

1

When I say that TLP-era Wittgenstein was a phenomenalist, I mean that that's a strong interpretation of the book. If we are serious about ontology — as opposed to biography — what really matters is the strength of perspectival phenomenism itself.

Nevertheless, I do think Wittgenstein was indeed a phenomenalist, and his redundancy theory of truth even hints at a perspectival component. I was even inspired by thinkers like Wittgenstein and Mach whose phenomenism *needed* the *explicit* addition of this perspectival component. It seemed to me that their work implied it, and it's possible that they left it unsaid as an obvious corollary.

2

But we've seen how people have preferred to turn Wittgenstein into a relatively boring linguistic philosopher. Mach is almost ignored altogether, just like Mill. James, another phenomenist, is primarily interesting to folks as a pragmatist. I like the pragmatism that is genuinely ontological. But that's the stuff that's basically a flavor of phenomenism.

But phenomenism is not popular, except as part of a larger *phenomenological* tradition that I'd say is built on it. People do obsess over Heidegger (and to a lesser degree Husserl), but it's easy to ignore the phenomenism at the core of it and appreciate it instead

as the study of tacitly representational consciousness. In this case, bracketing just means accepting indirect realism while also ignoring the “cause” of the representation. Not caring if there is one. The problem is that the “meaning” of the object is “worldly” or “interpersonal.” So the tacit assumption of indirect realism, which insists on a private representation, already “ruins” the object.

3

Husserl is one of my favorites, and it’s one of his passages that most inspired me. He’s talking here about about any ordinary extended object.

[I]t transcends experience not only in the sense that it is not absolutely given, but also in the sense that, in principle, it *cannot* be absolutely given, because it is necessarily given through presentations, through profiles.

∴
The thing is given in experiences, and yet, it is not given; that is to say, the experience of it is givenness through presentations, through “appearings.” Each particular experience and similarly each connected, eventually closed sequence of experiences gives the experienced object in an essentially incomplete appearing, which is one-sided, many-sided, yet not all-sided, in accordance with everything that the thing “is.” Complete experience is something infinite.¹

¹from Husserl’s *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*

I used the word “aspect” (and eventually “moment,” for one of these appearances, primarily to avoid tendencies to understand such appearances as subjective or representational. Appearings are “perspectival,” but they are *not* representational. Indeed, that was the mistake made by Locke and others. It just didn’t occur to them that aspects could be “real.”

Why not ? Because, for one thing, philosophers prioritized the tactile. The object “looks” larger or smaller as you move toward or away from it. But when you *touch* it, you get the “real” size. This means that “visual extension” was not enough. Only “tactile extension” gave the “real” size. The “real” is what *resists our will*.

4

It’s been said that philosophy has a visual bias, and that may be correct in general, but here we see vision recognized as not exactly trustworthy. It tells us that big things are small. The moon fits between my finger and my thumb. We don’t think that our own fingers and thumbs change sizes, but then they are always pretty close to us.

I don’t think it’s a coincidence that Mach, the great phenomenalist, wrote books on the complexities of measurement and our experience of space. James too in his *Principles of Psychology* (a great work of phenomenology) gives careful analyses of perception in its various forms. James, probably inspiring

Husserl, wrote that we tend to take one especially useful appearing of the object to *be* the object. For instance, a table is square because it looks square from directly above. That square aspect or appearing “is” the “real” table.

This is the “tacit phenomenism” of everyday life. The indirect realist, when he’s not arguing philosophy, is lost like the rest of us among objects and *not* the private representations demanded by his theory. This “tacit phenomenism” is also called “naive realism,” and I will happily grant that perspectival phenomenism is a parsimonious extension of this “naive” realism — one that gels with what philosophers *do*.²

5

Let’s get back to Husserl. His “Thing and Space” lectures are not especially user-friendly, but we can find the “aspect theory” there. In this context, a “perception” is (basically) an “aspect” or a “moment” of the thing.

We said that in perceptions, by their very sense, their object is one and the same. What does the sense, the essence, of the perceptions have to do here? Let us reflect; the datum is this: the perceptions stand in the synthesis of identification, the unity of the identity-consciousness encompasses them.

²I agree with phenomenology and logical positivism that the point is to explicate rather than speculate.

[P]erceptions, insofar as they in general, through their sense, through their essence, enter into such a consciousness of selfsameness, are called for that reason perceptions of the same object.

