PHILOSOPHY *IN MEDIIS REBUS*

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ABSTRACT: Philosophy should begin in the middle of things. I distinguish two ways in which I think that philosophy should begin in the middle of things, and then I describe the two dominant approaches to analytic philosophy today: scientific pragmatism and conceptual analysis (or, more broadly, "a priorism"). After giving reasons for dissatisfaction with both of these dominant approaches, I set out my own view – Practical Realism – and argue for the merits of its methodological and metaphysical components.

Keywords: philosophical method, scientific pragmatism, conceptual analysis, a priorism, phenomenalism, practical realism.

How should philosophy be pursued? I want to defend a conception of philosophy *in mediis rebus* – philosophy in the middle of things. The more familiar Latin phrase is *in medias res*, but Latin distinguishes two readings of 'in the middle of things'. There's the middle of things from which one starts, and there's the middle of things into which one jumps. *In medias res* is the middle of things into which one jumps; I, however, mean to invoke the middle of things from which one starts. Thus, risking an accusation of pedantry, I use *in mediis rebus*.[1]

So let us begin in the middle of things. There are two senses in which I think that philosophy must begin in the middle of things. The first is epistemological: I think that the Cartesian ideal of finding an absolute starting point without any presuppositions is illusory. The most that we can do is to be aware of our presuppositions; we cannot eliminate them. Wherever we choose to start, we are in the middle of things epistemologically. The second way in which I think that philosophy must begin in the middle of things is ontological: The objects of my interest at least initially are medium-sized things – primarily people, but also nonhuman organisms and other natural objects, and artifacts, and artworks. These are the kinds of things that populate the world that we all unavoidably contend with and care about. And it is that world – the everyday life-world – that I am ultimately interested in understanding.

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[1] Thanks to Gareth Matthews for pointing out to me the two Latin phrases and for pressing me to use the more ungainly one in the interest of scholarly precision.

We have no choice but to begin in the middle of things in both ways. The reason that there is no presuppositionless starting point is that one cannot do philosophy unless one has a natural language, and any natural language has countless presuppositions about the way the world is. And all natural languages, to my knowledge, recognize medium-sized objects, some with intentional states. It is medium-sized objects that we have sensory contact with; it is medium-sized objects whose presence or absence we can confirm by observation; it is medium-sized objects that we can manipulate for our own purposes. It is not surprising that natural languages recognize medium-sized objects since survival depends on relations to such things. We are no more able to do philosophy by stepping outside of our language than we are by stepping outside of our evolutionary history. So it is an inescapable fact that we begin with a body of substantive presuppositions. Moreover, we have reason to have confidence in the truth of these presuppositions. Since natural languages have been forged by eons of successful use, the built-in worldview of medium-sized objects is more likely to be correct, to quote J. L. Austin, than "any that you or I are likely to think up in our armchairs of an afternoon" (1961, 130).

In this paper, I want to set out and defend an approach to philosophy that begins in the middle of things. I call this approach 'Practical Realism'. In order to make clear what Practical Realism is, I want to locate it with respect to two approaches that seem to me to dominate analytic philosophy today. I call the adherents of one of these approaches 'scientific pragmatists', and the adherents of the other approach 'conceptual analysts', or, more broadly, 'a priorists'. My descriptions of scientific pragmatism and a priorism are idealizations. They are not meant to pick out positions actually espoused by any single philosopher. My purpose is to set out some characteristics of analytic philosophy that I think have been influential, in order to set the stage for Practical Realism. I shall set out the characteristics of the two approaches rather crudely.

Scientific Pragmatism

First, scientific pragmatism is associated with the slogan that philosophy is continuous with science. Although it is less than obvious what such a slogan might mean, I shall distinguish two versions of what I'll call 'scientific pragmatism'. What they have in common is commitment to the following thesis:

(SP) Science is the arbiter of reality (or at least of knowable reality).

Where they differ is in how they understand 'science'. On the more robust version of scientific pragmatism, science is construed narrowly to mean the physical sciences. Quine, the progenitor of robust scientific pragmatism,

notoriously holds that there could be no intentional science. Closely related to the rejection of intentional science is a strong thesis of the unity of science. To borrow Descartes's image, all the sciences are but branches of a single tree whose trunk is physics. (Descartes, of course, was no scientific pragmatist himself, but his more naturalistic descendants, of the robust variety, hold that the legitimacy of a putative science depends on its relation to physics.) Also associated with scientific pragmatism, and particularly with Quine, is the denial of a comprehensive analytic/synthetic distinction. There is no sharp difference between change of theory and change of meaning. All knowledge claims – from common sense to metaphysics – are susceptible to empirical disconfirmation by physical science.

