Chapter 5 – The foundations of post-Galilean metaphysics

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# 5.1 In search of a method

Science is not metaphysics. A higher-level science, such as biology or economics, offers testable theories and explanations concerning some limited domain of the natural world. Physics has much broader scope, but it is also restricted in its aims: completed physics will reveal to us no more than the fundamental causal structure of nature. Metaphysics, in contrast, has no limits on the scope of its enquiry. Metaphysicians try to do nothing less than give a complete account of reality.

The contemporary situation is that science is doing very well, whilst metaphysics is a mess. Philosophers were hostile to metaphysics in the first two thirds of the twentieth century, probably the result of a misplaced envy of the progress of science. From the nineteen seventies onwards, enthusiasm for the discipline has grown, but is yet to yield results. We still don’t have anything resembling a body of knowledge to teach to our undergraduates. It’s embarrassing.

The problem is that whilst natural science has been thriving since Galileo instigated the modern scientific method, the discipline of metaphysics still lacks a clear and respectable methodology. One important principle of theory choice in contemporary metaphysics is the weighing of theoretical virtues and vices. Various metaphysical hypotheses are compared along various dimensions of theoretical merit – economy, unity, elegance, explanatory power – in order to decide which is to be preferred. To this extent, contemporary metaphysics resembles natural science: where there are multiple hypotheses consistent with empirical data, scientists choose amongst them on the basis of theoretical virtues. Special relativity and the Lorenzian theory that preceded it both fit the datum that the speed of light appears to be the same in all frames of reference, but Einstein’s theory is generally preferred on the grounds that it is a much simpler interpretation of that datum.

However, weighing of theoretical virtues cannot provide us with a starting point for enquiry. Once we have the datum that the speed of light appears the same in all frames of reference, we can wheel in theoretical virtues to decide whether Lorentz or Einstein give the better account of that datum. But we need some data in the first place to get things going. Considerations of theoretical merit can distinguish better and worse accounts of the data, but it does not itself provide us with data.

What then is the source of initial data for metaphysics? What plays the role in metaphysics that empirical data plays in natural science? David Lewis, perhaps the most influential metaphysician of the twentieth century, offers *common sense opinion*:

 '..it is pointless to build a theory, however nicely systematised, that it would be unreasonable to believe. And a theory cannot earn credence just by its unity and economy. What credence it cannot earn, it must inherit. It is far beyond our power to weave a brand new fabric of adequate theory *ex nihilo*, so we must perforce conserve the one we've got [by which Lewis means the theory which is implicit in common sense].[[1]](#footnote-1)

Lewis does not believe that common sense in inviolable; he merely takes it to be a starting point. We must start with the theory implicit in common sense, but the possibility of making that theory more virtuous may justify revisions. Indeed, Lewis himself arguably ends up quite distant from common sense, believing that people are composed of temporal parts, and in the concrete reality of every world that might have existed. Nonetheless, the fact that a certain proposition is part of common sense constitutes some reason to believe it, and earns it a place in the defeasible source of data with which metaphysics begins.

But it is difficult to see why metaphysicians should have *any* respect for the pronouncements of common sense. The views of Copernicus, Darwin and Einstein were all radically contrary to the received wisdom of the time, but this did not count again those views from the perspective of rational theory choice. It would not be rational for a scientist in the nineteenth century to weigh up Darwin’s case for the thesis that man is evolved from apes, against the counter-commonsensicality of that thesis, taking its counter-commonsensicality to be a negative feature. The counter-commonsensicality of the thesis that we are evolved from apes – or that the Earth goes around the sun, or that time dilates – has no rational force whatsoever. Of course, some of the metaphysical views implicit in common sense may have some justification. But the mere fact that a proposition is part of common sense opinion does not in itself give us any reason to believe it.

