1. Is There Room for One More Realism?

As Rorty correctly notes, philosophers throughout the twentieth century have discussed the problem of realism; and, indeed, the history of the issue is much longer. As a result, there are so many different kinds of realism that one may ask whether there is room for one more. But my version of realism is not quite new—it can be found in both philosophical and scientific thought. I am looking for an adequate name for it, but this is not easy for the best names have already been taken. This is for example the case with “scientific realism” which I find appropriate because I try to shape my version of realism in agreement with the results of science. But this term is already used in many contexts—usually to characterise an attitude towards the existence of theoretical entities or truthfulness of scientific theories which I do not share (and which I am not dealing with in this paper since I am going to consider a more basic problem). Recently, for example, Nicholas Rescher uses it to name a stance to which I cannot subscribe. In his essay *Putnam and the pragmatic theory of truth* (Rescher 99, p.14) he writes:

Scientific realism stands committed to the thesis that the world is as science holds it to be; that the theories of science state the literal truth about reality as it actually is.

The realistic attitude is often presented in such—or similar—way and I invariably find it to be an amazing thesis. It is obvious that the demand that science gives the “literal truth about reality” cannot be read literally. First of all, there is the clear, formal constraint; since the cardinality of the set of all possible sentences one can formulate in all languages is equal to $\aleph$, while the cardinality of the set of events in the Universe is supposed to be at least $c$ or even $c^2$, there are not enough sentences in all the languages used in science to describe reality. But even if the “literal truth about reality” does not mean “whole truth” we
face the next problem; since abstraction and idealisation are among the main devices in science’s toolbox, and moreover science is always selective, “the world as science holds it to be” does not appear even in a science-fiction writer’s dreams. We should also relinquish the hope that the results of the different scientific investigations will assemble a complete, detailed account of everything that is in the world, since the world is, after all, filled with particular objects, each of them unique in its own way. It is not even like an anatomical atlas where after turning over the page with the picture of a man we can see his musculature until, turning page after page, we reach his skeleton. The thing is more complicated even within the realm of one theory. Classical mechanics, for example, gives models for many phenomena. A body in free fall, Earth’s movement around the sun, the flight of far-range rockets, etc. can be modelled within it, but in each case the Earth has to be treated in a quite different way: as an infinite plane, as a material point, as a sphere or as an ellipsoid. This clearly poses a problem for Rescher’s version of scientific realism; the Earth cannot be all these very different things simultaneously.

Both of the above arguments are commonly known, and they tend to be forgotten only when one speaks about descriptions of the world in a way which goes back to the Laplacian demon with his ready-made world, strong ontological reductionism, old-fashioned atomism, full determinism, and classical mechanics in addition. This picture of the way science describes reality was good for the nineteenth century, but is not useful any longer. Science does not describe the world in that literal way; it seeks for phenomena, understood as a tendencies of real objects to behave in a regular, repeatable way, and it attempts to discover laws expressing these regularities, thus governing the phenomena.

Since the notion of realism is a hybrid one—both ontological and epistemological—two kinds of objectivism are at work here. Thus, to be a realist one has to appeal not only to the mind independent existence of the external world (ontological objectivity), but also to the possibility of acquiring objective (in epistemological sense) and true knowledge of it. The last two problems—that of epistemological objectivity and that of truth—have dominated succeeding “editions” of the 20th century discussion. The first of the two is connected with the query, going back to the Kantian phenomenology, whether we can even reach reality itself, and not just a creation of our senses or a construction of our theories. Thus, subjectivity of cognition has been stressed either in terms of the object of cognition’s mind-dependency or theory ladenness. The discussion focused on the possibility of choosing a kind of sentences (propositions) to which some epistemic primacy can be ascribed. The second of the two problems mentioned concerns the usefulness of the classical conception of truth, since, as it is claimed, we have no direct access to reality. Other definitions of truth such as “idealised rational assertability” (Putnam 1990) or “good for us to believe” (Rorty 1994) have been proposed.

In this paper I am going to show that the realist stance regarding both kinds of objectivity (ontological and epistemological), and the classical notion of truth as well, are both possible and reasonable. We need only to see the task of philosophy as the integration of all our knowledge—practical, scientific, and philosophical as well—in a comprehensive, consistent picture. Since I am not interested in the question of whether God or values are real, so I could call my realism naturalistic. However, this could be misleading, since Hilary Putnam changed his mind, and began to defend natural realism.

