

THINGS (25 SEP 2024)

1

What is a thing ?¹ An apple, for instance ? For perspectivism (which is also phenomenism.)

What is an apple for the perspectivist ?

2

The apple is there for others too. The apple is not my private dream. I may hallucinate an apple or dream of an apple. But here we discuss ordinary apples in the world we share.

3

Is the real apple somehow “behind” the red shape that I see on the brown wooden table ? Is the real apple the obscure cause of the seen (unreal) apple ?

For perspectivism, the seen apple is the real apple. A moment of the real apple. A “perspectival part” of the real apple.

4

Mary sees the same apple, but she is nearsighted and colorblind, the poor creature. But she sees the same

¹Heidegger asks this question too.

apple. It's blurry but it's there.

We talk about the apple. She tells me it is blurry (for her). That she probably experiences its color differently.

We are both confident that we intend and discuss that particular apple. Which we see differently.

5

Mary and I agree that a stranger could walk in and see that apple too. That stranger could discuss the apple with us.

6

Is the real apple hidden away ? Does the real apple cause each of our brains to create a fake apple ? A private image of the apple which does not include the being of the real apple ? But the brains we know of would then be unreal images, just like the image of the apple. Why should some unknown thing that *causes* an apple or brain to appear *be* an apple or a brain ?

7

How would we *justify* the claim that some mysterious who-knows-what *causes* "consciousness" to "contain" "images" of apples and brains ?

How do we even show correlation ? Which experiences are being linked mathematically ? The obscure

postulated cause is nowhere to be found but in our metaphysical imaginations.

8

What I can do is see both an apple and someone else seeing the apple. Someone else can see me seeing an apple.

9

If I leave the room, the apple remains on the table. What does that mean? I expect that whoever walks into the kitchen will be able to see the apple.

10

To paraphrase J. S. Mill, the apple is the durable possibility of its perception.

11

If I suddenly die, the apple doesn't vanish. An extreme version of my leaving the room. What does that mean? At least that the living can still perceive the apple.

12

To perceive the apple is to include a “perspectival part” or “moment” of that apple in one’s associated “phenomenal field.” I see this side or that side of the apple. I call that seeing the apple. Though I can focus on just the side if I want.

13

For perspectivism, the phenomenal field is not consciousness. To talk of consciousness is to suggest that the apple has some kind of being beyond all possible appearances in this or that phenomenal field. For perspectivism, the apple is the logical unity of its perspectival parts.

14

This old idea is out of fashion and not well known. It arguably evolved from Berkeley’s subjective idealism. But it’s wrong to understand it as subjective idealism.

15

Why ? Because I am a thing in the world like the apple. My own being is just the logical-intentional unity or collection of my perspectival parts. My moments. The moments of my “empirical-linguistic ego.”

16

For perspectivism, to “have consciousness” is to have the-world-from-perspective. To have an associated phenomenal field. The empirical-linguistic ego is not its associated phenomenal field.

17

This phenomenal field —a streaming of the world from the perspective of the empirical-linguistic ego — is sometimes called the “ontological ego.”

18

Mary’s ontological ego is not really an ego at all. It is instead our-world-from-Mary’s-perspective. But our-world-from-Mary’s-perspective has the meaningful structure of Mary’s beliefs. So Mary’s ontological “ego” is intimately related to Mary’s empirical-linguistic ego.

19

When Mary tells me she sees the apple, she is articulating her phenomenal field, putting its structure into words. In our-world-from-Mary’s perspective there is an apple on the table.

20

If all of her friends are in the room and claim not to see it, then Mary might think she is hallucinating. The apple in her phenomenal field might be recategorized. It is still there-for-her, but now she worries that she might need her head checked.

21

Mary took some strong pain killers after dental surgery and found herself having a fun conversation with her best friend. Suddenly she found herself alone and drooling on her bed. She decided that the entire conversation was a dream or a drug-induced hallucination.

