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On Some Realisms most Realists don't like

This paper[1] is not founded on a solid statistical survey among realist philosophers regarding the question of which forms of realism they don't like. Being a speculative philosopher, I of course refrained from doing any such scientifically respectable but tedious investigations. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the forms of realism I will subsequently address are indeed forms of realism most realists don't like. I suspect that the reader will agree with me.

Let me make the point of this paper clear from the start. It is *not* simply to enumerate and describe realisms that are for the most part found unattractive even by realist philosophers; the point of the paper is to probe the question of what good philosophical reasons, if any, there may be *for rejecting* the realisms normally disfavored by realists, especially if considered in comparison to the philosophical reasons that are adduced *for accepting* the forms of realism realists normally favor. *Such good philosophical reasons will be found wanting*, and therefore there are only two alternatives for the realist: either to become even more a realist than before, by also embracing the forms of realism hitherto repudiated, *or* to altogether cease being a realist, by also repudiating the forms of realism hitherto embraced, and to join the camp of the anti-realists and skeptics. These two alternatives are dictated by two possible reactions to the lack of philosophical justification for opposing the dislike of some forms of realism to the favoring of other such forms: for either all of these realisms are "good" or all of them "bad"; hence it is not justifiable to consider only some of them "good" and the others "bad," or vice versa.

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[1] A shorter version of this paper was presented at the symposium "Philosophical Realism and the Central European Tradition", March 26-29, 1999, University of Texas at Austin.

1.

Before turning to particular forms of realism, a general characterization of positions of realism is in order. Let it be controversial whether it is an objective fact that the kind of entity *F* is non-empty.

> Then a person *x* is an *ontological realist* with respect to the kind of entity *F* if and only if *x* believes that it is an *objective fact* that some *y* are *F*.
>
> And *ontological realism* with respect to *F* is the position held by anyone who is an ontological realist with respect to *F*, *qua* ontological realist.
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> Here an *objective fact* is considered to be something that is not a figment of the mind, not a model, not a linguistic construction, not a fiction of any kind; it is something given, something which is encountered by us, not made up, abstracted or projected. Note that an objective fact may concern subjective occurrences. If a person is in pain, then it is an objective fact that he or she is in pain.
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> A person *x* is an *epistemological realist* with respect to the kind of entity *F* if and only if *x* is an ontological realist with respect to *F* and moreover believes that human beings have at least some knowledge — justified true belief — which is *individually* about at least some entities that are *F*.
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> *Epistemological realism* with respect to *F* is the position held by anyone who is an epistemological realist with respect to *F*, *qua* epistemological realist.

According to definition, being an epistemological realist (with respect to *F*) implies being an ontological realist; but it is possible to be an ontological realist without being an epistemological one. One can believe that it is an objective fact that some *y* are *F* without believing that any human being has any knowledge which is individually about some entity that is *F*. A famous case from the history of philosophy is Kant's being an ontological realist with respect to "Dinge an sich," while not being an epistemological realist with respect to them.

Ontological realism without epistemological realism with respect to the same kind of entity *F* implies no contradiction and does not render the belief-system of the realist who is thus disposed — we may call her a *Kantian* realist — inconsistent. However, the Kantian realist will find herself confronted with the question how she comes to believe that some *y* are *F* when she is not believing that any human being has any knowledge which is individually about some entity that is *F*

— a question that, for some *F* or other, may prove hard to answer.[2] In view of the normal equivalence in assertability of ontological realism and epistemological realism, the phrase "realism [or: realist] with respect to the kind of entity *F*" is here always to be taken in the single sense of "*epistemological* realism [or: realist] with respect to the kind of entity *F*." Finally, a realist *simpliciter* is a person who is a realist with respect to at least some kind of entity *F* where it is controversial whether it is an objective fact that some *y* are *F*.

2.

The question posed to the Kantian realist brings us to the general question how the realist justifies his realism. What arguments does he adduce to justify his belief that it is an objective fact that some *y* are *F* and that human beings have at least some knowledge about some entities that are *F*? There is indeed a schema of justification that is applied in very many instances. It runs as follows:

> There is a set of objective facts involving entities of the kind *G* — the *G*-facts —, and *if* there are certain objective facts involving entities of the kind *F*, *then* they provide an excellent possible explanation for the *G*-facts. Hence, with high probability, there are indeed these objective facts involving entities of the kind *F* — the *F*-facts, and they *in fact* explain the G-facts —, and in particular it is an objective fact that some *y* are *F*. Moreover, since human beings know quite a lot about the *G*-facts, they also know, via this knowledge and in view of the explanatory nexus between the *F*-facts and the *G*-facts, at least something about some entities that are *F*.

