Hubert Dreyfus and **Charles Taylor**. *Retrieving Realism*. Harvard University Press 2015. 184 pp. $39.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780674967519).

This slim coauthored book sketches a metaphysical outlook that tries to avoid the extremes of 'modern scientism on the one hand, and different brands of subjectivism and relativism on the other' (154). The authors call this outlook *pluralistic robust realism*, which they describe as the view that 'there may be (1) multiple ways of interrogating reality (that's the "plural" part), which nevertheless (2) reveal truths independent of us ..., and where (3) all attempts fail to bring the different ways of interrogating reality into a single mode of questioning that yields a unified picture or theory (so they stay plural)' (154). This outlook is inspired by the phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, especially as it was transformed by Dreyfus' late colleague Samuel Todes. The result is an engaging synthesis of many of the ideas that Dreyfus and Taylor have developed throughout their long and distinguished careers.

Retrieving Realism consists of eight chapters. The first tries to explain why scientism and subjectivism sometimes strike philosophers as the only options. Dreyfus and Taylor claim that 'a picture held us captive' (1)—that since the scientific revolution, Western culture has been in the grips of a defective view of what it means to know. They call this view the *mediational picture*, and argue that it has four features. First, it assumes that knowledge is representational: that it is directed at a 'world "outside" us' and 'comes about only through some features in the mind/organism' (10). Contact with reality is therefore mediated by something in the subject—'little images in the mind', perhaps, or 'sentences held true by an agent' (3). Second, 'the content of our knowledge can be analyzed into clearly defined, explicit elements', such that in principle, 'one could imagine making an inventory of what we know' (11). Third, these mediating elements constitute epistemic bedrock. There is no getting beneath or behind them, and any attempt to justify our beliefs must end with them. Fourth, there is a 'dualist sorting' (11) through which these inner elements get opposed to outer ones. In the mediational picture, for example, 'the "mental" has to remain a category' (11), but is assumed to be opposed to the physical, such that explaining how the two relate is an urgent problem. Dreyfus and Taylor seem to see this fourth principle as the most insidious one. They argue that even philosophers who think that they have escaped Cartesianism—Davidson and Rorty, for example—still have a habit of carving reality into an 'inner-outer structure' (12), with all sorts of pernicious effects.

Dreyfus and Taylor think the mediational picture is vulnerable to 'two basic axes of refutation' (27). The first, discussed in chapters two through five, questions the primacy of representation, by arguing that 'our grasp of the world cannot be entirely representational' (27), since representation is grounded in a more basic way of being in the world. Dreyfus and Taylor favour a version of this view deriving from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, according to which 'grasping things as neutral objects' is conceivable 'only against the background of a way of being in the world in which things are disclosed as ready-to-hand' (35). Knowing objects is therefore parasitic on engaged, embodied coping. This does not mean, however, that we cannot compare our beliefs with reality, and

chapter three tries to explain what this notion looks like in a post-mediational context. Dreyfus and Taylor point out that a child who is asked whether a picture is crooked easily answers this question by looking and seeing. But they claim that there is nothing simple about this looking and seeing. Positioning oneself in front of a picture and determining its spatial orientation actually 'presupposes the mastery of a daunting ensemble of skills we share with all higher organisms' (59)—an ensemble of eleven distinct elements (88-89). Thus, the notions of representation and correspondence to reality are not empty or incoherent, but they make sense only within a framework of embodied coping.

Dreyfus and Taylor further insist that embodied coping 'isn't conceptual' (51). This was the issue in Dreyfus' debate with John McDowell, and chapter Four of *Retrieving Realism* summarizes that debate and adds a conciliatory new round to it. Dreyfus and Taylor say that 'for a while our view *seemed* to be in disagreement with McDowell' (72, emphasis added), adding that it is 'not entirely clear to us what... he would reject' (87) of their current position. In a concession to McDowell, they grant that certain kinds of 'unreflecting' (76) coping, such as a football player's instinctive navigation of the field, could perhaps be called 'preconceptual' (77) rather than nonconceptual. But they seem to suspect that McDowell's hostility to the nonconceptual derives from a tacit commitment to the mediational picture—for instance, a 'sense that a "space of reasons" must be a space of reasoning' (77).