2. Scientific Naturalism

In the famous paper Many Faces of Realism (Putnam 87), Putnam still argues for internal realism, but already in his Dewey Lectures, Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind (Putnam 94) opts for natural or naïve, direct realism. I greet this change with enthusiasm, for although I like some elements of internal realism—especially the claim that “there are some facts to discover”—there are other elements that I do not like. For example, the conception of truth as idealised
rational acceptability was difficult for me to accept.

There is one more reason for my enthusiasm. Like Putnam (and many others), I try to find a path between “metaphysical realism and irresponsible antirealism.” But “my” way is different because “my” naturalism is slightly different from Putnam’s “natural” stance, since it is not at any rate naïve or direct. I am not so liberal as to agree with Putnam (Putnam 94) that bricks of ice exist in the same way as prime numbers do. But I disagree with Putnam’s stand mainly with regard to the attitude to science. In answering the question about both kinds of objectivity, epistemological and ontological, I can (and I do) rely on science, and Putnam cannot. This is because I trust science much more than Putnam does. Already in Many Faces of Realism he treats in the same way the orders of things given by science, common sense, arts, etc. He claims that science can easily undermine metaphysical questions but it cannot replace them, so, he concludes, it deprives us of foundations and we have to philosophise without any.

Putnam’s way of seeing the relationship between science and philosophy is shared by others. Either they demand science to give the foundation—the task of philosophy is then to “generalise” the results of science; or, quite the opposite, they expect philosophy to ground science, to give the criteria of the correctness of scientific reasoning. Since neither science nor philosophy does the expected job—simply because they cannot—they give reason for disappointment.

This seems to be nothing but a misunderstanding. Science and philosophy are linked in many ways, including feedback, but not in that way. The problem cannot be discussed here in more detail. But philosophical constructions have to be in agreement with the results of science or at any rate they must not be contradictory to them. For example, the Laplacian demon is not a good model for the subject of cognition at the end of the twentieth century. This is simply excluded by contemporary physics.

But—one can say—this model was in agreement with classical physics, so if science undergoes such deep revolutionary changes, maybe it would be better to find something more stable for philosophy to trust, for example, common sense. It is not a good idea. We all know how difficult—probably hopeless—it is to determine what science is. But nobody knows what common sense is. Whose common sense does one have in mind? Rorty’s ethnocentrism seems to be the best solution of this problem, but such a solution is untenable for me.

After all, it is hard to believe that philosophy might be “unfounded.” A conviction regarding the possibility of “unfounded” philosophy traces back at least to Kantian characterisation of philosophy (metaphysics) as a task for pure reason without any address to experience, and it is a consequence of the conjecture that it is philosophy which ought legitimate scientific (and others) considerations. But in my opinion, the only reasonable demand on our knowledge as a whole is to (try to) be consistent. The dream about an ultimate foundation of human knowledge—being that pure reason or experience as well—is unrealistic. If philosophers cannot trust science, then they must trust something else: religion, arts, common sense, natural language or appeal to intuition. Naturally, the intuition should not be disregarded at any rate. It plays a profound role in science as well. But at the same time there is nothing absolute in it. It is shaped by so many factors—common sense, language’s customs and science included—and it alters with changes in these factors. Science has its part in changing intuitions, common sense, languages but these change with some resistance, so they do not keep up with science. If we appeal to intuitions or something like that, we are always late.

Putnam, for example, looking—probably—for something stable in language, argues that, for example, “the word ‘small’ (and the comparative ‘smaller’) applied to, say molecules [has] exactly the same sense that it bears in talk of a small animal or a small piece of stone” (Putnam 94, p. 506). With molecules maybe that is OK, but—as we know—the set of the even integers is smaller than the whole set of the integers, and electrons are smaller than protons, yet not in the same way as animals or stones.
So my version of scientific naturalism trusts in science. Of course, this trust is not unlimited. I do not expect science to provide the ultimate foundations of a solution of philosophical problems; such a solution, on the other hand, would have to be consistent with scientific knowledge, because it is the best knowledge we have. If science changes the picture of the world again, we will have no other choice but to change our philosophy once more. The coherence of the philosophical world view is all that philosophers can and must care for.

