

# METAPHYSICA

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR ONTOLOGY & METAPHYSICS

Editors: RAFAEL HÜNTELMANN (Cologne)  
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Volume 1 (2000) • No. 2

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**Website:** [www.Metaphysica.de](http://www.Metaphysica.de)

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**Frequency of publication:** METAPHYSICA is published in two volumes annually. The price of a single volume is DEM 44.00 (EUR 22.50), in subscription DEM 76,00 (EUR 39,00) plus postage and dispatch costs. Order from: Verlag J.H. Röll GmbH, PO Box 9, D-97335 Dettelbach, Germany.

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ISSN 1437-2053

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR ONTOLOGY & METAPHYSICS

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NICHOLAS RESCHER

**What if Things Were Different?  
Deliberations Regarding Counterfactual  
Conditionals and Nonexistent Worlds**

*1. Preliminaries*

**S**urely things might have been very different. Caesar might not have crossed the Rubicon. Napoleon might never have left Elba. Surely we can reason sensibly from such contrary-to-fact assumptions so as to obtain instructive knowledge about unrealized possibilities.

But is this really so? There is, in fact, reason to think that reasoning from fact-contravening suppositions is far more problematic than appears at first sight.

A „counterfactual conditional“ along the lines of „If Napoleon had stayed on Elba, then the battle of Waterloo would not have been fought“ is, in effect, a conditional that elicits a consequence from an antecedent which represents a belief-contravening hypothesis.<sup>1</sup> And

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes what looks like a counterfactual conditional is only so in appearance. Thus consider „If Napoleon and Alexander the Great were fused into a single individual, what a great general that would be!“ What is at issue here is not really a counterfactual based on the weird hypothesis of a fusion of two people into one. Rather, what we have is merely a rhetorically striking reformulation of the truism „Anybody with all of the military talents of Napoleon and of Alexander combined, is certainly a great general.“

the reality of it is that in the context of other prevailing beliefs counterfactual hypotheses are always paradoxical.<sup>2</sup>

The substantive interlinkage of our beliefs is such that belief-contra-vening suppositions always function within a wider setting of accepted beliefs  $B_1, B_2, \dots, B_n$  of such a sort that when one of them (for simplicity, say  $B_1$ ) must be abandoned in the wake of a hypothetical endorsement of its negation, nevertheless the resulting group  $\sim B_1, B_2, \dots, B_n$  still remains collectively inconsistent. The reason for this lies in the principle of the systemic integrity of fact. For suppose that we accept  $B_1$ . Then let  $B_2$  be some other claim that we flatly reject, one that is such that we unhesitatingly accept  $\sim B_2$ . Now since (by hypothesis) we accept  $B_1$ , we will certainly also accept  $B_1 \vee B_2$ . But now consider the group of accepted theses:  $B_1, B_1 \vee B_2, \sim B_2$ . When we drop  $B_1$  here and insert  $\sim B_1$  in its place we obtain  $\sim B_1, B_1 \vee B_2, \sim B_2$ . And this group is still inconsistent.

Facts engender a dense structure, as the mathematicians use this term in relation (say) to real numbers. Every determinable fact is so drastically hemmed in by others that even when we erase it, it can always be restored on the basis of what remains (even as  $B_1$  can be derived from  $B_1 \vee B_2$  and  $\sim B_2$  in the preceding example).

The fabric of fact is woven tight. Suppose that we make only a very small alteration in the descriptive composition of the real, say by adding one pebble to the river bank. But which pebble? Where are we to get it and what are we to put in its place? And where are we to put the air or the water that this new pebble displaces? And when we put that material in a new spot, just how are we to make room for it? And how are we to make room for the so-displaced material. Moreover, the region within 6 inches of the new pebble used to hold  $N$  pebbles. It now holds presumably  $N + 1$ . But whence that extra pebble? Of which region are we to say that it now holds  $N - 1$ . And if it is that region yonder, then how did the pebble get here from there? By a miraculous instantaneous transport? By a little boy picking it up and throwing it?

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<sup>2</sup> Compare RODERICK M. CHISHOLM: Law Statements and Counterfactual Inferences, *Analysis*, vol. 15 (1955), pp. 97-105 (see especially pp. 102-05).

But then which little boy? And how did he get there? And if he threw it, then what happened to the air that his throw displaced, which would otherwise have gone undisturbed?

And what about the structure of the environing electromagnetic, thermal, and gravitational fields? Just how are these to be preserved, given the removal and/or shift of the pebbles? How is matter to be readjusted to preserve consistency here? Or are we to do so by changing the fundamental laws of physics?

The long and short of it is: hypothetical perturbations of reality confront us with problems without end. Every hypothetical change in the physical make-up of the real sets in motion a vast cascade of physical changes either in the physical make-up of the real or in the laws of nature (or both). We cannot make hypothetical redistributions in the make-up of the real world without thereby raising an unending series of questions.

And not only do redistributions raise problems, but even mere erasures, mere cancellations do so as well, because reality being as it is they require redistributions to follow in their wake. If by hypothesis we zap that book out of existence on the shelf, then what is it that supports the others? And at what stage of its production did it first disappear? And if it just vanished a moment ago, then what of the law of the conservation of matter? And whence the material that is now in that book-denuded space? Once more we embark upon an endless journey. The density of facts means that they are so closely intermeshed with each other as to form a connected network. Any change anywhere has reverberations everywhere.

This condition of things is old news. Already in his influential *Treatise on Obligations*<sup>3</sup> the medieval scholastic philosopher Walter Burley (ca. 1275–ca. 1345) laid down the rule: When a false contingent proposition is posited, one can prove any false proposition that is compatible with it. His reasoning was as follows. Let the facts be that:

(P)        You are not in Rome.

(Q)        You are not a bishop.

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<sup>3</sup> Translated in part in N. KRETZMAN and E. STUMP: *The Cambridge Translation of Medieval Philosophical Texts*, Vol. I: *Logic and Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; see pp. 389–412.

And now, of course, also:

(R) You are not in Rome or you are a bishop. (P or not-Q)

All of these, so we suppose, are true. Let us now posit by way of a (contingently false) supposition that:

Not-(P) You are in Rome.

Obviously (P) must now be abandoned — „by hypothesis.“ However, from (R) and not-(P) we also obtain:

You are a bishop. (Not-Q)

And in view of thesis (Q) this is, of course, false. We have thus obtained not-Q as a consequence of our supposition (where Q is an arbitrary true proposition). Thus Burley’s Principle is established: Any logically compatible proposition can be made to follow from a contingently false proposition.

It is clear that this situation obtains in general. For let p and q be any two (arbitrary but nonequivalent) facts. Then all of the following facts will also, of course, obtain:  $\sim(\sim p)$ ,  $p \ \& \ q$ ,  $p \vee q$ ,  $p \vee \sim q \vee r$ ,  $\sim p \vee q$ ,  $\sim(\sim p \ \& \ q)$ , etc. Let us focus upon just three of these available facts:

- (1) p
- (2) q
- (3)  $\sim(\sim p \ \& \ q)$  or equivalently  $p \vee \sim q$

Now let it be that you are going to suppose not-p. Then of course you must remove (1) from the list of accepted facts and substitute:

- (1')  $\sim p$

But there is now no stopping. For together with (3) this new item at once yields  $\sim q$ , contrary to (2). Thus that supposition of ours that runs contrary to accepted fact (viz., not-p) has the direct consequence that any other arbitrary truth must also be abandoned.

Burley’s Principle thus has far-reaching implications. For it means that we have to come to terms with the inescapability of ontological holism. As far as the logic of the situation is concerned, you cannot change anything in the domain of fact without endangering everything. Once you embark on a contrary-to-fact assumption, then all bets are off. Nothing is safe any more. To maintain consistency you



must revamp the entire fabric of fact, which is to say that you confront a task of Sisyphean proportions. This is something that people who talk glibly about other possible worlds all too easily forget

The decisive drawback and deficit of the possible-worlds approach to counterfactuals, that is so popular among contemporary semanticists, lies in its inherent intractability. This becomes apparent through such examples as „If four were greater than five, then arithmetic would be involved in a contradiction.“ We clearly cannot handle this by contemplating the situation in those possible worlds where four is greater than five, since there obviously are not any. Nevertheless, no one would have any difficulty making sense of that counterfactual, and in fact the present aporetic analysis validates it straightforwardly.<sup>4</sup> But there is no (sensible) question here of a recourse to „nonexistent worlds.“

The fact is that across the board, in every sort of setting or situation, the validation of counterfactuals and the assessment of their appropriateness is not a matter of anything as far-reaching metaphysically and demanding as an ontology of possible worlds. It is, rather, a mere matter of precedence and priority among the relevant beliefs that are at work in the setting of particular questions. What is needed is a localized micro-process and not a globalized macro-process. For when we make belief-contravening suppositions in ordinary workday situations, we are not shifting the frame of reference to the world at large (let alone having recourse to other possible worlds) — but are merely testing the comparative solidity and staying power of our actual claims within their contextual neighborhood. As with an Agatha Christie detective story, a closer scrutiny of the proximate suspects

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<sup>4</sup> In the setting of our present approach, we have the following accepted propositions:

- (1) Four is not greater than five.
- (2) The consistency of arithmetic [as we know it] entails (1).
- (3) Arithmetic is — and ought to be — consistent.

