

A Defense of Internal Realism

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(In December 1982 the American Philosophical Association sponsored a Symposium on my book, *Reason, Truth and History*, at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Division. While the papers of the critics, Hartry Field and Gilbert Harman, were published in the October 1982 issue of the *Journal of Philosophy*, only a short abstract of my reply was published—for some reason, this is the peculiar custom! What follows is my complete reply, which has not previously been published in full).

Great philosophical points of view which have permanent appeal cannot be expressed in a single sentence. This is one reason that I feel justified in having taken the 'metaphysical realist' to be a philosopher who accepts what Hartry Field calls 'metaphysical realism'₁ (the world consist of a fixed totality of mind-independent objects), *and* accepts 'metaphysical realism'₂ (there is exactly one true and complete description of the way the world is), *and* also accepts 'metaphysical realism'₃ (truth involves some sort of correspondence). These doctrines have been held by philosophers of every historical period, and one can think of a rich 'filigree' of ideas, doctrines, detailed arguments, which flesh out these abstract theses in different ways.

These three sentences (taken from, or rather torn out of their place in, my book *Reason, Truth and History*) have, in fact, no clear content at all apart from this rich filigree. What does it mean, apart from a philosophical tradition, to speak of 'objects', let alone a 'fixed totality' of *all* objects? What does it mean, apart from a certain philosophical controversy, to speak of 'mind-independence? Human minds did not create the stars or the mountains, but this 'flat' remark is hardly enough to settle the philosophical question of realism versus antirealism. What does it mean to speak of a unique 'true and complete description of the world'?

I can give this last a sense, if I assume 'metaphysical realism₁'. For then there is a definite set *I* of individuals of which the world consists (say, the spacetime points). And there is a definite set of all properties and relations (of each type, to avoid the paradoxes, but let us just consider the lowest type), call it '*P*'.

Consider an ideal language with a name for each member of *I* and a predicate for each member of *P*. [Perhaps Field, in his present nominalistic phase, would deny the existence of such a totality *P*; but then I don't know how to interpret his talk of *ways* of 'carving out pieces of noumenal dough' (p. 561).] Such an ideal language is not a denumerable language (unless we take properties in extension, and then only if the number of individuals is finite), but it is unique (up to isomorphism) and the theory of the world—the set of true sentences, up to any definite type—is likewise unique. There may well be other ways of giving sense to the claim that there is 'one true and complete theory of the world'; my point is only that the natural way of understanding 'metaphysical realism₂' involves assuming 'metaphysical realism₁'.

Conversely, if we assume there is an ideal theory of the world, then the notion of a 'fixed totality' of all individuals and the notion of a 'fixed totality' of properties and relations of these individuals is naturally clarified by identifying the totality of individuals with the range of the individual variables and the totality of properties and relations (of each type) with the range of the predicate variables (of that type) in the theory. Metaphysical realism *one*, *two* and *three* do not have content standing on their own, one by one. Each leans on the others and on a variety of further assumptions and notions.

FIELD'S SUGGESTION THAT THE 'REDUNDANCY THEORY' IS COMPATIBLE WITH METAPHYSICAL REALISM

Let me explain Field's suggestion that one could be a metaphysical realist and accept the 'redundancy theory' of truth. (This is how one could be a metaphysical realist and not accept the correspondence theory, according to Field.)

On the 'redundancy theory', to say '*P* is true' is merely to affirm *P*. Since truth is not a property on this view, the claim that one can be a metaphysical realist and still hold this view of truth amounts to the claim that one can say, 'there is a fixed totality of mind-independent things of which the world consists', while regarding that saying itself as true only in the sense of 'immanent truth', that is, in the sense that (by calling it true one indicates that) it is a part of the total corpus that one accepts. It is

hard to see why such a view should qualify as being metaphysically realistic.

Field further appeals to work of mine in which I suggested separating the theory of truth from the theory of understanding. He suggests that a description of a speaker's 'conceptual-role semantics', a description of the actual skill of producing sentences, assigning subjective probabilities to sentences, etc., might be a complete theory of *understanding*. Finally, he rejects the idea that there is an objective notion of 'degree of confirmation' or justification. He claims to be a metaphysical realist about that 'mind independent totality of objects', but a relativist about justification.

So, it is being claimed that one can deny that truth is a property, deny also that the sentences that we utter have any objective degree of inductive validity at all, and still claim that by virtue of uttering such *noises*, for that is all they are on such a picture, as 'the world consists of a fixed totality of mind independent objects' one has succeeded in being a metaphysical realist. If it that easy, why should not even Richard Rorty agree to become a 'metaphysical realist'?

