

Six Philosophic Essans

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in an
Olde and Forgotten
Style

Penned by Dr. Peter Ahumada
and dedicated to Lucas Ocean.

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Prologue

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Some people in philosophy think there is only one level at which it is permissible to do philosophy. The level is quite low. It is back and forth trench warfare over the most minor issues. It is considered less than scholarly to leave the mud and the muck and to ask why we are fighting in the first place. It would lead to the Christmas Truce—God forbid!—and we might decide we were fighting over nothing all this time.

Philosophy has aped the style of the hard sciences (where people do write jargon-laden papers about obscure and minor things) in order to gain reflected respectability from an obviously coherent discipline. Why are their papers obscure? We do not care so terribly about the developmental period of *Drosophila Melanogaster* or about whether the Canis Major Overdensity has more or fewer stars than the Sagittarius Dwarf Elliptical Galaxy. It is merely the nature of these sciences to accumulate a lot of information. Not everyone can chase the Higgs boson. So most scientists tell us arcane and utterly minor things about the world, and we are grateful.

Why are they difficult? Their horrible jargon arises from the genuine complexity of the subject. If they wish to tell us how trichloroethane is oxidized by sodium permanganate, there really is no easier way to do so. A fish is an ectothermic eukaryote, and you might think a scientist is being posh to say so, but they do have their reasons. They are not talking fancy to sound smart. They are smart, and it leads to them talking fancy.

Nowadays, philosophy, too, like the sciences, has fractured into a multitude of sub-disciplines and has produced vast rivers of discussion about minor issues. It is said you must devote years of study before you can attempt to tackle a single one! If you dare to contribute, you must first relate the entire discussion to the reader. All the famous people must be cited. Every

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0. A Brief Introduction

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A common theme of these essays is just how stupid philosophers can be. Clearly, David Lewis lost his marbles when he promulgated modal realism!² As a social unit, we philosophers are failing to confront a rather important issue. There is something rotten in Denmark. The fish has gone bad. Yet we have gotten rather used to the smell.

In the last essay, you'll find there are several philosophers who don't believe in physics! It is amusing when you are reading a densely written philosophy paper, and you suddenly realize the person doesn't believe in science. These people think Einstein was some kind of kook. They think Hawkings is a slobbering paralytic. In general, they think you can only talk about some of the particles some of the time. I am not sure what they think, actually. I do hope they are not teaching it in the schools. I hope philosophy and modern dance are the only disciplines where you can get a Ph. D. while believing this sort of thing. I don't mean to be rude to those dancers, but I shouldn't want to talk to them about anything deep. Anyway, there *are* these philosophers who don't believe in physics, and I think we should find a polite way of getting them to leave us alone.

Also in the last essay there is a man named Stoljar who, as the logical positivists were so afraid of in the early twentieth century, employs metaphysical jargon, e.g. "categorical" and "supervenience," in ways I do not

² A modal realist theorizes that there are a lot of parallel universes out there. There is an evil Spider-Man. There is a good Dr. Doom. It is the Marvel universe on steroids. And we live on Earth-616.

It is hard to say this with a straight face. It is pretty silly. I believe there has been only one modal realist. Yet we talk about it still.



1. Modal Realism's Fatal Flaw



Abstract: The basic flaw with Lewis's modal realism is that it describes what (Lewis thinks) there *is* and does not address what there might be. Hence, it does not face squarely the true nature of abstract possibility. What Lewis thinks exists out there, a tremendous multiplicity of disjoint spacetimes, might well exist! Or it might not. Lewis's own view of the cosmological structure of the universe is a single possibility, and both its affirmation and its denial need to be analyzed (or at the very least, analyzable) in any proper account of abstract possibility. However, it is obvious that Lewis's approach is internally incoherent and cannot apply to itself. In general, if the word 'actual' is taken to be a non-trivial scope limiter, the rest of the entities which truly exist, a non-null set by hypothesis, may then be talked about. Sentences about them may be placed in a set, Σ , where they obviously describe various abstract possibilities, possibilities which clearly cannot be dealt with by Lewis's approach.

Well, It *Is* a Possibility.

