Realism, Naturalism, and Pragmatism: A Closer Look at the Views of Quine and Devitt

Gregg Caruso

Abstract

Michael Devitt's views on realism and naturalism have a lot in common with those of W.V. Quine. Both appear to be realists; both accept naturalized epistemology and abandon the old goal of first philosophy; both view philosophy as continuous with the empirical procedures of science and hence view metaphysics as similarly empirical; and both seem to view realism as following from naturalism. Although Quine and Devitt share quite a bit ideologically, I think there is a deeper, more fundamental dissimilarity between the two. I will explore the difference between them in an attempt to bring out the subtle complexities surrounding the issue of realism–complexities, I will argue, Devitt sometimes overlooks. I will also explore a real tension in Quine between his earlier, more pragmatic (or anti-realist) tendencies and his later, more austere realism. I will conclude by defending a more Quinean brand of realism I call *internal realism*.

1 Introduction

Michael Devitt is one of the leading defenders of the metaphysical position of realism [4, 5, 8]. According to Devitt, "the defense of realism depends on distinguishing it from other doctrines and on choosing the right place to start the argument" [8, p. 90]. Devitt's starting point is made apparent by the five maxims he lays out at the beginning of [4], and which form the basis of his defense of realism. They are:

Maxim 1 In considering realism, distinguish the constitutive and evidential issues.

Maxim 2 Distinguish the metaphysical (ontological) issue of realism from any semantic issue.

Maxim 3 Settle the realism issue before any epistemic or semantic issue.

Maxim 4 In considering the semantic issue, don't take truth for granted.

Maxim 5 Distinguish the issue of correspondence truth from any epistemic issue.

Devitt's defense of these maxims, and the starting point they dictate, is largely based on his arguments for, and his acceptance of, naturalism— "the view that there is only one way of knowing, the empirical way that is the basis of science" [8, p. 96].

Devitt argues that we should give up the old a priori attempts at settling the metaphysical issue of realism, attempts that start from either an a priori epistemology or an a priori semantics, for such attempts are hopeless. Instead, we should embrace an empirical (or naturalized) metaphysics and work in the opposite direction. If we start with an empirical metaphysics, the contention is that we'll end up in a much better place—namely, with an empirical or naturalized epistemology[1] and an empirical semantics.[2] In addition, according to Devitt, "when we approach our metaphysics empirically, Realism is irresistible" [8, p. 96].[3]

Devitt's views on naturalism and realism have a lot in common with those of W.V. Quine—at least they appear to on the surface. Both accept naturalized epistemology and abandon the old goal of first philosophy; both view philosophy as continuous with the empirical procedures of science and hence view metaphysics as similarly empirical; both reject the possibility of a priori knowledge (see [11, ch.2]; and [6, 7]; both appear to be realists;[4] and both seem to view realism as following from naturalism. Devitt, for example, believes that once we approach metaphysics naturalistically "realism is irresistible." And Quine believes that once we go naturalistic our scientific theories and common-sense beliefs about

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[1]Epistemology itself becomes part of science and is "naturalized" in Quine's sense. See Quine's "Epistemology Naturalized" [13, ch.3].

[2]In this paper I will be more concerned with the first claim, that of naturalized epistemology. Devitt, however, goes to great lengths in [6] to apply a naturalistic methodology to semantics, and to defend an anti-holistic truth-referential view of meaning. Although Devitt's views on meaning and reference are drastically different from those of Quine's, this is not the issue I wish to discuss here. I am here concerned only with the issue of realism. I will discuss semantics, if at all, only in connection with this issue.

[3]The capital R in "Realism" is to indicate Devitt's own formulation of the realism thesis, which I will explicate in Section I of this paper.

[4]I say "appear" because there is a real tension in Quine between his later, more realist writings, and his earlier, more pragmatic (or anti-realist) writings. This is one of the issues I will be exploring throughout the paper.

reality can serve as the fabric of Neurath's boat. According to Quine, "There is nothing we can be more certain of than external things—some of them, anyway—other people, sticks and stones" [17, p. 1-2].

Although there are these similarities between Quine and Devitt, I think there is a deeper, more fundamental dissimilarity between the two. In particular, Quine does not think that the realism issue could be settled independently of all epistemic and semantic issues—at least it's not clear that he does. For Quine, these issues are all a jumbled mess. In addition, it's unclear whether Quine's acceptance of naturalism leads him directly to realism, or at least the brand of realism Devitt advocates. There is a real tension in Quine between his earlier, more pragmatic or anti-realist tendencies, and his later, more austere realism. In [11], for example, Quine suggests that the question of realism, understood in the language and mind independent way that Devitt defines it, may be spurious:

> "Certainly we are in a predicament if we try to answer the question; for to answer the question we must talk about the world as well as about language, and to talk about the world we must already impose upon the world some conceptual scheme peculiar to our own special language" [11, p. 78].

