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Author(s): Michael Devitt

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## ABERRATIONS OF THE REALISM DEBATE

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Antirealism about the physical world is an occupational hazard of philosophy. Most of the great philosophers have been antirealists in one way or another. Many of the cleverest contemporary philosophers are also: Michael Dummett, Nelson Goodman, Hilary Putnam, and Bas van Fraassen. Yet antirealism is enormously implausible on the face of it.

In this paper, I shall be concerned with several aberrations of the contemporary debate over realism. These aberrations have many sources: those who oppose realism; some of those who support realism; those who stand above the battle and dismiss it; and some more neutral figures. Some aberrations have a long history, going back to the positivists and beyond.

The defense of realism depends on distinguishing it from other doctrines and on choosing the right place to start the argument. In this respect, realism has not been well-served by some of its friends, particularly an earlier Putnam (1978: 1–77; 97–119). In *Realism and Truth* (1984), I argued for four maxims which formed the basis of my defense of realism. Many of the aberrations that concern me here infringe the maxims. To some extent, the argument of this paper depends on that earlier argument.

In part I of the paper, the focus is on the connection between realism and semantics. In part II, I consider the bearing of epistemology and naturalism on the issue. Aside from identifying aberrations, I shall occasionally offer diagnoses and respond to objections. The first aberration comes late in part I.

### I. REALISM AND SEMANTICS

A striking aspect of the realism debate is that it contains almost as

many doctrines under the name ‘realism’ as it contains participants.<sup>1</sup> However, some common features can be discerned in this chaos. First, nearly all the doctrines are, or seem to be, partly semantic. Consider, for example, Jarrett Leplin’s editorial introduction to a recent collection of papers on scientific realism. He lists ten “characteristic realist claims” (1984b: 1–2). Nearly all of these are about the truth and reference of theories. Not one is straightforwardly metaphysical.<sup>2</sup> However, second, amongst all the semantic talk, it is usually possible to discern a metaphysical doctrine, a doctrine about what there is and what it’s like. Thus ‘realism’ is now usually taken to refer to some combination of a metaphysical doctrine with a doctrine about truth, particularly with a correspondence doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

The metaphysical doctrine, which is what I shall call “realism,” has two dimensions, an existence dimension and an independence dimension. The existence dimension commits the realist to the existence of such common-sense entities as stones, trees and cats, and such scientific entities as electrons, muons and curved spacetime. Typically, idealists, the traditional opponent of realists, have not denied this dimension; or, at least, have not straightforwardly denied it. What they have denied is the independence dimension. According to some idealists, the entities identified by the first dimension are made up of mental items: “ideas” or “sense data.” In recent times another sort of idealist has been much more common. According to these idealists, the entities are not in a certain respect “objective”: they depend for their existence and nature on the cognitive activities and capacities of our minds. Realists reject all such mind dependencies. Relations between minds and those entities are limited to familiar causal interactions long noted by folk theory: we throw stones, plant trees, see cats, and so on.

Though the focus of the debate has mostly been on the independence dimension, the existence dimension is important. First, it identifies the entities that are the subject of the dispute over independence. In particular, it distinguishes a realism worth fighting for from what I call “Fig-Leaf Realism” (1984: 22): a commitment merely to there being *something* independent of us. Second, in the discussion of unobservables — the debate about *scientific* realism — the main controversy has been over existence.

I capture the two dimensions in the following doctrine:

*Realism:* Tokens of most common-sense, and scientific, physical types objectively exist independently of the mental.

This doctrine covers both the observable and the unobservable worlds. Some philosophers, like van Fraassen, have adopted a different attitude to these two worlds. So, for the purpose of argument, we can split the doctrine in two: *Common-Sense Realism* concerned with observables, and *Scientific Realism* concerned with unobservables.

In insisting on the objectivity of the world, realists are not saying that it is unknowable. They are saying that it is not *constituted* by our knowledge, by our epistemic values, by the synthesizing power of the mind, nor by our imposition of concepts, theories, or languages; it is not limited by what we can believe or discover. Many worlds lack this sort of objectivity and independence: Kant's "phenomenal" world; Dummett's verifiable world; the stars made by a Goodman "version"; the constructed world of Putnam's "internal realism"; Kuhn's world of theoretical ontologies; the many worlds created by the "discourses" of structuralists and post-structuralists.

*Realism* takes both the ontology of science and common sense, and the folk epistemological view that this ontology is objective and independent, pretty much for granted. Science and common sense are not, for the most part, to be "reinterpreted."<sup>4</sup> It is not just that our experiences are *as if* there are cats, there are cats. It is not just that the observable world is *as if* there are atoms, there are atoms. As Putnam once put it, *Realism* takes science at "face value" (1978: 37).

