

–I say *we don't seek truth*. And I know this might sound like relativism. But it's the mystification of truth that *makes* it sound like relativism. All beliefs are not equal. This demystification of truth goes back at least to Frege, arguably to Peirce.

–Inquiry, ontological conversation, is about improving one's opinions, theories, beliefs about the world.

–Yes. The world as our shared situation. The world as forum. Ontology specifies the world. But a minimal concept of the world is presupposed. We are here together discussing how it is, how *our* world is.

–The shared world.

–Right. And that's redundant for emphasis. Logic is essentially “transpersonal”. It's a performative contradiction to deny this. The ontological forum, this place of assembly, which is both the setting and our language, is always already assumed by anyone trying to be rational or scientific.

–I can deny it in the sense I doubt it. I am not convinced. But *I can't make a case for* that denial. Not without performative contradiction.

–Exactly. You can't argue that I'm wrong about the world if you deny that we are in the world and “in logic” together.

–But I can insist, for instance, on an irreducible ambiguity in our communication.

–Sure. Tho the more ambiguity you insist on, the less I know what you mean by such ambiguity. But there is a decisive difference between the claim the communication is imperfect and the claim that it is impossible.

–Aren't these points almost tautological ?

–I think so. And that's ontology generally maybe. We might also speak of quasi-tautologies, assertions that become tautologies once you understand them.

–And you understand them, perhaps, by seeing new aspects of familiar concepts.

–Exactly. So Wittgenstein’s “nonsense” in the *TLP* was only nonsense in the sense of tautology. “Once you understand me, these claims are seen to not be empirical or informative. Yet their transformation, for you the reader, from suggestive opacities to tautologies is insight.”

–What is that progress ?

–I’m tempted to invoke a harmonization of basic concepts. Cognitive dissonance is reduced. There is a special kind of pleasure in that. Comparable maybe to understanding a theorem in mathematics.

–But outsiders aren’t impressed.

–This stuff is like a difficult genre of poetry. Related to math but with unlimited access to analogy or metaphor. I love math, but ontology (or whatever you want to call it) is deeper and more seductive. And ontology includes math, decides the meaning of math. Which does not mean that ontology is going to maximize throughput.

–Because the goal is subjective. An experience of clarity.

–Yeah. Tact, taste, sensitivity to semantic and inferential norms. I suspect that those good at it are clever enough to have done something more profitable, but they are fatefully in love with digging into the most basic concepts.

–The moist basic concepts.

–Yeah.

### 3

–So philosophers, phenomenologists, ontologists. Whatever you want to call them. Foreground what lurks in the background.

–That’s it. They generate tautologies-in-retrospect.

–Let’s try to apply this to your seemingly far out phenomenism.

–Sure. The “world of experience” —just the world for those not corrupted by a particular theoretical tradition —is given as or has the form of many streams of that experience.

–So my life and your life and his life and her life.

–Right. Life. What life is like. And what life is like for the squirrel

outside my window too.

–Are you saying the world of experience is *made of* experience ?

–That’s a good place to take off but not a good place to land.

–Why a good place to start ?

–Because I do want to talk about the world in its blazing plenitude, the total context of life. Everything. Mountains and skyscrapers but also thoughts and feelings and novels and philosophers and insurance policies. The way it all sticks and flows together. The unreduced world that we find ourselves thrown into.

–All of this is “made of experience” in the sense that the world “happens” to me. It surrounds me. I am in it, at the center.

–Exactly. Exactly. You are thrown into the middle of this vast world, with things to do, a person to be. A protagonist who did not volunteer.

–So “experience” gets this “first-person shape” of the world right.

–Yes. And this is why people like idealism. It’s so obvious that the world is *my* world. It streams through my eyes and ears. It is suffused with my feelings, my belief. I am its occasionally unwilling nucleus.

–The problem is, of course, that you are not the protagonist of *my world over here*.

–Yes. That’s the problem. It’s our shared world, and yet we are both at the center of it. And I suppose my ontological artistry is not going to appeal to anyone who can’t follow me at least this far.

4

–So we all share the same world, but we all each find ourselves at the center of it. Our world, it seems to me, streams in through my eyes. Or do I call them “mine” *because* the world streams through them ?

–Let’s set that excellent question aside for a moment. I like how you put that. Our world streams in through *my* eyes —and ears, and nose, and skin, and tongue, and so on. And everyone is in this same basic situation.

–So it seems. So most of us believe, I think.

–Which is good for me. Because I am only trying to foreground what we don't usually notice lurking the background.

–So do we all get a private version of the world ?

–Now, as I see it, we come upon a fork in the road. My answer is yes. But yes how ?

–I'm guessing that we have arrived at the choice between aspect and representation.

–Yes. And the theoretical types have normally taken the wrong path, albeit for understandable reasons.

