

Non-dualism and World: Ontological Questions in the Non-dualizing Mode of Discourse

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> Context • The relation between language and reality, the problem of truth, and ontological questions in general belong to the perennial problems of philosophy. Although non-dualism deals with these problems and their presuppositions, it still remains at the periphery of philosophical discourse. **> Problem** • How to deal with ontological questions within the non-dualizing mode of discourse. **> Method** • The paper tries to reconstruct the origin of, and the interest in, ontological questions addressed to non-dualists; it discusses the possible types of answers to these questions and proposes an alternative way of dealing with them. **> Results** • Ontological questions cannot be formulated within a non-dualist conceptual framework and hence they cannot be answered. **> Implications** • This paper tries to pave the way for leaving ontological questions behind and moving on to a different range of philosophical queries ensuing from a non-dualizing perspective. **> Key words** • Ontology, reference, discourse, object, description, interpretation.

Introduction

The distinction between human language, on the one hand, and the world, on the other, seems natural and necessary to us. A philosophy that suggests that we consider this distinction as optional appears odd and bizarre. So a mode of speaking and thinking that not only dispenses with this distinction but even claims to be able to cope without a concept of truth and, furthermore, intends to turn our system of reference upside down, overtaxes the nerves of quite a number of people. It will, therefore, be no surprise that the reactions to these proposals often oscillate between indifference and distaste. Josef Mitterer's conception of a *non-dualizing mode of discourse* combines all these elements and, in addition, involves working with a terminology that takes some getting used to.

Nevertheless, since its publication, his conception has not only created a stir but has also kindled a great deal of interest among the representatives of very diverse disciplines. Variants of a non-dualizing mode of discourse are dealt with by media-theorists, culture-theorists, historians, geographers, feminists, and philosophers, amongst others. Although non-dualism has already

found a great number of sympathizers that draw on parts of non-dualist philosophy for their own purposes, some of its aspects remain controversial and quite a number of questions remain unanswered.

One of the particularly sensitive points seems to be the question of the possible ontological statements or implications of Mitterer's philosophy.

The assertion that the presupposition of a dichotomous distinction between language and world is a fabrication that may be accepted or rejected as soon as it has been exposed as nothing but a *pre-supposition* may be attractive. However, an increasingly urgent question concerns how one is then expected to deal with material objects in the context of non-dualism.

This seems to be a central question for many interpreters of Mitterer. The objection has already been raised many times against the constructivists and surfaces once again in this connection: even non-dualists drive to work with *the* car and not with the word *car* and they bite into *the* apple and not in the description *apple*. I should first of all like to illustrate how diverse the ways are in which authors deal with this aspect, using a number of examples that refer directly or indirectly to Mitterer.

Volker Gadenne writes, for instance:

“Thus, in order to continue the description *so far*, and formulate the next description *from now on*, one has to attend to a *non-linguistic object*, and observe its properties. There is no other way a description could be performed. This is at least how people normally conceive of a *description*, in contrast to fiction or fantasy. And I don't think Mitterer wants to propose that we should invent the properties we ascribe to things.” (Gadenne 2008: 159)

Siegfried J. Schmidt puts the problems he has with this question into the following words:

“[O]n the one hand, it is asserted that objects *are* linguistic descriptions and nothing but descriptions; on the other hand, descriptions are discussed *in association* with the objects to be described. A further problematical statement is that ‘reality and description performance form a dynamic unity’ ([Weber] 2005: 333), although the components of this unity can evidently be differentiated.” (Schmidt 2010: 140 my translation)¹

1 | Original quote: “[D]enn zum einen wird behauptet, dass Objekte sprachliche Beschreibungen und nichts als Beschreibungen sind; zum

Peter Strasser, comparing Mitterer's theses with the opening lines of the Gospel according to John, constitutes the problem as follows:

“And as the world from its beginning is nothing but the light which is ‘the word’ (St. John) or ‘the description *so far and from now on*’ (Josef Mitterer), we must realise that there is something that can neither grasp the light nor be grasped by the light. This ungraspable It is *no* description.”² (Strasser 2010: 84, my translation)²

Stefan Weber also keeps returning to this question and writes, for example:

“But do non-dualists then play with descriptions of apples instead of apples? (See §§25 and 26 in Mitterer 1992, pp.64ff) Yes and no, because the description ‘apple’ and the apple form a unity. I have to repeat, they fall together unless you believe your object you call ‘apple’ is categorically different to many already internalized (learned) descriptions that in sum make up an ‘apple’ for you, but then you do not only speak of the description ‘apple,’ but of many more descriptions – on an implicit level.” (Weber 2008: 142)

The literature on Mitterer's philosophy contains a large number of instances dealing with the question of whether and how, according to non-dualism, objects are connected with *material things*, how objects should essentially be understood according to non-dualism, and whether there is any sense in relinquishing the discussion of language-different objects. The pivotal point of all these analyses is the question:

anderen wird von Beschreibungen im Verein mit den zu beschreibenden Objekten gesprochen. Problematisch erscheint mir auch die Feststellung, dass ‘Wirklichkeit und Beschreibungsleistung eine dynamische Einheit’ bilden ([Weber] 2005, S.333), wobei offensichtlich zwischen den Bestandteilen dieser Einheit unterschieden werden kann.”

2| Original quote: “Und da die Welt von ihrem Anfang an nichts ist außer dem Licht, welches ‘das Wort’ (Hl. Johannes) oder ‘die Beschreibung *so far and from now on*’ (Josef Mitterer) ist, müssen wir uns dessen bewusst sein, dass da etwas ist, das weder das Licht begreifen, noch auch vom Licht begriffen werden kann. Dieses nichtbegriffbare Es ist keine Beschreibung.”

What does the non-dualist think of ontology? *Are there* no language-different objects, i.e., *are there* only descriptions? This paper is an attempt to reconstruct the origin of, and the interest in, such types of questions addressed to non-dualists, to discuss the possible types of answers to these questions, and to propose an alternative way of dealing with them.

The origin of, and the interest in, ontological questions

The question of *what there is* has always worried philosophers. Only too often this question is, due to its common-sense understanding, supplemented by the phrase “in the world.” *What is there in the world?* It is hardly difficult to guess what would surface first and foremost to most of us in replying to this question: tables, trees, cars... material objects. This kind of answer would probably have occurred to even the most experienced philosopher. It seems to be regarded as simply unphilosophical, if not downright unreasonable, *not* to ask questions like *What is there in the world? What really exists and in what form?* and *What is true; what is the Truth?* Whoever is not interested in what *really exists in the world* need not take part in scholarly/scientific discourse at all.

Where does this rigorously exclusive attitude derive from? What makes these questions so explosive? They clearly suggest a connection between the claim to truth and the insistence on the priority of ontological queries. The question *What is there?* is equivalent to the question *Whereof is it true to assert that it factually exists in the world?* If one does not pose this question or if one doubts its significance, then the foundation of all conscientious philosophical activity is lost, i.e., the *things* about which philosophical/scientific statements and assertions may be made. Naturally these things not only comprise material objects – depending on the philosophical position – but also, or merely, linguistic, mental or abstract entities.

This already implies that there is a second implicit presupposition that can scarcely be separated from the question

What is there? It is the question *Which language-different things exist in the world?* Even for George Berkeley, the great critic of the existence of material things, it was neither possible nor desirable to establish a philosophy without entities that were independent of language, human perception and human consciousness. The question *What is there?* was essential for him too, and in his philosophy this question could not be answered without insisting on the existence of language-different/perception-independent, while still immaterial, objects (cf. Berkeley 1710: §§25ff).