Lewis turns to common sense only because he thinks we have nothing better:

It's not that the folk know in their blood what the highfalutin' philosophers may forget. And it's not that common sense speaks with the voice of some infallible faculty of 'intuition'. It's just that theoretical conservatism is the only sensible policy of theorists of limited powers, who are duly modest about what they could accomplish after a fresh start.[[2]](#footnote-2)

However, we do have something better than common sense. Each of us has direct access to the real nature of one feature of reality: one’s own conscious experience. Consciousness is a small island of transparently revealed metaphysical truth in an ocean of darkness. My pleasures, pains, emotions, thoughts and sensory experiences, the nature of these things is directly revealed to me in so far as I form direct phenomenal concepts of them. Whatever the world is like it must be such as to contain my conscious states. The acquaintance each of us has with consciousness constitutes a crucial source of data for metaphysical enquiry.

In the light of this we can see that the received opinion of the mind-body problem gets things precisely the wrong way round. It is commonly thought that we know a great deal about the nature of the physical world, the challenge being to work out what consciousness must be like in order to fit into that world. In fact, we completely understand the general nature of consciousness, and the challenge is to work out what the world must be like in order to fit in around consciousness.

It is unlikely that we can get everything we want from this single source of data. The existence of my consciousness seems to be consistent with the non-existence of everything else. But of course we also have rich empirical knowledge concerning the natural world. The metaphysician, then, has two sources of data to appeal to in her investigations:

1. our immediate knowledge concerning the existence and nature of consciousness
2. our empirical knowledge of the world

I take metaphysics to be the attempt to bring together these two sources of data into a single, unified picture of the natural world. I shall call metaphysics so conceived ‘post-Galilean’. What Galileo separated, the post-Galilean metaphysician tries to bring back together. In what follows I shall explore in more detail these two sources of data.

# 5.2 Our immediate knowledge concerning the existence and nature of consciousness

When attending to a specific phenomenal property under a direct phenomenal concept, the real nature of that property, i.e. what it is for that property to be instantiated, is directly revealed to me. As I explained in chapter 4, a commitment to the acquaintance view is neutral with respect to most theories of what it is for ‘a property to be instantiated.’ The trope theorist can say that, in virtue of being acquainted with a pain trope, I know what it is for something to be a pain trope. The austere nominalist can say that, in virtue of being acquainted with myself at a time when I am pained, I know what it is for something to be pained.

Although the commitment to the acquaintance view does not itself entail any specific choice amongst these views, our acquaintance with consciousness does provide a source of data that can help us decide which of the various philosophical theories of the general nature of objects and properties is correct. I shall now try to describe how this might be done.

Questions of *first-order metaphysics* concern what kind of objects exist and what properties they instantiate. Questions of *second-order metaphysics* abstract away from these questions, and are instead concerned with the general nature of a property and the general form of an object.

Here are three debates in second-order metaphysics:

*Realism about universals/tropes versus class nominalism about properties*: Let us suppose that physics gives us reason to believe in electrons, and to believe that an electron has negative charge. But now consider the negative charge of a given electron. Is that negative charge an intrinsic constituent of that electron, or is negative charge to be identified with the class of negatively charged things?

*Realism about universals versus trope theory*: Suppose we accept that electrons exist and that negative charge is an intrinsic constituent of an electron. Now consider two electrons, A and B. Is the negative charge of electron A one and the same things as the negative charge of electron B? Or do we have here two numerically distinct (but qualitatively identical) negative charge*s*?

*Bundle theory versus substance-attribute theory*: Suppose we accept that the negative charge of each electron is numerically distinct from the negative charge of every other electron. We still have the question: is the electron a kind of bundle of negative charge and all its other properties, or is there some constituent of the electron which in some sense bears the properties of the electron?

It is difficult to see how empirical data could help decide these issues. Contemporary metaphysicians try to decide amongst these hypotheses either by appeal to considerations of theoretical virtue, or by appeals to pre-theoretical intuitions about what a property or an object is. To take an example of the latter kind of theory choice, consider an intuition-laden argument of David Armstrong against class nominalism:

Is a thing the sort of thing that it is – an electron, say – because it is a member of the class of electrons? Or is it rather a member of the class *because* it is an electron?....it seems natural to say that a thing is a member of the class of electrons because of what it *already* is: an electron. It is unnatural to say that it is an electron because it is a member of the class of electrons. And that it is natural to put the property first and the class second is some reason to think that that is the true direction of explanation. This is bad news for any Class Nominalism…’[[3]](#footnote-3)

