

any idea about something like “the whole or completed dance” in advance to speak meaningfully about the previous moves being part of it. And if we watch them, we can equally easily talk about possible dance moves they could perform *from now on*. If they decide to stop dancing that will not create an ontological entity called “the dance.” Non-dualists would say that the friends simply go on moving in a different way and may decide to continue dancing later.

«18» Similarly, ending a phone call does not mystically turn the process of talking into a *thing* called conversation that should be seen as the output of the previous process. For a non-dualist, an attempt to say something like that is just an unfortunate dualistically tinted interpretation of our language.

Conclusion

«19» In this commentary I first showed why I think it is justified to say that Weber confuses Mitterer with a linguistic idealist. For this purpose, I defined linguistic idealism and then gave examples from the target article that strongly indicate that Weber is attributing this view to Mitterer. In a second step I argued that linguistic idealism is *irreconcilable* with non-dualism: that is because linguistic idealism presupposes a distinction that cannot be made in non-dualism. In a third step, I talked about the role this misinterpretation plays in Weber’s understanding of non-dualism and suggested by way of an example how Weber’s critique of descriptions *so far* and *from now* collapses as soon as we stop alleging ontological commitments to non-dualism.

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[The beyond of philosophy: Against the dualistic principle of cognition]. Reprint of the original edition from 1992 with a new afterword. Velbrück Wissenschaft, Weilerswist. – Abbreviated “BOP” in this commentary. All translations are mine.

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The Critic’s Perspective: A Second-Order Critique of Stefan Weber’s Critique of Non-Dualism

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> **Abstract** • Philosophical approaches can be criticized by a semantic analysis of the logical course of their argumentation or by a pragmatic analysis of their originator’s intention and premises and of the approach’s practical effects. In this case, the target article is itself a critique of a philosophical approach, namely of non-dualism. I will focus on the pragmatic aspects of the critique, which are addressed in the concluding paragraphs. None of the practical consequences Weber imputes to non-dualism is justified.

Handling Editor • Alexander Riegler

«1» The critical reconstruction of a philosophical approach by a philosopher other than the originator of the approach is

always a construction itself and therefore an interpretation of the criticized approach in order to criticize it. Either the criticized philosopher will be convinced that the critique is legitimate or she will consider the critic’s critique a misunderstanding of the criticized philosophical approach. In his target article, Stefan Weber reconstructs non-dualism¹ by critically reconstructing the non-dualist critique of dualist approaches in philosophy. Thus, he adopts a meta-perspective on a philosophical debate. Commenting on such a meta-perspective (or second-order) argumentation necessarily takes a third-party (another second-order) meta-perspective, be it motivated to defend the criticized approach (here: non-dualism) by criticizing the critic’s critique of the criticized approach or be it motivated to support the critic by adding even more critical arguments to the second-order critique of the criticized approach (here: non-dualism). Of course, there are further possibilities to intervene, such as the motivation to find a compromise between both positions or to advance both the criticized and the critic’s position dialectically. Rather than discussing the logical consistency of his argumentation, my commentary on Weber’s critique assesses whether his critique matters from an applied and pragmatic perspective.

«2» Weber’s attempt to criticize non-dualism is without doubt very ambitious and sophisticated from a philosophical perspective. However, from a pragmatic perspective I wonder how his argumentation is motivated: Can Weber’s critique of Mitterer’s approach be used to clarify and to refine the seemingly abbreviated non-dualizing way of argumentation as is insinuated in his “implications”? Or does the critique serve to refute non-dualism as a whole if non-dualism is considered an “aberration” (§97)?

«3» It is helpful to remember that Weber started his academic career by enthusiastically applying Mitterer’s non-dualism to communication and media studies (Weber 1995; 1996). Thus, he can be considered an

1 | For reasons of consistency I follow the terminology used by the target article. However, Mitterer himself prefers the label “non-dualizing philosophy” in order to express the dynamic relationship between description of object and object of description.

insider who is excellently acquainted with non-dualism. Together with Alexander Riegler he co-edited two special issues about Mitterer's non-dualism (Riegler & Weber 2008; 2013). In the latter special issue Weber introduces critical aspects of non-dualism (Weber 2013), and recently he has even confessed:

“I have long been a (radical) constructivist. Today I yearn for truth and knowledge in a strictly empirical sense. At the moment I do not see that I can get them from anywhere. If we want to hang on to truth and knowledge, to a single reality, we should need a kind of ‘empirical journalism,’ whatever that might look like: data-driven, statistically informed. However, statistics can also manipulate. Obviously, we cannot escape this problem.” (Weber 2019, my translation)²

« 4 » In my rejoinder I want to focus on Weber's “conclusions” (§§94–96), which turn out to be practical consequences he imputes to non-dualism. Weber is mainly concerned that non-dualism may lead to an extreme relativism and even to solipsism, which he considers a dangerous philosophical idea (§94). He interprets Mitterer's non-dualizing argumentation from the perspective of ontology. Of course, the phrase “the so-called ‘world outside my consciousness’ is also part of my consciousness” (§95) can be understood as a solipsist perspective. However, what about an alternative formulation such as “from the perspective of consciousness every world outside consciousness needs to be made conscious, otherwise it does not come into mind”? I prefer this reformulation of Mitterer's approach to Weber's reconstruction above. It seems that Weber deliberately interprets Mitterer from a dualist perspective rather than using his expertise to understand the intention be-

hind Mitterer's approach. I find it difficult to imagine that Mitterer could possibly claim that there is *no* ontological difference between consciousness and something else beyond consciousness, which would be considered a negative ontology. Instead, Mitterer categorically refuses to think ontologically by rejecting dualist thinking. There is no such thing as an ontological opposite to dualism: dismissing an ontological position (as dualists and realists do) does not imply a negative/reverse ontological perspective, which asserts that there *is* no reality. Weber's trick is to suspect ontology everywhere rather than to follow the intention of radical constructivism and non-dualism, which both try to escape from the ontological trap by strictly avoiding any ontological justification rather than claiming that objects do *not* exist mind-independently or beyond their description. For a realist, who needs a firm ontological ground, every charge of the basic assumption that there is a real world that pre-exists to experience, implies a negative ontology such as “there is *no* real world pre-existing our experience.” The constructivist or non-dualizing alternative is to dismiss any ontological claim and to rely on the epistemologically inextricable relationship between observer and observed rather than the strict separation between the two. Any critique of constructivist or non-dualist approaches should take their ontological abstinence seriously rather than (re-)ontologize them and thus fail to understand their core ideas.

« 5 » Weber's problem with radical constructivism and non-dualism seems to be that he is not convinced of the constructivist solution to distinguishing between facts on the one side and error or fakes on the other side. He suspects constructivism and non-dualism of leading to relativist (i.e., strictly observer-related) thinking and therefore of being indifferent towards different descriptions of objects by attributing every observation the same value or validity (§96).³

« 6 » Such an implication is logically false because it is logically possible to compare different observations and descriptions of objects or events without insinuating that

“different” means that every observation and description is equally valid. Why should various (kinds of) observations all be of equal quality? There are many criteria that can be used to qualify an observation or description, including the trustworthiness of the observer and of the sources of information, and the consistency of the observation or description.

« 7 » When Weber concludes that “[e]very judgement is then subjective” (§96), he obviously uses the term “subjective” in the sense of arbitrary and voluntaristic. Mitterer, as well as radical constructivists, tries to overcome the dualism between subjective and objective knowledge or description. Therefore, the constructivist assumption that every judgement is based on observation does not mean that every judgement is subjective in the sense of arbitrary. I do not see the use of simply repeating old dualist ways of reasoning, which fail to meet the non-dualizing mode of argumentation.

« 8 » It is a common trick of dualist thinking to assert that only a language- or discourse-independent reality can serve as a valid arbiter in order to judge whether an observation/description is better, more valid, closer to the “truth” than another one. Weber uses the example of climate change in order to show the exigency and the severity of the problem: “In non-dualism, it is just the continuation of descriptions that counts. This opens the door for arbitrariness and extreme subjectivity” (§96). No, it does not! Neither is the premise (that just the continuation of descriptions counts) acceptable, nor is the conclusion (that this opens the door for arbitrariness and extreme subjectivity) justified, because Weber completely ignores the context of the argumentation: Every description of an object is made within a discourse about the descriptions of objects. Thus, the notion of “just the continuation” suggests that there is no struggle for truth or consent within the discourse. On the contrary: The more practically relevant a description of an object is, the more thoroughly, precisely, and also emotionally it is discussed. Weber himself mentions the solution of the problem he has with the non-dualizing anti-ontological position: Controversial statements about an object, such as “climate change exists” versus “climate change does not exist” should be compared against a

2 | “Ich war lange Zeit (Radikaler) Konstruktivist. Heute sehne ich mich nach Wahrheit und Erkenntnis, in einem strikt empirischen Sinne. Ich sehe im Moment nicht, dass ich die irgendwo her bekomme. Wir bräuchten, wenn wir an Wahrheit und Erkenntnis festhalten wollen, an der *einen* Wirklichkeit, eine Art ‘empirischen Journalismus,’ wie immer der auszusehen hat: datengetrieben, statistisch fundiert. Aber auch Statistiken können manipulieren. Wir kommen aus dem Problem offenbar nicht heraus.”

