

# Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

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## Yesterday

We held differing views about the nature of the mind and the soul. At one point, we believed that the mind in some way "belonged to" the soul—as its highest "part," so to speak, with reason being the highest spiritual/mental "faculty." Plato, for example, is sometimes interpreted as holding a view something like this. With Aristotle, the picture was focused slightly differently, but it was basically the same, with the soul now recognized as that which "brings" life to a body; it was the soul, for Aristotle (and probably for Plato too, for that matter), that was the motivating, "animating" constituent of any living organism. Similar views persevered throughout the medieval centuries in the West (with some significant variations). Eventually, organisms other than the human were denied a soul—this became the most widely held position in science and philosophy certainly by the seventeenth century—and the mind/soul came to be regarded as a separate, metaphysically distinct "substance," and substance came to be regarded as some kind of "stuff." Despite the popularity of Spinoza's disagreement with Descartes in this regard—the popularity evidenced in the famous *Pantheismusstreit* of the late Enlightenment and early Romantic periods—Descartes's view won the day, and Cartesian Dualism has remained a contender even up until now, at which time such variations on materialist/physicalist identity theory as we find in so-called "eliminative materialism" and evolutionary biology continue to seduce our more "scientifically minded" thinkers.

## Today

But when did "scientific" come to mean exclusively "materialist"? How is it that materialists have, in effect, taken over in so many of the fields of current scientific investigation? Is it simply because we have to "observe" an "entity" in order to examine it scientifically, and that such "observation" must always take place through our five "physical" senses alone?

It is largely as a result of materialist prejudice that we find ourselves so confused and bewildered today when it comes to thinking about the most profound scientific and philosophical issues. Physicists kept looking for the "smallest" material particle until, finally, matter itself dissolved before their eyes. "Now what?", asks the particle physicist. How to explain the curious apparent anomalies in the temporal direction of causation at the subatomic level? The high-energy physicist no longer knows how to talk intelligently about time. As for philosophers, when it

comes to talking about consciousness they have gone so far out into the left field of materialism that we find some of them still actually maintaining that all we need is a bigger microscope to see those tiny little thought particles banging into one another. As if human consciousness were to be "explained" as simply some kind of mental pool game, with ideas and concepts differing from one another in the same way, metaphysically speaking, as the color of the five-ball differs from the color of the eight-ball (which these thinkers are hopelessly stuck behind).

But there is a way out of this confusion. We shall have to rethink what matter is, and perhaps what we mean by the term "substance," and also what the mind and the soul are.

### Tomorrow

We shall believe something like the following: I do not have a "mind." I do not "have" a body. I am an organism that acts, that engages in operations, that behaves. Some of my activities, operations, and behaviors are called "thinking." I do not have a mind that does this thinking for me. My body does not do it for me either. I do it; I am it. It is one of the ways that I am. I do not "have" any mental dimension that functions or exists in any way apart from or separately from my organic being. But my organic being is not just this physical body. It cannot be disassembled into separated parts spread out on a lab table or an operating room floor and then be stitched up and reassembled again—at least not stitched up and reassembled as the same (in every sense identical) organism I used to be. I am an acting, operating, behaving whole, the various parts of which are integrated in the unity exhibited by the structures of my actions, operations, and behavior. Many of these actions, operations, and behaviors are habitual. I have become conditioned over time to act, operate, and behave in certain manners. These are my habits. They inform my actions, operations, and behaviors by structuring and directing them. They give them their general forms. These form-providing habits are not located in any "mind," because there is not one. They are not located in any body, because the structures they provide are of non-physical entities—namely, actions, operations, and behaviors.

