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# THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

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### REFLECTIONS OF A TEMPORALIST ON THE NEW REALISM

WITH respect both to its conclusion and its premises the "new realism" seems, on the whole, to deserve its adjective. The novelty of its conclusion consists in the fact that it rejects epistemological dualism without falling into idealism. It has in it quite as much of Berkeley as of Locke—to take Locke as a representative of natural realism; Berkeley, indeed, as the most eminent antagonist of the dualistic presupposition in epistemology, may almost be looked upon as the Moses—though not the Joshua—of the new philosophy. If he did not bring epistemology into what with the new realist passes for the promised land, he at least led it out into the wilderness from an Egyptian bondage. We may, as Professor Perry has proposed,<sup>1</sup> in classifying systems with respect to their views of the relation of idea to object, set down as the two highest antithetic genera epistemological monism and epistemological dualism; then idealism and the new realism alike must be classified as coordinate species of the former genus. Now, a realism which definitely and emphatically declares its innocence of dualism, though it is not without adumbrations in the previous history of philosophy, may, I suppose, be regarded without much exaggeration as a new type of doctrinal combination. And at first acquaintance, at all events, it must appear, in the light of the preconceptions which one is likely to derive from a study of the earlier history of philosophy, to be a paradoxical combination. For the long current terminology of the historiography of doctrines predisposes one to think of realism and dualism as synonymous, on the one hand, and of monism (in the epistemological sense) and idealism as synonymous, on the other. But if we accept the new doctrine's own account of itself as generically akin to idealism, it becomes important to determine carefully in just what consist the specific *differentiæ* by which the two kinds of epistemological monism are discriminated from each other.

<sup>1</sup> *Mind*, July, 1910.

At first reading of some of the formulations of their principle which recent realists have put forward, it may appear hard to define the difference between this type of realism and what has commonly gone under the contrary name. If "idea" and "object" are not two but one, which is the one? If the two snakes of the fable reciprocally swallow one another, why call the result by the name of one of the animals rather than by that of the other? Does not an acceptance of epistemological monism obliterate the ordinary distinction between realism and idealism? Or (if we are to retain either of the two terms whose original meaning was dependent upon a contrast now declared to be meaningless), are there not reasons for thinking "idealism" the apter term? For, since the new realist holds that "*when* things are known they are identical with the idea, or content of the knowing mind," does not even he imply at least a verbal distinction between the thing as (at the moment of perception) it is and is perceived to be, and the thing as it conceivably then might be (but isn't) *outside* of the "knowing state"? And does not he too identify the *esse* of the thing with the former? And is not this substantially the contention of the Berkeleian idealist?

There is, however, no real difficulty in defining with precision the distinction between the new realism and idealism, so far as their views about the "real" objects of veridical perception are concerned, even though both be taken as ostensible forms of epistemological monism. When the new realist asserts the identity of object and idea, he presumably means merely an identity *for the time being*. At the moments when a relatively perduring "thing" gets entangled with "the content of the knowing state," it is then and there numerically one with what is commonly called the idea of it. But the thing has many other moments, and these entanglements are but passing episodes in its history. The object is like the money in Iago's purse; "'twas mine, 'tis his," and so forth. If the new realist permits the use of the term "idea" at all—and he certainly does not himself consistently abstain from using it—his real doctrine may be formulated as the contention that some objects are from time to time identical with ideas; while the Berkeleian idealist declares all of them at all times of their existence to be so identical. In other words, the new realist (if he is truly an epistemological monist) dissents from idealism only with respect to the fate, or the manner of existence, of the object during what may be called the interperceptual intervals in the object's checkered career.

