

# On the Plurality of Discourses

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## Chapter 1

# : Introduction: On the plurality of discourses

WE TALK ABOUT THE WORLD IN DIFFERENT WAYS; by better understanding the ways we talk, we can better understand the world. Anyone who can appreciate this thought can appreciate the position here called *discourse pluralism*, or ‘pluralism’ for short. This covers a family of views in the realism debate, notably those of Michael Dummett (in one guise at least), Crispin Wright and Simon Blackburn. They believe that language is divided up into discourses corresponding to traditional areas of philosophical interest, like ethics, physics, aesthetics and mathematics. They think, moreover, that these can be categorised in terms of various hallowed philosophical notions like truth, belief, knowledge, and objectivity, with different areas accorded different statuses.

In dividing up fields of enquiry into these regions, and by then categorising them in this way, pluralists take their place in a long tradition that includes Plato’s division of the line and Kant’s division of the faculties. In the idea that language might be the appropriate object of investigation, and specifically, differing *discourses*, they have been influenced by Wittgenstein, in particular by his notion of language games.

Their overall aim is to reinvent the traditional questions of realism in a broadly language-focal manner. Philosophers in this vein are in some degree to Kant as Kant was to Plato. Using techniques and insights not available to their predecessors, they hope once more to fumble through reality’s drawers without descending to a random groping among mere concepts.<sup>1</sup>

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CHAPTER 1. : INTRODUCTION: ON THE PLURALITY OF DISCOURSES<sup>2</sup>

There are several formative suppositions that define the shape of pluralism as here characterised. The first is the emphasis on language, broadly construed. The project is in keeping with Kreisel's oft-quoted remark, that the problems turn on the objectivity of judgements, not the existence of objects. In this regard, they stand opposed to other eminent writers in the tradition, the juxtaposition with which is captured nicely by David Lewis' disclaimer in the preface to *On the Plurality of Worlds*:

About twelve years ago, I gave my thesis a bad name. I called it 'modal realism'. Had I foreseen present-day discussions of what realism really is, I would have certainly called it something else. As it is, I think it best to stick with the old name. But I must insist that my modal realism is simply the thesis that there are other worlds; and that these are of a certain nature, and suited to play certain theoretical roles. It is an existential claim, not unlike the claim I would be making if I said that there were Loch Ness Monsters, or moles in the CIA, or counterexamples to Fermat's conjecture, or seraphim. It is *not* a thesis about semantic competence, or about the nature of truth, or about bivalence, or about the limits of knowledge. For me, the question is of the existence of objects – not the objectivity of a subject matter (Lewis 1986: viii).

The fact that an alternative to the language-focal approach can be pursued with rich abandon is a reminder that to concentrate on language is a significant methodological and philosophical move.<sup>2</sup> The extent to which this dissertation has unity is the extent to which a concern with one particular aspect of that move ties together a selection of questions in the realism

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So far, too, are the students of metaphysics from exhibiting any kind of unanimity in their contentions, that metaphysics has rather to be regarded as a battle-ground quite peculiarly suited for those who desire to exercise themselves in mock combats, and in which no participant has ever yet succeeded in gaining even so much as an inch of territory, not at least in such manner as to secure him in its permanent possession. This shows, beyond all questioning, that the procedure of metaphysics has hitherto been a merely random groping, and, what is worst of all, a groping among mere concepts (*Critique of Pure Reason* Bxv)

<sup>2</sup>That it is not clear that all or even many issues should be primarily located at the level of language has been remarked in Hale 1997a.

debate. It is the claim, mentioned above, that language is divided into different discourses. This is a recurrent idea that is as seductive as a general thought as it is implausible – in some cases – as a particular one. My aim will not, however, be to show that it is false. That would be impossible, since there is no unitary and well-defined thesis regarding what the proposed plurality consists in. Instead, the notion is invoked in different ways at different times, often signifying different things. My purpose instead is to show up a *fait accompli* for a *fait incomplet*. My aim will be met if, at the end of the dissertation, the reader is left with a more cautious attitude towards this thematic principle than before.