David Lewis could be right, and he could be wrong. Either case is possible. On Lewis's own account of possibility, we cannot make sense of this statement. There could be an infinite number of causally disjoint spacetimes out there somewhere, including one where a person who looked very much like Nixon was not a crook. There might be one where Ultraman is battling the Smog Monster.³ However, this paper is not about whether or not Lewis is right about the existence of so many worlds and the honest Nixon-esque man. It is the subject of cosmology—is it not?—which is a branch of physics, not philosophy. The physicist, Alan Guth, thinks there might be an infinite number of universes spawned from tiny vacuum fluctuations. However, he does not seriously think that Ultraman is battling anybody in the great beyond!

³ See Allen Stairs's *Review Essay: On the Plurality of Worlds* for an excellent deflation of the claimed merits of believing in plentitude. (Stairs 1988, 333-52)



2. Sleeping Beauty versus Death



ABSTRACT. The solution to the Sleeping Beauty problem stems from the consideration of the number of possible ways one's present consciousness might be caused. Alternate versions of the story are explored in our essay to make clear how these ways should be counted and measured. For instance, taking one potential conscious line to be eternal and the other to be brief is quite helpful. Lewis, meanwhile, makes a markedly different claim concerning the proper probability Sleeping Beauty should assess. It is shown to stem from Lewis's general philosophical view, from a mismatch of possibilities with Lewis's possible worlds, and it is shown to have extreme and absurd consequences

The Riddle.

Elga's Sleeping Beauty problem has caused a furore (Elga 2000). It threatens to become a canonically unsolved problem, in the sense that arguments are continually being adduced to either side. Most people tend to have the intuition of $1/3$ for Sleeping Beauty's take on her probability that the coin flip was heads. Yet this is not a popularity contest. Moreover, the most influential philosopher of the last fifty years, David Lewis, endorsed the $1/2$ position (Lewis 2001). The stage is set for endless debate and a new permanent addition to the unsolved—and unsolvable—problems of philosophy.

I should think there is a real answer here! To see it more easily, I pose an alternate problem. The Sleeping Beauty problem is a style of problems. The specification of its parameters should not affect its solution. Indeed, the choice of its parameters in the classic case—a fifty-fifty coin toss, a mere twice recurrence of waking, a life after the experiment—all conspire, it seems to me, to maximize the plausibility of the incorrect alternative. Therefore, let us tweak all these parameters in order to confront what remains and to get at the truth.



3. The Gettier Problem and Disjunctive Knowledge



Abstract: Mister Gettier, you deny Smith knowledge. You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.

Gettier's dismissal of disjunctive knowledge is suspect. Every sentence you know can be rewritten as a disjunction. Every sentence you know fallibilistically and probabilistically can be rewritten in a Gettier-style form, the conclusion of which—according to him—is that you do not know it. Now, I do not share any of Gettier's intuitions about when ascriptions of “knowledge” hold. If we merely disagree about the assignment of ascriptions, our difference is linguistic. It is uninteresting and irrelevant. It amounts to a difference between the concept *he* calls knowledge and the concept *I* call knowledge. The Brits mean something different by a “biscuit.” Nobody should care about such things. However, the issue appears to be deeper. I suspect Gettier is not making any sense.

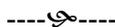
But why?

Gettier gives us an example where Smith has strong evidence to believe A = ‘Jones owns a Ford’ and strong evidence to disbelieve B = ‘Brown is in Barcelona.’ He believes the disjunction, C = ‘Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona.’ It is true, and he is justified. Unfortunately, says Gettier, since Jones is driving a rental car and Brown is only in Barcelona by pure chance, Smith does not *know* sentence C .

But why not? Gettier says the problem is that Smith is justified in believing A and that A is not true. Smith thinks that if A is true, then C is true. Yet the premise A is not true. There is something wrong—according to Gettier. Smith believes things that are not true, and we should not ascribe “knowledge.”



4. Williamson's Argument against the Given



ABSTRACT. In this paper, the argument against the given presented by Williamson in *Knowledge and Its Limits* is shown to be incorrect. There is a conflation within it of the characteristic the philosopher uses to describe the gedanken experiment and the characteristic the philosophic agent herself uses to describe her own world. Since these two characteristics need not be the same to establish luminosity, Williamson's argument fails. The borderline characterizations explored in his discussion turn out not to be relevant.

Prologue.

