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–Physicalism is a vague update of materialism. It's such bad philosophy that it has to serve some cultural purpose.

–I know that Lenin wrote that book against Mach.

–Exactly. And Sartre talks about how much Serious people like materialism.

2

I like your idea. So this first letter will be indulgent. I will keep my word as be as honest as I can manage.

In your letter you ask me if I ever think/feel that lots of philosophy is inferior to philosophical novels, etc. Absolutely.

I'll be shameless with you and say that I have learned some things from philosophy. And mostly it's a matter of noticing things. So I am not repeating some mantra from a book. I can see these factors or aspects of experience that were always there and continue to be there. I suspect this sounds mystical, and there is some sad humor in that, because it's opposite of mystical. I admit that I like to come up with a fine phrase. Recently it was *ontological horizon*. Most people don't use the word ontological at all, and most people aren't used to horizon being used as a metaphor for the background. But let me define ontology as a rational discuss of **what's going on**, of **how it is**. And I mean the big picture, the foundational.

What is the background then of this ontological discussion of what the fuck is going on around here ? In the most or even moist general or genital sense. I kid. What is the staging or the scenery of this very discussion ? In which we will play at being philosophers. In which we hold ourselves responsible to one another to make a case, adjust course if shown to be in error or incoherent, etc ? That is part of it right there. Rationality is an ethical notion. Ontology presupposes the normative. I mean ontology understood as a self-consciousness rational project. Even if children have already wild theories about what's going on, that creativity is important, yes, but not sufficient yet for ontological in the proper sense. That proper sense is described by Popper. Basically it's science in the most general sense. And science is a second-order

tradition, a belief about the way to develop beliefs. This tradition tends to have some developed beliefs already available. Like for us it's Plato and Hegel and so on. And deeper than that is just our enculturation, or having been trained into civilization. You have to learn to wipe your ass and say please before you can become a philosopher.

You also, and this is not so easy, have to "suffer the enlightenment." You have to become scientific, and that means identifying with the tradition. And members of this tradition hold only the tradition sacred. All other beliefs are subject to criticism. We let our beliefs do our dying for us. They die so we don't have to. While non-scientists have first-order myths, the scientist has a second-order myth, a myth that governs the use of myths. Funny way to put it, but science is "monotheistic" in a metaphorical sense. Autonomous creative-critical thinking. Like Emerson holding only his own mind sacred. But what that means is the rationality in that mind. Demanding proof, justification. Not just passively being led. There's an ideal sociality in all of this. You and I can be working on different pet theories, and we are going to have primitive first-order attachments. But we pride ourselves on deferring to the better reason. Or at least on trying to do so. This ideal communication community is the goal. Actual communities will always be scratched and bent.

So we've got this normative rationality. We also must have a language to discuss the world with. And it'll help if we actually live in the same world. If any of this is lacking, then ontology isn't available in this location, right? And rationality and world and language are all aspects of the same Situation. I like **lifeworld** for this. We all know this lifeworld. It's where we live. It's where we decide that maybe we could be a philosopher to. And then there's the role play with other humans, enacting the philosopher.

But part of the tradition, which we tend to find ourselves aping, is the skeptical challenge. Is this all a dream created by a demon? Or is it mediation or image of a real world that I can never have directly? And the people argue that all we know is the representation or the dream, so that we can't be sure that there is a world with other people who actually experience and have souls. And so on. And some of this is silly, but I insist that it is at connected to something vitally important. And this is why the ontological horizon is worth pointing out. Basically the skeptics are right on the "first-person-ness" of reality, but they are

wrong that what is experience is a representation or a private dream.

The skeptic and the relativist have identities that don't cohere. They offer a theory of knowledge according to which such a theory of knowledge is impossible or invalid. But they wrap up this simple structure in words that obscure the self-cancellation. And I was rocking a version of radical pragmatism once that now partially embarrasses me. I tried to deal with the issue even then, but there was still a performative contradiction, a mixed-message in my total comportment or dramatic avatar (my whole existential role among the others in the conversation.) I was less aware of what I was up to. We can call it the hero image or the ego ideal of whatever you want. It's the basic attitude or approach that structures (fills with content) a particular "performance of virtue."

For example, paradoxical skeptical types are earnestly attached to a (positive) theory of knowledge. They, like all of us, are more believer than doubter. Determinate personality "is" belief or manifests in the intellectual dimension as a final vocabulary, a basic approach, etc. But this particular Kantian type is self-deceived by the **surface** epistemic humility of their position. It's this same type of person who doesn't even see the decisive anti-skeptical significant of the ontological horizon. Basically we are talking about conspiracy theorists, who think they are great skeptics because they are willing to doubt what everybody knows. That is philosophically laudable. But then they accept rumors uncritically. And the motive is usually clear, a kind of anti-worldly resentment and the flattering sense of being in on the great secret. Wisdom is folly. The first are last.