"Then where *are* these habits located?" —Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The habits and forms I am talking about, in other words, are neither "ideal/immaterial" nor "physical/material." If a person always thinks about the same thing the same way, he or she is thinking about it in his or her habitual manner. When that person thinks about this thing this way, we say that he or she is using a concept. So what we call a "concept" is a form in my sense of the word (although there are, I

expect, countless different kinds of "non-conceptual" forms). Kant saw that concepts are rules that govern cognition, that they are not just a bunch of predicate depositories. They do not have qualities, they do not have parts, and they do not come in six-packs. To say that I "have" a concept of a table means that I know how to see a table, or how to remember one, or how to sit on one. My concepts are mine, your concepts are yours. If we are looking at the same table, there are two different concepts there (speaking physically/metaphysically). If someone were able to look at us looking at the table and see our two separate lookings, those two separate lookings would resemble each other. That is what it means for you to have "the same" concept that I have. But it is an identity of form (and not shape [*eidōs*, not *morphe*]), because we are talking about an activity.

In "Eye and Mind," the last of his essays that he lived to see published, Merleau-Ponty teasingly sandwiches the following tidbit of a paragraph between two others that seem to be totally unrelated (trans. Carleton Dallery): "We speak of 'inspiration,' and the word should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted." Merleau-Ponty makes no further mention of inspiration in the remainder of his essay, and what he means by taking the word "literally" he does not explain. We find him employing a stylistically similar device in the first two sentences of the second paragraph in the sixth chapter of part one of *Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. Colin Smith): "The realization that speech is an originating realm naturally comes late. Here as everywhere, the relation of *having*, which can be seen in the very etymology of the word habit, is at first concealed by relations belonging to the domain of *being*, or, as we may equally say, by ontic relations obtaining within the world." Regarding "the very etymology of the word": our word "habit," like the modern French *habitude*, comes to us through the old French *habit*, *abit*, which derives from the Latin *habitus* (*habere*, "to have"), which means: the way in which one holds or "has" oneself, i.e., the mode or condition in which one is, or exists, or exhibits oneself—be it in character, disposition, way of acting or of comporting oneself, or in way of dealing with things. Simply stated, a habit is a manner in which one "is" in the world, and the cultivation of habit is the development of a particular way of being, or existing. This conception of "habit" underlies Plato's criticism of poetry in the *Republic*, and we can best appreciate this criticism in the light of the distinction he draws between imitation and participation. Aristotle offers us a helpful hint in this regard in his *Metaphysics* (987b4–14; trans. Ross):

Plato accepted his [Socrates's] teaching, but held that the problem applied not to any sensible thing but to entities of another kind—for this reason, that the common definition could not be a definition of any sensible thing, as they were always changing. Things of this other sort, then, he called Ideas, and sensible things, he said, were apart from these, and were all called after these; for the multitude of things which have the same name as the Form exist by participation in it. Only the name 'participation' was new; for the Pythagoreans say that things exist by imitation of numbers, and Plato says they exist by participation, changing the name. But what the participation or the imitation of the Forms could be they left an open question.

In fact, Plato not only changed the name from "imitation"—he coined the term *methexis*, "participation," and we have to suppose that he was trying to capture some particular meaning with this new word that eluded the grasp of the old word, and concept, "imitation." In Plato's Greek, "habit" translates *hexis*, which is cognate with the verb *echein*, which usually translates "to have." But *echein* can also translate "to be" (as can the Latin *habere*). For the Greeks, and also for the Romans, a habit was something one "had" by virtue of consistently behaving (behaving) in a particular manner—by virtue, that is to say, of consistently existing or *being* in a certain way. Plato employed the ontological significance of this everyday word when he combined it with the preposition *meta* to form the word *methexis*, "participation." In combined forms, *meta* generally designates a community of or sharing among individuals; so *metechain* might literally be rendered the "having in common," or the "being in common" of some "thing" with another person or thing. Regarding Plato's technical philosophical notion of "participation" in the light of this etymology, we might say that "to participate" means to share the same habit, the same *way of being*, with another. Forget about "fusing horizons." What is actually going on here is carnal identification: the ongoing creation of the self as organic unity in a world that hosts not only other organic unities but also inorganic (no soul there) unities—and also, sorrowful misfortune, organic unities that have turned away from themselves and strive now to see themselves as no more than inorganic. What sad perversion. They have lost their way.

