A HUNDRED YEARS OF PHILOSOPHY

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CHAPTER 11

The New Realists

In the early years of the present century, it could no longer be presumed that Realism was intellectually disreputable, a mere vulgar prejudice. What a mind knows, Brentano and Meinong had argued, exists independently of the act by which it is known; Mach, and James after him – if they were still, from a Realist point of view, tainted with subjectivism – had at least denied that what is immediately perceived is a state of mind; and then Moore, seconded by Russell, had rejected that thesis which Idealists like Bradley and phenomenalists like Mill had united in regarding as indisputable: that the existence of objects of perception consists in the fact that they are perceived. The 'New Realism' brought together these converging tendencies; it owed much to Meinong, more to Mach and James, and it acknowledged the help of Moore and Russell in the battle against Idealism.

The first, in England, to formulate the characteristic doctrines of the New Realism was T. P. Nunn.[1] Best known as an educationalist, Nunn wrote little on philosophy, but that little had an influence out of all proportion to its modest dimensions. In particular, his contribution to a symposium on 'Are Secondary Qualities Independent of Perception?'[2] was widely studied both in England where, as we have already noted, it struck Bertrand Russell's roving fancy, and in the United States. Nunn there sustained two theses: (1) that both the primary and the secondary qualities of bodies are really in them, whether they are perceived or not; (2) that qualities exist as they are perceived.

Much of his argument is polemical in form, with Stout's earlier articles[3] as its chief target. Stout had thought he could begin by presuming that there are at least *some* elements in our experience which exist only in being perceived – he instanced pain. But Nunn objects that pain, precisely in the manner of a material object, presents difficulties to us, raises obstacles in our path, is, in short, something we must reckon with. 'Pain,' he therefore concludes, 'is something outside my mind, with which my mind may come into various relations.' A refusal to admit that *anything* we ex-

perience depends for its existence upon the fact that it is experienced was to be the most characteristic feature of the New Realism.

The secondary qualities, Stout had also said, exist only as objects of experience. If we look at a buttercup in a variety of lights we see different shades of colour, without having any reason to believe that the buttercup itself has altered; if a number of observers plunge their hands into a bowl of water, they will report very different degrees of warmth, even although nothing has happened which could affect the water's temperature. Such facts demonstrate, Stout thought, that secondary qualities exist only as 'sensa' – objects of our perception; they are not actual properties of physical objects.

Nunn's reply is uncompromising. The contrast between 'sensa' and 'actual properties' is, he argues, an untenable one. All the shades of colour which the buttercup presents to an observer are actual properties of the buttercup; and all the hotnesses of the water are properties of the water. The plain man and the scientist ascribe a standard temperature and a standard colour to a thing and limit it to a certain region of space, because its complexity would otherwise defeat them. The fact remains, Nunn argues, that a thing has not one hotness, for example, but many, and that these hotnesses are not in a limited region of space but in various places around about the standard object. A thing is hotter an inch away than a foot away and hotter on a cold hand than on a warm one, just as it is a paler yellow in one light than it is in another light. To imagine otherwise is to confuse between the arbitrary 'thing' of everyday life and the 'thing' as experience shows it to be.

In Nunn's theory of perception, then, the ordinary conception of a material thing is revolutionized; that is the price he has to pay for his Realism. A 'thing', now, is a collection of appearances, even if every appearance is independent of the mind before which it appears. Nunn's realism, at this point, is very like Mach's phenomenalism. The same is true of American New Realism.

Scottish 'common-sense philosophy', as we have already observed, dominated the American Universities during the greater part of the nineteenth century; nor was it entirely swept out of existence either by James's pragmatism or by Royce's idealism.

Peirce, to take the most notable case, continued to admire that 'subtle and well-balanced intellect, Thomas Reid'; his 'critical commonsensism'[4] owed much to Reid and his school. When Peirce criticized Reid, furthermore, it was from a Realist point of view; Reid, he complained, had not wholly shaken himself free from the Cartesian doctrine of representative perception. 'We have *direct experience of things in themselves*,' Peirce wrote in 1896. 'Nothing can be more completely false than that we can experience only our own ideas. That is indeed without exaggeration the very epitome of *all* falsity.'

The American tendency towards Realism, however, had been vigorously opposed by Royce in *The World and the Individual* (1900). Realism was there defined as, above all, a defence of independence, and Royce criticized it as such. 'The world of fact,' Royce describes the Realist as maintaining, 'is independent of our knowledge of that world . . . the vanishing of our minds from that world would make no difference in the being of the independent facts we know.' Royce's counter-argument, lengthy, robust and ingenious, is designed to show that if independence is ultimate – not mere 'appearance' – then all relations, including the relation of knowledge, are impossible in principle. In trying to preserve the independence of the objects of knowledge the Realist ends, according to Royce, by destroying the very possibility of knowledge.

Royce's attack provoked an immediate reply from two of his former pupils, R. B. Perry and W. P. Montague.[5] Relatedness and independence, they argued, are perfectly compatible. The task of explaining in what 'independence' consists is not, however, an easy one; in England, Schiller had attacked Nunn on this very point. To give a satisfactory account of independence was one of the two main problems which confronted the New Realists; the other was to explain, without abandoning Realism, how reality is to be distinguished from illusion – that rock on which so many hopefully-launched Realisms have foundered.