Armstrong takes it to be part of the class nominalist position that something is an electron because it is a member of the class of electrons. He then uses the intuition that this gets things the wrong way round as an argument against class nominalism. Actually, it is not clear that the class nominalist is obliged to put things this way round. The class nominalist may take it to be a brute fact about some particular object that it is an electron, in virtue of which it is a member of the class of electrons. But let us put this on one side, and assume that Armstrong is challenging the extreme blobby form of class nominalism, according to which there is no fact of the matter about what kind of thing an object is prior to facts about what sets it belongs to.

The real problem with Armstrong’s appeal to intuition in the above argument is that at best it tells us something about *his own concept* of propertiedness, i.e. the general nature of a property. In so far as we share Armstrong’s intuition, this seems good reason to think we share Armstrong’s concept of propertiedness. But what reason do we have to think that *our* concept of propertiedness is mirrored in the natural world? We could define two concepts of a property: propertyi which is the concept of a property conceived of as an intrinsic constituent of the object that instantiates it, and propertyc which is the concept of a class of intrinsically-property-less (i.e. blobby) objects. The important question is: which of these concepts is mirrored in the natural world?

Plato had an account of our knowledge of metaphysical truth, involving our acquaintance with the forms before our entry into the physical world. The rationalists believed that our ideas of fundamental metaphysical categories are put into our minds by God. But unless Armstrong wants to commit to some such supernatural story to justify treating his own concepts as metaphysically privileged, it’s hard to see what reason he has to think that *his* concept of propertiedness, as opposed to the class nominalist’s concept of propertiedness, is mirrored in the world.

Something similar is going on in C. B. Martin’s argument against bundle theory:

An object is not just a group of properties, because properties are not themselves objects to be grouped. An object, therefore, stands in need, not only of a set of properties as an ingredient, but also of the ingredient of a bearer of whatever properties are borne….A particular shape or size has to be *of* something….what is referred to as the 'square shape' *cannot be* thought of under some other description as an object that could have existed without need of being the square shape of anything but as an object existing in its own right.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Martin has the intuition that properties are unsaturated beings: they cannot exist as substances in their own right, but must be completed by being ‘of’ some object. As in the Armstrong case, at best this tells us something about *Martin’s* concept of propertiedness (and about the reader’s concept of propertiedness insofar as the reader finds her intuitions going in the same direction). But there is clearly another concept of propertiedness, that employed by the bundle theorist, which conceives of properties as saturated beings: able to exist without support from some other kind of entity. Again the crucial question is: which concept of propertiedness is mirrored in the natural world?

The acquaintance view provides what is required to make progress on these issues: direct understanding of a real feature of the world. Martin and Armstrong are entitled to use armchair reflections to draw conclusions about *their conception* of the propertiedness of size/shape/electron-hood. Similarly, the post-Galilean is entitled to use armchair reflections to draw conclusions about *her conception* of the propertiedness of phenomenal qualities. The difficulty for Martin and Armstrong is that they have no grounds for thinking that their conception of propertiedness accurately reflects the propertiedness of size/shape/electron-hood as they really exist in the natural world. In contrast, if the post-Galilean is right that the nature of phenomenal qualities is directly revealed to her when employing direct phenomenal concepts, then she is entitled to suppose that her conception of propertiedness does accurately mirror the propertiedness of phenomenal qualities as they really exist in the natural world. In the unique case of consciousness, armchair intuitions can take us all the way to reality.

Therefore, if we can alter the subject matter in the Armstrong/Martin arguments, such that they concern the propertiedness of phenomenal qualities, rather than the propertiedness of electron-hood/size/shape, and if the intuitions still remain, then we will end up with intuitions which the post-Galilean can legitimately take as support for the second-order metaphysical claims Armstrong and Martin are trying to make.