Since it is only with respect to these interperceptual intervals of time that the new realism and idealism can be distinguished, it ap-

pears likely to be advantageous to focus our consideration upon those intervals and to analyze the problem first of all in terms of them. The implied position of a Berkeleian idealist (if we do not permit him to fall back for aid upon the mind of God) with regard to these periods can be more or less intelligibly stated in such terms. For him, a given object, during the intervals between its successive appearances in perception, lapses (so far as finite consciousness is concerned) into sheer nonentity, or at most into a mere "permanent possibility" of future perceptions, while "the knowing state" persists (or may do so) in the form of representations of other complexes of objects. The new realist, on the other hand, declares that through the interval the *object* persists (or may do so) and goes on its way rejoicing. Does he, however, assert that during the interval "the knowing state" lapses, in the sense in which for the subjectivist objects lapse? With respect to the consciousness of a given individual object, obviously yes; but not quite so obviously with regard to consciousness in general. Easy enough is it for the idealist to treat the object *A* as non-existent or merely potential during its interperceptual vacations; for in the nature of the case *A* can not be on hand to protest that it is just as "real" as it ever was. But it is not so simple a matter for the new realist to treat "the knowing state" in like manner. For it *is* in a position to protest that it—whatever its definition may turn out to be—somehow persists in the absence of *A* or *B* or any other *particular* object of perception. In fact, the new realistic doctrine seems necessarily to imply (as the condition of its distinguishability from idealism) that there is a certain something—called by ordinary people "consciousness"—into which objects from time to time enter and from which they are presently sundered; that, for example, any unperceived object *A* has at times been "in" or "connected with" this something, and that it at the moment assumed conceivably might be therein but in fact is not, though the something at the same moment still has objects other than *A* "in" it. And this might seem to imply the simultaneous existence of a realm of objects outside of the "knowing state" and of that state itself apart from all save relatively few objects. So construed, the new realism would not, after all, appear a thoroughgoing example of epistemological monism; one would be tempted rather to call it part-time dualism. But this dualistic look, it seems, is held by the new realist to be dispelled from his doctrine so soon as one notes precisely what he conceives to be the nature of that something which seemingly persists simultaneously with the objects that have been, but no longer are, of it. And this matter is explained in the two theorems which may be called respectively the major and the minor premise of the new realism.

These premises are, of course, the theory of the externality of relations, and the relational theory of consciousness, or, better, of cognition. Relations presuppose, and do not constitute, the being and the nature of the entities related; and "being known" is simply a mode of relation into which objects may enter; *ergo*, the "being known" of an object presupposes, and does not constitute, the being and the nature of that object—such, apparently, is the argument of the new realism, reduced to syllogistic form. The symbol of the italic capital R is supposed to be the "open sesame" which will disclose the definitive solution of the ancient puzzle of epistemology. It should be noted that both premises are essential to the argument; I call attention to the fact because most partisans of the doctrine seem of late to bestow much more labor upon the justification of the major than of the minor premise. Now, on the face of it, this syllogism may appear to point no more directly to a monistic than to a dualistic realism; the conclusion of it, certainly, might be accepted with equal satisfaction by a realist of either sort. But there is incidentally contained in the premises a characterization of that something "into" which objects enter when they are perceived or thought, and with which (though outside of it) they may coexist during their interperceptual intervals. This something, it turns out, is not a "substance" or a "receptacle" or a "kind of being," but simply a relation, or, more precisely, a specific type of relatedness. Now, there is assumed to be something peculiarly unobtrusive and inoffensive about a relation; in particular, it has the modest merit of being unable to subsist without its terms, though the terms are (by the major premise of the syllogism) able to subsist without it. The conception of consciousness as a relation, then, not merely serves as part of the argument for realism, but also is intended to make it possible that that realism should escape the charge of even part-time dualism. When the thing *A* "enters" consciousness, it merely becomes related in a new way to *other things*; when it is "outside of" consciousness, it merely exists without, for the time being, having that particular relation predicable of it. Meanwhile other objects may be in that relation; but so far as *A* alone is concerned, the relation has lapsed into nonentity or bare possibility. Consciousness can accordingly be said separately to coexist with *A* during *A*'s non-perceptual intervals only in the most tenuous and most harmless sense; namely, in the sense that such relation continues to be for *A* abstractly possible; that the other things with which *A* can be and sometimes has been in the given relation, continue to exist; and that some of them are perhaps, even at that time, in the given relation with respect to one another. If the admission of these very elusive