American philosophical journals, in the first decade of the present century, contain a multitude of attempts to sketch a Realist philosophy which would deal satisfactorily with these problems. But New Realism did not come of age until the publication in 1912 of *The New Realism*, a cooperative volume with

contributions by E. B. Holt, W. T. Marvin, W. P. Montague, R. B. Perry, W. B. Pitkin and E. G. Spaulding.

The *New Realism* is the Realist equivalent of Idealism's *Essays in Philosophical Criticism*. A number of philosophers, by no means unanimous on every point, felt that they had in common a method of approach to philosophy, with the help of which they could satisfy their diverse aims. A manifesto,[6] it begins with a long explanatory preface and ends with a series of brief policy-speeches. The world of philosophy could no longer pretend ignorance of the fact that a new and revolutionary spirit of Realism was abroad.

In many respects, however, *The New Realism* had little to add except liveliness of statement to Moore's *Refutation of Idealism*. In other ways, again – in maintaining, for example, that philosophy is 'peculiarly dependent upon logic' and in defending the validity of analysis against the Idealist doctrine that 'the truth is the whole' – the New Realism is mainly important as a medium through which Russell's conception of philosophy was naturalized in America. Yet one must not overestimate the New Realism's indebtedness to English philosophy. Russell, after all, had learnt many of his most characteristic doctrines from William James, whom he describes as 'the most important of all critics of Monism'. The point most vital in the logic of *The New Realism* – that relations are external – James had particularly urged. Marvin summed up that doctrine with rare succinctness. 'In the proposition "the term *a* is in the relation *R* to the term *b*", *aR* in no degree constitutes *b*, nor does *Rb* constitute *a*, nor does *R* constitute either *a* or *b*.' From this it follows, presuming that knowledge is a relation, that the known is not constituted by its relation to the knower, or the knower by its relation to the known, or either knower or known by the fact that it is a constituent in the knowledge relation.

On so much, the New Realists agreed. There was not the same agreement about the nature of the knower or the nature of the known. When Russell referred favourably to the 'new Realism' he meant the 'neutral monism' which Perry and Holt had worked out under the influence of Mach, James and Nunn.[7] Other New Realists, Montague especially, were highly critical of neutral monism.

The Holt-Perry variety of realism is an out-radicalizing of James's radical empiricism. James had denied that there is such an entity as 'consciousness'; its adherents, he wrote, 'are clinging to a mere echo, the faint rumour left behind by the disappearing "soul" upon the air of philosophy'. There are only 'experiences'; knowing is a relation between portions of pure experience. F. J. E. Woodbridge,[8] however, had objected that 'experience' can only be defined as that of which a conscious being is aware; to talk of 'experience', therefore, is already to presume the reality of consciousness. Perry and Holt recognized the force of Woodbridge's criticism, which they tried to meet by defining experience without making any reference, explicit or implicit, to consciousness.

For this purpose, they adapted to their ends another facet of James's many-sided philosophy. James had emphasized – this had been the theme of one of his earliest essays, 'Spencer's Definition of Mind' (1878) – that a human being is an organism which has to maintain itself in an environment which sometimes favours, and sometimes threatens, its survival. Perry took over from James this emphasis on the human organism, and united with it a theory of perception which Bergson had sketched in his *Matter and Memory*: a mind's 'content', Bergson had argued, consists of that part of its environment to which its attention is momentarily directed. Mind, Perry concluded, is 'an interested response by an organism'. Our 'consciousness of a table', for example, consists simply in the fact that our nervous system is interested in the table. No entity, 'consciousness', is here involved, not even in the form of a 'mental act'.

Thus the familiar distinction between the 'private' contents of a particular consciousness and the 'public' world of science is, on the Holt-Perry view, quite unwarranted. James, in his 'How Two Minds can Know One Thing' (*JP*, 1905), had suggested that an experience is 'mine' only as it is *felt* as mine, and 'yours' as it is *felt* as yours – which does not prevent it from being in fact both mine and yours. Following up this hint, Perry condemns as 'the fallacy of exclusive particularity' the argument that because something is in your mind it cannot be in my mind; if it were not for the fact that the contents of minds intersect, he maintains, any sort of inter-human communication would be impossible.

No doubt, Perry admits, other people sometimes find it difficult to decide what I am thinking about – that is why it is plausible to suggest that the contents of my mind are private to me – but this difficulty, he says, never amounts to an impossibility. Even in the hardest of all cases, the case where I am remembering something, a careful observer, according to Perry, *could* apprehend what I have before my mind. 'My remembering London,' he says, 'consists of such elements as my central attentive process, certain persisting modifications of my cerebrum, my original dealings, practical and neural, with London – and London itself.' All of these are open to public observation, in principle at least.

The central teachings of neutral monism ought by now to be clear. 'Consciousness' is abandoned; and so also are the 'act of awareness' and the 'sense-datum', in the form they take in Moore's theory of perception. Nothing exists except objective 'elements'. Knowing is a relation between such elements, a relation peculiar only in that at least one of its terms must be an organic process.

