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On What Is Personally Appealing on Conceptual Relativism*

Abstract: Conceptual relativism is not an attractive position. Surely, it has its ups and downs, but the ups are rarely mentioned. This article has no ambition to provide a resolute groundbreaking argument in favour of the conceptual realism. It only aims to reconstruct the very basis of the given position from the defendant's point of view, while giving a bit of a personal (or existential if you will) touch to the whole topic. The personal element in question resides in the fact that there are incommensurable percepts, experiences, even worlds which all "feel" equally real to the subjects. This is something to what realism does not seem to be able to do justice without diminishing the ontological status of the "wrong" opinions, beliefs, etc., but this does not seem to go well with how we experience our "imperfect" realities. Conceptual relativists, however, are free from strictly distinguishing between correct and incorrect views on reality and, thus, they are able, if nothing else, to retain and appreciate the reality of our subjective worlds.

Keywords: realism, conceptual relativism, the gap, epistemological status, ontological status, personal appeal

Introduction

There are many kinds of relativism. In fact, there are too many of them to make some sort of a non-trivial overall definition of what they have in common and what would clearly distinguish them from theories of other sorts.

There is cultural relativism, moral relativism, epistemic relativism, truth relativism, etc. to name just a few. Yet another problem is that relativistic theories, in spite of the recent revival of interest in them, do not enjoy much popularity, therefore, they are usually described in a critical manner, pointing out their shortcomings rather than their appeals. One of the reasons for this disregard of relativism is perhaps that many of the claims they issue appear to be counterintuitive.[1]

Still, some versions of relativism are less controversial than others. For example, moral relativism[2] in its basic form is quite easily understandable and quite attractive too. Seeing how many people argue about moral values does make the claim that these values are relative to epochs, cultures, or even individuals quite believable.[3]

Other sorts of relativism often lack this kind of *prima facie* plausibility. One of them is the so called conceptual relativism pioneered by authors like Quine, Goodman, Putnam, or Kuhn.[4] One of the most common definitions of conceptual relativism is the following: "two incommensurable conceptual schemes may be equally adequate in their roles as cognitive tools."[5] In other words, there can be more than one correct way to describe something, without these explanations being commensurable. This basically means that there may be an item contained in one scheme which has no counterpart in another scheme nor is it explicable by combining items it contains and *vice versa*. The idea is not just about epistemological issues, like for example impossibility of translating certain words from one language to another one. It is also and perhaps foremost an ontological claim, about our very ontological concepts, even the most basic ones. Should this really be the case, it would practically mean that each person, quite literally inhabits a world of their own. Even more, if driven to the extreme

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[1] Kamil Kardis, Maria Kardis, Gabriel Paľa, Tadeusz Bąk, and Michal Valčo, "La culture du corps dans l'espacemédiatique de la société postmoderne" [The Culture of the Body in the Media Space of Postmodern Society]. *XLinguae: European Scientific Language Journal* 14, no. 4 (2021): 312–323.

[2] Peter Seipel, "Moral Relativism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Relativism*, ed. Martin Kusch (New York: Routledge, 2020), 165–173.

[3] Michal Valčo, "Crisis of Western Liberal Societies through the Lens of a Metanarrative Critical Analysis," in *Crossing Boundaries: Challenges and Opportunities of Intercultural Dialogue*, ed. Peter Jonkers and Youde Fu (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2022), 149–167.

[4] Willard Van Orman Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Columbia University Press, 1969); Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Harvard: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978); Hilary Putman, "Truth and Convention On Davidson's Refutation of Conceptual Relativism," *Dialectica* 41 (1987): 69–77; Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Berkeley: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

[5] Kenneth A. Taylor, "Conceptual Relativism," in *A Companion to Relativism*, ed. Steven D. Hales (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 159.

it can be said that a single person drifts between various worlds depending on what conceptual scheme they employ at the moment.