*Realism* is the minimal realist doctrine worth fighting for. Once it is established, the battle against antirealism is won; all that remains are skirmishes. Furthermore, *Realism* provides the place to stand to solve the many other difficult problems that have become entangled with it.

Any semantic problem needs to be disentangled from *Realism*.<sup>5</sup> In particular, the correspondence theory of truth is in no way constitutive of *Realism*, nor of any similarly metaphysical doctrine. The first step in arguing for this is to distinguish correspondence truth from *deflationary* (prosential, disquotational) truth.

According to a deflationary theory, the truth term is a linguistic device that is important to the *expressive* powers of language; it enables us to talk about reality by referring to sentences and thoughts. How-

ever, the truth term does not *describe* a sentence or thought and hence does not *explain* anything about its nature. The “equivalence thesis” holds for deflationary truth, as for any notion worthy of the name ‘truth’: appropriate instances of

*s* is true if and only if *p*

hold.<sup>6</sup> But the thesis holds simply because to refer to a sentence and assert that it is true *is just to assert the sentence*. According to the correspondence theory, in contrast, the thesis holds in virtue of a genuine pairing of sentences with situations, perhaps one explained in terms of the referential relations of parts of sentences. Most important of all, correspondence truth is an explanatory notion in a theory of the meaning or content of sentences and thoughts: it is *because of* this correspondence relation that sentences and thoughts have their roles.<sup>7</sup>

Suppose that one has in mind the metaphysical doctrine *Realism*. A natural way to state it is as follows:

*Realism\**: Most common-sense, and scientific, physical existence statements are objectively and mind-independently true.

And this is a completely appropriate way to state the doctrine, *provided that ‘true’ refers to deflationary truth*: it is an illustration of the sort of “semantic ascent” that deflationary truth makes possible, and often convenient, *whatever the subject matter*. Such ascent does not make a doctrine semantic, in the sense of being part of a theory of meaning; it does not change the subject matter at all.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, if it did, *any* doctrine about *anything* would become part of the theory of meaning (the Oxford Dream!).

Consider now the relation between *Realism* and truth. On the one hand, *Realism* does not entail the correspondence theory nor any other theory of truth or meaning. One can even be a realist and yet eliminativist about the semantic properties of thoughts and language, as has been nicely demonstrated by Stephen Leeds (1978) drawing on the views of Quine.

On the other hand, the correspondence theory does not entail *Realism*. The correspondence theory claims that representations do or do not have the property *truth* according as they do or do not corre-

spond in some way to reality. *This is compatible with absolutely any metaphysics.* The theory is often taken to require the objective independent existence of the reality which makes representations true or false. This addition of *Realism*'s independence dimension does, of course, bring us closer to *Realism*. However, the addition seems like a gratuitous intrusion of metaphysics into semantics.<sup>9</sup> And even with the addition, the correspondence theory is still distant from *Realism*, because it does not require that any particular sentences *be* true and so could not require the existence of any particular entities. The correspondence theorist could make another addition to deal with this: most common-sense, and scientific, physical existence statements *are* true. This addition to a semantic theory is totally gratuitous. Furthermore, if its talk of truth is *minimally* interpreted as merely deflationary, it is simply *a statement of* the existence dimension. The two additions, *minimally* interpreted, *are Realism\**; i.e. *are Realism*. It is hardly surprising, then, that with the help of these additions we can derive *Realism* from the correspondence theory! That theory is entirely irrelevant to the derivation.

*Realism* is about the nature of reality in general; it is about the largely inanimate impersonal world. If correspondence truth has a place, it is in our theory of only a small part of that reality: it is in our theory of people and their language.

**Objection 1.** “You are simply insisting that the *word* ‘realism’ be used metaphysically not semantically. That is a merely verbal point.”

My main point is not verbal at all. I am insisting on a distinction between two doctrines, whatever they are called. I am insisting on carving theory at reality’s joints.

On the verbal point, I claim that metaphysical doctrines like mine capture the only thing that is *distinctive* about views that have been called “realist” about the external world throughout the long debate. I have already indicated that correspondence truth is not distinctive. In part II we shall see that other views — for example, about the aim of science — are not either. Finally, it would be rather perverse to use ‘realism’ to refer to a doctrine that had no metaphysical intent.<sup>10</sup>

**Objection 2.** “Your realist doctrine is not what all the argument is about.”

*All* the argument is not about this doctrine, but part of it certainly is.

It is precisely because the doctrine is so often denied in philosophy that it is worth asserting. For examples of its denial one need only look to the history of idealism. And it is still being denied; see above. Either familiar ontic commitments are, explicitly or implicitly, paraphrased away; or, more frequently, the world is made strangely mind-dependent. It is because of these somewhat scandalous facts that the realist goes in for the “desk-thumping, foot-stamping shout of ‘Really!’” that Arthur Fine likes to mock (1986a: 129).