If not-(1) were to be assumed, then we would be forced into an abandonment of either (2) or (3), seeing that the trio {not-(1), (2), (3)} is logically inconsistent. Since there is no viable way around (2), this means that we would have to give up (3) and see arithmetic as involved in contradiction. And this validates the counterfactual under consideration.

immediately involved in the context at issue is happily always sufficient to resolve the mystery. Let us illustrate this general circumstance by a few concrete examples.

## 2. *Counterfactual Conditionals*

Consider the conditional: „If this stick were made of copper, it would conduct electricity.“ The situation is as follows:

- (1) This stick is made of wood.
- (2) This stick is not made of copper.
- (3) Wood does not conduct electricity.
- (4) Copper does conduct electricity.
- (5) This stick does not conduct electricity.

And now let us introduce the (1)-modifying assumption:

- (6) This stick is made of copper.

How is consistency now to be restored?

Note that our initial givens fall into two groups: general laws: (3), (4), and particular facts: (1), (2), (5). Now when (6) is introduced as an issue-definitive hypothesis we of course have to abandon (1) and (2) in the wake of this assumption. But that still does not restore consistency, since (6) and (4) still yield not-(5). However, the standard epistemic policy of prioritizing more general principles such as laws over particular facts in counterfactual contexts means that it is (5) rather than (4) that should now be abandoned. We thus arrive at the natural (5)-rejecting counterfactual conditional:

- (A) If this stick were made of copper, then it would conduct electricity (since copper conducts electricity).

in place of the „unnatural,“ (4)-rejecting counterfactual conditional:

- (B) If this stick were made of copper, then copper would not conduct electricity (since this stick does not conduct electricity).

Suppose, however, that for the sake of contrast we take the radical step of altering the fabric of natural law by contemplating the assumption:

LAIRD ADDIS

## The Simplicity of Content

### *Introduction*

Some philosophers hold that minds do not exist. With these philosophers one cannot, or in any case I shall not, argue. A larger group — the largest, almost certainly, among contemporary philosophers of mind, as I categorize — maintain that the mind exists but is, in one way or another, the same thing as something physical. It may be brain states, or behaviors, or patterns of or dispositions to behaviors, but, like the first group, these philosophers also hold that a human being is no more and no less than a physical organism. I shall argue only indirectly that these philosophers are mistaken in their materialism.

My argument in this paper is, instead, with some of a smaller group of philosophers of mind who allow that there is, or may be, *mental content*. I put it this way because I want to distinguish within this group those philosophers who, while dualistic in spirit, in fact doubt or deny the existence of mental content from those who affirm the existence of mental content. Against the skeptic of content within the context of dualism, I shall make some arguments for the existence of mental content.

The main argument of this essay, however, will be yet more narrowly focused. It will be against those philosophers who agree that there is mental content but who maintain that there is in all such contents a kind of complexity that in some way corresponds to the complexity of the *objects* of awareness. My positive thesis is that every mental content, in an important ontological sense, lacks complexity; I will be arguing for *the simplicity of content*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is, in part, an elaboration and extension of ideas and arguments made in my *Natural Signs*, chapters 2 and 3. The reader is invited to look there for discussion of other aspects of the issues discussed in this essay.

## I.

What is a mind? What is mental content? What is simplicity (complexity)? Before we turn to some history and then to the arguments, we need at least some measure of answers to these questions.

A person's mind is, first and foremost, that person's "stream of consciousness," composed of his or her awarenesses — perceivings, remembering, imaginings, feelings, doubtings, desirings, and so on — those entities that define us as conscious beings. These entities I call the primary mental entities. Comprising the secondary mental entities are those mental phenomena that seem not to be literal constituents of awarenesses but to depend on awarenesses for their existence — emotions, moods, bodily sensations and feelings, images and afterimages. And, further, as the tertiary mental entities the mind is also those states that, unlike awarenesses, a person may have even while asleep or unconscious — dispositional mental states such as beliefs, hopes, doubts, desires, and so on. Some philosophers believe that "behind" all these particular mental entities there is also, in each of us, a mental substance that is the self, while others believe that the self just is the "bundle" of some or all of the more particular kinds of mental entities already specified. For our purposes, we needn't resolve that issue or even those of my threefold categorization of mental entities; for the questions I intend to deal with have to do exclusively with the first group of entities; namely, awarenesses. While many philosophers also speak of content with respect to dispositional mental states, I assume and have argued that, given the nature of dispositions, this cannot be literally true; and that the only kinds of entities that do, or could, in that literal ontological sense possess mental content are awarenesses.

This rather cavalier insistence on the uniqueness of content to awareness will become both clearer and more plausible if we now ask just what mental content is. *There is mental content if, when a person is aware of something, that awareness is or contains an entity that correlates uniquely with the thing, or kind of thing, of which the person is aware.* Suppose you are thinking about the horse that you rode yesterday. If there is "in" your awareness any entity that correlates uniquely with either the particular horse that you were riding or with the kind horse (that is, the property of *being-a-horse*), then there is,

“in” your mind, mental content. But what is it to be “in” the mind or, more narrowly, “in” an awareness or “contained” by an awareness? I have used the double quotes, which I henceforth drop, because in its literal sense, ‘in’ is a spatial notion that is, for the most part anyway, inapplicable to mind. But we may begin clarification — call it stipulation, if you prefer — by saying that to be in the mind is just to be a property of the mind, assuming that the mind itself has been antecedently identified. And, in this context, we may say that to be a mind is just to be whatever particular or particulars exemplify the properties that characterize mental phenomena. More precisely, and very importantly, we shall say that to be in the mind is to be a *monadic* property of the mind, that is, a property that is not, in whole or in part, a relation. This assumes, as is proper, that there is an ontological distinction to be made between monadic and polyadic properties, a distinction that is reflected in, but not exactly paralleled by, the distinction between monadic and relational *predicates*. (The predicate ‘tall’ is grammatically monadic but refers to an inherently polyadic property.)

But what counts as a genuine property of the mind? Here again one enters a realm of confusion and complication in which one would want, in a full treatment of the matter, to distinguish descriptive from logical properties, substantive from formal properties, general from specific properties, and so on. For our purposes we may ignore most of these distinctions and say, first, that to be a property of the mind is to be a property of an awareness; and, second, that to be a property of such an awareness is to be a *constituent* of that awareness that distinguishes it, qualitatively, from some other actual or possible awarenesses. Thus, if your thinking about the horse you rode yesterday has a (monadic) property that correlates uniquely to that horse or to the property of *being-a-horse*, then it has a property that qualitatively distinguishes that awareness from that of, say, imagining that the moon is made of green cheese. And, if any awareness has any such property (I believe that *all* do), then there is mental content.

Before we turn to the notion of simplicity, there remains to be said something about the matter alluded to in distinguishing, as I did above, between a mental entity that correlates uniquely with a *particular* horse from one that correlates only with the *kind* horse. The tradition seemingly has found it easier to understand how a person can

be aware of the *kind* of thing one is aware of than of the particular thing itself. This is most evident, perhaps, in medieval abstraction theory according to which to be aware of a horse is for the mind to take on what was called the *form* horse (without, however, thereby becoming a horse). But taking on the form horse would have something in the mind that correlates with (or just *is*?) the property of *being-a-horse* and not with the particular horse of which the person was aware. How the medievals accommodated the *datum* that the person was aware of a particular horse and not just horsehood (it has to do, in Aquinas for example, with “phantasms” and the distinction between the senses and the intellect) is not my concern here. It is, instead, to establish that the most useful notion of mental content will include either kind of property — one that would correlate uniquely to the particular horse as well as one that would so correlate only to horsehood. In most of what follows, however, I shall take for granted that if there are mental contents, some of them are of particular things as particular and not only of their “forms.”

What is simplicity? More exactly, what is it for a property to be simple and not complex? Is this really an ontological distinction or only a misleadingly circumspect, if unintentional, way of reflecting the distinction between undefined and defined *predicates*, respectively — a distinction that is plausibly regarded as language-relative? I shall not argue that issue here, but simply assume that there is a difference in reality itself, independent of mind and language, between those properties that do, and those that do not, have other properties as constituents. Thus, as plausible examples, we may say that a specific shade of red is a simple property while the property of *being-a-horse* is a complex property. For a specific shade of red (and I’m referring, of course, not to light waves or dispositions to produce certain light waves or anything other than the property we *see*), while it may *exemplify* hue and brightness and other properties, has no other properties as literal constituents of itself. But the property of *having-two-eyes* is not *exemplified* by the property of being-a-horse; instead it partly *constitutes* that property without itself being that property.

Thus, assuming what has been here at best well-illustrated — that there is an ontological distinction between simple and complex properties — we may say initially that if mental content is simple, then the

property of the awareness that correlates uniquely to what that person is aware of is a simple property. That is exactly the position I shall defend in this paper. The alternative is that mental content is complex, but we must now understand that there are at least two ways in which mental content might be complex, both of which are in contradiction to the thesis of the simplicity of content.