This talk of the imposition of conceptual schemes onto the world would seem to make Quine an anti-realist on Devitt's criteria.[5] For Quine, what conceptual scheme we accept, and hence what ontology we accept, is often viewed as a pragmatic issue. Devitt, on the other hand, would want to argue that what exists is independent of all such issues and is instead an objective matter.

One of the things I would like to do in this paper is examine the tension in Quine between his realist and anti-realist tendencies. And I would like to do this not simply as a scholastic or historical exercise, but as a way of bringing out the subtle complexities surrounding the issue of realism; complexities, I feel, Devitt sometimes overlooks. I will argue that Devitt's maxims are incapable of establishing the brand of realism he desires. I will instead develop and defend a more Quinean brand of realism—one similar to Devitt's, but which he would most likely not acknowledge as his own (and perhaps not even acknowledge as a form of realism). The position I wish to defend is what I call internal realism.

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[5]For Devitt's criteria see Section I of this paper.

I. Devitt's Account of Realism

According to Devitt, the metaphysical doctrine of realism has two dimensions: an existence dimension and an independence dimension [4, 2.2 and 2.3]. The existence dimension commits the realist to the existence of such common-sense entities as stones, trees, and cats, and such scientific entities as electrons, muons, and curved spacetime. This existence dimension is not enough to define realism, according to Devitt, since anti-realists can also accept it.

> "Typically, idealists, the traditional opponents of realists, have not denied this dimension; or, at least, have not straightforwardly denied it. What they have denied is the independence dimension" [8, p. 91].

On some idealist accounts, the more traditional ones, the entities identified by the existence dimension are made up of mental items—ideas or sense data—and are therefore not external to the mind. And in more recent times another sort of idealism has become common.

> "According to these idealists, the entities are not in a certain respect 'objective': they depend for their existence and nature on the cognitive activities and capacities of our minds" [5, p. 44].

Devitt's account of realism rejects all such mind dependencies.

For Devitt, statements of the independence dimension of realism include such key terms as "external" and "objective." To say that an object has "objective existence," on Devitt's account, is to say

> "that it is not constituted by our knowledge, by our epistemic values, by our capacities to refer to it, by the synthesizing power of the mind, by our imposition of concepts, theories, or language" [4, p. 15].

And Devitt is quick to point out that many worlds lack this sort of objectivity: Kant's phenomenal world, Dummett's verifiable world, the stars made by a Goodman version, the constructed world of Putnam's internal realism, Kuhn's world of theoretical ontologies, and the many worlds created by the discourses of structuralists and post-structuralists [4]. As we will see in Sections II and III, Devitt may also want to add Quine to this list.

In addition to objective existence, the independence dimension requires that the material and physical world exist not only objectively but

also non-mentally. "At the insignificant risk of overkill," says Devitt, "it seems best to talk of both objectivity and independence in characterizing realism" [4, p. 16]. Simply put, the world must exist independently of the mental.[6] The joint claims of mind-independence and objective existence comprise the second dimension of realism—the independence dimension.

The two dimensions of existence and independence, then, sufficiently define Devitt's use of "realism." Neither dimension on its own will do. The existence dimension without the independence dimension leads to various forms of idealism. And the independence dimension without the existence dimension leads to what Devitt calls Weak, or Fig-Leaf Realism: a commitment merely to there being something independent of us without specifying its nature [4, p. 23]. For Devitt, this doctrine is so weak as to be uninteresting, but he believes it's worth stating because many so-called realists are committed to nothing more than this Fig-Leaf Realism.

For Devitt, the minimal realist doctrine worth fighting for, and one that preserves the above two dimensions, is captured by the following doctrine:

Realism Tokens of most current common-sense and scientific physical types objectively exist independently of the mental [4, p. 23].[7]

From now on I will use the term *Realism* (with a capital *R*) to refer to this doctrine of Devitt's so as to distinguish it from any other notion one may have. Realism pretty much takes for granted both the ontology of science and common sense, and the folk epistemological view that this ontology is objective and independent. As Devitt puts it: "Science and common sense are not, for the most part, to be 'reinterpreted'" [5, p. 45]. It is not just that our experiences are *as if* there are cats; there are cats. It is not just that the observable world is *as if* there are atoms; there are atoms. Devitt also believes the same goes for the unobservable world posited by science.

