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What is ‘Naive Realism’?*

Abstract

Naive realism is the subject of criticisms and attacks from more sophisticated philosophical positions. Many philosophers admit that naive realism is kind of common sense knowledge. In this paper the author suggests that this approach is incorrect one. In first part of article he gives an account of a typical view of naive realism; in second part, he attempts to answer the question as to why naive realism is naive; in third part he demonstrates that there is no equivalence between naive realism and the common sense knowledge; in the fourth part he analyses some examples of the philosophical argumentation which focuses on the concept of naive realism.

The so called ‘naive realism’ is often the subject of criticism and it is a negative point of reference for epistemological positions which are regarded as more sophisticated, such as representationalism, or various non – realist positions, i.e. as instrumentalism, idealism, etc. The problem is that the recipient of this criticism is exceptionally enigmatic because nobody has officially called himself a naive realist. There is also a lack of philosophical works devoted to the systematic defence of realistic naivety. Obviously the criticised views can be proclaimed under a different term. However, if we consider – as it is commonly done – the statement that objects are exactly as we see them as typical, and a negatively evaluated expression of naivety, it will turn out that in principle nobody holds such a view. Therefore, a question is: what are the objections formulated about naive realism against? Some people associate naive realism with everyday thinking. However, a closer analysis of everyday thinking – that it is usually an unconscious natural attitude or some kind of a background that an ordinary man has towards the world – shows that it is not in any way “naive” in the sense discussed here. Moreover, if everyday thinking was based on the assumptions of naive realism, the subject using it would not be able to function properly. The question then arises: what actually refers to the term ‘naive realism?’ We can make a hypothesis that naive

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realism is a theoretical construct used in philosophical reasoning to persuasively strengthen arguments for the defended epistemological position through suggesting that it has more of a sublime and sophisticated character than what the general public, or (automatically qualified as) less discerning authors think on the subject. However, since neither the general public nor any serious authors think in these terms, we cannot only reflect on the meaning of the polemics with naive realism, but also on the well-established theoretical value of such polemics and criticism of the positions.

The objective of this paper is to examine this issue. In the first part of the article, I present the characteristics of naive realism that are based on its most common features that can be found in the philosophy of the last century; in the second part I will answer the question: where is the naivety of naive realism? The third part relates to the identification of naive realism with common sense as a typical cognitive attitude of 'an ordinary man' I will quote some arguments in favour of this view, taking into account the previous characteristics of naive realism, that such identification is wrong. In the fourth part of the article, I will examine the use of the concept of naive realism in philosophical argumentation, showing that from the perspective of earlier findings, some commonly used solutions turn out to be more or less doubtful.

1. The features of naive realism

The term 'naive realism' can be found in every major encyclopedia of philosophy. It is also referred to by authors of classic and popular introductions to the theory of epistemology. As an important philosophical problem, naive realism was particularly thought about at the end of the first half of the twentieth century in the context of the famous book *Perception* (1933) written by H. Price in which the author attempted to reconstruct naive realism and to present a modified and philosophically sophisticated version. On the other hand, B. Russell's thesis from his work, *An Inquiry Into Meaning and Truth* (1940), was often quoted. According to Russell naive realism leads to physics and physics demonstrates the fallacy of naive realism.¹ Both issues evoked many comments and polemics, leading to, in some cases, the creative development of the problem of naive realism. It can be found especially in the works of A. Ayers which referred to Price and Russell: *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* (London 1940) and *The Problem of Knowledge* (1956). In this reconstruction, I focus primarily on these works, referring also to some characteristics that have provoked comments about naive realism formulated more or less in the same period and presented by D. Drake (published in various works including *Essays in Critical Realism*, 1920), C.D. Broad (*The Mind*

¹ H. Price, *Perception* (New York 1933), chapters II, III; B. Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (London 1980), especially p. 15; B. Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy* (New York 1960), p. 183. Cf. D. Cory, 'The Transition from Naive to Critical Realism', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 10 (1942), p. 261–268; J.W. Blyth, 'A Discussion of Mr. Price's *Perception*', *Mind*, 173 (1935), pp. 58–67; H.D. Lewis, 'Naive Realism and a Passage in the Theaetetus', *Mind*, 187 (1938), pp. 351–356; H.J. McLendon, 'Has Russell Proved Naive Realism Self-Contradictory?', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 9 (1956), pp. 289–302; A.P. Ushenko, 'A Note on Russell and Naive Realism', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 25 (1956), pp. 819–820.

and *Its Place In Nature*, 1925) and later, but with more original argumentation by W. Sellars in *Science, Perception and Reality* (1963) We can get an impression that, especially in the dominant mainstream Anglo-Saxon philosophy, the scope of defining what is meant by the concept of naive realism and where is its naivety, was established more or less in that period. Subsequent authors, whose opinions are also quoted in this paper, devote less attention to this problem and refrain from going into details. Rather, they copy earlier characteristics as the effective ones. The only significant difference lies in the fact that nowadays the use of once popular language on the theory of sensory data, by means of which Price and Ayer described naive realism, is being avoided. Some interesting comments can be found in the works of H. Putman, P. Strawson and J. Searle. However, especially in the latter two, the recognition of naive realism differs from the standard one, which results in losing a significant aspect of its naivety.

