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God and Phenomenology

Thinking with Jean-Yves Lacoste

JOERI SCHRIJVERS &
MARTIN KOČI, editors



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7

Affection, Mood, and Poetry

Overcoming Mentalism

JOSEPH RIVERA

Breaking the Spell of Impartial Spectating

A PRINCIPAL LESSON JEAN-YVES Lacoste's *Thèses sur le vrai* teaches us is that an object we experience never may involve us as impartial spectators [*spectateurs impartiaux*].¹ We justly observe, following from Lacoste's reading of the phenomenological tradition, that you and I are invested at each moment in the texture and feel of lived experience. Any object, be it a metal airport chair, a priceless Picasso painting, or a significant historical figure like Napoleon, evokes in me a certain affect, even mood: I love the object, I fear or admire the object, I conceive of the object as a particular kind of thing; perhaps it is boring or perhaps it is dreadful and cold, and so forth. The truth born of my encounter with any object invokes the following philosophical observation: experience arises always as the outcome of the *relationship* between the object and myself, between intuition and subjective affect. Because this relationship is governed by the logic of the heart or affect, it is the poet who occupies the coveted role of

1. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 66.

exemplary “phenomenalizer” [*phénoménaliser*]² of what Lacoste will simply name the lived fabric of experience. Experience is always *lived* experience enjoyed in the first-person singular, and it is the poet who maximizes the living dimension of all experience.

Following from this claim, it is necessary to emphasize that phenomenology privileges the first-person perspective. Givenness arises within my sense of “ownness” or “mineness” or what Dan Zahavi calls (in the wake of Husserl) “for-me-ness,” which suggests we enjoy a first-person intimacy with the world around us.³ The *phainomenon* appears to me only to the degree I experience it, that is, to the degree I fill it in with my perspective, even while I respect the integrity of its otherness. That is, I do not dominate the phenomenon; it is given from *its own* point of view. I must negotiate with it precisely by supplementing it with my own living subjectivity. Neither the subject nor the object arbitrates experience solely (neither *a parte objecti* nor *a parte subjecti* only); and yet, we insist, in the present essay, we are permitted to place an accent on the side of subjectivity. That privileging of the subject is precisely the foundation for the poetic structure of lived experience.

Such an interrelation between the phenomenon and the living subject requires careful philosophical calibration. Otherwise, the harsh reality is that the Myth of the Given may well creep unnoticed into phenomenological analysis of subjectivity. This appears to be the case in the work of Lacoste, whose volume *Thèses sur le vrai* casts the relation between subject and object in manner reflective of the arrangement of these domains in the Myth of the Given. This long critiqued (and mythic) structure presumes there are two separable tiers constitutive of experience: (i) the level of pure sensation constitutes the first base layer, and then, after the fact, a second level commences. (ii) This second level consists of the interpretative overlay the subject applies to the sense datum. This double structure may appear innocent or neutral at first glance, but after further investigation, it prioritizes the object and its side of givenness. It demands that the subject be governed by the sense impression itself—because they are pure or objective. I have elsewhere outlined and formulated a series of problems concerning the two stage sequence of the Myth of the Given from a phenomenological point of view.⁴

2. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 68.

3. Zahavi and Kriegel, “For-Me-Ness,” 36–53.

4. For more on the myth of the given, which is a debate in anglo-pragmatic philosophy (beginning with Sellars), see Rivera, *Phenomenology and the Horizon of Experience*, 142–62.

Lacoste insists we as subjects are recipients of raw data, what he calls “pure phenomenality” (the first level). We, in turn, develop a subjective overlay, what he calls the “filling in” of phenomenality from the point of view of the subject. This two tier or two stage structure surely duplicates something like the Myth of the Given insofar as pure phenomenality resembles the domain of pure sensation occupied by the “swarm of appearances” [*Gewühle von Erscheinungen*] that awaits formation by concepts, a synthesis of Kantian provenance.⁵ While Lacoste prioritizes the subjective power of constitution, arguably he does not advance beyond the rigid structural Kantian dichotomy between apriori appearances (pure sense data) and aposteriori concepts (universal laws of cognition).

Despite this glaring oversight, Lacoste does reinforce the necessary role mood and affection play in the unity of those two domains. In this way he achieves a victory over and advance beyond Kantian representational metaphysics or mentalism. When we “fill in” [*comblons*]⁶ or organize our experience, we do so precisely because we are not transcendental spectators who simply conform to objects, a position that Kant engineers and endorses. We are instead living subjects who bring to experience our mood, our relationship with others, and our history of affection (i.e, trauma, emotional highs, life-changing victories, profound losses, etc.). We are interested actors, not disinterested spectators who obey rigid universal laws of cognition.

The upshot, then, of such an emphasis on the living structure of experience is that it thoroughly abolishes the idea of a world graspable as an objective or impersonal thing. The world of sense data cannot constitute a collection of bare entities to which we correspond, as if the chair constituted an entity present-to-hand to be broken into scientific parts mirrored by a detached spectator. Phenomenology cannot in principle envisage the existence of a spectator who transcends the world only to look down on it and constitute the stream of experience as a neutral formation of raw givens.