22

Mary called up her friend the next day and told her about the dream. That dream was now an entity in the world that they could both refer to and reason about. As if Mary was telling her friend about a vacation she took without that friend.

23

The point is that even private experiences can play a role in discussions and inferences. So they are only partially private. Laura, Mary's friend, had an experience similar to Mary's once. So she "understood"

Mary. Both Mary and Laura had perspectival access to the same category of convincing hallucinations.

24

A “material” thing in the world like an apple is something *we* can perceive. More generally a thing is something that *we* can *talk about*. I can tell you about my toothache. If you look at my teeth, you might see a probably cause of the toothache, but you won’t see the toothache itself. But we can reason together about my toothache. You might recommend one painkiller rather an another. My toothache exists in the “space of reasons” or “ontological forum.”

25

We learn early on which parts of our phenomenal fields are directly-also-for-others. We learn that closing our eyes doesn’t turn the lights off in the room.

26

This is a fundamental social skill. We can’t live without it. But it can make philosophy more difficult. Because we have to “swim upstream” of habits that are justified practically but not logically.

27

It's not practically risky to believe that the "real apple" is some transcendent obscure cause of a fake apple represented in consciousness. Bad metaphysics is mostly harmless.

28

Good metaphysics (good ontology) is also mostly useless. Even if perspectivism is a superior alternative to the default dualism, it won't help you pay your bills. It might even distract you from more profitable pursuits.

29

The apple for perspectivism is the collection of its perspectival parts. These parts are scattered over a plurality of "nondual" phenomenal fields. A crude way of putting it: the apple is the sum of its actual and possible "appearances."

30

Of course the apple is something you can bite into and taste. You can feel the apple. You can chemically analyze the apple. All of this is included. The real apple is the "apple of experience."

31

Is the apple “transcendent” or elusive even for perspectivism? Yes. The “substance” of the apple is “logical.” Our ability to intend the same apple is the “essence” of the apple. This intending is what “glues” the perspectival parts of the apple together *as* parts of *that* apple. The concept of the apple is “open” or “ajar.” I don’t have access now to what others might make of it. The way it might show itself to others or even to me in the future. So this “logical transcendence” means that the apple is never “finished.”

32

So perspectivism is phenomenism, but this is not your grandmother’s phenomenism. Perspectivism is not, for instance, sensualism. Logic or meaning plays a central role.

33

For a “post-Heidegger” perspectivism-phenomenism, the world is “immediately” meaningful — structured by belief.

34

I immediately see an apple on the table. So do you. This is the familiar real world, already arranged in terms of states of affairs involving familiar objects.

35

For perspectivism, the real world is NOT hidden behind or away from “the world of experience” as its obscure cause. What Sellars calls “the scientific image” is just a part of this encompassing meaningful “lifeworld.”

36

We can play the game of creating maps of the world that remove most of the meaning. We can decide to see only this or that mathematical “essence” of what is going on. But the map we create does not make sense as a substrate of the lifeworld. It’s a mere piece of the lifeworld, one more piece of culture, however technologically useful.

37

Eddington writes of the two tables. The table we eat at and the other thing that is mostly empty space.

I have settled down to the task of writing these lectures and have drawn up my two chairs to my two tables. Two tables! Yes; there are duplicates of every object about me—two tables, two chairs, two pens.

One of them has been familiar to me from earliest years. It is a commonplace object of that environment which I call the world. How shall

I describe it? It has extension; it is comparatively permanent; it is coloured; above all it is substantial...

Table No. 2 is my scientific table. It is a more recent acquaintance and I do not feel so familiar with it. It does not belong to the world previously mentioned—that world which spontaneously appears around me when I open my eyes, though how much of it is objective and how much is subjective I do not here consider. It is part of a world which in more devious ways has forced itself on my attention. My scientific table is mostly emptiness. Sparsely scattered in that emptiness are numerous electric charges rushing about with great speed; but their combined bulk amounts to less than a billionth of the bulk of the table itself.

