaphor, as applied to the assertions of an empirical-linguistic ego. The picture theory is pretty good. But of course the picture theory is out of style. While perception as representation is always with us. Basically there are always new green philosophers tangled up in very old weeds. Repeating old mistakes. Like I did. But some of them persevere. Admit to themselves that their position doesn't cohere. And make some progress. Only to be misunderstood by a previous version of themselves. Who insists on the same incoherent assumptions. So it goes.

So phenomenalism-perspectivism is both profound and non-mystical ?

It's profound in the sense of counter-intuitive. The redundancy theory of truth is shocking. In my experience, not many people understand it. Even people who went to grad school for philosophy. They don't get it. Representationalism is a deep trench. It gels seductively with truth as correspondence. And correspondence truth is also very plausible in mundane experience. This is what fooled Ayer. We are just so used to people agreeing on certain kinds of states of affairs. Popper was shrewd enough to see that basic statements were essential *political*. What we simply decide to accept for now. And those are "truths." Very deep and automatic beliefs —though

they are still beliefs — tempt us toward a “deep” correspondence conception of truth. But this correspondence is at least kept within the world of experience. So here again philosophers take something reasonable and stretch it so that it becomes absurd.

It's not just that though. Isn't it also the proximity of phenomenalism to subjective idealism ?

Initially yes. I think you are right. But that is of course the usual misunderstanding of phenomenalism. Which, let's remember, explicitly rejects consciousness as some kind of primary stuff. What exists is the world. The subject is just an empirical linguistic ego in the world. No more real than the stars. Than the electrons moving back in forth in our wires. Even Berkeley, who went about it sometimes in a questionable way, was trying to defend our direct contact with the things of the world. His work already implies that things are the logical synthesis of their moments. The ore just needed to be smelted. It's unfortunate that he leaned on the term “mind.” Because what exists is of course the world. The lifeworld that we all live in together.

Reminds me of Hegel and Kant.

Yes. Kant put Reality at an infinite distance. Yet he also was (incoherently) a phenomenalist. He was a phenomenalist who hadn't shaken off the representational metaphor. And he needed a place to hide God and freedom and immortality. Religious distortion, as in Berkeley. But Hegel was a phenomenalist. And he was explicitly annoyed at the idea of the state of the

art of philosophy being equated with a paradoxical skepticism. Logic is ontology because we live in our current beliefs. There is no real world hidden away from us. But our beliefs and our world can of course change.

Kant was a phenomenalist ?

He included phenomenism in his system. He gave a powerful expression of it in his passage about inhabitants of the moon. Or Mars. I can't remember which. But he said that their existence was only meaningful in terms of possible experience. That's phenomenism. Though of course "experience" is an outdated terminology. Like "sensation" in Mach, Mill, Feuerbach, and Ayer. But a charitable reader can understand the point. So Hegel takes this phenomenist insight and jettisons "things in themselves" as pointless confusion. Hegel emphasizes that the confusion stems from a root metaphor.

Representation.

Yes. Knowledge as a distorting instrument. As a fun-house mirror. As a transformer of raw Reality into cooked Experience. A presupposed gap between us and reality. Presupposed without warrant. Baggage from the tradition. Which is the basis for plenty of contemporary mystification. Hoffman, for instance. Plato's Cave. An audience-flattering quasi-esoteric song and dance.

Is phenomenism esoteric ?

Only "accidentally." Like real analysis is "esoteric."

The “labor of the concept” is required. I won’t pretend that rational traditions aren’t elitist. The point is the synthesis of better and better beliefs. That’s education. Being less stupid and more the opposite of stupid. “The fascination with what’s difficult.” Working at a conceptual puzzle. Less immediately tempting than mystic insight or sci-fi fantasy. Plato’s Cave is the prototype for all conspiracy theory, which works by flattering its consumers. By making the last first, etc.

That reminds me of Nietzsche.

He’s an important thinker. In this context, his perspectivism is especially relevant. But his psychological critique of Platonism is rhetorically helpful. We’ve got to separate the justification of belief from the psychological explanation of belief. Very different things. Often conflated in the usual famous fallacies. But I think life requires us to switch modes all the time. I might start to doubt representationalism because of a Nietzschean critique. That might open me up to rational arguments for alternatives. It’s messy.

And there’s the uselessness of ontology.

