

THE BACKGROUND AND CENTRAL ARGUMENT OF DR. S. Z. HASAN'S REALISM REVISITED

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The book— *Realism: An Attempt to Trace its Origin and Development in its Chief Representatives*— originally published by the Cambridge University Press in 1928 is, in my judgement and estimate, is the outcome of late Dr. S.Z. Hasan's postgraduate studies at Oxford University in the twenties of this century which earned him D. Phil in Philosophy. Dr. Hasan, along with a few other top intellectuals and writers like Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Dr. Mir Waliuddin, Dr. S. Wahiduddin, Prof. M. M. Sharif, and Dr. Khalifa Abdul Hakim, played a significant role in the intellectual resurgence of Muslims in the first half of this century. Dr. Hasan's academic credentials are uniquely great and perhaps unparalleled at least in the Indo-Pak subcontinent insofar as he has the honour of having two doctoral degrees: Dr. Phil from Oxford and Dr. Phil from Erlangen— a topmost university of Germany between the two World Wars. Prof. M. Saeed Shaikh, who has been a student of S. Z. Hasan at the Philosophy Department of the Aligarh Muslim University in the years 1942-44, told me that Prof. Hasan's long stay in Germany extending over almost seven years had made him an exceptionally great expert of German language and thought. His command over that language— the premier language of recent philosophy—also comes out clearly while going through the pages of the present work in the form of technical terms and passages in German. As a matter of fact, his German book on Spinoza's Monism brought him the distinction of fellowship to the International Academy of Philosophy at Erlangen, and was taken up as part of "Series of Great Philosophers" by Rossal verlag Munich at the instance of Prof. Goesta Ecke. Perhaps this was an academic honour bestowed upon very few Asiatics.

Moreover, the fact that the book carries a foreword by no less an academician than Prof. J. A. Smith — the then Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Oxford — is highly significant. A few lines by way of introducing him and his philosophical position will be in order here. It was J. A. Smith with whom closes the line of Hegelian idealists in England

which started with J. H. Stirling, T. H. Green and others in the second half of 19th century. Like so many of his predecessors, he was trained at Oxford, and at Balliol College from which the movement sprang, where he came early into personal contact with its outstanding representatives, Jowett, Edward Caird, and Nettleship. The Hegelian stock of ideas came to him also, though in a less faithful form, through Bradley and Bosanquet. While H. H. Joachim, J. A. Smith's colleague at the College, kept the Hegelian flag flying at Oxford, he himself turned South for his idealism: to the writings of B. Croce and G. Gentile. In brief, he was content to announce his general allegiance to the Croce-Gentile "philosophy of the spirit." The author tells us that Prof. J. A. Smith and Mr. H. W. Joseph were his teachers at Oxford with whom he learned to think philosophically. However, I am sure that in the old tradition of Oxbridge education, J. A. Smith must have been not just a teacher but a warm and affectionate tutor and research supervisor and through him Dr. Hasan must have acquired a respect, if not a philosophical conviction, for idealism. This comes out unmistakably when he repeatedly says in his book that realism as an epistemology is opposed to subjective idealism and not to objective or absolute idealism. Prof. Smith pays him a great tribute when he says. "I have read it more than once with enlightenment to myself... In his introduction he outlines a view to which he has been led in the course of his study and criticism of the Realistic position. Here he opens out lines of speculation on which he proposes to develop his own independent thinking."

In undertaking a massive and thorough study of Realism Dr. S. Z. Hasan, I guess, must have found equally strong motivation from an antagonistic trend also very much present in Oxford of that time. Through all the triumphs of Idealism there, a sort of resistance movement had continued to state the case for Realism. Thomas Case, Professor of Metaphysics and Morals there from 1899 until 1910 and President of Corpus Christi College until 1924 published his *Physical Realism* in 1888 at the height of Idealism's success. His somewhat younger contemporary, John Cook Wilson swung Oxford opinion against Idealism. Dr. Hasan has discussed Cook Wilson's rationalistic Realism in Chapter III (Section One) of the book, while a brief notice of Case's position along with numerous other neo-realist philosophers has been taken in the appendix.

