



Introduction: Direct Realism – Historical and Systematic Perspectives

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In October 2022, as part of the DFG-funded research project “American Realism in the Early 20th Century”, we held a workshop on the topic of “Direct Realism – Historical and Systematic Perspectives” in Mainz, attended by many prominent figures in the field as well as emerging scholars. The present collection is a result of this workshop and a subsequent call for papers, comprising articles which cover the spectrum of state-of-the-art research on direct realism.

This collection is overshadowed by a tragedy. One of its contributors, Justin Donhauser of Bowling Green State University, succumbed to cancer on the 12th of October 2023, leaving behind his wife Beth, two daughters, and many friends and colleagues. Way too soon, at only 42 years, a prolific young academic was taken from the scholarly community. Only a few days before his untimely death, Justin asked for an extension to submit his final revisions, since he had to undergo emergency surgery. Alas, he could never submit them. After corresponding with Michael Weber, Chair of the Department of Philosophy at BGSU, with Justin’s wife Beth, and Fabio Paglieri, the Editor-in-Chief of TOPOI, I decided that it would be in Justin’s interest to have his contribution published posthumously. Only minor adjustments to the original manuscript were necessary. I thank Brandon Warmke for helping with this, Beth for agreeing to publish Justin’s paper, and Springer for making it open access without any fees. In Justin’s honour, I dedicate this collection to his memory.

Direct realism in epistemology and the philosophy of mind is the view that perception is not mediated by representational means such as concepts or ideas but that things are perceived directly. More recently, this position has experienced an unexpected renaissance. However, direct realism had its heydays during the first two decades of the twentieth century, especially among the “new” realists in the UK (e.g.

Bertrand Russell) and the United States (e.g. Ralph Barton Perry). The aim of this collection and the preceding workshop is to bring together historical and systematic perspectives on the direct realist conception. It is thus hoped that both perspectives will more thoroughly benefit from each other than to date.

This collection is structured – roughly – in chronological order of the time periods the respective papers are mostly engaging with. In the following, I provide a quick overview of the collection.

We start off with *Jani Sinokki*’s contribution entitled “Having a Cake and Eating It Too? Direct Realism and Objective Identity in Descartes”, wherein he revisits Descartes’ stance on direct realism and the debate surrounding it. Based on Cartesian sortalism, he construes Descartes’ view as a third option, steering the middle ground between direct and indirect realism, combining central features of both.

Second, in his paper “Inductive Metaphysics vs. Logical Construction – Russell’s Methods and Realisms in 1912 and 1914”, *Ansgar Seide* explores Bertrand Russell’s changing stance towards physical objects and the construal of their reality. He argues that the shift in Russell’s view is unfortunate in two respects: first, his later view is less simple, and second, as a consequence of that, goes along with Russell’s dismissal of simplicity as a criterion of theory choice.

Third, also concerned with Russell’s theories, *K. S. Sangeetha* provides us with “A Historical Perspective in support of Direct Realism”, arguing that indirect realism, as opposed to direct realism, is not suitable to account for knowledge of the external world. Pace Russell, it is argued that direct realism is highly efficient in avoiding the shortcomings of indirect realism.

Next, *Matthias Neuber* shares his historical insights into the development of so-called American Realism, which followed two strands: “new” and “critical” realism, respectively, as exemplified by the reception of Russell’s writings, which proved to play important roles for both. Neuber argues that the new realists paved the way for analytic philosophy in the United States.

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In his “Critical Direct Realism? New Realism, Roy Wood Sellars, and Wilfrid Sellars”, *James O’Shea* argues that critical direct realism, as put forward by Roy Wood Sellars and Wilfrid Sellars, can be characterized as a form of direct realism *sensu stricto*, despite the fact that, due to its phenomenal-realist origins, critical realism is, according to Montague, best construed as a form of indirect realism. O’Shea holds that critical direct realism remains a valid alternative to other variants of direct realism.

In “Critical Realism and Technocracy – RW Sellars’ Radical Philosophy in its Context”, *Mazviita Chirimuuta* proposes an externalist account to explain, historically, the victory of realism over idealism, on the one hand, and of scientific realism over logical empiricism and pragmatism, on the other. For this explanation, her externalist view takes into account social and political circumstances. In particular, she applies this externalist account to analyse RW Sellars’ agenda of critical realism in relation to the rise of technocracy in America after the first world war.

In his “Critical and Pragmatic Naturalisms: Some Consequences of Direct Realism in John Dewey and Roy Wood Sellars”, *Tibor Solymosi* explores the effects of direct realism on American naturalism as they appear in the debate that spans between Roy Wood Sellars’ critical realism and evolutionary naturalism, on the one hand, and John Dewey’s pragmatic realism and evolutionary pragmatic naturalism on the other, both responding to William James’ realism. Although their accounts seem similar at first sight, they entail important differences regarding, for example, the concept of mind.

For the eighth contribution to this collection, entitled “Explication in the space of reasons: What Sellars and Carnap could offer to each other”, *Krisztián Pete* and *Ádám Tamás Tuboly* take on the relationship between Carnap and W. Sellars, shedding light on the import their respective approaches to explication could have on each other, construing them as supplementary rather than opposing and competitive.

Next, *Julian Kiverstein* and *Giuseppe Flavio Artese* take on theories of direct perception in ecological psychology in their paper “The Experience of Affordances in an Inter-subjective World”. Focusing on the concept of affordances – “possibilities for action provided to animals by the environment they inhabit” –, they are painting a contrasting picture of cognitive and ecological psychologists, respectively, detailing their differing views on perception and mental

representation in animals, and arguing for a phenomenological account of affordances.

In her contribution “Being a Direct Realist – Searle, McDowell and Travis on ‘seeing things as they are’”, *Sofia Gabriela Miguens* sheds light on three current debates, contrasting John Searle’s direct realism with the approaches of John McDowell and Charles Travis, and the latter two with each other. Although all three can be considered direct realists, their views differ vastly. Miguens traces back these differences to their preconceptions of what the philosophical issue regarding perception is in the first place.

Building on and extending his “invisible disagreement” argument for colour realism, *Justin Donhauser* defends a nuanced version of direct realism in his paper “An Inverted Qualia Argument for Direct Realism”. Providing an intriguing thought experiment, he argues that different individuals, despite having different, genuinely subjective qualia, can agree on the (causal) properties of things causing these qualia. Thus, according to Donhauser, a selective form of realism results, disparate from perspectival realism, rendering the assumption that individuals share similar experiences unnecessary.

In “Naïve realism and the Relationality of Phenomenal Character”, *Roberta Locatelli* distinguishes between two claims of naïve realism regarding perception: 1, that mind-independent objects constitute the phenomenal character of perception, and 2, that perception is a relation to such mind-independent objects. In the current debate, these claims are often entangled, or used interchangeably. After untangling them, she argues that they are implausible or too weak, respectively, and thus proposes a stronger reading of the second claim, such that the first results as a corollary.

Last but not least, in “The Myth of Interiority (Le Psychologue Malgré Lui)”, *Charles Travis* indulges us with his essay on understanding and its relation to representing. In order to understand understanding, Travis distinguishes different forms of representing, namely allo-representing (saying that) and auto-representing (taking that) – representing in terms of expressing a thought and of representing to oneself, respectively – claiming that the disanalogy between the two is just as important and informative as the respective analogy, insofar as it holds. Through this analysis, the urge to psychologise auto-representing may vanish.

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