

Javier Cumpa & Erwin Tegtmeier (Eds.)
Phenomenological Realism Versus Scientific Realism
Reinhardt Grossmann – David M. Armstrong Metaphysical Correspondence

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Acknowledgements

When I was reading “The Fourth Way: A Theory of Knowledge”’s page 63 (Indiana University Press, 1990) I suddenly realised that there was an extensive philosophical correspondence of Reinhardt Grossmann with David Armstrong. Immediately I told my friend Erwin Tegtmeier who is also a friend of Grossmann. We agreed that the letters would be important and revealing and deserved to be published. During that time I had tried in vain to locate an archive of Grossmann’s writings who had retired in 1994. Hence, I was aware that we could get hold of the letters only if they were with Armstrong. Tegtmeier who is acquainted with Armstrong contacted him and it turned out that they were in Armstrong’s archive. Armstrong very kindly sent to me copies of the correspondence in less than a month. I read all the letters in very few days and I was confirmed in my expectation that the letters were important and helpful for the interpretation of the philosophies of Armstrong and Grossmann. I proposed to Rafael Hüntelmann (the general publisher Ontos Verlag) a publication of the philosophical parts of the letters of Armstrong and Grossmann and he received the idea enthusiastically. I started to work unceasingly on the project, to which I had the fortune that Erwin Tegtmeier accepted to join me. This is my personal and philosophical debt with Erwin Tegtmeier, David Armstrong, and Rafael Hüntelmann.

On one occasion, Peter Simons talked to me about his admiration for the metaphysical figures of Grossmann and Armstrong. My impression of his words was about two people who had made a great effort at what could be called: “A Revival of Metaphysics” in metaphysically inclement times.

Madrid, Spain, April 2009
JAVIER CUMPA

Preface

Immediately after the Second World War the philosophy departments of the English-speaking universities gave little attention to metaphysics. It was a deeply unfashionable pursuit. In the period between the two world wars the logical positivists of Vienna used their Verification principle to outlaw metaphysical statements. In 1936 A. J. Ayer popularized their ideas in his book *Language, Truth and Logic*. In a revised edition in 1946 he said that he had come to think ‘the questions with which it deals are not in all respects so simple as it makes them appear’ but nevertheless said ‘I still believe that the point of view which it expresses is substantially correct’ (p. 5). A still more powerful influence was Wittgenstein, who claimed in his *Tractatus* (1922) to solve the problems of philosophy once and for all. But when he came back to philosophy in the 1930s he was claiming that he wished to show the fly the way out of the bottle, the bottle being philosophy. Gilbert Ryle held that there was still a role for philosophy, but it was a matter of ‘conceptual analysis’. These sorts of ideas ruled. There was no place for metaphysics.

An unfortunate result, among many, was the divide that developed between the philosophers who espoused these new attitudes and Bertrand Russell, in my view the most important metaphysician of the 20th century. He cordially hated the new thinking, the philosophers of the new wave in turn ignored most of what he still had to say. For instance, in 1948 he published his important book *Human Knowledge: its Scope and Limits*. It was not just a work of epistemology, it put forward new metaphysical views, in particular his interesting idea that continuing things should be thought of as causal lines. But the book never received the attention it should have had.

In at least two departments, however, the new ideas took no root. At the University of Iowa the presiding genius was Gustav Bergmann. He had begun as a member, one of the youngest members, of the Vienna Circle. Hitler drove him, as so many brilliant European intellectuals and scientists, were driven, to seek refuge in the U.S. Bergmann’s thinking eventually led him back to metaphysics, to ontology, to the attempt to delineate the general features of reality, the categories of being. As one might expect, there developed in his school an interest in going back to the classical figures of philosophy, and interrogating them in order to see what they had to offer, especially in metaphysics. Among a number of Bergmann’s students were included Reinhardt Grossmann and his friend Herbert Hochberg, though

they were not contemporaries at Iowa. I thank Herb for information in this paragraph. Besides Bergmann's teaching, he recalls Everett Hall giving a course on the great Idealist metaphysician F. H. Bradley, and Richard Popkin, a young professor just starting out as a historian of philosophy. Not quite your typical influences for a philosophy school in the early fifties.