Right. I’ve got to make peace with that. Rorty, maybe because of his prominent position, was content to steer philosophy into cultural politics. And he didn’t think much of Husserl and Peirce. I think Rorty is great in many ways, but to me this is selling out. Sort of like turning on pure math because we should dedicate our lives to this or that Cause. If you insist that science be useful in the short term, then

you are betraying the spirit of science. Which is arguably a selfish thing to say. But I am more on the side of justifying art as art. Philosophy as philosophy. Math as math. I don't need a secondary reason to appreciate Husserl. I don't need phenomenology to be a tool "for" something else. Rorty's "private irony" was maybe his hiding place for this part of his own soul. He had his reasons. But Nietzsche is the kind of thinker that can help a person figure out their basic pose or attitude.

So phenomenology transcends politics ?

That's more of a personal issue. But for me science and art are transcendent in this sense. Beyond the moment, the topical. The pressing issues of the day. Do people have a right to such transcendence ? We see ambivalence in Sartre. The temptation to make existentialism fused with communism into a "religion." And Rorty of course wanted to fuse philosophy with relatively gentle progressive politics. And these days some are using Husserl and Heidegger as a foundation for a vague Mindfulness movement. Religion for the respectably still-quite-scientific man. Which is of course what most people prioritize. A role in the world. But the pure scientific role is not so popular. And philosophy — apart from politics and religion — is not so popular. So again you get sci-fi, you get Mindfulness, you get Scientistic *or* Pomo progressive politics. Which requires the intricate conceptuality to be watered-down, converted into a muddy tribe-indicating jargon. And/or something that fits on a sign in your yard. On a bumpersticker.

Can you sum things up ?

Sure. Phenomenalism is perspectivism. The world is given in a plurality of streams. These streams can be called ontological egos. At the center of every (human-associated) stream is an empirical-linguistic ego. This empirical ego is one more entity in the world — distributed over the plurality of its streamings. All entities in the world — including empirical-linguistic egos — have their genuine being in moments that appears in various streams and various times. The entity is a logical synthesis of these moments. The ontological forum is presupposed by the rational tradition of ontology. This helps explain why the “substance” of entities is “logical.” Entities are not just now and not just for me. To be a linguistic being is to run an “idiolect” of the “tribal OS”. This operating system is a set of (among other things) inferential and semantic norms. As a thinker, I am more “we” than “me.” Thinking is not primarily a function of the mortal body that hosts such thinking. Though the body is apparently necessary for such thinking to occur. *A sine qua non*. The tribal OS (logic) is a time-binding Conversation. A relatively immortal “Virus” that leaps from mortal host to mortal host. I can contribute to a rational tradition by catching up with the gist of its history and its current “state of the art” (best) beliefs. Ontology is an unpractical “following of the logic.” A hypersensitivity to rational-semantic norms, at the expense of indulging in sci-fi candy or respectable practical and

profitable pursuits. It's like pure math. An acquired taste. Anything else ?

You tell me.

Phenomenalism is *not* subjective idealism. It even rejects consciousness and the subject as ontologically primary. For phenomenism, there is only world. Only streamings of the world. Language/logic is fundamentally transpersonal, transperspectival, directed outward. We are immediately social beings, understanding entities "immediately" to be also for others. So phenomenism-perspectivism (at least post Hegel) is very anti-atomic in its conception of the self. No private logic. No private language. And yet idiolects. Which allow for creativity. For this or that person to excel in catching up and contributing to the Conversation. Belief is the meaning structure of world-from-perspective. But rational people seek consensus. Seek to enlarge their perspective. Make their beliefs objective or unbiased in the sense of exposing them to criticism, assimilating better beliefs from others. Truth, commonly mystified, is just a way to talk about belief. The picture theory is right. And picturing itself can't be pictured. Or seems resistant at least to further explication. Because meaningfulness or significance is the ontological forum into which we find ourselves always already thrown.

So that's it ?

Just about. Time shows by hiding and hides by showing. Each moment of an entity occludes or conceals all the others. In this sense, time "is" being. Each

phenomenal stream is a “first-personal” streaming of time-being-world. This is just an unfolding of the “world-stream” metaphor. Space is important too, but time is “deeper.” Time includes invisible and unextended entities like sonatas. I’ve been listening to Beethoven sonatas as I type all of this out. Basically a day’s “work.”