The realism dispute arises from the age-old metaphysical question, “What ultimately is there, and what is it like?”. I am sympathetic to the complaint that *Realism*, as part of an answer to this question, is rather boring. Certainly it brings no mystical glow. Nevertheless, it needs to be kept firmly at the front of the mind to avoid mistakes in theorizing about other, more interesting, matters where it makes a difference.

Why has metaphysics been conflated with semantics? I suspect that the conflation is very much part of the “linguistic turn” in twentieth century philosophy. However, I have a more precise diagnosis of the role given to correspondence truth.

**Diagnosis 1.** Giving *Realism\** as an example, I have pointed out that we can use the deflationary notion of truth to state a metaphysical view. If the distinction between deflationary and correspondence truth is overlooked, then a doctrine like *Realism\** may seem to be making the partly semantic claim that certain statements are correspondence-true; that they “picture” reality. And it seems that the distinction is an easy one to overlook.

My view that realism does not involve correspondence truth flies so much in the face of entrenched opinion that I shall labor the point. I shall do so in the context of the debate over scientific realism. My minimal doctrine, *Scientific Realism*, is an example of what is sometimes called “entity realism.” The metaphysical doctrine underlying the debate is usually a stronger one, “theory realism”: science is mostly right not only about which unobservables exist, *but also about their properties*. The following is a fairly typical example of a semantic version of this stronger doctrine:

*Contemporary Realism:* Most scientific statements about unobservables are (approximately) correspondence-true.

Why would people believe this? I suggest only because they believed something like the following two doctrines:

*Strong Scientific Realism*: Tokens of most unobservable scientific types objectively exist independently of the mental and (approximately) obey the laws of science;

*Correspondence Truth*: Sentences have correspondence-truth conditions.

These two doctrines, together with the equivalence thesis, imply *Contemporary Realism*. Yet the two doctrines have almost nothing to do with each other. *Contemporary Realism* is an unfortunate hybrid.

*Strong Scientific Realism* is a metaphysical doctrine about the underlying nature of world in general. To accept this doctrine we have to be confident that science is discovering things about the unobservable world. Does the success of science show that we can be confident about this? Is inference to the best explanation appropriate here? Should we take sceptical worries seriously? These are just the sort of epistemological questions that have been, and still largely are, at the centre of the realism debate. *Their home is with Strong Scientific Realism not with Correspondence Truth*.

*Correspondence Truth* is a semantic doctrine about the pretensions of one small part of the world to represent the rest. The doctrine is the subject of lively debate in the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind and cognitive science. Do we need to ascribe truth conditions to sentences and thoughts to account for their roles in the explanation of behavior and as guides to reality? Do we need reference to explain truth conditions? Should we prefer a conceptual-role semantics? Or should we, perhaps, near enough eliminate meaning altogether? These are interesting and difficult questions,<sup>11</sup> but they have no immediate bearing on scientific realism.

Semantic questions are not particularly concerned with the language of science. Even less are they particularly concerned with “theoretical” language “about unobservables.” Insofar as the questions are concerned with that language, they have no direct relevance to the metaphysical concerns of *Strong Scientific Realism*. They bear directly on the sciences of language and mind and, via that, on the other human

sciences. They do not bear directly on science in general.<sup>12</sup> Many philosophers concerned with semantics and not in any way tainted by antirealism are dubious of the need for a correspondence notion of truth.<sup>13</sup>

Are there atoms? Are there molecules? If there are, what are they like? How are they related to each other? *Strong Scientific Realism* says that we should take science's answers pretty much at face value. So there really are atoms and they really do make up molecules. That is one issue. Another issue altogether is about meaning. Do statements have correspondence-truth conditions? *Correspondence Truth* says that they do. This applies as much to 'Cats make up atoms' as to 'Atoms make up molecules'; indeed it applies as much to 'The Moon is made of green cheese'. Put the first issue together with the second and we get a third: Is 'Atoms make up molecules' correspondence-true? My point is that this issue is completely derivative from the other two. It arises only if we are wondering about, first, the meanings of sentences ranging from the scientific to the silly; and about, second, the nature of the unobservable world.

Suppose that we had established that *Correspondence Truth* was right for the familiar everyday language. Suppose further that we believe that atoms do make up molecules, and the like. Then, *of course*, we would conclude that *Correspondence Truth* applies to 'Atoms make up molecules', and the like, and so conclude that such sentences are correspondence-true. What possible motive could there be for not concluding this? Scientific theories raise special metaphysical questions not semantic ones.

*Strong Scientific Realism* and *Correspondence Truth* have very different subject matters and should be supported by very different evidence. Underlying *Contemporary Realism* is a conflation of these two doctrines that has been detrimental to both.

