

1

God as science-fiction. A disembodied but essentially human personality. Like Hal 9000 in Kubrick's *2001*. Essentially human through participation in the "space of reasons" or "ontological forum." Klingons and Q from Star Trek are also "essentially human" in this way.

So we should speak instead of rational beings. Generalized empirical-linguistic egos with whom we might discuss a world we share with them. World as the total context or ontological horizon.

2

God as early but *extreme* science-fiction. A projection of our linguistic-rational-social essence. Such a God might be called "the empirical-linguistic ego in itself." Because God is no longer empirical as object, not usually envisioned as having sense organs we might see. And yet also envisioned as having infinite access to all that is going on.

3

In his *Le Micromégas*, Voltaire imagines two kinds of non-human empirical-linguistic extraterrestrials. Sirians, from a planet orbiting the star Sirius, live $\approx 10,000,000$ earth-years and have ≈ 1000 senses. Saturnians, living on Saturn, live a mere fifteen thousand years and have only 72 senses, so few that they've

bothered to count them.

Mr. Micromégas, the Sirian protagonist, visits Saturn, and converses with one of its inhabitants. Sirians and Saturnians share the ontological forum, meet in the space of reasons. Engage even in gloomy philosophy. They are “essentially human,” which is implicit in Voltaire’s ability to translate and present their conversation. In our ability to relate to them.

4

Given such a variety of sense organs, the same empirical object must be potentially perceptually present in an unbounded number of ways, at least if we include all possible intergalactic rational beings.

How does a Saturnian, for instance, perceive an apple? With 72 senses, they might experience the apple in terms of 72 “channels” of perceptual presence. Most of these channels are inaccessible to humans of course. Some or even all human channels might be inaccessible to Saturnians. Yet it’s conceivable, perhaps with the help of technology, that Earthlings and Saturnians could discuss not only apples but empirical objects in general. And whether “consciousness” is a synonym for “presence.” And so on.

What should we make, in this enlarged context, of the “apple in itself”? A related question: What should we make of a now interplanetary concept of the empirical object?

The empirical object is (something like) the interpersonal possibility of perceptual presence. This perceptual presence is now generalized so that genuine empirical objects may not be empirically available to human beings considered biologically.

An analogy: A person born blind in 1345 can learn about the stars as empirical objects without being able to see them. Learn that *others* can see them. The blind person also can't touch, smell, or taste them. The blind person has only inferential access, could even become a scientific expert on stars, making predictions that others could check. So the stars are empirical objects in the ontological forum, and this blind person is a member of that forum.

The empirical object depends on perceptual presence in general but on no particular species-specific or ego-specific "channel" of such presence.

The "thing-in-itself" is its logical-inferential role in the space of reasons as potentially perceptually present for some of its possible members. Can we bend Kant in this direction ?

If I take away from an empirical intuition all thought (by means of the categories), there remains no cognition of any object; for by means of mere intuition nothing is cogitated, and, from the existence of such or such an affection of sensibility in me, it does not follow that this affection or representation has any relation to an

object without me. But if I take away all intuition, there still remains the form of thought, that is, the mode of determining an object for the manifold of a possible intuition. Thus the categories do in some measure really extend further than sensuous intuition, inasmuch as they think objects in general, without regard to the mode (of sensibility) in which these objects are given.

The biologically human modes of sensibility need not be taken to exhaust the possibility of perceptual presence. The TV show *See* imagines a world in which a virus has genetically altered the human species so that most humans are blind. Those thought to have vision are feared as witches, but they are taken to exist. Vision is *something* even for the blind, presumably manifested through the empirical knowledge of the sighted. The sighted can accurately predict the sonic-tactile experience of the blind.

As those born blind are to the sighted, so are humans generally in relation to Saturnians. Yet it is logically possible that we could achieve a mutual sense of intending the same empirical entities.

6

Consider the sequence $\frac{1}{1}, \frac{1}{2}, \frac{1}{3}, \frac{1}{4}, \dots$. This sequence of positive numbers has 0, which is nowhere in the sequence, as its limit.