To capture the distinction between realism concerning the observable world and realism concerning the unobservable world, Devitt further

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[6]This mind-independence claim amounts to the following: (1) the world does not consist in mental objects of experience, either in ideas, as idealists like Berkeley thought, or in sense data, as many phenomenalists thought; and (2) the world is not made up of minds, as Leibniz thought, or something ultimately spiritual, as the absolute idealists thought [4, p. 15-16].

[7]Although this statement of the Realism doctrine quantifies over types, Devitt insists that it is only a convenience [4, 2.3 and 2.4].

divides Realism into two separate doctrines. The first doctrine, which deals with observables, he calls *Common-Sense Realism* (even though some of the entities it is committed to are not common-sense ones). The doctrine that deals with unobservables he calls *Scientific Realism.*

Common-Sense Realism Tokens of most current *observable* common-sense and scientific physical types objectively exist independently of the mental.

Scientific Realism Tokens of most current *unobservable* scientific physical types objectively exist independently of the mental [4, p. 24].

Although some philosophers accept Common-Sense Realism but deny Scientific Realism, Devitt defends both. For the sake of convenience, I will refer to the combination of these two doctrines simply as Realism, distinguishing them only when the observable/unobservable distinction is at issue.

Central to Devitt's arguments for Realism is the claim that these metaphysical doctrines can and must be disentangled from all epistemic and semantic issues. As his third Maxim dictates, we are to settle the realism issue before any epistemic or semantic issue. It's Devitt's insistence that

> "*Realism says nothing semantic at all* beyond, in its use of 'objective', making the negative point that our semantic capacities do *not* constitute the world" [4, p. 39, Devitt's emphasis].

Similarly, Realism says nothing epistemic beyond the claim that the independence dimension denies that the world is dependent for its existence and nature on what we believe. Realism is simply a metaphysical doctrine for Devitt, and should therefore be separated out and settled independently of all other issues. The question, however, is whether or not this can be done.

Devitt, recall, wants to argue for something stronger than mere Fig-Leaf Realism; he wants to argue that tokens of most common-sense and scientific physical types (both observable and unobservable) objectively exist independently of the mental. To do this he must specify what these types are, or at least what many or most of them are. And it's unclear how he can do this without involving himself in disputes over what conceptual scheme to apply—an issue that is usually relative to pragmatic and epistemic concerns. As we will now see when we turn to

Quine, what ontology we accept is almost always relative to what one's interests are.

II. Quine and Pragmatism

To understand Quine's position on realism it's useful to put the discussion into some kind of context. A good place to start is with Quine's rejection of Carnap's contrast between *internal* and *external* questions [2].[8] Carnap's distinction was a powerful philosophical tool, and it's easy to understand Carnap's resistance to its elimination. For one, it provided a plausible diagnosis of the errors of traditional philosophers and a means of overcoming them. When philosophers debate over whether there are physical objects or universals, for example, Carnap's diagnosis was that they employ the *material mode* to talk about what is more perspicuously expressed in the *formal mode* as issues about linguistic expressions. What is really at issue is whether to adopt a certain linguistic framework. Take the existence of universals. According to Carnap: "Are there universals?" is better expressed, "Should we adopt a linguistic framework which employs '*x* is a universal' as one of its fundamental general terms?" Talk of universals is covertly talk of language. The same is true of physical objects.

Metaphysics, for Carnap, grows out of the error of viewing issues which, when correctly formulated in the metalinguistic formal mode, can be seen not to be substantive. And since adoption of frameworks

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[8]In [2], Carnap recognizes two sorts of questions concerning the existence or reality of entities: *internal* and *external* questions. According to Carnap, discussing a new kind of entity requires the construction of a linguistic framework. A linguistic framework is a way of organizing human communication about particular sets of experiences and observations—it is a set of rules governing the way in which these entities are described and referenced. For Carnap, an internal question is a question asked and answered within the linguistic framework. External questions, on the other hand, are asked of the larger system within which the entities are supposed to exist—that is, external questions concern the existence or reality of the framework itself. One of Carnap's examples concerns what he calls "the thing world," which he defines as "the spatio-temporally ordered system of observable things and events" [2, p. 210]. Internal questions regarding the thing world would include: Is there a white piece of paper on my desk? Are unicorns real or merely imaginary? What kinds of quarks are protons made of? Such questions, Carnap maintains, must be distinguished from the external question of the reality of the thing world itself. Carnap, being a logical positivist, believed that such external metaphysical questions were ultimately unverifiable and therefore meaningless [1, 2, 3]. For Carnap, which linguistic framework(s) we accept is a *pragmatic* issue concerning the utility of the framework concerned. Quine rejects Carnap's internal/external distinction largely on the grounds that it parallels the ill-fated analytic/synthetic distinction [11, 12]

