1

A picture held us captive.

Only by Wittgenstein can words be imparted power due to their brevity.

In less evocative words, what Wittgenstein refers to is the (alleged) inherent uncertainty that arrives with the empirical collection of data and knowledge. Hardcore Cartesian dualism may be a thing of the past, but in this way, its essence lives on.

Descartes had used the old skeptic arguments to the opposite of that which they had been made for; he used them to find a firm footing which is immune to any scepticism: the "inner". And, of course, he then distinguished between the inner and the outer.

The four pillars of mediational thought are as follows: Our access of the outside world is only through some features of the mind; the contents of our knowledge can be analysed into explicit inner "ideas"; we can never transcend these "ideas"; there is a sharp distinction between the mental and the physical.

These four pillars must be brought down if we are to reinstate realism.

A footnote: Cartesian dualism is very different from Platonic dualism. Plato considered the mental to be a higher, more complex version of the physical and allowed the two to interpenetrate, while Descartes adopted a harsher dualism. considering the physical as just "dead, unexpressive stuff".

The chapter ends with some interesting comments on the sociological effects of a mediational theory and how it enables a greater degree of ethic of personal responsibility.

2

The mediational theory first isolated the individual and then delivered the fatal blow by attaching primacy to representation.

Typically, the problem with dualism has always been regarding the interaction between the inner and the outer; and the same is brought up here as well. How do unanalysed, spontaneous bits turn into the ordered world we know so well?

The authors suggest that this is because the distinction between the two itself is unfounded, but I am not on board with this rather hasty conclusion. The question is not an easy one to answer; I suspect that to answer it would be nothing short of answering the hard problem of consciousness itself. It does not seem obviously, inherently impossible for our cognition to be able to convert spontaneous bits to ordered structures.

Fortunately for realism, this is not their main argument against the boundary.

The dualists spoke of unanalysed bits which impinge upon us, bits upon which we impose cause-effect relationships hitherto absent in them.

And now, perhaps for the first time in all that I have read I spot something which is not influenced by Quine, but rather, seems to have influenced Quine; and it is none other than Immanuel Kant, and

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the great Kantian argument for holism, an extremely profound holism, of which Quinean holism is but a subset.

Kant embarks upon a metacritique of that dualistic argument and points out that, in order to call bits disconnected atoms of experience with no connections or baggage, they are inadvertently placing upon it another baggage, for they are taking these bits as potential bits of "information", giving it a new dimension of "aboutness" (later known as "intentionality").

"In a sense the very move which dereifies our account of the knowing agent has an inherently holistic bent. What was formerly built into the elements is now attributed to the background which they all share."

And evidently, the reach of these discussions goes up to the difference of opinion between mediational and contact theories on the nature of a framework-mediational theories prefer to see each statement independently, while contact theories speak of an underlying, perhaps indescribable (as Wittgenstein would have had it) framework beneath it all.

Heidegger also spoke of first receiving the world as a qualitative whole or a primitive stance of involvement, and only subsequently changing our stance and grasping it neutrally/scientifically.

However, this does not imply that there is a logical hierarchy in which the concepts of neutral description are preceded by the concepts of significance, just like how although we need to first understand "marriage" before understanding "bachelor", there is no logical relationship of order between them.

The reader now feels a sense of dethroning representation and coronating inference as central in theories.

Subsequently, the authors make the point that there is a constant exchange of stuff (for lack of a better word) between the underlying framework and our higher-level representation due to an unending inflow of information. This they do in an attempt to undermine the distinction between the mental and the physical, since, say they, "it is a feature of this mediational view…that we can understand our grasp of the world as something which is in principle separable from what it is a grasp of".

However, I am left with the feeling that this is not a watertight argument against the boundary. There is more to come, though, and it is better.

We can hold fictitious beliefs. However, the beliefs we hold embedded in our abilities-beliefs of our body, "motor intentionality"-cannot be actualized or even said properly to be existing without the support of the object in question. For example, the ability to play basketball requires a basketball and a hoop, two physical objects. Ontological commitment to them is not possible by theoretical imagination; the fact that we agree upon a person having basketball-skill is proof that it really exists. I suspect this is merely another flavour of Putnam's brains in a vat argument.

And *this* argument is better; it is like another application of Occam's razor: the ability cannot be said to exist if there is no potential for it to be actualized. The authors noted parallels between Wittgenstein on language and Kant on experience earlier on with their description of the coming of the great holism; here again is another version of Wittgenstein on language.

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3

Taking stock of where we are with regards to the four pillars, I find that we have overthrown the second, the third and the fourth satisfactorily with the previous arguments. Not so much the first, though. Kant's great holism and Merleau-Ponty's dissolution of the I/O demarcation does not allow us to directly conclude that there is no "only through" structure. And while one can no longer claim reality to be absolutely untouchable, the very existence of this structure allows for distortion, and the possibility of distortion would effectively still place reality beyond our grasp.

4

The author's manner of overcoming this is by introducing the preconceptual understanding and denying the fact that data is "given" to us (the Myth of the Given) via an "only through" structure.

The preconceptual understanding is not a given; it is something synthesized through our interaction with our environment. It is embodied "in the interaction". And *that* gives it an objective, ontological foundation.

Note: Dennett, Dennett, Dennett. Dennett on qualia and our dispositions.