Certain questions are so deep-rooted, due to our philosophical socialisation, that we are no longer aware of the dogmatic presuppositions from which they arise or, even worse, that we cannot imagine ourselves to be capable of thinking at all if they were abandoned (cf. the degrees of changeability of constructs discussed in Riegler 2001). The ontological question of what exists, and in what way it exists, is such a case. The dualist presupposition, as it can be reconstructed in the non-dualizing mode of discourse, can be roughly stated in the following way: There is language, and beyond language there is something that is not language, something language-independent, something language-different: *the world*.

Taking this as the point of departure, certain questions arise. These questions then take the following form: What exists? Does the world exist? How certain can I be that it exists? In what form does it exist? How do our descriptions relate to the world? Can everything be reduced to language or are there language-different objects? In the dualizing mode of discourse, the answer to the question *What is there?* constitutes the foundation of all philosophical activity. In the non-dualizing mode of discourse, the dualist presupposition of a difference between language and world is not shared. Questions resulting from the dualist position arise only for those who share these presuppositions.

Ontological questions arise and become pressing *because and when* their source of origin is of the dualist kind.

Possible types of answers to ontological questions

We began with the question: What does the non-dualist think of ontology? *Are there no language-different objects, i.e., are there only descriptions?*

Up to this point, I have attempted to reconstruct the emergence of this question from the residues of dualist presuppositions of those asking the question and to describe the great interest in such questions together with their explosive nature as to the consequences of those presuppositions. Before further dealing with the possible forms of non-dualizing answers to this question, I should like to fulfill my promise of expounding what the conceivable sorts of answers to this question might be. When speaking of *sorts of answers* or *types of answers* I am addressing the different possibilities of justification that might be adduced for any one answer.

When the question is *What does the non-dualist think of ontology?* then four types of answers seem possible:

- A | The author's opinion
- B | The meaning of the text
- C | The logical implication
- D | The compatibility of descriptions performed so far.

A | The author's opinion

The question of whether, according to non-dualism, everything is description and nothing exists but descriptions can be understood as the question of whether Mitterer would deny the existence of material objects or, to put it in a less controversial way, would negate their existence. Understanding the question in this way betrays an effort to work out, by virtue of close reading, the opinions held by Mitterer on these and related questions. An example of such an approach is the above-quoted passage from Gadenne:

“Thus, in order to continue the description so far, and formulate the next description from now on, one has to attend to a non-linguistic object, and observe its properties. There is no other way a description could be performed. This is at least how people normally conceive of a description, in contrast to fiction or fantasy. *And I don't think Mitterer wants to propose that we should invent the*

properties we ascribe to things.” (Gadenne 2008: 159, my emphasis)

Why should we invoke the author's opinion? The attempt to clarify such questions on the basis of an author's opinion is probably most common in the dualizing mode of discourse.

The authors of philosophical texts are considered to be the key authorities concerning the understanding or misunderstanding of their writings. Whenever I am able to claim that my opinion is identical with the author's opinion, I will probably not encounter great resistance.

It is, of course, quite possible that some people believe that I am wrong in assuming my interpretation to be identical to the author's, their own interpretation being in fact the one the author actually holds. If the author is no longer alive, then we are plainly referring to an authority that can not speak for itself. In this case, we are obviously dealing with a phenomenon resembling the situation in which I would like to resolve a difference of opinion by referring to *the* (language-different) world in order to claim that it corresponds with my description. What happens, however, if the author is still alive and capable of voicing his opinions? If we share a basic consensus, i.e., if we start out together from the theses of his work and develop further descriptions together, what would then make *his* descriptions superior to *ours*? In what ways would a potential statement by an author differ from *a* possible description *from now on* that we might share and thus turn into a new basic consensus or not?