Crispin Wright puts it as follows:

Anyone who regards the debate between realist and anti-realist not as a single overarching debate but rather as the union of several local debates, so that the realist might conceivably win the mathematical case, but lose in the moral, for instance, will want to go along with the idea of *a plurality of discourses* with respect to which local realist and anti-realist views can be brought into opposition (Wright 2003b: vii) [emphasis added] .

Blackburn signals his allegiance to the overall cause by his opposition to what he calls:

[...] the denial of differences, the celebration of the seamless web of language, the soothing away of distinctions, whether of primary *versus* secondary, fact *versus* value, description *versus* expression, or of any other significant kind. Planting a stick in this water is probably futile, but having done it before I shall do it again, and—who knows?—enough sticks may make a dam, and the waters of error may subside (Blackburn 1998: 157).

Wright and Blackburn hold the substantive thesis that language itself, albeit ‘language’ in a broad sense, embodies the distinctions between their different areas of interest. This is not to be confused with the trivial sense in which we can say that we talk about different subject matters, as we might perhaps talk about ethics in the ethics seminar and physics in the lab, or about bread with the baker and the love of God with the vicar. Instead, it

is rather that language itself is for them regimented in such a way that the divisions may non-trivially be said to be linguistic in nature.

Michael Dummett has offered a classic statement of this view:

It is clear that one can be a realist about one subject matter and not about another: though someone may have a general inclination towards realistic views, it is plain that there is no coherent philosophical position that consists in being a realist tout court. This may be expressed by saying that one may be a realist about certain entities—mental states, possible worlds, mathematical objects, and not about others. But it seems preferable to say that realism is a view about a certain class of statements—since certain kinds of realism, for instance realism about the future or about ethics, do not seem readily classifiable as doctrines about a realm of entities. So, in every case, we may regard a realistic view as consisting in a certain interpretation of statements in some class [...] (Dummett 2003a: 230).<sup>3</sup>

We here see the questionable transition. Dummett starts from the “clear” idea that we can be realists about one subject matter and not another. He then combines this with the idea that realism should be phrased in broadly speaking linguistic terms. We then see an unmediated leap to the supposition that there will be classes of statements corresponding to those subject matters. Language, it is assumed, will be there waiting for us, capable of being divided up into areas corresponding to the divisions we need for the realism debate. But this is by no means a trivial supposition, and clearly does not follow from the prior two requirements. In a certain sense, language is a human phenomenon, and one that is closer to us than whatever goes on in the underbelly of reality. But nevertheless, it is an object of our own creation in the same sense as politics and capital markets, and our words are no more guaranteed to be amenable to the fleeting purposes of philosophical analysis than dominion and trade are to political and economic science.

The guiding motivation of this dissertation, then, is a discomfort felt at this thought, that there is a plurality of discourses not in the loose sense

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<sup>3</sup>Dummett’s anti-realist is known for having both a global and local guise. In the former, he doesn’t quite fit the pluralist criteria outlined here, but in the latter he does.

but in the sense that there are divisions to be found in language that will tie up with the various generalisations that philosophers like Dummett, Wright and Blackburn want to make about them. It is not that there is any agenda on my part to “celebrate the seamless web of language”, but I’d like to investigate the proposed seams. What this investigation amounts to, however, is not a unified response to a unified question. It is instead a patchwork of more particular treatments of certain claims that will already be familiar to the reader. The focus on discourse pluralism offers a new angle on these familiar topics, not a single new objection to a single thesis.

What, though, is the substantive sense of different discourses that is here being cautioned against? This can only be answered by reference to what philosophers like Dummett, Wright and Blackburn want to say about them. In this regard, it is necessary to note that they are pluralists twice over. Not only do they believe that there are a variety of discourses, but also that there is a variety of ways in which we might categorise them.

