Realisms

On What is There Anyway
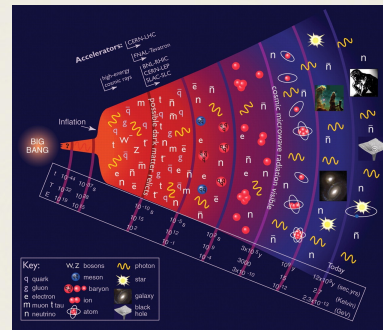
Claimants To Existence

Physical Objects?

Quarks?

Mary, the Mother of God? God?

Numbers?

Sets?

Universals?

Realism

*What is all this talk about *realism*?

  *Realism involves an *independent existence claim*: there are—in some specified domain of discourse—entities answering to our discourse.

    *Typically this will be understood as a claim to the effect that there are mind- and language independent entities. Such objects and their characteristics do not depend essentially or existentially on us; were we not on the scene, they would *be there anyway*.

  *Realism as often as not involves, additionally, a *kind claim*: the entities in a given domain of discourse form themselves into natural kinds.

    *Typically this will be understood as the claim that the world comes ready-made, pre-packaged, or pre-sorted into kinds.

      *Plato recommends that that we should strive to 'cut up each kind according to its species along its natural joints' (*Phaedrus* 265e), implying, then, that nature *has* natural joints or divisions, that kinds of beings—among others, the biological species—precede our perceptual and cognitive interaction with the perceiver-independent world.

Mind-World Interface

* Consider a typical macroscopic object: a tree in the forest.

    * The independent existence claim: it would be here, were we not.

        * N.b. This is to say that it is no more than causally dependent upon us (perhaps we planted it, as part of our reforestation programme, or perhaps not); once made, it does not depend upon our activities at all.

        * In particular, its existence does not depend upon our perceptual or cognitive faculties, upon our linguistic proclivities, or even upon our conceptual schemes.

    * This is independent of the question of whether all of the tree's properties enjoy such independence.

        * For example, in some (surprisingly difficult) sense, its colour properties implicate our perceptual faculties in their existence.

        * Such questions hover at the mind-world interface.

Domaines of Realism

* No realist need be a realist across the board, in:

    * category theory

    * mathematics

    * moral theory

    * aesthetic theory

    * scientific kinds

    * 'common sense' ontology—tables, chairs, what have you

Realism about Categories

* The world comes ready-made, both *vertically* and *horizontally*

    * ontologically

        * vertically: dividing into kinds (e.g. particulars and universals; categories)

        * horizontally: exhibiting dependency relations between kinds (e.g. non-basic and basic beings; wholes upon parts)

    * scientifically

        * vertically: dividing into kinds (e.g. being an electron; being H_2O)

        * horizontally: exhibiting dependency relations (the psychological on the neurophysiological; the biological on the chemical)

* Let us call the general realist orientation a commitment to the *ready-made world* (RMW)

Representation and Truth

* A cluster of realist inclinations:

    * Thought and language stand in some broadly *representational* relation R to the RMW

    * When R is adequate, where adequacy in perhaps governed by *correspondence*, then the thoughts and statements standing in R to the world are *true*.

        * More exactly, the RMW contains truth-makers: generally speaking there are structured parts of the RMW (facts, states of affairs) which *render true* our true beliefs and true statements.

    * The notion of a RMW marries readily with bi-valence.

    * Nothing about R implies, guarantees, or otherwise requires the actual truth of our beliefs.

        * Truth is verification-independent and epistemically unconstrained.

A Simple Argument

1. If RMW, then truth is both verification-transcendent (VT) and epistemically unconstrained (EU).

2. Truth is neither VT nor EU.

3. So, not RMW.

4. If (3), then realism is to be rejected and anti-realism embraced.

5. So, realism is to be rejected and anti-realism embraced.

A Motivating Thought

* Meaning is *truth-implicated*:

    * S understands the meaning of *p* only if S understands those conditions under which *p* is true.