3. Ontological Objectivity

Nicholas Rescher (Rescher 99a) insists that the ontological component of realism “maintains that there indeed is a real world — a realm of mind-independent, objective physical reality,” (p. 20) and he is convinced that “we indispensably need that initial existential presupposition to make a start. Without commitment to a reality to serve as ground and object of our experience, its cognitive import will be lost. Only on this basis can we proceed evidentially with the exploration of the interpersonally public and objective domain of a physical world-order that we share in common” (p. 21, 22). Since I—as a “naturalistic” and “scientific” realist—remember that the “culture” part appears the last few minutes on the clock of the history of human species, I am not so convinced about the importance of this presupposition. We had had to start the exploration of this “interpersonally public and objective domain” a very long time before we could even formulate the doubt about its objective existence. This presupposition does not seem of great significance even now. What difference does it make if the world is, in fact, God’s or even our dream, so it is fully mind-dependent as far as its existence is concerned, as long as our will is largely impotent, and the world is guided by its own laws to which we must be subordinated. From a metaphysical point of view it is a nice riddle whether the world is such a dream, although it is obvious that we can neither prove nor disprove it. The question is in any case entirely unimportant as far as practical matters are concerned. This stands in complete opposition to the question of what kind of objects really exist, for if I want to do something with the shadow I have to proceed with the shadow’s cause. Since I see the world as a field of our activity rather than as an object of our comprehension, I am some kind of pragmatist in fact; but to be a pragmatist today means too much for me.

Trusting science we can ask it for help in answering the ontological question: What does really exist? Since Parmenides’ time philosophers have kept elaborating the notion of Being, differentiating and hierarchising the modes of existence. That involves looking for substance, for the ultimate elements of nature and its ultimate features. Physicists since the seventeenth century have persistently looked for the “atoms” whose behaviour and properties determine the whole variety of phenomena. With such an attitude, bricks of ice—which are of special interest to Putnam—do not really exist.

But nowadays it seems that the history of seeking Democritus’ atom has an unexpected outcome. Probably there are no “atoms” at all. Reality, as it emerges from the theories of contemporary physics, seems to be a potentiality rather than another, hierarchical, stable structure. According to the hypothesis of spontaneous symmetry breaking certain symmetry is assigned to the world at the very beginning. The local breaking of this symmetry creates diverse particles and diverse interactions between them. This suggests that the known world with all its objects and processes are unnecessary, accidental: the Universe which came out from the chaos of “the first second” after the Big Bang is not a “ready-made world”. According to Prigogine (Prigogine 97, p. 6)—“the big bang was an event associated with an instability within the medium that produced our universe”. We may assume that the initial, unstable state had the possibility of bringing about a lot of scenarios. That in the Universe there are these but not those particles, that there occur these but not those interactions, and in addition that matter dominates over antimatter, that the universal constants (such as the mass of the electron) have specified values could be held to be the result
of fluctuations inside the unimaginable primordial matter of the first nanoseconds. Lee Smolin maintains that: “for me the most important idea behind the developments of twentieth-century physics and cosmology is that things don't have intrinsic properties at the fundamental level; all properties are about relations between things”. (Smolin 95, p. 289). Thus in a sense, all objects and their features in the Universe are incidental and relative, they are frozen _accidents_ in Gell-Mann’s sense. Through them reality manifests part of its possibilities.

The known Universe is a dynamic, developing process in which past states can only constrain further history but not entirely determine it. At present, chaos theory enables us to speak more precisely about “becoming”, emerging new objects, new features, self-organisation of matter on different levels, in categories of dissipative structures, solitons or attractors. During the cosmic evolution, a region of low energy emerged. “This is the domain—Prigogine (Prigogine 97, p. 6) writes—of macroscopic physics, chemistry, and biology. It is the domain in which human existence actually takes place.” It is our world in which the bricks of ice do exist as well as molecules of water assembling a crystal of ice, the hydrogen and oxygen atoms, nuclei encompassed by their electronic clouds, elementary particles, quarks,... all being actualisation of this primordial matter, this _medium_ mentioned by Prigogine, and thus having an equivalent ontological status. The weak ontological reductionism, that I am advocating (Kaluszynska 98), is the conviction that phenomena from a given layer of organisation of matter are the realisations of nature’s potentiality. Their course is conditioned—although not univocally determined—by the state of affairs on the “lower” level and restricted by the general laws covering that layer of reality. Thus although, say, gases are collections of huge numbers of atoms moving in chaotic, random ways, nevertheless they demonstrate a nice regularity as far as pressure, temperature, and volume are concerned, so they are the form of actualisation of reality as well as atoms are. Naturally, despite authorisation by science, these are metaphysical claims. Denying them is a metaphysical decision as well.