It should be noted that naive realism has always been characterised as a negative point of reference within the confines of the defence of particular epistemological positions such as critical realism, fenomenalism, scientific realism, etc. There has never been a philosopher, to the best of my knowledge, who would directly defend naive realism in the way depicted later in this work, even though some scholars, such as Sellars and Ayer, presented naive realism in a form which might be accepted. This acceptance was associated with the loss of its naivety, regarded as a primary flaw, and as a result of which we would deal with a situation where naive realism could be accepted as long as it is no longer naive. Also, contemporary attempts of a partial restoration of naive realism (which can be found for example in the works of Searle) do not imply bringing back its standard or dictionary form, but rather stem from a certain conceptual confusion. The situation that led to this can be presented in the following way: first, a rather bizarre position was called naive realism; then this definition was incorrectly identified, on the one hand, with common sense, and on the other, with direct realism as such. Then it was realised that neither common sense operates in such a way nor does direct realism involve such risky assumptions, and since it was acceptable to use the terms 'naive realism', 'common sense' and 'direct realism' interchangeably, it was acknowledged that reconstructing some aspects of one of the latter two views must also imply the restoration of naive realism as such. However, the position that is being attempted to be restored, has nothing to do with the standard version, which, as mentioned above, no one seems to have defended.

Bearing in mind these introductory comments, let us try to characterise the standard or classical form of naive realism. In this form, it is an epistemological position concerning mainly the theory of perception, although it entails (usually not clearly distinguishable) ontological conclusions regarding the existence of perceived objects.² Summing up the various features of naive realism indicated by the above mentioned authors, we may be tempted to construct a general description. Naive realism, therefore, would include the following propositions:

² Cf. M. Bradie, 'Ayer and Russell on Naive Realism', *Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*, 1 (1976), p. 176. In addition to the naive realism in literature there are also many other 'naive' theories: a naive mentalism, a naive mechanicalism, a naive physicalism etc.

(1) *Immediate perception of objects.* This feature appears in most descriptions of naive realism Broad writes about the naivety of this idea, according to which 'we are in a direct contact with parts of the surfaces of outer objects'.³ Armstrong describes naive realism as contrary to the representational "doctrine which holds that we perceive physical objects",⁴ whereas Ayer negatively describes it as a thesis which holds that "the perception of the physical objects cannot be analysed in terms of the presentation of sense-qualia".⁵ It could be concluded that naive realism assumes direct realism, or, taking into consideration the fact that the latter may have different formulations and consist of a whole set of views, it accepts the thesis of the direct character of perception, according to which the objects of our perception are external objects which exist independent of us, and not contingent upon our impressions, ideas, etc.⁶ But the problem lies in the fact that some authors consider naive realism to be some kind of phenomenalism. Admittedly, Dancy, allowing such a definition, also states that this position would have a "grotesque" character⁷ but, for example, Sellars characterizes naive realism as the simplest form of phenomenalism in which the term 'see' would be used as necessarily associated with the term 'exist' (which agrees with Ayer's characteristics; besides Sellars refers here to the same prop which is the dagger of Macbeth).⁸ At the same time, however, Sellars suggests that the term 'naive realism' should be considered as synonymous with the term 'direct realism' This introduces some confusion because the term is not used traditionally by Sellars, as a description of the cognitive relationship of two elements that is devoid of intermediary mental representation, but applying it to the 'direct' inference of knowledge from perceptual acts, which concerns the ontic status of their objects. However, if naive realism was a form of phenomenalism, it would be rather unconscious, identifying the appearance of things with themselves. This possibility of a dual interpretation is probably due to the fact that in the standard understanding discussed here, cognitive immediacy is not a necessary condition for naivety.

³ C.D. Broad, *The Mind and Its Place in Nature* (London 1925), p. 47. A good overview of Broad's representational realism is presented by J. Wild in paper 'An Examination of Critical Realism with Special Reference to Mr. C.D. Broad's Theory of Sensa', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2 (1953), pp. 143–162.