This much about the intellectual climate in which Dr. Hasan was nurtured philosophically. Now let us try to have a closer look at the subject of the book. Speaking very generally, in the early history of Philosophy, particularly in the medieval thought, the term “realism” was used in opposition to nominalism, for the doctrine that universals have a real, objective existence. In modern Philosophy, however, it is used for the view that material objects exist externally to us and independently of our sense experience. Realism is thus opposed to idealism, which holds that no such material object or external realities exist apart from our knowledge or consciousness of them, the whole universe thus being dependent on the mind, or in some sense, mental. It also clashes with phenomenalism or “Sensaism”, which, while avoiding much idealist metaphysics, would deny that material objects exist except as groups or sequences of *sensa*, actual and possible. Dr. Hasan’s purpose is to trace the development of realism from its origin in the common consciousness of man to its fulfillment in the philosophical writings of Prof. G. E. Moore. It is not an easy book to read and certainly a thorough grasp of the subtle arguments and counter-arguments requires patience and close reading. On the one hand he seems to view the development of realism as a continual battle between opposing views in which there are various “enemies” to be overcome. On the other hand, he regards it as an Hegelian dialectic, the final synthesis of which is achieved by Prof. Moore.

The origin of realism is to be found in the conviction of common consciousness that there is a real external world, or, as Dr. Hasan puts it, “Man believes in the existence of the world and its direct perception by a necessity of his nature.” (p.2) This necessity of man’s nature is then referred to as the “realistic instinct”, which is said to involve “two main theses: the reality of the external world and the direct revelation of it to our sense-apprehension”. To say that the external world is real is to say that it exists independently of us. But this independence is of finite mind, not necessarily of infinite mind. Realism has nothing to say to the view that there “may be an infinite mind, say God, who holds the whole universe of men and things on the palm of his hand, and on whom it depends for its being and its nature.” Subjective idealism is said to be the only metaphysics that is inconsistent with realism, whilst “objective idealism is but realism plus the hypothesis of an infinite subject” (p.9). Thus realism is treated as a theory of

knowledge, but Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Hegel, and Kant are all said to be realists. To my mind, this seems a bit curious conclusion. It is difficult to see what definition of *realism* could justify the classing of these philosophers in one group with the authors discussed in this volume. Moreover, it is hardly possible to separate Plato's theory of knowledge from his metaphysics, and to regard the latter as "realism."

Although realism has its origin in the "unconscious convictions of man", these convictions must be questioned before realism as a philosophy can be established. On the one hand, the epistemological doctrine of representationism denies the directness of perception— one main thesis of realism; on the other hand the metaphysical doctrine of subjective idealism denies the independent reality of objects – the other main thesis. Dr. Hasan conceives the development of the doctrine as consisting first in the exclusive assertion of the one thesis, then in the exclusive assertion of the other. Accordingly, his exposition falls into three main divisions, with smaller subdivisions. The beginnings of realism are found in Descartes, Locke, Reid, and Hamilton, They, however, failed to secure the directness of perception. The modern movement begins in Schuppe, Mach, and Avenarius who, however, do not succeed in making the subject of perception independent. Meinong, Stout, and the American "critical realists" are grouped together. They overcome subjective idealism, but do not succeed in overcoming representationism. Dr. Hasan's mode of dealing with these philosophers is well brought out in the following quotation: "The first of the series of unsuccessful attempts (Descartes, Locke, Reid) asserts only the existence of objects; the second (Schuppe, Mach, Avenarius) emphasizes only the directness of perception; the third (Meinong, Stout, "critical realists") aims at being a synthesis of both these movements, only the aim falls short of attainment. The attempt, however, succeeds in bringing out the paramount necessity of combining both the moments; it repeats more clearly and at a higher level the need which Reid had felt" (p. 45).

Realism proper "starts with Moore at the beginning of the century" (p. 107). The context is now regarded as centering in the conflict of thought and sense. This conflict is said to give rise to three species of realism: 1) the rationalistic realism of Cook Wilson, Prichard, and Joseph; 2) the empirical realism of Samuel Alexander, E.B. Holt, and Bertrand Russell 3) the critical realism of Moore, Dawes Hicks, and Laird. These writers are treated in this

order, much the greatest amount of space and attention being given to Prof. Moore, Dr Hasan's exposition is very clear and in fact is an intellectual feast for the thoughtful reader. Those who are not familiar with the writings which he criticizes may find it easy to grasp what exactly are its authors' views. Dr. Hasan painstakingly expounds their views by means of critical comments on papers which they have written about each other.