One way for mental content to be complex, the way that would perhaps most naturally suggest itself, is for there to be a single particular (substance, momentary particular, bundle of properties) that exemplifies a complex property, which complex property is the mental content. But another possibility is that there are multiple particulars (momentary particulars or separate bundles but not, of course, substances) each of which has a property — simple or complex — which properties jointly are the mental content. Each of these possibilities has its own peculiar flaws, as I shall argue later, but they share a broader defect in being unable adequately to account for the unity of an act of awareness. Indeed, at one level, one may say that any view that denies the simplicity of mental content must fail to safeguard the unity of thought.

Can it not be said that almost from the beginning of Western philosophy (there isn't much philosophy of mind in the pre-Socratics, as we know them) until at least as late as the nineteenth century, perhaps even only the twentieth century, it has been assumed nearly without argument that when a person is aware of something, there is in that person's mind something that correlates uniquely to that of which the person is thinking or at least to its kind? Some of the medievals, as we noted, spoke of the mind's taking on the form of the object of awareness; some of the later medievals, most notably William of Occam, spoke of natural signs or conceptual terms (in contrast with conventional signs and linguistic terms, respectively). The early modern philosophers preferred to speak of "ideas" while the language of "content" became dominant in the nineteenth century. (More precisely, because most of the important thinkers on the topic in this century were German-speaking, it was the language of "*Inhalt*", which is usually rendered as 'content' in English.) Early analytic philosophers, on the other hand, especially under the influence of phenomenism,

tended to speak of “sense data” (or “sensa”) or, more rarely, of “percepts”, taking perceptual awareness as the paradigm for all awareness.

The twentieth century saw also the first fully explicit challenges to the general notion of mental content — most notably in the thought of two of the century’s most important but in most respects quite different philosophers, Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre. I close this fragment of philosophical linguistic history by noting that the language of “content” has made significant return in the later twentieth century along with that of “representation”.<sup>2</sup> My use of ‘content’ then is by no means idiosyncratic, even if, in some eyes, the view in which it is embodied may seem so.

The first philosophers who felt compelled to make, or who was able to conceive, arguments for the existence of mental content were Kazimierz Twardowski and Alexius Meinong.<sup>3</sup> Even though I emphatically agree with their conclusion — that mental content exists — I have tried to show elsewhere that the arguments, as formulated by Meinong, are seriously flawed.<sup>4</sup> More recent philosophers who have explicitly defended the existence of mental content are, from quite different traditions, Edmund Husserl and Gustav Bergmann.<sup>5</sup> But unlike the two earlier thinkers, they made no arguments for the existence of mental content, being apparently satisfied to rest their case on the claim or mere assumption that we are, or can be, directly acquainted with mental content.

For my part, I have made three detailed arguments for mental content — or what I call *natural signs*, following William of Occam.<sup>6</sup> Here I will summarize those arguments very briefly. One of them, the *scientific* argument, holds that differences in behavior that are due to a difference in what people are aware of can be explained only if there

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<sup>2</sup> Other expressions that have been used in the twentieth century to capture the idea of mental content include ‘intentional property’ and ‘proposition’.

<sup>3</sup> See especially TWARDOWSKI: *Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen* and MEINONG: *Über Gegenstände höherer Ordnung und deren Verhältnis zur inneren Wahrnehmung*.

<sup>4</sup> See my *Natural Signs: A Theory of Intentionality*, 36-42.

<sup>5</sup> See especially HUSSERL: *Logical Investigations* and BERGMANN: *Realism: A Critique of Brentano and Meinong*.

<sup>6</sup> See *Natural Signs*, Chapter 3, “The Arguments for Natural Signs.”



## Was ist eine ontologische Erklärung?

Ontologinnen erheben den Anspruch, daß ihre Theorien Erklärungsleistungen erbringen. Ontologie vervollständige die von den empirischen Wissenschaften gemachten Erklärungsleistungen über die Struktur der Welt, indem sie das Wissen über die allgemeinsten, nicht-empirischen Strukturen des Existierenden beisteuert. Erklärungsleistungen sind entsprechend zentral bei der Theorieevaluation. Die Summe der Erklärungsleistungen einer Theorie abzüglich ihrer metaphysischen Kosten gilt unter epistemologischen Gesichtspunkten als Maß für die Akzeptanz resp. Bevorzugung einer ontologischen Theorie. Universalien-Freunde betrachten es z.B. als Vorteil, daß mit Universalien, nicht aber mit Tropen Ähnlichkeit erklärt werden könne, da Ähnlichkeit im Rahmen einer Tropentheorie als primitiv zugrundegelegt wird.

Vor diesem Hintergrund stellt sich die Frage, ob wir ein klares Verständnis dessen haben, was eine ontologische Erklärung ist. Wenn Ontologie die wissenschaftliche Erklärung der Welt (in einer idealen Wissenschaft) vervollständigen soll, dann müßten wir zum Verständnis dieses Anspruchs erstens generell verstehen, was eine wissenschaftliche Erklärung ist und zweitens geklärt haben, ob Erklärungen in der empirischen Wissenschaft und in der Ontologie vom gleichen Typ sind. Ersteres hat vor dem Hintergrund wissenschaftstheoretischer Diskussionen als fraglich zu gelten, soll hier aber nicht weiter verfolgt werden. Letzteres scheint etwa von David Armstrong bejaht zu werden. Einerseits versteht er nämlich wissenschaftliche Erklärungen als Kausalerklärungen und andererseits rekurriert er im Rahmen der Ontologie auf „inference to the best explanation“ — ein in kausale Kontexte zu stellendes Konzept. So wie mir aber die Identifikation von wissenschaftlichen Erklärungen mit Kausalerklärungen sympathisch ist, so halte ich eine Identifikation ontologischer Erklärungen als Kausalerklärungen für zweifelhaft. Jedenfalls ist z.B. die Erklärung von Ähnlichkeit über die (partielle) Identität der Universalieninstanzen keine kausale. Worin aber besteht die Erklärungsrelation, wenn es

sich nicht um eine kausale handelt? Jede Rede von „Schluß zur besten Erklärung“ ist nur soweit informativ, als verstanden ist, worin die Erklärung besteht. Und wenn wir weiter Erklärungsleistungen als Maßstab der evaluativen Bewertung ontologischer Theorien heranziehen wollen, dann muß sichergestellt sein, daß dieselben Adäquatheitskriterien zugrundegelegt werden. Über das Explanandum sollte Einigkeit bestehen. Leider ist das, wie ich zeigen werde, in der neueren ontologischen Diskussion nicht sichergestellt.

Was eine ontologische Erklärung ist, ist alles andere denn geklärt. Wenn man ‚Erklärung‘ als eine Relation versteht, dann besteht die Aufgabe darin, Kandidaten für die Relata und für die fragliche Relation zu identifizieren. In meinem Beitrag zur Lösung der Aufgabe werde ich zunächst auf Schwierigkeiten bei der Evaluation von Erklärungsleistungen ontologischer Theorien (I) und dann auf Probleme von ‚ontologische Erklärung‘ (II) eingehen. Die geführten Diskussionen werden erlauben, eine Matrix der Optionen dessen aufzustellen, was als ontologische Erklärung gelten könnte (III). Ich werde dabei dafür argumentieren, daß erstens schon die Wahl der Optionen Teil der ontologischen Diskussion ist und daß zweitens die Option „ontologische Erklärung ist *Identifikation* der kategorialen Struktur der Realität“ der beste Vorschlag ist. Ich hoffe mit diesem Papier ein bisher in der neueren ontologischen Diskussion vernachlässigtes Probleme ins Blickfeld des Interesses zu rücken und damit zu einer weiteren Stärkung der neuen Ontologie beizutragen.

## *I. Evaluation von Erklärungsleistungen ontologischer Theorien*

Tropen-, Universalien- und Nominalismusfreunde nehmen je für sich in Anspruch, mit ihren Theorien gegenüber den Konkurrentinnen bessere Erklärungen leisten zu können. Dies ist vor dem Hintergrund von wissenschaftlichen Rechtfertigungsansprüchen auch nicht anders zu erwarten. Allerdings stellt sich die Frage, ob wir für die Evaluation von konkurrierenden ontologischen Theorien eine befriedigende, allgemein anerkannte Grundlage haben, oder ob sich die Situation in der Ontologie ähnlich präsentiert, wie sie Robert Van Gulick (1996) hin-

sichtlich der Bewußtseinsdiskussion festgestellt hat, daß nämlich unterschiedliche Explananda im Spiel sind.

Als exemplarische Vorlage greife ich für meine Diskussion einen „state of the art essay“ von Cynthia Macdonald (1998) zur Tropentheorie auf. Sie diskutiert in ihrem Papier insbesondere die Frage, ob die von australischen Tropen-Theorien (Campbell 1990, Bacon 1995) in Anspruch genommenen Erklärungsvorteile tatsächlich bestehen. Sie kommt zu einem negativen Ergebnis, sieht sie doch die Tropen-Theorien hinsichtlich ihrer Erklärungsleistungen mit dem reduktiven Nominalismus und der Universalientheorie höchstens auf gleicher Stufe stehend, resp. wegen der Inkompatibilität der Tropentheorie mit der Theorie des nicht-reduktiven (anormalen) Monismus in der Leib-Seele-Diskussion das schlechtere Ende für sich habend. Es geht mir im Folgenden nicht um eine Verteidigung der Tropentheorie, vielmehr um den Typ der evaluativen Argumente.