⁴ D.M. Armstrong, *Perception and the Physical World* (New York 1961), pp. 23–24.

⁵ A.J. Ayer, *Russell and Moore: The Analytic Heritage* (Cambridge 1972), p. 126. Cf. A.J. Ayer, *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* (New York 1969), p. 48.

⁶ J.W. Cornman tries to present a technical definition of immediacy in the context of naive realism, starting with the following characteristics of direct experience and using an elusive in the Polish language difference between the terms *immediately* and *directly*: "s immediately experiences (object, property) p, at time t = df. At t, s directly experiences p and does so in such a way that this relationship of experiencing between s and p is simple (that is, does not consist in any other relationships or properties) and unanalyzable". J.W. Cornman, *Perception, Common Sense, and Science* (New Haven–London 1975), p. 221. According to some, for example Armstrong, naive realism is identical with direct realism (*Perception and the Physical World*, p. 23), others distinguish these positions from each other.

⁷ Cf. J. Dancy, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (London 1985), p. 155 (for this reason 'naive scientific realism' would be impossible).

⁸ W. Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality* (Atascadero 1991), p. 61.

(2) *Perceptual qualities reside in objects.* It can be seen that such characteristics are only possible if it accepts some form of representationalism which says that the identification of what is epistemologically private, or subjective, with what is ontologically public, and objective, is naive. Naive realism here would consist of regarding the matter of sense as a part of the surface of physical objects. As Drake writes, according to this view “perceptual data are in reality fragments of external beings, parts or surfaces of physical objects”.⁹ A similar view can be found in Price’s work who notes that, as for the question of the relationship between a sensual and material object, especially in the context of examining it as a “belonging to” relation, naive realism replies, holding that “in the case of a visual or tactual sense-datum, belonging to means the same as *being a part of the surface of*: in that literal sense in which the surface of one side of this page is part of the whole surface of this page”.¹⁰ The same characteristics, also arising from the positive opinion of representationalism, can be found in Broad’s works who identifies naive realism with a view that sense data, which are the manifestations of physical objects “are literally spatio-temporal parts of that object”.¹¹

(3) *Perceived objects exist independently of the perceptual subject.* This assumption can be understood in this twofold way: firstly, the objects do not cease to exist when they are not the object of perception and, secondly, they exist exactly in the same form in which they are perceived. What is important here is the idea that the mind and body of the perceiver are unnecessary or irrelevant for the existence of the object as well as for the occurrence of the sensuous quality of the external object. A naive realist identifies private sense data with the space-time parts of objects, believing at the same time that these “spatio-temporal parts of it which are not manifested in sensation are of precisely the same nature as those which are so manifested”.¹² He believes that (as a direct naive realist) “unperceived objects are able to retain properties of all the types we perceive them as having”.¹³ Also Russell states that each person who is philosophically and scientifically naive, believes that when you perceive something, it is still there when we do not look at it.¹⁴ From this assumption we can conclude that a naive realist is somebody who has not experienced a Copernican revolution in epistemology and does not see the impact that the subject of cognition has on, not only some features of the object, but also on its formation.¹⁵

(4) *Objects are perceived exactly as they are.* In such a form this assumption has an epistemological character, whereas in an ontological form it is associated with the latter and reads as follows: objects are always the way they are perceived.

⁹ D. Drake, *The Approach to Critical Realism*, [in:] D. Drake, *Essays In Critical Realism* (New York 1920), p. 8.

¹⁰ H. Price, *Perception*, p. 26.

¹¹ C.D. Broad, *The Mind and Its Place in Nature*, p. 422.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 422.

¹³ J. Dancy, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, p. 147.

¹⁴ B. Russell, *An Inquiry Into the Meaning and Truth*, p. 283.

¹⁵ Cf. H.A. Pritchard, *A characteristics of naive realism*, [in:] *Kant’s Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford 1909), and a polemic with D.L. Murray: H.A. Pritchard, ‘Philosophic Pre-Copernicanism? An Answer’, *Mind*, 19 (1910), pp. 541–543.

However, it is its epistemological form that is decisive. This could be the shortest and the most adequate of the characteristics of naive realism presented here in its standard version: “objects are exactly the way we perceive them” (Russell),¹⁶ “external objects [...] are always the way they appear” (Kotarbiński),¹⁷ “the world is the way it presents itself” (Woleński).¹⁸ It seems that this feature – that is the conviction that our perception accurately copies transcendental entities existing independently of us – can be regarded as vital for the characteristics of naive realism. From this perspective it is understandable that naive realism could be formulated in a phenomenalist version (representational). The problem is not whether we perceive the world directly or not, but about whether we see it exactly as it is.