But what is the ontological status, then, of a concept, or a form, or a habit? There is no container-like "mind/soul" for them to be stored up in, and they are not made up of ideal or physical matter (whatever that may turn out to be). If we can stop and just consider my actions, operations, behaviors in general—if we can just stop for a second and really look at

my being honestly—the answer to this question is obvious. But we just do not have the words and "conceptual" tools to articulate it clearly. It goes like this: I am always in relation to something. I am always standing opposite, next to, behind, or over against something, looking at it, hearing it, touching it, smelling it, imagining it, remembering it, desiring it, hating it, not knowing it, hoping like hell it doesn't happen. These are conscious relations. They are manners in which my consciousness relates me to the object, whatever it may be. Phenomenologists have described this as the intentionality of consciousness. But they have been wrong about its origin. They have been wrong about all kinds of origins. It is misleading to say that consciousness is always intentional—better: consciousness arises out of intentional relations. If we say that consciousness is always intentional, that consciousness is always characterized by intentionality, then we are almost destined to fall into some kind of subjectivist or idealist trap. We will start thinking of consciousness as some kind of magical, supernatural "thing" that possesses this wondrous feature of always being directed toward something, and of special creatures "having" this magical "thing" called consciousness. But as it happens, the intentionality comes first, then consciousness may or may not follow. If the intentionality, the directedness of a relation—more precisely, and this is all important: of an *organic* relation—is sustained, voilà consciousness. Consciousness arises as a whole spectrum, from your common or garden-variety vegetable consciousness at the lower end of the most simple organic relations (the sentience of a plant: phototropism) to your run-of-the-mill Absolute Idealist who formulates convoluted syllogisms at the other end (the consciousness of a human being, like Hegel, who—maybe after all in one strange and perverted sense was indeed correct—saw himself, his own philosophical system, as the highest culmination of "spiritual" activity).

I am suggesting a new Copernican hypothesis. This will hopefully guide my investigations in a more fruitful direction. Instead of forever attempting vainly to "explain" consciousness, stomping around like a rooster in a henhouse, I might perhaps get on with the task of actually attending to its nurture and proper guidance. The basic idea of the manner in which to proceed is quite simple. I must discover—or perhaps better: uncover—the intentionality of my most "primitive" actions, engagements, and operations. I have to identify those features of an action that exhibit what I can recognize as intention, and I must then isolate that intentional component and puzzle out what it is. Eventually, I may hope to discover how these intentional components of numerous primitive actions function harmoniously in the organism, in me, in such a way as to give rise to what I call "consciousness."

Instead of asking about the necessary conditions of the possibility of cognition (Kant) or consciousness, we must ask the ontological question: what are the necessary conditions of the possibility of intentionality? What makes something intentional? How, or by virtue of what, does a relation become intentional? Is all "becoming" intentional? Is all being thereby intentional?

What are we doing in so-called "reflection"? To begin with, it is not the case that "I reflect." There is no "I" apart from that basic core form of intentional activity, my "mind" and "soul." There is reflection going on. Reflective activity is taking place. What is reflecting what here? Or rather, what does this word "reflecting" really mean? What activity does the word point to? That is, what does the word intend? (How *do* words intend?—Answer: basically, the same way that works of art do what they do. A work of art exhibits an organic unity—that is how it can work [operate] as it does; i.e., with intention, an intentional guiding structure.) What *is* this activity we call "reflection"? In so-called reflection, what we have is a relation happening between or among acts of intending, which are themselves relations. (This is also how things grow. Relations get together, intentions intertwine.) In meditation, we calm our habits and ways of relating (acting, engaging, behaving)—in effect, we perform a kind of phenomenological "reduction": we strip away all the "non-essential" habits and ways of being—we suspend them, disengage them—and what we are left with is the very core of our being, the very heart of our mind and our soul. What are these? Are these the two *hypostases*, one human and the other divine, that underlay Boethius's *persona*?

Husserl was wrong in maintaining that the consciousness of the subject "constitutes" the object. The subject "is" in a certain way by means of the object, and the object and the subject are in a sense ontologically identical: they are as one in the intentional activity, engagement, or behavior that gives to each of them their "activated" form as poles of an organic relation. (I suspect this is closer to what Brentano, in recalling Aristotle's *De Anima*, was trying to get at, and also Twardowski.) What we call an "object" elicits a way of organic acting that I experience as "red." We experience red as a predicate or quality that we attribute, linguistically, to the object.