As a result it would mean that there is no objective world to be shared. On conceptual relativism our conceptual schemes do not depend on how the world is, rather, what exists is relative to the schemes we impose on it. And since our individual schemes differ, so do our worlds. To be sure, conceptual relativists do not claim that it is slightly different interpretation of facts, or having gone through different experiences that causes our worlds to differ, and therefore, metaphorically speaking, we live in different worlds. There is nothing metaphorical about their claim, for the facts which we encounter are themselves already literally imposed on the world by our very own minds. Therefore, according to conceptual relativists we inhabit different worlds in the most literal sense.

And since there are numerous correct descriptions which are incommensurable, it seems that there ought to be a separate world for each such description. To be more exact, these various, equally correct descriptions do not describe the world correctly in the sense that they are describing it from different perspectives. They are literally constructing worlds of their own. Although conceptual relativists may concede that there must be something out there, it does not mean that there is some sort of formless lump from which we build our private worlds. There simply is nothing like concept-unrelated reality. Not only is there no all-encompassing objective world (unless we abandon the basic rules of logic), there is no concept-neutral common basis for all those distinct worlds we construct either. Crudely explained, the world we normally call the objective world is simply made by us throwing our private concepts at each other.

Especially if put this way, it is really difficult to find something least appealing in this line of thinking. But before we can try to discover something a bit more attractive about conceptual relativism, we should say something about its natural opponent, which is realism. Just as relativism, realism also has various branches; conceptual realism, epistemological realism and many others, each of them having their own nuances and problems. However, the general idea of realism is well known and therefore it needs no elaborate introduction. Even less since we are about to put it into contrast with already discussed conceptual relativism, therefore more of its features will come up eventually.

Contrary to conceptual relativists, realists like Blackburn[6] or Davidson[7] do believe that there is objective, shared world to be explored. How much of its structure and how accurately we might be able to disclose is a matter of dispute, but the main point is that there indeed is such a structure. A realist needs not to believe, and hardly anybody does, that we might be able to unravel all the

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[6] Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[7] Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1974): 5–20.

mysteries of the world some time in the future. More common and sober version of realism allows for cognitive mishaps in a Popperian[8] manner, so to say, be it in our scientific research or in our everyday discovering of the world around us. Realism is typically a rather optimistically laden theory, meaning that those mishaps, or at least most of them can be amended by means of trial and error over time. However, not every realist is automatically bound to share this kind of optimism. One can very well, without abandoning realism altogether, lament about how much the science has gone astray or how much of ancient knowledge has been irreversibly lost.

"The Gap"

Conceptual relativism, as we know it today, stems from Kant's[9] distinction between receptivity and spontaneity, from which directly follows the distinction between phenomenal and noumenal world; the world as it is and the world how we take it. Although the idea itself is much older, it was arguably Kant who was arguably the first to coin the distinctions in question. The basic idea is that the deliverances coming to us via receptivity are already somehow structured by doings of our mind's spontaneity. Now the obvious problem is that we have no means to verify whether and how much these conceptual structures (or categories in Kantian terminology) correspond with the outside world. We cannot step out of the grid by which spontaneity organizes our experiences and mediates the world to us. Even if we could, hypothetically, it is most likely that such a world would be completely unintelligible to us.

Therefore, there seems to be a "gap" between how the world actually is and how we take it to be. The whole quarrel between conceptual relativists and realists basically boils down to disagreement about this gap; that is, more precisely, about whether there actually is such a gap or not. According to the realists, there, indeed, is such a gap, for on their account there is an independent objective world which is represented in our minds more or less correctly. How huge the given gap is, is a matter internal to realism, addressing of which largely depends on just how robust the version of realism does one endorse. The overall idea, however, remains more or less the same: by means of trial and error we can test our concepts in order to find out which fits the objective world and which do

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[8] Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[9] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Maria Baghramian, "Why Conceptual Schemes?," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 98 (1998): 287–306.

not. For not even realists believe that the world comes to us ready-made directly revealing its inner structure through our receptivity without fail. What they do believe is that at least a bit of this structure can be deciphered and correctly conceptualized from what our senses deliver to us.