turns on pragmatic convenience rather than correspondence to reality, philosophers delude themselves when they believe they are involved in a substantive debate.

A further advantage of retaining the distinction between internal and external questions surfaces when we consider the relation between pragmatism and objectivity. Our taking a realist attitude towards a subject matter, our seeing it as objective, involves believing that the correct answer to questions arising about it are not up to us. The force of this observation is nicely captured by Carnap's distinction. When I attempt to answer an internal question from within the perspective of a particular framework, it is not up to me what answer I should give. The rules of the framework, in light of experience, determine some answer as the correct one. However, when the question "Are there physical objects?" is raised as an *external* question, this form of objectivity is missing. The correct answer will reflect the tastes, interests, and standards of simplicity of the person who asks it. For Carnap, choice of framework reflects subjective interests and purposes, not correspondence to an objective independent reality.

Carnap's distinction, then, enables us to disentangle the subjective and objective elements in the growth of knowledge. For example, the objectivity of science can be acknowledged and explained in terms of the character of internal questions. But if, on the other hand, we follow Quine in abandoning this distinction, a number of problems seem to arise. Once the situation is muddied by the recognition that pragmatic considerations may have a role in answering even internal questions, then it is difficult to sustain the claim that the theoretical parts of science are genuinely objective. We need to determine how Quine disentangles the subjective and objective elements in our knowledge. Are all questions analogous to internal ones for Quine, or are they analogous to external ones? And if neither analogy is appropriate, assuming subjective pragmatic criteria are invoked when we revise our opinions, can room be found for saying that we investigate an objective reality? These are the questions to which I now turn.

In "Two Dogmas" [11, ch. 2], Quine notes two effects of abandoning the analytic/synthetic distinction. The first is "a blurring of the supposed boundary between speculative metaphysics and natural science" and the other is a "shift toward pragmatism" [11, p. 20]. I will discuss the first of these effects in the next section, but for the moment I would like to focus on the shift toward pragmatism. In the closing sections of both "Two Dogmas" and "On What There Is" [11, ch. 1 & 2], Quine

gives numerous endorsements of pragmatism. It may first appear, then, that pragmatic considerations become relevant to all questions once the contrast between external and internal is abandoned. Curiously, though, the references to pragmatism vanish from Quine's later writings. As to whether this represents a substantive shift in Quine's thinking is an issue I will address a little later on. For the moment, I would like to focus on the possibility that Quine's pragmatism requires that *all* questions have the status of Carnap's external questions. If this were the case, realism would go by the board for all objectivity would be lost. Could this have been what Quine wanted?

Well, many passages in [11] seem to support just such a reading. In "Identity, Ostension and Hypostasis" [11, ch. 4], for example, Quine refers to Duhem and asserts that it is meaningless to "inquire into the absolute correctness of a conceptual scheme as a mirror of reality" [11, p. 79]. He goes on to say:

> "Our standard for appraising basic changes of conceptual scheme must be, not a realist standard of correspondence to reality, but a pragmatic standard. Concepts are language, and the purpose of concepts and of language is efficacy in communication and prediction. Such is the ultimate duty of language, science and philosophy, and it is in relation to that duty that a conceptual scheme has finally to be appraised" [11, p. 79].

And again, in "On What There Is" [11, ch. 1], after admitting that choice of ontology like choice of scientific theory rests upon pragmatic considerations of overall simplicity and coherence, Quine appears to advocate a tolerant pragmatic pluralism or relativism.

Our acceptance of an ontology is, according to Quine,

> "similar in principle to our acceptance of a scientific theory, say a system of physics: we adopt, at least insofar as we are reasonable, the simplest conceptual scheme into which the disordered fragments of raw experience can be fitted and arranged" [11, p. 16].

