

NOTES ON EIGENHOFF

First, his work will not make sense unless you see why he claims that “consciousness” is just “presence” or “being.” What does he mean by what he calls the “unseen problem of the physical”?

He emphasizes that he was studying Mach’s *The Analysis of Sensations* when “it all clicked, it all finally gelled together.”

Why? Because Mach and Mill and other phenomenologists “saw” or “recognized” or *faced* this “problem of the physical” and offered a (partial) solution. J. S. Mill was especially good on the issue of how we *share* a world. While Mach is great at “foregrounding” the “neutrality” of a single phenomenal stream.

Eigenhoff believes that great philosophy/ontology, on the issue of consciousness and “the physical,” has basically been forgotten/misunderstood.

Since physicality is left vague and unexamined, it has taken on a tacit but phony “absolute solidity.” An unwarranted/incoherent “view from nowhere” is adopted.

But let us return to the first point. If you *see* that “consciousness” is a confusing synonym for *presence* (perceptual and “signitive”), then you also “see” that “first-person-ness” is primary rather than epiphenomenal — that “perspective is fundamental.” What he calls “from-a-point-of-view-ness” is “deep.” Reality itself is “fragmented” or “cracked.” Reality (the world) is the “logically fused system of its first-person streamings.”

Objects in the world always have both a “from-a-point-of-view-ness” and a “between-us-ness.” This weird lingo, like Heidegger’s hyphenations, is an attempt to avoid the associations of other, more familiar terms. Every entity is a logical synthesis of its “moments.” These “moments” are its “pieces.” For instance, a single perception of a red rose would be a “moment” or “aspect” or “face” of that rose. The “from-a-point-of-view-ness” is “implicit” in the *way* the rose manifests. Maybe it is seen by candle

light. Or by a colorblind person. Or by an alien with 17 eyes.

But the rose is also “speaking” or “intend-able” or “conceptualized” or “recognized.” It is *that rose over there*. As Husserl emphasized. The rose is “understood” or “taken to be” transcendent. If I walk around it, see it from different positions, I see *that same enduring rose* as an “infinite system of adumbrations.” I also (if I take it to be empirically “real”) understand this “system” to offer “faces” to others who might walk in. Even if the rose is destroyed, I can continue to refer to it. I can discuss it with others.

For Eigenhoff, the “transcendence” of the rose — and of any entity — is “logical.” Or “conceptual.” Philosophers make a mistake¹ when they misread the “logical substance” of this “conceptual” “between-us-ness” as a kind of radically external “outside of consciousness” “thing in itself.”

Keep in mind that “consciousness” (for Eigenhoff) is *being itself*. Not a kind of stuff but the presence *of* many kinds of stuff, with no kind of stuff taken to be fundamental. In other words, “there is only presence.” But Eigenhoff agrees with Heidegger and Derrida that this presence is a “trace” —is not point-like.

Each “existence” or “aspect” of the world (each phenomenal stream) is a streaming of *time*. The presence of one aspect or moment of an entity is the absence of all of its other moments or aspects. So “showing is always also hiding.” He enjoys using the coin as a metaphor for this. To see one side (in the usual human situation without mirrors or photographs) is *not* to see the other. The coin can only manifest itself “through time.” Time (existence) is disclosure or unveiling. But to unveil one aspect is to veil the others. This, in my view, is the poetic core of Eigenhoff’s work. Existence is time is a “coin with two sides.” These two sides are showing and hiding, and showing and hiding are “one.” Thanks to the “bottleneck” structure of time/existence/“consciousness.”

¹offer an inferior explication

He also embraces a radical version of the redundancy theory of truth. For Eigenhoff, there is only belief and its transformation. The world is always “from a point of view,” and its dynamic intelligible structure is the “belief” of the sentient organism or empirical ego at the “center” of a streaming or aspect of the world. Note that Eigenhoff therefore presents his own “aspect theory” as *just a belief*. It does not represent a pre-articulated reality that “makes it true.”

His view is close to Sartre’s, as provided in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. And close to Wittgenstein’s in the *Tractatus*. There is no “witness” “behind” the empirical ego. Against Berkeley, Eigenhoff rejects the idea that the world is fundamentally “for” a subject. In this sense, the world is not “mind.” At the same time, he does assimilate what is good in subjective idealism, which is its recognition that “first-person-ness” is in some sense ontologically fundamental. He quotes Wittgenstein: “experience is *world*”. But world is always world-from-POV. The world itself is “shattered into aspects”, and so are the situations and the objects they include that “constitute” an aspect or streaming of the world.

This might even make him a naive realist. But he emphasizes that “empirical reality” is a flexible category. Traditionally “internal” entities are also “between-us” or “transcendent,” thanks to the role they play in the space of reasons. Brandom’s inferentialism is an obvious influence. Eigenhoff calls it a “flat ontology.”

But he also claims that “the world is fundamentally a forum.” So normative-linguistic subjects play a special role. He largely adopts Brandom’s work on this issue. Of course the normative-linguistic ego is “also” the empirical ego. A human body is “trained to say ‘I’ and take responsibility for itself.” Even the unity of such an ego is institutional: “One is one around here.” It’s vaguely imaginably that a different form of life might think of *two* foci of responsibility inhabiting the same body, taking turns “steering it.” The institution of the single “self” can be seen as ancient technology that we now take for granted.

Finally, I'll mention Eigenhoff's assimilation of skepticism, of the ground as an abyss. One cannot *prove* the general success of reference (that we are even talking about the same things), for such a proof would only be meaningful in the context of such success. So "the forum" and our mutual intelligibility is "radically presupposed." Usually we take it for granted, but this abyss-as-ground can be foregrounded.

Another related skeptical point: perspective is fundamental, and even semantic and inferential norms manifests in terms of aspects. Which is to say that they are grasped from this or that point of view. Informally, we "know" this. That words mean different things to different people, that one person's "proof" is another person's "nonsense." But to foreground it (perhaps) increases one's sensitivity to the "poetic" function of language. This "poetic" function is foregrounding itself, pointing out, calling attention to, disclosing, etc. Conversation is not primarily a kind of deductive calculation. So Eigenhoff is critical of "formalistic" approaches, including the fetishization of symbolic logic, or "careful" arguments that don't have a grip on their fundamental concepts.