Macdonald verwirft die von Tropenfreunden reklamierten Erklärungsvorteile aus folgenden Gründen:

- (1) Tropenfreunde sprechen von der Überlegenheit der Tropentheorie. Es bestehen aber verschiedene miteinander konkurrierende Versionen der Tropentheorie, weswegen nicht generell von einer besseren Erklärungsleistung der Tropenontologie gesprochen werden kann.
- (2) Tropenvertreter beanspruchen die Einfachheit ihres Apparats („Einkategorienontologie“) als einen Erklärungsvorteil. Die Ökonomie einer Theorie ist aber nicht als Erklärungsleistung verbuchbar. Ökonomie und Erklärung sind zwei unterschiedliche Aspekte im Rahmen einer Theorieevaluation.
- (3) Tropentheorien sind konfrontiert mit zwei Regreßsituationen: (i) Primitive Tropen mit ihren inhärenten Charakteristika genügen nicht, um Tropen zu Substanzen unter Einschluß ihrer externen Relationen zu bündeln — Substanzen rufen nach Bindungstropen, die ihrerseits nach weiteren Bindungen rufen etc. (ii) Tropen können Ähnlichkeit nicht erklären. Entweder droht der schon von Russell beschriebene Ähnlichkeitsregreß oder Ähnlichkeit muß als „brute primitive“ willkürlich gesetzt werden.

- (4) Die Raum-Zeit der speziellen Relativitätstheorie stiftet eine spezielle Schwierigkeit für die Tropentheorie, weil die Position einer Trope ein inhärentes Merkmal sein müßte, gemäß der spez. Relativitätstheorie aber eine externe Relation ist.

Die Tropentheorie ist im Gegensatz zur Universalientheorie mit der gemäß Macdonald derzeit akzeptierten Standardkonzeption in der Leib-Seele-Forschung, dem nicht-reduktiven Monismus, inkompatibel.<sup>1</sup>

Diese fünf Punkte lassen sich in drei Gruppen unterteilen. (3)-(5) beziehen sich auf geforderte Erklärungsleistungen. Deren angebliche oder tatsächliche Nichterfüllung fallen für die fragliche Theorie negativ zu Lasten. (2) übt eine Kritik an der fälschlichen Konfundierung des Ökonomiekriteriums mit einer Erklärungsleistung, ist also dem Feld wissenschaftstheoretischer Kriterien zuzuordnen. (1) scheint auf den ersten Blick trivial und für alle Theorien zu gelten. Genauso wie es nicht die Quantentheorie gibt,<sup>2</sup> so bestehen unterschiedliche Ver-

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<sup>1</sup> Macdonalds Argument dazu lautet wie folgt:

1. Prämisse: Der nicht-reduktive Monismus ist wahr.

(1a) Mentale Eigenschaften (Ereignisse) sind physische Eigenschaften (Ereignisse).

(1b) Mentale Eigenschaften sind nicht reduzierbar auf physische.

(1c) Mentale Eigenschaften sind nicht gesetzmäßig mit physischen verknüpft.

(1d) Mentale Eigenschaften supervenieren über physischen Eigenschaften.

2. Prämisse: Die Tropen-Theorie ist wahr.

(2a) Ereignisse sind Tropen oder Tropenkomplexe und fungieren als Elemente in kausalen Gesetzen.

(2b) Eigenschaften sind Klassen von exakt ähnlichen Tropen.

Akzeptiert man diese Prämissen, ergeben sich folgende Unverträglichkeiten:

(Annahme 1): Mentale Tropen sind einfach.

(C1) Mentale Tropen sind identisch mit physischen Tropen. (1a, 2b)

C1 widerspricht 1b.

(Annahme 2) Mentale Tropen sind komplex.

(C2) Mentale Ereignisse interagieren gesetzmäßig mit physikalischen Ereignissen (1a, 2a).

C2 widerspricht 1c. Folglich sind beide möglichen Annahmen mit dem anomalen Monismus unvereinbar.

<sup>2</sup> Unabhängig voneinander haben mich unlängst zwei theoretische Physiker vor einer entsprechenden philosophischen Legendenbildung gewarnt. Zwar lassen sich die wichtigsten Grundpostulate einheitlich formulieren, diese bilden jedoch bloß den Ausgangspunkt, nicht den alleinig maßgeblichen Kernpunkt der Mikrophysik.

sionen wichtiger ontologischer Theorieoptionen. So unterscheiden sich Universalientheorien relativ zu ihren Verpflichtungen auf eine aktualistische oder eine possibilistische Position. (1) wirft versteckt die Frage nach den Bestandteilen eines ontologischen Explanans auf — Thema des 2. Teils dieses Aufsatzes.

(ad 2) Die Einfachheit eines ontologischen Apparats (Kategorien-system) erklärt tatsächlich überhaupt nichts. Entweder erklärt ein bestimmter Apparat oder er erklärt nicht resp. schlechter als ein anderer. Die Regel besagt bekanntermaßen, daß eine Theorie dann einer anderen vorzuziehen ist, wenn sie bei gleicher Erklärungsleistung gegenüber der anderen einen einfacheren Apparat besitzt. Die Geschichte der empirischen Wissenschaft kennt allerdings genügend Beispiele der Einführung (Postulierung) neuer, zusätzlicher Entitäten, weil mit den zur Verfügung stehenden die Erklärungsleistungen ungenügend sind (Boyd 1985). Theorien werden auch verworfen, weil sie zu einfach sind. Das Ökonomieprinzip, verstanden als methodologisches Instrument der Theorieevaluation, setzt Kriterien der Evaluation von Erklärungsleistungen voraus. Es setzt somit Erklärung voraus, und ist nicht selbst ein Bestandteil der Erklärung.

Ontologinnen können weiter gar nicht mit guten Gründen auf das methodologisch verstandene Ökonomieprinzip rekurrieren. Denn nehmen wir einmal an, wir hätten eine Situation mit zwei ontologischen Theorien von genau gleich starker Erklärungskraft. Könnte es der Fall sein, daß dann diejenige wahr (metaphysisch wahr) ist, die einfacher ist? Ich halte das für nicht möglich. Selbstverständlich kann nur eine der beiden wahr sein. Es ist nun wohl erkenntnistheoretisch denkbar, daß wir zu einem gegebenen Zeitpunkt zwischen den beiden nicht entscheiden können und deswegen die einfachere bevorzugen. Aber der Kriterium der Einfachheit kann nicht über Wahrheit entscheiden. Wir benötigen ein selbst ontologisch gehaltvolles Argument für die Wahl der einfacheren Theorie. Ein solches Argument steht durchaus zur Verfügung. Ontologisch gesehen basiert das Einfachheitsargument auf einer atomistischen Konzeption. Dieser zufolge ist die Welt aus einfachsten Elementen zusammengesetzt und die Komplexität der Welt wäre eine kombinatorische Vielfalt dieser elementaren Bausteine. Aber obwohl der Atomismus ontologisch eine respektable Theorie ist (Armstrong 1997), macht diese geforderte ontologi-

sche Fundierung des Einfachheitskriteriums nachgerade kenntlich, weshalb wir es nicht als Element der Erklärungsevaluation benutzen dürfen, will man den Vorwurf der Zirkularität vermeiden. Denn als Bestandteil der Prämissenmenge einer ontologischen Theorie ist auch der Atomismus der Forderung ausgesetzt, daß mit ihm bessere Erklärungsleistungen als in diesem Fall mit einer nicht-atomistischen Theorie erbracht werden können. Der Atomismus ist Teil des behaupteten Explanans. Der Frage, ob das Explanans erklärt, kann man nicht dadurch ausweichen, indem man einfachere Theorien als besser erklärende deklariert. Das Ökonomieargument, in diesem Punkt ist Macdonald Recht zu geben, kann in der Ontologie nicht als Kriterium der Evaluation der Erklärungskraft einer Theorie verwendet werden.

(ad 3-5) Diese Punkte gehören in den Bereich der Evaluation von Erklärungsleistungen. Dem klassischen Verständnis Platons zufolge (exemplarisch im 2. Teil des Dialoges *Parmenides* durchgeführt) ist die Methode der Ontologie diejenige der (nicht-Hegelschen) Dialektik: Es werden Hypothesen über die kategoriale Struktur des Seienden aufgestellt und mit den Mitteln der zur Verfügung stehenden Logik auf ihre Konsequenzen hin geprüft. Wenn die deduktiven Konsequenzen mit dem zu Erklärenden übereinstimmen, sind die Hypothesen adäquat resp. wahr. Das scheint mir trefflich zu charakterisieren, was auch die modernen Ontologinnen tun. Freilich sind Vergleiche zwischen konkurrierenden Kategoriensystemen nur dann möglich, wenn auch Einigkeit bezüglich den Explananda besteht. Was sind die Explananda einer ontologischen Theorie?