Our ontology is determined once we have fixed upon the overall conceptual scheme that is to accommodate science in the broadest sense. Noting, however, that simplicity is not a clear and unambiguous idea, Quine contrasts two conceptual schemes for coping with experience. One, a phenomenalistic scheme, talks only of sense experience and their prop-

erties; the other, a physicalist scheme, deals with ordinary physical objects.

> "Which should prevail? Each has its advantages; each has its special simplicity in its own way. Each, I suggest, deserves to be developed. Each may be said, indeed, to be the more fundamental, though in different senses: the one is epistemologically, the other physically, fundamental" [11, p. 17].

From the point of view of the phenomenalistic scheme, and from Quine's own empiricist outlook, physical objects are imported to make coherent sense of our experience as "irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer" [11, p. 44].

> "For my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in the gods of Homer; and I consider it a scientific error to do otherwise. But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conceptions only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proven more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience" [11, p. 44].

It is easy to take away from this the picture that all inquiry is a more or less useful kind of myth making. On this anti-realist reading of Quine, there is no sense in which one or another of the myths is objectively true; we can approach our experience without seeing any one of them as fundamental.

Is this how we should read Quine? Nelson Goodman [9, 10], a figure close to Quine in many ways, has developed a view similar to the one under consideration. In [10], Goodman explicitly defends an anti-realist pluralism or relativism. He contrasts many different "versions" of the world that we construct—those of science, of common sense, of literature, music, and other arts—and deplores the view that some one of these is closer to reality or more perspicuous as a representation of it than the other. For Goodman, there is not one true account of reality, but as many versions of it as we construct and find to be fruitful. Could this be what Quine wanted? I think the answer is no. In a review of Goodman's book, Quine rejects this tolerant pluralism [17, ch. 11]. And in his later writings, Quine increasingly describes himself as a realist and turns to the physical sciences for a description of reality.

What we need is a reading of Quine that makes him less offensive to Devitt's Realism, but which, at the same time, does justice to these earlier insights. The reading I will suggest, and the position I wish to defend, is a form of *internal realism*: a realism that captures the intuition that most common-sense and scientific existence statements are objectively true, but claims that this objectivity arises only from within a particular language, theory, or conceptual scheme.[9] The objectivity will arise because, "judged [from] within some particular conceptual scheme...an ontological statement goes without saying, standing in need of no separate justification at all" [11, p. 10]. As for why the conceptual scheme should be a realist one, this will be discussed in the following section. Although this internal realism will preserve more objectivity than Goodman's versions, it will not fulfill the demands of Devitt's maxims. For if Quine is correct, when we set out to answer the question of realism "we must talk about the world as well as about language, and to talk about the world we must already impose upon the world some conceptual scheme peculiar to our own special language" [11, p. 78]. It can only be internal to such a conceptual scheme that realism makes sense, for "we cannot detach ourselves from it and compare it objectively with an unconceptualized reality" [11, p. 79]. Devitt overlooks the important role that conceptual scheme and language play in settling the ontological issue, and his maxims therefore reflect an untenable dualism between the two.

III. Quine's Realism and Naturalism

We just saw how Quine adopts a pragmatic standard for appraising basic changes of conceptual scheme, and we were afraid that this would lead to a loss of objectivity—i.e., we feared that Quine's pragmatism essentially involved turning every question into an external one. I think this is the wrong way to approach Quine. As we will now see, I think it is less misleading to say that he turns every question into an internal one. For Quine, our views of what exists evolve with the language we speak. And since our ontology is internal to the language we speak, and we can never

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[9]I am here using the term *objective* in a different sense than Devitt. Objectivity, for Devitt, recall, means "that it is not *constituted by* our knowledge, by our epistemic values, by our capacities to refer to it, by the synthesizing power of the mind, by our imposition of concepts, theories, or language" [4, p. 15]. Part of what I'm arguing is that this is not a good definition of objectivity, for the issue of realism can never be separated out from all these other issues. My use of objectivity should become clearer in what follows.

step outside language altogether, we can only appraise our ontology in a piece-meal way.

The anti-realist reading of Quine considered in the previous section results from ignoring important continuities between philosophy and the rest of our knowledge; continuities that are required by the holism Quine urges in [11] and elsewhere. It also ignores Quine's naturalism and empiricism. As I will now argue, the naturalistic philosopher is justified in taking for granted his everyday view of the world when he considers questions about knowledge, meaning, and ontology. And although this will bring with it a certain amount of objectivity, there will always be room for adjustments. These adjustments can still be made on pragmatic grounds; it's just that the pragmatic standards must be applied internal to the conceptual scheme one occupies, and they must be answerable to experience.