In the philosophy of mind, robust scientific pragmatism finds its champions in Paul Churchland and the other eliminative materialists. Churchland's idea is that our ordinary ways of thinking of things are just so many folk theories – folk psychology, folk biology, folk physics, and so forth. These folk theories are ripe for replacement by more sophisticated scientific theories with physicalistic taxonomies.

A less robust form of scientific pragmatism finds so-called nonreductive materialists among its adherents. Agreeing with their more robust cousins that science is the arbiter of all knowable reality, these less robust scientific pragmatists countenance intentional sciences as well as physical sciences, without supposing that the laws of an intentional science are reducible to the laws of physical science. Although he does not fit exactly, in many ways Jerry Fodor is a contemporary advocate of this less robust scientific pragmatism.

Scientific pragmatism is dominant in philosophy of psychology today. Here is the "take" of a scientific pragmatist on the way that we ordinarily explain each other's behavior in terms of beliefs and desires: For example, Sam wanted some beer and thought that he could get beer at the corner store, so he went to the corner store. The scientific pragmatist construes such talk as deployment of a folk theory, according to which beliefs and desires are particular inner states (presumably, brain states). Both the more and the less robust scientific pragmatists believe that our folk psychology stands in need of vindication by science.

But the more robust scientific pragmatist and his less robust cousin differ in two ways. The first difference here follows the difference in what each is willing to count as science. In order for folk psychology to be vindicated, the more robust scientific pragmatist requires that neuroscience find the relevant beliefs and desires in the brain. The less robust scientific pragmatist requires only that there be a science with intentional laws over computational processes that countenance belief-like and desire-like entities. The less robust scientific pragmatist does not require, or even anticipate, that (in Jerry Fodor's words) "empirical theories that appeal to intentional constructs will (or should) be replaced, eventually, by explanations couched in the nonintentional vocabulary of neuroscience" (1994, 3).

So the first difference between the more robust and the less robust scientific pragmatist concerns what would count as vindication by science of (what they construe as) folk theory. The more robust scientific pragmatist requires that explanations ultimately be expressed in a nonintentional vocabulary; the less robust scientific pragmatist allows explanations to be expressed in an irreducibly intentional vocabulary.

The second difference between more and less robust scientific pragmatists concerns their differing assessments of the prospects for vindication of so-called folk theories by science. The less robust scientific pragmatist is more optimistic about the prospects of vindication (in his sense). The more robust scientific pragmatist (e.g., Paul Churchland) is confident that folk psychology will not be vindicated (in his sense); and he is happy to conclude that our talk of beliefs and desires is just as false as our ancestors' talk of witches. (As I argued at great length in my book *Explaining Attitudes*, I think that the more robust and the less robust scientific pragmatists both go wrong at the start when they construe attributions of beliefs and desires as deployment of a folk theory of inner goings-on.)

In sum: Neither the more nor the less robust form of scientific pragmatism has a place for genuine knowledge outside the purview of scientific theories. The two versions differ in what each requires for a theory to be scientific: the more robust version would not countenance any irreducibly intentional science; the less robust version would. Although the less robust version seems to me eminently more plausible than the more robust version of scientific pragmatism, I am going to focus on the more robust version – from which I want to sharply distinguish my own view.

My main complaint about robust scientific pragmatism is that everything that we commonsensically believe and say is false unless it can be integrated into the physical sciences. For example, suppose that Jones says, "Finishing my Ph.D. will help me get a job." If taken literally (as Jones intends it), rather than in a "dramatic idiom," what he said is false, according to a robust scientific pragmatist. It is false – no matter what the state of the job market – if states of affairs like finishing one's Ph.D. or getting a job resist incorporation into physical science. Since states of affairs like finishing one's Ph.D. or getting a job seem irreducibly intentional, it seems highly doubtful that either will be incorporated into any physical science (even as explananda). Indeed, I think that hardly any of our commonsensical knowledge will be vindicated in the way that the robust scientific pragmatist demands. If that is right, then almost everything that everyone thinks is true (and indeed everything that we daily bet our lives on) turns out, on the robust version of scientific pragmatism, to be false.