The only reason that I can think of for denying that truth is a property is that one has bought into a physicalist or phenomenalist, or, in the case of some philosophers, a cultural relativist, picture of reality which leaves no room for such a property. Having adopted such a picture, the philosopher feels compelled to say either that there is no such thing as truth, or, more commonly today, to 'save' the word 'true' by offering a disquotational theory. It is only commitment to one or another reductionist picture (whether the picture is called a 'realist' picture or whether it is called an 'antirealist' picture does not matter) that leads anyone to think that truth is not a property. But notice! The very person who strongly denies that there is any such property as truth, and who waves his picture at us to call our attention to its various attractions, as, for instance, Richard Rorty does in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*—notice that this very philosopher does not recognize that his picture is only a picture, but believes that in some deep pre-theoretic sense his picture is the way the world is. That truth *is* a property—and a property wick, unlike justification, or probability on present evidence, depends on more than the present memory and experience of the speaker—is the one insight of 'realism' that we should not jettison. But Hartry Field shows signs of being inclined to jettison this insight, although he calls himself a 'metaphysical realist' and says that I am a 'non-realist'. Could it be that I am more of a realist—though not a 'metaphysical' one—than Field, after all?

JUSTIFICATION AND REFERENCE

The level of abstractness of Field's and Harman's discussions is such that no reference to the practice by which we decide what any given word refers to—no reference to the practice of interpretation—ever intrudes. So let us look at some actual cases.

The term *phlogiston* did not in fact refer to anything. In particular, it did not refer to valence electrons, although I met a scientist once who did (half-jokingly) propose that we say, 'there really is such a thing as phlogiston; it has turned out that phlogiston is valence electrons'. Why do we regard it as reasonable of Bohr to keep the same word 'electron' (*Elektron*) in 1900 and 1934, and thereby to treat his two very different theories, his theory of 1900 and his theory of 1934, as theories which describe the same objects, and regard it as unreasonable to say that *phlogiston* referred to valence electrons?

'Conceptual-role semantics' has no answer to such questions, for conceptual-role semantics knows no notion of synonymy at all. Bohr's subjective probability metric in 1900 was not Bohr's subjective probability metric in 1934. But this does not say whether the word *Elektron*, or any other German word, did or did not change its reference in Bohr's idiolect. If Field is right, and there is no objectivity to justification, then how can there be any objectivity to *interpretation*?

It seems to me that there are two options open to Field. Field might say that there is a fact of the matter as to what is a good 'rational reconstruction' of a speaker's referential intentions (and that treating 'Elektron' as a 'rigid designator' of whatever sort of entity is responsible for certain effects and approximately obeys certain laws is such a good 'rational reconstruction'), but not an objective fact about justification in science and most of daily life. Or, alternatively, he might say that interpretation *is* subjective, but this does not mean that reference is subjective. The first option would involve him in the claim that deciding on a proper 'rational reconstruction' of a speaker's semantic intentions is an activity isolated from 'full general intelligence', full 'inductive competence', etc. But how can the decision that something does or does not 'approximately' obey certain laws (near enough, anyway)—the decision that electrons as we now conceive them 'fit' the referential intentions of Bohr in 1900 but not the referential intentions of phlogiston theorists a little earlier—possibly be isolable from or different in nature than decisions about *reasonableness* in general? The second option would involve one in the claim that we have a notion of reference which is independent of the procedures and practices by which we decide that people in different situations with different bodies of background belief do, in fact, refer to the same things. This claim seems unintelligible. If that possibility is put forwards seriously, then I have to throw up my hands!

Note that the point does not depend on recherche examples: we treat people two hundred years ago as having referred to what we today call 'plants' (or to approximately the things we today call 'plants') even though we disagree with people two hundred years ago over the essential properties of plants. Without an informal practice of discounting certain differences in belief ('charity in interpretation') we could not say that the most common words of the language have kept even a part of their reference fixed across two hundred years. If all of this is supposed to be subjective, if translation practice is subjective, then I don't see that any intertheoretic, interlinguistic notions of reference and truth are left at all. But if it is supposed to be objective, then I want to ask why the notions of translation (a notion needed for even a disquotational theory of reference) and interpretation are in better shape than the notion of justification.

GILBERT HARMAN'S VIEW

Harman and I meet much more head on than Field and I do. Field is, so to speak, trying to scatter my fire, whereas Harman faces it and tries to throw it back in my face.