–Representation.

–Yes. The wrong path.

–So you say that our private version of the world, which you agree that we have, is *not*, however, a representation.

–Correct.

–But, according to you, representation is the popular choice.

–Yes.

–Could you sum up this representationalism ?

–Sure. It's sometimes called indirect realism. Basically you never see the actual thing (the apple). Instead what you have is only an image thrown up by the brain.

–An image that represents the real apple.

–Right.

–The image is mental. The apple is what ?

–That varies. For some the apple is made of physics stuff. For others it is undetermined.

–The physical stuff apple is molecules, etc.

–Right. And I think apples are made of molecules. But I also think it's the red apple that we experience and enjoy that is also made of molecules.

–You believe in one apple.

–Exactly. I don’t double the apple. The apple for physics is the same apple that is also red for people with normal eyesight.

–Is your red enjoyable apple, which is made of molecules, also thrown up by the brain ?

–No. Of course the brain is causally related to my perception of the apple. But, despite the temptation of this physiological triviality, there is just one apple.

–How are you so sure ?

–Logic. We trivially discuss *the* apple. But we can also deflate the physiological “argument” (red herring.) The brain that supposedly dreams up the second, mental apple is itself in the same situation of this mental apple. For the indirect realist, the brain dreams up itself. The brain is self-caused like God. And I can’t help but mention the theological passion in the attempt to neutralize the lifeworld, convert it into an illusion. Reminds me Feuerbach’s analysis in *The Essence of Christianity*.

–I can feel your frustration.

–I’m an artist, a musician. Bad ontology offends me. But it’s a pleasure to have something to criticize, something to fix. And maybe there’s also a self-assertion in calling out what feels like a masochistic self-alienation. A perverse worship of dead stuff, if only it will allow access to Truth.

5

–So we are getting existential and psychological.

–So it seems.

–So the dead stuff is the real physical apple.

–Right. A theory that makes sense in the lifeworld and helps us navigate it is projected *under* the lifeworld, to function as a truth-making substrate. Despite the absurdity of this projection, it works itself in as a latent metaphor.

–And you’ve said elsewhere that you were taken in yourself.

–Yes. I loved science as a child. I was good at it. And I thought I was getting esoteric knowledge of what things *really* were. Atoms and

void, of course, in a metaphorical sense that allows for versions popular today.

–So physics and biology classes got you behind the illusions of everyday life.

–Of the lifeworld. Yes. And the same attitude thinks that love is really just oxytocin. Everything vivid and juicy is really something gray and made of machine-precision legos. All electrons are the same. All water molecules are the same. I mention this because I think it's tangled up with the reductive motivation.

–It has a certain beauty. Like music made from 12 tones.

–Yes. It has a theological beauty. And a mathematical beauty. And, boring as it is to say, I love physics and biology and math. More than most, I think.

–But you won't betray philosophy ?

–Right. Call it what you want. I like "ontology" lately. But, as a person at the center of your "private version" of the world, you have to make sense of it as a totality. This *sense-making itself* is perhaps what is most difficult to make sense of.

–So ontology is always still trying to figure out what ontology is.

–Yes. And one might joke that being *is* ontology. In other words, the world has the form of a creature at the center of it trying to make sense of it.

## 6

–You mention that the second apple, the physical apple for the indirect realist, offered the possibility of Truth.

–Right. And I didn't stress that there is only *one* physical apple. We can each have a private representation (most of them red and enjoyable), but all of these are representations of the same single physical apple.

–And this real physical apple makes our statements true or false.

–Exactly. Whether we can know which, statements about the apple are either true or false. They are true if they "agree" with the state of the physical apple.

–So representationalism (indirect realism) gives us a single physical truth-making entity. “Behind” or somehow causing a private representation in each of us.

–Right. That’s the basically incoherent story. I should add that as a disclaimer. It’s like talking about the rational square root of 2. You might trust, before you’ve studied the issue, that there’s a solid referent for that phrase. But there is not. So I am in the weird position of explained what amounts to nonsense.

–So the physical apple is an absurdity ?

–Only when understood as a second apple. As apart from the familiar apple.

–So a physicist studies the apples of experience ?

–Exactly. I might say *of course*, but I’ve met too many people who think that physics gives us esoteric knowledge. They enjoy the thought of themselves as scientific, but they abandon empiricism without even noticing it. The mathematical models are so sexy that I understand. The math is so a-sensual, so logical. As if on another plane. And we might say that it’s on another channel. Or that it’s another layer. Like the apple’s taste and color are on separate channels, in some sense. Well our theoretical physics knowledge about the apple is one more layer. Concept is part of the total experience of the apple.

–Husserl makes a similar point in *Ideas*.

–Yes. You might say that I’m giving a longwinded version that doesn’t ask as much from my readers.