Let us therefore discard the case that authors might voice their own opinions in order to resolve this question for it would, in my opinion, not make any significant difference. Is the opinion of authors of which we occasionally speak anything other than our own interpretation of their texts supplemented by the description that it corresponds with the intentions of the authors? We read a text, and reading a text means interpreting it. It is not possible to distinguish between the interpreted text and the interpretation of the text. Text and interpretation form an indivisible unity. This unity is our actual understanding of the text – our description of the text *so far*. This description

so far can be continued with descriptions such as “corresponds with the understanding of the author” or “corresponds with the opinion of the author”. The description *so far* in combination with this new description then forms our description *from now on*. This procedure is accessible to everybody. All philosophers may enrich their interpretations of Mitterer's books by utilizing the description that their interpretations correspond with his views.

“Authors' opinions” cannot, therefore, be adduced as legitimating authorities in answering such questions, irrespective of whether they are either voiced by the authors themselves or presented in the form of descriptions by us.

B | The meaning of the text

Although we may not be entitled to draw on the author's verdict on the ontology question, it must surely be safe to assume that the text, on publication, carries a meaning that is independent of its author. If I now want to decide how a non-dualist must deal with the question, should I not refer to the text in which the foundations of non-dualism have been written down? What else could I possibly refer to? What else could I use to justify myself? Furthermore, different portions of the text containing statements that invite contradictory interpretations may help to indicate where the weak points of the text are. An example of this kind of procedure is demonstrated by the following reading of the above-presented quotation from Siegfried J. Schmidt:

“On the one hand, it is asserted that objects *are* linguistic descriptions and nothing but descriptions; on the other hand, descriptions are discussed *in association* with the objects to be described. A further problematical statement is that ‘reality and description performance form a dynamic unity’ ([Weber] 2005: 333) *although obviously the components of this unity can evidently be differentiated.*” (Schmidt 2010: 140, my translation, last sentence is my emphasis)

However, what presuppositions have to be accepted for this kind of understanding? At first glance it seems to rest unconditionally on the belief in a more or less objective textual meaning. Such a line of argumenta-

tion implies, in addition, that this textual meaning can be identified in a more or less clear-cut manner. And moreover, that this more or less objective textual meaning, which can be identified in a more or less clear-cut manner, will finally help to decide without further controversy which of the offered interpretations is correct.

Within a non-dualizing mode of discourse, as I wish to understand it, these presuppositions are not, however, acceptable. Accordingly, a text cannot be read independently of its interpretation. In non-dualism, textual meaning can only originate whenever I extend the description *so far* (the text) with a description *from now on* (my interpretation). The text as commonly accepted basic consensus cannot decide which of its interpretations is the better one. The text can only be rendered capable of such a decision if I supplement it with my interpretation and turn the resulting construct into a presupposition for the other dissenting interpretations.

An examination of the question of how non-dualism conceives of the existence of material things cannot rely on *the* meaning of a text, which also includes all those texts in which the non-dualizing mode of discourse is explained and substantiated.

C | The logical implication

An answer to the question of the non-dualizing treatment of ontological questions cannot, therefore, rely on the opinions of authors, whatever they may be. The opinions of authors do not justify our answers. Nor is it possible to explain our answers by reference to the meaning of the texts presented in non-dualist writings. Are there still alternatives?

A possible argument might be that texts may indeed admit many different interpretations, i.e., all those interpretations that are actually produced and only those. For this reason, certain interpretations do not exist. So could we perhaps distinguish possible from impossible interpretations – “impossible” in the sense that we can assume that interpretations are seriously attempted and not simply jokingly performed by people who are not concerned with the plausibility of what they produce? However, how could a text possibly exclude particular interpretations? Perhaps by means of logical

implication, by a kind of intrinsic logical necessity?

Let us consider this proposal a little more closely. After all, even Mitterer argues in the terms of classical logic, using the figures of infinite regress, contradiction, etc. Should not logic, therefore, also find its place within a non-dualizing philosophy? In what context does Mitterer argue with the help of these logical patterns? When does he speak of consistency, necessity, and infinite regress? According to my interpretation, he introduces such lines of argumentation whenever he states an intrinsic self-contradiction within the dualist mode of discourse by using its instruments.