Let me begin by asking how objective justification really is on Harman's view. Harman's examples of innate maxims presupposed by justification are the familiar maxims of conservatism, simplicity, and predicative power. But if each speaker has the 'innate' knowledge that he or she ought to preserve past doctrine and preserve 'simplicity', while having *no* objective standard of 'simplicity' itself, or of the the right kind of 'conservatism', then justification is not going to be any more objective on Harman's account than it is on Field's account. If one opts for the view that justification is objective *just to the extent* that the great majority of speakers do, in fact, interpret these innate maxims the same way, and subjective where speakers disagree, then, depending on how high one sets the standard of 'majority' agreement, and depending on the time, the place, and the culture, either you will discover that this very philosophical view is itself not justified, or you will find that many things —the infallibility of the Pope, for example— which we would not count as justified will turn out to be 'objectively' justified in certain cultures. Philosophy itself is a field in which one believes that there is some right solution, or right dissolution or right discussion (or objectively better and worse discussion) of the problems, but in which this rightness (or 'better and worseness') does not consist in the possibility of an argument that will be satisfying to the 'majority'. I find it a source of wonderment that philosophers, of all people, should be the ones to think that the fact that

certain ideas are intrinsically controversial indicates that there is no being right or wrong about those ideas. The argument that Harman gives for regarding ethics as non-cognitive¹ is precisely the argument that the man on the street gives for regarding *all of philosophy* as non-cognitive.

I prefer to interpret Harman not as holding that it is *only* these desperately vague maxims of 'coherence', 'simplicity', etc., that are innate, but, rather, as holding, as his reference to Chomsky's competence/performance distinction suggests, that there is a detailed system of rules in the brain that interprets these vague-sounding maxims. On such a theory, what is justified is not necessarily what actual people say is justified, but is rather what an ideally 'competent' member of the species would say is justified².

The notion of 'competence' was introduced by Chomsky in *Syntactic Structures*. The 'competence' description, in Chomsky's sense, is a description that *conflicts* with the biological description. When I perform the experiment of trying to produce an infinite series of grammatical sentences (say, 'There is one apple'; 'There are two apples'. 'There are three apples'... —this is something I have the 'competence' to do, according to Chomsky) and fail, as I sooner or later must, this 'performance error' is not due to any failure of my brain to live up to its biological 'specifications'. The brain is not built to use an infinite paper tape, or other form of infinite external memory, and would fail to go on producing these sentences forever even if it has such mechanical aids. In short, the *competence description* is like the description of the air as a perfect fluid —it may be, as Chomsky contends, the best description to use for the purposes of linguistic theory, as the description of the air as a fluid is the best description for certain purposes, but that does not mean that it is simply an account of the physicalistic facts. It is an *idealization*.

Chomsky promised us, in *Syntactic Structures*, that there would be a *normal form* for grammars and a mathematical simplicity function that would make all this precise. One would only have to look at the alternative descriptions of the speaker's competence, written out in the normal form, and measure the simplicity of each one, using the mathematical

¹ Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, 1977, Oxford University Press; John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 1977, Penguin Books (London).

² 'Methaphysical Realism and Moral Relativism: Reflections on Hilary Putnam's *Reason, Truth and History*', *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LXXIX, n.º 10, oct. 1982, pp. 568-574. Harman writes (p. 570), '... we suppose that in the end the same basic principles underlie everyone's reasoning, in the way that the same grammar may underlie the speech of different speakers who have different vocabularies and different skills at speaking'. I reply to this argument that the notion of an 'underlying' principle which is here appealed to (like the Chomskian competence/performance distinction on which it seems to be based) is just the notion of a best idealization or best explanation, and that Harman owes us a reason to believe that *these* are physicalistic notions.

function to be provided, to see which one is 'simplest'. That one would then be, by definition, *the* description of the speaker's 'competence'. (Strictly speaking, Chomsky owes us another function as well—a function to measure the *goodness of fit* between a competence description and the actual performance. Chomsky seems to assume that what is a 'performance error' is something that smart speakers will all know 'intuitively').

This idea that one can mathematize the description of competence in linguistics, has since been given up. At present, the idea that one particular idealization of a speaker's behavior represents his 'competence', rather than another, rests entirely on our intuitive notion of a 'best idealization' or a 'best explanation'. To argue that the notion of justification is made *physicalistic* by identifying it with what people would say according to their *competence* description (in a much more ambitious sense of 'competence' than even Chomsky has ever endorsed) is absurd.