To this end, they formulate what will here be called *hallmarks* of realism.<sup>4</sup> These are features that are possessed by some discourses and not others, and reflect important realism-relevant insights. In character, these hallmarks come from the philosophical canon, turning on notions like truth and objectivity. The advances are supposed to come in the subtlety with which they are formulated, and the awareness that discourses may have some features that might traditionally be associated with realism and others that are traditionally associated with its denial. Perhaps, for example, ethical claims, unlike those of physics, are on the one hand mere expressions of attitude rather than descriptions of an independent reality, but at the same time are subject to standards of rational appraisal in just the same way that the claims of physics are.

In hypotheses of this sort, contemporary authors countenance a more intricately patterned fabric than their predecessors. Plato, for example, whilst distinguishing between different grades of truth, knowledge, and being, thought that these marched in step. A higher grade of truth entailed a higher grade of knowledge and being, and vice versa. Thus whereas the Line offered a definite hierarchy of various fields—aesthetics, mathematics, ethics and so on, the contemporary pluralist is open to the possibility of there being no such hierarchy. It might be that physics shares some things

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<sup>4</sup>These correspond roughly to what Wright calls ‘cruces’.



in common but not others with ethics, which in turn shares some things in common but not others with mathematics, and so on. Whether, at the end of this, one discourse counts as more ‘realist’ than another is not an additional question.

The question as to whether there are divisions between discourses in the relevant sense equates to the question as to whether those discourses will support taxonomy in the above terms. To take an example that will be extensively discussed in the opening chapter, consider Wright’s taxonomy in terms of different types of truth, as then applied to compositionally complex sentences like “Yesterday only five of the twelve torturers actually inflicted pain but the other seven who amused the prisoners with funny stories were equally bad”. If the division into discourses is to serve its purpose, it needs to sort this sentence into discourse about the past, discourse about ethics, number, medium-sized physical objects, pain, and perhaps others. Only then does it carve at the desired joints, i.e. between the traditional issues on which the pluralist wants to take a variety of different stances. But how is this carving to be done so that it matches up with a pluralism operating in terms of different types of truth? The sentence does not decompose into a number of individually truth-apt elements (viz. subsentences) that might each take one and only one of the variety of truth-types. The problem, then, is that language is not susceptible to the kinds of division that Wright requires.

The background worry is that in a hurry to meet his bold aims, the pluralist has been misled by a triviality. The intention was to locate the realism debate at the level of language, and to give a variegated response to different topics of philosophical interest. The triviality is that there is a sense in which we may discuss a matter of ethics rather than a question of physical science, as we may talk about one thing with the baker and another with the vicar. But this commonplace does not imply that language can be divided up into distinct regions fit to support the kinds of generalisation the pluralist wants to make. That is a further claim, and the aim of this dissertation is to show that it is too often ungrounded.

Part of the explanation as to why this transition has been frequently made is perhaps due to the genealogy of particular formulations of pluralism. Many positions in the realism debate have begun life, or at some point flourished, as global positions. For example, rival conceptions of truth

that are now taken by Wright to apply on case-by-case bases have often been pitted against each other across the board. The debate between the correspondence and coherence theories, for example, had halcyon days as a disagreement between Hegelians and their opponents. In this confrontation, it was an all-or-nothing matter. Indeed, Dummett's own formulation of anti-realism is often defended as a global thesis. If, then, as it will be argued, there is a misfit between the terms of generalisation that pluralists wish to use, and that which they wish to generalise over—discourses, then part of the explanation might be that the terms of the debate are suited to the global rather than the local case.

There may also be something to be said about the way in which pluralism, as a general thesis, has in some cases – primarily the Dummettian – been developed with the mathematical case as a paradigm. Mathematics is a peculiar discourse in that it is relatively well defined and self-contained. It looks suited to the template of a discourse as a “class of statements”. Perhaps, working with this case as a paradigm, it has been assumed that other discourses, for example that of ethics, physics, or aesthetics might permit similar treatment. But, as we will see, this is not the case.