Here is a post-Galilean re-write of the Armstrong argument:

Is a pained thing pained because it is a member of the set of pained things? Or is it rather a member of the class *because* it is pained?....it seems natural to say that a thing is a member of the class of pained things because of what it *already* is: a pained thing. It is unnatural to say that it is a pained thing because it is a member of the class of pained things…

If intuitive force remains after this change, we find ourselves with an intuition which concerns the real nature of pain: the intuition that being in pain is prior to membership of the set of pained things. The post-Galilean who has this intuition may legitimately take it as grounds for opposition to class nominalism (or at least to the blobby version of class nominalism according to which I am in pain in virtue of being in the set of pained things).

Here is a post-Galilean re-write of the Martin argument:

A particular phenomenal quality has to be *of* something…what is referred to as the ‘feeling of pain’ *cannot be* thought of under some other description as an object that could have existed without need of being the painful feeling of anything but as an object existing in its own right.

Again, if the intuition remains, we find ourselves with an intuition that phenomenal qualities are unsaturated beings, which stand in need of support. The post-Galilean who has this intuition may legitimately take it as grounds for opposition to bundle theory.

Let us focus on the question of whether pain is saturated or unsaturated. We might initially think that there are three possible positions the post-Galilean may take on this issue: (i) a phenomenal conception of pain does not settle the matter one way or the other, (ii) a phenomenal conception of pain characterises pain as saturated, (iii) a phenomenal conception of pain characterises it as unsaturated.

I am inclined to think that option (i) is not ultimately a coherent position for the post-Galilean to take. One cannot understand what it is for something to be square without understanding what it is for something to be shaped; for being square is just a specific way of being shaped. By analogy, it seems that one could not understand what it is for pain to be instantiated without understanding what it is in general for a property to be instantiated. Given the acquaintance view, our introspective conception of pain reveals what it is for pain to be instantiated, and thereby also ought to reveal what it is in general for a property to be instantiated. To put it another way, whether or not pain is saturated is surely an aspect of the real nature of pain, and the acquaintance viewtells us that the real nature of pain is revealed to us in introspection.

For similar reasons, the post-Galilean cannot deny that a phenomenal conception of pain reveals whether pain is a universal, a trope, or a set of particular objects. In attending to how my pain feels, its real nature is revealed to me. Whether it is a universal, a trope or a set of objects is surely part of its real nature, and so this ought to be in some sense apparent to me in introspection.

This entails that we can in principle discern, by attending to phenomenal qualities in introspection, whether they are universals or tropes, and whether they are saturated or unsaturated. We ought to be able to know, from meditating on our conscious experience, whether Plato or Aristotle was right about the nature of properties, and whether Locke or Hume was right about the nature of objects

If the truth on the ancient philosophical questions of second-order metaphysics is introspectively available, how is it that philosophers have disagreed on them for thousands of years? The answer is that metaphysics is hard. When we simply attend to our conscious experience, thinking of it in terms of what it’s like to have it, we get the metaphysical reality of it exactly right. But when we start reflecting on that reality using abstract metaphysical categories – ‘universal’, ‘particular’, ‘saturated’ – we are liable to go astray. The second-order metaphysical truth is directly available to us, but that very lack of epistemic distance also makes it hard to get things in clear focus.

How then should post-Galileans proceed when there are contradictory intuitions concerning consciousness? Let me say a little more about how I envisage the business of post-Galilean metaphysics.

A post-Galilean believes that her concept of consciousness is her only direct window onto the nature of the world as it is in and of itself. If she is serious about getting to the truth, she will spend time and effort attending to the conception that arises in the mind when one attends to one’s phenomenal qualities, considering it from all angles, trying hard to behold it without prejudice or confusion. When convinced that the phenomenal intuitions of another post-Galilean are leading him astray, she will carefully try to understand why her fellow is going astray, and try to find words that will point him in the right direction. At the same time, she will consider carefully and with an open mind the words of her fellow intended to illuminate to her possible errors in her intuitions.

In contrast to the combative clashing that can sometimes mark the practice of analytic metaphysics, post-Galilean metaphysics, at least so far as the gathering of initial non-empirical data is concerned, needs to be a more gentle business. It must be a humble, open-minded, collective attempt to get clear on something which is in the grasp of each of us, but whose epistemic nearness perversely makes it more difficult to get a grip on.