It is time, then, to introduce what Quine calls the fifth and final milestone of empiricism: the milestone of naturalism [17, p. 72]. Quine's *naturalized epistemology* abandons the old goal of first philosophy and instead views epistemology as an enterprise within natural science. Attempts at transcendent doubt, or transcendent justification, are no longer seen as worthy pursuits. The philosopher and the scientist are in the same boat according to Quine, and "unlike the old epistemologists, we seek no firmer basis for science than science itself" [18, p. 16]. The futility of trying to doubt everything all at once, or trying to achieve an external position, is replaced by the analogy of Neurath's mariner who "has to rebuild his boat while staying afloat in it" [13, p. 84].

According to the new naturalistic approach, epistemology "simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science" [13, p. 82]. It views the human subject as a natural phenomenon, and uses empirical science to study epistemic activity. Epistemology, in its new setting, is seen as a scientific study of how the human subject takes sensory stimulation as inputs and delivers as output a theory of the three-dimensional world.

In our attempt to answer the central epistemological question, viz., how did we acquire such a responsible theory of the external world, Quine believes we are free to use the fruits of science to investigate its roots. In a nice summary of the position, Quine writes:

> "Cartesian doubt is not the way to begin. Retaining our present beliefs about nature, we can still ask how we arrived at them. Science tells us that our only source of informa-

> tion about the external world is through the impact of light
> rays and molecules upon our sensory surfaces. Stimulated
> in this way, we somehow evolve an elaborate and useful sci-
> ence. How do we do this, and why does the resulting science
> work so well? These are genuine questions, and no feigning
> of doubt is needed to appreciate them. They are scientific
> questions about a species of primates, and they are open to
> investigation in natural science, the very science whose ac-
> quisition is being investigated" [15, p. 68].

This use of science to investigate its own acquisition and success is a
radical break from traditional epistemology, for it abandons the quest
for a nonscientific justification of our knowledge of the external world.

How, then, does naturalism relate to the issue of realism? Well, we
can now say that it is our scientific theories and common-sense beliefs
about reality that serve as the fabric of Neurath's boat, and which allow
it to stay afloat when threatened by philosophical perplexities. Once
naturalism is embraced there remains no reason to doubt such beliefs and
it seems natural that realism should follow. The naturalistic philosopher
works from within a realist worldview since it's the one that science
dictates. As Devitt puts it:

> "Naturalized epistemology takes science, and hence its posits
> pretty much for granted. And an obvious starting assump-
> tion is the aforementioned one that these posits exist objec-
> tively and independently of the mental. So it approaches
> epistemology from a Realist standpoint; it is in accord with
> Maxim 3" [4, p. 76].

Quine appears to agree with Devitt about the relationship between nat-
uralism and realism. He points out, for example, that naturalism reflects
an "unregenerate realism" [17, p. 72]. And he adds:

> "The naturalistic philosopher begins his reasoning within the
> inherited world theory as a going concern. He tentatively
> believes all of it, but believes also that some unidentified
> portions are wrong. He tries to improve, clarify, and under-
> stand the system from within. He is a busy sailor adrift on
> Neurath's boat" [17, p. 72].

Both seem to agree that in accepting naturalism we have no choice but
to continue to take seriously our own particular world-theory, or loose
total fabric of quasi-theories. But what does it mean to "take seriously"

our current theories, and does that lead to the brand of Realism that Devitt desires?

Perhaps it simply means that we should take science seriously since it's the only game in town. But in that case, what does science itself tell us about scientific activity? We learn in Quine that our only source of information about the external world is through the impact of light rays and molecules upon our sensory surfaces. From a practical point of view, its utility lies in fulfilling expectation and true prediction:

> "Our talk of external things, our very notion of things, is just a conceptual apparatus that helps us to foresee and control the triggering of our sensor receptors in the light of previous triggering of our sensory receptors. The triggering, first and last, is all we have to go on" [17, p. 1].

Quine denies that these remarks have any skeptical content, for the passage is itself about external things—people and nerve endings. And for Quine, "There is nothing we can be more certain of than external things—some of them anyway—other people, sticks and stones" [17, p. 1-2]. But he goes on to add, "there remains the fact—a fact of science itself—that science is a conceptual bridge linking sensory stimulation to sensory stimulation" [17, p. 2].

