Scholastic Realism

1868 | Some Consequences of Four Incapacities | W 2:239, CP 5.312

But it follows that since no cognition of ours is absolutely determinate, generals must have a real existence. Now this scholastic realism is usually set down as a belief in metaphysical fictions. But, in fact, a realist is simply one who knows no more recondite reality than that which is represented in a true representation. Since, therefore, the word “man” is true of something, that which “man” means is real. The nominalist must admit that man is truly applicable to something; but he believes that there is beneath this a thing in itself, an incognizable reality. His is the metaphysical figment.

1903 | Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism: Lecture IV. The Seven Systems of Metaphysics | CP 5.100-101

It is the same with the operations of nature. With overwhelming uniformity, in our past experience, direct and indirect, stones left free to fall have fallen. Thereupon two hypotheses only are open to us. Either

1. the uniformity with which those stones have fallen has been due to mere chance and affords no ground whatever, not the slightest for any expectation that the next stone that shall be let go will fall; or
2. the uniformity with which stones have fallen has been due to some *active general principle*, in which case it would be a strange coincidence that it should cease to act at the moment my prediction was based upon it.

That position, gentlemen, will sustain criticism. It is irrefragable.

Of course, every sane man will adopt the latter hypothesis. If he could doubt it in the case of the stone – which he can’t – and I may as well drop the stone once for all – I told you so! – if anybody doubts this still, a thousand other such inductive predictions are getting verified every day, and he will have to suppose every one of them to be merely fortuitous in order reasonably to escape the conclusion that general principles are really operative in nature. That is the doctrine of scholastic realism.

1905 | Letters to Mario Calderoni | CP 8.208

Even Duns Scotus is too nominalistic when he says that universals are contracted to the mode of individuality in singulars, meaning, as he does, by singulars, ordinary existing things. The pragmaticist cannot admit that. I myself went too far in the direction of nominalism when I said that it was a mere question of the convenience of speech whether we say that a diamond is hard when it is not pressed upon, or whether we say that it is soft until it is pressed upon. I *now* say that experiment will prove that the diamond is hard, as a positive fact. That is, it is a real fact that it *would* resist pressure, which amounts to extreme scholastic realism.

1905 | Issues of Pragmaticism | EP 2:354; CP 5.453

Another doctrine which is involved in Pragmaticism as an essential consequence of it, but which the writer defended (*Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 1868, and *North American Review* 1871) before he had formulated, even in his own mind, the principle of pragmaticism, is the scholastic doctrine of realism. This is usually defined as the opinion that there are real objects that are general, among the number being the modes of determination of existent singulars, if, indeed, these be not the only such objects. But the belief in this can hardly escape being accompanied by the acknowledgment that there are, besides, real *vagues*, and especially real possibilities. For possibility being the denial of a necessity, which is a kind of generality, is vague like any other contradiction of a general. Indeed, it is the reality of some possibilities that pragmaticism is most concerned to insist upon.

1905 | Notes on Portions of Hume's "Treatise on Human Nature" | MS [R] 939:21

The *scholastic realist* says, "[…] there are real *laws* (or necessities,) and real *possibilities*. They are not *actual*: they do not exist: but they are not figments. They are such as they are whether you and I think them to be so, or not. The *future* does not exist. But it *is* really true that if I find the air in my study stuffy, I *can* open the window."

1908 [c.] | A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God (G) | MS [R] 842:132

…the doctrine of scholastic realism neither is that *all* concepts are real (which would be the *ne plus ultra* of absurdity) nor that any concept is *perfectly* real; but that *some* concepts are real in *some* measure.

1909 | Essays Toward the Interpretation of our Thoughts. My Pragmatism | MS [R] 620:13

…the doctrine of the scholastic realists was that *some*, – not *all*, – generals have an "objective" truth,