There is also a worry to be had regarding the lineage from Wittgenstein's language games to the pluralist's discourses. Whilst it is certainly true that at various points Wittgenstein distinguished between what is involved in talking about ethics, mathematics, first person psychological avowals, and many other kinds of statement, it is not so clear that there is a considered model of a language game that matches up with the pluralist idea of a discourse. To get a sense of this we need merely consider the wide variety of language games that Wittgenstein cites: bothering your neighbours for apples (*The Blue and Brown Books* p.172), lying (*Philosophical Investigations*, hereon ‘*PI*’, §249), playing ring-a-ring-a-roses (*PI* §7), talking about hidden beetles (*PI* §293) and talking about dreams (*PI* p.157). Now, there is no doubt that Wittgenstein used the notion of language games in many different ways, some of which are closer to what the pluralist requires, but some caution must be taken so as not to be dazzled by the reflected glory of the other uses to which Wittgenstein put the concept.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of structure, this dissertation can be thought of as falling into

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<sup>5</sup>One of the more considered defences of Wittgenstein as a pluralist can be found in Blackburn 1990.

roughly two parts. The first focuses mainly on Wright and issues raised in *Truth and Objectivity*. It is a patchwork within a patchwork, consisting of three chapters that can be read largely independently of each other and together of the second half of the dissertation. The second is relatively unified. It switches focus to Blackburn's quasi-realist, and specifically his confrontation with Hilary Putnam. In more detail, the second (following) chapter follows up the criticism, already mentioned, that Wright's truth-pluralism suffers a knock-down argument from considerations regarding the compositional features of a natural language, like English. The third examines the relation of Wright and Blackburn's views to semantic non-factualism, as allegedly entailed by Kripke's sceptical argument. It is argued that their own responses to this have been unsatisfactory, and some claims are made as to what the consequences are. The argument of the fourth chapter is more speculative, asking whether the proposed *occasion-sensitivity* of our language, as championed by Charles Travis, suggests that the plurality of discourses is better thought of as a motley of language games—a rag-tag bunch unfit for service in the realism debate. In the course of deflecting this accusation, the spectre of *pragmatism* enters. This is followed up with a long chapter discussing Putnam's opposition to the fact/value distinction as conceived by the quasi-realist. In the subsequent chapter, the tables are turned, with Putnam's own views coming in for criticism.

What is interesting about this clash is that Putnam's aims are, on one way of construing them, close in spirit to those of the pluralist as previously characterised. In a recent work, for example, he writes the following:

[...] I shall be defending what one might call *pragmatic pluralism*, the recognition that it is no accident that in everyday language we employ many different kinds of discourses, discourses subject to different standards and possessing different sorts of applications, with different logical and grammatical features—different “language games” in Wittgenstein's sense—no accident because it is an illusion that there could be just one language game which could be sufficient for the description of all reality! (Putnam 2004: 21-2).

This sounds like the very thesis previously described. Putnam, however, views pluralism in the vein of Dummett, Wright and Blackburn – especially

Blackburn – as misguided. He believes that it tries to make generalisations in the wrong terms, terms that presuppose a discredited background metaphysics. This latter is the position that Putnam calls metaphysical realism, the idea that “there is a totality of Forms, or Universals, or “properties,” fixed once and for all, and that every possible meaning of a word corresponds to one of these Forms or Universals or properties” (Putnam 1999: 6).

It isn’t clear, however, why the positions that these authors take presuppose such a conception. Indeed, for the most part they explicitly deny precisely this kind of totalising realist view. The alleged connection comes out in relation to Putnam’s contrast between ‘Dichotomies’ and ‘Distinctions’. (These are terms of art that I’ll mark out by the use of capitals.) At one point Putnam claims a Dichotomy is to “be applied to absolutely *every* meaningful judgement in absolutely every area” and secondly that “if one accepted that distinction [...] then all philosophical problems would be solved at once” (Putnam 2004: 10-11). A Distinction is to be understood, on the other hand, as an appropriate exercise of pragmatist discernment. It goes without saying that Distinctions are good and Dichotomies are bad.

