

## NOTES (10-10-24)

1

In “Physics and Reality”, Einstein enriches Mach’s phenomenalism.

On the stage of our subconscious mind appear in colorful succession sense experiences, memory pictures of them, representations and feelings. In contrast to psychology, physics treats directly only of sense experiences and of the “understanding” of their connection. But even the concept of the “real external world” of everyday thinking rests exclusively on sense impressions. Now we must first remark that the differentiation between sense impressions and representations is not possible; or, at least it is not possible with absolute certainty. With the discussion of this problem, which affects also the notion of reality, we will not concern ourselves but we shall take the existence of sense experiences as given, that is to say as psychic experiences of special kind.

I believe that the first step in the setting of a “real external world” is the formation of the concept of bodily objects and of bodily objects of various kinds. Out of the multitude of our sense experiences we take, mentally and arbitrarily, certain repeatedly occurring complexes of sense impression (partly in conjunction with sense impressions which are interpreted as signs

for sense experiences of others), and we attribute to them a meaning—the meaning of the bodily object. Considered logically this concept is not identical with the totality of sense impressions referred to; but it is an arbitrary creation of the human (or animal) mind. On the other hand, the concept owes its meaning and its justification exclusively to the totality of the sense impressions which we associate with it.

The second step is to be found in the fact that, in our thinking (which determines our expectation), we attribute to this concept of the bodily object a significance, which is to a high degree independent of the sense impression which originally gives rise to it. This is what we mean when we attribute to the bodily object "a real existence." The justification of such a setting rests exclusively on that fact that, by means of such concepts and mental relations between them, we are able to orient ourselves in the labyrinth of sense impressions. These notions and relations, although free statements of our thoughts, appear to us as stronger and more unalterable than the individual sense experience itself, the character of which as anything other than the result of an illusion or hallucination is never completely guaranteed. On the other hand, these concepts and relations, and indeed the setting of real objects and, generally speaking, the existence of "the real world," have justification only in so far as they are connected

with sense impressions between which they form a mental connection.

Einstein presents physics as concerned with the empirical part of the total phenomenal stream, noting also that it's not always decidable whether a bundle of sensation is empirical (really out there) or not (a hallucination.) Our reasoning is involved in such a decision. How does what I seem to see cohere with the world as I currently understand it ?

## 2

Einstein takes a phenomenalist basis from Mach but emphasizes the role of creative postulations that are not immediately empirical. Only some of their logical implications finally refer to experience.

The essential thing is the aim to represent the multitude of concepts and theorems, close to experience, as theorems, logically deduced and belonging to a basis, as narrow as possible, of fundamental concepts and fundamental relations which themselves can be chosen freely (axioms). The liberty of choice, however, is of a special kind; it is not in any way similar to the liberty of a writer of fiction. Rather, it is similar to that of a man engaged in solving a well designed word puzzle. [...]

Physics constitutes a logical system of thought which is in a state of evolution, and whose basis cannot be obtained through distillation by

any inductive method from the experiences lived through, but which can only be attained by free invention. The justification (truth content) of the system rests in the proof of usefulness of the resulting theorems on the basis of sense experiences, where the relations of the latter to the former can only be comprehended intuitively. Evolution is going on in the direction of increasing simplicity of the logical basis. In order further to approach this goal, we must make up our mind to accept the fact that the logical basis departs more and more from the facts of experience, and that the path of our thought from the fundamental basis to these resulting theorems, which correlate with sense experiences, becomes continually harder and longer.

He defines “truth content” pragmatically. This is compatible with the perspectivist deflation of truth. All we ever have are tentative *beliefs* which we *call* “true.” The express convenience of the word “true” tempts us to reify such use into a truth that is somehow beyond all mere belief.

Many logical positivists tried to define empirical statements in terms of their verifiability. But this approach takes a mystified notion of truth for granted. Popper’s “basic statements” are a superior alternative. In perspectivist lingo, such a basic statement is belief shared by most members of the scientific “forum.” Basic statements are themselves tentative. They are strong shared beliefs *for now* — until we have reason

to question them.

Compact (economical) theories should *imply* basic statements. The forum must be able to come to a consensus about whether a prediction is successful or not.

### 3

To be scientific or rational is to seek a coherent set of warranted beliefs. Of course the practical effectiveness beliefs adds to their extra-scientific value. This helps explain why physics has accidentally encouraged so much bad philosophy, especially the usual dualism of a consciousness stuff and some kind of consciousness-transcendent physical stuff.

This alienated “matter worship” is blind to the necessary centrality and “reality” of the conversation that establishes which beliefs are warranted — and therefore which entities are relatively “real.”

### 4

Perspectivism is “profound” as a “nondual” theory and yet also a radical demystification. Immaterialism shatters the projected transcendent fetish.

Perspectivism is phenomenism is immaterialism. But it is not subjective idealism.

The recognized primacy of the scientific horizon or ontological forum is a demystification of the isolated private-language ego. While perspectivism accounts

for perspectival “isolated” character of perception, it emphasizes the deep sociality of the empirical linguistic ego.

Perspectivism is surprisingly anti-skeptical, even while demystifying the concept of truth. The forum that enables questioning cannot itself be questioned without performative contradiction. This is a socialization of the Cartesian move. We justify our beliefs, therefore we are. Therefore we might as well accept the belief that we are here together as justified, for our being-together-in-logic (the forum) enables justification in the first place.

5

—I think I understand you. I even agree, but I’m somehow disappointed.

—I understand. For me there was an initial thrill of untying so many knots. But one gets used to those knots being untied. Then the thrill is gone.

—Fair enough. And really how is this different from common sense ?

—I think it’s maybe an explication of pre-theoretical common sense. But I think it’s very different from *theoretical* common sense.

—In other words, when people begin to ontologize, an inherited confused dualism pours out of them.

—Exactly. Sci-fi bong-hit physics-inspired dualism.

—Physics inspired ?

—Not by actual physics. I mean the outsider fetishization of the equations, which goes with a crude anti-empirical projection of transcendent Matter. As I showed above, Einstein knew better. Einstein was an enriched phenomenalist. So was early Carnap. And many others.

—But what harm is there in such confused dualism ?

—Maybe none at all. Maybe all that sci-fi bong-hit stuff is good for morale. I don't think that perspectivism / phenomenism will save the world. It's just the solution to certain puzzles that most people have never felt the need to try to solve, if they've ever noticed them in the first place.

—So your papers are written for a few strange personalities like your own.

—Exactly. And they aren't original at all in their basic context. They are just footnotes or elaborations or variants. I try at least to make certain insights more vivid, more accessible to those few who might value them.