For this reason, the more robust version of scientific pragmatism, especially in its eliminative materialist guise, courts what I have called 'cognitive suicide'. If taken to impugn attributions of belief and other attitudes, eliminative materialism would put rationality, assertability, and truth at

risk – not to mention moral or immoral behavior. If we accepted the robust version of scientific pragmatism, not only would we be almost universally wrong, but we would also be unable to explain our errors, or even to recognize them as errors. From the point of view of physical science, what could count as an error? Things just happen the way that they happen. Period. Electrons don't make mistakes, and neither do we if we are considered in wholly physical terms. Our bodies move in certain ways, explainable by physics; but what makes a particular motion a mistake is not explainable by physical science. Nothing is even describable as a mistake in the language of physics. (Although I can't argue for it here, even the less robust scientific pragmatism, I believe, has been unable to give a satisfactory account of error.) [2]

On the more robust version of scientific pragmatism, we can make no sense of the idea of making sense. So the robust version of scientific pragmatism seems to me a nonstarter. The less robust version of scientific pragmatism is somewhat more promising; but I think that it too goes wrong when it construes the presuppositions of ordinary language as folk theories – as would-be scientific theories in need of vindication by more sophisticated scientific theories.

Conceptual Analysis

The main dissenters from scientific pragmatism take an a priori approach; they employ conceptual analysis or metaphysical intuition. Conceptual analysis is a method of philosophizing by analyzing concepts. Analyzing concepts is supposed to yield a priori truths, where a truth is a priori if it is justifiable independently of sensory or introspective experience. These truths of analysis, when combined with empirical claims, are supposed to allow an a priori passage to new substantive truth. For example, suppose that the meaning of 'water' is "the stuff that falls from the sky, fills the oceans, is odorless and colorless, is essential for life, is called 'water' by experts, . . . or which satisfies enough of the foregoing" (Jackson 1994, 39). Then, we know a priori that water is the stuff that falls from the sky, fills the oceans, and so on. Now suppose that scientists discover that the stuff that falls from the sky, fills the oceans, and so on, is H_2O and, further, that H_2O is distributed in such and such a way; call it 'L-distributed'. From

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[2] You might think that philosophers of biology who employ a notion of function may have a place for error. Where there's function, there's the possibility of malfunction. And where there's the possibility of malfunction, there's the possibility of error. But the only idea of function that I know of that makes a place for error depends on the idea of what is responsible for the survival and reproduction of ancestors. I do not believe that this notion of function is powerful enough to account for the ways in which we go wrong. Moreover, this idea of function would construe almost all self-sacrifice for unrelated organisms, for example, as malfunction. Any account of error that construes the noblest acts as biological mistakes is inadequate, to say the least.

these two contingent facts, known a posteriori, the conceptual analyst moves a priori to the conclusion that water is L-distributed. This inferential move is supposed to be a priori, I take it, because we have a priori knowledge of the meaning of 'water', and when that knowledge is added as a premise to the two a posteriori theses (the stuff that falls from the sky and fills the oceans is H_2O and H_2O is L-distributed), a logically competent person can deduce that water is L-distributed. We did not know that the statement 'H_2O is L-distributed' entailed 'water is L-distributed' until we learned a posteriori that H_2O is the stuff that falls from the sky, fills the oceans, and so on. The part of metaphysics concerned with analyzing concepts does not depend on science. It can be done from an armchair. I take Frank Jackson (in his important paper "Armchair Metaphysics," from which I took the example about the L-distribution of water) to be a contemporary advocate of conceptual analysis.

Let me begin with a couple of theses gleaned from conceptual analysts. Let us call statements of the form 'Water is the stuff that falls from the sky, fills the oceans, and so on,' 'meaning statements.' Conceptual analysts hold that

1. True meaning statements are available for use in philosophical arguments.
2. Meaning statements are justifiable a priori.

Let me say why I think that neither (1) nor (2) is true.

My argument against (1) – the thesis that true meaning statements are available for use in philosophical arguments – is as follows. Apart from a handful of simple cases (like 'A sister is a female sibling'), I do not think that our philosophical exertions to date give us any reason for optimism that we will ever have available meaning statements for philosophical use. Even in the case of 'water', one of the most worked-over examples in all of philosophy, Jackson introduces his meaning statement by saying, "[S]uppose that the right account of the semantics of 'water' is that it is a rigidified definite description meaning roughly 'stuff which actually falls from the sky, fills the oceans . . . and so on' " (39). We must *suppose* that we have a true meaning statement (that is to be regarded as a priori); no one claims that we actually have one.