Not only are semantic doctrines not constitutive of the metaphysical issue of realism, they are, with one exception to be explored in the next part, almost entirely irrelevant to the assessment of realism.<sup>14</sup>

A lot more needs to be said in describing, let alone defending, my approach to realism. In particular, the bearing of epistemology on realism needs to be considered. Nevertheless, if I am right so far, we can start listing aberrations and naming names.

**Aberration 1.** The way that the realism issue is posed by the British School founded by Dummett is mistaken. The School starts with a properly metaphysical statement of the issue. This is immediately replaced by a formulation in terms of truth, which is then taken not as deflationary but as part of a theory of meaning.<sup>15</sup> Whatever the merits of the various theories of meaning then proposed, the theories are irrelevant (above-mentioned exception aside) to the metaphysical issue which they are alleged to settle. For the metaphysical issue is not one about meaning.

**Aberration 2.** The fulminations of Richard Rorty (1979) and Arthur Fine (1986a, b) against correspondence truth, taken by them as reasons for putting the realism issue behind us, are in fact irrelevant to realism. For the issue is not about correspondence truth.<sup>16</sup>

**Aberration 3.** A great deal of Larry Laudan's "confutation of convergent realism" (1981) is beside the realist point because it is aimed at "assertions about the interrelations between truth, reference and success" (p. 22); in particular, at the idea that we need to see a scientific theory as (nondeflationary-) true, or its terms as referring, to explain the success of the theory. I agree that there is little to be said for this idea.<sup>17</sup> However, *Realism* does not depend on such arguments in favour of truth and reference.

**Aberration 4.** Putnam has produced a model-theoretic argument (1978: 125–7; 1983: 1–25) against "metaphysical realism" and in favor of "internal realism." Putnam starts by arguing against the possibility of determinate reference relations to a mind-independent reality. As a result, there is no way in which the "ideal" theory — one meeting all operational and theoretical constraints — could be false. So metaphysical realism is "incoherent." Putnam anticipates and dismisses a response that appeals to the causal theory of reference. All the causal theory does, he claims, is add more theory to the ideal theory: "How 'causes' can uniquely refer is as much of a puzzle as how 'cat' can" (1978: 126). The argument has generated a storm of responses.<sup>18</sup>

Now whatever the rights and wrongs of this debate, the issue has nothing to do with *Realism*.<sup>19</sup> It has to do with reference, with the theory of representation. Metaphysical realism is a hybrid of something like *Realism* with something like *Correspondence Truth*. The only part of this hybrid that *may* be affected by Putnam's argument is *Corre-*

*spondence Truth.* Indeed, the challenge of Putnam's argument can be posed, and often seems to be posed, in a way that presupposes *Realism*: a representation is related causally to one mind-independent entity but causally\* to another; which relation determines reference?

If it proves very difficult to naturalize reference, then perhaps we should seek a nonreferential theory of mind and language. If we were *completely* desperate, perhaps we *might* contemplate giving up naturalism. What we should *never* countenance for a moment is the idea that "we cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description" (Putnam 1981: 51). To accept that idea is not to rebuild the boat whilst staying afloat, it is to jump overboard.<sup>20</sup>

**Aberration 5.** Realism is not about the *semantic interpretation* of existence claims. It is sometimes claimed that a person's realism about certain entities cannot be simply exemplified in a belief or claim that those entities exist. We must know how such a belief or claim is to be interpreted; realism about cats must come from a certain view of the reference of 'cat', for example.<sup>21</sup> I have argued against this at length elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> Briefly, we do not need to move into a metalanguage discussion of our object language claims to establish ontic commitment. Indeed, if commitment could never be established at the level of the object language it could never be established at all. The idea that talk about the world is unclear and in need of interpretation, yet talk about language and its relation to the world is straightforward on the face of it, reflects the damage of years of living under the linguistic turn.

**Objection 3.** "The realist's talk of 'mind-independent' reality is obscure and metaphorical. The only way to make sense of it is to talk of meaning and truth."

Dummett is a famous example of someone who takes this sort of view. He thinks that any metaphysical view is "a picture which has in itself no substance otherwise than as a representation of the given conception of meaning" (1977: 383); it adds only a "metaphor" (1978: xxviii—xxix). He subscribes to what I call "the Metaphor Thesis" (1984: 201): metaphysics beyond meaning is mere metaphor. His support for this sweeping thesis is remarkably inadequate, consisting largely in a discussion of the realism dispute about numbers.<sup>23</sup>

Though philosophers who make this sort of objection do little to demonstrate the alleged obscurity, I think that we can discern what

bothers them. It is indeed hard to know what to make of the usual statements of antirealism. Is it really claimed, for example, that there could not have been stars and dinosaurs if there had not been people? If not, in what way, precisely, are dinosaurs and stars supposed to be dependent on us and our minds? No clear answer emerges. However, this obscurity is a problem about *antirealism* not realism.