Of course there is no guarantee that, even with these efforts, consensus will result. Even if it were not possible to achieve consensus amongst post-Galileans, this would not entail that the method is to be rejected. There are many areas of intellectual enquiry which have not managed to achieve consensus amongst practitioners, ethics and economics being obvious examples, but it does not follow that these are defunct areas of enquiry or that practitioners are misguided in taking themselves to be justified in believing the conclusions they come to.

Having said that, with the help of an agreed method and source of initial data second-order metaphysics might be able to achieve some kind of consensus, at least on certain issues. I speculate that a settled post–Galilean community might gravitate towards a broadly agreed commitment to the real existence of concrete features of objects, i.e. Aristotelian universals or tropes. We pre-reflectively take the immediate objects of sensory perception to be particular objects: tables, chairs, etc. But it is more natural to take the immediate objects of introspection to be properties: how pain feels, what it’s like to see red. This seems to pretty straightforwardly count against austere nominalism. And intuitively, the throbbing ache I am introspectively aware of is located in time, where the Aristotelian/trope theorist would locate it, rather than outside of time, where the Platonist would locate it. This seems to pretty straightforwardly count against Platonism.

How should we decide whether two qualitatively indiscernible feelings of pain are numerically identical or distinct? This is a difficult question, but for the post-Galilean it is to be answered by careful reflection and meditation on one’s own conscious experience, and by subtle attempts to share what one takes oneself to have found. This is not a way of proceeding that analytic metaphysicians are used to. I am recommending a radical shift in how second-order metaphysics is done.

Can second-order metaphysics be completed by reflecting on one’s conscious experience? This depends on one’s view concerning the objects of acquaintance; on whether we are acquainted only with properties, only with objects, or with both objects and properties.

Suppose one is acquainted only with one’s phenomenal qualities. In having a priori access to the nature of one’s phenomenal qualities, one has a priori access to the general nature of a property; one could not understand what it is for pain to be instantiated without understanding what it is in general for a property to be instantiated. Therefore, in principle one could know through introspection whether properties are saturated or unsaturated: whether or not the instantiation of a property involves its being supported by a substratum. But given that one is acquainted only with the properties themselves, one will have no a priori access to the nature of the substratum supporting one’s phenomenal qualities, if such a thing there be.

Suppose one has this kind of view, and is lead to the conclusion that phenomenal qualities are saturated. It follows from this conclusion that one’s phenomenal qualities are not borne by a substratum. But if one does decides that one’s phenomenal qualities do stand in need of support, the entity that one takes to support them will be a ‘that I know now what’. Ascertaining the nature of substrata in this case will be a more speculative matter than ascertaining the nature of properties. Whilst judgements about the nature of properties are justified through careful attention to the direct revealed phenomenon, hypotheses concerning the nature of substrata must be justified by the theoretical benefits of a given hypothesis as part of a broader theory of how directly revealed phenomena are brought together with empirical phenomena in a general conception of the world.

Now suppose the converse position, that one is acquainted only with the bearer of one’s phenomenal qualities, and not the qualities themselves. A post-Galilean austere nominalist claims that one is acquainted with the subject of one’s experience at a time when one is such-and-such-wise phenomenally, and in virtue of this knows what it is to be such-and-such-wise phenomenally (Hence, this is a non-blobby form of austere nominalism, as a given subject is intrinsically such as to satisfy certain phenomenal predicates). For this kind of post-Galilean, there are no second-order metaphysical categories which one cannot understand attending to the object of acquaintance. There is only one second-order metaphysical category – that of object – and one is acquainted with an instance of that category.

Furthermore, on this view it will be a priori accessible that there are no other second-order metaphysical categories. One cannot understand what it is for something to be pained, without understanding what it is for something to be propertied. If one understands what it is for something to be propertied, and for something to be propertied is not a matter of its instantiating a property (or being involved in any way with an entity from some other second-order metaphysical category), then one knows that it is not the case that for something to be propertied is a matter of its instantiating a property (or being involved in some way with an entity from some other second-order metaphysical category). On this view, therefore, the complete second-order metaphysical truth can in principle be ascertained from a direct phenomenal conception.