And this preconceptual understanding would also be prelinguistic; beyond language. That which Wittgenstein said could not be spoken of but only *shown.* Here I also see shades of Minsky on the complexity of common sense; the preconceptual is Minsky's statement "The experiences we find easiest to recollect are often just the kinds we find hardest to describe" taken to the extreme.

The authors then demarcate the preconceptual into the more fundamental prelinguistic and the more surface level prepropositional; in my opinion, however, the prepropositional is irrelevant, and holds no importance in our argument against the "only through" structure.

5

The authors finally move on to that old, classic argument of the sceptic: How can one prove that we are all not just brains in a vat?

And they argue that this assumes that a brain is a *sufficient* condition for consciousness; and they argue that the brain is, in fact, only a *necessary* condition for consciousness, and our body and the environment around us *needs* to be present for sentience.

6

Up until now, we were working on establishing the possibility of a contact theory; we must now argue against the existence of a monological world. We can experience reality directly, perhaps, but is it possible at all for us to share this experience with others?

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The authors' answer is that it is-but only at a preconceptual, prelinguistic level to begin with; we may build it up from that. Wonderfully, this does not violate Quine's indeterminacy, for that concerns *postlinguistic* communication!

But this does not mean the authors leave Quine's thesis alone.

They claim that, once given the ontological footing of the preconceptual, one can completely overcome the issue of radical translation; and this can, say they, be done by *abandoning* the subject-object distinction that Quine assumed during the act of translation. One can translate only by integrating oneself with the alien society as one of them; by behaving and interacting with the environment as they do.

I disagree.

To begin with, while we may have proven the mental-physical distinction to be illusory, the illusion still exists; even when learning our first language, we treat the world as the object and the self as the subject; this dichotomy can never be completely eradicated.

Furthermore, the phenomenon by which one behaves and interacts as the members of society do and *yet* not speaking the same language as them is *exactly* the kind of thing Quine was trying to illustrate with his famous elephants-in-grass example.

And so despite our common ontological footing, I do not see the monological problem going away in any meaningful manner beyond the preconceptual. The situation here is not the same as the preconceptual or Dennett's qualia; dispositions does not equal understanding.

And this conclusion suggests a need for us to draw a concrete demarcation between the preconceptual and the postconceptual...have the authors merely replaced one faulty dichotomy with another?

7

Now arises a new problem. If our perception of objects begins only due to our *interaction* with them, how can there be the possibility of understanding the independent existence of these things?

The authors now distinguish between two kinds of interactive relationships. In the first case, we are unable to see the wall behind us due to certain causal relationships, but the act of seeing a wall is yet a comprehensible one for us. And as for the second and more extreme relationship between our embodiment and the world-we cannot even make sense of things such as "up", "down", and "within reach" without first understanding the structure our embodiment.

The authors make clear the need to strike a middle ground between the two, in a way which would allow us to both have an ontological footing on the independent existence of objects (this represented by the first kind of interactive relationship) and also make the preconceptual something emergent by the interaction between our embodiment the environment (this represented by the second).

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This is characterized well by the following statement of theirs: "The determination of objects depends on us, but we can effect this determination only insofar as we align ourselves with a truly independent reality."

Which brings us to a fresh problem. If all the independent truths we may know depend on our embedding, what differentiates our scientific beliefs from our everyday beliefs?

(This is somewhat approaching the problem I raised earlier of a concrete demarcation between the preconceptual and the postconceptual; the authors now refer to a 'boundary condition'.)

The 'fresh problem' I referred to can be rephrased as the problem of knowing *which* theoretical description of the universe should be considered to be the 'correct' one.

And this seems to me once again to be the monological problem (whose solution I had previously disagreed with) under a different guise.

And the authors this time proceed by declaring this (rephrasing of the monological problem, according to me) to be an *empirical* problem, and then further argue on grounds which are empirical in nature that there can only be one 'correct' theory.

And once again, for the same reasons I disagreed with their solution to the monological problem, I disagree here, in the sense that if there is only one correct theory, we cannot possibly know which one it is.

Which leaves me with the conclusion that, unless one is willing to entertain the possibility of a *radically polymorphous* world (albeit yet with the limitation of the (admittedly weakened) monological problem), the realism which has been retrieved is an uninteresting one.

8

And indeed, something like this is what the authors show their ultimate leanings towards; but instead of James W. McAllister's view of multiple equivalent structures, they believe that all these structures merely illustrate different aspects of a given object, and all build up to one unifying structure.

They later add that they believe the only way to decide which of the two views-multiplicity or unity- is correct can be decided only empirically…although I personally lean towards the unifying view-not because of its beauty or anything of the sort (in fact, its apparent beauty discourages me from supporting it; in the sense that it seems to good to be true)-but because we encounter problems when we look at the radically polymorphous view by stepping out of the box; for is not the radical polymorphous view itself one unifying worldview?

Although even then, one requires a criterion of sorts which separates unifying theories from lower-order theories, and a way to weed out imposters which claim to be unifying theories but are actually merely misguided lower-order ones. How can we know *this* theory expounded in the book is truly a unifying theory transcending the lower-order ones and not one of the misguided ones? And even if it gives us a criterion, how can we allow it to evaluate itself?

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