Da Cynthia Macdonald im Rahmen der Evaluation von Erklärungsleistungen der Tropentheorie Schwierigkeiten im Hinblick auf die spezielle Relativitätstheorie (SRT) ortet, muß sie letztere für einen Teil des Explanandums halten. Ist sie das? Und wenn ja, weshalb? Weshalb ist die SRT relevant und nicht z.B. die Theorie der Plattentektonik? Und was genau gelte es zu erklären, die Minkowski Metrik  $\eta$ , die vierdimensionale Mannigfaltigkeit oder noch etwas anderes?<sup>3</sup> Hier anschließen läßt sich auch die Frage, weshalb wir nicht anstelle der SRT die allgemeine Relativitätstheorie (ART), deren Modelle die Metrik  $g$  haben,

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<sup>3</sup> Modelle der speziellen Relativitätstheorie haben die Form  $\langle M, \eta \rangle$ , wo  $M$  eine vierdimensionale Mannigfaltigkeit ist.

## On Some Realisms most Realists don't like

This paper<sup>1</sup> is not founded on a solid statistical survey among realist philosophers regarding the question of which forms of realism they don't like. Being a speculative philosopher, I of course refrained from doing any such scientifically respectable but tedious investigations. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the forms of realism I will subsequently address are indeed forms of realism most realists don't like. I suspect that the reader will agree with me.

Let me make the point of this paper clear from the start. It is *not* simply to enumerate and describe realisms that are for the most part found unattractive even by realist philosophers; the point of the paper is to probe the question of what good philosophical reasons, if any, there may be *for rejecting* the realisms normally disfavored by realists, especially if considered in comparison to the philosophical reasons that are adduced *for accepting* the forms of realism realists normally favor. *Such good philosophical reasons will be found wanting*, and therefore there are only two alternatives for the realist: either to become even more a realist than before, by also embracing the forms of realism hitherto repudiated, *or* to altogether cease being a realist, by also repudiating the forms of realism hitherto embraced, and to join the camp of the anti-realists and skeptics. These two alternatives are dictated by two possible reactions to the lack of philosophical justification for opposing the dislike of some forms of realism to the favoring of other such forms: for either all of these realisms are "good" or all of them "bad"; hence it is not justifiable to consider only some of them "good" and the others "bad," or vice versa.

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<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this paper was presented at the symposium "Philosophical Realism and the Central European Tradition", March 26-29, 1999, University of Texas at Austin.

## 1.

Before turning to particular forms of realism, a general characterization of positions of realism is in order. Let it be controversial whether it is an objective fact that the kind of entity  $F$  is non-empty.

Then a person  $x$  is an *ontological realist* with respect to the kind of entity  $F$  if and only if  $x$  believes that it is an *objective fact* that some  $y$  are  $F$ .

And *ontological realism* with respect to  $F$  is the position held by anyone who is an ontological realist with respect to  $F$ , *qua* ontological realist.

Here an *objective fact* is considered to be something that is not a figment of the mind, not a model, not a linguistic construction, not a fiction of any kind; it is something given, something which is encountered by us, not made up, abstracted or projected. Note that an objective fact may concern subjective occurrences. If a person is in pain, then it is an objective fact that he or she is in pain.

A person  $x$  is an *epistemological realist* with respect to the kind of entity  $F$  if and only if  $x$  is an ontological realist with respect to  $F$  and moreover believes that human beings have at least some knowledge — justified true belief — which is *individually* about at least some entities that are  $F$ .

*Epistemological realism* with respect to  $F$  is the position held by anyone who is an epistemological realist with respect to  $F$ , *qua* epistemological realist.

According to definition, being an epistemological realist (with respect to  $F$ ) implies being an ontological realist; but it is possible to be an ontological realist without being an epistemological one. One can believe that it is an objective fact that some  $y$  are  $F$  without believing that any human being has any knowledge which is individually about some entity that is  $F$ . A famous case from the history of philosophy is Kant's being an ontological realist with respect to "Dinge an sich," while not being an epistemological realist with respect to them.

Ontological realism without epistemological realism with respect to the same kind of entity  $F$  implies no contradiction and does not render the belief-system of the realist who is thus disposed — we may call her a *Kantian* realist — inconsistent. However, the Kantian realist will find herself confronted with the question how she comes to believe that some  $y$  are  $F$  when she is not believing that any human being has any knowledge which is individually about some entity that is  $F$ .



— a question that, for some  $F$  or other, may prove hard to answer.<sup>2</sup> In view of the normal equivalence in assertability of ontological realism and epistemological realism, the phrase “realism [or: realist] with respect to the kind of entity  $F$ ” is here always to be taken in the single sense of “*epistemological* realism [or: realist] with respect to the kind of entity  $F$ .” Finally, a realist *simpliciter* is a person who is a realist with respect to at least some kind of entity  $F$  where it is controversial whether it is an objective fact that some  $y$  are  $F$ .

## 2.

The question posed to the Kantian realist brings us to the general question how the realist justifies his realism. What arguments does he adduce to justify his belief that it is an objective fact that some  $y$  are  $F$  and that human beings have at least some knowledge about some entities that are  $F$ ? There is indeed a schema of justification that is applied in very many instances. It runs as follows:

There is a set of objective facts involving entities of the kind  $G$  — the  $G$ -facts —, and *if* there are certain objective facts involving entities of the kind  $F$ , *then* they provide an excellent possible explanation for the  $G$ -facts. Hence, with high probability, there are indeed these objective facts involving entities of the kind  $F$  — the  $F$ -facts, and they *in fact* explain the  $G$ -facts —, and in particular it is an objective fact that some  $y$  are  $F$ . Moreover, since human beings know quite a lot about the  $G$ -facts, they also know, via this knowledge and in view of the explanatory nexus between the  $F$ -facts and the  $G$ -facts, at least something about some entities that are  $F$ .

This schema — the so-called *Inference to the Best Explanation* — is, for example, employed in justifying the form of epistemological realism that is virtually every realist’s darling: *scientific realism* — the thesis that, as a matter of objective fact, there are unobservable physical entities and that those are the objects, indeed the main objects, of scientific knowledge. In the case of scientific realism Inference to the Best Explanation has certainly its greatest psychological force; what

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<sup>2</sup> But notice that there is nothing particularly unreasonable about believing that there are flowers nobody has ever thought of, *without* believing that human beings know anything which is invidually about some flower nobody has ever thought of.

its *rational* force is, is, however, notoriously a matter of controversy. The anti-realists and skeptics insist on the radical position that it is in *no case* rational to employ it, even if there were purely objective criteria for something, *A*, being a good, excellent or best possible explanation of something else, *B*. If, however, the value of a possible explanation is more or less a matter of personal taste, then one does not have to be an anti-realist and skeptic in order to consider Inference to the Best Explanation with good reason an unconvincing form of argumentation. Undoubtedly people very often believe something, *A*, because they find it to be a good, excellent, or best possible explanation of something else, *B*. But what could be the force of this reasoning if, from the objective point of view, one possible explanation for *B* is as good as any other?

### 3.

I do not aim in this paper to criticize Inference to the Best Explanation, which indeed is and has been of paramount importance for the metaphysical ventures of mankind. I will merely point out the problem that most realists are unjustifiably selective in applying this form of argumentation. They welcome its employment in establishing certain forms of realism, whereas they reject its employment in any attempt to establish other forms of realism, *although* the latter forms of realism are *compatible* with the former, and *although*, considered from an impartial point of view, Inference to the Best Explanation serves the latter forms of realism just as well as the former. On the contrary, they usually even affirm the negations of the realisms in question. This casts doubt on the metaphysical rationality of most realists: apparently they have from the start certain prejudices *on what there is not* which no inference to the best explanation, or any other argument, is allowed to shake.

Of course, most realists will deny this charge; they will flourish *Occam's Razor* — the methodological instrument in metaphysics which is the reductive counterpart of the ampliative Inference to the Best Explanation; they will assert:

The realisms in question are rejected on the basis of Occam's Razor: It is not needed as an objective fact that there be entities of the kind *F*. Therefore it is not an objective fact.

Unfortunately, Occam's Razor can be used to eliminate *everything* Inference to the Best Explanation can be used to introduce. Why then is Occam's Razor applied in some cases, and not applied in others where it could also be applied? For who says we absolutely need any particular explanation which on the basis of Inference to the Best Explanation leads us to believe in the objective existence of a certain kind of entity? We can very well do without that explanation, however cherished by us. No bridges will collapse, no planes crash. For the anti-realist, indeed, even *scientific realism* is a mere result of the incontinent desire for metaphysical explanation, of that intellectual vice which is the mainspring of all error and futility — a vice which, as the anti-realist is happy to point out, could be overcome without any detriment at all to the technological blessings of science that constitute in large measure what is considered to be its *success*.

One does not need to be as radical as the anti-realist to see a problem in the *de facto* application of Inference to the Best Explanation and Occam's Razor. Let me recapitulate and bring the difficulty into sharper focus: Some forms of realism are accepted by most realists on the basis of Inference to the Best Explanation, although these forms of realism could also be rejected by them on the basis of Occam's Razor. Other forms of realism are rejected by most realists on the basis of Occam's Razor, although those forms could also be accepted by them on the basis of Inference to the Best Explanation. Can these goings-on be rational?