This schema — the so-called *Inference to the Best Explanation* — is, for example, employed in justifying the form of epistemological realism that is virtually every realist's darling: *scientific realism* — the thesis that, as a matter of objective fact, there are unobservable physical entities and that those are the objects, indeed the main objects, of scientific knowledge. In the case of scientific realism Inference to the Best Explanation has certainly its greatest psychological force; what

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[2] But notice that there is nothing particularly unreasonable about believing that there are flowers nobody has ever thought of, *without* believing that human beings know anything which is invidually about some flower nobody has ever thought of.

its *rational* force is, is, however, notoriously a matter of controversy. The anti-realists and skeptics insist on the radical position that it is in *no case* rational to employ it, even if there were purely objective criteria for something, *A*, being a good, excellent or best possible explanation of something else, *B*. If, however, the value of a possible explanation is more or less a matter of personal taste, then one does not have to be an anti-realist and skeptic in order to consider Inference to the Best Explanation with good reason an unconvincing form of argumentation. Undoubtedly people very often believe something, *A*, because they find it to be a good, excellent, or best possible explanation of something else, *B*. But what could be the force of this reasoning if, from the objective point of view, one possible explanation for *B* is as good as any other?

3.

I do not aim in this paper to criticize Inference to the Best Explanation, which indeed is and has been of paramount importance for the metaphysical ventures of mankind. I will merely point out the problem that most realists are unjustifiably selective in applying this form of argumentation. They welcome its employment in establishing certain forms of realism, whereas they reject its employment in any attempt to establish other forms of realism, *although* the latter forms of realism are *compatible* with the former, and *although*, considered from an impartial point of view, Inference to the Best Explanation serves the latter forms of realism just as well as the former. On the contrary, they usually even affirm the negations of the realisms in question. This casts doubt on the metaphysical rationality of most realists: apparently they have from the start certain prejudices *on what there is not* which no inference to the best explanation, or any other argument, is allowed to shake.

Of course, most realists will deny this charge; they will flourish *Occam's Razor* — the methodological instrument in metaphysics which is the reductive counterpart of the ampliative Inference to the Best Explanation; they will assert:

> The realisms in question are rejected on the basis of Occam's Razor: It is not needed as an objective fact that there be entities of the kind *F*. Therefore it is not an objective fact.

Unfortunately, Occam's Razor can be used to eliminate *everything* Inference to the Best Explanation can be used to introduce. Why then is Occam's Razor applied in some cases, and not applied in others where it could also be applied? For who says we absolutely need any particular explanation which on the basis of Inference to the Best Explanation leads us to believe in the objective existence of a certain kind of entity? We can very well do without that explanation, however cherished by us. No bridges will collapse, no planes crash. For the anti-realist, indeed, even *scientific realism* is a mere result of the incontinent desire for metaphysical explanation, of that intellectual vice which is the mainspring of all error and futility — a vice which, as the anti-realist is happy to point out, could be overcome without any detriment at all to the technological blessings of science that constitute in large measure what is considered to be its *success*.

One does not need to be as radical as the anti-realist to see a problem in the *de facto* application of Inference to the Best Explanation and Occam's Razor. Let me recapitulate and bring the difficulty into sharper focus: Some forms of realism are accepted by most realists on the basis of Inference to the Best Explanation, although these forms of realism could also be rejected by them on the basis of Occam's Razor. Other forms of realism are rejected by most realists on the basis of Occam's Razor, although those forms could also be accepted by them on the basis of Inference to the Best Explanation. Can these goings-on be rational?

The truth could very well be that with respect to the considered forms of realism most realists have indeed firmly entrenched positions. But these positions are not based on argument, not on Occam's Razor or Inference to the Best Explanation, which are a mere garnish used to fill, in a thousand modifications and refinements, books, papers and conference discussions — a pageant revolving endlessly on the question whether some kind of entity or other can be "dispensed with" or "not dispensed with," as if our theoretical needs, our hunger for explanation or our desire, however deep, for an ontological desert, could determine what there is and what there is not. Rather, the posi-

tions on the considered forms of realism are determined exclusively by an intricate interplay of psychological and sociological *causes*; philosophical reasons are inessential.

Let us hope that this is not the truth. But becoming more consistent in the application of our philosophical reasons and arguments in the question of which forms of realism should be accepted, which rejected, would certainly help to dispel the impression that, in fact, *it is the truth*.

4.