Before stating very schematically the current position with regard to realism in philosophical debate and Dr. S. Z. Hasan's own contribution on the subject, let me first mention a few writers and books which contain citations of Hasan's work. Prof. L. Susan Stebbing opines in a critical notice of the book that Dr. Hasan has rendered a valuable service to students of modern realism by giving such a full account of Prof. Moore's writings. It is all the more valuable since Prof. Moore had refused to republish, in accessible form, the articles which had so greatly influenced contemporary philosophers. In her view, Dr. Hasan is perhaps the first writer to have stated clearly the extent to which modern philosophy has been influenced by Prof. Moore's views. She rightly appreciates that the book is exceptionally well-documented and gives her opinion that Dr. Hasan seems to have read nearly everything that had been written by the philosophers whose views he expounded and criticized. She is also all praise for the very full and well-arranged bibliography. Similarly, another leading professor of philosophy, in view of its thorough and exhaustive treatment, called it the "Bible of Realism." The book has been referred to and discussed in numerous other works by British, American, and Australian scholars. The renowned American philosopher D. S. Robinson reproduced and discussed Dr. Hasan's explication of realist position in his *Introduction to Modern Philosophy*. Dr. Rudolf Metz in his classical *A Hundred Years of British Philosophy* (first published originally in German in 1938) pays glowing tribute to the analytical skill and intellectual acumen of S. Z. Hasan in expounding objectively and meticulously the doctrines of scores of realists with finer differentiation and shading. Leaving many other citations, I shall finally mention John Blackmore's excellent article entitled "On the Inverted use of the terms 'Realism' and 'Idealism' among Scientists and Historians of Science" published in an academic journal in 1979 in which he ranked S. Z. Hasan with the eminent philosopher Lovejoy in making most informative and exact distinctions in realist position.

This book of course now is mainly of historical interest as the author could not even consult the more mature ideas presented by G. E. Moore after October 1925 (the writing of the book was finished by then). In the tradition of Thomas Reid, common-sense realism was further revived and extended by Moore along with common-sense view of perception. Moore's defence was primarily of the certainty of such simple perceptual statements as "This is a hand"; he argued that denial of these statements leads to inconsistency in beliefs and behaviour and that the grounds for their denial involve propositions less certain than they are. His "A Defence of Common-Sense" and "Proof of an External World" published in his *Philosophical Papers* (London: 1959) state his position clearly. However, his analysis of such statements in terms of sense data led away from direct realism and the common-sense view of the nature (as opposed to the reliability) of perception. Defence of common-sense became ultimately associated with the Oxford linguistic analysts. The staunchest recent defenders of the common-sense against the argument from illusion are J. L. Austin, Quinton, and Ryle. Simultaneously, however, much interest is also being shown currently in a variety of realism known as "perspective realism" or the variegated forms of the theory of appearing. Roderick M. Chisholm, as its chief representative, maintains that direct realism can deal with illusions, or at least perceptual relativity, by saying that sensible qualities are not possessed by the object *simpliciter* but are always relative to some point of view or standing conditions. We always perceive sensible qualities in some perspective – spatial, even temporal, or illuminative. Such perspective-realist statements as "The table is round from here" sound forced, for the natural word to use is "looks," not "is," and it is possible to express this kind of direct realism in terms of looking and appearing. Physical objects simply are such that they appear different from different position, and we see them as they appear from a view-point. Whether this kind of reasoning is satisfactory has also been disputed. It is true that there is nothing over and above Mr. X, for Mr. X himself appears – here there *is* something to do the appearing. But when there is no physical object at all, what does the appearing (as in hallucination)? Perhaps we must resort to sense data again – or if this term is too theory-laden or immersed in invalid distinctions, we must resort to something we admittedly do have, and we are once again back to sense

experience. And so the dispute continues and surely there is nothing like finality in philosophy.