As for conceptual relativists, there basically is no such gap on their account. This is because, as mentioned earlier, we literally construe our own worlds; they are created by our act of thinking about them, as it were. The boundaries between receptivity and spontaneity are erased on conceptual relativism, and so is the division between noumenon and phenomenon. There is nothing more to know about the world than what we perceive, only that what we, whether knowingly or not, add to it. It is not an imperative that we are aware of constructing our worlds. Quite the contrary. From a phenomenological point of view, it really feels as if we are exploring an objective world. And not simply because we are used to it or that we construe our worlds in a way that makes us feel like that. Arguably, it is mostly because most of our cognitive capacities and processes underlying our conscious lives are not introspectively accessible to us.[10] Acknowledging this does not automatically mean admitting that there is something objective, conceptually unrelated, a medium that makes our consciousness possible. It just means that our minds are not completely self-transparent. This makes sense if we consider that the mind, which is the creator of the world it inhabits, cannot completely perceive itself, just like an eye cannot look upon itself to put it figuratively.

The Quarrel

Why are our worlds (or worldviews, if you will) so similar, yet so different? The observation of similarity in peoples' understanding of the world and the amount of agreement we are able to achieve is water to realists' mill, while recognizing the diversity and antagonismin sometimes even the most basic matters seems to underpin the relativists' opinions. The fact that there is some deal of unity in views on morality, beauty, pleasantness, and perhaps, most notably, science is usually taken to be a point in favor of realism. However, it sort of depends on how much unity and/or disparity there is. This seems to be a matter of personal opinion, for there is hardly any reliable scale to measure the amount of each. Therefore, the argument works both ways, which is why it is difficult to take it for a serious argument in favor or against either of the

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[10] Richard E. Nisbett and Timothy Wilson, "Telling More than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes," in *Psychological Review* 84 (1977): 231–259.

views in question; especially if we take into consideration the paradoxes of the inductive method and other issues that science (which is supposed to be a flagship of realism) faces. Nevertheless, the presence of unity of all sorts in the world is usually brought up by the realists; perhaps not as a conclusive argument, but at least as an indication of the validity of their view. They accuse the conceptual relativists of "sliding too easily from epistemological truth to metaphysical falsehood"[11]; what, broadly interpreted, is just a reiteration of the argument that conceptual relativists make an unwarranted claim about inexistence of the objective world about based on unattainability of total knowledge about it.

It may be true that such a conclusion is hasty and a slothful one. But in this respect at least, the realists are guilty of a similar fallacy. While relativists, without a proper epistemological basis, are making a strong metaphysical claim, realists are making a strong metaphysical claim in order to raise their epistemological hopes. Giving up on the objective world due to its unreachability seems equally legitimate (or illegitimate) as insisting on its existence, again without sufficient epistemological evidence, in order to retain and justify one's epistemological convictions.

Another basic, but no less important problem regarding the contention between realism and conceptual relativism is the problem of truth. This issue is directly related to the one just discussed, or, as a matter of fact, an integral part of it. Here, however, the tables are turned regarding the difficulty of dealing with the problem. For realists, the truth is more or less just a question of corresponding with the objective world. Of course, there are difficulties about how to ensure and verify this correspondence, but the idea is pretty simple.

It is a much more difficult task for conceptual relativists to explain how certain conceptual schemes can be truer, or better, or more correct (for "truth" seems to be to a little too strong a term for more extreme versions of relativism) than others, and perhaps even more challenging to explain how can one be incorrect in one's description of the world if one is creating it. The most simple and straightforward answer is that on conceptual relativism a claim, belief, opinion, etc. is true or correct in relation to a conceptual framework from the point of which we are considering it. Each such framework has its own criteria of correctness. The problem is that the correctness of criteria employed by certain framework can only be checked by another, broader conceptual framework and so on, leading to infinite regress. But this is not much of an issue for conceptual relativists, since unlike realists, they are not looking for some stable constant basis of knowledge, and so the infinite regress of constant verifying and adjusting of the criteria of correctness is perhaps not the most pleasant, but certainly an expected outcome.

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[11] Taylor, "Conceptual Relativism," 168.

