

# **REALITY**



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# The Philosophical Order (Again)

Metaphysics

Epistemology

Ethics

Politics

□ In this discussion we are going to be dealing specifically with **metaphysics ... metaphysical realism ....** or as API Associate D'Ansi Mendoza 2012 has put it '**realism per totam viam**'.

*Mendoza Espana, A.D. 2012. Three Essay on Money, Credit, and Philosophy: A Realist Approach per totam viam to Monetary Science. Ph.D thesis in Economics, York University, Toronto.*

# If a Tree Falls in the Forest ?





# The Basic Axioms of Reality

- ❑ Here we draw on the approach of Peikoff (1991), by using the same chapter headings as he did. (Peikoff, it will be recalled, is a follower of Ayn Rand and ‘**Objectivism**’.) We saw earlier that there are many vitriolic criticisms of Rand on the internet. But these all have to do with ethics/politics/literary criticism *not* metaphysics. How can these arguments about ‘reality’ be refuted, if at all?
- ❑ An **axiom** is ‘... a proposition ... from which we may begin; an assertion that is taken as fundamental ... (Blackburn 1994, 32-3).
- ❑ Axioms are not subject to proof, they are ‘self-evident’ ... But conservation/discussion cannot proceed without them ... it becomes meaningless. All subsequent ‘proofs’ in epistemology depend on the axioms.
- ❑ What are the axioms of reality?

[[Peikoff. L. 1991. *Objectivism the Philosophy of Ayn Rand*. New York: Meridan.}]

# The Three Axioms

## □ Existence

‘Existence exists’, there is ‘something’ rather ‘nothing’, *etc.*

## □ Identity

*A* is *A*, *A* is not ‘*not A*’, and so forth.

## □ Consciousness

Consciousness is a property of a subset of living beings (*e.g.*, humans). This view is called ‘**biological naturalism**’.

Even idealists must accept the axiom of consciousness, whether they like it or not, because to engage in thought or argument they must obviously be conscious and assume that others are conscious.

[We are not referring here to the Cartesian ‘*cogito ergo sum*’. It is not a question of ‘*I think therefore I am*’ but, ‘*I am therefore I think*’ ]

# What are the Implications of the Axioms?

- ❑ Identity implies **causality**.
- ❑ Existence has primacy over consciousness.  
(That is, one needs first to ‘exist’ in order to be conscious).
- ❑ The metaphysically given is the ‘**absolute**’.

# Identity Implies Causality

□ If  $A$  is  $A$ ,  $B$  is  $B$ ,  $C$  is  $C$ , *etc.* then for change/movement to occur in one of them, it must come from the outside.  $A$  must cause  $B$ ,  $B$  must cause  $C$ , and so on (The principle of **causality**.)

□ But then there is the problem of infinite regress. It is thought that there must be an ‘**uncaused cause**’, or a ‘**prime mover**’, or something, to get the ball rolling.

□ What should we do to solve this problem? Typically, some form of supernatural consciousness is chosen to do this, **G-d**, a ‘**World Spirit**’, or the ‘**One**’, or some such. But this seems incoherent. We would have to suppose some kind of free-floating intellect which is *not* biologically grounded.

□ The only alternative is to make existence itself the primary.

# Existence has Primacy over Consciousness

- ❑ The *Primacy of Existence*, rather than the *Primacy of Consciousness* is a key realist principle.
- ❑ Idealists would insist on the *Primacy of Consciousness*.
- ❑ There are three types of *Primacy of Consciousness*:

Supernatural: (G-d's consciousness)

[In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with G-d, and the Word was G-d  
(JOHN 1:1)]

Personal: (Subjectivism, solipsism)

Social: (Group consciousness, 'will of the people')

# The Metaphysically Given is the Absolute

- ❑ This should be taken to mean physical reality in the sense of the various laws of nature, physics, chemistry, biology, and so on. Also, it is best to think of it as a *process*, including change, rather than an inventory of unchanging ‘things’.
- ❑ On the other hand, social relations are ‘real’, but not ‘metaphysically given’. There must be a *Construction of Social Reality* (the title of Searle’s book) by the participants.
- ❑ The social world is real and has causal effects, but it is not the ‘absolute’. It can be changed by human intervention (not always for the better!). Social science is a special case.
- ❑ The key question is whether, or not, the existence of social facts as well brute facts affects the general thesis of metaphysical realism
- ❑ Marchenko and Smithin (2023) say that the answer is NO. Social science can still be ‘scientific’, but in a different way to the natural sciences.
- ❑ It is probably fair criticism to say that most realist philosophers, up to now, have not really dealt adequately with the issue of social reality.