The truth could very well be that with respect to the considered forms of realism most realists have indeed firmly entrenched positions. But these positions are not based on argument, not on Occam's Razor or Inference to the Best Explanation, which are a mere garnish used to fill, in a thousand modifications and refinements, books, papers and conference discussions — a pageant revolving endlessly on the question whether some kind of entity or other can be “dispensed with” or “not dispensed with,” as if our theoretical needs, our hunger for explanation or our desire, however deep, for an ontological desert, could determine what there is and what there is not. Rather, the posi-

tions on the considered forms of realism are determined exclusively by an intricate interplay of psychological and sociological *causes*; philosophical reasons are inessential.

Let us hope that this is not the truth. But becoming more consistent in the application of our philosophical reasons and arguments in the question of which forms of realism should be accepted, which rejected, would certainly help to dispel the impression that, in fact, *it is the truth*.

#### 4.

What I have said so far is rather general and non-concrete. It is time to move on to examples. Two of the most prominent forms of realism are realism with respect to universals and realism with respect to states of affairs, the belief that it is an objective fact that there are properties and relations and that we have some knowledge about them, and the belief that it is an objective fact that there are states of affairs and that we have some knowledge about them too. Realism with respect to universals has been with us for a very long time (ever since Plato); in contrast, realism with respect to states of affairs is more or less a development of the last two centuries. Both realisms have gained considerable popularity among realists in recent times, since they are considered to be natural annexes to scientific realism, which is, as I have said above, practically every realist's darling. In view of this, it is not amiss to point out that one can be a good scientific realist without being any sort of realist with respect to universals or states of affairs. After all, the entities a scientific realist avows to objectively exist — subatomic particles, photons, electromagnetic fields, etc. — are *individuals*, and therefore neither universals nor states of affairs. Protestations to the contrary notwithstanding,<sup>3</sup> it seems to me that the source of both realisms — of realism with respect to universals and realism with respect to states of affairs — is natural language, not natural science.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. DAVID ARMSTRONG: *Universals and Scientific Realism*. Instead of a detailed documentation of majority opinions among realists, the influential philosopher David Armstrong will here serve as the *typical* realist, representing the majority of realist philosophers.

## Fission, Sameness, and Survival: Parfit's Branch Line Argument Revisited

Life is dangerous but, as the lore of science fiction has it, so is survival. A moderately malfunctioning teletransporter may create a physical and psychological duplicate of you on Mars while failing to destroy the original on Earth. In this way you have apparently succeeded in surviving *twice at once*, and thus should be identical with *either* survivor. But since you cannot be identical with *two* survivors, it seems that we should say that *neither* of them qualifies as your survivor ...

Such fictional scenarios of fission or reduplication by teletransportation, or cloning, or brain transplantation are well-known gambits in the current debate about personal identity. With technological fancy and surgical graphichness varying to taste, these illustrations commonly serve to unhinge accounts of personal identity based on physical or psychological continuity.<sup>1</sup> If two persons, Y and Z, can be shown to be physically or psychologically continuous with person X, such continuity cannot be what personal identity consists in.

This common use, however, is not the only one that has been made of fission or reduplication scenarios. In his discussion of physical and psychological "branch line cases"<sup>2</sup> Derek Parfit urges a rather different and, I believe, systematically much more momentous conclusion. If it is conceivable that the graph representing the continuation of a person's physical or mental existence is not linear, then, Parfit's argues, the relation of personal identity is not necessarily coextensive with the relation of *survival*. "Branch line cases" thus entail according to Parfit

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<sup>1</sup> Locke's *Essay*, chapter 27, is often cited as the historical locus classicus for the division of persons. However, the discussion about fission (or reduplication, resp.) goes back much farther, cf. Sedley [1982]. The contemporary discussion of fission scenarios takes its departure from Wiggins [1967], Shoemaker [1984], Parfit [1975], [1984], Lewis [1983a], and Unger [1990].

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Parfit [1984], p. 199, 253ff.

a conceptual distinction between the notion of identity and the notion of survival.

Parfit's argument for the conceptual separability of identity and survival is leveled against theories of practical and moral rationality that operate with the classical notion of a uniquely realized "Cartesian self." If it can be shown that the primary value in agent utility is *conceivably not* (i.e., is necessarily co-extensional with) the promotion of a personal self that is numerically identical with the agent, then rational decisions cannot be determined *tout court* by self-interest. And the branch line cases show, Parfit claims, that what matters in our practical concerns is the promotion of a 'self' that can 'branch' over time, i.e., be 'distributed' over several bodies. Thus so-called 'other-regarding moral attitudes' or 'genuine altruism' can be treated as forms of 'self'-interest to the degree to which ethical theory abandons its longstanding bias in favour of Cartesian selves,.

Parfit's discussion of branch line cases has received continuous attention for more than two decades now. Some of Parfit's critics have called into question whether the separability of identity and survival entails the ethical ramifications proclaimed.<sup>3</sup> Others doubt that the argument demonstrates the ethical irrelevance of identical selves on any account.<sup>4</sup> A third group focuses on Parfit's notion of survival, objecting on various grounds that it fails to match our ordinary notion of survival.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, S. Shoemaker and D. Gordon each surmise that a self-interest theory of morality might well be combined with Parfit's non-Cartesian, "reductionist" account of personal identity and self, cf. Shoemaker [1985], p. 452, and Gordon [1985], p. 328.

<sup>4</sup> Several of Parfit's reviewers and commentators point out that Parfit's division of accounts of personal identity into "reductionist" and "non-reductionist" or "Cartesian" does not exhaust the alternatives, cf. e.g. Cassam [1989]; Korsgard [1989]; Shoemaker [1985], p. 446f; Margolis [1986/87], as well as in [1988], p. 36ff.

<sup>5</sup> One type of the criticism raised by Parfit's notion of survival concerns the fact that it is based on a 'no-ownership' account of propositional attitudes. Some commentators complain that Parfit does not argue that an impersonal description of mental events is possible, notwithstanding well-known neo-Kantian objections, cf. McCloskey [1986]; Margolis [1986/87], p. 323; Shoemaker [1985], p. 446f; Oaklander [1987]. On a different track Parfitian survival has been charged with inadequacy either relative to Parfit's own requirement of 'non-triviality,' (cf. Ehring [1987]) or relative to

The observations I want to offer here belong into this last group of comments. While Parfit's critics have so far focused on the significance of the branch line argument, I will raise the question whether the argument can at all be coherently formulated.<sup>6</sup> More precisely, I will argue that Parfit's own specifications imply that the "R-relation", i.e., the relation claimed to capture of "what matters in survival," turns out to hold not only *along* but also *across* the branches representing the development of a reduplicated person. This curious fact of 'interbranch survival,' as I shall call it, has gone unnoticed so far. Yet, as I shall show, it is certainly unintended — the fact that the R-relation also holds across branches creates a trilemma for Parfit's approach. Either the envisaged notion of personal identity is circular, or the R-relation fails as a reconstruction of the common sense notion of survival, or talk about persons '*branching*' (being reduplicated etc.) remains semantically empty.

The essay's first four sections offer a rather narrowly focused critical analysis of Parfit's argument. The fifth and last section shall show why it is worthwhile, from a larger systematic perspective, to undertake such an analysis. Given the ethical implications Parfit intends to draw from the argument, it is important to see precisely where the difficulties arise that have generated resistance against Parfit's liberalization of the Cartesian notion of self — perhaps, this will be my suggestion at the end, the argument is simply *terminologically miscalibrated*. For even though Parfit's branch line argument fails to establish the conceptual separability of survival and identity, it can be used to show the *separability of sameness and numerical identity*. Parfit's "R-relation," while unsuitable for modelling the common notion of survival, can be taken to reconstruct the relation 'is the same individual

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common sense intuitions which require, beyond mental continuity, physical continuity (cf. e.g. Martin [1987]; Brennan [1987]; Persson [1985]. In places this charge of inadequacy has been formulated as the objection that fission scenarios are beyond the horizon of possibility for which our concepts are accountable, cf. e.g. Robinson [1988].

<sup>6</sup> None of the twelve reviews of *Reasons and Persons* and about twenty discussion papers on Parfit's treatment of personal identity inquires more closely into the validity of the argument. J. Thomson and D. Lewis notice ambiguities in Parfit's definition of survival (cf. Thomson [1987]), pp. 171ff. and Lewis [1983a], pp. 19ff).

(conscious being or person) as.’ Branch line cases are imaginable scenarios in which we have *double occurrences of the same individual*. Branch line cases thus force us to give up the presupposition, pervasive in ontology throughout its history, that individuality (‘is the same individual as’) and numerical identity (‘is numerically one with’) are necessarily coextensional.

### 1. Parfit’s relation of survival: some clarifications

Much of the initial appeal of Parfit’s branch line argument derives from the fact that malfunctioning teletransporters enjoy the modal status of ‘Hollywood actuality.’ That this scenario, or something sufficiently like it, represents an *imaginable* possible world that can serve as a relevant ‘data point’ *vis-à-vis* ontological claims, shall be simply assumed here, even though this assumption is certainly in need of justification.<sup>7</sup> Parfit argues that the fact that we can imagine a person to be reduplicated forces us to reconceive the relationship between survival and identity.