4. The Objectivity of Cognition

Even though being convinced of the objective existence of the region of “low energies”, that is, the layer of reality on which biological life is possible, one can still doubt the possibility of reaching it in our cognition. Centuries of philosophical investigations can testify that such distrust is justified. The problem becomes especially difficult when the subject of cognition is viewed as something over and behind the senses, the brain, and even the mind. The mind-body problem is extremely fascinating, and no wonder that so much effort is committed to trying to solve it, but fortunately enough a naturalistic-oriented epistemology does not require a solution of it. So, I share fully the conviction of Putnam, that: “A sane naturalism recognises that human beings are a part of nature, and their mental capacities require a certain specific sort of material embodiment. ... Seeing an object should not be thought of as a two-part affair: a purely physical interaction between the object, the light rays, and the eye, as the first part, followed by the ‘cognitive’ processing in the brain. The whole affair is cognitive” (Putnam 93, p. 187). Of course, such an attitude does not absolve us from facing the serious problem of the _objectivity_ of cognition.

Perceptions are surely—as Putnam writes—“certain abilities we posses which depend upon our brains and upon all the various transactions between the environment and the organism” (Putnam 94, p. 489), but when we see an oasis in a desert, we would prefer to be sure that what we see faithfully represents reality.

We can rightly worry about the accuracy of our perceptions. The problem has been familiar since ancient times. One of the best analyses of it was done by Francis Bacon who took into account both the biological and the social factors disturbing perception, which can disturb cognition as well. Contemporary science has delivered many arguments for the rightness of Bacon’s conjectures. I am not going to discussing them in detail but simply to list some of them, limiting myself to biological ones. Those will be good enough to
show that it is a weighty problem indeed.

a) Our perceptual abilities are limited to those which are important for the survival of the human species. The abilities of animals (or plants) to recognise the environment do not duplicate our own. Although the sciences allow us to go far beyond our sensory perception, it is tenable that some parts or aspects of reality—having no biological importance—will be left unknown for ever. The issue is excellently expressed in Wislawa Szymborska’s poem *Conversation with a stone*.

b) The resolving power of our senses is not too impressive.

c) Our tendency to confabulate is really striking. It starts already on the level of the retina and nerve cells. Single neurons react to illusory contours and to the context of stimuli. Francis Circ—from whom I took this information—remarked ironically that many philosophers, were surprised to learn this. I confess, I was. The selective and confabulatory activity increases with the higher levels of our nerve system, and, of course, with the levels of conscious transformation of information.

These observations—and, of course, the list may be much prolonged, especially if cultural factors are taken into account—prompted some philosophers to speak of “our world”, this often being an introduction to taking subjectivist, relativist, and anti-realist stands. Although I also see a good reason for speaking about “our world” (or simply “world” as a different notion from reality) I try to avoid such “nihilistic” conclusions, while at the same time trying to avoid falling into incoherence.

I use the term “world” much in the same sense as biologists use the term “habitat”. Lewontin (96, p. 88) wrote that the style of living determines what is essential for a given organism, thus determining its habitat. He claimed that as there is no organism without a habitat, so there is no habitat without a given organism. It is likely that the world is reality *for us*, tailored for us. It is a construction in which massive, separate, sharp-shaped objects as well as smooth surfaces, straight edges, continuous lines exist due to the bad resolving power of our senses and selective-confabulatory activities of our nervous system. But due to science we know very well that reality is quite different: a good magnifier shows that the edge of a knife is not a perfect line; a microscope shows that the smoothness of a polished surface or sphericity of a drop of water do not really exist. How can we divide wine and glass—Feynman asks—when one melts into the another? In addition, our cultural (especially scientific and technical) activities keep changing the “furniture” of our world, so it is essentially historical. Voltaire excellently describes the feelings of a man who moved from Paris to London: “He has left in Paris a world, which was full, here he will find it empty. In Paris everyone sees the world composed of whirls of a subtle matter, in London nobody sees anything like that. For our Cartesian everything happens as a result of impact, which is completely unintelligible. For Mr. Newton everything happens as a result of gravitation, the cause of which nobody knows either.” But how could we doubt the existence of photons since photocells open doors in front of us? Weitszäcker notes somewhere that photons behave as if they exist, so we can do nothing else but treat them as if they exist. For many—for example Hacking is one of them—the possibility of manipulating an object testifies to its existence, but on the other hand we should remember that phlogiston and ether did many useful things. They also behaved as if they existed.