MY 'COMPANIONS IN THE GUILT' ARGUMENT

Suppose we decided to just take such notions as 'competence', or, perhaps, 'best explanation', or, perhaps, 'justification', as primitive. Since these notions are not physicalist³ notions, our 'realism' would no longer be of the sort Harman wishes to defend. But why not go this route? someone might ask. Why not conclude, for example, that Brentano was right? That there are unreduced semantical properties? What can be wrong with an antireductionist metaphysical realism with primitive semantical notions, primitive notions of justification, and so on?

Well, in the first place, if nothing is wrong with it, then the question why one should be a non-cognitivist just in *ethics* becomes a serious one. The disagreement in ethical values, that Harman points out, is matched by disagreement in standards of justification and of explanation. That one should not, other things being equal, harm a benefactor, is more universally accepted than is the relevance of *prediction* to the question whether the earth came into existence five or six thousand years ago (or whenever). This does not bother Harman, because Harman thinks that there are physicalistic facts (facts about 'competence') which determine who is right in such a disagreement, but no physicalistic facts which determine who is right when there is ethical disagreement. Admitting objective ethical facts that are not reducible to physical facts would be a total

³ I argue that these notions are not physicalistic in 'Why Reason Can't be Naturalized' and 'Beyond Historicism', chapters 13 and 16 of *Realism and Reason*, (vol. 3 of my Philosophical Papers), 1983, Cambridge University Press.

violation of the spirit and content of physicalism. If the metaphysical realist has to break with Harman (and with Mackie) by admitting *any* unreduced and irreducible ethical or epistemological or intentional notions —has, say, to take as primitive such notions as 'best idealization' or 'best explanation'— then the whole *raison d'être* of his sharp fact/value distinction is demolished. Our ideas of interpretation, explanation, and the rest flow as much from deep and complex human needs as our ethical values do. If the objectivity of ethics is rejected on the ground that the distinction between a human need and a mere desire is itself a mere projection, a distinction without a real difference, then we have to be told why the same thing should not be true of the deep human needs which shape the notions of interpretation, explanation, translation, and the like.

I can imagine a critic who would now say, 'Very well, Putnam, I will concede that what is and is not a good interpretation, what is and what is not explanatory, what is and what is not justified, are in the same boat as what is and is not *good*. But I am willing to be a metaphysical realist about goodness too'. What would I say to such a critic?

I would be pleased that my critic accepted my 'companions in the guilt' argument. It was, after all, one of my main purposes in writing *Reason, Truth and History* to get people to realize the very great strength that the companions in the guilt argument has. There are no serious reasons for ethical relativism which should drive a rational man, *moved by those reasons alone*, as opposed to the sway of the *Zeitgeist*, to be an ethical relativist but not a total relativist. And if a rebirth of a full-bodied, red-blooded metaphysical realism were the way to get people to accept the objectivity of ethics, then I would almost be willing to pay the price of letting that happen. But I don't think the metaphysical realist picture has any content today when it is divorced from physicalism.

The particular problem with physicalism that I emphasized in *Reason, Truth and History* is that the question, 'What singles out any one relation R as 'the' relation of reference?' has no answer. Harman's response is that the world has 'a single causal structure'⁴. But this doesn't help. For if my linguistic competence is caused by E_1, E_2, E_3, \dots , then it is true that it is caused* by $E_1^*, E_2^*, E_3^*, \dots$, where the * denotes the corresponding entity in a suitable non-standard model. So I then ask, 'Why is reference fixed by causation and not by causation*?' The only answer a physicalist can give me is, 'because that is the nature of reference'. To say that *nature* itself singles out objects and puts them into correspondence with our words is a claim that has no meaning that I make out at all.

Consider, for example, one way in which it has been suggested that

⁴ 'Metaphysical Realism and Moral Relativism: Reflections on Hilary Putnam's, *Reason, Truth and History*', *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. LXXIX, n.º 10, oct. 1982, p. 569, p. 573. The phrase Harman uses is 'a single causal and explanatory order'.

'nature' might do this. David Lewis has recently taken up the suggestion that there are certain classes of things 'out there', 'elite classes' as he calls them, which are intrinsically distinguished, and he suggests that it is a 'natural constraint' on reference (i.e., a constraint which is *built into nature*) that as many of our terms as possible should refer to 'elite classes'⁵. This does not uniquely determine the reference of our terms: there are other desiderata, and there are sometimes trade-offs to be made between the desiderata, but this is supposed to be the constraint that makes language 'hook onto' the world.