[Division] seems to involve three people: the original person, and two resulting people. If we decide that the resulting people are indeed, as they seem to be, two people, we cannot claim that each of them *is* the original person. But we may conclude that ‘the relation of the original person to each of the resulting people’ ... contains ... all that matters ... in any case of survival.’ If this is so — if this relation does contain all that matters, but is not identity — then what matters cannot be identity.<sup>8</sup>

It might strike one as peculiar that Parfit, here as elsewhere, uses the verb ‘to matter’ with the grammar of a binary relation. Identity is said not to matter *in* survival; but what does identity not matter *for*? Should we take the conclusion as the claim that identity is not a necessary condition for survival or that it is *irrelevant* to rational choices

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<sup>7</sup> Parfitians need to address the objection that “science fiction examples provide dubious support because there is little reason to suppose that what it is rational to care about under actual circumstances must be the same as what we think it would be reasonable for us to care about under very different circumstances’ (Adams [1989], p. 459).

<sup>8</sup> Parfit [1976], p. 91.



pertaining to survival? Talk about “what matters” apparently entangles a valuative and semantic dimension and Parfit’s commentators diverge indeed significantly on the reading of the phrase.<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this essay, however, we can safely retreat to the semantic dimension and equate the “relation of what matters in survival” simply with ‘(the relation of) survival,’ following Parfit’s own practice who abbreviates “what matters in survival” as “the R-relation” and takes his argument to show that “the R-relation and identity fail to coincide,”<sup>10</sup> or that “questions of survival” do not “presuppose” “questions of identity,”<sup>11</sup> or that R-relatedness without reduplication amounts to “ordinary survival.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, by identifying “what matters in survival” with survival itself we get all about the R-relation that matters to Parfit in the branch line argument, for this argument operates strictly at the semantic level and thus is best reconstructed as the following set of claims:

*Premise 1:* The relation that contains all that matters in survival, hereafter the R-relation, allows for ‘branching’ graphs, i.e., the relation R is not a one-one relation.

*Premise 2:* The relation of personal identity is a one-one relation.

*Conclusion:* The R-relation and personal identity fail to coincide.

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<sup>9</sup>J. Perry reads the conclusion as a claim about truth-conditions: “identity is not what makes a case of survival a case of survival” (Perry [1976], p. 86). This seems inappropriate for two reasons. First, Parfit clearly has more than truth-values in mind when he states that “most of us are convinced that [personal identity] matters, or has value” (Parfit [1984], p. 263). Second, if we take the claim to be about truth-conditions, the implication should go the other way: ‘survival is not what makes a case of identity a case of identity’; otherwise Parfit could not claim, as he does, that identity is a sufficient condition for survival (cf. Parfit [1976], p.106). (For this same reason I also do not think it correct to read Parfit’s conclusion as the statement that identity and what matters in survival are in “opposition” (Lewis [1983a], 19).) Thomson emphasizes the valuative aspects by taking Parfit to argue that “it ought not matter to [the person who is about to ‘branch’] whether he will survive the performing of both operations” (cf. Thomson [1987], p. 183). Similarly Unger [1990], who contrasts the “crucial prudential use” of ‘what matters’, with the “marginal desirability use” (p. 260).

<sup>10</sup> Parfit [1976], p. 96.

<sup>11</sup> Parfit [1975], p. 200.

<sup>12</sup> Parfit [1984], pp. 201 and 261.

The task of this first section then will be to make the claims involved in this argument as precise as possible, by drawing together whatever clarifications can be gleaned from Parfit's elucidations and discussion of examples.

The dialectical exposition of Parfit's branch line argument fills a substantial part of *Reasons and Persons*, which indicates the argument's importance for Parfit's criticism of the self-interest theory of practical rationality; given that the R-relation, i.e., the relation that "contains all that matters in any case of survival," plays such a pivotal dialectical role in Parfit's approach, one should expect it to be particularly carefully defined. Surprisingly, however, apart from stressing R's possible non-linearity, Parfit offers as his final and definitive characterization only the following.

(D1) "What matters is Relation R: psychological connectedness and/or continuity with the right kind of cause ... The right kind of cause could be any cause."<sup>13</sup>

Definition (D1) lacks, first, a description of the type of entities related by R — does R relate persons, person stages, or total states of consciousness? Second, (D1) lacks any specification of the causal relation involved — if the right kind of cause could be "any cause," does this mean that, say, a certain person stage could be connected *to a previous person stage* by any *type* of causal relation, arbitrarily unreliable and indirect, or that a certain person stage could be causally related to *everything*? Third, (D1) lacks any specification of the formal properties of R — is R transitive, symmetric, or reflexive? Let us consider these questions in stride.

(1a) *The relata of the R-relation.* A person is an entity which occupies a spatially extended region for a certain amount of time. Let us say that at each moment in her life, a person is present by a 'manifestation' and let us refer to a manifestation by time-indexed variables and individual constants 'P-at-t' etc. The relation of survival can then be expressed by relational terms 'x is survivor of y' or 'x survives as y' operating on terms for manifestations.

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<sup>13</sup> Parfit [1984] p. 215f and again p. 262.

## Gibt es Gegenstände, die nicht existieren?

### 1. Die empirischen Daten

Die Annahme, dass es nichtexistierende Gegenstände gibt, beruht wesentlich auf zwei Thesen, die — *prima facie* jedenfalls — fundiert sind durch alltägliche Erfahrung:

(i) Wir können an nichtexistierende Gegenstände ebenso gut denken wie an existierende. Mit „denken an“ ist hier jede Art des intentionalen Gerichtetseins gemeint, einschließlich Arten des emotionalen Gerichtetseins, wie fürchten, wünschen, hoffen etc.

(ii) Wir können über nichtexistierende Gegenstände ebenso gut sprechen wie über existierende. Mit „sprechen über Nichtexistierendes“ ist hier gemeint: Unsere Sprache enthält singuläre Terme (sowohl Eigennamen als auch bestimmte Beschreibungen), die nichts Existierendes bezeichnen und die wir nichtsdestotrotz in der Absicht gebrauchen, auf *etwas* Bezug zu nehmen, wobei diese Bezugnahme auch gelingen kann. Dass die Bezugnahme auf einen Gegenstand gelungen ist, zeigt sich insbesondere in jenen Fällen, in denen dem durch den singulären Term bezeichneten Gegenstand *wahrheitsgemäß* eine Eigenschaft zugesprochen wird.

Einige Beispiele für (*prima facie*) intentionales Gerichtetsein auf etwas, das (gemäß Annahme) nicht existiert:

- (1) Die Großaktionäre des Henkel-Konzerns fürchten die Waschmaschine, die ohne Waschmittel perfekt sauber wäscht.
- (2) Friedrich fürchtet das ewige Höllenfeuer.
- (3) Die antiken Griechen verehrten Zeus.
- (4) Ponce de Léon suchte den Jungbrunnen.

Einige Beispiele für (*prima facie*) Bezugnahme auf nichtexistierende Gegenstände:

- (5) Sherlock Holmes ist der berühmteste Romandetektiv der Welt.
- (6) Die DDR hat zu existieren aufgehört.

- (7) Das *perpetuum mobile* muss erst erfunden werden.
- (8) Das runde Viereck ist zugleich rund und nicht rund.
- (9) Der heilige Gral existiert nicht.
- (10) Das ideale Gas kommt in der Natur nicht vor.
- (11) Atlantis könnte existiert haben.
- (12) Das runde Viereck ist ein unmöglicher Gegenstand.

*Prima facie* können also nichtexistierende Gegenstände sowohl Objekte des intentionalen Gerichtetseins als auch Objekte der Bezugnahme sein. Viele Denker betrachteten (und betrachten), in der Tradition von Alexius Meinongs Gegenstandstheorie, diese Fälle von (*prima facie*) intentionalem Gerichtetsein bzw. Bezugnahme auf nichtexistierende Gegenstände als empirische Daten, die ernst zu nehmen sind und denen daher auch eine ontologische Theorie gerecht werden muss. (Vgl. z.B. Castañeda 1979, Chisholm 1972, Crittenden 1991, Devine 1974, Haller 1986, Jacqueline 1996, Lambert 1983, Parsons 1980, Zalta 1988.)

Eine Weise, diesen Daten gerecht zu werden, besteht darin, nichtexistierende Gegenstände als eine Kategorie von Gegenständen unter anderen zu akzeptieren, mit anderen Worten: anzunehmen, dass es Gegenstände gibt, die nicht existieren.

## 2. Zwei Argumente für die Annahme nichtexistierender Gegenstände

Es gibt zwei „Basisargumente“ für die Annahme nichtexistierender Gegenstände (also für die These, dass es nichtexistierende Gegenstände gibt). Das *Intentionalitätsargument* ist abgeleitet aus der These von der Möglichkeit des intentionalen Gerichtetseins auf Nichtexistierendes. Das *Referenzargument* ist abgeleitet aus der These von der Möglichkeit der Bezugnahme auf Nichtexistierendes.