A first stab at a clear statement of realism denies *any* dependencies of the world on our minds. An intelligible claim of the mind-dependency of the world stands clearly opposed to this realism. An intelligible claim about meaning or truth is beside the metaphysical point. Unintelligible claims can be ignored. Realism does not become unclear because it is sometimes opposed by nonsense.

A qualification to this statement of realism is immediately called for and was made: realism allows for the familiar causal interactions between minds and the world. Realism disallows all other dependencies. That is sufficient to characterize realism about “natural” objects like stones, trees, and cats, but not artefacts like chairs, pens, and cars. These objects owe their nature to the purposes for which we built them or to the way we habitually use them. So realism must be further qualified to allow for that sort of mind dependency too.

The center of the realism debate has always appeared to be over the nature of reality (see discussion of objections 1 and 2). The realist position on reality is perfectly clear. The antirealist position is often not, but what it is unclear about is reality not something else altogether. The fashionable assumption that antirealism is not about what it appears to be about is highly implausible. It requires argument not casual assertion.

We shall return to this issue soon, after considering the bearing of epistemology on *Realism*.

## II. REALISM, EPISTEMOLOGY, AND NATURALISM

I have spoken of *Realism* as a metaphysical doctrine. However, it is also a little bit epistemological. The independence dimension denies that the world is dependent for its existence and nature (except in the familiar ways) on what we believe. This denial is the full extent to which *Realism* is epistemological.

To say this is not to overlook the enormous role that epistemology has played in the realism debate. *Realism*, like anything else, must be argued for by giving evidence. Historically this has immediately raised an epistemic question: Is that evidence good enough? This question has dominated the debate. Skeptical doubts about the evidence have been the main motivation for antirealism. However, arguments for and against *Realism* are one thing, *Realism* itself is another.<sup>24</sup>

**Aberration 6.** It is a mistake to identify realism with the view that we have knowledge of the physical world. The realist cannot, of course, be a thorough-going Cartesian skeptic. Nor can anyone who claims to have substantial knowledge about the world, be she paleontologist, plumber, or your ordinary common or garden antirealist. Antiskepticism is almost universal, not distinctive of realism.<sup>25</sup>

A realist's antiskepticism must, of course, take a special shape: she claims to know about a *mind-independent* world. This fact about a realist epistemology is responsible for the only exception to the claim (part I) that semantic doctrines are almost entirely irrelevant to the assessment of *Realism* (1984: 39–40).

From the equivalence thesis it follows that if a certain worldly situation obtained, then the sentence, ‘Caesar had five moles’, is true. Now suppose that it could be established that the correct semantics should be built around an epistemic notion of truth; for example, around the notion *verifiable*. Then it would follow that only if ‘Caesar had five moles’ were verifiable did Caesar have five moles. This would threaten *Realism*. What must the world be like for it to be linked this closely to our cognitive capacities? The most plausible explanation of such a close link *might be* that the world is in some way mind-dependent. Thus, a verificationist theory of meaning might lead by inference to the best explanation — by abduction — to antirealism.

So the realist should resist verificationism. Note, however, that this does not show that a semantic doctrine is constitutive of *Realism*; the relation between the doctrines is abduction not entailment.

Putnam likes “the metaphor” that “the mind and the world jointly make up the mind and the world” (1981: xi). Ernest LePore and Barry Loewer claim (1988: 470) that the metaphor is cashed in Putnam’s identification, following Peirce, of truth with ideal justification.<sup>26</sup> The present discussion enables us to add to the case already made against this claim, in effect, in discussing objection 3.

The metaphor is about the nature of reality. The closest link we can get between Peircean truth and reality is exemplified in statements like.

Caesar had five moles only if ‘Caesar had five moles’ is ideally justified.

Statements like this have no *immediate* bearing on the metaphysical dispute about *Realism*; they entail no position on that dispute. *They are brought to bear only when we seek an explanation of why they hold.* Furthermore, it is not obvious in advance that the best explanation will be antirealism.

Consider, for example, the analogous claim that follows from a really bizarre theory of truth:

Caesar had five moles only if ‘Caesar had five moles’ is affirmed by the Pope.

On its own, this shows nothing about *Realism*. When we supplement it with an explanation, we might prefer an antirealist one that has the Pope creating the world or a realist one that ascribes to the Pope divine insight into reality. *An argument is needed to get from a theory of truth to antirealism.*

Return to the Peircean claim. I think that the realist may well be able to give a plausible explanation of this claim under *some* interpretations of the vague “ideally justified” (1984: 31–2, 187). If she could, then clearly Peircean truth poses no problem for *Realism* and so must be unsuitable to cash Putnam’s metaphor.