The “thing in itself” is like this limit. It is not empirically available. It is instead the limiting maximally general concept of the empirical object. Any *particular* form of perceptual presence is contingent. No “mode of sensibility” is privileged.

The “substance” of an empirical thing is “logical.” An empirical thing is potentially but indeterminately perceptually present for a possible member of the ontological forum. The “thing in itself” is the *intended* thing, independent of its *manner* of perceptual presence for those communicating.

7

The total presence of the Our-world-from-my-perspective includes non-empirical objects like “perceptions” that get recategorized as (just “my”) “hallucinations” or “dreams.” An empirical object is an intention object in this total streaming of the world which is categorized as also available to others, though from a different perspective in an enlarged sense that includes varying modes of sensory access.

8

How does God relate to a creature like a Sirian ? In Voltaire’s story, Mr. Micromégas discusses the possibility of beings with yet more senses and even longer-lived than the already god-like Sirians.

Is God something like the “limit” of the sequence

1, 2, 3, 4, ...? Technically this limit does not exist. Perhaps we can use a related metaphor. The positive real numbers can be expressed as $(0, \infty)$. This ∞ is not itself a real number, but only a convenient symbol expressing the unboundedness of the set.

God is the “infinite” empirical-linguistic ego in terms of “His” “access” to the world. But God is the *vanishing* empirical-linguistic ego in terms of our access to “Him” as empirical object. A linguistic ego that can experience everything and yet not *be* experienced as if a body with a location.

We can bring this sci-fi back to its earthly source, as Feuerbach does, and understand time-binding human rationality as dependent upon its biological hosts in general but on none of them in particular. God is the “softwhere” that “runs on” the bodies of participants in the rational community or ontological forum. The linguistic part of an empirical linguistic ego is an (finite) “idiolect” of this “softwhere.”

This ontological forum is unbounded and interplanetary. Androids might win suffrage in year 2085. Humans may begin to radically alter their own genetic material in such a variety of ways that the human species is no longer a species in the traditional sense. Voltaire’s science-fiction could even prove prescient. Visitors from distant stars could develop the ideas of Kant or Husserl.

What seems to matter most is a sense of intending the same object, independent of the varying modes of its perspectival perceptual presence. That the neo-

human and the Sirian are both convinced that the same apple is being discussed. Both are convinced that the other understands well enough what makes an object empirical in the sense of potentially perceptually present for others in the forum.

But the empirical object need not be present for all members of that form. Nor for any particular member at all times. Perceptual presence is perspectival. The relative state of the sense organs of an empirical linguistic ego are causally and therefore inferentially related to whether and how the object is perceptually present.

9

If we bend Kant in this direction, we achieve an empirical phenomenalism that emphasizes the ontological forum. This “forum” expresses what Heidegger the basic “transcendence” of “Dasein.” What we perceive is the world, not a private representation of the world. But the perceptual presence of the object does not “exhaust” the object. The object need not be more than all of its possible presencing, but it is more than any particular presencing. It endures through time, offering itself to non-human modes of sensibility.¹

¹Aspect phenomenalism analyzes this situation further.

Many thinkers before and after Kant understand the “thing in itself” in terms of its primary qualities. In particular, they prioritize *tactile* spatiality. Visual spatiality is more obviously perspectival and therefore problematic. For example, the moon fits between my finger and my thumb, if I look at it from Earth. But we all agree that no human could wrap their arms around the moon.

For these thinkers, tactile extended matter moving in space and time, both taken as “objective,” cause the phenomenal presence of both primary and secondary qualities. The motion of colorless soundless “matter” in the environment induces motion in the “brain-in-itself.” The brain-in-itself generates, as a function of this motion, a consciousness stuff which includes perceptual experience. Including the perceptual experience of brains, eyes, and apples.

Progress in physics has forced a modification of this general approach. Time and space are no longer absolute or objective. Quantum mechanics substantially desubstantialized matter. But the general framework of physical stuff generating a consciousness stuff remains dominant.