[P]erceptions, as we grasp them in self-posing evidence, are in fact connected through an identity-consciousness, so that if we now speak of this connection, it is not mere talk, it is not merely accepted in an empty intention of such a kind, but instead the talk simply brings to expression the identity-connection as it is absolutely given in the self-posing.³

In other words, the entity is an “intentional” or “logical” *synthesis* of such “perceptions.” This logical synthesis is also a temporal synthesis, because the perceptions do not occur at the same time.

I think, though, that it’s better to avoid talk of “consciousness” and “perception” as tending to dilute our friend phenomenism with traditionally representational terms. While aspects or moments (“perceptions”) remain, as in Husserl, *immanent*, they are immanent with respect to a *neutral* phenomenal stream. The point is to *replace* talk of “consciousness” with a terminology that evades our entrenched foe, which is of course a dualism of consciousness and something else.

Husserl actually uses a word which is translated as “moments” for such perceptions, as he explores the

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character of this synthesis.

The perception which stands before my eyes, and on which I exercise phenomenological reduction, is an absolute givenness; I possess it, as it were, for itself, with all that essentially makes it up. It is “immanent.” The intentional object, however, is precisely “transcendent.” Indeed the latter appears in the flesh, and it is essential to perception to present it in the flesh. But do I actually possess it itself, given along with moments that really constitute it?

Even though the intentional object is constituted by its moments, it transcends any subset of those moments “disclosed” so far. The object is “ajar,” in that moments not yet and even only *possibly* to be disclosed are also “parts” of it. So the object is *temporally* “ajar.” But it is no less important that the object also “collects” the “perceptions” that *others* have had or might have of it. In other words, the object “scatters” its actual and possible aspects or moments over the plurality of *all* phenomenal streams. So the object is *interpersonally* ajar.⁴

Ontology’s necessary object is the ontological forum itself. This forum includes the logic that allows us to discuss and therefore intend the *same* object. This object, constituted by perceptions that are not necessarily simultaneous, endures through time. Those in the forum must there be able to intend this enduring

⁴Even “interpersonal” is slightly misleading, in that it encourages a conflation of a phenomenal stream and the person at the center of it, but I couldn’t think of an alternative that wasn’t distractingly clunky.

object, so a logical (intentional) synthesis is a temporal and an interpersonal synthesis. This is implicit in even the most mundane discussion of a book or a cat. We can of course speculate about the future of the book or the cat. We walk into a room and perceive that same book or cat in a new way, adding to what we know of either.

6

Each stream, while indeed person-*centered*, is nevertheless a streaming of *the world itself*. The being of one of these persons is “part” of the *world’s* being. My “empirical ego” appears in a special way within the stream associated with it, but it appears also in many other streams. It, too, is a “transcendent” object in Husserl’s sense. This is what Wittgenstein seems to mean when he writes that “the thinking, presenting subject; there is no such thing.” For he has already accounted for the empirical ego, and he is making the point that there is not a second “ontological ego.”⁵

7

The moments of entities are scattered over time and over the plurality of streamings of the world. Are streams then merely sequences of such moments ?

⁵If the concept of an ontological (or transcendental) ego is differentiated from the empirical ego, then one basically has phenomenism. But “ego” is of course misleading as a synonym for being. Phenomenism roughly understands phenomenal consciousness as being itself, but this tends to be misunderstood, precisely because consciousness is tacitly assumed by most to be representational. An ontological ego still sounds somehow like a subject, when of course it is intended, as a synonym for being, as prior to any subject-object distinction.

Things aren't as simple as that, as phenomenology shows. But we can say that each stream is an "unrolling contexture" in which such moments are embedded. My life is "punctuated" with intentional entities, that I grasp immediately as also-for-others, as "things of the world." *I myself*, as a locus of responsibility, am one such entity, albeit of a particularly complicated kind. But such entities don't come one at a time and conveniently fringeless.

So much good work has already been done on this topic that I'll refer readers to Heidegger and Husserl. My focus is presenting perspectival phenomenism as the ontological *basis* of such phenomenological descriptions.

8

With that in mind, I'll finish by describing the total conception of the world which is implied by the analysis of a single stream. If the "ajar" objects of the world are the temporal and interpersonal (logical) syntheses of their moments, then none of their being is "hidden away from" the plurality of the world's streamings. The world itself is no more than the "system" of all of these streams. Just as objects are "shattered," so is the world itself. The object is the synthesis of its moments, and the world is the synthesis of its streamings.