Das Intentionalitätsargument lautet:

1. Intentionalität ist eine zweistellige Relation. Daher gilt: Wenn ein Subjekt auf etwas intentional gerichtet ist (das heißt, wenn das Subjekt an etwas denkt, sich etwas vorstellt, etwas fürchtet,

sich nach etwas sehnt etc.), dann gibt es nicht nur das Subjekt, sondern auch das Objekt des intentionalen Aktes.

2. Es gibt intentionale Akte, deren Objekte nicht existieren.
3. Also gibt es Gegenstände, die nicht existieren.

Das Referenzargument lautet:

1. Wenn ein Satz der Form „Ps“ (das ist ein Satz, der aus einem singulären Term „s“ und einem Prädikatausdruck „P“ besteht — kurz: eine Prädikation) wahr ist, dann gibt es einen Gegenstand, der durch den singulären Term „s“ bezeichnet wird.
2. Es gibt wahre Sätze der Form „Ps“, so dass gilt: der singuläre Term „s“ bezeichnet keinen existierenden Gegenstand.
3. Es gibt wahre Sätze der Form „Ps“, so dass gilt: Es gibt einen Gegenstand, der durch den singulären Term „s“ bezeichnet wird, und dieser Gegenstand existiert nicht.
4. Also gibt es Gegenstände, die nicht existieren.

Die Kraft beider Argumente hängt freilich nicht zuletzt davon ab, ob es gelingt, plausible Beispiele zu geben für intentionale Akte, die auf nichtexistierende Objekte gerichtet sind, bzw. für wahre Sätze der Form „Ps“, deren singulärer Term „s“ keinen existierenden Gegenstand bezeichnet. An solchen Beispielen scheint allerdings kein Mangel zu herrschen, wie die angeführten Sätze (1)-(12) zeigen sollten.

Sätze, mit denen intentionale Akte ausgedrückt werden, die auf Nichtexistierendes gerichtet sind, werden im Folgenden als *Instanzen des Intentionalitätsarguments* bezeichnet; Sätze der Form „Ps“, für die gilt, dass „s“ nichts Existierendes bezeichnet, werden *Instanzen des Referenzarguments* genannt. Jede Instanz des Intentionalitätsarguments kann als Prämisse eines Arguments für die Annahme nichtexistierender Gegenstände fungieren. Ein solches Argument entspricht folgendem Schema:

1. s ist intentional gerichtet auf o.
2. Also gibt es o.
3. o existiert nicht.
4. Also gibt es etwas, das nicht existiert.

Auch jede Instanz des Referenzarguments kann als Prämisse eines Arguments für die Annahme nichtexistierender Gegenstände fungieren, und zwar nach folgendem Schema:

1. Ps.
2. Also gibt es s.
3. s existiert nicht.
4. Also gibt es etwas, das nicht existiert.

### *3. Einige Gründe gegen die Annahme nichtexistierender Gegenstände*

Es gibt mindestens drei gute Gründe, die Argumente für die Annahme nichtexistierender Gegenstände sehr gründlich zu prüfen, ehe man sich auf eine ontologische Festlegung auf nichtexistierende Gegenstände einlässt:

- (i) Da der Bereich des Nichtexistierenden unendlich groß ist, führt eine ontologische Festlegung auf nichtexistierende Gegenstände zu einer gewaltigen Vermehrung der angenommenen Entitäten; daher stehen nichtexistierende Gegenstände grundsätzlich im Verdacht, das Gebot der ontologischen Sparsamkeit zu verletzen.
- (ii) Die Annahme nichtexistierender Gegenstände wirft eine Reihe schwieriger Fragen auf: Können Gegenstände, die nicht existieren, Eigenschaften haben, und wenn ja, welche? Ist der goldene Berg golden und ein Berg, obwohl er nicht existiert? Wenn ja, muss nicht für jeden Berg gelten, dass er irgendwo lokalisiert ist? Wo ist dann der goldene Berg lokalisiert? Muss nicht außerdem für jeden goldenen Berg gelten, dass er grundsätzlich sinnlich wahrnehmbar ist? Aber ist ein nichtexistierender Gegenstand nicht grundsätzlich der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung unzugänglich? Welche Eigenschaften hat der goldene Berg denn noch, außer dass er golden und ein Berg ist? Wie hoch ist er, beispielsweise? Wenn der goldene Berg weder golden noch ein Berg ist, welche Eigenschaften hat er dann? Wie steht es mit unmöglichen nichtexistierenden Gegenständen, etwa dem Ge-

genstand, der zugleich rund und nicht rund ist? Verletzen derlei Gegenstände nicht den Satz vom Widerspruch?

- (iii) Es drängt sich der Verdacht auf, dass die Annahme, dass es Dinge gibt, die nicht existieren, in sich widersprüchlich ist. Dieser Verdacht ist gegründet auf unsere Gewohnheit, im gewöhnlichen Sprachgebrauch die Ausdrücke „es gibt“ und „existiert“ in vielen — wahrscheinlich den meisten — Kontexten austauschbar zu verwenden. „Es gibt keine Cholera in Europa“ und „Es existiert keine Cholera in Europa“ scheinen genau dasselbe zu bedeuten, ebenso wie „Der Weihnachtsmann existiert nicht“ und „Den Weihnachtsmann gibt es nicht“.

Der Eindruck der Widersprüchlichkeit der These, dass es Gegenstände gibt, die nicht existieren, lässt sich nur zerstreuen, wenn man plausibel machen kann, dass — entgegen dem ersten Anschein — der Ausdruck „existiert“ nicht dasselbe bedeutet wie der Ausdruck „es gibt“. Ein Unterschied zwischen „es gibt“ einerseits und „existiert“ andererseits kann auf zweierlei Art eingeführt werden:

- (i) Man kann zwei Seinsweisen unterscheiden, wobei eine davon durch den Ausdruck „Existenz“ bezeichnet wird. Der Ausdruck „es gibt“ kann dann dafür verwendet werden, Sein im Allgemeinen zu bezeichnen. Demgemäß würde gelten: Es gibt alles, was existiert, aber es existiert nicht alles, was es gibt.
- (ii) Man kann sich auf *eine* Seinsweise beschränken, diese mit dem Ausdruck „Existenz“ bezeichnen, und dem Ausdruck „es gibt“ eine völlig andere Funktion zuweisen, etwa die Funktion eines substitutional (bzw. ontologisch neutral im Sinne Priors) interpretierten Existenzquantors. (Vgl. Marcus 1962, Prior 1971, Williams 1981.)

Doch beide Strategien sind zumindest nicht unumstritten. (Vgl. z.B. Quine 1969, van Inwagen 1983, White 1968.)

#### 4. Kleiner metaphilosophischer Exkurs über das Wesen ontologischer Fragen

Fragen der Form „Gibt es Gegenstände der Kategorie K“? — also zum Beispiel: „Gibt es abstrakte (bloß mögliche/unmögliche/notwendige/zeitlose) Gegenstände?“ — lassen sich niemals isoliert beantworten, sondern immer nur im Zusammenhang des Gesamtsystems unserer Überzeugungen. Die Antworten müssen sich stets daran orientieren, welche Funktion die Annahme dieser Gegenstände innerhalb des Überzeugungssystems hat. Die Annahme darf als gerechtfertigt gelten, wenn sie dazu beiträgt, das Gesamtsystem unserer Überzeugungen kohärenter zu machen, also etwa eventuell vorhandene Widersprüche zu beseitigen, vorher nicht sichtbar gewesene Zusammenhänge explizit zu machen bzw. solche Zusammenhänge herzustellen oder Theorien (bei gleichbleibender Erklärungskraft) zu vereinfachen. Lässt sich eine solche Leistung nicht aufweisen, so kann die Annahme dieser Gegenstände nicht als gerechtfertigt gelten. Wenn sie darüber hinaus die Kohärenz des Gesamtsystems unserer Überzeugungen sogar *vermindern* würde (etwa weil sie zu Widersprüchen in dem System führen würde oder zumindest Fragen aufwerfen würde, auf die wir innerhalb dieses Systems keine Antworten finden), dann gibt es einen positiven Grund, die Annahme dieser Gegenstände abzulehnen.

Das ist die einzige Methode, Antworten auf Fragen der Form „Gibt es Gegenstände der Kategorie K“ zu finden, ohne sich dabei auf das Gebiet schlechter metaphysischer Spekulation zu begeben. Entsprechend besteht auch der Sinn einer solchen Frage in nichts anderem als darin, ob und in welcher Weise die Annahme solcher Gegenstände zur Kohärenz des Gesamtsystems unserer Überzeugungen beizutragen in der Lage ist.

Dies gilt für ontologische Fragen im Allgemeinen, und daher auch für die Frage, ob es nichtexistierende Gegenstände gibt. Es geht also darum, ob die ontologische Festlegung auf nichtexistierende Gegenstände eine kohärenzfördernde Funktion in unserem Überzeugungssystem erfüllen kann, welche diese ontologische Festlegung rechtfertigen könnte. Die Frage, ob es nichtexistierende Gegenstände gibt, soll in diesem Sinn verstanden werden.