Within the dualist mode of discourse, traditional logic has its natural place – and this is a prominent one. An example of how easy it is to believe that particular statements necessarily follow from the theses presented in Mitterer's books and that others can definitively be excluded is indicated by passages in Strasser's essay. He writes, for instance:

“For the subjunctive description's truth depends on something that is completely independent of the description itself, namely the perceptions and ideas represented in God's infinite mind. This is a provoking case of dualistic ontology. *It must be rejected without mercy, given Josef Mitterer's sophisticated view of how real things can be really real.*” (Strasser 2008: 270, my emphasis)

Can we therefore say that a necessary consequence of Mitterer's texts is, for example, that George Berkeley's theses have to be rejected outright without *If*s and *But*s because they logically entail a “provocative case of dualist ontology”? Can a text possess such properties that the theses it contains exclude particular descriptions and practically impose other descriptions? For non-dualists this is an idle question. As already mentioned, there is nothing like an uninterpreted text that would be accessible to us. All we have are interpretations of texts. To say of a text that it actually excludes particular interpretations despite somebody already having interpreted it in this way cannot meaningfully be asserted within the non-dualizing mode of discourse. The text evidently also admits that interpretation.

To say that the text logically precludes a particular interpretation only makes sense when the text is understood in combination with its own interpretation. It is therefore clear that every interpretation deviating from one's own interpretation or contradicting this interpretation can be described as logically false. But that is not what is usually meant when people speak of the logical implications of a text. One must perhaps formulate it more carefully. A text may exclude interpretations on logical grounds, and these interpretations are unperformed interpretations or at least belong to the set of yet unproduced interpretations. This would further imply that every new interpretation of the text cannot be one of the interpretations that have already been excluded. And furthermore, that we cannot use our own interpretations to prove that an already performed interpretation of the text contradicts this text. Such assertions do not therefore achieve very much. Should anyone be interested in asserting that a text excludes particular interpretations, and these interpretations are unavoidably interpretations that have never been produced and will never be produced in the future, then they are free to do so. The result would, in any case, merely be a possible description that one could accept or reject.

How does this affect our initial question?

In no other way than that it is impossible to justify an answer to the question of the non-dualist understanding of the existence or non-existence of material things by asserting that their (non-)existence is logically implied by non-dualist theses.

Therefore, an answer to the question of the non-dualizing understanding of ontological questions cannot be reached on the grounds of logical necessity.

D | The compatibility of descriptions performed so far

An answer to the question of a non-dualist ontology cannot be based on the opinions of authors, on the meaning of texts, or on the assertion of logical implications.

However, what if we examine the possibility that a description in itself is inconsistent? Could we then not exclude particular answers or qualify others as at least poten-

tially correct on such grounds? And how would such inconsistency manifest itself? If a description *from now on* is a changed and, for example, supplemented description *so far*, what if elements of the description *so far* contradict elements of the description *from now on*? Could this possibly be the kind of situation in which variant interpretations have to be excluded?

Before pursuing this eventuality further, I should like to focus briefly on another question: Why are we so keen to exclude particular interpretation variants; why is the un-ambiguousness of an answer so important? An indication that this is very important is perhaps that Stefan Weber makes a great effort to decide this question definitively in an unambiguous way by writing, as already quoted above:

“But do non-dualists then play with descriptions of apples instead of apples? (See §§25 and 26 in Mitterer 1992, pp.64ff) *Yes and no, because the description ‘apple’ and the apple form a unity. I have to repeat, they fall together unless you believe your object you call ‘apple’ is categorically different to many already internalized (learned) descriptions that in sum make up an ‘apple’ for you, but then you do not only speak of the description ‘apple,’ but of many more descriptions – on an implicit level.*” (Weber 2008: 142, my emphasis)