This situation puts me in mind of earlier attempts at conceptual analysis – in particular, of phenomenalism. Phenomenalists supposed that what they called 'physical-object statements' (about chairs, for example) could be translated into statements about actual and possible sense data (about patches of color and shapes, for example). As far as I know, not a single correct translation was ever produced; but it was thought that, in principle, there were correct translations and that the inability of philosophers actually to produce them was irrelevant. Today we are in a similar situation with respect to meaning statements, and I suspect that sooner or later, we'll

abandon the whole project of trying to formulate meaning statements, just as earlier philosophers abandoned the project of translating physical-object statements into sense-data statements. So I do not accept the first of the two theses gleaned from conceptual analysts: True meaning statements are not now, and are unlikely ever to be, available for use in philosophical arguments.

The second of the two theses gleaned from conceptual analysts is that meaning statements are a priori. This thesis, too, I think is incorrect. A priori statements are supposed to be statements that are known or justified independently of sensory experience or of knowledge of the world. The idea that meaning statements are a priori presupposes that there is a sharp line dividing knowledge about language and knowledge about the world. The claim that there is such a sharp line seems to me clearly false. One does not learn a language and then, in a second and separate step, go out and see how it applies to the world. To learn a natural language *is* to acquire an understanding of the world. Knowledge of language is not a different thing from knowledge of the world. You learn what water is at the same time that you learn what the word 'water' means. And you are not justified in believing either of these apart from sensory experience. As I have argued elsewhere (Baker 1998), sensory experience is required for the acquisition of any empirical concept that can be used in inference. Knowledge of what the word 'water' means in the sense of being a competent user of the word 'water' cannot be known a priori. Moreover, you can be a competent user of the word 'water' and not know that water is the stuff that falls from the sky, fills the oceans, or satisfies any of the other descriptions given. And it is certainly not a priori that the stuff that falls from the sky is the same stuff that fills the oceans.

There's another reason to think that paradigm cases of so-called a priori truths – like 'Water is the stuff that falls from the sky' – even if they are true meaning statements, are not a priori. 'Water is the stuff that falls from the sky' entails 'Something falls from the sky'. But the statement 'Something falls from the sky' is clearly an empirical statement, not one that can be known or justified apart from sensory experience. Therefore, I think that it is false that meaning statements – of the form 'Water is the stuff that falls from the sky, and so on' – are a priori.

A Priorism

Closely linked to this notion of conceptual analysis is appeal to a priori intuition into matters remote from experience, or, indeed, remote from anything known to obtain in the actual world. A great deal of high-powered metaphysics today relies on a priori intuition about nonactual possible worlds. (Think of David Lewis's recombination principles.) Conceptual analysis – a priori intuition about the meanings of concepts – is a natural ally of a priori intuition about the nature of reality. So let me broaden the cluster of features that I've identified as conceptual analysis to include a

priori intuitions about the nature of reality in general. I'll call conceptual-analysis-cum-a-priori-intuition as a method of philosophizing 'a priorism'.

A priorism aims to proceed without presuppositions about the actual world. It either analyzes concepts or offers philosophical propositions that are supposed to be self-evident, apart from knowledge of the way things are. Since, like any other approach to philosophy, a priorism relies on natural language, it cannot disavow the presuppositions of natural language. But it does assume that those presuppositions can be sheared off from presuppositions about the world. For reasons that I have just given and for reasons that pragmatists of all stripes have given before me, I think that this assumption is false.

One of the appeals of a priorism is that it seems to give philosophers something distinctive to do. If a priorism is a legitimate enterprise, then philosophers are not just handmaidens of science; they can make their own unique contribution to the great edifice of knowledge. They have insights about things like nonactual possible individuals, and they provide conceptual analyses, which, when combined with scientific discoveries, yield new knowledge. On the other hand, if a priorism is a bust, then – some may assume – the philosopher has no special methods and philosophy should be seen to be continuous with science. That is, it seems that philosophers have only two choices of method in philosophy: a priorism or scientific pragmatism.[3]

I'm not claiming that every analytic philosopher fits neatly into one category or the other; rather, I set up a priorism and robust scientific pragmatism as ideal types against which I want to set out my own view of Practical Realism. It seems to me that almost all of what I read today in contemporary analytic philosophy tends toward one or the other of these ideal types.

Practical Realism

What I want to do now is to show that there is indeed an alternative to a priorism and to scientific pragmatism. Before comparing and contrasting

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[3] The relation between the viability of a priorism or of scientific pragmatism and an absolute analytic/synthetic distinction is complicated. It may seem that a priorism is the correct method in philosophy if there is an absolute analytic/synthetic distinction, and that scientific pragmatism is the correct method in philosophy if there is not an absolute analytic/synthetic distinction. But if we understand analytic statements to be statements that are true (or false) in virtue of the meanings of the words, independently of the way that the world is, the situation is not so clear. On the above characterization of analytic statements, only truths of mathematics ('$2 + 2 = 4$'), truths of logic ($p \lor \sim p$), and explicit definitions ('A brother is a male sibling') would be serious contenders for being analytic. This would not suffice to make a priorism a correct method in philosophy. On the other hand, absence of an absolute analytic/synthetic distinction would not be sufficient to make scientific pragmatism the correct method in philosophy; for Practical Realism is equally compatible with the absence of an absolute analytic/synthetic distinction.

