

1

What is Mill up to with his phenomenalism ? He is best understood as a demystifier. *What, if anything, is this so-called matter?*

We mean, that there is concerned in our perceptions something which exists when we are not thinking of it; which existed before we had ever thought of it, and would exist if we were annihilated; and further, that there exist things which we never saw, touched, or otherwise perceived, and things which never have been perceived by man. This idea of something which is distinguished from our fleeting impressions by what, in Kantian language, is called Perdurability; something which is fixed and the same, while our impressions vary; something which exists whether we are aware of it or not, and which is always square (or of some other given figure) whether it appears to us square or round—constitutes altogether our idea of external substance. Whoever can assign an origin to this complex conception, has accounted for what we mean by the belief in matter.

2

Mill doesn't want to project a useless, confusing *stuff* "behind" the properties mentioned above.

The log which I saw on the fire an hour ago, has been consumed and has disappeared when I look again; the Possibilities of Sensation which I called by that name, are possibilities no longer. The ice which I placed in front of the fire at the same time, is now water; such Possibilities of Sensation as form part of the groups called ice and not of the groups called water, have ceased and given place to others. All this is intelligible without supposing the wood, the ice, or the water, to be anything underneath or beyond Permanent Possibilities of Sensation.

3

The concept of possibility hints at inferentialism. Ice is a clump of potential sensations. So is water. One clump, ice, can become another clump, water. Given, for instance, the proximity of another clump, fire. So a crucial possibility in the clump known as ice involves sensation only indirectly, and this is of course the possibility of its becoming another type of thing, a new clump of new sensation possibilities, like water or steam. And this new clump it has become includes its own new relational or transformational possibilities. Water may become ice again.

Mill is trying to show that nothing deep or hidden is required. The meaning of the existence of things is founded in experience.

4

Mill's focus on sensation is potentially misleading. It even looks primitive to those who have "seen the lifeworld" with the help of phenomenology.

But we can read Mill charitably. To stick with sensation is to emphasize the *essential* "for-person-ness" of the world. Indirect realism tends to take the extra-phenomenal aperspectival being of the object for granted. In a strange blindness to such an anti-empirical move, it doesn't even see the issue. The "pre-empirical" object is "axiomatically" given, and it's only sentient perception of that object that poses a problem. Indeed, the problem becomes explaining the "consciousness" of a representation of the object, as something separate, in terms of the somehow represented object.

5

This is perhaps because *logic is transperspectival*. I intend the object not only to "collect" (unify) its moments for me, but also to collect its moments for you. The object collects or synthesizes what are, for just that reason, its manifestations, appearings, aspects, moments. The object is a temporal and interpersonal synthesis. This is not presented as an empirical hypothesis but rather as a making explicit of what is and has always been going on in our discussions of the world.

The ontological forum is initially transparent. By “transparent” I mean *hidden in plain sight*. As fish are said to not see the water they swim in, ontologists have often “looked right through” the conditions that enable ontology.

Logic itself, if noticed at all, is initially understood as “outside of the object.” This even makes sense in certain practical discussions, where the relevant perceptual objects “don’t care” what we think of them. The soil isn’t plowed by the mere thought of plowing. The situation isn’t molested by the mere consideration of that situation.

6

This tempts us to a theory of a stuff that is somehow more than the “regularity” offered by phenomenalism.

In fact, almost all philosophers who have narrowly examined the subject, have decided that Substance need only be postulated as a support for phenomena, or as a bond of connexion to hold a group or series of otherwise unconnected phenomena together: let us only, then, think away the support, and suppose the phenomena to remain, and to be held together in the same groups and series by some other agency, *or without any agency but an internal law*, and every consequence follows without Substance, for the sake of which Substance was assumed.

Can we solve this mystery, reduce this confusion, by supposing that substance is logical? To say “logical” is to say “conceptual” or “semantic.” It is not so easy to say what saying is. Belief is “the structure” of a continuum (of a streaming aspect of the world.) We are “immersed” in “significance.”

In other words, perception gives us entities in an “immediate” way. I see the chair, not planes of color, etc. Or, more technically, I take an aspect of the chair as the chair, and I can analyze this experience so that the chair being given through an aspect becomes thematic. “Logic pervades the world.” I see the chair “as” a temporal and interpersonal unity. As a chair that you might see, that we can discuss. Yet we both know that we never see this “same” chair also in the same (exact) way. In other words, we only see the same chair *through* different aspects or moments of that chair.

We understand that the chair continues to “offer” aspects or moments of itself to others. We understand that the chair may outlast us. Even if the chair burns away, we can continue to discuss it, think of it differently. Even burned away, the chair remains a transcendent object that can reveal more itself. In the same way, philosophers discuss the same Socrates now that died long ago.

7

Mill’s talk of *sensation* has an unfortunately subjective ring. Even Mach, who takes a moment in his *The Analysis of Sensations* to emphasize that sensations are better understood as neutral *elements*, tends to fall back on the more familiar word. The advantage of “sensation” is its close relation to the first-person-ness of the world. This “first-person-ness” is what the physicalist forgets or refuses to address. The typical strategy is to see this first-person-ness as somehow accidental and secondary, *even though it is the basic structure of experience itself*.

Aperspectival “matter” explains no more than the attribution of analgesic power to morphine. It not only fails to explain anything. It leads to an absurd doubling of the world, with the familiar world cast in the role of mere private representation. The irrationalism of this move is concealed by the ease with which we switch from a practical direct realism to a theoretical indirect realism. It costs us nothing but bad ontology to live in such confusion, precisely because we don’t live in it, except within a certain conversational game.

For Mill, “matter” has a dominant “innocent” meaning. It’s only a certain kind of theorist who generates the mystified variety.

Matter, then, may be defined, a Permanent Possibility of Sensation. If I am asked, whether I believe in matter, I ask whether the questioner accepts this definition of it. If he does, I believe in matter: and so do all Berkeleians. In any other sense than this, I do not. But I affirm with confidence, that this conception of Matter includes the whole meaning attached to it by the common world, apart from philosophical, and sometimes from theological, theories. The reliance of mankind on the real existence of visible and tangible objects, means reliance on the reality and permanence of Possibilities of visual and tactual sensations, when no such sensations are actually experienced. We are warranted in believing that this is the meaning of Matter in the minds of many of

its most esteemed metaphysical champions, though they themselves would not admit as much: for example, of Reid, Stewart, and Brown. For these three philosophers alleged that all mankind, including Berkeley and Hume, really believed in Matter, inasmuch as unless they did, they would not have turned aside to save themselves from running against a post. Now all which this manœuvre really proved is, that they believed in Permanent Possibilities of Sensation.

8

To choose an easy example, subjectivity is latent *in* the object in the way that the object is given. In the way that the object *is*. Which is to say as this or that *aspect* of a system of possible aspects. Logically the object is not any of its aspects in particular. Logic pervades the ontological forum.

Is it a misunderstanding of intention (of meaning) that leads to the postulation of what Kleiff calls a “noumenal goo” ?