The usual objection springs to our lips. 'But what of error and hallucination? Are pink rats and bent sticks objective elements?' Holt is perfectly willing to accept this consequence. 'Every content,' he writes, 'subsists in the all-inclusive universe of being.' But surely, we protest, some contents are real, others unreal. 'As to what reality is,' Holt aloofly replies, in a passage which gave rise to more than a little shocked comment, 'I take no great interest.'

This is a natural enough answer, for on Holt's view the difference between the real and the unreal is an arbitrary convention. We set up a system of connected perceptions which, as Hume expressed the matter, we 'dignify with the name of reality'; we call a perception 'real', according to Holt, if it has a place in such a system, and 'unreal' if we wish to deny it the right of entrance to this exclusive society. As Russell mischievously put the same point, some perceptions form part of the 'official biography' of a thing – its staid, respectable behaviour under normal circumstances – whereas others are wild, abnormal, best forgotten, unless the epistemologist insists upon acting as a muck-raker. The philosopher, Holt is saying, cannot be expected to bother his

enlightened head with so merely respectable a distinction.

On the ordinary account of the matter, there is a sharp distinction between, say, those properties of a tree which 'really belong to it' and those, such as its perspective foreshortenings, which are 'unreal' or 'subjective'. But Holt follows Nunn in arguing that the innumerable geometrical projections of the tree – to any of which the nervous system may react – have each of them an equal right to be regarded as belonging to it, even if it is convenient for practical purposes to describe a certain shape as its 'real shape'. The projections, it is clear, are all actual relations of the tree, and there is no precise way, Holt argues, of distinguishing between 'the tree' and 'its relations'. As in Nunn's case, then, the Holt-Perry defence of the commonsense view that the objects of perception exist independently of the perceiver culminates in what is anything but a commonsense view about the nature of the objects themselves.

American New Realism was, indeed, severely criticized on just this point. There was something suspect in the very ingenuity which Perry and Holt brought to bear upon their epistemology. The original group disintegrated; Holt became a distinguished psychologist, Perry a moral theorist and a scholar, Pitkin made his reputation by advising a multitude of readers how to be happy though forty; Montague continued to philosophize, but in a manner certainly not New Realist; neither Marvin nor Spaulding made substantial contributions to philosophy.[9] Yet the movement had made its impact. As Perry suggests in his *Realism in Retrospect* (*CAP*, 2) it was an important wing of the contemporary battle against Cartesianism; the New Realism attacked dualism in the interests of a theory more sympathetic to the empirical spirit of the age than Absolute Idealism could ever be. And whatever the difficulties in which the New Realists found themselves, the force of their polemics against Cartesianism and Absolutism was unaffected. Few philosophers, nowadays, would *wholly* reject the name of 'Realist'.

Marvin's contribution to *The New Realism* had borne the title 'The Emancipation of Philosophy from Epistemology'. An odd-sounding title; for Realism had ordinarily been, above all else, an epistemology. But in Marvin's eyes, a Realist epistemology is important mainly because it leaves the philosopher free to under-

take the study of 'metaphysics' – understood as an attempt to discover 'the highest generalizations warranted by our present knowledge'. If, as philosophers since Descartes had been accustomed to maintain, all knowledge is based upon knowledge of the contents of our own mind, then it seemed plausible to conclude that an inquiry into the human mind ought to precede any inquiry into reality itself; and the final effect of this circuitous approach to metaphysics had been the actual absorption of metaphysics, at least in empirical philosophies, into epistemology. If, on the other hand, knowing is merely one of the many external relations which link our experience, there is no reason to believe that a detailed epistemology is an essential propaedeutic to metaphysics. The metaphysician is thus emancipated, Marvin thought, from his servile dependence upon the epistemologist.

It was left to a British philosopher, Samuel Alexander, to work out a recognizably Realist metaphysics. His *Space, Time and Deity* was published in 1920, at the beginning of a decade remarkably productive of metaphysical systems; the first volume of McTaggart's *The Nature of Existence* appeared in 1921 and Whitehead's *Process and Reality* in 1929. *The Nature of Existence*, however, belongs in its essentials to the British 'neo-Hegelian' movement; *Space, Time and Deity*, like *Process and Reality*, has the New Realism behind it, even although it is by no means unaffected by Bradley and Bosanquet. And there is another vital difference between *Space, Time and Deity* and *The Nature of Existence*; McTaggart is trying to construct a strictly deductive metaphysics, Alexander to 'give a plain description' of the world in which we live and move and do our thinking. In his 'Some Explanations' (*Mind*, 1921), Alexander goes so far as to assert that he *dislikes* arguments, a strange pronouncement from a philosopher. 'Philosophy,' he says, 'proceeds by description: it only uses argument in order to help you to see the facts, just as a botanist uses a microscope.' In an earlier article on 'Sensations and Images' (*PAS*, 1910) his affiliations with Husserl are even more obvious; his method, he says, is 'an attempt to exclude philosophical presuppositions, and to state what is actually present in a given experience'. Nothing could be more remote from *The Nature of Existence*, which is argument through and through.

