

IMMATERIALISM

1

One more *ism*. This time synonymous with phenomenism. Immaterialism is phenomenism, or perhaps *neo*-phenomenism. Phenomenism *after* phenomenology. But seen to be its basis. Which is anti-representational (anti-dualist) immaterialism. Merriam-Webster gives *a philosophical theory that material things have no reality except as mental perceptions*, which misses the point entirely. Right without left, north without south. “Mental perceptions.” Enduring confusion.

2

Experiment. Start with indirect realism. Assume that perception is private “mental” representation. “In” “consciousness” perhaps. Now insist that the represented stuff does not exist. Of course the indirect realist can only pity you, for representation *implies* the existence of the represented. As left implies right and north south. Of course.

But Dr. Merriam Webster is missing the point. Immaterialism is anti-representationalism. Is anti-the-entire-framework. Is anti the founding *metaphor* of indirect realism. To deny Matter (I don't mean the matter of the physicists) is to deny Mind. To throw out north is to throw out south.

The representationalist (the indirect realist) is parked on this metaphor. But not as a considered and justified metaphor. But rather as too obvious to even be *noticed*. The contingent is taken to be necessary. “A picture held us captive.”

3

Phenomenology is sometimes understood anemically as merely the science of representative consciousness *as such*. In the worst case, ontologically speaking, as a representationalism that ignores the represented. Cares about “consciousness.” As if detached from what it represents. The object as it appears, as distinguished from what or whether it really is.

This ontologically anemic philosophy is still better than nothing. It at least *notices* the lifeworld. Even if it vaguely understands it as the crust of a substrate. The icing on a Substance cake. This kind of phenomenology can even afford to be literary, hermeneutic. Though trapped within parentheses. The suspension of metaphysics ? No. For the assumption that there *is* Consciousness (capitalized to mock the mystification) is a massive ontological assumption. The first step is wrong. The beginning is also the end.

4

Consciousness and Matter. Representation and represented. Might be Kant’s infinitely dark Matter. Might be the scrolling green source code of *The Matrix*. Might be Primary Quality. A curator’s careful selection from Sellars’ scientific image. The image of an image. But Sellars, bless his art, emphasized the space of reasons, the ontological forum. And to recognize this ontological forum, which is also an ontological horizon in the sense of background, is to start to escape from a metaphor with all the sense and dignity of a round square.

5

Another helpful *ism*. This time it's obscure, possibly a term I can be blamed for. Aspectualism. Which is a phenomenism. Which is an immaterialism. Different names for the same idea that highlight this or that aspect of that idea. A visual metaphor for visual creatures. One that can and should and will be generalized into a forbidding term. But let us climb this disposable ladder.

6

Aspectualism rejects the concept of consciousness. I mean of course its ontological use, not its use by anesthesiologists or attorneys for the accused. Rejects it as some primary substance. In relation to some other primary substance.

Let us recall Dr. Merriam Webster's "mental perceptions." Which seems to imply that perceptions are *in* consciousness. Or perhaps "are" consciousness. Concept-cookie-cuttered Qualia. That handwaving-somehow represents "uncircumsliced" Reality. The original sin of indirect realism. The stiffnecked unwitting assumption that perception is representation. Because, perhaps, it looks different from here than there.

Surely the object itself isn't changed by me walking around it. So what I see, since it changes, can't be the object. Now this at least is an *argument* for the representational metaphor. Maybe one of the better ones.

A cheaper argument, initially more convincing, is just our commonsense about the way that eyes and nerves and brains work. If one assumes that human being is really just a sponge in the dark. If one sees the wires leading into its isolated control room. If one assumes (without justification, to put it mildly) that uncircum-

sliced reality is really Information transmitted by content-neutral electrical pulses. It seems reasonable. Until one realizes that this commonsense is absolute founded on a tacit direct realism. On trusting the senses to report their untrustworthiness.

An relatively honest direct realist might at least sweat a little at this point. And switch into a choosy Motte and Bailey strategy. As if there is a continuum that runs from naive realism to indirect realism. Which is reminiscent of primary qualities versus secondary qualities. Long ago blasted by Berkeley. A bad philosopher in some of his positive claims but strong in his negative mode. I take J. S. Mill's phenomenalism to fixed Berkeley's, which only then deserves the name of phenomenalism. For Berkeley's Matter was God.

Spoiler alert. The real object does "unfold" itself in or through time. This or that aspect is never *all* of the object. But the object is not more or other than these aspects. If, that is, we generalize this visual-spatial metaphor. The object, from moment to moment, can look different, smell different, whatever different. It "gives" itself differently as it unfolds. I can walk around a table. I can get to know Joe over the years. I can deepen my understanding of Samuel Johnson. Entities enduring through or over time. The same entity is different from moment to moment.

But logically it is the same entity. Same river, different water. So instead of aspects we can switch to talking about *moments*. The moments of an enduring, unfolding entity. An entity that "needs time" in order to show itself, give itself. The thing, the object, the entity. It's not other than its moments taken as a whole. It's not hidden behind, except in the sense that one aspect can occlude another. I can't normally see both side of a coin at once. The coin needs time in order to show itself. I turn it around in my hand, the enduring coin.

The entity is the logical synthesis of its moments. Actual and possible moments. A logical synthesis is a temporal synthesis. And an interpersonal synthesis. We live together in language, ourselves intensely temporal creatures. Consider Brandom's understanding of the subject as the locus of responsibility in a regime of scorekeeping. The ontological forum.

Properly understood, this alone suffices to free us from the representational metaphor. The issue of reference. Husserl's excellent work in *Logical Investigations*. I intend always a object in *the* world. The rest is performative contradiction. Tho it's surprising how easily philosophers miss this. The condition of their own possibility. The assumption at the base of the philosophic pose or project. For surely one is talking about the world, even to say that it cannot be talked about. That it does not exist.

7

Which takes us back to the absurd dictionary definition of immaterialism. If perception is mental (and presumably private), then such "subjective idealism" is *of course* ridiculous. And that's the comedy. The representationalist is an inconsistent subjective idealist. Accepting the premise. Denying the consequence. Saved only by the worldly uselessness of ontology. Typical case: pieces of the scientific image are declared Real. The rest is Representation. But (as shown long ago) the Real is just a selection from Representation. At least Kant left the Real in total darkness, aware at least of this pitfall. Presumably stuck in premise of subjective idealism. But too serious a person to like it.

8

Wittgenstein is a genuine immaterialist in his *TLP*. Which, it seems to me, is not generally recognized. His excellent later

work still manages to lead fanboys into the tedious tendencies catalogued by Gellner. Because it's fuzzy and easy. And vaguely profound. But in a folksy way. But the early stuff, which might get this or that point wrong, gets the fundamental things right. Maybe influenced by James. And/or Mach.