Why now this urge for unambiguousness? In the non-dualizing mode of discourse it can hardly be claimed that the reduction of different (mutually diverging) descriptions represents an end in itself. The (deeply internalized) tendency directed towards accepting the primacy of a unitary opinion over a plurality of viewpoints derives from our customary dualist concept of truth. If one believes in an objective *beyond* that is language-different and static and corresponds in one way or another with our *true* beliefs exclusively, then it is hardly surprising that one seeks to reduce the plurality of viewpoints to a single one, i.e., the *true* one. And, moreover, everyone holding a view different from mine thus implicitly asserts that my own view is false. Everyone asserting something that differs from my own view thus accuses me of being wrong. However, the decision to resist these presuppositions implies that a uniformity of opinions can no longer

claim priority over a plurality of opinions without providing good reasons for its desirability. It follows that every single case must be argued afresh when considering the advisability of excluding some opinions/descriptions, even though we might not share them. Why should the question of what non-dualists think of ontology and whether they actually bite into *the* apple or merely into the description *apple* ask for an unambiguous answer? I have no idea.

However, as even Stefan Weber seems to believe that this question should be resolved, I shall try again and reiterate the question at the beginning of this paragraph. Can it be that a description *from now on* is inconsistent in itself? If this were so, then it could be that solely a non-dualist answer to ontological questions (as a description *from now on*) will not be inconsistent. In such a case, it would at least seem to make sense, even from a non-dualizing perspective, that an unambiguous answer to this question could be helpful.

Let us examine an example:

Description *so far*:

/The table standing in the corner is round./

Description *from now on*:

“The table standing in the corner is round and square.”

Is the description *from now on* in our example contradictory and inconsistent? Well, there are several ways we can try to give this description a clear-cut meaning:

1 | The table under discussion could be a completely different table.

This other table could indeed have round and square features. However, in this case we would not be dealing with a description *from now on*; it would be a description *so far* of another table.

2 | The table could have changed.

Then the description *from now on* would be: “The table standing in the corner was once round and is now square,” and not: “The table standing in the corner is round and square.”

3 | The table could be changing all the time.

Here again, the description *from now on* would preferably have the form: “The table standing in the corner is sometimes round and sometimes square.”

4 | The table could have the form of a semi-circle.

In this case we could say that the description *from now on* is not precise enough. It should actually run: “In some places the table standing in the corner is round and in other places the table standing in the corner is square.”

What now, however, if we understand the description *from now on* as the continuation of one and the same description *so far*, i.e., that the table standing in the corner is described at the same time in the same way as square *and* round?

At this point an argumentation analogous to the one in the preceding paragraph with regard to logical necessity might come in handy. If there actually are people who continue their description *so far* with such a description *from now on*, who or what can then decide whether this is admissible or not? The original description *so far* obviously permitted its development with such a description *from now on*. To be quite precise, the description *so far* only made it possible. The claim that such a description is inconsistent in itself or contradicts itself can only arise when I continue my description *so far* – The table standing in the corner is round and square! – in such a way as to transform it into the description *from now on*: “The description /The table standing in the corner is round and square./ is inconsistent.”

Whoever considers this an adequate foundation for excluding such descriptions, even though they have been executed in all seriousness, should be allowed to continue accordingly in the context of their description *from now on*.

As far as I am concerned, this is unnecessary. I suspect, furthermore, that this kind of argumentation will not satisfy all those who grapple with ontological questions.

Thus even the compatibility with descriptions executed *so far* cannot justify an answer to the question of whether non-dualists would negate the existence of material things.

It seems as if none of the possible types of answers are capable of producing what we want: an answer whose justification is satisfactory.



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An alternative approach to ontological questions

What does the non-dualist think of ontology: *Are* there no language-different objects, i.e., *are* there only descriptions?

Let us sum up: the question arises and is explosive for the reason that, and when, the basis of departure is of the dualist kind. No answer to this question can be found that meets the requirements of the dualist departure basis, i.e., the requirement of proper justification.