Finally, suppose that one is acquainted with the state of affairs of *the subject of one’s experience instantiating phenomenal qualities*, such that there is nothing more to the nature of both property and property bearer than is apparent in a direct phenomenal conception. It is clear that in this case, as in the case of the austere nominalist, the complete second-order metaphysical truth can in principle be ascertained from a direct phenomenal conception.

Thus, it is only post-Galileans who think we are acquainted only with properties, and that those properties turn out to be in need of support, who need to involve speculation in the context of an overall theory in second-order metaphysics, in order to reach a view about the nature of substrata. For all other post-Galileans, the complete second-order truth ought in principle to be reached entirely from careful reflection on one’s own conscious experience.

(Nature of tropes, or do this later?)

# 5.3 Our empirical knowledge of the world

 One can make considerable headway on second-order metaphysical questions just by reflecting on one’s own consciousness. But one cannot get all that far on first-order metaphysical questions with only this data source. I can know about the existence of the determinate form of conscious experience I am currently having. I can thereby know that physicalism is false. But I cannot know whether there is anything outside of my own mind at this particular moment of time.

If it is to move beyond solipsistic agnosticism, post-Galilean metaphysics must allow appeal to both our immediate knowledge of consciousness and to our empirical knowledge of the world more generally.

This raises two questions concerning the latter source of data:

1. What is the content of our empirical knowledge?

Specifically: Do we know that there are macroscopic physical objects, such as tables and chairs, or do we just know certain facts about what we are disposed to experience as we negotiate the world, i.e. that we are disposed to have table-like and chair-like experiences? Do I know that other minds exist, or only my own mind? Do I know about things in the past and future, or only the present? Can we know that the unobservable posits of science exist, such as electrons, or only the things we can directly observe?

1. What justifies our empirical knowledge?

Given that the only aspect of the world that is directly revealed to me, i.e. my current state of consciousness, is compatible with the non-existence of tables, electrons, other minds, the past, etc., how can I be justified in believing in any of these things?

Each of these is a huge philosophical question, which deserves a book in its own right. I want the post-Galilean method to be compatible with a variety of accounts of what we know empirically, and how we know it. Some empirical knowledge is required to do post-Galilean first-order metaphysics, but the method itself need not be dogmatic about the empirical contribution. The pressing contemporary question is not how to investigate the world empirically, but how to move from empirical investigation to metaphysics proper.

I don’t want my own thoughts on the foundations of empirical knowledge to infect the post-Galilean methodology, but for what it’s worth I am inclined to think that our empirical knowledge is ultimately pragmatically grounded. It is reasonable for me to suppose the bare minimum that I need to in order to fully engage with the life I seem to be living. Suppose I have no reason to think the scenario in which my partner exists more probable than the scenario in which nothing has ever or will ever exist except my current state of consciousness. Still, it is only by really believing in the existence of my partner over time that I can fully engage with the life I seem to be living. Given this, it seems reasonable for me to believe in the existence of my partner.

This does not entail that it is fine for me to believe anything I want. Many people fear a post mortem meeting with the moral judge, who may condemn them to eternal suffering based on their ethical conduct whilst alive. In general this is a mistaken priority. Most people have not behaved so badly as to deserve damnation. You shouldn’t be worried about the meeting with the moral judge; that’ll be mostly box ticking. It’s what happens next you should worry about.

After meeting the moral judge, the recently dead are sent round the corridor to a more fearsome fellow: the epistemic judge. The job of the epistemic judge is to examine your epistemic conduct whilst in the land of the living. For each of your beliefs, she will want to hear reasons, and will make a judgement over whether your epistemic conduct was respectable. She’s not so harsh really; she just wants you to have done your best. Most people are going to burn.

Where there are grounds, of which you ought to have been aware, for judging the probable truth of a certain belief, the epistemic judge will expect you to have made use of such grounds. Woe betide anyone who ignores the certain knowledge accessible to each in virtue of acquaintance with consciousness. But it seems reasonable to hope that, in the absence of such grounds, the epistemic judge will accept pragmatic justification for belief. ‘What was I to do, you honour? I had no way of knowing whether my wife existed, but she seemed to, so I thought I might as well believe in her. Have mercy, your honour, the human state is so epistemically frail.’