James expressed the world in a similar way as "a world of pure experience." Others use "panexperientialism" for something very close to perspectival

phenomenalism. In my view, the word “experience” has the same potential to mislead as the word “consciousness.” Even the term “immaterialism,” otherwise excellent, still emphasizes the negation of “Matter,” vaguely implying that we are left with “Mind.” For this reason, presentations of phenomenalism should emphasize the rejection of consciousness no less than the complementary “things in themselves.”

9

Leibniz should be credited for anticipating this understanding of the world in his *Monadology*. In the passage below, we can read “Monad” as stream.

And as the same town, looked at from various sides, appears quite different and becomes as it were numerous in aspects [perspectivement]; even so, as a result of the infinite number of simple substances, it is as if there were so many different universes, which, nevertheless are nothing but aspects [perspectives] of a single universe, according to the special point of view of each Monad.

This summarizes perspectival phenomenalism, given the reading of Monad as stream, and understanding the streams alone to constitute the world.

Schrödinger, in *My View of the World*, also anticipates this kind of “absolute” perspectivism.

In the preceding sections I have been trying to

establish, first, that the hypothesis of a material world as the cause of our wide area of common experience does nothing for our awareness of that shared character, that this awareness has to be achieved by thought just as much with this hypothesis as without it; secondly, I have stressed repeatedly, what neither can be nor needs to be proved, that this hypothetical causal connection between the material world and our experience, in regard both to sense-perception and to volitions, differs *toto genere* from that causal relation which continues in practice, perfectly rightly, to play so important a part in science, even now that we have realized, with George Berkeley (b. 1685) and still more clearly with David Hume (b. 1711), that it is not really observable, not, that is, as a *propter hoc* but only as a *post hoc*. The first of these considerations makes the hypothesis of the material world metaphysical, because there is nothing observable that corresponds to it; the second makes it mystical, because it requires the application of an empirically well-founded mutual relation between two objects (cause and effect) to pairs of objects of which only one (the sense-perception or volition) is ever really perceived or observed, while the other (the material cause or material achievement) is merely an imaginative construct.

I have therefore no hesitation in declaring quite bluntly that the acceptance of a really existing

material world, as the explanation of the fact that we all find in the end that we are empirically in the same environment, is mystical and metaphysical. Nevertheless, anyone who wants to make it can do so; it is convenient, if somewhat naive. He will be missing a great deal if he does. But he certainly does not have the right to pillory other positions as metaphysical and mystical on the supposition that his own is free from such “weaknesses.”

The first alternative position to be taken up in modern times was probably Leibniz’s doctrine of monads. As far as I can understand it, he tried to base that broadly shared character of our experience to which reference has so often been made on a pre-established harmony (that is, an essential similarity laid down right from the start) in the course of events taking place in all the monads, which do not, for the rest, have any influence on each other of any kind; ‘monads have no windows’, to use the expression which has become current. Various monads—human, animal, and the one and only divine one—differ only according to the degree of confusion or clarity with which the self-same series of events is enacted in them. I would not have referred to this suggestion (the naivety of which, so far as offering an explanation of anything is concerned, almost surpasses that of materialism) if I had not come across a very remarkable observation made upon it by Friedrich Theodor Vischer. He writes, in so many words:

[F] or there is but one monad, mind, which is in all things; monad has no plural. True, Leibniz stopped short of the splendid consequences of his idea, since, in sharp contradiction with the very concept of the monad as a conscious (spiritual) unity he postulated a plurality of monads side by side, like so many dead things, with no communication between them—but what does that matter to us?

The words occur in a criticism of an analysis of various works, including Goethe's *Faust*, by H. Duntzer (Cologne, 1836).

“There is but one monad.” Then what does the whole of monadology turn into? —the philosophy of the Vedanta (or perhaps the more recent but certainly independent one of Parmenides). Briefly stated, it is the view that all of us living beings belong together in as much as we are all in reality sides or aspects of one single being, which may perhaps in western terminology be called God while in the Upanishads its name is Brahman. A comparison used in Hinduism is of the many almost identical images which a many-faceted diamond makes of some one object such as the sun.

Elsewhere he mentions Mach, which suggests to me he too may have started with phenomenalism and saw how well it gelled with perspectivism, which it needs to explain the way we *share* a world.