Use of the category “our world” does not, in my opinion, have to result in subjectivism, relativism or anti-realism. It is true that nobody knows what it might mean for the world to be coloured without appropriate eyes and brains, but the ability to create definite reactions is an *objective* though *relative* feature of some objects. It is not subjective (in the sense of being “dependent on the subject”) that some objects cause in animals’ bodies some processes allowing them to differentiate those objects from others. Nobody is surprised that an amoeba prefers insolated places, that processes which determine its behaviour are objective. The amoeba’s reactions are specific, and so are ours. To the best of our knowledge, only people can consciously see colours just as only some crystals (quartz—for example) can produce electric charge when they are struck or just as only plants can absorb the carbon dioxide under the influence of the sun, yet nobody refuses the objectivity of the phenomena of photosynthesis or piezoelectricity, although
they can appear only under very specific circumstances. But even if I have convinced you of the objectivity—say “species” objectivity—of our world (and of the objectivity of the amoebae’s world, which is different from ours), you can still ask whether this world (and amoebe’s world as well) really exists. Given my view of reality as a potentiality, to the above question I can answer—“yes”. Our world is this layer of low energy, mentioned above, and has the same ontological status as each intersection of reality which has its own specific phenomena and laws. So there are facts to which our knowledge must correspond to be true.

In arguing for the objectivity of our cognition I refer to the notion of recognition, the first is the conscious form of the second. In this way I can again use the results of science to help me. Animals — like human beings — have to recognise their environment rightly to live in it. This animal’s faculty is not so primitive as just simple reaction to a given stimulus. The efficiency of a scarecrow proves the birds’ faculty to abstract. The thing is even more sophisticated.

I saw on TV an experiment with a small monkey sitting in front of a device consisting of three pipes and three boxes placed exactly below the pipes. The point was that the first pipe was linked to the third box, and the monkey could not see in which way pipes and boxes were linked. The experimenter put a nut into the first pipe, and the monkey opened the first box. Since it did not find the nut, it opened in turn the second and third boxes. Then it succeeded. This was repeated again, and again until the experimenter exposed the connection between the pipes and boxes, and the monkey—after the experimenter put the nut into the first pipe—opened the third box at once. The experiment showed not only that the monkey has excellent recognition of its environment, but also that it is in a way familiar with the law that unsupported objects always fall sheer to the ground. It probably knew about acceleration but it did not express that, simple because it lacked the appropriate means to do it. That, however, is not the end of the story. The monkey was convinced about a far more comprehensive—indeed metaphysical—claim: it was sure that nuts cannot simply disappear, so not finding the nut in the expected place, it kept looking for it in the other boxes. The experiment also revealed that the monkey’s beliefs form a hierarchy: the Law of Conservation of Matter is first, the Law of Free Fall—second.

That is our heritage. “The monkey not perceiving realistic enough a branch it jumped onto was dead monkey very soon”. Ditfurth, who reported this playful saying of George Gaylord Simpson, added: “thus it does not belong to primogenitors of present primates.” (Ditfurth 89, p. 427). So we entered our human life with a useful inheritance.

All the same, mistakes are always possible in recognition and in cognition as well. A sparrow taking a scarecrow as its enemy is wrong. Language gives us quite a new possibility: falsehood, which seems to have been a part of us from the very beginning of the human species, since already Adam tried to lie to God in Paradise. Thus a quest for the truth is a necessary task indeed.