Practical Realism with scientific pragmatism and a priorism, I would like to describe it briefly.

Practical Realism, as I have suggested, begins in the middle of things. It is notable for two commitments. First, the Practical Realist holds that metaphysics should not waft free of the rest of human inquiry. Metaphysics should be responsive to reflection on cognitive (and other) practices, scientific and nonscientific. The Practical Realist does not confuse metaphysics with epistemology; but she does connect them for the reason that metaphysics detached from the rest of inquiry is just idle. The second commitment is that the Practical Realist takes the world of common experience as an important source of data for philosophical reflection. The world that we live and die in – the world where we do things and where things happen to us – is the arena of what really matters to all of us, from the least to the most reflective among us. The world of ordinary life is populated with medium-sized dry goods (to paraphrase Austin) and persons with intentional states.

Practical Realism recommends philosophical reflection on what is found in the world that we all live in and that we all care about. And philosophical reflection is an attempt to understand, as Wilfrid Sellars put it, "how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest sense of the term" (1963, 1). The products of philosophical reflection are justified by how well they explain the data gathered from everyday life (in the case of metaphysics) or from science (in the case of philosophy of science) or from art (in the case of philosophy of art). Although it would be foolhardy to fly in the face of established science, philosophical results are not confirmed or disconfirmed on the basis of assimilability into science.

Using the term 'knowledge' in a way that excludes mathematical knowledge and logical knowledge, Practical Realism is committed to this: All knowledge is empirical in a sense to be explained, but not all knowledge requires validation by science. (To say that all knowledge is empirical is to dissent from the conceptual analysts; to say that not all knowledge requires validation by science is to dissent from the scientific pragmatists.)

First, I've already said why I don't believe that conceptual analysis yields substantive knowledge that is really independent of sensory experience. Knowledge of language is not independent of knowledge of the world. Armchair philosophy is not a priori. As competent speakers of a language, we generate certain kinds of data, based on our experiences. Language is part of the world; it is not a world apart. Second, not all empirical knowledge requires validation by science. To show this, I want to distinguish three grades of being empirical: empirical (1) as what is confirmable or disconfirmable by ordinary observation; (2) as what is confirmable or disconfirmable by systematic experimental inquiry; or (3) as what is confirmable or disconfirmable by integratability into the physical sciences.

In the first sense, phenomena are empirical when they are confirmable

or disconfirmable by ordinary observation. Here I include observation from everyday life. Anyone can confirm that fire burns, or that a person's nose will bleed if struck sharply, or that traffic is heavy on Friday afternoons before holiday weekends. Such generalizations are continually being confirmed by all of us, scientists and nonscientists alike. Generalizations that are empirical in this sense are confirmed and disconfirmed in the course of ordinary life and are warranted as long as they reliably enable us to accomplish our aims – regardless of the ultimate outcome of any science. When David went out to slay Goliath, he did not need to wait for a mature physics to be justified in selecting stones instead of twigs for his slingshot. The justification available to David for selecting stones was as complete as it would be today: knowledge of quantum mechanics would neither add to his grounds nor undermine them. In this first sense of 'empirical', we are all empiricists without any special scientific training. This is the sense in which what is empirical underwrites our know-how about getting along in everyday life. Our knowledge of language is empirical in this sense: it is on the basis of experience that we know what to say when, and that we know, for example, that water is the stuff that falls from the sky and fills the oceans and so on. Call what is empirical in this first sense the 'ordinary-empirical'.

In the second sense, what is empirical is subject to experimental tests which yield replicable results. Consider, for example, a study by Funder and Sneed (1993), which used videotapes of unstructured social interactions, from which sixty-two behaviors were coded.[4] Funder and Sneed asked college students how they would use the sixty-two behaviors to judge the degree of each of five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness). This yielded the college-student subjects' explicit theory of traits. Funder and Sneed compared the subjects' explicit theory with how the subjects actually judged the five personality traits on the basis of what they observed on the videotape; this yielded the subjects' implicit theory of behavior. Then Funder and Sneed compared both explicit and implicit theories with the actual trait-behavior associations from friends. Funder and Sneed drew conclusions about what behaviors subjects explicitly believe they use as an indication of particular personality traits, about what behaviors subjects actually use in making specific trait judgments, and about correlations between the behaviors exhibited on the videotapes and the personality descriptions provided by friends. The results, as you may expect, were complicated. If the results stand up under replication, then the experiment yields empirical knowledge in the second sense. When standard social-science research uncovers something that we did not already know by ordinary-empirical means, then it is empirical in the second sense, which I'll call 'experimental-empirical'.