Suppose, however, that the realist could not give an explanation. Then, if the claim is accepted (see below), we must find an antirealist explanation: some account must be given of the dependency of reality on our minds that explains why this claim is true. But if this account of mind dependency could be given we would have exactly what we wanted to cash the metaphor. The excursion into truth has brought us right back where we started. In sum, if we cannot cash the metaphor nonsemantically, talk of truth cannot be brought to bear on the realism issue. If we can cash the metaphor nonsemantically, we do not need talk of truth to cash it.

We are in the position to identify another aberration. Since the metaphysical issue is distinct from epistemic and semantic ones the question arises: Which issue should we start with? Traditionally,

philosophers started with an epistemic issue and argued for antirealism on the ground that the realist's world would be unknowable. Recently, philosophers have tended to start with a semantic issue and to argue for antirealism from verificationism: for example, an abduction along the above lines. But suppose that we start with the metaphysical issue. I have argued elsewhere that we can then establish realism (1984: ch. 5) and proceed by abduction to nonverificationism: the best explanation of language in a realist world is one involving correspondence truth (1984: ch. 6; 1981). Which starting place is better?

**Aberration 7.** It is a mistake to start building a metaphysics from epistemology or semantics.<sup>27</sup> The realism issue should be settled first. Failing to do so is one of the most pervasive and serious aberrations of the realism debate.

Consider the priority of *Realism* over semantics, for example. The argument for *Realism*, independent of semantics, is very strong. The argument for verificationism, independent of metaphysics, is very weak. Indeed, that argument seems to rest entirely on a priori reflections about linguistic competence. Why should we believe these claims about what meanings we could grasp and what concepts we could have, particularly since they threaten something as plausible as *Realism*? What is the *basis* of these claims? Whence cometh this knowledge (1984: 204–20)?

My view of where to start reflects my naturalism. I take the theory of language to be an empirical, conjectural, theory like all others. So there is no question of giving semantics an unearned privileged position in deciding what there is and what it is like. Perhaps naturalism is *needed* to justify my view of where to start. If so, so be it (1984: 63–69; Devitt and Sterelny 1987: 7–9, 225–49).

Aberration 7 is often accompanied by a certain caricature of realism. According to Putnam, realism requires a “God’s Eye View” (1981: 74); that we have “direct access to a ready made world” (p. 146) and so can compare theories with “unconceptualized reality” (1979: 611); that we can make “a transcendental match between our representation and the world in itself” (1981: 134);<sup>28</sup> According to Rorty the realist believes that we can “step out of our skins” (1982: xix) to judge, without dependence on any concepts, whether theories are true of reality.<sup>29</sup> But, of course, no sane person believes any of this. What realists believe is

that we can judge whether theories are true of reality, *the nature of which* does not depend on any theories or concepts.

**Diagnosis 2.** What lies behind these bizarre, and always undocumented, antirealist fantasies?<sup>30</sup> I think that the answer is clear: the Cartesian picture.

According to this picture we start the quest for knowledge locked in our minds, contemplating our ideas, and asking the following questions: Is there a world out there causing this inner show? Does it resemble the show? How can our ideas reach out to this world? But the naturalist does not start from scratch with epistemic and semantic questions. Those questions arise when we already have wide-ranging, well-based, opinions about the world, opinions derived from common sense and science. The questions arise when we focus on a small part of the world: people. We go on to seek empirical answers to those questions; we seek a naturalistic epistemology and semantics. The theories that result have no special status. Indeed, given our lack of confidence in these areas, the theories should have rather a lowly status. To suppose that we can derive the right metaphysics from epistemology or semantics is to put the cart before the horse.

From the naturalistic perspective, the relations between our minds and reality are not, in principle, any more inaccessible than any other relations. Without jumping out of our skins we can have well-based theories about the relations between, say, Ron and Maggie. Similarly, we can have such theories about our epistemic and semantic relations to Ron and Maggie.

**Aberration 8.** It is a mistake to think that what is distinctive about realism is the view that truth is the aim of science.<sup>31</sup> Minimally construed, it is certainly hard for a realist to deny this view. On that construal, the truth in question is deflationary. So, semantically descending, the view is that the aim of science is to discover what entities there are — observables and unobservables — and what they are like. Now any realist (who is not so radically eliminativist in her epistemology as to eschew talk of discovery) will believe that science *already has* discovered many of the entities there are and approximately what they are like. How then could she plausibly deny that the aim is to discover more? So a basic constraint on a realist epistemology pushes one strongly toward a view of the aim of science.<sup>32</sup> However, the view is not

constitutive of realism nor even peculiar to realism; it could be held by a Kantian idealist, for example.