Although Quine embraces an almost unrepenting physicalism in his later writings, it would seem that his theory here does not support such an austere position. If science teaches us that science is nothing but a conceptual bridge, valued because we are enabled to anticipate the future course of experience, doesn't science itself undermine its claim to give us a "true" account of physical reality? If different theories, offering alternative accounts of the underlying nature of matter, were equally effective in enabling us to avoid perceptual surprise, what sense attaches to the claim that one is true and the other false? It appears that the pragmatist claims of Section II have not been left behind.

Devitt considers such an objection [4, 5.9] but dismisses it quickly. He concludes that "Realism alone explains 'the regularities in our experiences' " [4, p. 80]. This may simply be, however, a lack of imagination on Devitt's part. What reason, except for some *a priori* one, do we have for thinking that no alternative to our current conceptual scheme could be equally successful in communication and prediction? I believe that Devitt, and Quine himself at times, downplay without cause the important pragmatic features of [11].

In his later writings in particular, Quine seems hell-bent on defending physicalism. I imagine it's because he believes that our best theorizing

will lead to a physicalistic conceptual scheme:

> "A physicalistic conceptual scheme, purporting to talk about external objects, offers great advantages in simplifying our over-all reports. By bringing together scattered sense events and treating them as perceptions of one object, we reduce the complexity of our stream of experience to a manageable conceptual simplicity" [11, p. 17].

I think someone could agree with Quine that philosophy should fall into place as a part of science, while rejecting Quine's own "scientific" view of reality. Quine is a physicalist, and he sometimes claims that the physical facts are all the facts. It is physics that describes the nature of reality, and sciences other than physics are treated with some suspicion.[10] In a review of J.J.C. Smart, Quine endorses the claim that "the physicist's language gives us a *truer* picture of the world than does the language of common sense" [17, p. 92-93]. This I find unwarranted. The retreat from Carnap's external perspective to Neurath's boat does not offer any obvious basis for adopting this austere conception of the structure of reality.

Let me contrast two ways in which Neurath's boat metaphor could be developed. According to the first (version A), we start with a vast, somewhat disorganized structure comprising all of our common-sense beliefs and prejudices, together with scientific beliefs drawn from all the different disciplines. As a result of scientific inquiries, this corpus of opinions grows and evolves: new opinions are added, old ones are jettisoned, and others are reformulated or revised in other ways. This is the most natural reading of the doctrine. My remarks about Quine's physicalism, however, might suggest an alternative interpretation (version B). Since only physics describes the facts, all that the boat metaphor is supposed to represent is the development of physical theory. Common-sense assurances, theories from chemistry, biology, economics, historical descriptions, would then have no place in the boat. If this second version is required by Quine's physicalism, it is hard to see why it is preferable to the first.

In addition, I need not settle this issue at all to make the point I wish to make. Since science is a linguistic structure that is keyed to observation only at points, our talk of the external world is "just a

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[10]Quine's psychology, for example, is heavily behavioristic and physiological, having little room for the patterns of explanation used in common-sense discussions of the mind and action. Quine's physicalism is the principle source of the distinctive flavor of his philosophical position.

conceptual apparatus that helps us to foresee and control the triggering of our sensory receptors in the light of previous triggering of our sensory receptors" [17, p. 1]. Once this is acknowledged, it will be realized that Neurath's boat is a conceptual one, making contact with some external reality from time to time, but creating its own reality while out at sea! We can always fight over which theory (or set of theories) should be accepted based on pragmatic and epistemic grounds, but it's meaningless to inquire into the absolute correctness of a conceptual scheme as a mirror of reality for "we cannot detach ourselves from it and compare it objectively with an unconceptualized reality" [11, p. 79].

This brings us to an important point. The naturalistic picture that has developed makes use of two different conceptions of reality. One is differentiated into objects and is relative to the language that differentiates it, and the other one is undifferentiated. This latter is reminiscent of Kant. It is what produces in us the disordered fragments of raw experience, the scattered sense events. Although in "Two Dogmas" [11, ch. 2] Quine denies that we are *conscious* of any raw data, his naturalized epistemology retains a similar dualism ([12, ch. 1]; [13, ch. 3]). Our knowledge of the external world is mediated through "stimulations" at the surfaces of our perceptual organs, and our framework of sentences is tied down to reality only insofar as it enables us to anticipate these stimulations. These stimulations receive conceptual interpretation through our activity of inquiry: "we adopt, at least insofar as we are reasonable, the simplest conceptual scheme into which the disordered fragments or raw experience can be fitted or arranged" [11, p. 16]. For Kant, the ordering in question is transcendental. For Quine, who rejects Kant's distinctions,[11] all ordering is a matter of theorizing.