Apart from the above features, which due to their prevalence can be considered essential to define naive realism, I would also like to draw attention to two less important features that clarify the previous characterisation.

(5) *Perception is knowledge*. Price draws attention to this assumption. When answering the questions, what is perceptual consciousness and how is it connected to sensory cognition, naive realism states that awareness of the object is strictly speaking “*knowing that* there exist an object to which the sense-datum now sensed by me belongs”.¹⁹ This knowledge does not depend on inferring from the existence impression about the existence of the object as the cause of these impressions (as in the causal theory of perception), but it has a pre – discursive character (it is a type of *tacit knowledge*). Sellars refers to such a solution, seeing the confusion in naive realism of two meanings of the term ‘direct experience’ – non-epistemic with epistemic, that is suggesting that the impression of something is the knowledge of the thing (here we have the case of identifying *sensation* with *inspection*). “According to ‘naive’ realism, seeing that a leaf is green is a special case of knowing that a leaf is green. Indeed, it is a special case of direct, i.e. non-inferential, knowing. One can infer from the fact that the leaf looks black when one is viewing it in a red light that the leaf is green. To do so, however, is not to see that the leaf is green. Nor does seeing that the leaf is green consist in inferring that it is green from the fact, say, that it looks green and one knows oneself to be viewing it in daylight. This is not to say that such an inference cannot occur, but simply that it is not an analysis of seeing that the leaf is green”.²⁰

(6) *The subject is in a privileged, absolute relation to the world* This view is attributed to traditional realism by Putman who seems to identify it with metaphysical realism (at least some of its claims), which he criticised, accepting at the same time a type of ‘natural realism’.²¹ Referring to Austin’s criticism of sense data theory, Putnam attempts to defend a different understanding of ‘naivety’

¹⁶ B. Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, p. 15.

¹⁷ T. Kotarbiński, *Elements of the Theory of Knowledge*, p. 80.

¹⁸ J. Woleński, *Epistemology*, p. 17.

¹⁹ H. Price, *Perception*, p. 26.

²⁰ W. Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality*, p. 61.

²¹ Cf. H. Putnam, *The Threefold cord. Mind, body, and world* (New York 1999), Lecture II: “The Importance of Being Austin: the Need for a »Second Naiveté«”, pp. 21–41.

which however boils down to refining naive realism from all the features that constitute the unique nature of this position.

Undoubtedly, we could add some more features to this list but I think that either they could be reduced to those already mentioned above, or they would not be essential for the characterization of the standard version of naive realism, or they would refer to some specific understanding of this position. Therefore I suggest to end this general description.

2. Why is naive realism naive?

Another point refers to the naivety of naive realism. What causes one form of realism to be described using this term? In other words: what is the essential naivety of this realism?

There are numerous ways to reply to this question. The most general one relies on identifying naive realism with an unreflective attitude of the 'common man' and finding naivety in this unreflectiveness. Following this line of reasoning, Robert Audi, as Russell and Price did before him, observes naivety in ignorance of philosophical reflection concerning the nature of perception, regarding this naivety as synonymous to a pre – philosophical and pre – scientific supposition (a good indication of that would be, for example, ignoring philosophical arguments regarding perceptual illusion).²² Besides, such an understanding of the term 'naive' can be found when applying it to views other than realism. That which is naive is considered to be identical with that which is common, unreflective, stereotypical and colloquial. This kind of approach lies in the basis of the recognition of naive realism as an expression of common-sense views on the nature of knowledge, which I discuss later on.

Naivety can also be characterised on a more detailed level. It can be seen then in the proclamation of some philosophical views (epistemological, but also ontological). In this sense, naivety is connected with one of the features of naive realism mentioned above. We can presume that it relies on recognising the fact that an adequate description of the perceptual processes can be made by referring to mechanisms of reflection or reflectivity (therefore the naive theory of reflection is often discussed, not in the sense that its 'non- naive' version could exist, but recognising it as naive as such).²³ Naivety can also be found in a more general feature – the recognition of a non propositionality of perception,²⁴ the recognition of sensory data as part of an object or, as Sellars does in making no distinction between the epistemic and non epistemic character of sensations.

It seems, however, that naivety does not depend on the proclamation of some theory of cognition but rather on the fact that this view has the character of

²² Cf. R. Audi, *Epistemology. A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (New York–London 2003), p. 30; B. Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, p. 81; H. Price, *Perception*, p. 26.

²³ Cf. T. Kotarbiński, *Elements of the Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 80–81.