[4] This study is discussed in von Eckardt 1995.

What is empirical in the third sense is what is subject to integration into the physical sciences. What is subject to integration into the physical sciences may or may not actually be integratable into the physical sciences. But from the perspective of what is empirical in the third sense, putative empirical explanatory phenomena that are not integratable into the physical sciences are simply deemed false – empirical but false. There is no consensus as to what counts as integration into the physical sciences, but part of the idea is this: The categories in terms of which we classify phenomena (that are empirical in the third sense) must be explicable solely in terms of the categories of the physical sciences. So if the social sciences, which paradigmatically are experimental-empirical, are themselves deemed to be empirical in the third sense, then their legitimacy depends on whether or not their categories of, say, intentionality can be reduced to categories taxonomic in the physical sciences. Call what is empirical in the third sense 'physical-science empirical'.

The three senses of 'empirical' will help me locate Practical Realism with respect to scientific pragmatism. Robust scientific realists like Paul Churchland consider the empirical to be exhausted by what I called the 'physical-science empirical'. All truths must be integratable into the physical sciences. A less robust scientific pragmatist takes the empirical to be exhausted by the experimental-empirical together with the physical-science empirical. A Practical Realist, by contrast, has a still broader notion of 'empirical'. What is empirical includes not only what is physical-science empirical and what is experimental-empirical, but also what is ordinary-empirical.

There are many things that no one would call a priori that I do not need to justify by sensory experience. I know without leaving my armchair that I had breakfast this morning, that I live in Amherst, Massachusetts, that the word 'accommodate' is spelled with two ms, that I'll get a telephone bill next month. These are all in the same epistemic boat: I know none of these things with Cartesian certainty, but I do know them, and I'm justified in asserting them without verifying them by sensory experience. (In fact, I have never verified that I live in Amherst, Massachusetts; I simply moved there.) If my claim to knowledge is challenged, I would certainly appeal to sensory evidence (what the dictionary says about how to spell 'accommodate' is sensory evidence) to justify my claim to know. Moreover, my knowledge that water is the stuff that falls from the sky is on a par with these other bits of knowledge: I'm prepared to claim to know them from my armchair without special confirmation, but it does not follow that they are a priori. Nor does it follow that they can be regimented into an experimental-empirical theory, much less regimented into a physical-science empirical theory. But I think that there is no question that they express genuine knowledge. (I do know how to spell 'accommodate'.)

Phenomena involving everyday behavior of ordinary things – medium-sized objects (artifacts as well as natural objects), animals, and people –

are ordinary-empirical (i.e., neither a priori nor in need of validation by science). A Practical Realist may be thought of as an apostate scientific pragmatist who takes the field of truth to extend beyond the physical sciences – beyond the sciences altogether – to commonsensical claims that are reliable and indispensable. Without relying on commonsensical claims that are daily confirmed by millions of people, a scientist could not even make it to the lab.

Our everyday knowledge of the world is empirical (albeit what I have called ordinary-empirical). If people stopped slowing down at yield signs, we would revise our belief that people generally slow down at yield signs. Revisability of belief on the basis of experience is a hallmark of the empir-ical – regardless of whether the belief is integratable into physical science. We can count on such homely generalizations as "Rumors can cause harm" or "A sharp rap on the nose causes it to bleed" or "Driving drunk is danger-ous." Our everyday knowledge of the world has epistemic, as well as prudential, virtues: Everyday knowledge, though revisable, is remarkably reliable. We depend on it; we cannot help depending on it; and our use of it enables us to act successfully and to satisfy our desires. In light of these virtues, it is difficult to take seriously those who pretend that our knowl-edge of the everyday world is just a folk theory that must be cast aside if it is not vindicated by science. We live in a world of medium-sized objects that behave in largely (or at least somewhat) predictable ways. It is not that science tells us just *what* exists; rather, science tells us what *else* exists.