Alexander's method makes *Space, Time and Deity* a peculiarly difficult book to read and to discuss; in many respects, it is more like a work of literature than a philosophy. We expect from a philosopher a running thread of argument, interspersed with polemics. But there is very little of this in Alexander; he simply puts a hypothesis before us and then tells us to look and see how reasonable it all is, how admirably it squares with our experience. He does not exhort us, he does not argue with us, he merely bids us cast off our sophistication and look at the world through the naïve eyes of absolute innocence; yet the world he thus presents to us is complex and sophisticated in the extreme. Most philosophers have refused to follow his guidance; for all the acclaim which greeted its appearance, *Space, Time and Deity* is not now widely read. But it has its staunch admirers, some of them prepared to maintain that it is the most important contribution to philosophy our century has known.

When Alexander reached Oxford from Australia in 1877[10] his first contacts were with men of note in the Idealist movement – Green, Nettleship and A. C. Bradley were all tutors at Balliol in Alexander's time. He was naturally influenced by their teachings; and even when he broke with the Idealists, they continued to speak of him with a respect they rarely showed to New Realists – although this charity did not survive the bleakness of Cambridge where McTaggart, forgetting his own blackened pots, complained of *Space, Time and Deity* that 'in every chapter we come across some view which no philosopher, except Professor Alexander, has ever maintained'. It would be inhuman to expect the arch-enemy of Time to praise its arch-prophet.

Influences of a distinctly different sort were also at work on Alexander; the new biology and the new experimental psychology won his admiration. Stout and Alexander, indeed, collaborated in the defence of psychology against its Oxford critics. Alexander's friends did not know whether to be amused or alarmed by his psychological experiments. This was not merely the enthusiasm of youth; *Space, Time and Deity* appeals more often to experimental psychology than to any other form of empirical inquiry. Similarly, the influence of biology, so apparent in Alexander's first book *Moral Order and Progress* (1889) – which belongs to the school of Leslie Stephen – was never wholly to be dissipated;

conceptions derived from biology play an important part in *Space, Time and Deity*.

First, however, Alexander was to make his name as an epistemologist, in a long series of articles culminating in 'The Basis of Realism' (*PBA*, 1914). The immediate stimulus which provoked Alexander's paper was the appearance of Bosanquet's *The Distinction between Mind and its Objects* (1913). In that book Bosanquet welcomed Realism as an ally in the Idealists' battle against the theory of representative perception and, what is ordinarily associated with it, the 'brickbat theory of matter'. But his final verdict on Realism was nevertheless adverse: it sinned gravely, he argued, by speaking of mind as if it were simply one particular entity in a world of particular entities. 'I should compare my consciousness to an atmosphere,' Bosanquet wrote, 'not to a thing at all. Its nature is to include. The nature of objects is to be included. . . . I never seem to think in the form "my mind is here and the tree is there".'

In sharp opposition, Alexander maintains that consciousness is a property of certain organic structures; the tree, for him, is not *in* my consciousness but *before* it, as an object 'compresent' with a conscious being. Alexander, indeed, was permanently influenced by Moore's 'Refutation of Idealism'; although he was attracted by the neutral monist reduction of the 'mental act' to an organic response he could never persuade himself wholly to reject the act-object analysis. For Alexander, however – and this brings him closer to Holt and Perry than to Moore – an act of mind is a *conation*, a response to an object. It is such a conation, not a cognitive act, which cognizes an object.[11] And the 'content' of a mental act, for Alexander, is not a pale copy of its object; it consists in those psychological features peculiar to the mental act as a process – its intensity and its direction.

If this is the real situation, if knowledge is nothing more than the 'compresence' of a mental act and an object, how account, we might ask, for the very existence of views like Bosanquet's? What confuses Bosanquet, Alexander argues, is his acceptance of the common assumption that in contemplating an object we are at the same time contemplating the act which knows it. Then the consequence follows that in perceiving *X* my real object is not *X* but 'my consciousness of *X*', within which *X* is somehow an

ingredient. Since, however, *X* is obviously not 'in my consciousness' in that sense of 'consciousness' in which it is identical with an individual mind, 'consciousness' has to be converted into a general 'medium' or 'atmosphere' within which things exist.

Alexander, however, is determined to retain the common-sense distinction between individual minds and their objects; he cuts the ground from under the Idealist argument by denying that we ever contemplate a mental act. Acts cannot be contemplated, but only 'enjoyed' – 'lived through', as it is sometimes put. Thus 'our consciousness of an object' is never, for us, an object of contemplation; what we contemplate is the object, simply – although we at the same time enjoy the act which is conscious of it.[12] The mental act and its object are sharply sundered. Objects cannot be enjoyed, mental acts cannot be contemplated. From 'an angel's point of view' – the point of view of a being higher than ourselves – our conscious act would be an object; an angel would contemplate our conscious act as something compresent with its object. But we are not angels; for us the mental act exists only as an enjoyment.