5. The Problem of Truth

The problem of truth sinks in an ocean of deliberations, misunderstandings, and simple absurdities as well. Especially constructivists, who come from different kinds of post- or neo... isms—Derrida, Rorty, Foucault, Latour, Fuchs, duBois, Barnes, Blo... that is a long list — utter astounding opinions. I do not have time, nor inclination to discuss them in detail, although some of them are really funny. Roughly speaking, truth is a “cultural institution”, a “social and historical phenomenon, like money, state or authority”. It is not discovered but constructed. The constructivists readily unmask social circumstances causing a groundless attachment of the Western World—the rest of the world seems to be protected in some way—to the idea of truth. They are sometimes very ingenious and usually perceive a force and
power behind an innocent-looking truth. Any discussion with them is impossible. Rorty asked by Kolakowski about finality of mathematical truths insisted that they are sociological facts as well, and answering a question concerning the Archimedian theorem of the existence of infinitely many prime numbers said something like: “Well, nobody has brought anything better to us”.

The constructivist’s reasoning is usually developed in opposition to the realist. The realist is supposed to say that TRUTH is an ideal, symbolic duplicate of reality; moreover it is in some way “outside” culture, “outside” knowledge, quite independent from our beliefs, investigations, etc. I have not met any realist claiming something like that, but Rescher suggests that there are many defenders of such an attitude. He writes:

If an adequate understanding of what is at issue with truth pivots on the idea that truths state how things actually stand without any inherent reference to our beliefs, views and opinions about the matter — if, as is widely maintained, truth is something altogether detached from human thought and ideas — then how can we possibly achieve knowledge about it? How then can we ever validly claim that our thought corresponds with reality so as to get at the real truth?

I do not understand again what “outside” and “detached” mean in this case, since the word “true” is just a qualification of our propositions, beliefs, views, opinions; etc., “truth” being either a short form of the phrase “true proposition” (belief, etc.) or the name of a set of such propositions. So following the classical conception, and the common language’s custom as well, “true”—in the sense “consistent with reality”—is the relative qualification of our propositions (beliefs, etc.). Some of our propositions (beliefs, etc.) describe states of affairs (events, facts, etc.) which actually exist, thus they are consistent with reality, they are true, just as some houses are located close to a river. “Being located close to a river” is a relative property of those houses—does it means that it is in a way “outside” them? John is taller than Jack is—we have here another relative feature; what does “outside” mean here? If one wants to use such a spatial metaphor, it will be better to associate truth with between; between propositions and states of affairs. The simple observation that “true” is a relative attribute of propositions brings to an end deflationist concerns about what true sentences have in common with each other, which distinguish them from the others. Probably the houses located close to a river have no more in common than the true sentences, yet nobody sees the philosophical problem about the localisation of the houses, and so many struggle with the problem of truth.

The most difficult problems arise in connection with speaking about the “truth” instead of true sentences. They are pseudo-problems, in fact, since they are caused simply by the manner of using words. Especially when written with capital letters, TRUTH becomes a mystery indeed. Nobody even knows what it looks like, not to mention how to grasp it. But written with small letters it can also throw one into confusion. Rescher (Rescher 99, p.5,6), for example, sketches the following dilemma:

(1) The truth must agree with reality.
(2) Therefore, in order to determine the truth we must determine what is really so, that is, what reality is like.
(3) We have no access way to reality independent of what we take to be the truth about it.

Here (3) says that we cannot get at reality save via truth but (2) says that we cannot get at truth save via reality. We seem to be trapped in a Catch-22 situation where skepticism — inability to get at truth — is the only outcome.

In order to avoid the trap of this vicious circle, Rescher proposes to replace (2) with (2‘):

(2‘) To determine what reality is like we must determine what the truth is (exactly as per (3)): reality determinations supervene upon truth assessments: the epistemic route is our only access-way to reality.
The proposed change yields very substantial consequences. First of all, the first thesis now not so much determines the notion of truth but rather expresses a conviction—we are already familiar with it—that “reality is as science—here truth—holds it to be”. It is suggested, moreover, that we can determine truth without any access to reality. Indeed, instead of a correspondence with facts or reality, Rescher refers to “truth-estimation” in terms of “successful predictions", and “effective applicative control” (Rescher 99, p. 9). I really do not know how we can even speak about “successful predictions” or “applicative efficiency” without speaking about agreement with facts, states of affair or reality, but I cannot deal with this problem now. The more essential point is that with this new list, truth estimation plays a crucial part. For if reality is as truth holds it to be, and truth is determined via truth-estimation, via the process of inquiry, the exactness of the last comes into ontological prominence. Of course, if truth is determined via the relation of correspondence with reality, the accuracy of truth estimation is not so important. We have never lived in the Golden Age of Certainty, so we perfectly know, how to live with reasonable probability. But with Rescher’s proposal we face a theoretical, not only a practical issue.