²⁴ Cf. H. Putnam, *The Collapse of Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge–London 2002), p. 102; the similar statements see P.F. Strawson, *Causation in Perception*, [in:] *Freedom and Resentment*, p. 87.

some mere generalisation and it only sets the dividing line between a naive and a sophisticated view. Dancy writes, for example, that the naivety of naive realism lies in the fact that, assuming that unperceived objects can retain all types of properties that we perceive as belonging to them, this realism insists on the word “all”.²⁵ We can conclude that the essential naivety of naive realism lies in the fact that it claims that *objects are always exactly the way we perceive them*.

3. Naive realism and common sense

In philosophical literature, there is a tendency to identify naive realism in the above characterised standard version with knowledge or common sense thinking. Ayer simply states that “as for naïve realism, its strength is in remaining veridical to common sense”.²⁶ Common sense is usually understood as a more or less coherent set of views, usually unconscious, characterising the so called ordinary man, which are manifested in his behaviour, basic statements and methods of reasoning. Since there is no room for a detailed analysis of a common sense, it is enough to assume that common sense is understood as a pre-reflexive system of ontological and epistemological assumptions (and sometimes also axiological), proclaiming, for example, that there are material entities in space and time, there are intelligent beings, there are also some causal relationships between what is mental (thinking), and what is material, etc.

However, we may emphasise here that this identification of naive realism in the form described here with what is actually meant by the common sense approach of the so-called ordinary man, is faulty. The problem is not only that, at the ordinary level, the process of cognition proceeds in a different way than is assumed by naive realism because it is not a point of argument, but also that the point is that the pre-philosophic, and in some sense natural general epistemology, that is, a common sense notion of cognition, does not coincide with its naive-realistic concept. So an ordinary man is neither naive in his perception nor does he have a naive idea about it. Besides, some researchers of common sense do not describe it with the term ‘naive’ or ascribe to it previously mentioned features, especially the belief that objects are always exactly as we perceive them. We cannot infer any features which would characterise a standard version of naive realism from the traditional description of common sense (made for example by Reid and Moore), nor the latter result in typical properties of a common sense knowledge. Both positions proclaim something rather different, and in many cases their views are contradictory. Since there is no room for a detailed proof that the so-called attitude of an ordinary man cannot be described using the characteristics assigned to naive realism (or at least not by the essential characteristics; and as for the other two, they could

²⁵ J. Dancy, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, p. 147.

²⁶ J. Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge*, trans. E. König-Chwedeńczuk (Warszawa 1965), p. 102 (Ayer writes that naive realism is an “intuitive” approach”, p. 99); cf. also J.W. Cornman, *Perception, Common Sense, and Science*, pp. 217–218. It is worth noting that some authors formulate objections to the validity of such identification. Cf. e.g. H. Price, *Perception*, p. 26.

be usually applied only conditionally).²⁷ I shall confine myself here to indicate on which theoretical levels we could attempt to demonstrate it.

(1) *Empirically*. The easiest way would be to show that in common knowledge, people do not accept the cognitive assumptions attributed to naive realism, is by exploring how this cognition functions in practice. Practice shows that at least the basic premise, which also attests to the naivety of naive realism, is not accepted here, that is, the claim that we know things exactly as they are (or in the ontological form that things are always as we know them). Such an assumption could at best characterise the early stages of human ontogeny, where clear distinction between subject and object, or words (symbols) and objects, has not been made yet. Perhaps some features of naive realism could be linked to children's self-centredness as described by Piaget, which characterises pre-operative thinking and ceases to dominate around the age of 7 (though already weakened from the age of 2).²⁸ However, we must add that later studies, even if they confirmed the validity of Piaget's theory, weakened it and pointed to fact that this stage lasts shorter than previously thought. Many researchers have also suggested that with the acquisition of language (beginning at approximately 1–2 years old), a child acquires the ability to understand perspective of knowledge, both his own and others. They also begin to understand contextualism of knowledge which leads them to realise that objects appear to be relativised to the point of view and their conditions of perception.²⁹ This makes some of their characteristics to be naturally regarded as a secondary quality (using the terminology of Locke), and thus relative to the subject and its condition (after dark, white paper is still "white" to an average person even though it does not seem like that). The problem here is not the fact that an ordinary man, not seeing things exactly the way they are, also believes that he perceives them this way (in his naive epistemology), but rather the fact that he knows that he does not perceive them this way. The latter undermines the suggestions of Price and Sellars: on one hand they are right that perception involves some non-inferential knowledge of its subject (and the relationship between perception and object), but it is not about involuntary imitation of perceptual judgment (referring to how the object is actually perceived) at the ontological level (referring to what the object really is). It is rather a kind of interpretation taking place already at the elementary level of perception based on certain patterns or cognitive structures available to the subject (culturally or phylogenetically developed).³⁰ Concluding, the analysis of common cognition itself, as well as common sense knowledge about the cognitive processes (natural

²⁷ For example, in his classic characteristics of common knowledge Moore clearly points to an assumption of a subjective relativization of knowledge: "many of the acts (of consciousness) depend on the changes that take place in our bodies."