Of course, it is tempting to go for a more robust construal of the view: take the aim as correspondence truth. How else are we make sense of the notion of *discovery* which seems essential to even the minimal construal? Talk of the aim of science, unlike *Realism* itself, is concerned with the link between scientists and the world. Ultimately, it demands a semantic theory. *Correspondence Truth* is an attractive candidate — and one that I favor — but whether it is the right one is a long way from being determined by *Realism*. And if it is the right one, it can be adopted by antirealists as well.

**Aberration 9.** It is similarly a mistake to think that what is distinctive about realism is the convergent view of scientific progress.<sup>33</sup> This is another view that is neither constitutive of *Realism* nor peculiar to it. Once again, *Correspondence Truth* is an attractive semantics to use in the explanation, but that has little to do with *Realism* (1984: 113–17, 155–7).

**Aberration 10.** Though *Realism* is an *overarching* doctrine, it is a mistake to think that it is, in any interesting sense, *about* science, a *meta-theory*.<sup>34</sup> Of course, theories about the aim of science, and of its progress, are, in an interesting sense, meta-theories.<sup>35</sup> So also are theories in epistemology, methodology, and semantics. But a theory of this kind that stems from *Realism* is not *Realism*. *Realism*, like any other metaphysics, constrains theories on such matters, but it does not determine any particular one. And any particular one may be compatible with many metaphysics.

My aim in this paper has been to distinguish the metaphysical issue of realism from other issues and to urge that the metaphysical issue should be settled first. I have not presented a positive argument for realism here. However, once realism has been disentangled from other doctrines, the argument for it is fairly simple and, it seems to me, as persuasive as anything could be (1984: chs. 5, 7; 1988a).

If this is so, there is little to be said for antirealism. Why then is antirealism so popular? One cause has already been indicated: the Cartesian picture and fear of skepticism (Diagnosis 2). I think that there is another.

**Diagnosis 3.** The clue is to be found in the mystical flavour of many

statements of antirealism. Antirealism is like religion.<sup>36</sup> Religion is even less plausible than antirealism, is supported by even worse arguments, and yet is even more popular; indeed, religion is not just a hazard of philosophy but a hazard of life. If we could explain religion, I think that we could explain antirealism.<sup>37</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Susan Haack (1987) distinguishes *nine* “senses” of ‘realism’!

<sup>2</sup> See also Boyd 1984: 41–2; Fales 1988: 253–4.

<sup>3</sup> Two examples are Hilary Putnam’s “metaphysical realism” (1978, 123–25), and the account of realism by Arthur Fine (1986a: 115–6, 136–7).

<sup>4</sup> For the reasons for the qualification, see my 1984: 16–17, 121–2. Brian Ellis demonstrates nicely some further reasons for qualification; 1985: 52–8.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. my 1984: Maxim 2 and ch. 4.

<sup>6</sup> More needs to be said to allow for the paradoxes, ambiguity, indexicals, and truth value gaps, but these problems are irrelevant to our concerns.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this distinction, see Quine 1970: 10–13; Grover, Camp, and Belnap 1975; Leeds 1978; Field 1986; Brandom 1988; also Devitt and Sterelny 1987: 162–5. Grasping the distinction is not aided by the fact that deflationary truth is sometimes called correspondence; e.g., Ellis 1985: 53.

<sup>8</sup> I agree with Putnam (1985: 63) that Tarski’s famous article would have been better called “The Nonsemantic Conception of Truth.”

<sup>9</sup> Which I mistakenly went along with; 1984: 26–8.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the verbal point, see my 1988b: 160–1.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. my 1984: Maxim 4 and ch. 6.

<sup>12</sup> “... Whatever be the interest in the philosophy of language, it has very little value for understanding science” (Hacking 1983: 45).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Field 1978, Churchland 1979, Stich 1983.

<sup>14</sup> For the reason for the qualification, “almost,” see my 1984: 114–17, 230–1.

<sup>15</sup> Two recent examples of this swift move from metaphysics to semantics are Wright 1988: 25–7; Luntley 1988: 1–2. Luntley claims (p. 12) to have “shown” my earlier criticism (1983a: 75–83; 1984, particularly: 198–204) of this move to be wrong. He’s bluffing. He has simply repeated the move without supplying any justification of all.

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to Fiona Cowie for many thoughts about Fine. For more on Rorty see my 1988b. Much of Rorty’s argument against correspondence truth, and all of Fine’s depend on gratuitously saddling that notion with an implausible epistemology; see my discussion of the God’s Eye View in the next part. Fine’s “natural ontological attitude” mostly seems just like *Realism*. However, at times one wonders; 1986b: 163–5. Van Fraassen’s claim that Fine’s view would be compatible with his “with minor modifications” (1985: 246) should give the realist pause.