Look at the jack-in-the-box. You wind him up, press the button, and out he pops. All the matter is the same as it was before. The location of all the "particles" is different, and we are now at moment eight instead of at moment four, and heat has been shifted (there was motion), but otherwise after he pops out all the matter is the same as it was before he was wound up. But at that moment after I have wound him up and

before I have pressed the button, the relations that are happening among all the particles differ in a very important way from the before and after relations. They "exhibit" tension. It is the form of that tension that we have to investigate. Tension—*tendere*, *τείνω* "to tend," "to stretch"—intention, intentionality—direction, directedness: the so-called "intentionality of consciousness"—consciousness always "has" an object, is always "directed toward" some "object"; this is what we have to examine. The "form" of that intention—stretching, reaching, pulling, attracting. This is the real point of Husserl's eidetic reduction. But instead of looking for the "origin" of that *eidos* in some "thing" before or after the act of intending—that is, in some kind of transcendental ego or transcendental intersubjectivity (understood as some kind of a pre-existing cultural mass) or in the real lifeworld of shaped things and the anxious and concerned dealings of a dread-ridden Dasein—we have to look at that act of intending itself. This is not "epistemology" or "metaphysics." It may be cognitive science, but it is most certainly ontology. We are looking for the form of the elasticity of Merleau-Ponty's flesh of the world. After we have done that for a while, maybe then we can think about "origins."

Perhaps "need" will do some work here. When I need something, I am experiencing a want, a deprivation. This "makes me" feel uneasy, and this uneasiness I am lingering in while I am needing something has a certain tension, the tension of a yearning, a beckoning. What I am now asking is: what *is* that tension? What makes that tension what it is, *as* tension? (My very wanting here—right now as I write, the frustrated desire to articulate these thoughts, i.e., to "think" successfully—is an instance of what I am trying to talk about.) Aristophanes's description of the experience of *eros* in Plato's *Symposium* comes to mind. I am not using "tension" as a metaphor here—at least, no more than I am using any other word as a metaphor. But this is very hard to express. How does one express what expressing is? Heidegger saw this about tension, and he also saw the importance of the point I am trying to express, the "way of looking at things" that I am attempting to convey. But he took a very wrong turn, and that error proved literally fatal to more people than untroubled thought can acknowledge. He also got lost, then, in the words. He drifted away into the profound-sounding pseudo-mystical nonsense of a fatalistic idealism. Heidegger said that every great thinker thinks only one great thought. That was his. But his undisputed brilliance blinded over a half a century of thinkers who might otherwise have gone on to pursue phenomenology in an honest and fruitful manner. He criminally derailed and subverted the most sincerely profound and honest thinking we have seen since the hot and holy days of Ammonius

Saccas.

Wittgenstein was wrong about one very important point. He got very close, but not quite there yet. Knowing is not doing. Knowing is being *able* to do. The tension of a coiled spring is not itself a physical "thing." There has to be a spring there in order for us to squeeze it and bring tension about, but the tension is not the spring. Knowing is like that tension. It is activated, or engaged—it "becomes operational"—in the doing. I can now honestly say that, yes, I do know how to play tennis. Right now as I type. Here comes the interesting part: *all* of my knowledge enjoys the same ontological status. Knowing is a way to do, not the doing itself. The doing "embodies" the knowing, just as my body embodies my mind and soul.