²⁸ Cf. B.J. Wardsworth, *Piaget's Theory of Cognitive and Affective Development* (New York–London 1984), pp. 81–83.

²⁹ Cf. e.g. M. Tomasello, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition*, p. 202; *idem*, *Origins of Human Communication* (Cambridge–London 2008), pp. 73–82 (these cognitive skills are the basis of language acquisition).

³⁰ Cf. E.H. Gombrich, *Illusion and Art*, [in:] R.L. Gregory, E.H. Gombrich, *Illusion In Nature and Art* (New York 1973), pp. 193–243.

epistemology), indicate that they are not naive in the standard sense described here.

(2) *Transcendentally*. For this purpose we can appeal to the so-called transcendental argument which rests on the idea that from certain states of affairs we can infer some required conditions of their possibility. J. Searle tried to use this type of scheme with the aim to prove the validity of external realism however not as a theory but as a pre-theoretical, common approach to reality, a type of tacit knowledge, which he describes as Background of human actions and knowledge.³¹ To examine the possibility of relevant identification of naive realism with the common sense approach we should reverse the pattern of transcendental argumentation and seek instead the required conditions for some state of affairs, considering which hypothetical state of affairs could appear as consequences of certain conditions if we recognise them as the required ones. Let us assume that the earlier characteristics of the standard version of naive realism involves a set of necessary conditions of possibility for action and knowledge. Among these conditions, the key position belongs to the assumption which states that we know objects exactly as they are (or objects are always the way we now perceive them). Now let's ask what actions of a subject (including cognitive ones) could be constituted based on such necessary assumptions. Now it is easy to notice that, accepting such an assumption, a man could not act in such a way as he does and, for example, include perspective and contextual perception. Thus, if we assume that human cognitive activities require some initial subjective conditions of possibility, they cannot be assumptions which characterise naive realism.

(3) *Phenomenologically*. If naive realism was to be identical with the common-sense approach, its assumptions would have to be identical with what is defined as the natural attitude of the subject towards the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). However, the analysis of this natural approach, which was carried out in the framework of the phenomenology, indicates that the rudimentary cognitive approach constituted in this framework is of a different nature. It is characterized by, among other things, the ability to take into account the context of knowledge, and therefore the subjective perspective and the objective context. We must therefore emphasize that the analysis of the natural attitude shows, not only that at this rudimentary level the subject does not approach the reality in a naive way, but also that its natural, and common epistemology is not naive.

(4) *Adaptationally*. This argument would be a combination of the solutions suggested in points (1) and (2). The point here is to demonstrate that an entity whose cognitive system would work based on the assumptions of naive realism, would not be able to adapt to the surrounding environment. This version could be described as 'strong' as it would be based on the assumption that what we as humans take for the surrounding environment is identical with the reality existing objectively and independently of us, and therefore an entity with different cognitive structures could not survive in this environment. However, what can be concluded is, at most, the fact that we could not survive living as we do, formulating the same

³¹ Cf. J. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York 1997), pp. 177–197.

description of reality. If we understand the ‘environment’ or ‘reality’ to be similar to Kant’s conception ‘nature’ and therefore, as a complex structural phenomena arranged according to the laws of consciousness, then it will also be an effect, not the cause of adaptation (our image of world would be one of the elements of our adaptation to the world). So we should formulate an adaptive argument in a weaker, relativised version, stating that if the assumptions of naive realism were at the basis of knowledge, the beings known as *Homo sapiens* would not function the way they currently do, since their adaptive mechanisms would have to take another form, which, in turn, could lead to the conclusion that as they are differently adapted to the environment, they would just have to be different beings. Besides, this reasoning could be reversed: recognising the assumptions of naive realism as the effect of hypothetical adaptation, we should recognise the fact that it would have to refer to other types of entities functioning in different conditions (we could try to construct thought experiments describing the phylogeny of entities whose cognitive approach includes the assumption that they know things always exactly as they are).³²

