

A LETTER

1

First, thank you for your interest. I'm a marginal artist who believes in his obscure wares. So of course I'm glad to repondeficate.

2

Permit me to sound arrogant. Most people don't understand what has happened in philosophy. Most people aren't up to date on physics. I don't pretend to be up to date on physics. But I do pretend to be up-to-date-ish on foolosophy.

Am I a crank ? That is a question that *should* be asked. My work isn't for and won't appeal to the credulous. Because I'm a gloomy rationalist. Don't be fooled by the cute name. Ontocubism isn't DADA. I am afflicted with the temperament of a poet or an inventor. But critical philosophy is a strange form of art indeed.

Why this narcissistic preface ? I presuppose a reader sinister as myself. I mean that critical thought itself is sinister, corrosive, fault-finding.

What dominates the popular space — the outsider space — is sentimental idealism. Kastrup, Hoffman, Vervaeke, Gilchrist. I had something like an online friend to discuss philosophy with, but he was primarily ambitious for that kind of role. We agree on so much

of the technical stuff that I feel it as a loss.

That technical stuff is where one achieves valuable novelty. There one finds “the labor of the concept.” If the goal is primarily the supply of yet “another” politico-religious ideology, then the durability of the construction is compromised. One aims a product at those eager in the first place to believe. I like to think that I aim my own constructions at those eager to root out unwarranted presuppositions, excessive ambiguity, and of course latent contradictions.

3

Pardon my arrogance, I say. *Am* I arrogant ? Is what I’m tentatively calling “ontocubism” a big deal ? Maybe I’m not so arrogant, and ontocubism is a little deal after all. But an inch of real progress (if I can even claim that) is better than success with something hollow. Frankly, it’s not *easy* to perform or enact that attitude. Who’s happier ? The popular derivative band that lives from their art or the understand “authentic” artist who may or may not be eventually appreciated for such authenticity ? Consider the way that Schopenhauer railed at those indeed forgettable and forgotten university professors. I’m glad for him that he got a piece of recognition near the end of his life.

But his pessimism had a “spiritual” value. Ontocubism has (I hope) a dry kind of beauty. I think a certain “aesthetic spirituality” is implied. It’s like a Richard Serra sculpture, beautiful in what it doesn’t

say. We might compare Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic* to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein speaks of silence. Ayer practices it. Wittgenstein's style is seductively eccentric. If the book wasn't so good anyway, that kind of gimmick would put me off. Which of the two is idolized today ? Ayer is almost forgotten.

The pursuit of gimmicks and mystique is juvenile. We the relatively old were all young once. To be "old in spirit" is to have shattered many an idol. Do you ever look at online philosophy forums ? There's a young Nietzsche-boy type who eternally recurs. I was like that myself once, drunk on "cynical mysticism," caught up in a typical performative contradiction, namely the less genteel version of Wittgenstein's quasi-mystical invocations of silence.

4

What happens is a shift from vehicle to content, from avatars to ideas that are independent of those letter-carrying avatars. You might say that Nietzsche, for instance, becomes *more* interesting this way. I think of the lonely artist, sometimes manic with inspiration, sometimes a fool for the usual sentimental political-spiritual pose. How many human beings in his time had basically the same depth without the skill or the will to express it ? Many, I think. How many scrawled bitter insights in journals no one bothered to read or preserve ?

The “Vision of The Wheel” is a vision of Futility and Vanity. Schopenhauer is not so far from pseudo-Solomon. Not so far from The Fire Sermon. But he, like Nietzsche, could put down a good line.

That sets me up to confess that Ontocubism is only minimally original. On the other hand, the more I read philosophy the more I see how unoriginal they all are. I love Heidegger, but much of Heidegger is already, for instance, in Feuerbach. Who reads Feuerbach ? Almost no one. I myself, even more obscure than Feuerbach, am hardly in a position to persuade any one to notice the influence.

Does it matter that anyone notices ? Yes and no. Does philosophy itself matter ? I suggest that avatars are the primary product for a dominant taste which is always “juvenile.” People need heros more than they need difficult impractical conceptual achievements. The envelope is the letter.