If we are immersed always already in the world (and thus cannot get outside of it), what kind of world, then, do we inhabit? What is the world’s physiognomy in relation to me as an engaged actor within its domain? Lacoste addresses this query by claiming, on phenomenological grounds, that we live in a world always partially veiled because our mood determines what is manifest and what is not. We are active explorers of the world (*exploratrice du monde*),⁷ because the dynamic of our relation to the world is one of constant unfolding and contestation. Lacoste thus opens

5. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 234/A 111.

6. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 68.

7. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 106.

up the prospect of the world as a site of dynamic becoming that is at every turn “questionable.”⁸ The presence of an object to me in the world remains questionable because it is infused from the outset with “my” mood, which fundamentally yields to change and reconstitution. Here the “questionable” does not descend into a pessimistic view of the world of experience, as if we never may be sure about which event is authentic or not.⁹ In his reflections on phenomenology and worldmaking and in his wide-ranging *Être en danger* (2011), the idea of the “questionable” simply highlights the provisional and partial circumstances of all experience as such. A chair is never just a neutral sense impression, a mere chair. It could be a place of rest, of loneliness, the site of a crime, or a family heirloom. If made from wood, it appears inviting and warm, if from plastic, it looks cold and uncomfortable. The present essay shall develop the subjective dynamic of manifestation in a manner Lacoste celebrates in the wake of Heidegger, namely, that mood affects how the world appears.

This is due to the fact that we dwell in a middle condition, one in which we occupy a space between pure subjectivity and raw objectivity. This condition submits the world’s manifestation to being governed in large measure by mood, without at the same time giving up on the world as having demonstrable integrity in its own right, as an independent horizon of meaning. Here, and for the Heideggerian tradition from which Lacoste regularly draws his categories, mood consists of a primitive state of shedding light upon the world, of “throwing open” and thereby assigning a subjective articulation to the world. The very Greek grammar of the word phenomenon is rooted in the middle voiced verb *phainesthai*, which indicates or signifies therefore a “bringing to the light of day,” or an action which “puts something in the light.”¹⁰ Moreover, this verb invokes in me a fundamental receptivity, a middle voice that occupies the state of being-affected by things. Hence the verb’s act of “throwing open” or conferring, bestowing, and unveiling the dimensions of the world is to be integrated with an equally important attitude of receptivity. The middle voice of the verb “to bring to light” indicates two sides of manifestation: I am first affected by the world only to bring it to light by force of mood and affect.

For Lacoste mood and frames how a thing is unveiled. Hence why Heidegger reconfigures the meaning of truth as *aletheia*, or the unveiling of

things or the notion that “the entities of which one is talking must be taken out of their hiddenness; one must let them be seen as something unhidden; that is, they must be *discovered*,” rather than merely composing truth as the act by which the mind conforms to the object, making thereby the mind and object “agree.”¹¹ Often it is my mood that determines which swarm of sensations will protrude and provoke in me a synthetic experience. For Lacoste, essentially following in the wake of Heidegger, writes “what interests me wins the status of a theme. And what does not interest me, if it appears, will do so only in the margins of the field of consciousness.”¹² In this exact phenomenological sense, we enjoy the double power of “letting appear” and “making appear,” or in phenomenological terms, veiling and unveiling.¹³ Truth and appearance, to continue with Heidegger, harken back to *logos* and the definition of phenomenology; because *logos* can “signify that which, as something to which one addresses oneself, becomes visible in its relation to something in its ‘relatedness,’ *Logos* acquires the signification of *relation* and *relationship*.”¹⁴ For a thing to become a “phenomenon,” it must be unveiled or uncovered or illumined by me, since “Covered-up-ness is the counter-concept to ‘phenomenon.’”¹⁵ Indeed, if we are to remain faithful to phenomenological research, we commit ourselves to looking at an object with intensive purpose and intention (not as mere passive spectators), for the very act of unveiling-uncovering takes agency and intervention, since meaning “must first of all be *wrested* from the objects of phenomenology.”¹⁶ And the poet operates strongly under the force of this intervention for the sake of uncovering (this act of “wresting”), modelling phenomenological method for us in exemplary fashion. How?

Poetic literature embodies an expression of creative genius in this specific regard: the poet facilitates an excessive type of unveiling or “wresting” because her genius tells us what is true about the world when we feel it in the domain of mood, often called the heart. Lacoste develops this thesis to great effect insofar as he implies the poet describes experience according to the logic of the heart, which he claims eludes the theoretical question of “why.” The heart neither asks “why” nor interrogates the causal logic of the waterfall witnessed on a hike or the kiss exchanged with a lover. I simply enjoy the waterfall or the kiss. I undergo it. I suffer it. I accommodate it just

8. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 103.

9. Though I think Lacoste’s earlier theological view of the world is vulnerable to the charge of pessimism, even if it is not completely Gnostic in outlook; for more on this see Rivera, *Phenomenology and the Horizon of Experience*, 165–90.

10. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 51.

11. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 56–57.

12. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 105.

13. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 69.

14. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 58.

15. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 60.

16. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 60 and 61.

as it is given to me in my first-person point of view. The poet draws out this subjective affect with lyrical genius and provocative command; he “wrests” from the phenomenon its subjective truth. For this reason no third-person analysis takes place in poetry; such analysis remains held up at the level of passive receptivity. If it were to be applied, such analysis would ruin or deaden the experience of the waterfall or the hike or the kiss.

The present chapter therefore challenges, with Lacoste, the reigning picture of objective or neutral knowledge that scientific discourse or empiricism would presume is not only attainable but also commendable. Sensation and empirical “raw” givens invoke nothing more than the myth of pure objective data, which supposedly serve as that touchstone of truth to which minds must conform. Some philosophers of science suggest a corrective (in a phenomenological spirit). I generally concur with them that science functions as a “fable” that constructs a concrete story to mirror an abstract theory, but never in a way that exceeds the local conditions out of which the fable emerges, or the local language in which it is told.¹⁷ Scientific language aspires to neutrality without in fact realizing it does not and never may accomplish a “view from nowhere.”

What do I experience in flesh and bone, in my own skin? I see the gorgeous and breath-taking waterfall, not the visual waves of data hitting my retina. I hear the waterfall amid the chirping birds and sunshine, not the auditory data vibrating my hearing organ. If we are to read Heidegger over the shoulder of Lacoste, we can quote from *Being and Time* the germane observation about hearing as immersive and first-personal: “What we ‘first’ hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking waggon, the motor-cycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling.”¹⁸ The landing of sense-data (the moment I hear the waterfall) already invites the force of interpretation, in which the subject and world address each other as a compound or unity that precedes any representational gap between raw data and an interested subject. That is the structure of knowing that poetic literature amplifies.

Should we follow a poetic analysis of mood and truth, the phenomenology of experience results in two preliminary conclusions we may glean from Lacoste’s *Thèses sur la vrai*: (i) that the world does not remain at a distance, an object forced into a set of manageable, disposable significations or objective syntax, and (ii) the subject is not a static spectator whose interior chamber aims to simulate or copy the world out there. In this way, phenomenology’s mood-based cognition overcomes representational metaphysics.

17. Cartwright, *Dappled World*, 38.

18. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 207.

I will engage with Lacoste’s text directly on this point in section III below. My argument shall claim that poetry, among speech acts, that can generate memorably this form of nonrepresentational know-how. Since poetry encourages the lived experience of the present moment just as it is given, it is thereby poetry that also insists we dwell richly in those givens with an open heart. It is “mentalism,” what Lacoste associates with the idea of an impartial spectator, that alienates us from the givenness of things. To this obstacle we now turn.

Mentalism Defined

It is at this juncture that we must visit briefly (and only in sketch-form) the conceptual architecture of mentalism, which represents the Cartesian-Kantian bogeyman Lacoste and French phenomenology in general seeks to subdue. It begins and ends with the metaphysics of representation, whereby the mind holds objects at a distance in order to grasp them, even force them into a manifold of a priori mental categories. Mentalism relies heavily on the notion of a *disengaged* or *impartial* spectator, an abstract interpretation of the self—a disembodied mind who occupies a view from nowhere, presumably to enable the scientific method to proceed unhindered by the “prejudice” of contingent vocabularies enunciated by individual voices with particular moods, affections, and histories.

Lacoste lights upon and forcefully repudiates the impartial spectator on several occasions throughout *Thèses sur le vrai*. A more sustained philosophical and genealogical critique of the disengaged spectator, however, originates from joint authored book by Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus, *Retrieving Realism*.¹⁹ Here I only briefly highlight what I appreciate most about their engagement of the topic at hand. They justly condemn the very idea of the isolated impartial spectator who can view the real world “out there” as an object located outside of the mind, a world which can liaise with me only by means of sense stimuli.

A principal metaphysical problem the bedevils mentalism arises right away: how does the mind “in here” make sense of the world “out there” if there is a bottomless interval between the two? I must traverse the gap. But how? I must reach outward to “grasp” or “gather” data, and in so doing represent the world inside my mind. Yet a chief conceptual and existential problem arises: representation trades on the vexing idea of overcoming the interval. It thus constructs a conceptual “bridge” between two domains,

19. Taylor and Dreyfus, *Retrieving Realism*.

mind and world, and this bridge formulates an indispensable go-between (or instrument) for experience to obtain at all.

The implication to be drawn out here is that experience becomes split between an “inside subjective experience” versus an “outside objective realm.” The only way the mind can experience the world, then, is through a connection made possible by the bridge. The scope and capacity of concepts, ideas, or representations that mediate the sense impressions received from the world. The metaphysics of mentalism demands the mind assume the role of *impartial mediator* between itself and world.

Taylor and Dreyfus name the problem of the interval the “mediational” theory, and it originates with Descartes and is reinforced masterfully by Kant.²⁰ The Cartesian world picture of dualism between a “thinking mind” and an “extended body” (or exterior world as *res extensa*²¹) trades on the unforgettable “ghost in the machine” metaphor born of Ryle’s critique of Descartes.²² Not so much a metaphor for Descartes but a genuine description of his error, the machine of the body serves the purpose of a literal surrogate for the world. The body, in this mediational theory, inhabits not life but the mechanistic behaviour of a machine, a name Descartes confers on the body over and over again in the *Treatise on Man*, an obvious text subject to critique untapped by Lacoste, Taylor and Dreyfus.