modes of simultaneous separate existence of consciousness and of an object over against it be dualism, the new realist would, I suppose, say that it is eminently what Herbert Spencer would have called a "transfigured" dualism, from which all the objectionable elements have been eliminated. And so much of a dualist he would perhaps without scruple avow himself to be. Less of one, certainly, he could hardly be without ceasing to be a realist.

Such is apparently the part played by the relational theory of consciousness in connection with the two aspects—the realistic and the anti-dualistic aspect—of the new doctrine. It is of this theory—the minor premise of the realist's syllogism—that I desire in the rest of this paper to speak. Here, at least, I let the *possible* externality of relations pass unchallenged. That, with respect to certain sorts of objects, many relations are in some sense (though in a sense which ought to be carefully defined) external and not constitutive, is too obvious to need discussion. The new realists may, I think, now fairly take it for granted that they have by much iteration acquainted the idealists with the truth that a citizen may be also a mayor without deriving from that office any of the characters of his mere citizenship, or that a man may bear the relation of father to one person, of son to another, and of husband to a third, without thereby being multiplied into as many numerically distinct entities as he has relations. I do not feel sure that any large number of either idealists or dualistic realists have been wholly ignorant of these truths, or that their failure to embrace the new realism has been chiefly due to anything so simple as a disregard of truths of this sort. I would myself, at any rate, suggest that the attention both of the partisans and of the opponents of the doctrine may be more profitably directed for a time to the minor premise. The next thing needful in the discussion, I think, is a more serious consideration than we have yet had (from any realist) of the question:<sup>2</sup> *Is consciousness merely a relation between independently existing objects, in the sense necessary in order to enable the new realist to escape dualism?*

If a negative answer to this question is equivalent to maintaining that consciousness is presented at any given moment of perception as a sort of distinct stuff or separable element over and above both the objects making up the content of that moment and the re-

<sup>2</sup>One way of dealing with this question would be to examine in detail the several rather discordant accounts which recent realistic writers have given of the kind of relation which they suppose consciousness to be. This, however, has, I think, already been well done by Professor Bode—and with results damaging to the new realism (*Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. XV., 1908, pp. 255-264). I shall here try to deal with the question in a more generalized form.

lations subsisting between them, then one must agree with the new realist that a negative answer is impossible,—at all events if we give the term “objects” the wide denotation which the realist gives to it. “The objects of consciousness,” says Professor Woodbridge, “may be as varied and variable as you please. They may be men and trees, reds and what we call mere ideas, present fact and remembered happenings, reasonings and discussions, pains, pleasures, emotions and volitions; they may even constitute what we call the self.” Assuming that all these things are to be called “objects” or “content,” then it is assuredly true that the “consciousness” existing at any specified time is never at that time “discovered as one thing set over against other things which are not already its content”; it is true, to use Professor James’s phrasing, that consciousness is *not* “one element, moment, factor of an experience of essentially dualistic inner constitution, from which, if you abstract the content, the consciousness will remain revealed to its own eye.” In such contentions as these the new realism seems to me to express a genuine fact; at the bottom of the relational theory of consciousness is a correct piece of psychological observation. It appears to me to be also true, and is, indeed, a thing upon which I should wish to insist, that, as both James and Perry have remarked, the “consciousness” (whatever it is) of a given moment of perception is revealed (as an aspect of the complex somehow, after all, distinguishable from the objects perceived) only by retrospection,—though the like can not quite be said of all our non-perceptual experiences. Primarily, consciousness is a something disclosed by a *post mortem*; you catch it in the first instance (so far as it is predicable of your own individual experiences) after the particular bit of content to which you now think of it as belonging is dead and gone. Of an item of direct perception, at least, it must be admitted that “it becomes ‘opinion’ or ‘thought’ only when a fresh experience, thinking the same object, alters and corrects it.”