What I have said so far is rather general and non-concrete. It is time to move on to examples. Two of the most prominent forms of realism are realism with respect to universals and realism with respect to states of affairs, the belief that it is an objective fact that there are properties and relations and that we have some knowledge about them, and the belief that it is an objective fact that there are states of affairs and that we have some knowledge about them too. Realism with respect to universals has been with us for a very long time (ever since Plato); in contrast, realism with respect to states of affairs is more or less a development of the last two centuries. Both realisms have gained considerable popularity among realists in recent times, since they are considered to be natural annexes to scientific realism, which is, as I have said above, practically every realist's darling. In view of this, it is not amiss to point out that one can be a good scientific realist without being any sort of realist with respect to universals or states of affairs. After all, the entities a scientific realist avows to objectively exist — subatomic particles, photons, electromagnetic fields, etc. — are *individuals*, and therefore neither universals nor states of affairs. Protestations to the contrary notwithstanding,[3] it seems to me that the source of both realisms — of realism with respect to universals and realism with respect to states of affairs — is natural language, not natural science.

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[3] Cf. DAVID ARMSTRONG: *Universals and Scientific Realism*. Instead of a detailed documentation of majority opinions among realists, the influential philosopher David Armstrong will here serve as the *typical* realist, representing the majority of realist philosophers.

More specifically, natural language, of which the language of science like the language of philosophy is a mere technically modified outgrowth, abounds with prima facie instances of singular reference to universals and states of affairs. Can all these apparent instances of reference be in fact "mere names," *flatus vocis* as the nominalists would have us believe? No; the best explanation of the ubiquitous apparent reference to universals and states of affairs in natural language is that there are indeed objectively given universals and states of affairs there to be referred to, and it is natural to add that they are indeed in many cases referred to successfully and become objects of objective knowledge. We are not required to believe that every apparent instance of singular reference to a universal or state of affairs is a real one; of course not; neither is every apparent reference to an individual a real one. But the phenomenon of ubiquitous apparent reference to universals and states of affairs can hardly be accounted for on the basis of denying any objective ontological basis for it.

Here we have a classical example of founding forms of realism by applying Inference to the Best Explanation. The anti-realists concerned, the nominalists, will of course fail to be convinced and charge that all that makes the realist with respect to universals or states of affairs believe in universals or states of affairs is simply his irrational will to believe in them. No, for the nominalist, simply no explanation can be good which is based on universals and states of affairs and which jettisons his cherished ontological parsimony. The nominalist will, therefore, offer elaborate arguments which via paraphrastic elimination of names are designed to demonstrate the dispensability of universals and states of affairs in the semantics of natural language; if needed, he will offer arguments that are intended to demonstrate the dispensability of universals and states of affairs wherever else they may be thought to be necessary; he will — *ultimately*, as it seems — conclude, invoking Occam's Razor, that there are no objectively given universals and states of affairs.

For an impartial spectator, it is difficult to drive away the feeling that in the whole debate realist and nominalist are merely rehearsing in so many words what they — for whatever cause, but in the end beyond any argument pro or contra- believe, respectively disbelieve in. In any case, the arguments on both sides are likewise logically

inconclusive. The skeptic, indeed, will sarcastically point out that it is a remnant of a magical world view to hold that names call forth entities, and that it is likewise such a remnant to hold that ceasing to name something will make it disappear. But like Cassandra, nobody believes a skeptic.

5.

It is an addition to the above picture of the magical power and logical weakness of metaphysics that most realists with respect to universals or to states of affairs unaccountably turn away from Inference to the Best Explanation to nominalistic strategies and Occam's Razor in order to reject, while sticking with their realisms, stronger versions of these very realisms. They want to be realists with respect to universals or to states of affairs all right, but not all the way. Specifically, they reject *Boolean* realism both with respect to universals and to states of affairs; hence, while believing in objectively given states of affairs, they disbelieve, in fact deny, that there are, as a matter of objective fact, *negative* or *disjunctive* states of affairs. Ostensibly as a reason for their denial, they will argue at great length that such states of affairs can be dispensed with.

This is curious and less than consistent, because the case for negative and disjunctive states of affairs is, on the basis of Inference to the Best Explanation, just as good as the case for states of affairs in general. Let me illustrate: Suppose an investigator has come to believe that the murder in house B was committed either by the gardener or by the butler. The investigator has also come to believe that the murder in house A was not committed by the gardener, but by the butler. This little story strongly suggests the following ontological interpretation of it, or explanation of the singular references occurring in it: The investigator is related in the same manner, by the relation of belief, to three different entities: (1) to the entity *that* the murder in house B was committed *either* by the gardener *or* by the butler, (2) to the entity *that* the murder in house A was *not* committed by the gardener, and (3) to the entity *that* the murder in house A was committed by the butler. Now it is admitted that it is an objectively given state of affairs, per-

haps even an obtaining one, *that* the murder in house A was committed by the butler. Is it in any manner plausible to deny that the first "that"-phrase and the second also refer to objectively given states of affairs? No; but if these "that"-phrases do thus refer, then it is an objective fact there are negative and disjunctive states of affairs (and certainly we know something about them, or about appropriate substitutes for them: nothing hinges on the examples chosen).