Rescher seems to be aware of the importance of the problem when he asks: “Are mere estimates good enough?” He however insists (Rescher 99, p. 11, 12) that:

Whatever theoretical gap there may be between warrant and truth is something which the very nature of concepts like “evidence” and ‘warrant” and “estimation” authorises us in crossing.

After all I still have my doubts. Some of Rescher’s remarks make them even deeper. We can read (Rescher 99, p.9), for example:

Our confidence in the acceptability of a truth estimate varies immensely with its precision. We might be tempted to squabble about the claim that yonder person is 3.735 meters tall. But the truth of the thesis that his height is between 1 meter and 4 meters is truly in (reasonable) question.

So he argues finally (Rescher 99, p. 14, 15) for a schoolbook-scientific realism, based on an admirable law:

There is in general an inverse relationship between the precision of a judgment and its security: detail and probability stand in a competing relationship.... For any sort of estimate whatsoever there is always a characteristic trade-off relationship between the evidential security of the estimate, on the one hand (as determinable on the basis of its probability or degree of acceptability), and on the other hand its contextual definitiveness (exactness, detail, precision, etc.).

Figure 1 (see Appendix) pictures the law, so we can see how it works. I am not so happy with it. If I say that I hold one pencil in my hand, and it is the case, the exactness of this claim is absolute, so its security is equal (or near to) zero. The security of the claim that I hold from one to ten pencils is bigger, and I can insist almost with certainty that the number of pencils in my hand varies form one to one hundred million. The most secure claim seems to be to the effect that sometimes, somewhere, something happens. It does not sound well. Each risk is better than such security.

What is wrong with truth understood as correspondence between propositions and facts, that so many philosophers try to find some other way to grasp it? The fault is usually perceived on the side of reality, of course. Either the very existence of objective reality is doubted or the possibility of the cognitive accessibility to it is doubted. “Our world” is declared to be the only object of cognition, but it is supposed not to exist in an objective way. I tried to show earlier that contemporary science does not incline one to accept any of such conclusions. We can take “our world” as existing objectively—in an ontological sense—as well as presume that we can acquire objective knowledge about it, in a “species objectivity” sense. But we are faced now with the next puzzle: the vicious circle mentioned above. As we remember, Rescher claims that “we have no access to reality apart from what we think to be true about it” (s.12). Thus to decide whether our knowledge is true we should compare it with reality, but we cannot do that
without true knowledge about reality, so the circle closes.

The reasoning looks so plausible, that to recognise that something is wrong with it, we have to realise that all our practical activity requires the presupposition that our beliefs are true. Of course, sometimes we are wrong, and we have to pay for our mistakes, but our successes happen too often to be accidental. Let us look closer at the problem. You told me that my jacket is in the closet. What do I usually do to check if your information is true? Do I start looking for the mystic TRUTH to acquire access to reality in order to compare it with your information? No, I simply open the door to the closet. If amoebae already recognise insolated places, and Pavlov’s dog could even distinguish a circle from an ellipse, why is it we that lack a direct access to reality? But we have such access. It is simply not true that “[w]e have no access to reality independent of what we take to be the truth about it.” I easily recognise a lot of faces, voices, smells, having no idea concerning “truth” about them. We acquire knowledge about reality living and acting within it.

All examples refer to our every-day experience. They are so-called home truths, and usually are treated as truths of a “lower sort” if compared with scientific truths. However in the naturalistic view the existence of the realm where the truth-values of huge numbers of sentences can be decided has great importance. Of course, assigning the truth-value to an even larger number of sentences—scientific propositions included—creates a lot of serious problems. It is often a hopeless enterprise, especially when we try to describe the world with inappropriate categories. I cannot deal with this topic now, since it requires description of the way in which science refers to reality. But, nevertheless, the realm of direct experience with its home truths, extended by scientific devices more and more, is a ground where all theoretical non-analytical constructions can, and must be anchored. It also makes realism a reasonable stance.

Appendix

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Figure 1**
Bibliography

N. Rescher, Multifaceted Reality and Contextualistic Realism, 1999a (to appear).