We must be precise, however. When such questions are advanced by dualizing philosophers then it is certainly quite understandable why they do so. And it is not at all difficult to imagine why they consider an answer to this question as being of paramount importance. And one may state with even greater clarity that the dualist camp has no problems with justifying an answer to this question. A simple *Yes* or *No* spoken by Mitterer would probably more than suffice. Should his answer to the question be *Yes*, then the non-dualizing mode of discourse would appear yet a little stranger than usual.

But a certain measure of strangeness is quite permissible within philosophy; it would be quite in order. Philosophy has, after all, even survived Berkeley's idealism.

In the case that the answer is *No*, Mitterer would be accused of inconsequence if not inconsistency. He speaks of descriptions and of the impossibility of ever reaching beyond descriptions – the impossibility of penetrating to something language-different – and still negates the question of whether

everything is just description. So there is something language-different after all! Contradicting oneself is not held in high esteem within philosophy; it would not be the done thing.

If dualizing philosophers put such questions to non-dualists then the non-dualists find themselves in a precarious situation – from the dualists' point of view. Dualizing philosophers know, of course, that *the* world exists, i.e., the language-different world. What they want to know is whether non-dualizing philosophers are so bold and weird as to deny this fact or to admit that their philosophy is just contradictory gobbledygook.

It would be an unconquerable task to attempt to convince dyed-in-the-wool dualists of the non-dualist mode of discourse. I am also inclined to think that such missionary activity is not entirely compatible with my own understanding of the non-dualizing mode of discourse.

Let us therefore consider another case.

The question is posed or treated by people who have already discovered the non-dualizing mode of discourse for themselves and who sympathize with Mitterer's theses and struggle to understand them. This text is primarily directed at them, and thus also at myself. So what is the answer for people who want to know whether the philosophy that has caught their interest entails the compulsory repudiation of the existence of material things? With regard to this case, I have attempted to show that the reasons for asking these questions at all are grounded in special personal presuppositions. And, furthermore, that any endeavor to apply the non-dualizing mode of discourse renders it

impossible to find an answer that will do justice to the dualist elements intrinsic to the question.

Does this mean that is an impossible question in non-dualism on which one should preferably remain silent; a blind spot, or something that simply cannot be expressed *in this way*? Is it unfair to confront a non-dualist with this question? I do not think so. One must simply give up hope of getting a dualist answer from a non-dualist philosopher.

Does the non-dualist bite into *the* apple or into the description *apple*? How does such a question arise? By understanding the words "apple" and "description" in a rather particular way.

Let us consider the following sentences:

- "I am biting into the apple."
- "I am biting into a material thing."
- "I am biting into a language-different thing."
- "I am biting into a description."

Why does this last sentence appear to be so absurd? Because a quite specific understanding of the relationship between these sentences is presupposed. Biting into an apple means biting into a material thing. To be a material thing entails being a language-different thing. To be a description entails not being language-different. Not being language-different entails not being a material thing. If something is not a material thing, that something cannot be an apple in the usual sense of the word. Biting into a description is the opposite of biting into an apple.

Why does this last sentence appear to be so absurd? Because we understand it in contrast to the preceding sentences. And it is precisely this difference between description and language-different things that the non-dualizing mode of discourse does not make. For the non-dualists, "I am biting into the word or the description *apple*" sounds no more or less absurd than "I am biting into the language-different thing *apple*."

Both sentences result from a presupposition that non-dualists do not accept – from a distinction that they do not make.

Do non-dualists bite into *the* apple or into the description *apple*? Do non-dualists drive *the* car or the word *car*? *Are there* no language-different objects, i.e., *are there* only descriptions?

Non-dualists can see no more point in answering these questions than an atheist would see in dealing with the question of whether God is omnibenevolent or cruel.

Is not the implication then simply to call "description" what the dualists call "thing," but to utilize both expressions with the same meaning? No. Because the same meaning would be a pre-linguistically-given language-different object. Something like that can only be referred to by someone who upholds the presupposition of the dualist distinction between language and world.