3 | The German words “gleichgültig” and “gleich gültig” refer to an interesting double meaning: “indifferent” and “of equal validity.”

reality disparate from language (§96). Obviously, such a “reality disparate from language” is documented by and in the shape of language-based and visual reconstructions, such as scientific reports, including statistical results and charts. We have good reasons to believe in these (mostly) scientific sources and to prefer them to the (mostly) propagandistic climate change deniers for several reasons: They are more authentic, consistent, sound, comprehensive, trustworthy, etc. than arguments simply used for propagandistic purposes. Sometimes propaganda is even disguised as scientific studies. Such studies can be considered pretend science if they are sponsored by influential corporations who are jointly responsible for climate change and who are not interested in policies against climate change diminishing their gains. However, even the serious scientific reports are still sources (media) *claiming to represent* “reality” and used within a discourse about the “right” description of the object/event (for a discussion in detail cf. Völker & Scholl 2014). Mitterer’s non-dualism teaches us to check which descriptions are part of the consent about the object and which are not. In the case of dissent, we use several indicators in order to decide about the validity of an object’s description, such as trustworthiness, consistency, comprehensiveness, and the authenticity of the observer’s purposes. Claiming the truth of a description in the first place is a strategy within discourse, which can be challenged, supported, neglected, etc. In any case, every material used in order to prove a certain description to be the better or best description is part of the discourse. Mitterer sensitizes the observer to accept that she is involved in the discourse by participating in it and that every claim of having the better/best argument, of being able to describe the object in a better way than others has to be disputed and is exposed to dispute. I cannot see any complicity of Mitterer’s philosophy with anti-humanist or ethically dangerous positions.

« 9 » If Weber is worried by populist (and most often extreme right-wing) denunciation of basic consents of a liberal society, I share this concern. However, I certainly prefer the constructivist and non-dualizing response to this challenge (as outlined above). It is tempting to search for easy

clarity or decidedness, but I am not willing to quit the achieved level of epistemological sophistication in favor of the simplistic realist claim that an ontologically presupposed reality teaches us whether a description of an object is “true” or “false.”

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How Criticizing Non-Dualism Reveals Basic Questions of Theoretical Philosophy

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> **Abstract** • I argue that Mitterer’s non-dualism does not succumb to the ontological fallacies that Weber claims it does. Also, I show that Weber’s conclusion that “dualism” is a logical alternative to the alleged failure of non-dualism is suggestive rather than argumentative. Instead of focussing on arguments on the level of naïve realism, it would have been better to discuss Mitterer’s idea of the “linguisticness” of the world on the basis of more elaborate philosophies.

Handling Editor • Alexander Riegler

Introduction

« 1 » From the perspective of contemporary and classical philosophy Stefan Weber’s target article is challenging, because while its terminology appears to be philosophically familiar, in some cases it is not properly defined (e.g., “dualism,” “language,” and “empirical evidence”) or is idiosyncratic (e.g., “non-dualism”) or is selective when the term for only one half of a dichotomy is used (e.g., “object” but not “subject”). Furthermore, it would be easier to understand what it is all about if the *discipline* of the theoretical philosophy at issue were named: epistemology, philosophy of language, metaphysics/ontology or philosophy of mind (Hübner 2015: 2f).

Questions of a philosopher

« 2 » *What is it all about?* At a high level, the target article is about a dualistic refutation of a philosophical theory called “non-dualism.” Put in the wording of theoretical mainstream philosophy: it is about the *ontological* question of whether Josef Mitterer’s idealistic-linguistic monism is more convincing – in his claim that only language *exists* – than dualism, which claims that there are two distinct ontological spheres. The starting point of this ontological discussion and the common ground between Mitterer and Weber is that there is an “idealistic realm of mind or language” (§4). The difference is