To know an object, for Alexander, is to be a mental act compresent with it. The familiar question inevitably occurs to us: if its objects are compresent with the mind, how can it fail to apprehend them as they are? In reply, Alexander, following Nunn, first of all admonishes us not to confuse between selective apprehension and error. A mind is conscious only of what stirs an impulse in it; its 'object' is not the complete thing with which it is compresent, but only a selection from that complete thing. This incompleteness is not, by itself, error. If two people see a table, one as a flat edge, the other as a corner, neither is in error, Alexander argues, unless he wrongly believes that what is true of his 'object' is true of the table as a whole. In general – a point Royce had also stressed – there is no error involved merely in *having* an object before our mind. If we look at a distant mountain, for example, we have blue before our minds; so far all is well: we make a mistake only if we go on to ascribe the blue to the distant mountain. Then we are confusing, according to Alexander, between one thing and another; we are imagining that an object lies within a certain spatio-temporal contour when it actually lies outside it. The error does not consist in our having a

non-existent object before us but in our *misplacing* a real object.

The same analysis applies in principle, he tries to show, to more difficult cases. Suppose we wrongly believe that a patch of grey paper against a red background is green. In this case, there is no green anywhere in the neighbourhood of the paper, as there was blue in the neighbourhood of the mountain. But the important point, to Alexander, is that green at least exists *somewhere*, and it is there spread out over an expanse just as we now suppose it to be spread over the paper. Both the object apprehended and its mode of combination with other objects already exist in the world; our error lies in misplacing or mistiming them: we do not create a wholly novel object. This theory of error, which is essential to Alexander's Realism, is worked out in *Space, Time and Deity* with a wealth of detail which can here only be mentioned, not conveyed.

'The temper of Realism,' Alexander wrote in *The Basis of Realism*, 'is to de-anthropomorphize; to order man and mind to their proper place among the world of finite things; on the one hand, to divest physical things of the colouring which they have received from the vanity or arrogance of mind; on the other, to assign them along with minds their due measure of self-existence.' Thus Realism, as he conceives it, is naturalistic; for it, the human being is one finite thing amongst others, not the ruler and lord of the finite universe. Such a naturalism is usually condemned on the ground that, as Alexander expresses the accusation, it 'degrades mind and robs it of its richness and its value'. Alexander's aim in *Space, Time and Deity* is to put mind in its place without degrading it. For this purpose, a useful instrument lay near at hand: the theory of 'emergent evolution'. The conception of 'emergence' goes back at least as far as G. H. Lewes' *Problems of Life and Mind* (1875); but it had more recently been worked up into a theory of evolution by the philosopher-biologist C. Lloyd Morgan.[12] Lloyd Morgan hoped to tread a midway path between 'mechanism' and 'vitalism'. The mechanists had set out to show that organisms are 'nothing but' physico-chemical structures, which have assumed their present shape as a result of the operations of natural selection. For the vitalist, on the contrary, an organism possesses a 'vital force'; it is, indeed a medium through which life struggles towards perfection.[13]

Lloyd Morgan had no patience with vitalism as a biological theory. 'With all due respect,' he wrote in *Instinct and Experience*, 'for M. Bergson's poetic genius – for his doctrine of Life is more akin to poetry than to science – his facile criticisms of Darwin's magnificent and truly scientific generalizations only serve to show to how large a degree the intermingling of problems involving the metaphysics of Source with those of scientific interpretation may darken counsel and serve seriously to hinder the progress of biology.' Vitalism, he argues, is not a scientific hypothesis, it is a metaphysics – a theory about the 'Source' of evolution, not a description of evolutionary processes. The theory of emergent evolution, on the other hand, purports to be a careful description of what actually happens in evolution, a description which at the same time brings to light the inadequacy of the 'mechanical' view that living processes are merely physico-chemical. In a genuine evolution, Morgan maintains – as distinct from the routine repetition of an established habit of action – there is always 'more in the conclusions than is contained in the premises'; in other words, the resultant process is never 'nothing but' the processes out of which it has evolved. Thus it is that modes of behaviour – consciousness, for example – can evolve out of physico-chemical processes without themselves being reducible to, although they are continuous with, such processes.

This doctrine of emergent evolution supplies the framework for Alexander's *Space, Time and Deity*. It might seem strange that a theory developed by a biologist for biology should be thus employed in a metaphysics; metaphysics is most often envisaged as a supra-scientific inquiry, in which science is, if not superseded, at least transcended. But for Alexander, metaphysics is itself a science, distinguishable from, say, physics only by its greater degree of comprehensiveness. Although its *method* differs from that of a natural science yet its conclusions must accord with the conclusions of scientists, and it can well take a hint from their discoveries. For its subject-matter is simply those pervasive features of things which are variously exemplified in the different fields of science: Space, Time, and the Categories.

