

ELECTRIC MEAT

1

Joe survived a head injury. Now he has a little circular window on the side of his skull, about the size of a silver dollar. You can see his brain on the other side. I look at Joe's brain through this little circular window. I am looking for his "consciousness." He tells me he is thinking of a number between 1 and 10. I can't see his consciousness. I can't see that number either. I just see meat, which I am told is electric meat.

2

"I see electric meat." In fancy *aspect phenomenalism* terms, an aspect/moment of Joe's brain is "in" the stream of my "ontological ego." In other words, the-world-from-my-perspective includes an aspect of Joe's brain, which is *some* of its "actual being."¹

In still other words, I am finding my *own* "ontological consciousness" as I look through that window—and not Joe's. In Joe's "ontological consciousness," on the other hand, there is a number between 1 and 10. Or so he claims.

¹Joe's "actual" brain is "in" "my" "ontological ego" —but also in Mary's and Joe's own "ontological ego" or "personal" streamings of the world. I do not mean an "image" or representation of that brain which is "really" somehow somewhere else.

3

“Ontological consciousness” is “world-from-perspective.” So it’s not *really* consciousness. It’s the perspectival “being” of the world’s entities.

Joe’s brain, for a phenomenalist, has *some* of its genuine being “as” my own “ontological” “consciousness.” Joe’s brain is the unity or synthesis of all of its “sides” that it “shows” in various streams of “ontological consciousness.” Joe looks in a mirror and see’s his own brain. Mary, who looks on from the back of the room with a serene smile. She glances at me. Now my face is in *her* “ontological consciousness.” In other words, a “side” or “adumbration” of my face is “in” her “neutral” phenomenal stream. “Her” stream is the one with her nose in the “picture” — and not my nose or Joe’s nose.

4

I don’t have a “true” “view from nowhere” face that is somehow *apart from* its “appearances”² in all possible phenomenal streams. My face, Joe’s brain, and Mary’s smile all have their *being* —all of it — only in various ontological egos — in nondual or neutral phenomenal streams. All entities are “shattered across” these streams. Since each of these streams “is” “time” (indicated by the “stream” metaphor), all entities are shattered across various ontological egos — and across time, for “intentional” entities endure, and we can remember and predict them.

²moments

In other words, entities are the logical (interpersonal and temporal) unities or syntheses of their “moments.” This term “moments” emphasizes the relationship between time and entities. Entities “endure.” We recognize the same entity even as that entity “shows different sides” of itself “over time.”

Here it’s important to note that “sides” is a metaphor. The “sides” of a piece of music are also shown “over time,” though music has no (spatial) shape. This is why “moments” — because it does not prioritize the visual-spatial — is the best term for the “sides” or “aspects” of entities in general.³

But it’s illuminating⁴ to *start* with the visual analogy. A complicated 3D object can only manifest itself to the eyes “over time.” It has to be seen from various perspectives. In other words, it “gives itself” (to the eyes) as a series of profiles or aspects.

5

Now let’s consider what Popper calls “basic statements.” These are attempts to state “just the facts.” Like : “The odometer reads 60,000 miles.”

Many people think that “physical objects” are unproblematic. They hope to “reduce” or “explain” an elusive consciousness stuff in terms of a supposedly non-problematic “physical” stuff. They don’t see that what they want to call “consciousness” is precisely the

³Husserl uses a term that is often translated as “adumbrations.”

⁴a visual metaphor

being of these physical objects.

Joe (we are now done looking at his brain) is looking at the odometer of a gently used car. He tells me: “The odometer reads 60,000 miles.” He also tells me: “The number I was thinking of earlier was 3.”

6

In both cases, Joe the linguistic-empirical ego is telling me about moments “of” or “in” his ontological ego. This ontological ego is just his ontological “consciousness” or (more accurately) “nondual” phenomenal stream — the one with his nose in it, which he mostly ignores.

I have to take his word for 3 being the number he was thinking of. But I can look at the odometer myself. Right? I agree with him: “The odometer reads 60,000 miles.”

The odometer, as I the empirical-linguistic ego look at it, appears in my ontological ego. I believe without knowing how to prove it that Joe and I intend the same entity, the odometer, in our assertions about it. I don’t know how to peep “inside Joe”⁵ to check this anymore than I knew how to peep inside and see the number 3 when he was first thinking of it.