<sup>17</sup> 1984: 87–91, 106–10, 113–7. See also Levin 1984.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis 1984 is a particularly helpful one. My own response criticized Putnam’s dismissal of the causal-theory solution: the point of the solution is not that the causal theory’s use of ‘cause’ determines reference but that causation itself does (1983b; 1984: 188–91). Putnam was not impressed (1983: xi–xii, 295–6).

<sup>19</sup> Cf., for example, three recent responses to Putnam: Heller 1988; Fales 1988; Lepore and Loewer 1988. See also T. Blackburn 1988: 179. Putnam seems to find the idea of realism without correspondence truth inconceivable (1985: 78; 1987: 15–16).

<sup>20</sup> The idea is an aberration of such magnitude that others pale almost into insignificance beside it. I have not listed it because there is no room to discuss it in this paper. For some helpful criticisms of the idea and what leads to it, see Aune 1987; Wolterstorff 1987; Brown 1988; McMichael 1988; "Philosophy and Lunacy: Nelson Goodman and the Omnipotence of Words" in Stove forthcoming. See also Devitt and Sterelny 1987: chs 12–13.

<sup>21</sup> S. Blackburn 1980: 354; Fine 1986a: 138–9, 152; 1986b: 175–6.

<sup>22</sup> 1983c: 671–2; 1984: 40–46.

<sup>23</sup> Dummett 1973: 507–8; 1977: 380–9; 1978: xxiv–xxix, 229–47 (cf. my 1983a: 79–82; 1984: 200–4). See also S. Blackburn 1980 (cf. my 1983c). Luntley (1988) wrings his hands frequently about the unclarity of talk of mind-independent reality. Rorty thinks that we need Davidsonian semantics to clarify the talk; 1976: 327; 1982: 12–15 (cf. my 1988b: 165–6). Barry Taylor spoils a subtle and helpful discussion of what this talk amounts to with a sudden, largely unsupported, move to talk of truth; 1987: 59–61.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. my 1984: Maxim 1 and ch. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Fine 1986a: 137; Margolis (1986: 113); Fales 1988: 254. Margolis thinks that realism "(at least initially) refuses to disjoin so-called ontological and epistemological questions" (p. 111). I think that the reverse is the case. Blurring the distinction between ontology and epistemology is a mark of the antirealist.

<sup>26</sup> Ellis (1985) subscribes to a Peircean notion of truth and yet seems to agree with much of *Realism*. However, at bottom, his position is antirealism: "there is no way that the world is absolutely, only ways in which it is relative to various kinds of beings" (p. 71). How does he arrive at this view? He believes that choice of the ideal theory, hence truth, is not entirely determined by empirical evidence but partly by "pragmatic" considerations which are *our* "epistemic values" (p. 68). So, he concludes, the world is dependent on those values. I assume that the intermediate step here involves the equivalence thesis in the way I illustrate.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. my 1984: Maxim 3 and ch. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Putnam attributes this sort of idiocy to realist friends "in places like Princeton and Australia" (1979: 611). The British School has more bad news for Australians (particularly black ones): "there is no sense to supposing that [Australia] either determinately did or did not exist [in 1682]" (Luntley 1988: 249–50).

<sup>29</sup> See also 1979: 293; Fine 1986a: 131–2; 1986b: 151–2.

<sup>30</sup> Bill Lycan has nicely mocked the fantasies with his name "Turtle Realism": antirealists should go all the way and accuse realists of believing that the earth sits on the back of a giant turtle (1988: 191). Australian realists believe that the turtle sits on the back of a giant crocodile: "Crocodile Realism."

<sup>31</sup> Cf. van Fraassen 1980: 8.

<sup>32</sup> "The different views about the aim of science lead naturally to different views concerning its theoretical achievements" (Ellis 1985: 48). I think that this is the wrong way round as an account of both the actual and rational order of thought.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. S. Blackburn 1980; Laudan 1981; Boyd 1984.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. van Fraassen 1985: 255n; Fine 1986a: 113–4, 145; 1986b: 150, 161, 171.

<sup>35</sup> Fine is dismissive of all such theories about science because he sees them as requiring a stance outside science (1986a: 147–8). The theories do not require this stance. Science can be discussed from within science.

<sup>36</sup> For some other speculations along these lines, see "Idealism: A Victorian Horror Story" in Stove forthcoming.

<sup>37</sup> My thanks to Fiona Cowie for comments on an earlier draft. The version of this paper that was distributed, and partly delivered, at the Oberlin Colloquium (April 1989), included a discussion of van Fraassen and scientific realism. This has been dropped because of space limitations. Parts of the longer paper were also delivered at

Davidson College and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (April 1989) and at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (May 1989).

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*Department of Philosophy  
University of Maryland  
College Park, Maryland 20742  
U.S.A.*