This is a trite little argument, but nobody to my knowledge, has answered it satisfactorily, that is, without presupposing from the very beginning that there simply are no negative and disjunctive states of affairs and without immediately retreating into the citadel of total skepticism: the claim that analogy proves nothing whatsoever, that apparent reference is no indication whatsoever of real reference, that we absolutely have to be seriously impressed by the possibility (although a mere insubstantial conceivability) that the apparent objects of belief may not be the real objects of belief.

The argument can be strengthened by adding to the story that the investigator neither believes that the murder in house B was committed by the gardener nor believes that it was committed by the butler; he is entirely undecided in the question which one of the two did it. This immediately blocks the possibility of reducing the investigator's apparent doxastic relatedness to a disjunctive state of affairs to his doxastic relatedness towards either of the two state of affairs which disjunctively constitute that state of affairs. One might claim that the investigator's belief in a disjunctive and also in a negative state of affairs can *in some other way* be adequately redescribed in such a manner that neither an apparent reference to a disjunctive nor to a negative state of affairs occurs in it. Ontologically, success in an endeavor to produce such a description would conclusively prove nothing: not mentioning something simply does not show that it is not there. And I rather doubt that success is possible; in very few cases, if any, one can adequately redescribe an act of mind which seems to be *about* some object (seems so most of all to the subject of that act of mind herself) as not being about that object at all. As a rule, the redescription misses entirely the quality of intentionality that is characteristic of the act of mind it is purported to be an adequate description of. Try to adequately describe Jim's thinking of Vienna without any reference to Vienna.

It is at least as difficult, I submit, to describe the investigator's believing that the murder in house B was either committed by the gardener or by the butler without any reference to the state of affairs that either the gardener or the butler committed the murder in house B.

6.

What I have said concerning Boolean realism with respect to states of affairs, can be *mutatis mutandis* also applied to Boolean realism with respect to universals. A realist with respect to universals has no good reason to disbelieve in negative and disjunctive universals. If apparent reference to universals is, as this realist believes on the basis of Inference to the Best Explanation, not always an illusion, why then should apparent reference to negative and disjunctive universals always be such an illusion? I fail to see any plausibility in this.

For natural language abounds with instances of apparent singular reference to negative and disjunctive universals as objectively given entities, and so does the language of science. Consider the property of *not being electrically charged*, a *negative* property which certain sub-atomic particles have as well as the atom itself, and which, it seems to me, is completely on a par — ontologically and epistemologically — with the proper property of *being electrically charged*. But consider in turn this latter, prima facie so very respectable property, which some other sub-atomic particles have, but not the atom itself, and what one finds is that it is indeed no other property than the *disjunctive* property *of being either positively or negatively electrically charged*. Yet does being disjunctive reduce in any manner the ontological status of *being electrically charged*, does this make a non-entity out of it? I fail to see any reasonable point in defending such a position for someone who is a realist with respect to universals.

As negative and disjunctive states of affairs can be believed in, so negative and disjunctive properties can be intended to be acquired or kept. If Jim who is not a father intends *to be a father*, which property is Jim intending to acquire by taking appropriate measures? The straightforward answer is: the property of being a father. And if Jack who is not a father intends *to be not a father*, which property is Jack

intending to keep by taking appropriate measures? The equally straightforward answer is: the property of not being a father. But this is a negative property. What is Jack intending to keep if there is no such property? I don't know of any good answer to this question. Is he intending to keep the *property of not having the property of being a father*? But this does not help, since the newly introduced property is also *negative*. Is the entire description of Jack's situation simply misleading, and is, more correctly speaking, Jack who is not a father simply *not intending to be a father*? But not intending to be a father is clearly something else than intending not to be a father. The enemies of negative properties had better not tell us that both phrases mean or ought to mean the same.

In turn, if Jim who is neither eating a banana split nor a cheeseburger intends to eat a banana split or a cheeseburger, which property is Jim intending to acquire? The answer is: the property of eating a banana split or a cheeseburger. But this is a disjunctive property. What is Jim intending to acquire if there is no such property and if, as we may suppose, Jim, being undecided, is neither intending to eat a banana split nor intending to eat a cheeseburger? Again, I do not know of any good answer to this question.

7.