Let us now finally address the question squarely: Did S. Z. Hasan put forward a theory of his own on the issues about which the book undertakes to explore the ideas of so many thinkers in such detail? My firm and considered answer to this will be “yes – he did.” While closely reading the Introduction of the book (indeed a long drawn out Introduction of 39 pages in which he suggests a blue-print for complete philosophical justification for realism in times to come) I get the impression that Dr. S. Z. Hasan was at heart a deeply religious person and the basic metaphysical tenets of Islam permeated his thought very deeply and thoroughly. He took particular care to explain that his Realism, so far from issuing in Materialism, harmonized better than any other with genuine artistic, ethical, and religious consciousness of man. According to him all knowledge, perceptual knowledge included, cannot be understood on the analogy of physical relations; knowledge is not a case of causality. It is a fact *sui generis* – it cannot be explained. To my mind, behind Dr. S. Z. Hasan’s notion of the ‘instinctive’ or ‘common consciousness of the un-sophisticated man’ and ‘the ultimate human nature’ lurks the Qur’anic notion of *fiḥrab* (the primordial mold or pattern) on which God created man. And this *fiḥrab* has a built-in affirmation of the duality of self and not-self, not-self covering all material objects existing in the external world. Elaborating it he wrote” “My object is given to me as existent... Its existence, rather it or its existent nature is before me. There is no question of belief or conviction about it yet. The existent nature is simply there. It is sight – *sui generis* and distinct from the other forms of my apprehension, viz., ideation or thought” (p. 5). Indeed, Dr. Hasan finds a number of concepts and ideas to be *sui generis*; that is, he frankly admits them to be irreducible, unanalyzable, and of a peculiar nature of their own. For example, discussing the status of appearance, he wrote: “Is it a physical or psychological entity? In truth it is neither. It is simply appearance. Its mode of being is *sui generis*. It is other than real and therefore other than physical or psychological” (p 8) Again, both *sensa* and images are characterized as modes of being *sui generis*; one never passes into the other, as Bergson urges. Thus he seems to take many human experiences, including perception, as something given and essentially unexplainable.

Perhaps taking a cue from Kant, Hasan presents a happy blend of idealism and realism or, in other words, his realism has a tinge of idealism, as we read: “Independent existence is a pure concept of the understanding. It is not given by sense – sense cannot give it. What it gives is a presentation, and not the independent existence of the presentation. That in fact is a conviction, a belief that accompanies the presentation and is other than it. It is a concept supplied by thought or understanding” (p. 10). He maintains that there is no veil between the knower and the known which has to be raised; that reality is there, we only come to see. In other words, the theory involved is that knowledge is revelation, and not that it is reproduction of the object or production of the object. Dr. Hasan regards vision or intuition as the very ideal of true knowledge and asserts that even philosophers like Kant and Spinoza do not disagree with the ordinary man on this point. In the last but one paragraph of the Introduction, he very succinctly summarizes the underlying religio-metaphysical basis of realism thus: “If man is the ultimate reality, then the object must depend upon him – and we have subjectivism. But if God is the ultimate reality, then the object depends upon Him, and not on man – we have realism.” This can quite reasonably be regarded as the consummate expression of his philosophical analysis of realism.

I was told by quite a few old students and disciples of Dr. S. Z. Hasan (M. M. Ahmad, Burhan Ahmad Faruqi, and Chaudhary Abdul Hameed among them) that gradually Dr. Hasan became disenchanted with the empty, sterile, and unincisive logic-chopping and hair-splitting analyses of Anglo-American philosophers and, so to say, gradually switched over to “political realism” in the then socio-political scenario of the Indian subcontinent. He is on record to have constantly kept two books on his office table in philosophy department of Aligarh Muslim University: the Holy Qur’an and Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. The religious impulse in him asserted itself more and more and prevailed over the purely philosophical one. In so doing, he moved from the scholastic analyses of perception, sense data, presentationsim, and representationsism, etc., to what German intellectuals call “lebens philosophy”: a philosophy of life in concrete setting. From the early thirties onwards, he became passionately involved in the freedom struggle of the Muslims of India and devoted most of his time and energy in discussions and efforts geared to establishing the religious identity and political autonomy of Muslims of this region. In this connection, he also met

and corresponded with Allama Muhammad Iqbal and earnestly tried to organize a well-disciplined group of Muslims on the basis of *bay'ah* (vow of allegiance) in order to launch Islamic revivalist work in addition to the strictly political dimension very well represented and advocated by the Muslim League. But unfortunately all these efforts did not materialize and fizzled out in very preliminary stages. In my opinion Dr. Hasan's shift of interest from the narrow confines of the intricacies of academic philosophy of realism to politics and religious assertion of Muslims was not erratic or accidental. Partly the political exigencies of that time were the causal factors for this shift. But at a deeper level this was the result of a Kantian-style progressive development of thought. I have already noted above that the imprint of Kant's philosophy on his mind was very deep. In my view, the present work *Realism* represents the 'Critique of Pure Reason' phase of Hasan's intellectual development. Following in the tracks of Kant, he moved on to 'Practical Reason' and this phase is represented by his engagement in Muslims' freedom struggle and Islamic resurgence. As things turned out, he eventually migrated to Pakistan but alas did not live long. He passed away in 1949 at Lahore and was buried in the graveyard of Miani Sahib. May his soul rest in peace. Amen.