(5) *Pragmatically.* It would be a variant of the above mentioned argument, except that if in the previous one, the object of consideration was an unintended and spontaneous application of the principles of naive realism, here we would consider a situation in which their adoption could lead to the desired cognitive effects. This solution is weak because it assumes that there is a set of common cognitive interests at the common sense level, common to all people and therefore we could demonstrate that naive realism does not allow for the implementation of some or all of these interests. Perhaps if these interests were reduced to biological survival, such a suggestion would be justified. In other cases the common performance level is too closely associated with the surrounding culture which, even if it maintains its biological minimum, might give it a peculiar form. Therefore, the thesis that the assumptions of naive realism are at variance with the realisation of our interests (practical and purely cognitive) could only be relatively true (or in the relativisation to cultural-historical conceptual scheme), which would take the form of common sense (*nomen omen*) tautology: naive realism does not usually allow for the realisation of our practical interests, except in cases where our practical interests coincide with the consequences of their assumptions.

These were some of the methods which allowed us to demonstrate that what had been earlier presented as the standard model of naive realism, cannot be identified with the assumptions underlying the basis of common knowledge or common sense natural attitude. Some of these solutions are more effective, some less so, but they do not only demonstrate that naive realism cannot be the real foundation of human action and knowledge, but also that you cannot regard it as an expression of pre-philosophical views on knowledge. The idea of the duplication of reality by knowledge, the homomorphism of the world and its image is rather a philosophical idea – the first attempt to construct a theory describing the cogni-

³² On this subject see e.g. H.C. Plotkin, *Evolutionary Epistemology and Evolutionary Theory*, [in:] H.C. Plotkin (ed.), *Learning, Development and Culture. Essays In Evolutionary Epistemology* (New York 1992), pp. 4–7.

tive mechanisms and cognitive relation. Common-sense thinking, however, rather involves elements of cognitive relativism, associated with perspectivism and contextualism underlying human perception. Thus, from the standpoint of common sense, the recognition that things are always exactly the way we see them would be unreasonable.

4. Naive realism in arguments

In my final point of the paper, I would like to show how the standard model of naive realism works in philosophical argumentation. I will discuss here two examples: the classic argument from illusion and the argument which I define as an unjustified disjunction

(1) *Argument from illusion*. This argument is used to demonstrate the fallacy of the position of naive realism, and later on realism as such. Its most general form roughly reads as follows: we assume that sense perception provides us with a reliable picture of the world, but there are some cases where sense perception provides us with a false picture of the world. What is more, we do not have independent criteria to distinguish between the reliable perception and the false one, therefore we have to acknowledge that sense perception in general cannot provide a reliable image of the world (but informs us about our sensations). The most basic example of perceptions which are regarded as false are perceptual illusions. In philosophical literature there are numerous examples; here I will refer to two authors only due to the fact that the criticism of their solutions relied on undermining the validity of identifying naive realism with common knowledge.

In his first *Meditation* Descartes forms objections against the ordinary treatment of the testimony of the senses, referring to the following everyday situations in which he states that the senses 'deceive' us: for example, objects which are distant from us appear smaller than they really are. Another well known argument is formed by Ayer in the framework of his criticism: a coin looked at from different angles once looks circular and once elliptical, which is a special case of the universal phenomenon which says that whenever we turn an object or change our perspective on it, it appears to us in a slightly different form. Because we cannot choose the right perspective, this argument proves that all sense perceptions of an object are false. We can conclude that we cannot build epistemology taking sensory cognition as the starting point (Descartes) and that we do not perceive objects as they are (Ayer, Price).

What is wrong with this reasoning? Well, it is in the initial assumption which assumes that naive realism defined as a view which holds that we always perceive things exactly as they are, is a valid description of a common or typical human cognition. If it was true, this argumentation could be accepted which means that if an ordinary man in his everyday life always believed that objects are always the way they appear, demonstrating that there are exceptions to this rule might be considered as an argument for the fact that common knowledge and our ideas about this phenomenon are wrong. However, as I have already demonstrated, it is not the case which means that common knowledge cannot be identified with what is characterised here as the standard form of naive realism. Therefore, the

conclusion derived from such considerations is wrong. To be more precise, it is not only the conclusion that our senses deceive us and that very often or maybe even always our perceptions are inadequate – because we could agree that is the case – but it is the thesis holding that is it commonly overlooked. We should rather say that the opposite is true – the general awareness of the limits of the sense knowledge is a condition for its possibility.