We shall not rehearse this Cartesian text in the detail it demands. Yet, we can adduce a few examples for the purpose of illuminating what Lacoste finds objectionable about the impartial spectator. For example, the following statement occupies the spectator conception of knowing in Descartes:

And when a soul has been put in this machine, this will allow it to sense various objects by means of the same organs, disposed in the same way, and without anything at all changing except the position of the gland [Et ceci sera cause que, lors qu’il y aura une ame dans cette machine, elle pourra quelquefois sentir divers objets par l’entremise des memes organes disposez en meme forte].²³

20. Much of their analysis on the spectator and the mediational theory lies in Taylor and Dreyfus, *Retrieving Realism*, 1–26.

21. Heidegger memorably describes the Cartesian framework of the “world” as *res extensa*. See *Being and Time*, §19, “The definition of the ‘world’ as *res extensa*.”

22. Ryle, *Concept of Mind*, 4.

23. Descartes, “Treatise on Man,” 155. The diagram of the pineal gland is 147. For French, see AT, 11:183.

Here the gland is “gland H” or the pineal gland in the brain, the seat of the subjective principle or the soul, the specular ghost who indwells the machine-body.

We can also invoke further commentary on the body in the *Treatise on Man*. Here we see a methodical analysis of the organic body conducted by Descartes. A discussion of a medical examination of the brain and its physical connection to the eyes by way of the optic nerve unfolds over several pages (with accompanying diagrams). In this philosophical consideration of the body Descartes is concerned to pick apart in detail the mediational role the body plays in the communication of visual sense data. We can in this Cartesian map of mind and body conceive of the mind or soul as a subjective principle linked to the world by the eyes (eyes serve the purpose of a bridge).

The point here remains irrefutable, and it is one I challenge with Lacoste: Cartesian anthropology, through analysis of the brain and the body, shows that the outside world is *mediated* to the soul (i.e., mind) by way of sense impressions. In this way the soul represents the world as an object copied in the brain—an act of mediation whereby simulation of the world is built up out of sense impressions by force of the subjective representation (or gathering of sense data) of the mind. This, in short, highlights the basic duality that funds the Cartesian roots of mentalism.

Within the metaphysics of Cartesian “mentalism” lies the fundamental assumption that it is only the mind or the act of thinking that can permit the mind to traverse the gap, to receive sense impressions from the “outside.” Mentalism derives its namesake from the very idea that the mind should be granted privilege over mood and affect. Some like Antonio Damasio would dismiss deduction as “Descartes’ error,” the forlorn legacy of classical or early modern rational epistemology, that “thinking, and awareness of thinking, are the real substrates of being.”²⁴

Lacoste highlights how this reductive view of the subject is reductive because it conceives of the mind as reflective thing, a representational cryptographer who copies data from the outside world. Lacoste names its activity as impartial spectating, while others in philosophical tradition over the past few decades have named it a type of deductive “cognitivism” or “intellectualism” or “mentalism” or “conceptualism.”²⁵ What if there is an

24. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 248.

25. Representational metaphysics is called cognitivism by Haugeland, *Having Thought*, 9–46; intellectualism by Henry, *Essence of Manifestation*, 161–61, 375 and 412 and by Taylor, *Language Animal*, chapter 1; and mentalism by Hilary Putnam and Hubert Dreyfus, see Putnam, *Representation and Reality*, chapter 1 and Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, ix. Lacoste might call it conceptualism, as I do in his wake in

alternative way to inhabit the world that involves affection and mood, forms of dwelling that close the gap between mind and world because they do not privilege thinking? This is precisely the path down which Lacoste's work travels, which celebrates the power of poetry to meet the challenge of the disinterested [*désintéressé*] spectator.²⁶

Lacoste on Heideggerian Affect: Pragmatic and Intersubjective

The phenomenological reality of the world is that it remains a subjective accomplishment. Each of us dwells not as an impartial spectator, but as an "artisan of evidence" (Lacoste's term), which conveys the fundamental notion that what is true to us is true only because and insofar as it counts as true "for us" according to the standards set by practical and interpersonal motives. I remain and will always remain an active agent who intervenes in the world by bringing the world to light. As Heidegger contends, (and I might add this constitutes an observation with which Lacoste strongly concurs) we as embodied creatures dwell among things in a manner that is always already interested in their normative utility, their pragmatic structure (as *pragmata*, things with which we engage the in their serviceability, conduciveness, usability, manipulability). This dealing with things-as-equipment occurs by force of the instinct of "circumspection" (*Umsicht*), an affect supported by a more fundamental type of affect, "care" (*Sorge* or *souci* in French) for things and care for others (*Fürsorge* or *sollicitude* in French).

Anything must arise within our remit of a fundamental openness to things, for they obtain according to the broadest term in this linguistic family of ideas, namely attunement or mood (*Stimmung*)—anxiety and boredom consist of a taxonomy of fundamental moods or *Grundstimmungen* in Heidegger. All of these "affects" or prereflective types of "know-how" work in conjunction with each other to combat the assumption that humans operate according to the theoretical deliberation of a disengaged or impartial spectator. We are to be understood as involved actors in the world who "wrest" from objects their context, their environments, and their peopled setting, on the basis of what matters to us.