Space and Time come first: 'it is not too much to say,' Alexander writes, 'that all the vital problems of philosophy depend

for their solution on the solution of the problem what Space and Time are and, more particularly, how they are related to each other.' Philosophers have usually depreciated time; this is obviously true of Bradley and McTaggart, amongst recent philosophers, and the same can be said, to a large degree, of Russell. 'There is some sense,' he had written in *Our Knowledge of the External World*, 'in which time is an unimportant and superficial characteristic of reality. Past and future must be acknowledged to be as real as the present, and a certain emancipation from slavery to time is essential to philosophical thought.' Any philosopher who approaches philosophy through logic is likely to argue in this way: on the face of it, implication is not a temporal relation and 'truth', as logic understands it, is eternal. One may note, in contrast, that for Alexander 'truth' is relative. 'Truth,' he says, 'varies and grows obsolete or even turns to falsehood'; to be 'true' is to be accepted by the 'social mind' and what that mind accepts varies from time to time.[14] And of inference, which like the Idealists he takes to be the subject matter of logic, he writes that it 'betrays most plainly that truth is not merely reality but its unity with mind, for inference weaves propositions into a system, and system and coherence belong not to reality as such but only in its relation to a mind.' Not even truths, then, and not even logical relations are eternal; Alexander is 'taking time seriously' with a vengeance.

Bergson had already sought to rehabilitate time. But Bergson elevated time, Alexander thought, at the expense of Space, and in the process left it completely mysterious. In this respect, the opposition between Bergson and Alexander is complete: Bergson's philosophy is a protest against the interpretation of time in spatial terms, whereas Alexander maintains that this is how it *must* be interpreted, although equally, he grants, space must be interpreted in temporal terms. Neither space nor time, indeed, is intelligible in itself; each can be understood only by reference to the other, as an aspect of Space-Time.[15]

Alexander did not think it necessary to show in detail that time and space by themselves are unintelligible. In their negative arguments, he was prepared to follow Bradley and McTaggart: pure time would have to be at once pure succession and pure duration. But he does not conclude, as they did, that time is

'unreal'; we meet it in our experience, Alexander argues, and must describe it as we find it there. In that experience, however, it is never *pure* time; our experience is of the spatio-temporal. The succession we encounter in our concrete experience is the successive occupation of a place; the space with which we have dealings is not an undifferentiated inert mass but is at different instants diversely occupied. Once we recognize these facts, the 'contradictions' in Space and Time, Alexander thinks, lose their terrors.

On the naïve view of Space and Time, they are twin boxes within which things move about; in reaction against the 'box' theory, philosophers have attempted to identify Time with the relation of temporal succession and Space with the relation of spatial coexistence. But the relational theory of Space and Time, Alexander argues, ignores the fact that the terms in such relations are *themselves* spatial and temporal, and that it would involve a vicious infinite regress to try to reduce such spatio-temporality to a further set of relations. Furthermore – an objection which carries him to the heart of his metaphysics – 'relation', like any other category, is intelligible only if it is interpreted as a mode of spatio-temporality. To use it to give an account of Space-Time is to reverse the true order of dependence.

Alexander proposes a third view of Space-Time: it is, he says, the 'stuff' out of which things are made (although in a Pickwickian sense of 'stuff', since matter is subsequent to Space-Time). This is not an easy theory to comprehend, nor do Alexander's elucidations and elaborations always relieve his readers' bemusement. Perhaps what he wants to say will be a little clearer in another form: Space-Time, he argues, is identical with Pure Motion; to say that Space-Time is the stuff of which things are made is to affirm that a thing is a complex of motions. 'Motion' is 'the occupation of points which successively become present'; and this occupation of a point by a succession of instants is precisely what Alexander means by 'Space-Time'. He would, he says, happily speak of the ultimate Stuff as Motion instead of Space-Time, were it not that we find it harder to represent to ourselves the idea of an all-encompassing Motion than that of an all-encompassing Space-Time. Alexander's metaphysics, indeed, is in many ways akin to that of Heraclitus; 'the universe', he

says, 'is through-and-through historical, the scene of motion'.[16] A spatio-temporal universe, for him, is by its nature a universe in growth: this is the point at which Alexander's theory of Space-Time unites with the doctrine of emergent evolution.

The part of *Space, Time and Deity* on which Alexander particularly prided himself is Book II, *Of the Categories*. As we have seen, he regards the categories as the pervasive characters of things; this pervasiveness, he thinks, needs some explanation; it arises from the fact that the categories are properties or determinations of the primordial stuff, Space-Time. They belong to everything, just because everything is a complex generated in Space-Time.

We can illustrate the manner of his procedure by reference to two categories which have already occupied our attention in other contexts – universality and relation. There are, he argues, no 'particulars' and no 'universals'; everything is an 'individual', i.e. is both particular and universal. It is 'particular' in so far as it is distinguishable from other things of the same 'general plan of construction'; its 'universality' consists in the fact that the same plan of construction is repeated elsewhere, whether as the construction of that same finite being (as a marble keeps the same form as it rolls along the ground) or of different finite beings (as the marbles in a bag all have the same general construction). This possibility of repetition, Alexander argues, depends upon the uniformity of Space-Time, which enables a thing to change its place while retaining the same plan of construction. In that respect, to talk of 'universality', according to Alexander, is simply a way of drawing attention to Space-Time's uniformity. Furthermore, a 'plan' is simply a regular mode of behaviour; the universal, as Alexander describes it, is not a Platonic form, changeless, immutable and eternal, but a pattern of motions, 'instinct with Time'.