In other words, to make this argument work we should assume that examples used here are some kind of aberration from a norm that for the common man would be naive realism. Thus the fact that objects appear to become smaller when we increase distance or that the coin changes its shape when being rotated can be considered as an aberration (and an argument against common knowledge) only by someone who would assume that objects should not decrease with distance and that a coin should not change its shape. But this is unacceptable to a common sense. From the standpoint of the natural attitude it is not surprising that distant objects are smaller than close objects: we would be surprised if they were the same size or that if a coin would remain round in spite of being rotated. Besides, these arguments are not new – they have been already formulated by the critics of Descartes and Ayer, that is Mersenne and also Austin who wrote: “That a round coin should ‘look elliptical’ (in one sense) from some points of view is exactly what we expect and what we normally find; indeed, we should be badly put out if we ever found this not to be so”.³³

Shortly speaking, the argument from illusion, understood as the questioning of common views on knowledge, only works when we recognize that from the point of view common sense, the facts that are presented are aberrations from the norm constituted by the assumptions of naive realism. It is possible that someone might think in this way but certainly it would not be the so called ordinary man.

(2) *Unjustified disjunction*. This argument relies on using erroneous consequences resulting from identifying naive realism with common sense to defend a position which admittedly is not true, but it is also not common in a non-naive sense (but sometimes it is rather controversial and not clear). However, it is being defended by bringing matters to a head: either common knowledge is identified with naive realism (with all the consequences) or the non-naive and non-common position in the form of a “lesser evil”.

This scheme, usually used in order to defend phenomenalism, takes the form of a cross experiment. It relies on demonstrating that if the acceptance of one of the two competitive theories solving some issues (in this case the problem of human cognition) lead to absurd or false consequences, so automatically we have to accept the other. Such reasoning (based on the *modus tollens* scheme) would read as follows: if naive realism is real (things are always the way we perceive them), so in such a case things can at the same time have and do not have certain qualities (because different observers perceive them in a different way), which is absurd. In order to avoid it, we assume that we do not perceive objects, but sense data, and they can have, at the same time, different qualities to different

³³ J.L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (London 1962), p. 26. Cf. S.L. Reynolds, ‘The Argument from Illusion’, *Noûs*, 4 (2000), pp. 604–621.

observers. So, we perceive objects always the way they are or we do not perceive objects but sense data. To such an argument, Austin points out: “Further, it seems to be also implied (a) that when the ordinary man believes that he is not perceiving material things, he believes he is being deceived by his senses; and (b) that when he believes he is being deceived by his senses, he believes that he is not perceiving material things”.³⁴ However, the sentence “»We never perceive sense-data« is not, as a matter of fact, equivalent to and interchangeable with »We always perceive material things«”.³⁵ In other words, neither from the rejection of naive thesis about that we do not always perceive things exactly as they are does not mean that we only perceive sense data, nor does the rejection of the sense data theory result in automatic acceptance of naive realism. This reasoning has two basic flaws faults of cross-type arguments: firstly, it assumes that the fault is in one of the hypothesis being tested, not taking into consideration the fact that it can be placed in an inexplicable premise lying at the basis of this hypothesis (in this case in identifying naive realism with common knowledge). Secondly, it assumes that the elimination of one of the hypotheses indicates the correctness of the other, whereas in fact there could be a number of different solutions (in other words, we do not only have P and Q solutions but also – not taken into consideration, intentionally or not – Y, Z etc solutions).

It is evident then that in a case studied here we are faced with two faults: an assumption which identifies naive realism with common sense realism and the recognition that the possible theories of perception are limited to naive-common and phenomenalist. In a situation when we are aware of these faults, the argument for phenomenism has more of a persuasive character than that of a substantial character. Especially when an author suggests that he is conscious of the inconvenience of phenomenism but he proposes to adopt this position because otherwise we would be doomed to absurdities resulting from naively realistic theory of cognition. It looks as if someone has formulated a disjunction: “Either all birds are sparrows or nobody has ever seen a real sparrow” and then, because of an obvious fallacy of the first thesis, suggests to accept the latter as a “lesser evil.” Perhaps such a choice is justified in cases in which the opposing theses embrace the whole spectrum of possibilities, but neither in this case, nor in the discussed problem of the theory of perception, does it happen.

5. Conclusion

As I was trying to show, naive realism in a standard form cannot be identified with a common sense approach as is usually suggested. Common sense has little to do with naivety; we should rather ascribe to it a kind of shrewdness which is the basis of awareness that things are not always such as they appear and that the observer may have a role in cognitive processes. Both of the issues are not problematic as such, but rather constitute a type of rule of cognitive tolerance included in the Background or as a part of *tacit knowledge* which relies on allowing

³⁴ J.L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, p. 10.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

for a constant margin of error in the evaluation of a reality based on sensations. Because of it, common knowledge – from the adaptational point of view – is usually effective. If not, it could be due to the excess of naivety and the loss of contact with everyday life.