A serious problem arises here for Devitt's formulation of the Realism doctrine. We can even say that a paradox threatens: Devitt is unable to make use of either of the two notions of reality that naturalism recognizes. The undifferentiated notion is no good because, at best, it can only secure a brand of Fig-Leaf Realism. And the differentiated notion of reality does not possess the mind-independence and objectivity that Devitt desires; it is conceptual through-and-through. If science is just a linguistic and conceptual structure that is keyed to observation at some points, how can we take its posits as having *objective existence*—an existence "that is not *constituted by* our knowledge, by our epistemic values, by our capacities to refer to it, by the synthesizing power of the mind, by

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[11]Quine denies the distinction between the transcendental, *a priori*, and necessary on the one side, and the empirical, *a posteriori*, and contingent on the other.

our imposition of concepts, theories, or language" [4, p. 15]? It appears
that Devitt is left with only one option: to embrace internal realism.

IV. Internal Realism

According to internal realism, the differentiated reality that naturalism
recognizes lacks "objective existence" (as defined by Devitt), for it *is*
constituted by our imposition of concepts, theories, and language. In
fact, science itself teaches us that it is so constituted! Internal realism,
however, still maintains its *own* brand of objectivity. It's the kind that
comes along with being internal to a conceptual scheme. Just what is
involved in treating an area of discourse as objective? What does it mean
to view a conceptual scheme, language, or theory as describing a facet
of reality? According to internal realism, it simply means taking one's
conceptual scheme seriously and owning the beliefs of the moment. It has
nothing to do with correspondence to some "external" or "independent"
reality.[12]

Suppose that according to my current theory (or as part of my total
fabric of quasi-theories), protons have positive charge. This will mani-
fest itself in several ways: in the explanations I accept, in the inferences
I draw, and the assertions I make. Among these assertions will be the
assertion that protons carry positive charge. My taking this as "ob-
jective," or as describing a facet of reality, consists in the fact that I
say, "Protons carry positive charge." Relativity to theory is not explicit
or implicit in my speech act; I simply treat it as assertible. The fact
that it is assertible serves as a kind of fixed point for philosophical and
scientific reflection. Internal realism therefore claims that our scientific
and common-sense views of the world provide us with our substantive
conception of reality—that which we take to be objective.

Internal realism follows Quine in rejecting the Carnapian framework.
And part of that rejection is the denial that we can step back and take
up a transcendental view of our knowledge. This "realism" reflects the
view that our cognitive position is always internal to a body of substan-
tive theory: "Whatever we affirm, after all, we affirm as a statement

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[12]Internal realism denies, as do Quine and Devitt, that the issue of realism can be
formulated in terms of a correspondence notion of truth (or any other substantive
notion). Quine, for example, embraces a purely deflationary or disquotational notion
of truth (e.g., [14]). And Devitt argues that the correspondence theory of truth is in
no way constitutive of his doctrine of Realism [4, 8]. Devitt maintains that Realism
does not entail the correspondence theory, and the correspondence theory does not
entail Realism.

within our aggregate theory of nature as we now see it; and to call a statement true is just to reaffirm it" [16, p. 327]. But internal realism also acknowledges that our "aggregate theory of nature" has a certain amount of relativity to it. And this need not be in conflict with naturalism. For naturalism itself tell us that our knowledge of external objects is mediated through sensations or experiences (or stimulations), which receive conceptual interpretation through our activities of inquiry. It acknowledges a dualism of data and interpretation.

Now it's possible that Devitt would be open to such a position. In fact, he may even argue that his doctrine of Realism says nothing more than my Quinean brand of internal realism. If that were the case, then there would be nothing more than a verbal dispute between us as to what we should call the position. I am skeptical, however, that Devitt would agree with everything I've argued. For one, the differentiated reality that constitutes what I'm calling internal realism has a certain amount of relativity to it, and I'm not sure Devitt wants to acknowledge such relativity. In addition, internal realism maintains that we can never step outside our own conceptual scheme, language, or theory so as to settle the realism issue. Although there may be a sense of reality that allows us to secure a brand of Fig-Leaf Realism, the reality that matters most to us is the one that's constituted by our conceptual scheme. It is only internal to a conceptual scheme that the issues of realism and objectivity make any sense.

Gregg Caruso
Corning Community College
1 Academic Drive
Corning, NY 14830,
USA
`<gcaruso@corning-cc.edu>`

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