5

Now I get to the content of ontocubism. Much of it is already in J. S. Mill’s phenomenalism. But there’s a naive understanding of phenomenalism that’s liable to cause confusion. Even J. S. Mill’s own requires adjustment. We get help from Mach and James. For what I’d call a genuine phenomenalism, *consciousness does not exist*.

On other words, immaterialism is *also* a rejection of “Mind.”

But we do *not* replace the duo of Mind and Matter with a mystified Neutral Substance.

We get more help from James. *Radical pluralism*. There are lots of categories that we can apply to objects. None of them is fundamental. No special magic Substance needed.

We can also get help from Heidegger here. Let us consider the ontological difference. Let us do this also without mystification. We have things that are present and the presence *of* those things.

It seems to me that it's meaningless or confused to treat being or presence itself as a kind of stuff. One can, I suppose, talk of an it-is-there-ness or a there-hood. One can dig for synonyms for "being" or "presence."

But any kind of categorical name just obscures the issue. "All is X." Oh yeah ? Then it might as well be the case that nothing is X. Let X be mind, matter, neutral goo, etc. Of course a *sentimental* effect may be thereby achieved. The vague spiritual guy wants "mind." The scientific guy wants "matter" or "the physical." Like an old school logical positivist, I jeer at their contamination by "metaphysics."

6

Above I insisted that there is just the world. It's not mind or matter or any kind of substance. It's just there.

But ontocubism, as a phenomenism, is far from a

reductive physicalism. Long ago, I liked the whole “atoms and void” thing. I confused Sellars “scientific image” with nonsense like “true reality.” What’s seductive about this scientism is that it seems unsentimental indeed. That’s part of the issue. It’s a sentimental reaction to an opposed flavor of sentimentality.

Let me save myself from accusations of psychologism. A sorry motive does not a bad theory imply. But once one grasps confusion as such, one is tempted to play psychologist. How are genuinely clever people caught off guard by this ? How did *I* fall once for this or that piece of mystification ?

I should make a case that *is* mystification. If you just look into the conditions for the possibility of warranted belief, many grand claims are revealed as naive or incomplete.

What does rational conversation tacitly presuppose ? Why should I believe Democritus ? Do the signs he shares have meaning ? Are they binding on us as fellow participants in the scientific-philosophical conversation ?

How does Democritus account for the genuine normativity needed in order to project his claim as warranted ? Are claims too made of atoms ? *Is atomism made of atoms ?*

To be sure, a theist or mystic could and maybe should make this same point. Reductive physicalism seems to have a serious problem. Embraced as an alternative to superstition, it tacitly offers us outlandish claims that are roughly equivalent to “atomism is made of

atoms.”

One can of course retreat to something banal. “We just strive to explain how complex entities work in terms of how their simpler parts work.” This is fine but boring.

It’s only fair that I call out the supernaturalists for their own evasion. If an inscrutable God is invoked, rationality is implicitly declared secondary. Others invoke the Ineffable or the Trans-rational. It’s worth noting that they won’t call it (just) feeling. Look at Nietzsche’s portrait of Jesus in *The Antichrist*. That’s the right way to do it, but Nietzsche’s Jesus won’t debate in the first place. He might offer parables, for those with ears to hear. My criticism is directed against the performative contradiction of those who earnestly *argue* against the normativity they presuppose in doing so. This can also be framed in terms of the incoherence of the persona they project.

The “spiritual” guy hates the “Nietzsche” guy hates the “spiritual” guy. They mirror one another. Both pretend to sit above the conversation they participate in. Both types seek recognition, precisely for their not needing it. Managerial mystic and marginal self-ordained superman, both complaining. One about the materialism, the other about the slavishness of the mob.

Am I defending rationality with rhetoric ? I confess. The “positivism content” of my “theory” should stand on its own. Should.

Mill was maybe an optimistic progressive guy. His em-

piricism was maybe hopeful. He defended free speech, not only talked but *live* feminism. That another reason to celebrate him as an influence. We see some of this in the logical positivists. Does a dry rationalism *function* in an ethical vacuum ? Does logical positivism make sense for a world-weary disillusioned type ?