The twentieth century saw a lot of discussion that disparaged Descartes's awareness of his own existence. It was a tenet of logical positivism early on that we must "be careful to avoid falling into the *cogito ergo sum* and related nonsense" (Schlick 1959, 220). The remark was written by Moritz Schlick, arguably the wisest of the logical positivists, but in the very same essay he wrote passionately, "Well, under no circumstances would I abandon my own observation statements. On the contrary, I find that I can accept only a system of knowledge into which they fit unmutilated" (Schlick 1959, 219). He finished the passage by announcing stridently, "What I see, I see!" (Schlick 1959, 219)

His first person soliloquy clashes dissonantly with his obligatory chant of the logical positivist refrain that Descartes wrote nonsense. The refrain was more consistently expressed by Carnap who wrote that 'Descartes exists' is a mere pseudo-statement and that it "violates the above-mentioned logical rule that existence can be predicated only in conjunction with a predicate, not in conjunction with a name (subject, proper name)." (Carnap 1959, 74) Carnap had just mentioned a rule found in Russell's formulation of mathematical logic.



5. Physical Supervenience Is Trivial



Abstract: Prosser claims supervenience is not generally true. This cannot be the case because supervenience is a fundamentally trivial relationship between fundamental entities and various collections of them we might choose to talk about. Prosser gives us an infinite “Zeno object” and shows the larger sphere does not have the same sort of properties as the smaller spheres that make it up. However, analogous properties (of one sort or another) repeating across scale is not supervenience. The example he offers is irrelevant.

Why Are We Talking about Supervenience?

The red spot of Jupiter is an interesting feature. Clouds are whirling around the planet. Storms come and go. It is chaos. Everyone knows a single flap of a butterfly’s wings could cause a hurricane. What makes the red spot stay where it is? How does it manage to survive? How does any macro-object manage to operate in easily recognizable ways?

It turns out nice things happen. It is not obvious from a look at the rules. But nice things *do* happen. Soap films make nice bubbles. The air inside a balloon can be thought of as exerting a pressure. Ice expands when cooled. The same fraction of hydronium atoms gets spawned in water whenever acetic acid arrives. So, we talk about it *having* a pH. But what is a pH? Can you hold it? Can you touch it? Is it a fundamental feature of any fundamental particle? Molasses *has* a viscosity. Otherwise, there wouldn’t have been a Great Molasses Disaster in Boston back in 1919. But what is it, really? Copper has a specific heat. What is that? There is a law of Dulong and Petit concerning specific heat. Big things follow the law at warm temperatures. What a French law! Bananas ripen occasionally on Sundays. It is true, and we could call it a law. It works sometimes. What a French thing to do! To work well some of the year and to take summers off. To be moderately productive some of the time. Why are the French so pleased with themselves?



6. Epiphenomenalism Revisited



ABSTRACT. In this paper, it is argued that to entertain dualism, at all, in the context of the scientific paradigm is to embrace epiphenomenalism. It follows strictly from the causal closure of scientific laws, which can be and always is enforced by design. Philosophers such as Chisholm and Merricks are dismissed as unscientific. A core intuition of Chisholm that phenomena cause each other is explored and dismissed, too, to be replaced by the notion of common antecedent causation. Stoljar’s argument for “o-physicalism” is ultimately criticized for a lack of intelligibility and for its ultimately being a form of dualism in disguise. Or for making supervenience less than a logical relation, which is pointless. Once again, for any science that leaves something out, another version of science can be proposed that does not. The result is causal closure by design, which (by design) is logically incompatible with interactive dualism.

Intuitions in Philosophy.

Something unintuitive is happening in philosophy. I’ll admit that. Yet recent writings in philosophical journals have begun to leave the impression that there is no such thing as a bad intuition. I have my intuitions. You have yours. If we follow my intuitions, we get here. If we follow yours, we get there. One man’s *modus ponens* is another man’s *modus tollens*.

So, is philosophy just a bunch of intractable people with implacable intuitions talking back and forth?

Nowhere is this issue more apparent than in the debate about materialism and dualism, where the latter resolves into interactive dualism and epiphenomenalism. Stoljar, in his *Two Conceptions of the Physical*, reasonably frames the discussion in terms of the following four sentences:

1. If physicalism is true, a priori physicalism is true.
2. A priori physicalism is false.
3. If physicalism is false, epiphenomenalism is true.
4. Epiphenomenalism is false.