Chapter five deals with the topic of global error. Thought experiments such as Descartes' evil genius hypothesis and various brain-in-vat scenarios are often held up as powerful arguments for the mediational picture, suggesting as they do that our inner representations might be radically out of step with a mind-independent reality. The authors claim that such thought experiments, 'which can seem quite sensible on the representational construal', reveal themselves to be 'incoherent' (93) when we abandon mediational assumptions. Their strategy is to refuse to concede that the errors explored by the standard thought experiments are even possible (97). Global error may be possible in the weak sense that 'as far as we know, there is no obstacle in the way things are to this occurring' (97). But they suspect that it is still 'ruled out by the way things work in our world' (97)—that a disembodied self would not be capable of genuine thought at all. Once again, the mediational picture is the villain: only if we tacitly accept its dualist sorting will we assume that 'conscious experience must be available in the brain alone' (97).

Chapter six develops the authors' second criticism of the mediational picture. It challenges 'the primacy of the monological', claiming 'that our grasp of the world is first of all shared, and then only secondarily imparted to each one of us' (28). Chapter six, therefore, deals with what Heidegger calls being-with-others. Its central claim is that to be an embodied agent is to inhabit a space of shared 'social meanings' made possible by 'intercorporeality, the ways in which our bodies are attuned to each other' (118). For Dreyfus and Taylor, some of the most interesting consequences concern the topic of cross-cultural communication. They are hostile to the idea that different cultures might have incommensurable conceptual schemes—not just because this idea ignores what we all share 'as human beings in contact with the world through engaged coping' (107), but because the language of conceptual schemes implies that a culture's distinctive sense of things 'is formulated exclusively in concepts or propositions' (116). But Dreyfus and Taylor also have doubts about Davidson's critique

of the scheme-content distinction, which they think does not take seriously enough the 'real, partial barriers to understanding' (112) that fall short of total incomprehension. They prefer to think of cross-cultural communication in terms of a Gadamerian fusion of horizons, a phenomenon they interpret as having its basis in intercorporeality.

Chapters seven and eight try to flesh out pluralistic robust realism. Though this position is a 'contact theory' in which 'nothing separates us from reality' (17), Dreyfus and Taylor are keen to distinguish it from the 'deflationary realism' (141) they attribute to Rorty. Rorty, they claim, thinks that once we have abandoned Cartesianism, we will no longer have any use for the idea of reality as it is in itself. Dreyfus and Taylor, by contrast, think that they can make perfectly good sense of this idea. Citing Kripke's account of rigid designation, they argue that it is at least possible that the universe contains 'natural kinds with essential properties' (141). And it is possible that we might discover and refer to a natural kind through 'a provisional mode of reference that remained noncommittal as to which, if any, of the properties that we used to refer to it were the essential ones' (141). We might start an investigation of gold by focusing on its colour and shininess, only later discovering that 'its essence is to have an atomic weight of 79, regardless of whether or not it is gold colored' (141). Other cultures might come to refer to gold through other properties. Ancient Egyptians might have done so via the sacredness gold was revealed to have through their religious practices. According to Dreyfus and Taylor, nothing about the process of referring to natural kinds requires us to say that modern science's account of gold is uniquely right and ancient Egypt's wrong. Yes, the former explains gold's causal properties while the latter does not. But 'having an atomic number of 79 need not be considered to be *the* essential property of gold. It is essential only relative to our way of questioning nature so as to reveal its independent properties' (151). Thus, we should abandon the idea of *the* way reality is in itself, while recognizing that 'there could well be *many* languages each correctly describing a different aspect of reality' (153-154).

Admirers of Dreyfus and Taylor will already be familiar with some of the material in this book. Parts of chapters one and two appeared in Dreyfus' exchanges with McDowell; another part of chapter two appeared in an earlier essay of Taylor's on Rorty. But their admirers will still want to read *Retrieving Realism*, not least because of the way it updates their views of McDowell, Rorty, and several other longstanding interlocutors. Above all, the book is a particularly clear and concise expression of a view that results from applying the insights of phenomenology to certain questions in contemporary metaphysics. It is most interesting when seen as a fusion of horizons.

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