With these two fundamental contentions of the new realist, then, one must in the main agree. While a given content of perception is “in” consciousness, the consciousness is not then and there revealed as an element distinct from and coexistent with the content; but when that content has lapsed, a subsequent moment’s experience directed back upon the former *does* make some kind of distinction between the previous content and the consciousness of it; and it is (in the case of perception) only from the point of view of this external reflection of present upon past that the distinction arises. But it still remains to ask why this retrospective distinction is made; just what the nature of that past “consciousness”

is which the retrospective view reveals; and whether this retrospective view does not after all exhibit in our experience a duplicity which is incompatible with the proposed alliance of realism with epistemological monism.

The answer to these questions may be seen if one considers what it is that happens when a hallucination, dream, or illusion comes to be recognized as such. While it lasts, the hallucination is for the victim of it as good "content" as any other of his perceptions. When he later recognizes its falsity, he does so because he discovers certain peculiarities to *have been* characteristic of that content. The hallucinatory object, he finds, existed only during the consciousness of it; it gives no evidence of that antecedent and subsequent existence which experience has led him to assume that material objects have. And it was not at the time an object perceived by others, though those others may at the same moment have perceived the space in which it seemed to have its *locus* and the context of other objects with which it was, even in the hallucination, associated. In fact, it turns out that the other percipients at that moment experienced as vacant, or as otherwise occupied, the very space which the hallucinatory object ostensibly occupied. Since common sense has an ancient prejudice against admitting that a body both can and can not be in a given space at a given instant, and since the testimony of many witnesses and of the general uniformities of experience is against *his* object, the victim of the hallucination, when he recovers, proceeds to call his object somehow "unreal," and to declare that the "content" that was truly in the space in question was that beheld by the other percipients. But how shall common sense render any intelligible account of this actual existence of an object at a certain moment in a definite space which a subsequent moment's corrective judgment declares to have contained no such object, save by recognizing some sort of duality in existence, by regarding the hallucinatory object as having had a being which is different from actual being in the space common to the majority of percipients? Whenever common sense first asked this question, the conception of consciousness was born, and with it the promise and potency of epistemological dualism.<sup>3</sup> Be it observed that the corrective judgment, through the making of which the conception of consciousness is generated, predicates "unreality"—now interpreted as "existence merely for consciousness"—of the object of the hallucination *at the moment when that object was present*. The correction is made sub-

<sup>3</sup> The conception could equally well have been generated out of other experiences of the contrast between "appearance" and "reality," *e. g.*, out of a little reflection upon the peculiarities of the memory image. But in the interest of brevity I confine myself to a single case.

sequently; but (from the point of view of common sense) it purports to describe the nature or mode of existence of the object as it was at the time when it was actually perceived.