According to dualism, the non-distinction between language and world implies that this difference goes unrecognized, ignored, and denied, or that different categories are mixed. What happens, though, is that this personal decision for such a distinction is presupposed for everything and everyone.

According to non-dualism, the non-distinction between language and world implies that the decision to disregard this distinction does away with the difference. There is nothing, therefore, that could be merged, and nothing that has to be separated.

Without the distinction between language and world it makes no sense to say that one of these domains does not exist because these domains and categories have only arisen by virtue of being distinguished from each other. Within a non-dualizing mode of discourse, it would simply be incomprehensible to deny the existence of language-different things. I would have to switch over to my dualist viewpoint and perform the distinction between descrip-

tions and language-different things. Only then would it become possible to understand what it means to deny the existence of language-different material things.

If the presuppositions underlying a question are not shared, the question cannot be meaningfully answered by the person who does not share the presuppositions. The question itself becomes meaningless as soon as its presuppositions are negated: only for those, of course, who do not share the presuppositions.

For the religious individual, the question of whether God is omnibenevolent or cruel is not only meaningful but also important. Not so for the atheist. For the dualist, the question of the existence of language-different material things is not only meaningful but also important. Not so for the non-dualist.

The question of what non-dualists think of ontology is the question of which variant of the dualist ontology they consider to be better or more appropriate.

I would expect the non-dualists to abstain. They may voice preferences if they so wish, and they may find some dualist ontology more attractive or agreeable than another, but they will be unable to *adopt* any of them and still remain in the non-dualizing mode of discourse.

In the same way, atheists may prefer the idea of an omnibenevolent God to the idea of a cruel God. But as soon as they subscribe to the idea that God *is* omnibenevolent they can no longer meaningfully call themselves atheists.

One last time: What does the non-dualist think of ontology: *are* there no language-different objects, i.e., *are* there only descriptions?

Within the non-dualizing mode of discourse one may, in my understanding, leave such questions undecided in a relaxed manner. One even must leave them undecided. The interesting thing is to understand *why*.

Conclusion

Readers will probably have noted that I have so far failed to document Mitterer's books by proper summarizing references. This cannot pass without comment, of course.

It means in no way that I have not properly taken *the gist* of thoughts and lines of argumentation from *The Beyond of Philosophy* and *The Flight from Contingency*. On the contrary. For this reason I wish to make up for this neglect now in a somewhat unusual but all the more straightforward manner.

The principal concern of my text was to examine a specific question resulting from the reading of Mitterer's texts and the reading of texts on Mitterer's philosophy, as well as from conversations with Mitterer and some of the readers of his books.

The peculiar character of the situation in which this text finds itself is made up of several components. On the one hand, the guiding question originated in attempts to operate the non-dualizing mode of discourse. On the other hand, it is directed at people who make use of the non-dualizing mode of discourse. On the one hand, an answer to the question must be attempted. On the other hand, it turns out that an answer does not seem possible. On the one hand, a scholarly paper must justify the answer that it offers. On the other hand, I have tried to explain why none of the customary techniques of justification are appropriate in this case. These circumstances have inspired me to employ a somewhat different way of quoting. In the present text I could not, and did not want, to *refer* to and *rely* on the opinions held by Mitterer or the statements contained in his texts. I do not believe that it is meaningful to say that this text is a logical or illogical consequence or derivative of the texts by Mitterer, or that it corresponds with the descriptions in those texts.

What can be said and should be said, however, is this. My interpretation of the texts *The Beyond of Philosophy* (1992), *The Flight from Contingency* (2001), and *On Interpretation* (2013) is the basis of departure of the present text and can be understood as a description *so far*. The present text is the development of that description *so far*. It is my own description of the non-dualizing mode of discourse *from now on*, a description transformed and supplemented by new elements. To what extent it corresponds with the descriptions of the non-dualizing mode of discourse by Mitterer and those of the readers of this text, I am not going to tell.

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