[Marchenko, A. and J Smithin, 2023. *Is philosophy part of economics or is economics part of philosophy?*, *Aurora Philosophy Journal* 2(1).]

[Searle, J.R. 1995. *The Construction of Social Reality*. New York: The Free Press.]

# To Argue for Idealism and Materialism is to Reject the Axioms

- ❑ In textbooks and philosophical dictionaries ‘idealism’ and ‘materialism’ are what is given as opposites, *not* usually idealism and realism.
- ❑ However, this is a false dichotomy. *Both* idealism and materialism entail rejecting the axioms in one way or another. Idealism rejects the primacy of existence, and materialism rejects consciousness.
- ❑ They both fail. The actual struggle in philosophy through the ages is that between realism and idealism, and of these only realism seems to be internally consistent. (Even an idealist philosopher must act like a realist when crossing the street).

# Realism is Not Co-Extensive with Materialism

- ❑ Social facts, determined by **collective intentionally**, are immaterial but real.
- ❑ But they can, and do, have causal effects on the material world, (*e.g.*, the ‘line in the sand’, ‘money as a social relation’, *etc.*)]
- ❑ Therefore, there is a realm which is not material, but is real. But, does this necessarily have to be transcendental, spiritual, or supernatural?
- ❑ The ontology of the social world is different from that of the physical or material world. However, they are still part of the same *single* world of existence. They must be consistent with one another. This rules out *dualism*.

# Some More Definitions

**Causation** is ‘ ... (o)ne of the central problem areas in metaphysics. Causation is the relation between two events which holds when, given that one occurs it produces or ... necessitates the second.’ (Blackburn 1994, 59)

**Dualism** is ‘ ... (a)ny view that postulates two kinds of thing in some domain is dualistic; contrasting views ... only one kind of thing are **monistic**. The most famous example ... is mind-body dualism, contrasted with ... idealism (only mind) ... or physicalism (only body ...).’ (Blackburn 1994, 110)

**Intentionality** is ‘ ... the directedness or ‘aboutness’ of many ... conscious states ... The problem of intentionality is that of understanding the relation ... between a mental state or its expression, and the things it is about.’ (Blackburn 1994, 196)

**Prime Mover**, a *mover* is ‘ ... (t)hat which initiates motion but is itself unmoved ... the *primum mobilis* ... outermost sphere of the heavens ... imitates the self-contained nature of G-d.’ (Blackburn 1994, 252)

[Blackburn, S. 1994. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press]

# Ontological *versus* Epistemological Objectivity and Subjectivity

- ❑ The ‘brute facts’ (physical facts) are both **ontologically** and **epistemologically objective**.
- ❑ ‘Social facts’ are **ontologically subjective** (they rest on collective intentionality), but **epistemologically objective**.
- ❑ Both are ‘real’.

# Knowledge, Opinion, & Truth in Social Science

❑ If social facts are epistemologically objective, even if ontologically subjective, there can be a valid social science & actual knowledge rather than mere opinion. According to Gilson (1990, 93-4):

**An idealist ‘thinks’, but a realist ‘knows’.**

❑ Therefore, it is possible to *aspire* to the ‘truth’, even though it might not actually be achieved in any particular investigation.

❑ However, so-called ‘**critical realism**’, of which the *starting point* is the critique of knowledge, is untenable.



[Gilson, E. 1990. *Methodical Realism: A Handbook for Beginning Realists*. San Francisco. Ignatius Press. (English translation of *Le réalisme methodique*, 1935).]