Here's the promised informal elaboration of my "ontology." I see myself as a phenomenologist providing a **foregrounding description** of the basics of our situation.

1

The **ontological forum** is the minimal concept of our situation which is tacitly presupposed by **rational** inquiry. I also call this the **ontological horizon.**

This forum is the world in which ontologists find themselves. The world they share, the world they discuss. The language they use to discuss this world is understood here as part of that world.

It is the place of assembly. The agora, the marketplace, the theatre. *All the world's a stage.* Existence is "thrown" into the forum, into a public space, a public logic, a public collection of acceptable roles to play, heroic poses, of "ego-ideals." Heidegger calls this "interpretedness."

2

I've focused **not** on the entire world, which might be called "the big forum," but only on the little sub-forum of those who understand themselves to be critical thinkers, to be "rational" or "scientific." I understand "ontology" to be, basically, a rational inquiry into the basics of our situation. It offers a "big picture." My personal approach to ontology is phenomenological, which means that I try to foregroundingly articulate, merely bring out what is latent in the background, in the scenery. What we already know without knowing that we know it. But all "rationality-identified" ontology is included. This paraphrase of Karl-Otto Apel from Encylopedia.com sketches the governing ideal of this tradition.

> [A] participant in a genuine argument is at the same time a member of a counterfactual, ideal communication community that is in principle equally open to all speakers and that excludes all force except the force of the better argument. Any claim to intersubjectively valid knowledge (scientific or moral-practical) implicitly acknowledges this ideal communication community as a metainstitution of rational argumentation, to be its ultimate source of justification.

Within our ontological forum, a person might **argue** that "only as phenomenology is ontology possible." The related adjective *forensic* refers to courts of law. And, indeed, one makes a case for claims in such a forum.

Specifying the character of this "force of the better argument" is something done within the very forum that is already governed by this yet unelucidated force.

3

The ontological forum is the public space in which that same forum is discussed, articulated, illuminated. The forum is, after all, what **is.** The space involved here is a

"space of reasons" (Sellars.)

> The essential point is that in characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.

Justification is normative. Knowing is normative. We ontologists aspire to settle our beliefs "rationally." We share a meaningful, normative "space."

4

We can specify this forum by eliminating or excluding both logical and performative contradictions. For instance, communication is possible in the forum because it's a performative contradiction to say that communication is not possible. We can also "safely" rule out the possibility that everyone but me is a P-zombie, an NPC without sentience.

Let me emphasize that the psychological possibility of crippling doubt is not being denied here. A person can have a genuine solipsistic crisis, lose faith in language, etc. But expressing this crisis would not count as ontology. Because the assertion of this crisis-skepticism denies this or that condition for the possibility of the rational specification of how it is (the rational, critical-cooperative settling of a system of beliefs.)

To offer a belief for consideration *as an ontologist* is to make a case for it in the "forensic" context. An offered theory that implies its own impossibility is absurd. It should be emphasized that many popular theories imply their own impossibility. Usually without this being noticed by those who hold and make a case for these self-subverting beliefs. Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (especially the first book) is a great resource on this topic. He offers psychologism as a self-subverting interpretation of logic. To summarize, the typical mistake is an attempted reduction of the normative which of course has to appeal to that same reduced normativity to make its case.

5

Back to phenomenology. Which I understood as "anti-speculative" and "anti-constructive" **foregrounding description.** *Phenomenological* ontology is the kind that just wants to shine a light on what is already all around us. Or, different metaphor, to draw back a curtain. We tend to not see that which is too close. Fish don't see the water. People don't see the basic context in which they normally just live. For me the genuine bracketing involves a suspension of our default, practical orientation. The phenomenologist perversely focuses not on what is given (the practically relevant object) but the context in which it is given —the way, for instance, that spatial objects are given only in/as a series of aspects. The alternative phrasing, **ontological *horizon***, emphasizes the way that our own rationality tends to recede into the scenery and function transparently.

6

What are the consequences of the foregrounding of this horizon ? Ontology itself becomes its own necessary object. Or it recognizes itself as necessarily at the center of the web it weaves. Any story of the world has to make sense of the telling of that story. That story, inasmuch as it is ontological, is a warranted or rationally developed story. An ontologist has to include the possibility of that rational story's genesis in his or her larger story of the world as a whole.

This is a serious problem for reductive theories. To say that the world is essentially "atoms and void" is to leave the possibility of **saying so** unexplained. What is the status of the meaning of this assertion itself ? Is atomism, as a theory, *itself* made of atoms ? Is atomism a bundle of atoms in the void ? Perhaps it is a complicated equivalence class of such bundles of atoms ? But what then is an equivalence class ?

One challenge for atomism is the construction from such atoms of the forum (essentially a space of reasons) in which a plausible case can be made for atomism in the first place.

Another challenge is the explanation of sensory qualities.

> Sweet exists by convention, bitter by convention, colour by convention; atoms and Void [alone] exist in reality.

Mach might tease Democritus with the suggestion that atomsare atoms by convention. In general, arguments against such crude reductivism will tend to remind the reductionist of their dependence on that same forum which they unaddressed in their presentation of a truly real — and often "independent" — substrate.

7

The forum is self-articulating, self-describing. The essence of this ontological forum is the "Conversation." Its cooperative-adversarial determination of its own character. For instance, we always have some pre-ontological understanding of what it means to be rational, or we could not do ontology in the first place. But a central task for ontology is to further determine or illuminate just what this rationality **is.** Ontology in this sense seeks to define itself. To know itself. The Conversation might be called a "self-thinking god."

8

To be "in" the forum is to speak a language. To intend public entities. Logic is essentially transpersonal or prepersonal. Language is deeper than surface expressions of selfhood. I am "we" as a condition for the possibility of being a "me."

I emphasize this point to present our mortal bodies, metaphorically, as "hosts" for the Conversation. Thin clients, computing the next move. Waves move through water. Memes move through talking primates. We even tend to identify with the virus rather than the host. I am the virus and not this body that it experiences as a prison or a sinking ship.

9

The Conversation is time-binding. It is an individual writ large, for the individual is of course time-binding. I remember and anticipate and act in terms of that remembrance. Culture is (memetic) sediment. To be thrown into the forum is to be thrown into such sediment, such interpretedness. Into the way things are done around here. Into the who of everyday existence. Into the default (pre-)personality.

The forum is a "form of life". It includes a vague, default understanding of the world (of the forum). This includes our place or role in this forum (on this stage.)

The "theory of the forum" presented here is also a "dramaturgical ontology." "All the worlds a stage."

10

Dramaturgical ontology, at least as I've presented it before, also emphasizes that the world is given "first-personally." The forum only exists in/as I-centered aspects. The point is that this very complex thing, an entire personality, plays an absolutely fundamental role.

Transpersonal logic glues together the-world-for-Jack and the-world-for-Jill. It allows us to intend the same worldly entities, even though we only get (in some sense **are**) different aspects or moments of these same entities. I go into this more in my papers on "neutral phenomenalism." Basically a nondual theory, tho very much a secular and non-mystified version. I know that "nondual" is a word pretty much owned by incense sniffers. But I can't omit a fundamental virtue of neutral phenomenalism —that it solves the mind-matter issue. Or at least reduces the semantic dissonance.