Still, this does not explain how can one be mistaken about something within one's own world prior to accepting new criteria for correctness, and why should one accept another criteria in the first place. Arguably the simplest, most straightforward answer, though by no means an exhaustive one, is that not just interpersonally, but also a single person inhabits several incompatible worlds at once. Thus the "error" in understanding one's world can be simply explained as a case of collision of such incommensurable worlds; and this applies even more to the collision of the worlds of different persons. To put it plainly, on conceptual relativism, the truth is a matter of relativity; the falsity is an issue of correspondence. The understanding between people deploying different, or at least similar conceptual schemes is then simply achieved by virtue of "epistemic solidarity." That is, by making concessions and adjustments, if only tentatively and temporarily, in order to somehow understand each other. It is not an ideal reserved just for a realist to reach a sort of unity and agreement not just between one's views but also with the views of others. The difference is just in that conceptual relativists believe it is obtainable on different basis and motivated by different motives.

The Appeal of Conceptual Relativism

There are of course more sophisticated ways to counter the conceptual relativism. Although the view itself is not the most captivating one, and some of its implications are clearly counterintuitive, it still manages to make justice to some of our intuitions which realism cannot. Certainly not as smoothly as relativism can.

Realists (and not just them) distinguish between the so called *primary existents* and *secondary existents*.[12] The primary existents are ordinary things like furniture, edifices, trees, etc. Secondary existents, on the other hand, are entities like rules of chess, nations, or countries. The obvious difference between the two is that primary existents are simply "out there" while secondary existents exist only by means of us inventing, establishing, and thinking about them. This distinction is not so straightforward, however. For what counts as primary existent, relative to one conceptual scheme may count as secondary existent in another. For example, consider looking at a house. As such it is a primary existent. You can then count in other houses nearby and "invent" and/or apply a concept comprising them all which would be a street. The street is now a secondary existent consisting of primary existents, that is, the houses. However, if you shift your attention (or, in other words, change your conceptual scheme)

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[12] Taylor, "Conceptual Relativism," 167.

to, for example, the bricks the house is made of, then the bricks are primary existents on which the concept of the house is applied on, and thus the house is a secondary existent in this regard.

The observant reader may have already noticed that this line of thinking is surprisingly similar to the way conceptual realists think about concepts and conceptual schemes. Taylor[13] is aware of this similarity and warns us not to be swayed by it, so let us consider some of their differences then. Of numerous dissimilarities to be found here, I want to point out two which are most relevant to this discussion. The first is that realists distinguish two types of secondary existents, as it were. Ones that are meant to capture things existing out there; to conceptualize them, make sense of them, and to place them into the order of the world, and others by means of which we usher new entities into existence. We do not deploy the concept of a house on a bunch of bricks in order for there being a house. We do it because we found out that the bunch possesses a certain structure. On the other hand, we did not create the concept of chess to describe it; we invented it so there would be such a thing as chess. For relativists all existents are more or less of the latter sort. The second difference is that realists allow only for "up and down" conceptual relativity. Relatively to conceptual scheme a house can be either a bunch of bricks, or a primary (or less secondary) existent which, together with other houses are part of the secondary existent—a street, a town, a district, etc. They do not allow, however, for conceptual relativity on the same level; or, in other words, the *faultless disagreement*.[14] Meaning that there cannot be two or more incommensurable descriptions, opinions, perceptions, etc. of one thing without any of them being mistaken (the opposite claim is basically the definition of relativism mentioned earlier). Taken at face value, this position truly looks commonsensical, especially with regard to science. However, there appear to be cases in which we disagree about something, yet there is no telling which of the competing opinions is the right one and which is wrong. What is more, sometimes it seems that there is no need to make such a decision.

Perhaps the most noticeable and very often mentioned cases like these are the cases of the judgments of taste.[15] Taste is always subjective. Whenever we ask someone about their taste concerning certain things, be it music, food, or literature, we are asking about how they subjectively feel about the stuff. Surely, they may then offer us a list of "objective" reasons for their likes and dislikes.

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[13] Taylor, "Conceptual Relativism," 159–178.

[14] Dan Zeman, "Faultless Disagreement" in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Relativism*, ed. Martin Kusch (New York: Routledge, 2020), 485–495.

[15] Timothy Sundell, "Disagreements about Taste," *Philosophical Studies* 155, no. 2 (2011): 267–288; Peter Lasersohn, "Context Dependence, Disagreement, and Predicates of Personal Taste," *Linguistics Philosophy* 28 (2005): 643–686; Max Kölbel, "Faultless Disagreement," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 104 (2004): 53–73.