When we see a hammer, we always see it automatically in a pragmatic modality. The hammer forms a tool whose use is to hammer a nail into a shed in the act of the construction of the shed, etc. The shed is not defined as a "shed" independently from or in advance of other items or entities in the

chapter 9 below.

26. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 114.

immediate environment in which the shed appears. Rather the shed arises in relationship with a multitude of concrete factors, which entails a normative context that tells me a shed acquires its usefulness in a domestic context, i.e., as a small uninsulated building located in the back yard of a detached house. Its size as "small" and "uninsulated" corresponds to its intended use, which is to serve the purpose of storage of such hardy things like firewood, bikes, paint cans, etc.

We are hermeneutical creatures who negotiate the world according to practical know-how. We regularly distinguish the meaning and content of objects as equipment, that is, as meaning-laden objects embedded in a network of enviroing stimuli, rather than as bare objects floating free of context.

What is within in existential reach and made manifest is only manifest according to this rule of practical reason: Lacoste observes in Heidegger's wake that what appears to us depends on our interest for it to be true for us [*l'événement due vrai dépend de mon intérêt pour le vrai*], and it is true for us on the basis of the thing's meaning within the context of its normative-pragmatic significance.²⁷ And this attentiveness to the hammer belongs to, and is rooted originally in, the domain of prereflective affect, or circumspection, not theoretical and cognitive deliberation carried out by an impartial spectator who could not care less about the context of the hammer or shed.

Even our sense of space and spatiality elicits the same kind of prereflective know-how, which fixes the meaning of an object's spatial coordinates on the basis of inferential relations I "feel" or "sense" between the object and its environment.²⁸ Take the hammer once more. I may be "close" to it physically, at which point I can assure myself that the hammer lays only three feet away from my right hand. Yet, what the impartial spectator fails to see is that the hammer may be much further away regarding its utility and practical purchase.

To be exact, this closeness of equipment has already been intimated in the term 'readiness-to-hand,' which expresses the Being of equipment. Every entity, that is 'to hand' has a different closeness, which is not to be ascertained by measuring distances. This closeness regulates itself in terms of circumspectively 'calculative' manipulating and using. At the same time what is close in this way gets established by the circumspection of concern,

27. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 117.

28. For an excellent guide on the connection between spatiality and affection/mood in Heidegger, see Franck *Heidegger et le problème de l'espace*, 65–80.

about the direction in which the equipment is accessible at any time.²⁹

It must be made clear that such existential proximity (existential spatiality), rooted in calculative manipulability, expresses its spatial significance in the context of the public norms of the utility of the tool of the hammer that we feel and know circumspectively.

If we “deal” with or “care” for the hammer in the context of utility, and thus manipulate it accordingly, then this activity converts the hammer from a bare entity into a thing for which I care for, or have concerned dealings with. This, to reiterate, is what Heidegger calls circumspection.³⁰ I see the hammer not as a disinterested spectator would encounter it, but as an interested agent who engages with it as a useful object ready-to-hand. As an artisan of evidence, Lacoste informs us that we enjoy intimacy with the hammer as a tool for construction because we deal with it from the standpoint of a handyman or builder or DIY enthusiast. I handle objects as they are intended to be handled because mood always has understanding and understanding always has its mood.³¹

Affect and pragmatic know-how also involves interpersonal connection, quite literally between persons (*Fürsorge*). I invoke and develop an example from Lacoste: imagine a genuine encounter I may have with a long-time friend I have not seen in a while.³² I see him walking in a crowded train station. Initially I do not recognize him. I am of course courteous to the individual person as he walks briskly by me. It is a human being I notice walking in close spatial proximity (say six inches away) to me as I work through a crowd to my relevant platform. While I may brush shoulders with the person, he nevertheless remains spatially something like an “entity,” a present-at-hand object whose significance remains remote. He may well lay a million miles away from my existential and practical field of interest—whereas the impartial spectator would like to suggest he really lies only a few feet away (spatially).

Seconds later instinct or practical know-how remaps the bare space of an entity onto the “circumspectively allotted place”³³ of the existential totality of my interpersonal environment. This means nothing less than my

29. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 135.

30. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 98.

31. Heidegger writes tellingly if somewhat cryptically, “A state-of-mind always has its understanding, even if it merely keeps it suppressed. Understanding always has its mood.” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 182.

32. Lacoste, *Thèses sur la vrai*, 129.

33. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 138.

interest has shifted from catching my train to figuring out who the person is that squeezed by me. In this shift of perspective, the person draws close to me, securely within my circumspect field. This occurs the moment I feel the look and gate of the person as intensely familiar. I exclaim to myself silently the name of the person, John! It is you! I have not seen you, my old friend, in five years, and I see you are arriving home for Christmas. My friend is now thirty feet away as an entity, but he is as intimate to my heart as he possibly can be, once I realize his identity.