What Eddington didn't see was that it's the same table, viewed differently. He "saw" it but ignored the "logical substance" of the one intended/discussed table.

I need not tell you that modern physics has by delicate test and remorseless logic assured me that my second scientific table is the only one which is really there—wherever "there" may be. On the other hand I need not tell you that modern physics will never succeed in exercising that first table—strange compound of external nature, mental imagery, and inherited prejudice—which lies visible to my eyes and tangible to my grasp.

The second table-for-physics is the same table-for-experience. Of course. Or how could physics, as an empirical science, discuss the table-for-experience. Indeed, the table-for-physics is an extension of the table-for-experience. Physics is refined experience. Of course.

What needs explaining perhaps is how shrewd physicists can be such lazy philosophers. Elsewhere in the passage he completely misunderstands Berkeley. The prestige of the physicist — derived from technological power — perhaps encourages an arrogance on their part and a credulity in their audience.

But this technological power is manifest — where else — in experience. So the mystical dualistic interpretation of physics is just confusion. So many people are afraid of math that it's easy for everyone concerned to leave what's going on in a delightful haze.

38

We end up with a weird situation where a thoroughly and even relentlessly empirical ontology like phenomenism is miscategorized as speculative or mystical — while the default dualism that includes an obscure hidden stuff is sound “scientific” sense.

39

This confused dualism rides the coat-tails of technology. If you really only care about technology, it doesn't matter. The bad philosophy of some physi-

cists — because it flatters them — may even keep their spirits up and help them make a better ICBM.

40

Eddington (unlike Kant) might tell us that the real apple is, in spatial terms, mostly swirling electrons pushing against one another without touching. Where are those electrons ? Right there in the apple.

But how different are these electrons than the cells of the apple which we couldn't see before the invention of the microscope ? Or the genetic material that was postulated before we could detect it with instruments ? The enrichment of our understanding of the apple is not a second apple. It applies to the same old apple of experience. Which is why we care.

41

Does the apple still exist if every sentient creature is suddenly gone ? We here, who must be alive in order to discuss the issue, might even say yes. We might say that apple remains potentially perceivable. Some might say yes in stronger terms. The apple's being remains completely intact, they claim, whether or not sentient life ever arises in the first place.

42

My issue with this stronger claim is that it's not clear how their intending of that apple is even meaningful.

Exists *how*? What do we mean *now* by the existence of a “material” thing? Presumably it’s this meaning that we try to project as a completely perception-independent existence. And it’s crucial that such independence includes all possible perception.

43

So what do we make of a material thing that *cannot* be perceived? We can of course postulate not-yet-perceived entities and even those that will remain obscure. But such postulations are only taken seriously through their causal-inferential connection to *perceivable* (“material”) entities.

44

It’s harmless enough to snap the words together. The completely transcendent experience-independent thing in itself. But an intensely critical-empirical philosophy will “uselessly” sniff for some connection to “experience” — to the logically-conceptually organized phenomenal field.

45

Let us go back. Laura is blind, but she loves to eat apples. Mary hates to taste them but loves the way they look. Mary and Laura discuss the apple as Laura eats it. The same apple manifests in Laura’s field in terms of taste and texture and the close sound of a crunch.

For Mary, that apple is mostly visual, though she can just hear the crunch. She sees Laura's mouth going to town on the apple. Laura doesn't see anything, but she hears Mary giggle.

46

The apple that both intend as the same apple manifests differently in both phenomenal fields or ontological egos. Joe walks in and enjoys the scene. Laura, Mary, and the apple are all in his phenomenal field. So is Mary's giggle. Laura wants to know who just walked in, probably Joe.

47

To sum up: For perspectivism (phenomenalism), a "material" thing is the logical synthesis or collection of its manifestations or moments. These moments are scattered across many phenomenal fields. They are scattered over time too, because material things are understood to endure. I can tear my coat on a barbed wire fence, but it remains my coat. There is no secret apple "behind" the "apple of experience." Mathematical models describe the things of experience, not some occult metaphysical realm.