But even if we acknowledge those reasons, they may or may not compel us to share their tastes. If they do not, we can then simply conclude that their taste is different from ours, or that it is awful, but we probably would not say that it is wrong. Certainly, we often use phrases like: "you don't know what good music is," but such statements seem to express our disregard for someone's taste (which is also subjective) rather than being statements about actual wrongness of it.

On top of that, taste varies not just interpersonally but it also changes over time. Similarly, as we do not think about tastes of others as wrong, an individual whose taste changes may think about their former taste as terrible, or immature but certainly not wrong. There also are, a little more controversial cases concerning taste when a person likes and dislikes the same thing at the same time. Here, the incommensurability is not that between views of different persons but it takes place within one and the same individual. It can be argued that a person in such situation simply likes something about an object but dislikes something else. And surely it is often so. But what about cases when one cannot exactly put one's finger on what one likes and dislikes about something? It can be that there actually are features of a given thing one likes and others that one dislikes, but one is only unable to discern them. Or perhaps not. This issue is basically just a special case of the original problem that polarizes realists and conceptual relativists. The realists would probably want to go with the indiscernibility option, while the conceptual relativists would most likely claim that in this situation a person likes an object from within one conceptual framework while disliking it from another.

What I am trying to say is that there are respects in which conceptual realism can appear more intuitively attractive than realism. This is no solid argument against realism of course. Nor is it meant to be. It is just that pointing out the counterintuitive features of conceptual realism is often the first weapon of choice used against it. But at least in the case of taste, it may have the upper hand concerning intuitive acceptability. For is it not more plausible to admit the *faultless disagreement* is possible, in areas like that of taste, morality[16] or political views (for starters), than make complex roundabout explanations and toying with epistemological and, what is more, ontological statuses of allegedly wrong views?

Distinguishing between ontological and epistemological issues is a tricky business when talking about concepts. For concepts as such come into being by our epistemic acts. Whether and how these acts are provoked, regulated, or otherwise influenced by something external is at the core of the dispute between

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[16] Brian Hedden, "Does MITE Make Right? On Decision Makingunder Normative Uncertainty," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics (11),* ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 102–128.

realists and relativists. What I want to focus on, however, is not the (possible) metaphysics "behind" the concepts, but the ontology of the concepts themselves.

Let us return to the topic of secondary existents. The very term "secondary" reveals that there might be something different, something inferior as compared to primary (or less secondary) existents. This impression is probably not what realists are trying to invoke by employing it. Nevertheless, it seems that the more secondary the existent is, that is, the more primary (or less secondary) are underlying it, the less epistemologically reliable it is. For concepts are fallible, and the more of them are included in the secondary existent based on them, the higher the possibility that some of them will be defective, thus making it more vulnerable to error. What makes them wrong is that they do not correspond accurately to the primary existents underlying them, and ultimately, to the "raw reality."

Even more peculiar is the status of the secondary existents which do not describe but create entities. Just like the "wrong" concepts, they do not correspond to anything but themselves, the only difference being that it does not make them incorrect. Obviously, this is because they are not meant to be "correct" in the sense of accurately capturing something, but the commonality is interesting, nevertheless. And it is not just regarding "entity creating" concepts where the correspondence is not the main issue. For example, there are pieces of art relying on creating an illusion, and it is the illusion not the "objective" stuff inducing it that matters. So it looks as if sometimes not representing the world "correctly" can become the goal of an epistemic act.

The lack or absence of correspondence changes the epistemological status of concepts. They can be either correct or wrong. They either describe the outside world correctly or they do not. This does not concern just the world describing concepts, but also the existence conferring concepts. We can be wrong about the rules, and all the possible moves in chess. We can fail to be deluded and may miss the point of an artwork. Even the most subjective concepts, set by ourselves and only for ourselves can be erroneous if we fail to recognize all the ramifications of the rules of correctness we set for them.