As convention would have it, I turn around and shout to my friend to have a coffee. He recognizes me back in that instant. The reunion follows suit. The observation for our purposes is that this person’s identity was a truth I came to discover only after that person “protruded out” as significant and concerned to me. The person is a friend of deep emotional significance who, only through circumstance, I have not seen for some years. Out of the corner of my eye I could not help but feel his distinctive bodily movements and the unique shape of his gaze emanating out from his dark, almost black eyes. The object, the person walking by me, provides here intuition or data. I picked up on it because it provoked in me great interest, and spatially it exercises the “function of discovering the environment circumspectively and bringing it close; this knowledge is used only in and for a concerned Being which does not measure stretches—a Being towards the world that ‘matters’ to one [Sein zu der einen “angehenden” Welt].”³⁴

What is instructive here is that I did not recognize the friend on the basis of deliberative reason or cognitive or strategic calculus performed by the impartial spectator. I felt my friend John because he “matters” or “comes on” [*angehenden*] to me in my world. I felt his peculiar gate, his gaze, and finally, the totality of the formation of his bodily presence. The busy crowd and my focus on getting to the platform initially prohibited my capacity to “care for” John immediately. Yet, in the moment of my recognition, when the “penny drops” and I say eureka that is John, I do not undergo a change in the perception of the physical environment.³⁵ What changes is my existential and practical stance within that same physical environment. That is, Lacoste makes clear that mood determines truth since John the entity had the same coat and hat on his body as John the lifelong friend, that is, both before and after recognition.

Lacoste roots the embodied process of recognition in the temporal dynamic of gathering data; in this case it occurred relatively instantaneously,

34. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 141. The original German is included in the MacQuarrie and Robinson translation.

35. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 129.

however, there remained what Lacoste calls the “accumulation of indices” of John’s sense of self. In the window of about fifteen seconds I recognized John as we approached each other unknowingly in a bustling train station.

My pre-experience of John makes me an engaged artisan or connoisseur of John’s intuitive display of data—the collection of manifestations that compose the structure of John’s self. Truth described here is participatory, an event in which both myself and the dynamic movement of the world coemerge.³⁶ Truth as “mine” does not collapse into solipsism, since it evokes an event that occurs and unfurls within my concerned engagement with the world. Hence the very structure of “existence” is related to the structure of “truth;” in point of fact Lacoste takes pains to show they are circular in their mutual illumination.³⁷ I wrest from the world its living fabric, its truth, and the poet can show this higher way to truth with heightened alertness. We can dwell poetically if and only if mentalism’s impartial spectator disappears in the evocations of poetic literature.

Dwelling Poetically

How do such examples (encountering a hammer and chancing upon a life-long friend) justify what appears to be an exaggerated claim on the part of Lacoste about the nature of poetic language and the genius of the poet, namely: the poet functions as the exemplary phenomenizer of truth, or the “over-phenomenizer” or “super-phenomenizer” [*surphénoménaliser*] of experience.³⁸ The prefix in French of *sur* permits us to claim that poetry functions as a language of excess, similar to the prefix in German of *Über*—in English, translations could include *hyper* or *super* or *over*. All would be suitable. Not to be reduced to mere literary devices like hyperbole, the poetic trope makes the appearance of an object “over-appear” or “super-appear” in the sense that poetry amplifies an object’s emotional landscape. Saturating the reader with a combination of sensory overload, vibrant vocabulary, and philosophical appeals, the poet’s stanza brings to life more fully that which already lives right before us in a fragmentary and partial manner.

As John O’Donohue, a poet in his own right, observes powerfully, the poem “is a shape of words cut to evoke a world the reader can complete. The poem is shaped to enter and inhabit forgotten or not yet discovered alcoves in the reader’s heart.”³⁹ To dwell poetically is to behold the world

with the soulful eyes of the heart, couched in my “engaged stance.” For the rich experience of the heart cultivates a taste for the first-person singular, in which “I myself” enjoy the waterfall or the beach or the sunrise just as I taste it in that moment, without expectations for how it must be theoretically or objectively thematized (like an impartial spectator would like to disclose). I dwell in the poetic attitude when I remain consistently open to the richly unexpected events that unfold out from the scene, from the waterfall, beach, or sunrise, without recourse to a scientific framework or the network of causes that brought it about. Lacoste exclaims, “the experience offered to us by the poet is absolutely unexpected.”⁴⁰

I know of no better poet to illustrate this poetic genius than Walt Whitman. His own reflections on the vocation of the poet inform the reader that poetic structure fundamentally defies structure. If structure requires closure, firm boundaries, and rigid form, then the poem operates on another plane of existence, that of the personal. He writes, “poetic style, when address’d to the Soul, is less definite form, outline, sculpture, and becomes vista, music, half-tints, and eve less than half-tints. True, it may be architecture, but again it may be the forest wild-wood, or the best effects thereof, at twilight, the waving oaks and cedars in the wind, and the impalpable odor.”⁴¹

The richness of manifestation illustrated in the dynamics of “poetic style” arises in the interplay between subject and object, whereby the hermeneutic specific to this interplay depends entirely on the living subject, the heart or soul. A poem lingers in the heart. It awaits development in a new key while it resounds in the heart’s rhythmic largess. “A great poem,” Whitman continues, “is no finish to a man or woman but rather a beginning [. . .] to no such terminus does greatest poet bring [. . .] he brings neither cessation or sheltered fatness and ease.”⁴²