Likewise Joe doesn’t know how to check that *I* am “intending” the odometer. Do we “mean” the same thing by our assertion? We “agreed.” Our assertions were congruent.⁶ Is that all we can hope for? We can

⁵inside the stream associated with the linguistic-empirical entity called “Joe”

⁶The problem can be iterated here. How could we “prove” that we even heard the same words?

ask one another questions, but we'd again be trusting that we "meant" the same thing by the same words. We trust of course that we do. Practical life is founded on this kind of trust.⁷

7

My point is that "physical objects" aren't so simple as they seem to be. We are in the *habit* of agreeing about the ordinary things of this world.⁸ Things mostly work out.

But this encourages a questionable belief that such objects escape the "problem" of "subjectivity" — of the way that reality seems to be "given" "in the first person."

Many conflate objectivity (unbiasedness) with objects. Because we tend to agree about odometers — we say the same things about them⁹ — we forget that they are "given" to us "perspectively." Our phenomenal streams are "immanent." They are "hidden" from others, in a peculiar sense.¹⁰ Joe can tell me that he was thinking of the number 3, that the odometer read 60,000 miles. But I can't "see" Joe's "seeing" directly. Our phenomenal streams don't cross. They run parallel like the graphs of linear functions with the same slope.

⁷This practically justified but theoretically unjustified trust seems to be the foundation of the hazy scientific "physicalism" of those who simply shrug off the theoretical problem *because* it is "merely" theoretical. But this evasion of ontology is not therefore *good* ontology. It's more honest to confess a frustration with the difficulty of such issues rather than to pretend that such a retreat unties the knot rather than cutting it.

⁸We are also in the habit of deciding that the same entities "have consciousness."

⁹We tend to agree that we say the same things about them, and so on.

¹⁰I can include your toothache in my inferences, while granting that you have a special access to the pain aspect of that toothache.

Yet our streams are streamings of the same world. Aren't they ? But can I say so ? If I can't check the "private meaning" of Joe's words ? Perhaps I can't be sure. But I can reason that all reasoning — all rational discussion — is pointless from the start if I don't trust that I share a world and a language with others.¹¹ So I can *suffer* from extreme skepticism, but it would be absurd and confused for me to *argue* for it. To argue is to presuppose that one is understood by those who share a world that includes the discussed entities. And they have to share a logic too, or I can't argue that my beliefs are warranted. And it's hard to see why I'd bother with justification in the first place if I thought myself trapped in a bubble of isolated "consciousness."

8

"Physical" objects exists "perspectively." Our stable consensus about them in practical life encourages us to forget this. So instead of "the problem of being" we end up with a *narrower* problem of "consciousness." We ask how consciousness can arise from objects, without noticing that objects only exist as "adumbrations" "in" or "of" "consciousness."¹²

Of course aspect phenomenism doesn't like the word "consciousness" for a "located" or "perspectival" streamings of the world. That's because this "mental" word "consciousness" encourages the assumption that "phys-

¹¹The ontological forum is ontology's necessary or radically presupposed entity.

¹²In other words, the meaning of "being" is itself problematic, and this extends to all entities, the "physical" as well as the "mental."

ical” being is unproblematically “solid” or assured. And *other than* the being of “mental” entities.

9

But consider this: we trust in physical entities as “really there” in the sense of “also for others” *because* we trust that others “mean” the same thing by the same words. I believe that this old red couch is “real”¹³ because you and I and whoever shows up can talk about it. Or we have the sense that we are talking about it, because our words sufficiently agree.¹⁴ I believe in the couch in the same way and because I live in the congruence of what you and I and others (privately) *mean* by assertions involving the couch.

The “physical” depends on the “mental” in this sense. The problem of the “immanence” or “perspectival character” of phenomenal streams can be *ignored*, but our practical trust in physical objects is not a *solution* but something that *itself* cries out, to the ontologist at least, for explanation —or at least for being noticed as an issue.

¹³Here I mean practically real. For phenomenalism all “experiences” are “ontologically” real, even if some of them more important to us practically.

¹⁴That our words agree is one more thing that can be problematized. In fact we usually just get on with life, without pausing unless our desires are frustrated.