But let me turn to another form of realism which most realists despise for no good reason: realism with respect to the non-existent — the thesis that, as a matter of objective fact, some entities do not exist and that we have at least some knowledge which is individually about some entities that do not exist. In fact, many realists believe that realism with respect to the non-existent is a logical inconsistency. The few friends of the non-existent have taken considerable pains to point out that "to be an entity" and "to exist" need not necessarily mean the same, that it is legitimate to take "to be an entity" in the sense of "to be an object," and "to exist" in the sense of "to be actual [or real]," that there is no logical inconsistency involved in the thesis that some objects are not actual. This seems only reasonable, but their efforts have not been to much avail. The reason is clear: once one admits that there

is a legitimate interpretation of "some entities do not exist" in which this sentence is not a logical inconsistency, then it becomes difficult, and indeed very difficult for a realist with respect to universals or states of affairs, to defend the falsity of this sentence under any legitimate interpretation. But this falsity is precisely what the inveterate enemy of the non-existent absolutely wants to hold on to, hardened in his ontological prejudice, unreachable for any argument to the contrary.

Let me illustrate. Suppose we have a realist with respect to universals or states of affairs but who is a firm anti-realist as far as non-existent entities are concerned. Let this philosopher, in a moment of weakness, accept that "some entities do not exist" can be legitimately interpreted as a logically consistent sentence, in the way just indicated, to mean as much as "some objects are not actual." He will then have to give up his opinion that there are no non-existent entities in whatever acceptable sense. For certainly there are both non-actual states of affairs and non-actual universals.

Being a non-actual state of affairs is as much as being a non-obtaining state of affairs, a state of affairs that is not a fact, that is not the case. And there are lots of states of affairs that do not obtain, that are not facts, that are not the case. For example, *that* the moon is a planet of the sun is, indeed as a matter of objective fact, a non-obtaining state of affairs. And therefore there is, as a matter of objective fact, at least one non-actual object, and hence, according to at least one admittedly legitimate interpretation, there is at least one objectively given non-existent entity.

Similarly, a non-actual universal is a universal that is not exemplified by any actual objects. And there are lots of universals that are not exemplified by any actual objects. For example, the relation of perfect human love is not exemplified by any actual objects. And therefore, again, there is, as a matter of objective fact, at least one non-actual object, and hence, again, we may legitimately conclude that there is at least one objectively given non-existent entity.

In view of these arguments our realist with respect to universals or states of affairs and anti-realist with respect to the non-existent may be imagined to quickly revoke his concession that "some entities do not exist" can legitimately mean the same as "some objects are not

actual." But being a self-respecting philosopher, he will presumably think of a "better" reaction: he will not revoke his concession, but deny that the singular designator "that the moon is a planet of the sun" and the singular designator "the relation of perfect human love" do indeed *refer*. Indeed, in every case where he is confronted with the apparent naming of a non-actual object, he will deny that an object is named at all. His sole reason for this is that if an object were named in any of these cases it would be — horribly — a non-actual object, whereas it is the rock of our realist's ontological faith that there are no non-actual objects because there are no non-existent entities.

Yet is it plausible to deny that the name "that the moon is a planet of the sun" and the name "the relation of perfect human love" do in fact refer? If they do not refer, what then is the belief of a child *about* who believes that the moon is a planet of the sun? What then is the effort of two people guided by who try as much as possible to realize within their relationship the relation of perfect human love? For it seems to me undeniable that the belief of the child is indeed *about something*, and that the effort of the two people is indeed guided by *something* (by a *causa finalis*, as the scholastics say). What else could this be than the non-actual state of affairs that the moon is a planet of the sun in the first case, and the non-actual relation of perfect human love in the second?

8.

To give an argument for the non-existence (or non-actuality) of some *individuals* may seem to be somewhat more difficult than to give one for the non-existence of some states of affairs and universals. But I, for my part, know that I might easily not have existed: if my mother and father had never met, and that easily somebody else could have existed in my place: if it had not been, accidentally or for whatever reason, my turn to be conceived and born into my family, but *Kerstin's*. Call her "Kerstin" — this woman who could have existed in my place. Kerstin, certainly and as a matter of objective fact, does not exist. Hence it is an objective fact that there is at least one individual that does not exist. And although Kerstin does not exist, there are quite a few items that

are known individually about Kerstin, and not all of these merely concern what could have been; for example, it is known that Kerstin is a human being, that she is female, that half of her genes come from my mother's, and half from my father's side, and that she is, therefore, in many respects similar to me, as sisters are to brothers, that the only chance she had to exist was also my only chance to exist, etc.

Thus much about Kerstin in particular. In general, if everyone of us exists but might not have existed, why reject that some people — some known quite well by us — might have existed but do not exist? The refusal to believe this involves a strange, unsatisfactory asymmetry between contingent existence and contingent non-existence: whereas the occurrence of the first is admitted, the occurrence of the second is rejected. Or should we, instead of *admitting both*, contingent existence and contingent non-existence, *reject both*? But this position lacks plausibility. Is it in the slightest degree plausible that everyone of us exists necessarily, that it is impossible for us not to have existed? I do not find this plausible at all.