If God had decided that it is not the metaphysical realist's relation R but some non-standard counterpart R* that was to be the 'singled out' relation of reference, then our experiences would have been the same, the sentences we would have believed would have been the same, and our successes and failures would have been the same. This is part of the argument of *Reason, Truth and History* that none of my critics has contested. It follows that Lewis' 'natural constraint' is not brought into existence by our *interests*; rather, it has to be thought of as something that operates together with those interests to fix reference.

What Lewis' story claims is that the class of cats cries out for a label, with the class of cats* does not cry out to be named. Rather than solving the problem of reference, what the idea of a constraint built into nature and of 'elite classes' does is to confuse the materialist picture by throwing in something 'spooky'.

The problem does not effect only reference relations; warrant relations, explanatory relations, cotenability relations (that one truth would still be true if another *weren't* true) all share the feature that they cannot be fixed by anything psychological, anything 'in the head'. Physicalism cannot say how they are fixed without falling back on medieval-sounding talk of 'single causal structure', or 'causal powers', or 'natural constraints'. Physicalism is a failure.

ANTIREDUCTIONIST METAPHYSICAL REALISM

The question my imaginary interlocutor raised a few minutes ago was, 'Why would I wish to reject a metaphysical realism which was antireductionist and free of any fact/value dichotomy?' My answer turns in part on the phenomenon of equivalent descriptions.

(Equivalent descriptions are theories which are incompatible when taken at face value, or which have what at least seem to be quite different ontologies, but which are treated as notational variants in the actual

⁵ The suggestion was first advanced (but only to reject it!) by G. H. Merrill.

practice of science. A more precise characterization is given in *Realism and Reason*, but this informal characterization, and the examples I shall mention, may perhaps make clear what I have in mind. As an example—one I shall return to shortly—you may think of the pair of theories consisting of the ‘nominalistic’ physics presented by Field in his *Science Without Numbers* and the ‘same’ physical theory presented in a more standard way using the second order theory of real numbers, or, equivalently, the third order theory of natural numbers.)

An example I have often used in this connection is the pair of theories consisting of a version of Newtonian physics in which there are particles and forces acting on the particles but no extended ‘objects’ between the particles (no ‘fields’, according to the conception in which fields are not merely logical constructions), and the theory of Newtonian physics as it is done assuming the ‘electro-magnetic field’ and the ‘gravitational field’ and treating these as genuine particulars.

The question whether gravitation is an entity existing between bodies, or a genuine ‘action at a distance’, or has yet some other nature, came up repeatedly in the controversy between Newton and Leibnitz. Newton’s own reply was that the question is not a question for ‘experimental philosophy’. The rejection of this sort of question, the question whether some particular item in a workable scientific representation of the facts is really ‘out there’ in the metaphysical realist sense, is *not* a rejection that springs in all cases from positivist preconceptions (it did not so spring in Newton’s case, in fact), but is rather a rejection that is part of science itself, a rejection that springs from the need to separate scientific and metaphysical questions. Now, what I think we have learned since Newton is that metaphysics is not a possible subject.

I may be wrong about this; perhaps Saul Kripke will show us how to do metaphysics. But to show us how to do metaphysics, Kripke, or whoever pulls off the stunt, will have to do something truly revolutionary. A metaphysical system will have to be rich enough to embrace what is indispensable to discourse, including talk of reference, talk of justification, talk of values in general; and it will have to be accompanied by some sketched-out story of how we can have access to ‘metaphysical reality’. To rely on ‘intuition’ when the question is ‘whether the electromagnetic fields is real’ (whatever that is supposed to mean), or ‘whether there are absolute spacetime points’ (whatever that is supposed to mean), or ‘whether there really are sets’ (whatever that is supposed to mean) is to rely on what we don’t understand with respect to questions we don’t understand.

The modern ‘metaphysical realist’ is typically a philosopher who does not even attempt such a revolutionary enterprise. Rather, he treats single sentences, torn out of any real theoretical context, as genuine philosophical questions, and he simply assumes that we have some ‘handle’ on the notion of *truth* as applied to such sentences.