Grossmann was a young German who after the military collapse of Germany found himself in shattered Berlin with no high school education and no work. As he told the tale, he supported himself, and in great measure his parents, by successful operation on the black market. He and some of his like-minded friends were able to remedy the gap in their education. They got qualifications for high school by paying in black market kind for tutorials to suitable teachers. Eventually Grossmann got to the Free University of Berlin, and from there a scholarship took him to the University of Iowa.

Another school where the flight from metaphysics did not occur was the University of Sydney. From 1927 the Challis Chair of Philosophy was held by a Glasgow educated Scotsman, John Anderson, who dominated the philosophical thinking at the university, indeed in all Sydney, for the next thirty years. Anderson had a systematic Realist view that extended to all the traditional spheres of philosophy, and included, centrally, a metaphysics. It took its inspiration from the metaphysical work of the English philosopher Samuel Alexander, but purported to be more rigorous and thoroughgoing than Alexander. Anderson, however, never published his full work in this area and it has to be gathered from his dictated lectures in 1949-1950, now published as *Space, Time and the Categories* by Sydney University Press, with an Introduction by myself. I attended these lectures, and they inspired in me a life-long devotion to the topic of metaphysics.

Grossmann and I started by corresponding with each other, but met later, I think first at Austin in 1980 when I taught at the University of Texas for a semester. Later I saw him at the beautiful campus of the University of Indiana at Bloomington and he came to Sydney where he loved the sun and the surf of the beaches. We were both of the opinion that metaphysics should be central to a systematic philosophical position, though, like philosophers generally, were unable to agree on the details! We enjoyed our correspondence and our friendship, and I hope the correspondence may interest others.

D. M. Armstrong Sydney, April 2009

Introduction

We choose the title “Phenomenological Realism vs. Scientific Realism” because these two terms indicate what is common and what is different in their respective metaphysical positions. The realism common to them involves the ontological acknowledgement of concrete as well as of abstract entities such as universals and numbers which are taken as independent of mind. The attributes “phenomenological” and “scientific” which differentiate between Armstrong and Grossmann refer to the way they support their ontological realism. Armstrong uses evidences of the natural sciences, Grossmann evidences of perception and introspection. The epistemological differences explain part of the disputes between Armstrong and Grossmann, e.g., over the simplicity of universals.

We have divided this work into four parts distributed in thirty two letters from 1976 until 1987, and three isolated commentaries on three works from 1984 until 1992. Thus, the structure of the book includes an important stretch of the intellectual development of both philosophers from the preparation of their cardinal works, Armstrong with “Universals and Scientific Realism” (Cambridge University Press, 1978) and Grossmann with “The Categorical Structure of the World” (Indiana University Press, 1983), until the publication of Grossmann’s “The Existence of the World: An Introduction to Ontology” (Routledge, 1992) and Armstrong’s “A Combinatorial Theory of Possibility” (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

I

The simplicity or complexity of universals is the main topic of the first section of the volume. Grossmann starts by referring to an ontological argument against complex universals contained in one of his papers and in a book which shows that complex universals cannot be further universals in addition to the universals they consist of. He agrees that science determines what properties there are but cannot see how scientific research would lead to the conclusion that perceptual properties such as a shade of colour or being square are complex. Grossmann insists that scientific analysis can conclude that those universals are *connected with* other properties but not that they *consist of* them.

In his reply Armstrong describes phenomenologically simple universals as *epistemologically simple* and explains that this means only that they

appear to be simple. He asserts that physical analysis give us good reasons to believe that the phenomenologically simple is really complex. He is astonished that Grossmann takes being square to be simple in spite of definitions of squareness by geometry. Since Armstrong advocates conjunctive universals he has to defend himself against Grossmann's refutation of complex universals. Armstrong claims that his conjunctive universals are not entities in addition the conjunct universals. He argues that there is a partial identity between the conjunctive universals and their conjuncts and therefore no diversity.