7

–This is a digression, but is it fun, tedious, or what ? to switch into that mode ? Of rehashing what is tautological for you at this point.

–It can be tedious. I think it’s more fun to express my ideas as compactly as possible, with fresh metaphors. But I want to be understood.

–Will making it accessible make it less attractive ?

–Maybe. There’s definitely a perverse mystique effect where authors can be rewarded for their ambiguity. I tend to think of it as a decadent

taste. But I should stress that dense, technical writing is not guilty automatically of intentional ambiguity. Some stuff is just hard to understand. Maybe it's complex. But, with philosophy, it might just be revolutionary.

–Can you explain this second situation ?

–Revolutionary ? Sure. A change in metaphor can be revolutionary. Moving from representation to aspect is difficult. It took me years to get it, though my eyes had scanned over the crucial influences years before.

–For example ?

–Like James writing that consciousness does not exist. That one line, properly understood, is a revolution.

–And that's equivalent to choosing aspect over representation ?

–Yes. Objects are shattered into aspects (or moments.) And the world itself is shattered into neutral phenomenal streams of such aspects. Consciousness does not exist because consciousness and world are fused together. You end up with neutral streams of the world, though with that shape of having a thrown self at the center making sense of it.

–So it has what is good about idealism.

–Right. Without private bubbles. Each stream has a certain privacy. That's built in to the stream metaphor. But the stream is no more self than world or world than self. An I-centered streaming aspect of the world. But I should save my breath for new analogies.

–You don't expect to change your mind on this ?

–I can't be sure. But let me try to sketch my situation for you. Imagine that you have a big noisy machine that doesn't work very well. It's made of various parts that don't reliably cooperate.

–OK.

–Now imagine that you take this machine apart, throw out about half of the parts, and use the remainder to rebuild a much smaller machine that hums and seems to work perfectly.

–You don't let something like that go.



–Right. It’s annoying for me to say so, but I think only one person that I actually talk to gets it. I mean people will criticize it, or try to, but in a way that indicates they don’t even see it yet.

–So you are alone with a beautiful idea.

–Yes. Almost alone. But less alone when I find this idea in Mill, Mach, Heidegger, Husserl. Different versions or flavors of it maybe. But the same nondual neutral triumph over the old confusion. And it’s clear to me, as I probably waste my substance on Reddit, than very few members of my pretentious brotherhood do escape from the old confusion.

–Indirect realism.

–Yeah. Physicalism. Speculative realism. All the physics bro stuff that doesn’t even see the ontological forum. A very weird style of irrationalism. A cargo-cult scientific numerological irrationalism.

–Strong words.

–I know. But you should see how strange r/consciousness is. Sci-fi, mysticism, science journalism. The credentialed gurus of the day. Kastrup, Hoffman, Vervaeke. Hard science credentials. But as if an excuse to start a religion.

–Playing the long game.

–Yeah. And, to be fair, people want a religion. So I am stubborn to work at an ontology that doesn’t scratch where most people itch. Because it scratches where I itch.

–Which is how it’s like pure math.

–Right.

–What do you think about those gurus ?

–I don’t dislike them personally. Kastrup is too idealistic. Hoffman is lost in the usual problems with indirect realism (that it depends on direct realism.) Vervaeke might be more grounded. He likes Heidegger.

But my impression is that he's drawing in all the spiritualists and giving them a less embarrassing jargon.

—An excuse to feel scientific ?

—Yeah. Scientific cover.

—But you don't believe in truth.

—That's right. So science for me is (to oversimplify) a style of managing beliefs.

—Spiritualists are just too sloppy, I presume.

—Yeah. I can imagine stylish ways to be spiritual, but I don't usually see them. Maybe because the legit spiritual types, as I conceive them, don't lose themselves in a performative contradiction. Vervaeke and Kastrup are both viewed in political terms, as maybe founding a new religion that will save us from blah blah blah.

—Is that worse than the later Heidegger ?

—“Only a god can save us.” The way that I understand that, I'd say that Heidegger wasn't “guilty” (in that statement) of a spiritualistic optimism. Though I agree that the later Heidegger and the crisis Husserl project themselves, to some degree, as gurus or saviors or as John the Baptist figures.

—Which you don't like.

—It's not my style. I'm more mathematical. Articulate the “theorems.” But I don't solve the problem of life for you. I work in a genre. I try to constrain the future. Describe the general situation. The wheel is also a zero.

—For hevel and hevel amen.

—Moist entirelessly without substance. And that's part of the charm of phenomenism, already in Mill. *No matter*. This already implies that “being is time.”

—And time is the fire in which we burn.

—And the nothingness of every entity.

—No substance beneath or outside of the phenomenal stream.

—Right. So we might call this world a dream if we weren't all dreaming

it together.