The complex of these intentional components—these habits and other essential ways of acting, engaging, and operating—that has given rise to what I call "my" consciousness is what makes me what I am. It gives me my personality, my "self." We also call this the "mind" and the "soul." Again, this "mind" and "soul" are not anything "ideal," and they are not "physical"; they are what we call "mental" and "spiritual." My mind and soul are essentially intentional. They have what we call "intentional being," not ideal being or physical being (whatever these two sorts of being may turn out to be, or not to be). What we have been calling "mental activities" and "spiritual activities," and "mental entities" and "spiritual entities," would better be called "intentional entities" (if "entities" may even be allowed here). It may be that the soul is the same for each of us—that mine is identical to yours in every respect except location—and that the mind is what is different, or more different. The mind has to do with bodily habits (as well as what we call "conceptual" or "intellectual" activities). Aristotle was correct in identifying matter as the "principle" of differentiation and individuation. The "mental" inhabits the body, or the flesh, the same way that laws of nature inhabit the universe: the mental directs the body, and is in turn conditioned by the acquisition of bodily habits, for the mental is precisely the intentional component of the habitual.

One of the most important questions to be asked immediately must surely be how intention(al)ity is transferred from one organic unity to another. How does this actually take place? What, so to speak, is the "mechanism" of this transfer? Another way of formulating the question: how does metaphor do what it does? For metaphorical expression consists of precisely such a transfer—such a "carrying across"—of intention *qua* information. In that regard, the following grouping of terms seems correct for aesthetics:

techné—craft—(re)production—communication—data—work of art  
poiésis—art—(re)creation—expression—information—aesthetic  
object

Other questions are to be raised in response to this new information in all areas of scientific and philosophical inquiry. For example, in *Physics*: Does the transfer of intention determine the spin of the particle? That is, can Schrödinger's cat finally crawl out of its box? In *Ethics*: If the killing of a person is morally wrong, and a person may be defined as a human organic unity (genetically human organism) with a mind/soul (animated genetically human organism), then abortion is morally wrong the instant that intention(al)ity inhabits the genetically human organism. This would certainly be no later than quickening (St. Thomas may have been correct)—whenever we might now regard quickening itself as first "originating"—but it may be sooner in the development of the entity in the womb. (This does not "answer the question"—it just thickens the stew by tossing in another complication regarding "personhood.") In *Religion*: what many religions have regarded for millennia as the "endless cycle of death and rebirth" may in fact be the result of the entrapment of intentionality in (acquired and "inherited") habitual ways of organic being directed. In *Metaphysics*: perhaps it is not the case that intentionality is "transferred through" time. Perhaps it is rather the case (and here comes yet another Copernican hypothesis) that intentionality "inhabits" time as a mode of its own being. In other words, perhaps it is the case that time is a habit of intentionality, and that what we call time is in fact constituted by intentionality itself. If that turns out to be so, then the nature of the relation between consciousness and time will be a delicious field of study indeed. (Perhaps Newton's "temporal infinitesimals" are not real, as he thought they were, but *intentional*.) *Epistemology*: "truth" becomes an adverb. There is no nebulous hermeneutic "truth" as the Event of Meaning (=understanding=interpreting), no great *Ereignis* that we have all been waiting for. "Truth" is now used as a predicate of certain kinds of intentional activity. It is not the case that "truth happens"—no more than "understanding something" *happens*, or "meaning something" *happens*. Truth is not an occurrence. Truth is a characteristic, or feature, or quality of an intentional activity. If the aim is true, we have got truth. If it is not, we are wrong—and we have sinned: *hamartano*, "to miss the mark." So, to ask "What is the truth of the matter?" is really to ask "How are we to approach that matter correctly?" "Correctly" will have to be defined in terms of the context—and pragmatically, correspondingly, coherently, or whatever. But now we are just hassling with words again. What are these words? What *are* they? ...

wordswordswords, words and letters, words looked at like they were things that somehow possessed or could carry meaning in the same way that baskets can carry apples. That is not what words are and that is not what they do. Ask anybody, and “watch” yourself while you are asking. Words are just little habitual whips that help me to herd my intentions linguistically in a certain direction. I “think” without language all the time. But language enables me to slow down some kinds of my “thinking” so that I can get a handle on them, channel “them,” “conceptualize” them—“Egyptify” them, says Nietzsche. Life seems easier this (linguistic) way.

These questions will seem childish soon. I laugh at myself. For the rest, wherever we wind up going with this new information, let us pray that it be God’s will that we go there wisely, with kindness, compassion, and love and good will toward all.

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