Let me point out, before leaving realism with respect to the non-existent, that it is an inconsistent triad to hold (1) that everything exists, (2) that it is not contingently the case that everything exists, and (3) that something might not have existed. Enemies of the non-existent usually hold on to (1) and (2); this forces them to conclude that everything exists *necessarily* — contradicting metaphysical common sense. If, on the other hand, they *do* believe that at least they themselves or some part of themselves — say, a certain tiny hair on their head — might not have existed, that is, if they hold on to (1) und (3), then they have to conclude that it is merely a contingent fact that everything exists; it might have been otherwise. This is a very uncomfortable position for them, for they are then confronted with the task of explaining this strange metaphysical contingency: that everything exists, although it could have been the case that something is non-existent. Can this be an accident? Hardly. But if not, what is its explanation?

9.

Most realists are scientific realists. On the basis of Inference to the Best Explanation they conclude that there are indeed, as a matter of objective fact, tons of electrons, neutrons, photons, and what not. Nothing much wrong about that. But consider now that most realists go on to believe that, basically, there are also no other individuals but electrons, neutrons, photons, and stuff like that. That is, from scientific realism they proceed to *physicalism*.[4] Scientific realism does not imply physicalism; there is no logical necessity involved in the transition from the one to the other, since scientific realism does not logically exclude certain other forms of realism, which physicalism certainly does exclude. Nevertheless most scientific realists are physicalists.[5]

The step from scientific realism to physicalism is made by them, broadly speaking, on the basis of Occam's Razor — or so they pretend. They had better simply assert their basic belief that there are no non-physical individuals, which is a respectable metaphysical position, and let this be the end of it. For from the logical point of view, it is very shaky business to base anything on Occam's Razor. In some cases it is in fact much more problematic than to use Inference to the Best Explanation to establish the contrary conclusion. Let me illustrate this by considering another form of realism most realists nowadays don't like.

10.

If one believes that it is an objective fact that there are psychical individuals which are not physical, and that at least something is known

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[4] Note that physicalism is a thesis about *individuals*. It is compatible with realism with respect to universals, or sets, or states of affairs, etc. In fact it is often combined with one or the other of these realisms. Cf. BRIAN ELLIS in "What Science Aims to Do," p. 170.

[5] Cf. "What Science Aims to Do," p. 170: "We can isolate a number of strands in the thought of scientific realists, apart from those already mentioned; and perhaps it will be useful to do so, for most scientific realists see them as going together as a package deal. Firstly, there is a commitment to a physicalist ontology."

individually about at least some of these entities, then, applying our definitional schema for forms of realism, one is what may be called a *Cartesian realist*. Cartesian realism — it is not quite the same as Cartesian dualism, but is certainly implied by the latter — once ruled the roost; nowadays it has fallen into utter disfavor with most people who are otherwise realists (with scientific realists, with realists with respect to universals, with realists with respect to the non-existent). It has, in ever larger quarters, become a matter of intellectual pride to profess materialism and to spurn Cartesian realism. But I find the intellectual zeal frequently shown in waging philosophical war against Cartesianism less than rational. There is an unphilosophical touch of fanaticism to it. Contrary to the widespread enthusiasm for a so-called anti-Cartesian revolution, for the ultimate liberation of mankind from the Dark Ages, it seems to me that Cartesian realism is at least as well-founded as any other form of realism. The following argument is inspired by Thomas Nagel *et al.*

It is undeniably an objective fact (not constructed, not a model) that we experience sensations, feelings, thoughts, perceptions. These are psychical individuals. But sensations and feelings do not appear to be physical, although they frequently revolve around something physical; neither do thoughts and perceptions appear to be physical, although, of course, their objects often are. Rather, all these psychical entities undoubtedly appear to be non-physical. Now the best explanation of the unquestionable non-physical appearance of psychical individuals is *that they are in fact non-physical*; for the most appropriate conception of the essence of psychical individuals is that in their case appearance and reality coincide, that, qua psychical individuals, they necessarily are as they appear to be, and appear to be as they are. Therefore, as a matter of objective fact, there are psychical individuals which are not physical, and who would doubt that a lot is known about them individually?

In order to fight this argument, the physicalist must draw into question what Descartes discovered: that the essence of psychical individuals is as described; he must argue that even in the case of psychical individuals — of sensations, feelings, thoughts, perceptions — appearance and reality *can* fall apart — that is, fall apart with respect to the bearer and subject of these entities, to whom they appear.