We invoke Whitman’s meditation on the beach as a concrete example. The poet “makes” us see objects in a certain “full” or “excessive” light insofar as the beach always remains the beach subject to growth. Reformulated in poetic style, the beach grows, and its enlargement is never physical and molecular, but is a welling up within my emotional landscape. My soul and heart enlarge as I soak up the beach in poetic form, prompting not a hermeneutical “terminus,” because no such determinate and final pronouncement on the nature of “beach” or “ocean” can be adjudicated once and for all. In the encounter with the beach and the sea, what emerges is the “unexpected” beginning of the ocean’s super-appearance given to me in the first-person

36. Lacoste, *Être en danger*, 173–75.

37. Lacoste, *Être en danger*, 179.

38. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 68.

39. O’Donohue, *Divine Beauty*, 90.

40. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 126.

41. Whitman, *Complete Poems*, 788.

42. Whitman, *Complete Poems*, 759–60.

singular. My poetic stance “wrests” from the beach its living color, a living exchange of excess with the ocean only a poet like Whitman can bring into form.

Take an excerpt from *Song of Myself* about an encounter and exchange with a beach. I am persuaded Whitman captures a genuine feeling the beach can evoke in any sea swimmer, seasoned or not:

I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers, I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of me, we must have a turn together, I undress, hurry me out of sight of the land, Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse, Dash me with amorous wet, I can repay you. Sea of stretch'd ground-swells, Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths, Sea of the brine of life and of unshovell'd yet always-ready graves, howler and scooper of storms capricious and dainty sea, I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and of all phases.⁴³

I enjoy the sea by surrendering to its movement, power, and living prowess, its “amorous wet” that is the “brine of life.” I do not know who might like to perceive the sea from the point of view of an impartial spectator. Whitman’s account may be heightened for rhetorical effect, but that is just the point: the beach here is too inviting, for its fingers reach out and state “we must have a turn together.” Who can deny a swim now?

Lacoste shall describe the excess of Whitman’s language as a new economy of appearing and, eo ipso, as a new economy of truth [*Nous entrons dans une nouvelle économie de l'apparaître, qui est une nouvelle économie de la vérité.*].⁴⁴ I am inclined to argue that such a suggestion is well-intended but ultimately overhasty: that poetry causes me to dwell in an entirely different universe or economy of truth, or that poetry “breaks with the limits of the world” [briser les limites du monde]⁴⁵ encourages an opposition between a poetic world and an empirical world. What I find meaningful in Lacoste’s recuperation of the poetic style of truthmaking is that he links it to theological and liturgical modes of truthmaking. Lacoste pays the poet a complement of the highest order when he declares that the “poetic vision is also theology” [la vision poétique est aussi théologique].⁴⁶ I do not deny poetry can evoke a sense of the sacred in the encounter with the sea, even a strong sacramental and thus Christian sense of the sacred. Of course it can and it does (my own Christian identity prefers this hermeneutic).

43. Whitman, *Complete Poems*, 84.

44. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 119.

45. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 124.

46. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 126.

But poetry trades on instinct and heart, less on doctrine and conceptually-refined architecture. I think Lacoste would concur and I have explicated this version of theology as “lived” in the heart elsewhere.⁴⁷ Poetry like theology is architecture, indeed, but its structure is waving oaks and cedars in the wind, which endlessly bend here and there.

If I admit I should like to dwell poetically in the world, and thereby feel the world just as it is given to me in my active intervention to enjoy the world (rather than think through the world’s structure and confer on it the rigid architecture so valued by the impartial spectator), then it follows we must prioritize the heart, affect, mood, and embodied habit. Mentalism must be bracketed or at least minimized, and I am persuaded this is the task Lacoste sets himself to achieve in his excellent *Thèses sur le vrai*

Poetic dwelling, then, as Lacoste often conceives it, explains the fact that I singled out John of a bustling crowd without reflective cognition involved. What if I were moving through the crowd at the train station with pure theoretical interest. I surely would have missed John’s protrusion. The poet, we must conclude, detaches us from our theoretical detachment. Great existential and epistemological riches await us if we are open to the sense of the heart, or what Heidegger names the “great hall where all knowledge is kept,” which opens up our investigation to the subjective principle he names the heart.⁴⁸ In this domain, the poetic attitude wields the power to scent or “to take to heart” John’s embodied self, for it brings John existentially close, intimate to my heart’s interpersonal know-how or *Fürsorge*.

The poetic celebration of instinct appeals to the heart and thereby lures us away from cold calculus of scientific detachment or impartial spectating. The assumption that scientific objectivity reaches the pinnacle of human knowledge and truth is fully challenged when I read Walt Whitman or Seamus Heaney, for: the poet illustrates powerfully that we are not disinterested spectators and never have been. Lacoste contends it is unnatural for us to achieve a view from nowhere. We cannot be disinterested even if we should muster up supreme scientific focus and apply it to this goal while in an actual laboratory.⁴⁹ What is “true” is meaningfully engaged by our instincts, affect, and life history, in short, our heart. We simply *are* interested creatures who care about what we deal with. The poet is an exemplary in inaugurating us into this shift in perspective, what Lacoste names a poetic reduction.