Now, it is hardly clear to me what account a new realist can consistently give of the status of the hallucinatory object *at that time*, or of the difference between it and the coexisting "real" objects. He might conceivably say that in terms of that moment there is no essential difference between the two kinds of object, that the distinction relates solely to the subsequent histories of the two. An "unreal" object would then differ from a "real" one only in being comparatively short-lived, and in thus disappointing our natural expectations of its recurrence. But this strictly pragmatic account would (in addition to other difficulties) conflict with the view about space which it appears necessary for any genuine realist to take. The new realist agrees, I suppose, with common sense in regarding space as "independently real" and "objective," and in assuming that the portion of real space in question at the time of the hallucination was, as all save one of the percipients testified, void of the object perceived there by the victim of the hallucination. And it seems also legitimate to take it for granted that the new realism does not maintain that the same portion of real space can be at once both empty and filled. Our realist accordingly is constrained to these admissions: that the false object existed; that it existed as a definite "thing" or mass of content; that it existed in space and with spatial attributes; and yet that it did not exist anywhere in "real" or "objective" space, though it was referred to that space by the subject of the hallucination. All of which appears to be obviously tantamount to the admission that spatial objects may at least in some cases really exist in some realm or medium other than that of real space. Such a realm or medium, so far as I can see, is precisely what people ordinarily mean by "consciousness"; and the kind of object that has its subsistence therein is what they ordinarily mean by an "image" or "representation." But the existence of an object in this medium evidently is not properly describable as the momentary entrance of a real and perduring spatial thing into a new relation with other things; for in the case of the hallucination the particular thing that is "in consciousness" does not endure and does not, though perceived as spatial, exist in the same real space in which other objects are still—by the new realist, and by common sense—supposed to exist. In hallucinations, illusions, or even mere errors, then, we have instances in which the meaning of an object's "being in consciousness" can not be expressed in terms congruous with the relational theory. These instances are, of course, not coex-

tensive with the whole of consciousness. But they are exceptions which suffice to refute the supposed rule.

It is true that some representatives of the new realism have undertaken to explain, in language which they conceive to be appropriate to their general doctrine, wherein error and illusion consist. I shall not attempt to review those explanations; for the matter can be settled by a much shorter and easier method. It seems to me to be evident from any analysis of the doctrine that it is *inconsistent with the admission that any perception or other presentation can be false or illusory at the time at which it occurs*. The new realist's universe—if I have at all understood him—consists at any specified moment exclusively of real things and real relations. If a thing has come into the "consciousness-relation" with other things, then that relation too is real, in the same sense and to the same degree as anything else. The whole mass of content, things and relations alike, exists upon a common plane of objectivity without duplication; there seems to be no way in which a new realist can stop short of what Professor Montague calls "pan-objectivism." And in such a universe I can see no room for anything that corresponds to what is usually meant by hallucination or illusion or falsity or "purely subjective existence." Doubtless, things and their relations may change; some elements in the original moment's content may subsequently prove more lasting, and so more "dependable," than others, or they may enter into a new and larger system of relations which gives them a significantly altered aspect. But a real thing does not by changing retroactively transform its past character—at least it would seem paradoxical that a realist should suppose this possible. Falsity predicated of a perception at the moment of its presence can not, therefore, be defined merely in terms of the later vicissitudes of the perceived—or rather, of other—objects. But, as we have seen, the new realist's position (which is at this point the position of common sense) requires him to regard the hallucination as *having been a false version of a coexistent fact*, to regard the hallucinatory spatial object as having existed otherwise than in the then existing real space. And this apparently can not be conceived except by assuming two distinct planes of existence, the content of one of which purports in some fashion to correspond to the contemporaneous content of the other, but is subsequently discovered to have failed to do so. Such a dualistic assumption, however, the new realist has debarred himself from making.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Some defenders of realism appear to suppose it possible to avoid the difficulty arising from the existence of a real consciousness of unreal things by reciting to us the physiological circumstances under which such illusory presentations occur. This, however, seems too palpable an irrelevancy to deserve consideration.