This is a somewhat desperate move; for how, for example, could a sensation of mine be otherwise than it appears to me (appearing, for example, non-physically)? But the physicalist does not stop here; he is not a skeptic who merely wants to surpass Cartesian skepticism and to doubt what Descartes said cannot be rationally doubted: that appearances (or *cogitationes*) qua appearances are as they appear to be, and appear to be as they are. No, he does not merely doubt this, but denies it, and in addition he claims to know what the true nature of psychical individuals is: science, in its greatness, has revealed their essential physicalness to him.

Or so he says; what science has *in fact* revealed to him, to an ever greater extent, is the *correlation* between psychical and physical individuals. It is one step further — *not* a step within science, but already a metaphysical step, presumably made in the name of Inference to the Best Explanation — to consider this correlation to be non-contingent. Yet even a non-contingent correlation between the psychical and the physical does not imply that the psychical is essentially physical. Algebraic numbers, for example, are non-contingently correlated with natural numbers in the strictest possible sense: one-to-one and analytically; but of course no algebraic number is or could be essentially a natural number.

This did not give any pause to the physicalists. They went on to apply that great instrument of ontological surgery that in the name of parsimonious reason cuts away everything that is unnecessary: Occam's Razor; they used it to excise an utterly unnecessary, and unreasonable difference indeed: that between *correlation* and *identity*: correlated entities were made to be identical entities, and *therefore*: every psychical individual is essentially physical. Gottlob Frege, alluding to Leibniz, once sarcastically praised the fruitfulness of the *Principle of the Non-Distinction of What is Different* for the philosophy of arithmetic.[6] The philosophy of arithmetic did not remain its only field of application; the Principle — of course not under the compromising name Frege had given it, or under any other name — was made to be the cornerstone of materialist metaphysics; and it still is, although presently it has rather become *a principle of blurring as much as possi-*

[6] See FREGE, "Über die Zahlen des Herrn H. Schubert."

ble the distinction of what is different by the endless incantation of "supervenience" and "emergence." From the point of view of reason, it would certainly be better not to base materialism on some perversion of Occam's Razor; better simply to profess it as a deeply felt metaphysical creed. For this is what materialism may well come down to.

11.

And not only materialism. As I have suggested above, quasi-religious primitive beliefs, that are caused in some way or other, but not based on reason, may well constitute what ultimately powers anyone's taking a stand on any metaphysical issue. Inference to the Best Explanation, Occam's Razor — both may well be mere alibis (but from the logical point of view, highly problematic alibis), adopted in order to assuage critical reason, most of all the critical reason of the believers themselves. This is a strong suspicion; for how else can it be accounted for that applications of Inference to the Best Explanation are unfairly made out to be "bad," although, to the impartial observer, they are just as good (and as bad) as the ones that are considered to be "good"? How else can it be accounted for that obviously bad applications of Occam's Razor are praised as the apex of enlightened reason?

Let me present one last example of a realism most realists don't like to underscore the force of these skeptical questions. If one believes that it is an objective fact that there is precisely one divine being[7] and that at least something is known which is individually about this being, then one is what can be called a *monotheistic theological realist.* Now theological realism is a kind of realism most realists turn away from in disgust if it is suggested as a reasonable and defensible position in philosophy. But this revulsive reaction, in its turn, does not appear to be reasonable itself, although it is of course understandable in view of the development of western thought in the last 500 years, which

[7] Divinity is traditionally held to include: actuality, personhood, omnipotence, omniscience and perfect goodness, in addition — less centrally — unchangeability and simplicity. For what follows, the first four attributes are crucial.

tends to promote antagonism between a religious and a scientific socialization.

Why does the said reaction not appear to be reasonable? This needs some elaboration. We observe regularities in our world, some of which we, extrapolating what we observe, believe not to have failed in the past and not to fail in the future. This belief is not based on reason, but as David Hume has pointed out, on blind trust. However, as I have said above, nobody heeds the skeptic, and therefore we have to live with the following astonishing bit of philosophical inconsequence that sums up the state of mind most philosophers are in with respect to induction: "Yes, yes, of course, we all know what Hume has said; he is right; but never mind: it is beyond reasonable doubt that there are regularities in this world that never fail."

The phenomenon of never-failing regularities in this world, presumed to be well-established, then cries out for explanation. Now consider the following possible explanation of this phenomenon which most realists consider to be a good one: the never-failing regularities in this world occur because they are *objectively necessary*; they are the consequences of so-called laws of nature.

