GOD AS SCI-FI

We can think of 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. The **essentially** "human" is not hardware (biology) but software (culture). Is it not easy to imagine today's humans editing their own genetic code while remaining human in the sense that matters to us ? Is it not at least vaguely plausible that androids could one day win the right to vote ? If they convince a majority of citizens that they are rational beings ?

THE WORLD AS FORUM

So perhaps we should speak instead of *generalized* empirical-linguistic egos. As generalized "people" we can relate to and share a world with through mostly successful conversation. This world is essentially a "forum."

Democritus argued for his atomism without noticing that the very case he made for it depended on a rational-conversational framework that it left unexplained. This "forum" or "scientific horizon" is the receding background or horizon that functions as if transparently as the quiet condition for the possibility of any theory.

REALISM VERSUS ANTIREALISM

Here's one way to frame the realism-versus-anti-realism debate: Is our rational determination of **How It Is** *part* of the world ? Or is our discussion locked outside of reality, as if we are peeping through an unbreakable window ? For the anti-realist, we are at the sense-making center of this world, whether we like it or not. We are the spider who finally discovers *itself* at the center of its ontological web. Being is (essentially) ontology. The answer, perversely, is the question.

Speculative realism revolts against this insight of critical philosophy, driven by a nostalgia for pre-Kantian, pre-critical naivety. A lust for the total and absolute transcendence of the object. But this is a lust to be free of rationality itself. A lust to speak the unspeakable.

VOLTAIRE'S INTERGALACTIC IMAGINATION

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 $\approx$ 1000 senses. The story deserves to be read in full, but here what matters is that the Sirian eventually meets some humans and talks philosophy with them.

Voltaire, way ahead of Star Trek, gives us an "essentially human" conversational partner. The traveler from Sirius has far more sense organs and manners of sensory access to the world than the humans he talks with. We can imagine Micromegas learning to identify what humans call an "apple." What is an apple for his 1000 sense organs ?

THE APPLE IN ITSELF

Despite his great advantage on humans in this matter of sensory access, Micromegas is still in the human situation with respect to the "real" apple or "the apple in itself." Some other being for even farther away may have other forms of sensory access. We could also consider intellectual access to the apple, understanding it in terms of chemistry and biology, which is to say in terms of its complex causal and inferential relations

with other empirically available objects.

The point is that there is no apriori limit on the way that apple might present itself to potential participants in the "forum" of rational beings. 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.

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 in general ?

THE INTERPERSONAL POSSIBILITY OF PERCEPTUAL PRESENCE

The empirical object is $\approx$ 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 1555 could learn about the stars as empirical objects without being able to see them, could learn that *others* can "see" them. The blind person, like the sighted, also can't touch, smell, or taste them. So the blind person has *only* "inferential access", and yet could even become a scientific expert on stars, making predictions that others could verify.

The empirical object depends on perceptual presence in general but on no particular species-specific or ego-specific "channel" of such presence. Claim: The "(empirical) thing-in-itself" is its logical-inferential role in the space of reasons as potentially perceptually present for some of its possible members.

KANT

Let's go back to a key source.

> 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.

I speculate that Kant had read Voltaire's sci-fi when he wrote this.

The biologically human modes of sensibility need not be taken to exhaust the possibility of perceptual presence. As those born blind are to the sighted, so are humans generally in relation to the "man" from Sirius. Yet it is logically possible that we could achieve a mutual sense of intending the same empirical entities. In Voltaire's story, humans are able to understand and by understood by (and amuse) the ancient, towering Sirian.

MATHEMATICAL METAPHORS

Consider the sequence $\frac{1}{1}, \frac{1}{2}, \frac{1}{3}, \frac{1}{4}, ...$ 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 merely possible member of the ontological forum. The "thing in itself" is the *intended* thing or *thing as socially-transpersonally intended*, independent of its *manner* of perceptual presence for those communicating. Of course participants can understand and reference this variation in the *way* that the object is present for others.

THE REAL AND THE UNREAL

The total presence of the the-world-from-my-perspective includes non-empirical objects like "perceptions" that get recategorized as (just "my") "hallucinations" or "dreams." An empirical object is an intentional 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. We can categorize and re-categorize. As Ayer emphasizes, all empirical statements are both theory-laden and fallible. The so-called "given" is never completely given. I can always change my mind about the status of a phenomenon. Was there really something up in the sky ? Whether or not my friends agree with me will shape whether I categorize that phenomenon as a perception or a hallucination, etc.

THE TRANSCENDENCE OF THE OBJECT

What seems to matter most is **a shared sense of intending the same object**, independent of the varying modes of its perspectival perceptual presence. But the empirical object need not be present for all members of the forum. Nor for any particular member at all times. Perceptual presence is perspectival. The relative states of the sense organs of an empirical linguistic ego are causally and therefore inferentially related to whether and how the object is perceptually present. For instance, I, stuck in human hardware, can't see the apple on the table if photons aren't banging against my retina. But the lady from Pluto has sonar, and I can be convinced of this in the same way that those born blind can be convinced that there's this thing called sight. I learn that the apple transcends my personal perspectival access to it. It's this familiar transcendence that gets amplified by some philosophers into a tantalizing but paradoxical absolute transcendence, which might be called a trans-logical or anti-rational transcendence. To me, speculative realism has both the charm and the faults of mysticism.

TACTILE SPATIALITY

Many thinkers leading up to Kant understood the "thing in itself" in terms of its "primary" qualities. In particular, they prioritized (implicitly) *tactile* spatiality. Visual spatiality was obviously perspectival therefore problematic, because this was a quest of course for the transcendent Real. 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. So Descartes' extended stuff is tactile. Newton found action at a distance creepy, because thinkers tended to take tactile chunks of matter colliding as the fundamental reality, as what lurked outside The Matrix of phenomenal experience as its substrate or skeleton.

For them, the motion of colorless soundless "Matter" in the environment induces mo-

tion in the "brain-in-itself." Then this brain-in-itself generates, as a function of such motion, a Mysterious Consciousness Stuff that includes perceptual experience that the unlettered take for reality itself. So runs their tale, even if this tale frames the evidence they need for the case they make for it on the side of illusion. For such indirect realism *takes for granted* (in a naive-realist way) the perceptual experience of brains, eyes, and apples.

WHY

Given how weak indirect realism is as an ontological theory, the question becomes: Why was it so popular ? Why is it so popular still, among the few who bother with such issues ? It helped natural science, for it was a useful way to think about dead stuff. The ideology that only mathematizable primary qualities were real only made physical science more glamorous and exciting. If objectivity was conflated with radically transcendent objects, this was harmless enough and maybe even useful in the local context. I remember being a kid in grammar school who took to physics and biology, and I adopted in the usual naive way the idea that here finally was the "real" "theology," the transcendent secret knowledge. Now it's easier to see that humans will worship black box oracles if they help us find oil or the rare earth minerals we need to crank out Teslas. The prestige of physics is technological and economic on the one hand and a Monet distance-effect mathematical mysticism on the other. Which I say as a fan.