Relations, similarly, are essentially spatio-temporal. Alexander defines a relation as 'the whole situation into which its terms enter, in virtue of that relation'. Thus the maternal relation, for example, is a set of actions on the part of the mother and a set of actions on the part of the child, considered in so far as they 'establish a connexion' between mother and child or 'initiate a transaction' between them. A relation, therefore, is a concrete

whole, not a vaguely-conceived 'link' between terms. Often, Alexander maintains, it is more important than the terms; as when, in time of war, although we are aware that the conflicts taking place involve men, we envisage the conflict-situation clearly, the individual men scarcely at all. But these are, comparatively speaking, matters of detail: the important point, for Alexander, is that a 'relation' is a spatio-temporal transaction between spatio-temporal constituents, the transactions having a 'sense' or a 'direction'. To put the same point differently, a relation is motions passing between systems of motions.[17]

From the Categories, Alexander passes in Book III to 'The Order and Problems of Empirical Existence' which many of his critics have considered to be the most profitable section of *Space, Time and Deity*. So far it has simply been said that the empirical qualities a thing possesses are 'correlative with' their underlying motions. But 'correlation' is an intolerably vague conception; the problem now is to make it more precise. The clue, he thinks, comes from the mind-body relation.

This is an unexpected suggestion; most philosophers have seen in the mind-body relation one of the most intractable of all philosophical problems. Alexander does not agree. Observation and reflection make it perfectly apparent, he thinks, that certain processes with the distinctive property of being conscious occur in the same places and at the same times as 'highly differentiated and complex processes of our living body'. The 'correlation' of mind and body consists, then, in the fact that *the very same process* which is experienced from within, or 'enjoyed', as a mental process can be 'contemplated' as a neural one.

Physiological processes of a certain type and complexity, according to Alexander, are conscious processes. Consciousness, to express the matter in terms of evolution, 'emerges' at a certain point in the development of living processes. No knowledge of physiology, he considers, could enable us *prior to experience* to predict that this quality would emerge, even although, after the event, we can determine the degree of complexity exhibited by those physiological processes which are conscious. 'Consciousness' is a novel, unpredictable quality, for all that it has its roots in, and is determined by, physiological processes.

Working with this 'clue to quality', Alexander describes the

general pattern of emergence. When Space-Time or motion reaches a certain degree of complexity qualities emerge: first, the so-called 'primary qualities' such as size, shape and number, which are 'empirical modes of the categories', then secondary qualities like colour, which stand to the primary qualities as mind stands to body, then living processes, then mind – and deity. In each case, we must accept with 'natural piety' the fact that new qualities emerge; there is no 'explanation' of this fact, it just is the case.[18] The determination of the sequence and number of stages is, he says, a problem for natural science: the metaphysician must be content to sketch the general conception of a 'level of existence', and to illustrate the relationship holding between such levels.

We can now summarize Alexander's theory of finite existences. Every finite existence, in the first place, is compresent with (spatio-temporally connected with) other finite existences. A finite existence is a substance, i.e. a volume of Space-Time with a determinate contour; it is the scene of movements, which have each of them a history. They appear in time, exist through time, and end in time. There are three distinguishable aspects of a thing: its spatio-temporality, the processes which occur in it, and its plan of construction, or configuration. The first, from our point of view, is the thing's place, date, duration and extent; the second its qualities, perceived as sensibilia; the third is its 'nature', which we take as the object of our thought.

Alexander's theory of knowledge now finds its home within this metaphysical framework, as a special exemplification of it. A mind, like anything else, is a particular finite existence, and is 'compresent' with a variety of other finite existences. 'Compresence', it is important to observe, does not connote simultaneity. Many of the events with which a mind is 'compresent' – or which, as Alexander also expresses the matter, form part of its 'perspective' – occurred a very long time ago, the events it perceives in the distant stars being a striking example. This, however, is not peculiar to mind; everything reacts to events which have already passed away. We can think of anything whatsoever as the point of departure for a 'perspective', which will include all those events in various places and of various dates to which it is related, with which, that is, it 'has transactions'.

Space-Time, indeed, is built up of such perspectives, not of simultaneous cross-sections.[19]

How does Deity fit into this metaphysics? That is the question Alexander sets out to answer in Book IV of *Space, Time and Deity*. Deity, Alexander argues, is the next stage in evolution; it bears the same relation to mind as mind does to living processes and living processes to the physico-chemical. For us to predict its nature is impossible. To call Deity 'mind', for example, would be comparable to asserting that living processes are nothing but physico-chemical processes: Deity must no doubt *be* mind, but its distinctive properties will not lie in that fact.

Considered thus, Alexander admits, God is ideal rather than actual, in the making but not yet made. If we demand an actual God, that can only be 'the infinite world with its nisus towards deity'. Why, we may object, should we not describe Space-Time – which is both infinite and creative – as God? One reason, according to Alexander, is that no one could worship, or feel a religious emotion towards, Space-Time; and it is the object of a metaphysics of deity to discover an entity towards which such an emotion is appropriate. He admits the abstract possibility that metaphysics might lead the philosopher to the conclusion that there is no such entity; but his own metaphysics, he considers, leads towards deity, not away from it. And this, he argues, is a point in its favour, for 'a philosophy which leaves one portion of human experience suspended without attachment to the world of truth is gravely open to suspicion'; the presumption must always be, he thinks, that to every appetite there corresponds an object which could satisfy it, and the religious emotion, on his account of it, is such an appetite, to be satisfied with no object less than Deity. That this Deity was very different from the God of ordinary religion, not least in the fact that there is no reason for regarding Deity as the last stage in evolution, did not seriously perturb Alexander.