This approach, given the discussion above, is anthropocentric. Contingent forms of *human* perceptual presence are declared primary. The “transparent”

normativity of the ontological forum is situated in relatively unreal consciousness stuff. The normativity I have especially in mind is semantic and inferential.² But we should not forget the normativity that makes the scientific enterprise scientific. A scientific claim is rational or warranted rather than arbitrary. A rational belief is one that is determined by the practice of a community pursuing a normative ideal of unbiasedness (objectivity) through subjecting beliefs to criticism, pruning, and synthesis.

So the necessary is made contingent, while the contingent is made necessary. The scientific conversation which aspires to determine the “real” is placed by some in that community on the side of the unreal, on the side of mere appearance.

Our ability to intend the same object and engage in rational discussion is dissolved in “consciousness” that is “causally” generated (somehow) by the brain. By the only indirectly available brain-in-itself. This seems to imply psychologism and therefore the nullification of some rational norms that make such a projection of causality warranted or not in the first place.

The serious problems with this traditional but still popular approach are solved by an enriched post-Kantian “phenomenalism.” But this enriched phenomenalism is nothing like the subjective idealism that confuses the empirical linguistic ego with the ground of the world’s being. Not the individual “subject” but the ontological forum itself is ontology’s fundamental and

²How do humans distinguish between perceptually present but only-for-me “hallucinations” and the genuine perceptual presence of empirical objects ? They reason with themselves and one another.

necessary entity.

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Yet such enriched phenomenism is still able to shock by its rejection of consciousness stuff (Mind) and its rejection of the complementary notion of the-world-in-itself (Matter.) It does understand reality as a system of *neutral* “phenomenal streams” — which are not “Mind” and yet are structured by the beliefs of a central empirical-linguistic ego.

This “phenomenism” is just as accurately called “perspectivism.” It embraces a deflationary approach to truth. “The world in itself” is a normative ideal. This “true” world is the world as understood by the ideally objective and experienced empirical-linguistic ego. In other words, this “world in itself” is the world as “God” knows it. In both cases we have an ∞ that should not be mistaken for a real number. Phenomenism insists on the empirical, and rejects as unscientific the confusion of these idealities with “stuff in itself.”

As De Finetti explains in his paper *Probabilism*, probability is an expression of belief. It does not exist in the object except in the sense that we project it on the object. Such belief is fundamentally personal (perspectival), but those who embrace scientific normativity work with others to establish a set of shared probabilistic beliefs, which are understood to be *relatively* objective as opposed to indulgently arbitrary or “subjective.”

To sum up, the sci-fi of Voltaire and traditional theology help us understand “things in themselves” in terms of their “logistical substance” as “intendable” within the ontological forum which is presupposed by the ideal that governs rational or scientific discussion.

The empirical thing itself “transcends” any *particular* mode of its sensory given-ness. But it’s wrong to therefore project a “stuff in itself” which is independent by definition of *all possible* sensory given-ness. It is also irrationally anthropocentric to choose “primary” qualities from “consciousness” as more than pragmatically handy and declare them to “correspond” to such “stuff in itself” in a way that secondary qualities do not. For possible extraterrestrial members of the ontological forum, both primary and secondary qualities as humans understand them may not be available, and that need not matter.

What matters as a *sine qua non* is an ability to discuss or intend this or that object in the first place. This suggests that placing logic or thought itself in a “consciousness stuff” which is understood to have a contingent secondary reality is something like a performative contradiction.

Yet the motive that drives such materialism is laudable. Physicalists or materialists understand that entities are transcendent with respect to individual “subjects.” Unfortunately they misunderstand subjectivity in the same way that Berkeley did. They accept many idealist premises. They embrace the idea of

“consciousness” as a stuff but paste on a non-empirical-in-principle stuff-in-itself without being able to make sense of how “consciousness” relates to such “stuff.” They also forget to account for the validity of the normativity that enables and drives their sense-making as rational in the first place.