The moral judge tempers her expectations for ethical conduct, given the weaknesses of the human condition. The epistemic judge does the same with regards to epistemic conduct. Or at least they are cold hearted witches if they expect us never to give in to temptation, and to stoically refrain from all judgements which no available evidence can settle. It is not just to judge humans with the standards of gods.

What is required in order to fully engage with the life I seem to be living? I must commit to the existence of the other conscious beings I seem to vividly experience, and to believe that their consciousness is as they seem to be saying it is (unless I have reason to believe otherwise). I must believe that I genuinely had experiences I seem to vividly remember having had, and that those interactions with other conscious beings that I seem to vividly remember really took place. I must believe that systematic regularities in the past will persist into the future. If I don’t with all my heart accept these things, then I’ve no chance of flourishing as the person I seem to be.

However, it doesn’t seem to be necessary in order to live a full and happy life to believe in the material objects of ordinary experience. Whether there is a glass of wine in front of me, or whether there are particles arranged glass of wine-wise, or whether the cosmos instantiates glass of wine-ish properties in a nearby-me spatio-temporal local manner, so long as the possibility of social lubrication is provided for, all is good. Indeed, one can live a perfectly normal life as an idealist, identifying the non-mental objects of the surrounding world with permanent possibilities of experience.

My hope, therefore, is that the epistemic judge will allow us a merely pragmatic justification for what we might call ‘the Berkeleian facts’: (A) facts about other minds in the past and present, (B) objective facts about how minds that exist will be disposed to experience in the future. Of course I cannot just wilfully believe whatever I want regarding which conscious beings exist, and how they will be disposed to experience in the future. I must base my judgements on the most likely hypothesis given the assumption that my (i) my vivid, consistent experiences are in some way veridical, (ii) systematic regularities in the past will persist into the future.

Suppose you wake up down a hole with amnesia, and you vividly hear a voice telling you how you got there and what’s to be done about it. Even in the absence of a reason to think it probable that your auditory experience is veridical, and that the voice is speaking the truth, it is reasonable for you to take a leap of faith and suppose that both are the case. What else are you going to do?

Human life is a bit like that. Our basic empirical commitments are grounded in a pragmatically justified leap of faith; or rather reflection reveals that to be the only proper basis for them. But just because our basic commitments are grounded in faith does not make them beyond rational criticism. Some leaps of faith are more reasonable than others, and the epistemic judge will want to hear your reasons.

# 5.4 An educated guess at the nature of reality

The aim of post-Galilean metaphysics is to make an educated guess at the nature of reality. This is an inherently speculative business. There are issues which can be more or less straightforwardly settled with empirical evidence, such as whether water is H2O, or whether the world is warming up. But metaphysical issues, such as whether objects are bundles of properties, or whether consciousness is irreducible (the topic of the next chapter), are not like that.

It may not be possible, then, to build consensus amongst post-Galilean metaphysicians of the kind we find amongst, say, biologists; although having said that we may surprise ourselves. And it is far from clear how post-Galilean metaphysics could help us build bridges, or cure cancer, or make life in any way more comfortable; although we must remember that technological advances often have surprising sources. Still, I think it’s worth attempting. The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, even if it lacks instrumental value, is an end in itself, just as literature and music are ends in themselves.

What is distinctive about post-Galilean approach to metaphysics is that in its attempt to work out the most likely hypothesis concerning the nature of reality, it restricts itself to three sources:

* Careful reflection on one’s own conscious experience
* Empirical data
* The weighing of theoretical virtues

My hope is that this clear and respectable methodology may allow progress.

The rest of the book will be an exercise in first-order post-Galilean metaphysics. My claims in later chapter are much more tentative than in earlier chapters, and are intended as a first stab to be improved upon by future work.

1. Lewis 1986: 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lewis 1986: 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Armstrong 1989: 27-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Martin 1980: 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)