Whatever the case, the ontological status of basically any kind of concept we consider does not seem to be affected by its presumed epistemological status. Concepts are always equally real. Whether realist or relativist, we all live in the world of the concepts, with only difference being that the realists believe that the deliverances we receive, though not conceptualized yet, possess a structure of sorts irrespectively of our mind's status conferring powers, and that this also delimits the pool of concepts we are able to deploy. Nevertheless, on the purely conceptual level, all the concepts appear equally real. It matters not if they are supposed to describe something beyond themselves or not; and if they are, in this respect, it is irrelevant whether they do so accurately, partially accurately, or completely inaccurately. We experience them as equally real, and equally real they

are indeed, even when we recognize them as incorrect. I may be jumping the gun here a bit, drawing from epistemological to ontological claims; but as long as we are talking about concepts themselves, and not about what they may or may not represent, perhaps this need not to be seen as a foul move altogether.

There can be no *faultless disagreement* according to realists. They can admit mutual and equally real existence of incommensurable concepts on the condition that their epistemological status is different, meaning that one of them is correct and the other is not. While this might be the most natural and commonsensical response from the realist, the matter is not that simple. The reason is pretty plain. If concepts really come into being by our epistemic acts, then the ontological quality of the concepts produced by them should be also altered along with the epistemological status of the acts producing them. This would mean that realists need to concede that incorrect, "more secondary," "entities creating […] concepts possess different ontological status. If they would, I conjecture that they would say that the less corresponding (to the objective world), or the less certain the concept is, the less real it is.

In fact, Merlo and Pravato,[17] in their commendable attempt to reconcile realism with conceptual relativism are suggesting something similar. On their account the points of view of different subjects are not all metaphysically "on a par," that is, one's own mental states are metaphysically superior to the mental states of others, even if only subjectively so. Adopting an approach like this would surely rid us of many problems, but it does not quite address (at least not directly) the main problem which we are dealing with here. The claim that our mental states, experiences, and concepts are subjectively superior to us in metaphysical respect truly hits the spot. But being subjective does not mean that there are no parts of the objective world realists seek to preserve. Incorrespondence does not imply incoexistence. How can then realists account for coexistence of subjective incommensurable concepts, if not by denying it or adjudging different ontological status to each of them?

However, both options seem intuitively implausible, and metaphysically iffy, to put it mildly. The solution by treating opposing views as ontologically unequal may be passable for realists, although it is quite controversial. Nevertheless, whichever path they choose to take, it will be intuitively, and by extension personally far less appealing than the one conceptual relativism has to offer. Relativists have no need to disturb either epistemological or ontological statuses of incommensurable concepts, as for them they pertain to different worlds. This conclusion might not be the most plausible from the metaphysical point of view, but it has its ring to it when it comes to describing the subjective experiencing of the world.

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[17] Giovanni Merlo and Giulia Pravato, "Relativism, Realism, and Subjective Facts," *Synthese* 198 (2021): 8149–8165.

Even if what I said about the ontology of the concepts is not entirely correct, the personal appeal of relativism remains. The realist alternative is not completely secure either, though it also has its ways to attract sympathy (apparently more than relativism does). The reason why I call the appeal of relativism personal is that its attractivity depends on from what end one picks up the topic. If one starts by focusing on the most basic, objective, or most intersubjectively common concepts, the realism is clearly the more alluring one. If, however, one chooses to start thinking about the reality from the subjective point of view, starting with the unshareable, incommensurable concepts, moving towards slightly more intersubjectively conveyable ones, then it is relativism which answers our epistemological and ontological expectations more accurately. It is not the "objective" facts that make the world our own. The reality we inhabit is personalised precisely by subjective, super-subjective, often incommensurable concepts which distinguishes it from the worlds of others, and to which relativism seem to capture more neatly than realism. Here lies the personal appeal of conceptual relativism.

Is it not counterintuitive, and even cruel to deny our subjective worlds the same ontological status as those allegedly (more) correct ones are supposed to posses? On a bit more favourable reading, the main motive behind the conceptual relativism is not to destroy the objective world, but to acknowledge and properly appreciate the reality of the worlds we inhabit. It seems that for relativists the world of the brain in vat is as real as the one in the skull. Put this way, the idea is not so repulsive. However, this is not just about the worlds of madmen, it is also, and primarily, about the worlds we, "sane" people, occupy, have occupied, and will occupy. Of course, if there is such a thing as objective world the correspondence does matter. But even if relativists were to lay down all of their weapons they would still be the rightful protectors of the subjective worlds.