Metaphysics in a Practical-Realist Vein

Even though a Practical Realist begins with the world that she encounters in everyday life – begins, that is to say, in the middle of things – she is not barred from technical pursuits in philosophy. For example, I've recently written on the relation between persons and bodies. Mustering what seemed to me facts about persons and bodies, I came to the conclusion that human persons are constituted by human bodies, but are not identical to the bodies that constitute them. This conclusion, in turn, led me to develop a highly technical account of the general notion of 'constitution' and of ways of having properties. Finally, I found myself espousing a particularly strong version of essentialism. Although I may give it up, at this time I am committed to holding that things have essential properties – properties without which they could not exist. Indeed, I have the nerve to state this in overtly metaphysical language:

> x has F essentially if and only if at any possible world and at any time at which x exists, x has F at that world and at that time.[5]

[5] For refinement, see Matthews 1990. Also see Marcus 1971.

How did a pragmatist (like me) wander into the thickets of essential-ism?[6] By reflections like these: There are many different kinds of things. Things of different kinds can survive different kinds of changes. For example, your body, because it is of the kind *human organism*, can survive complete replacement of all its cells by different cells. But the Bayeux tapestry, because it is of the kind *tapestry*, could not survive complete replacement of all its threads by different threads – no matter how similar the replacement threads were to the original. Even if it could survive replacement of some of its threads, complete replacement of threads would result in a new tapestry. It is not that, with complete thread replacement, the Bayeux tapestry would simply lose some properties and gain others; rather, the Bayeux tapestry would no longer exist.

Some things, therefore, go out of existence altogether; it's not just that they lose this property or that, but rather that they cease to exist. And the conditions under which they would cease to exist are determined by the kinds of things that they are. For example, when the combatants in the English civil wars dismantled a certain manor house for its stones, the manor house did not just cease to be a manor house – the way that a student who drops out of school ceases to be a student. Rather, the manor house ceased to exist altogether. There was no individual thing that used to be a manor house, but then was a bunch of stones scattered all over the county.[7] The thing that was a manor house did not survive the dismantling.

Indeed, anything that exists at t and is not eternal can (and will) go out of existence. If a thing can go out of existence altogether, and not just cease to be an F (a manor house or whatever), then there are conditions under which it would cease to exist altogether and conditions under which it would persist. That is, it has what I shall call 'de re persistence conditions'. Since most (if not all) of the things around us will cease to exist sooner or later, most of the things around us have *de re* persistence conditions.[8]

Once we have the notion of *de re* persistence conditions, it is but a short step to the notion of essential properties. For x's *de re* persistence conditions are those in the absence of which x could not exist, and essential properties of x are those in the absence of which x could not exist. If staying intact is a *de re* persistence condition of the manor house, then the manor house has staying intact as an essential property. Anything that exists and is not eter-

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[6] The following discussion of essentialism comes from Baker 2000.

[7] See Chapter 7 of my 2000 for a discussion of mereology. On my view, ordinary things often cannot be identified with mereological sums; rather, mereological sums constitute ordinary things.

[8] One reason to reject "contingent identity" understood as '$x = y$, but possibly $x \neq y$,' is that anything that can go out of existence has *de re* persistence conditions; but x's being "contingently identical" to y is logically incompatible with x's having *de re* persistence conditions. See my 1997.

nal, therefore, has essential properties in the above sense: If F is an essential property of x, then x cannot exist without having F.[9]

I am not invoking the occult. Anything that can go out of existence has *de re* persistence conditions; and anything that has *de re* persistence conditions has essential properties in the sense defined earlier. That is, the essential properties of a thing are those in the absence of which the thing could not exist.

Philosophers generally consider this version of essentialism – the thesis that individuals have essential properties without which they could not exist – the strongest grade of essentialism. For me, this essentialism is motivated by such down-to-earth considerations as the fact that there are conditions under which a particular manor house, say, would cease to exist. This version of essentialism, stemming as it does from reflection on the everyday life-world, seems fully compatible with a basically pragmatic outlook.

Indeed, this suggestion of melding essentialism with a kind of pragmatism is further supported by details of the essentialism that I espouse (you may think of it as oddball essentialism):

1. Some things (e.g., artworks and artifacts) have relational properties essentially. (I take a relational property to be a property that could not be instantiated by anything that was alone in the world. A relational property may be expressed by a monadic predicate – e.g., is a dollar bill.)
2. Some things (e.g., artworks and artifacts) have intentional properties essentially. (I take an intentional property to be a property that could not be instantiated in a world without propositional attitudes – e.g., being a flag.)
3. Some things (e.g., artworks and artifacts) have properties whose instantiation depends on conventions, on language, or on other aspects of culture essentially.