This invites the following comment. It is of course a very good possible explanation of any phenomenon to say that it is objectively necessary, that things could objectively not have happened in any other way, *if* such an *explanans* could in fact be true. But it cannot be true that the never-failing regularities in this world are objectively necessary. For as Hume has persuasively argued, the only objective necessity is *conceptual necessity*, and the conceptual necessity of the never-failing regularities in this world is completely out of the question: they certainly *are not* conceptually necessary (but "contingent"). The friends of *natural necessity* will tell the skeptic that the regularities in question are supposed to be objectively necessary in some primitive, irreducible sense. Unfortunately they fail entirely to provide any elucidation of this sense. Please note that it is not a definition that is asked for, but merely some clarification of the idea of necessity invoked. In order to provide such clarification it is really not helpful at all to maintain that the supposed objective necessity of the (supposedly) never-failing regularities in this world is grounded in various cases of one universal objectively *involving* or *implying* ("necessitating") an-

other universal, that this is what a law of nature amounts to;[8] for this objective involving or implying cannot be of a conceptual nature (like, for example, being yellow conceptually implies being extended), or else the necessity of the never-failing regularities in this world would be a conceptual one, which it isn't. Then, which not merely factual implication or involvement of one universal by another other than a conceptual one is meant by the friends of laws of nature? I have no idea, and I suspect, following David Hume, that, assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, nobody else has any reasonably clear idea of the intended relation.

In any case, believing in natural necessity, and in laws of nature as its basis, *because* their existence would well explain the never-failing regularities in this world, is, for an impartial observer, certainly no better than believing in God, whose existence as the sole divine being would certainly explain these regularities at least as well (providing also an explanation of why they appear to us to be in some sense objectively necessary and yet contingent: the will of God is independent of our wills, and his decrees, while contingent, are for us human beings incontrovertible).

12.

Thus monotheistic theological realism is seen to be no worse than realism with respect to laws of nature and natural necessity, and it is puzzling why the latter realism is embraced, the first rejected (and even negated). Either to refrain from both or, if not, then to accept monotheistic theological realism seem to be the most reasonable reactions (since one cannot well accept both realisms as an explanation of the never-failing regularities in this world, and because the theological realist has a somewhat clearer idea of what she is believing in than the realist with respect to laws of nature and natural necessity).

But of course, most realists won't react in either of these two manners at all. For them, it is an incontestable principle that any (possible) explanation that invokes the existence of God is *bad*, indeed *very bad*;

[8] Cf. ARMSTRONG: *What is a Law of Nature?*

any explanation, on the contrary, that does without the existence of God is, for this very reason, an explanation with considerable merits; at least it has acquired the right to be respected and scrutinized.

Reason, most realists say, must do without God. Some of them do indeed question *why* this must be so, and give the answer that reason — or in other words, philosophy — must in accordance with Occam's Razor do without God, because science *can* do without Him; for the purposes of science, God is an "unnecessary hypothesis." But leaving aside the question whether the needs of science, and nothing else, should be absolutely mandatory for philosophy, it is undeniable that science *can* do just as well without laws of nature and natural necessity. Therefore, by applying Occam's Razor, one can conclude, by parity of reason, that philosophy *must* do without laws of nature and natural necessity. With "laws of nature" I do of course not mean what one can find, printed in bold face, in science textbooks; I do not mean Newton's Laws or Boyle's Law, not such sentences and not the regularities described by them, but the metaphysical hypostases which are supposed to be the foundations of these regularities, somehow imparting to them a non-conceptual contingent necessity. No scientist, who is not at the same time a metaphysician, needs these hypostatic laws of nature for anything in science or in private life, whereas he may indeed need God, at least in private life. Laws of nature, in the metaphysical sense, are needed only by metaphysicians, and by some of them, it seems, for the sole purpose of fighting supernaturalism which they consider to be a pernicious error of mankind.

13.

I have arrived at the end of my survey of realisms most realists don't like. I mention in passing that *modal realism* is a special case of realism with respect to the non-existent, which I have treated in some detail. I have not talked about *moral realism*, which is outside the realm of theoretical philosophy strictly speaking. But let make the general comment that moral realism, just like the widely despised realisms that were to some extent considered in this paper, is a form of realism which would deserve a less unjust treatment by realists, if it were

regarded by them from the point of view of a *fair* use of the method for founding forms of realism, Inference to the Best Explanation, and of a fair use of the method for dismissing them, Occam's Razor. Justice or, in other words, *methodological balance* would require that there is greater uniformity in the realists' attitude towards the plurality of possible realisms: they should not *overcritically* reject (negate completely or to some lesser degree, or observe skeptical neutrality with respect to) certain realisms, while accepting *uncritically* certain others; this is the main general point which I have attempted to drive home in this paper. Only by observing a greater methodological balance in metaphysics it is at least to some degree reasonable to suppose that the results of applying Inference to the Best Explanation and Occam's Razor are indeed bits of knowledge.

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