Grossmann argues that phenomenological simplicity is the only criterion of simplicity we have. And he claims that without it Armstrong cannot distinguish between properties of which a property consists and those which are merely connected with it. Armstrong, for his part, resorts in his answer to a phenomenological argument. He admits that redness appears simple but claims that squareness appears complex. He is convinced that he can distinguish between properties connected with squareness in a law-like fashion and properties which are partly identical with squareness. Eventually, Armstrong offers tentatively a criterion of identity between properties according to which properties are identical only if they have the same causal powers.

Grossmann doubts that Armstrong's criterion works. He asks: "could not *two* properties, since they are lawfully connected, have the same causal powers". Then he argues for the phenomenological simplicity of squareness. He points out that children recognize squareness though they cannot count the number of sides. That does not go together with Armstrong's assumption that having four equal sides is constitutive of squareness.

In his answer Armstrong admits that he has no clear-cut criterion to distinguish between constituents of a conjunctive property and properties lawfully connected with it but he thinks that there are reasons to decide on the alternative. Finally he offers an argument for the existence of conjunctive properties. It is that two particulars which have both the property P and the property Q resemble are equal not only with respect to P and Q but also with respect to being both P and Q.

Grossmann tells Armstrong in the next email that they have not accomplished to make any progress concerning the issue of ontological reduction. Yet he also announces to him: "I shall try to write you a lengthy letter on this subject soon". Then, he declares his universal realism as inherited from Gustav Bergmann. Similarly, Armstrong gives to Grossmann an account of the genesis of his advocacy of universals as derived from

that of John Anderson. And concerning the question of the ontological reduction, Armstrong simply says that he has sympathy with the physicalist temperament and, therefore, with its usual reductions.

The announced “lengthy letter” became Grossmann’s review of Armstrong’s “Universals and Scientific Realism” where Grossmann raised the issue of ontological reduction again. Mainly, Grossmann criticizes three points of Armstrong’s ontology. In the first place, Armstrong’s argues against an exemplification relation. For Grossmann, this argument shows rather that it is characteristic of relations that they need not be related to what they relate. In the second place, Grossmann deals with the argument against the existence of complex universals. Grossmann thinks that the argument for the existence of conjunctive universals precisely proves that not every well-formed propositional context represents a universal. In regard to the existence of structural universals, Grossmann suggests that Armstrong’s position is defective because an admission of wholes formed by universals seems to require, contrary to Armstrong, also an admission of the “ties” between such universals. Grossmann also appeals to the phenomenological experience as a proof that universals are simple rather than complex. Lastly, and in the third place, concerning Armstrong’s world-hypothesis, Grossmann objects that while it is true that particulars are spatio-temporal entities, it is not true that universals and states of affairs are.

Almost two months later, Armstrong sent a reply to Grossmann’s three objections. This reply was intended as a paper, but finally it was not published by Armstrong. Fortunately, however, now we can read his reaction. As to Grossmann’s first objection, he thinks that to distinguish two non-relational elements of a state of affairs does not imply that they require be related by one additional relation; as to the second, Armstrong asserts that Grossmann’s hyper-atomism simply does not permit him to concede that complex universals are logically and epistemologically possible. Armstrong argues that Grossmann must offer a theory of possibility; thirdly, Armstrong does not see any reason to admit Grossmann’s two realms of the concrete universe and the abstract world. From his point of view, both he and Grossmann are talking about the very same realm.

Grossmann sent to Armstrong a letter with some remarks on his own view on the debated issues. Concerning exemplification, Grossmann objects to Armstrong’s claim that it is possible to construe wholes without relations. Furthermore he maintains against Armstrong that these relations can be perceived. As to complex universals, Grossmann claims that what