47. Rivera, “God and Metaphysics in Contemporary Theology,” 823–44.

48. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 207.

49. Even in scientific laboratories the individual passions and interplays between peers undermines the very idea of objective research. See the sociological studies of the laboratory in Latour and Woolgar, *Laboratory Life*.

According to Lacoste the poet achieves a distinct kind of shift in perspective (or reduction) on our behalf that permits the living or subjective structure of truth to come into lasting and vivid focus. If we are not held captive to the scientific view of detachment, then poetry feels natural. However, many of us cannot help but rely on the metaphysics of science as a point of departure for how and why we experience the world the way we do. Lacoste will even claim scientism can maintain a “stranglehold” [*mainmise*] on our collective western imagination.⁵⁰

This is all the more reason to enjoy poetry, which permits the ego to reconnect with its own first-personal disposition, its heart. Someone like (for myself) Walt Whitman can put into play a “poetic bracketing” or reduction that puts between parentheses the scientific metaphysical question: “why?” This is Lacoste’s chief interpretation of the poetic reduction: it literally brackets the question of “why,” the very question that may well motivate the scientific method. That is, I may read Whitman’s view of the beach and how he undresses to enter into the sea. In the act of reading, I do not ask why his encounter with the sea is happening the way it is; nor do I interrogate what causal and mathematical features can be objectively disclosed about the experience of the sea’s “amorous wet.” Poetry brackets this very “why” question altogether. Lacoste makes clear that the poet makes an object “overappear” precisely because poetic formations elude the theoretical questions of why or because. Theory does not intervene. Thus “phenomenological description prescribes us with an ideal type of intervention in the form of nonintervention.”⁵¹ And this due to the fact that the phenomenon “appears to us with its own horizons.”⁵² To interrogate a phenomenon, say my lived experience of the beach, about its “why” and its “because” robs the experience of its lived quality—only a poet accomplishes the lived cartography of experience with the excess proper to over-appearing. That is, the “poet makes us see the ‘without why,’ but he does not abolish the prosaic evidences” according to which a phenomenon is given. In fact, even my encounter with the sea on the beach is a scene in a “world marked by the omnipresence of why.”⁵³

While cognitive spectating can dislodge us from the world in which we are immersed by instinct, it is poetry that can reintegrate us from the alienating power of impartial reflection. Poetry, that is, enables us to live from and enjoy the elements, and in this, it is holy and sacred practice. Lacoste,

50. Lacoste, *Être en danger*, 72–77.

51. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 64.

52. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 63.

53. Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai*, 62.

a critical and faithful reader of Heidegger, would echo the sentiment that “the poet in the time of the world’s night utters the holy.”⁵⁴ No doubt it is the technological constitution of western culture that embodies the “night” of civilization (the destitute time), and is the poet who, by performing a special kind of reduction (reduction here meaning leading back to), can bring hope to the late modern mood: we can deny technology’s impartial spectating in favor of the heartfelt joy of first-person experience, whereby “I” undergo the world just as it is given to me.

Conclusion

We have considered in the foregoing mentalism, the chief obstacle to a proper understanding of a poetic style of knowing that defines the phenomenological analysis of practical reason. The very suggestion that deliberative reason and rational calculation ought to represent the foundation of social cognition and contemporary research on the topic is flawed, and it is Lacoste’s work, carried out in the wake of Heidegger, on affect, instinct, embodied know-how, and mood that opens up various important insights about these structures of anthropology. While we do not deny that concepts and mental categories shape how we grasp the flow of information in which we find ourselves, such mentalism can imprudently urge us to overlook a more basic grammar or medium of communion with the world. In order to meet the challenge of mentalism and develop the poetic style of know-how, I have read Heidegger as he is reframed by Lacoste’s recent work on poetry and affect. In this spirit a critical evaluation of affect in both the domain of “objects” and “persons” was followed by a reading of Walt Whitman on poetic dwelling and Lacoste on the poetic reduction. The instinctive center of practical reason, whether it lies within the use of a hammer or the care of an old friend, is the heart. To enjoy intimacy with my environment, I dwell with my heart open, so that it remains receptive to what gives itself independently of the theoretical calculus born of impartial spectator. I concur with Whitman’s wise self-observation about his vocation: if the poet “breathes into any thing that was before thought small it dilates with the grandeur and life of the universe.”⁵⁵ This comment justifies the conclusion that poetry can be a theological type of intervention, of “wresting” from objects one kind of truth. The excess of poetic language prompts the excess of the desire of the heart, whatever that be; it dilates the heart, making possible an excess of experience which necessarily initiates the soul into absolute love, into

54. Heidegger, “What Are Poets for?,” 92.

55. Whitman, *Portable Walt Whitman*, 335.

transcendence, into the joy of over-appearance [*surapparâître*]. The world as world entails the expansive play of affect, in which the world as horizon moves in living conjunction with ever-dilating domain of the first-person singular. For the poet puts in place the conditions for us to find “the path between reality and our souls.”⁵⁶

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56. Whitman, *Portable Walt Whitman*, 336.