Are we back in the realm of avatars ? Was the primary product an optimistic scientism ? “Nevermind the technicalities, we like your smell.”

I saw today on the same philosophy forum both a spiritual guy and a scientism guy both imply that what the world needs now is to think as they do. I almost envy them what I take to be their naivety. The younger scientific guy might go places though. He’s just not yet disenchanted by disenchantment itself.

Let me return to the positive content of the doctrine. I use the term *forum* for the set of conditions for the possibility of rational conversation. Karl-Otto Apel is good on this issue. In retrospect, I should have read him many years ago. But he’s not a glamorous avatar. As far as I know, only one passing online stranger understood what the fuck I was trying to point out as this forum. I started a thread about it on a foolosophy forum once, and no one seemed to understand it. A *philosophy* forum. But, to be fair, haunted primarily by amateurs and maniacs. It was mostly a place to invoke avatars as ego-ideals. Of course. Who starts elsewhere ?

I tend to talk about the “components” of this forum.

We've got to share a world and be able to understand one another. So (in short) objects and concepts are *between* us. Not inside the subject as jar. For the jar is a door. The "subject" is a component of the forum, a mere piece of it. This forum (us rather than me) is ontology's necessary because presupposed entity. In other words, ontology presupposes the possibility of ontology and all that such a possibility implies.

I don't pretend that these implications are immediately determinate. But we can rule out private concepts in a private logic. We can rule out "skeptical" theories of knowledge that presuppose an enclosed subject. I think indirect realism crumbles with the foregrounding of the forum. I realize that people can cling to some pastel modification of "indirect" realism that is ultimately the old gag of primary qualities versus secondary qualities. A theory demolished long ago.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." It's fine as a practical maxim, but it's phenomenologically wrong as fuck. Still, this shrewd practical maxim gets inflated into a confused supposed-to-be-an-actual-theory. This theory insists on a container subject, where the beauty is presumably stored. The residue of a value-raised world is "real." Is the warrantedness of a claim also stored in the jar of the isolate subject ? Are melodies less real than vibrations of air molecules, though no less "ideal" ?

An old complaint against the mystification of the scientific image. Is the theory of general relativity also

in ego-jars ? The meaning of the math ? Is the “real” math just ink molecules on paper molecules ? But what are molecules ?

If the “physical” *mirrors* the theory of the physicist, then we seem to have the tacit but disavowed equation of thought and being.

The attempt to articulate and justify an “anti-” metaphysics tends to be *bad* metaphysics.

I invented this character Horn once. I wanted to show others how “cynical mysticism” (post-rational pragmatism) ought to be done. Horn was shrewd enough not to stoop to playing the game he saw himself as transcending. A coherent pragmatist persona doesn’t bother with philosophy. Instead, he or she creates and uses technology. Horn may *believe* that power is knowledge, but he lives this belief. To argue for it is inconsistent. Though Horn could retort that rhetoric is technology. He can pretend to be playing the game while seeing himself as a manipulator of the naive.

This would only make sense if Horn was pursuing a practical goal. If he was just trying to win recognition, he’d be a Nietzsche guy. Since philosophical conversations are impractical, Horn makes more sense as a cynical politician.

I should emphasize that I am not Mr. Horn. I am touched with a world-weary irony, but apparently I’m still invested (quite sentimentally?) in some kind of universal rationality. Horn tells me that it’s all just rationalization. I remind him that his cynicism is self-

cancelling. He grins. He's well aware.

I know that I could have explained the forum in a single paragraph. Those with eyes to read could have deduced the rest. Perhaps I too am only hawking an avatar.

7

Now for some esoteric Plato, understood as a kind of early Derrida.

Reality is the collision or fusion of the discrete and the continuous, of “constituting ideality” and a “qualitative continuum.” An entity is a unity. The “substance” of an entity is “logical.”

The chair is between us. We can speak about and intend that same chair. I see it from here, you from there. What are these appearances of the chair ? Are they images in mind ?