Conclusion

The relativists may be unable to answer certain questions. But at least they are not avoiding them. Sliding into relativism needs not to mean giving up on questions; rather, if meant honestly, it means truly acknowledging them. To simply solve the disparities in our world, the problem of truth and fallacy by conferring a lesser ontological status upon "wrong" views, precepts, or even emotions may seem tempting from default, as it were, realist point of view but, if nothing else, it does not do justice to our experiences of those allegedly "false" worlds.

In other words, if one lives for some time in a certain world, believing it to be the correct one, but later, for whatever reason, one reconsiders one's world view thus leaves to another (in relativist terminology), should this make one's knocking around the former one less real? I believe not. Conceptual relativism may raise more questions than it answers, but at least in this point it may have an upper hand, which is quite paradoxical, since it is relativism which is usually taken to be more intuitively appealing. And perhaps, in overall, it is, but maybe not in this respect.

I am well aware that my paper does not cover the whole debate between conceptual relativists and realists. What I tried to show is that there is also this personal aspect to it, which is worth considering and which should not be left out in spite of there being perhaps more substantial dilemmas to be dealt with. This is something one should keep in mind, if only marginally, when addressing "the big questions."

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Daniel Dancák

Sur ce qui est personnellement attrayant dans le relativisme conceptuel

Résumé

Le relativisme conceptuel n'est pas une position attrayante. Il a certainement des hauts et des bas, mais les hauts sont rarement mentionnés. Cet article n'a pas l'ambition de fournir un argument décisif et révolutionnaire en faveur du réalisme conceptuel. Son but est simplement de reconstruire les fondements d'une position donnée du point de vue de l'accusé, tout en donnant à l'ensemble su sujet une touche quelque peu personnelle (ou existentielle, si vous préférez). L'élément personnel en question est qu'il existe des perceptions, des expériences et même des mondes incommensurables qui se « sentent » tous également réels pour les sujets. C'est un aspect auquel le réalisme ne semble pas pouvoir rendre justice sans diminuer le statut ontologique des opinions, croyances, etc. « erronées », mais cela ne semble pas correspondre à la façon dont nous vivons notre réalité « imparfaite ». Les relativistes conceptuels, en revanche, ne font pas de distinction stricte entre les vues correctes et incorrectes de la réalité, et sont donc capables, ne serait-ce que préserver et d'apprécier la réalité de nos mondes subjectifs.

Mots-clés : réalisme, relativisme conceptuel, fossé, statut épistémologique, statut ontologique, appel personnel

Daniel Dancák

Su ciò che è personalmente attraente del relativismo concettuale

Sommario

Il relativismo concettuale non è una posizione attraente. Ha certamente i suoi alti e bassi, ma gli alti sono raramente menzionati. Questo articolo non ha l'ambizione di fornire un argomento decisivo e innovativo a favore del realismo concettuale. Il suo scopo è semplicemente quello di ricostruire i fondamenti di una determinata posizione dal punto di vista dell'accusato, dando all'intero argomento un tocco un po' personale (o esistenziale, se preferite). L'elemento personale in questione è che ci sono percezioni, esperienze e persino mondi incommensurabili che tutti "sentono" ugualmente reali per soggetti. Questo è un aspetto a cui il realismo non sembra in grado di rendere giustizia senza sminuire lo status ontologico di opinioni, credenze, ecc. "sbagliate", ma questo non sembra essere compatibile con il mondo in cui sperimentiamo la nostra realtà "imperfetta". I relativisti concettuali, invece, sono liberi da una rigida distinzione tra visioni corrette e scorrette della realtà e sono quindi in grado, se non altro, di preservare e pprezzare la realtà dei nostri mondi soggettivi.

Parole chiave: realismo, realismo concettuale, divario, statuto epistemologico, statuto ontologico, appello personale