These features of my version of essentialism are, I realize, nonstandard, but defensible on the kind of pragmatic grounds that I gave earlier. According to Practical Realism, philosophy can be as abstruse and as technical as you please. In this, Practical Realism resembles a priorism. But unlike the a priorists, the Practical Realist does not take metaphysical claims or rational intuition to be self-evident. I certainly do not take essentialism to be self-evident. It is justified not by appeal to pure reason or to metaphysical intuition, but by appeal to reflection on ordinary things that we antecedently care about and by the theoretical work that it does once postulated.

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[9] Note that this construal of essential properties leaves open the possibility, which on my theory is an actuality, that one thing may have F essentially and that another thing may have F nonessentially. A manor house has the property of staying intact essentially, but a bunch of molecules that is currently intact does not.

Practical Realism is a form of pragmatism in that it takes its cue from practices that serve us so well (and that do not support any sharp distinction between language and "the world"). Practical Realism is a form of realism in that it affirms the unvarnished truth of the language of successful practice.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by summarizing what Practical Realism does and does not imply. First, as I've said several times, Practical Realism advocates beginning in the middle of things. I start with the idea that I'm a person in the midst of a lot of other things, and I have a lot of attitudes – beliefs, desires, hopes, expectations, and so on. I could make no sense of my own life (literally: nothing would count as making sense) without having attitudes. The other things in the midst of which I find myself include persons and nonpersonal objects, and many of the nonpersonal objects – from passports to painted portraits – are meaningful. (Call an object an 'intentional object' if it has an intentional property essentially, where, again, an intentional property is one that cannot be instantiated in a world without propositional attitudes.) I believe that such things as passports and portraits are essentially intentional in the sense that they could not exist in a world without minds. Yet we can hardly understand our world, in which things like passports and portraits play a prominent role, if we disregard such intentional objects. And we utterly fail if we try to understand things like passports and portraits in nonintentional terms. So a philosophy that begins in the middle of things starts with what matters to us all – and much of what matters to us is resolutely intentional. It matters to every one of us whether we are arrested, whether we can pay our bills, whether our reputations are ruined by malicious rumors. Intentionality is a stubborn fact; and if it cannot be reduced to something else, then so be it. Practical Realism starts by acknowledging what we cannot in good faith deny.

Second, Practical Realism implies that we should take seriously the fact that there seem to be an almost infinite variety of kinds of things in the world. A description of the world as mereological sums of simples does not begin to do justice to the world that we inhabit. Rather, new things of new kinds come into existence. A world like ours, full of computers, satellites, and all manner of electronic equipment, has kinds of things in it – things with kinds of causal powers – fundamentally different from those in the world that the dinosaurs inhabited. This is a prosaic intuition, based on the kind of everyday experience that everyone has. Practical Realism implies that this kind of prosaic intuition should not be dislodged by abstract philosophical argument about, say, metaphysical simples – or quarks, for that matter.

Third, Practical Realism does not imply that metaphysical intuitions

are sacrosanct. Our epistemic situation is one in which commonsense beliefs that earn their keep daily are better justified than are our metaphysical beliefs. For me, unlike the a priorists, it is the metaphysical intuitions (not the intuitions that are confirmed in everyday life) that are to be tested. And the way to test metaphysical intuitions, according to Practical Realism, is by their consequences for understanding ordinary experience. That the relation between a statue and a piece of marble that makes it up is constitution, not identity, for example, is one such claim that I have defended at length. Such a claim is ultimately justified by its usefulness in making sense of an enormous range of phenomena. So, like the a priorists, I think that we can do metaphysics apart from science; but like the scientific pragmatists, I do not think that such metaphysics is really a priori or independent of experience. Metaphysics, practiced in a Practical Realist vein, is not exempt from empirical considerations – either from reflection on ordinary things or from science. Our epistemic ideal should be overall coherence among *all* our beliefs, not privileging metaphysical beliefs over those that we cannot get along without.

Fourth and finally, although Practical Realism is a friend of metaphysics, Practical Realism implies that there should be a route back from the arcane to the things that people care about – that is, the everyday world of medium-sized things. For example, a Practical Realist will want a theory of properties to say something useful about ordinary properties – properties like being employed that are far removed from those, like spin and charge, that are deemed to be fully "natural." Practical-Realist philosophy, therefore, not only begins in the middle of things, but it also – no matter how technical or abstruse it gets – refuses to sever its ties to the ordinary world that we all care about. In short, respect for what matters to us – regard for the world in which we find happiness or boredom or misery, in which we have satisfying or frustrating relationships – is the hallmark of Practical Realism.

Practical Realism is one way to do philosophy *in mediis rebus*.

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