No. The chair “has its being” in these appearances. The chair is the logical synthesis of its appearances. It “is” all of its actual and (more importantly) *possible* appearances. These appearances involve, for instance, color and tactile pressure. I see it. I can sit on it. I can burn it and smell it. These “sensory” qualities are “continuous.” But the chair is intend-able or speak-able as a unity of its moments. I use “moments” as a more appropriate synonym for appearance. Not all objects are ocular. But all things are temporal. A logical synthesis is a temporal synthesis. Also a spa-

tial synthesis. The moment or aspect is a function of the perceiver's relative location. In less subjectivistic terms, the object can take up more or less of a "visual field" and still be the same object.

What Mill's phenomenism implies is basically a secularized version of Leibniz's monads. The world is conceived as a system of streams of what one has but should no longer call "phenomenal consciousness." When I'm feeling dramatic, I call them "torrents of naked reality." They are "perspectival streamings of the world itself." Such a "torrent" is not to be identified with its "host." It's as if the world streams "through the eyes" of a creature therefore called "sentient." But this "stream" is not consciousness or experience. It is indeed the world itself.

This claim is supported by Derrida's analysis of signs as not "inside" some "container subject." We have also foregrounded the forum. We tacitly presuppose our access to objects and concepts that are *between* us or in the world. The subject is empties. The subject is turned inside out. The subject is transcendent like every other logical-intentional object. The "residue" of this subject is just the "aspectual" character of every entity in the stream.

You might say that the perceptual presence of empirical objects has a "from-a-point-of-view-ness." We might talk of an "implied" or "suggested" subject. This woman's face is painfully beautiful in Joe's stream and nothing special in Jim's. Same face, two aspects in their total lifeworld richness, unified logically by Joe and Jim sharing in signs, able to co-intend a face

that is *between* them.

The varying and transcendent-subject-relative appearances of entities tempted philosophers to postulate the container subject as an ontological absolute. They took the forum they stood on for granted, even as they cancelled its possibility. They kept talking and making arguments of course. They didn't notice the contradiction. I know people who have read Kant like the bible for years, and they still haven't seen the absurdity. The man who said that the scandal of philosophy was the lack of a proof of the external world was talking nonsense. The possibility of proof is a tacit assumption of the essence of externality.

I tried to explain to him that concepts have to be "public." At some point, where the rubber meets the road, we either meet in the same concepts or we aren't talking at all. Derrida pries the sign out the jar by using what's strong in Husserl against what is weak. A genuine sentence has to signify in my absence. The letter must be intelligible beyond the death of any particular author or reader.

But "concepts" are (roughly) equivalence classes of signs. They too are transcendent objects in the world *and therefore given in perspectival moments or aspects*. So we are not all plugged into to a magic telepathic system of *pure* conceptuality. We "understand" the same concepts differently. But we mostly intend the same concepts, even as we disagree about their features. To deny this is to deny the forum is to deny one's own intelligibility as a denier.

For “Eso-Plato” (my creation perhaps, my Socratic Puppet), there is neither “pure” ideality nor an unmo-
lested qualitative continuum. The “One” and the “In-
definite” are theoretical devices, formal indications. One can step into the same river twice, for the river is not the water but the “form” of the water. It is our co-intending of that moving water as an enduring entity.

If the river dries up, it persists as intentional object. The cup of coffee I didn’t drink just now is *also* a genuine (if perverse) intentional object. We create such objects, with the help of signs, easily and often.

Concepts are relatively very pure. They are minimally “material.” Equivalence classes of signs, typically mystified toward an utter, untainted ideality, as if a dove could fly in a vacuum.

As a worker in the field of concept, who thereby flees his death as a mere animal, this is not a happy result. But we seem to find purity enough in concepts that do indeed leap from sign to sign.

The practical man makes babies and builds skyscrapers. The impractical man is more realistic. All of this stuff is relatively ephemeral. Better to bury your secret in a clay jar, till the latest inquisition passes. Lay your minimally material eggs like an insect and die in peace, for thou shalt not die.

But, as Sartre saw, this “gnosis” and scientific content generally isn’t mind. It’s a stone that I can’t digest. It is realer than I am. So O’ Brien identifies with the

Inner Party. The gnostic with the gnosis. Or tries to.
The artist squeezes himself into a stain.