In all this we may see something of the natural history of the conception of consciousness, which it has become the fashion in some quarters to regard as a strange sort of artificial product designed by crafty idealistic metaphysicians for the mystification of men's minds. In point of fact, that conception was manifestly an early and an inevitable discovery of common sense; and one of its primary functions was precisely to make common-sense realism possible, by making it reconcilable with the undeniable facts of dream, illusion, and perceptual error. There may, however, be a hint of truth in the would-be iconoclastic assertion that the idea of consciousness is but "the faint rumor left behind by the disappearing 'soul' upon the air of philosophy." For if the dream theory of the origin of the idea of the soul be correct, "consciousness" and "the soul" may well have had, at least in part, a common genesis; or rather, the latter may be considered a primitive and crude version of the same explanation of the same facts of experience. The savage, on waking from his dream, learned from his tribesmen that his "real" body had all the while been lying inert before their eyes; yet his memory testified that he had been bodily present in far distant scenes and engaged in the most stirring activities. From the moment when man first pondered this incongruity, the recognition by him of *some* sort of deeply significant doubleness in things became inevitable. By the savage that doubleness was (according to the hypothesis mentioned) first given recognition by means of the conception of souls. The soul was a sort of double of the body, more tenuous, more elusive, more versatile, but quite as "real" and as lasting and as truly in space. The spirit theory thus implied (though obscurely and vaguely) that the regions visited in dream or in delirium were a part of the same, single, real space in which the body lived and moved; the dreamer had been a "long way off," but he had actually been somewhere. This explanation of the facts obviously gave rise to many difficulties; the notion of consciousness and its "images" must have early begun to supplement it and eventually came to supplant it as a means of formulating the known fact of the duality in things. But among latter-day philosophers it is the new realists who seem to me to stand nearest to primitive spiritism. For primitive spiritism was a spontaneous attempt to give an account of that duality, to explain dreams and hallucinations and imaginations, in exclusively objectivistic terms. And I am not sure that it does not surpass more recent attempts of the same sort in consistency and in clearness. Those who have discarded the notion of consciousness (except as an objective "relation" between objects) ought at least to view with sympathetic interest the effort of man, before he had quite discovered the

notion of consciousness, to render intelligible just those facts of experience which constitute the points of greatest difficulty, or at least obscurity, in their own doctrines.<sup>5</sup>

The foregoing neglected commonplaces are not, of course, set down as an argument in favor of the dualism of common sense. Neither do they amount to an argument for idealism as such or against realism as such. All that is quite another story. What I have propounded is primarily an argument to show the inadmissibility of that combination of realism with epistemological monism in which consists the distinguishing novelty of the "new" realism. A genuine realist, it would seem, can escape dualism only at the cost of an implicit negation of the possibility of illusion and error, only by denying that there can be at any given cross-section of time both appearance and reality. And this is a cost which he at least,—sharing as he must the assumptions of common sense about the existence of a single objective space and the identity of the "real" content of any portion of such space at a given moment with the perceptions of the generality of normal percipients,—can not afford to pay. It is, however, true that the observations which have been here set forth also appear to render invalid the special form of argument for realism that has lately come into vogue, by exhibiting the falsity (or else the ambiguity) of that relational theory of consciousness which constitutes the minor premise of the new realist's syllogism.<sup>6</sup>

ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY.

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY.

<sup>5</sup> Professor Perry has with admirable candor "admitted that error is an outstanding problem," and merely urges that "that circumstance is at least equally difficult for the subjective idealist." This, however, seems more pertinent as a criticism of subjective idealism than as a defense of the new realism. ("Conceptions and Misconceptions of Consciousness," in *The Psychological Review*, Vol. XI., 1904, p. 296.)

<sup>6</sup> Two points in the title of this article perhaps need explanation. The label which the writer has there ventured to affix to himself—under the influence of motives similar to those which led Huxley to invent the name "agnostic"—doubtless suggests a special sort of metaphysical opinions, to which the writer does, in fact, incline. But for the present occasion the term "temporalism" may be taken merely as the designation of a certain method of analysis, which it is hoped that the paper exemplifies. The essence of the method consists in an attempt to identify with definiteness the particular moment of existence, the relative temporal *locus*, of each entity or process or relation referred to by any proposition. There is some reason to think that a good deal of confusion in both metaphysical and ethical reasoning is sometimes due to neglect of this precaution.—The new realism which the paper discusses is supposed by the writer to be a theory actually held by some of his contemporaries. But, desiring to avoid dispute with other men over the exegesis of their own utterances, he has usually, in the more controversial passages, refrained from naming any individuals as responsible for the opinions criticized. It is possible