A number of other philosophers were prepared to describe themselves as Realists, and felt the impact of Alexander's philosophy, without making the transition from epistemology to metaphysics. John Laird,[20] in such works as *A Study in Realism* (1920) expounded a 'down-to-earth' Realism – he liked to remember that his birth-place was near Reid's – in which the em-

phasis was critical and analytic rather than metaphysical. He admired Alexander greatly, and thought that Alexander's work overshadowed his own, but the atmosphere of his philosophy is that of Moore's Cambridge, where he had been a student; he did not move easily amid Alexander's abstractions. From his own Gifford Lectures *Theism and Cosmology* (1940) and *Mind and Deity* (1941) very little emerges in the way of a definite conclusion: no more than that a transcendental theism is 'not proven' although an immanent theism has some measure of attractiveness for a reasonable man.

Another Scottish professor, the scholar N. Kemp Smith, author of classical commentaries on Descartes, Hume and Kant, stood much closer to Alexander, for all that he described himself as an 'Idealist'. His *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory of Knowledge* (1924) is an attempt, as he expresses the matter, to formulate 'an idealist theory of knowledge along realist lines.'[21] There is, he argues, no necessary connexion between Idealism and subjectivism; subjectivism is metaphysically neutral, lending itself as much to the purposes of a Mach as to the purposes of a Berkeley. The Idealist can also be a realist; what he has to show, according to Kemp Smith, is not that reality is mind-dependent but that it incorporates 'spiritual values', that these, indeed, operate 'on a cosmic scale'. Thus much of Kemp Smith's argument is an attempt to demonstrate the many-sidedness of Nature, its richness and resourcefulness, quite in opposition to the tendency of many idealists to deaden Nature in order to make of mind the one enlivener.

Kemp Smith is able to absorb into his Idealism both Alexander's critique of subjectivism and his theory of natural processes. But he does not go all the way with Alexander, particularly in regard to the independence of secondary qualities. He agrees that sensa are not in the mind; he still thinks that they exist only in dependence upon an organism. They are on his view a biological device, enabling the organism to deal with an environment so complex that to see it accurately would be to find it overwhelming. When we look at water, for example, we see something continuous and stable, not a dervish-dance of molecules; and if we were not thus deluded, it would wholly bewilder us. We are deceived only because Nature is taking care of our interests.

Another philosopher who saw virtue in the resurgence of realism was C. E. M. Joad, who moved with it from 'The Refutation of Idealism' to *The Analysis of Matter*. But *The New Realism* was too pale and emaciated to claim a permanent lien over Joad's wide-ranging affections. Within a seam-bursting eclecticism, Russell, Bergson and Plato had somehow all to make room for themselves, as the representatives, respectively, of matter, life and value.[22] The result was a conglomeration of considerable popular appeal but little philosophical consequence. The fact remains that Joad – an invigoratingly polemical broadcaster, essayist and lecturer at a time when the ideal of 'good taste' was threatening to destroy personality – represented 'philosophy' to a large segment of the British public. What this proves, either about philosophy or about the British public, I should not care to say.

CHAPTER 12

Critical Realism and American Naturalism

If the patents law had application to philosophical trademarks, 'critical realist' would have given rise to some pretty legal battles. To be a realist, and yet to be free from any suspicion of naïveté – that was a prospect which attracted a variety of philosophers, however diverse their objectives in every other respect.

British[1] critical realism was generated in Scotland in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. There, as in America, Reid's 'Common-sense' philosophy had not been wholly submerged beneath the wave of enthusiasm for exotic metaphysical systems. We note its persistence, for example, in the writings of that highly idiosyncratic Scot, S. S. Laurie,[2] who, for all his Idealism, was prepared roundly to assert that 'I am conscious of an object at a distance, which is extended, localized, configurated, coloured, and of a certain mass'. Another Scot, Andrew Seth (Pringle-Pattison) was, as we have already seen,[3] no less insistent upon Nature's independence of Man, although his long discipleship to Kant made it impossible for him to return whole-heartedly to the Scottish tradition of 'natural realism'. It is to mark the fact that he hoped to be a realist without ceasing to be a Kantian that Seth described himself as a 'critical realist'.

'The conscious being,' he writes in opposition to any form of naïve realism, 'cannot in the nature of things overleap and transcend itself'; what we are directly aware of, he therefore argues, must be 'in our mind,' even although it points to a world independent of ourselves. He was naturally accused, as American critical realists were to be, of attempting to reinstate Locke's theory, universally condemned, of representative perception. Locke, Seth replies, made a serious blunder; he thought that knowledge is *of* ideas, whereas in fact it takes place *through* ideas. Although we are directly *aware* of ideas, they are not what we *know*. At this point, Seth joins hands with Stout, to whose early work he freely refers.

Seth's main critical attack is directed against phenomenalism: were experience not referred to objects, he argues, it would be an