BEING 'TRUE' IN THE REALIST'S SENSE VERSUS BEING RIGHT

What I believe is that there is a notion of truth, or, more humbly, of being 'right', which we use constantly and which is not at all the metaphysical realist's notion of a description which 'corresponds' to the noumenal facts. In that humble sense, there is no question of choosing between Field's theory in *Science Without Numbers* and the more standard 'mathematical' versions of the 'same' theory. They are both 'all right'. They are both *right*, if either is. From the point of view of the notion of being 'right' that does actual work in our lives and intellectual practice, a mathematical theory which takes sets as primitive and a mathematical theory which is intertranslatable with the former, but which takes functions as primitive, may similarly, both be right; from the point of view of life and intellectual practice, a theory which treats points as individuals and a theory which treats points as limits may (in their proper contexts) both be right; from the point of view of life and intellectual practice, a theory which represents the physical interactions between bodies in terms of action at a distance and a physical theory which represents the same situation in terms of fields may both be right.

Let me conclude by trying to say a little more about my own picture, for I do have a picture. I don't think it is bad to have pictures in philosophy. What is bad is to forget they are pictures and to treat them as 'the world'.

In my picture, objects are theory-dependent in the sense that theories with incompatible ontologies can both be right.

Saying that they are both right isn't saying there are fields 'out there' as entities with extension and (in addition) fields in the sense of logical constructions. It isn't saying that there are both absolute spacetime points and points which are mere limits. It is saying that various representations, various languages, various theories, are equally good in certain contexts. In the tradition of James and Dewey, it is to say that devices which are functionally equivalent in the context of inquiry for which they are designed are equivalent in every way we have a 'handle on'.

To prevent misunderstandings, I am not claiming that some perfectly good description of the world contains the sentence 'There are no chairs in Manhattan', used in such a way that it could be rendered homophonically into standard English. Not every sentence changes its truth value on passing from one acceptable theory to some—or any—other acceptable theory. But to break the metaphysical realist picture, it is enough that the project of giving a 'complete description of the world' without employing sentences which do have this kind of instability, this dependence on a theory for their truth value, is an unworkable project.

If objects are, at least when you get small enough, or large enough, or

theoretical enough, theory-dependent, then the whole idea of truth's being defined or explained in terms of a 'correspondence' between items in a language and items in a fixed theory-independent reality, has to be given up. The picture I propose instead is not the picture of Kant's transcendental idealism, but it is certainly related to it. It is the picture that truth comes to more than idealized rational acceptability.

This kind of 'idealism' is not a 'verificationism' which requires one to claim that statements about the past are to be understood by seeing how we would verify them in the future. All I ask is that what is supposed to be 'true' be *warrantable* on the basis of experience and intelligence for creatures with 'a rational and a sensible nature'. Talk of there beings saber toothed tigers here thirty thousand years ago, or beings who can verify mathematical and physical theories we cannot begin to understand (but who have brains and nervous systems), or talk of there being sentient beings outside my light cone, is not philosophically problematic for me. But talk of there being 'absolute spacetime points', or of sets 'really existing', or 'not really existing' I reject. When we claim that such a sentence as 'There are absolute spacetime points' is true, we are using the word 'true' in a way that does not connect with a notion of warrant that we actually have or that I can imagine any being with 'a rational and sensible nature' actually having.

Now, the picture I have just sketched is only a 'picture'. If I were to claim it is a *theory*, I should be called upon to at least sketch a theory of idealized warrant; and I don't think we can even sketch a theory of actual warrant (a theory of the 'nature' of warrant), let alone a theory of idealized warrant. On the other hand, metaphysical realism is only a 'picture'. At a very abstract level, the debate between 'metaphysical realism' and 'idealism' is a standoff. Each side can truthfully say to the other, 'you don't have a theory!'

In spite of this, I think that the idealist 'picture' calls our attention to vitally important features of our practice—and what is the point of having 'pictures' if we are not interested in seeing how well they represent what we actually think and do? That we do not, in practice, actually construct a unique version of the world, but only a vast number of versions (not all of them equivalent—I have focussed on the case of equivalent descriptions simply as a dramatic case) is something that 'realism' hides from us. That there is nothing wrong with vague predicates—all that is wrong is to be too vague in a given context—is another fact that 'realism' ignores or misrepresents⁶.

The first of these facts, the pluralism of our practice, has been expressed by Nelson Goodman in a naughty way by saying that there are

⁶ I argue that vagueness is a phenomenon for which metaphysical realism has no successful account to offer in 'Vagueness and Alternative Logic', chapter 15 of *Realism of Reason*.

many worlds, not one. The second fact, the ultimacy of vagueness, was expressed to me in a recent conversation by Rogers Albritton by saying that there are vague objects.

Recognizing such facts as these is part of what might be called 'rejecting "realism" in the name of the realistic spirit'. It is my idea that reviving and revitalizing the realistic spirit is the important task for a philosopher at this time.