* Perhaps this fact alone ushers in a broad anti-realism?

* Can truth really be verification-independent and epistemically unconstrained?

Denying VT/EU

* The basic thought: given the connection between meaning and truth, the RMW makes inexplicable our incontestable semantic abilities: we understand things, including propositions which are undecidable.

* Given that we do evince understanding even of undecidable propositions, RMW must be rejected.

* In particular, RMW's commitment to VT/EU must go.

* Somehow, then, the world must conform to our conceptual, semantic, and epistemic exigencies; it must not, after all, be ready-made, but rather *made as encountered*.

Idealism: *Esse est Percipi*

* Two problematic arguments from Berkeley:

    * Primary and Secondary Qualities

    * The Master Argument

Against Naive Realism

1. If S_1 perceives some object *o* to be ϕ and S_2 perceives the same *o* to be not-ϕ, where ϕ is a random perceptual quality, then *o* is neither ϕ nor not-ϕ *in itself*.

2. It often happens in perception that S_1 perceives *o* to be ϕ while S_2 perceives *o* to be not-ϕ.

3. Hence, for any random perceptual quality ϕ, no object *o* is either ϕ or not-ϕ in itself.

Primary v. Secondary Qualities

* Secondary:
  * colors, sounds, tastes, scents, tactile features

* Primary:
  * extension, figure, motion, rest, solidity, and number

Two Morals

* One common response: secondary qualities are mind-dependent (or, somehow, mind-implicated)

* Berkeley's response: that is correct—but so too are primary qualities mind-dependent (or, somehow, mind-implicated)

    * That is to say, then, that all qualities are mind-dependent (or, somehow, mind-implicated)

The Master Argument

* ... I am content to put the whole upon this issue; if you can but conceive it possible for one extended moveable substance, or in general, for any one idea or any thing like an idea, to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I shall readily give up the cause. . .But say you, surely there is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and no body by to perceive them. I answer, you may so, there is no difficulty in it: but what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call books and trees, and at the same time omitting to frame the idea of any one that may perceive them? But do not you your self perceive or think of them all the while? This therefore is nothing to the purpose: it only shows you have the power of imagining or forming ideas in your mind; but it doth not shew that you can conceive it possible, the objects of your thought may exist without the mind: to make out this, it is necessary that you conceive them existing unconceived or unthought of, which is a manifest repugnancy. When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas. But the mind taking no notice of itself, is deluded to think it can and doth conceive bodies existing unthought of or without the mind; though at the same time they are apprehended by or exist in it self. —Berkeley (*Principles of Human Knowledge* §§ 22–23)

Berkeley's Master Argument

(1) Entities exist independently of the mind only if it is possible to conceive of them as so existing.

(2) It is not possible to conceive of entities as existing independently of the mind.

(3) So, it is not the case that entities exist independently of the mind.

Why (2)?

(1) It is possible to conceive of things existing independently of the mind only if it is possible to conceive of things as unconceived.

(2) Conceiving of *x* as unconceived is impossible. (It's a contradiction.)

(3) So, it is not possible to conceive of things as existing independently of the mind.

Two Responses

* (1) is true taken one way, false another—and the argument needs the false reading:

    * True: it is possible to think of there being unconceived objects only if it is possible to think *that* there are objects that are not conceived by anyone (*de dicto*).

    * False: it is possible to think of there being unconceived objects only it if is possible to conceive *of* a particular object which is unconceived (*de re*).

* (2) is false: the ancillary argument conflates, in its second premiss:

    * There exists an object which is both conceived and unconceived (necessarily false, but beside the point).

    * It is possible to conceive of an unconceived object (true, and so hardly a contradiction).

        * Compare:

            * There exists an object which is both seen and unseen (necessarily false, but beside the point).

            * It is possible to see an unseen object (true, and so hardly a contradiction).