Putnam’s most vocal opposition is to Blackburn’s alleged Dichotomy between factual or descriptive discourse on the one hand and valuational or expressive discourse on the other. For Putnam, this is a throwback to an archaic metaphysics that should be rejected in favour of more subtly drawn Distinctions. The problem, however, is that having lain siege to the Dichotomies Putnam fails to draw the required Distinctions. That is to say, whilst his attack on Blackburn has some force, he fails to make good on his promise to elucidate the supposedly varying functions of different language games. His *pragmatic pluralism*, then, falls flat. One of the interesting results of this is that the position Putnam searches for creeps towards that of the quasi-realist at the same time that some of the more extreme claims of the quasi-realist are toned down in response to Putnam’s criticisms. The reasons for this stem from the kind of ideological alignment that is nicely expressed by the similarity between Putnam’s above statement of his position and the quasi-realist position itself. Both parties are agreed on the need to say more about the apparent diversity of our linguistic practices, and that this somehow is at the heart of philosophy. The difficulty is how to do it. In the final chapter more is said about this, with reference to recent work by David Macarthur and Huw Price. But there is no need to pre-empt the

outcome of that discussion here.

In regard to terminology, where possible I have tried to keep faith with extant uses, but some modifications have been made to avoid confusion. By ‘anti-realism’ will usually (though not always) be meant the Dummettian thesis that truth is in some way equivalent to warranted assertibility. This is a narrower use of the term than Dummett himself maintained, for whom ‘realism’ was the primary category opposed to which there might be many different forms of ‘anti-realism’. For the general category I have sometimes opted for the equally noncommittal but even less pleasant sounding ‘non-realism’. This, like its opposite ‘realism’ will be used with no fixed significance other than that they are contraries. What they stand for will depend on the context of discussion. I should emphasise that this terminological stipulation is not supposed to be of lasting value, but is introduced merely to oil and organise the discussion of this dissertation. The fact that I have not used terms with complete uniformity is because in cases where no misunderstanding is likely, I have tried to use them in as least a revisionary way as possible.

The most awkward of all is the moniker ‘pragmatism’. Its main application in the current work will be to Putnam, who has himself occasionally accepted and occasionally shunned it. It will at times be extended, as it is in the literature, to Richard Rorty, without thereby meaning to imply that Rorty and Putnam have very much in common. It will, however, be scrupulously withheld from Blackburn, who if history had turned out differently would have been aptly called such. As history has in fact turned out it is misleading to apply it to him given its association with Rorty and Putnam. This is despite the fact that in recent work Blackburn himself has acceded to being called a pragmatist. No such concession is made here: Putnam and Rorty count as ‘pragmatists’ and Blackburn counts as a ‘quasi-realist’. Matters are further complicated by the fact that David Macarthur and Huw Price, who are discussed in the final chapter, refer to themselves both as ‘pragmatists’ and ‘global quasi-realists’.

Having said that, let the reader be reassured that wherever possible I have tried to avoid jargon. And with that out of the way, let us begin.

## Chapter 2

# : Compositionality and truth-pluralism

**I**<sup>N</sup> *Truth and Objectivity* Wright distinguishes certain discourses corresponding to traditional philosophical divisions and proposes a collection of hallmarks that purport to capture insights regarding their nature and status.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will argue that Wright’s project suffers from chronic defects when applied to languages that are compositionally structured in the way that English is.

The discussion will begin by outlining Wright’s position, and defending it from some standing objections in the literature, focussing on the problem of mixed conjunctions. These objections, it will be argued, can be satisfactorily replied to in just the ways that truth-pluralists, including Wright himself, typically have. They are, however, the tip of an iceberg. Once its chilly proportions are appreciated, truth-pluralism is sunk.

### 2.1. TRUTH-PLURALISM AND MINIMALISM

Whitehead summarised the European philosophical tradition as a series of footnotes to Plato. If that was correct then truth-pluralism is a further footnote, specifically, to the analogy of the Line:

[T]ake a Line which has been cut into two unequal parts, and divide each of them again in the same proportion, and suppose the two main divisions to answer, one to the visible and one to

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<sup>1</sup>N.B. To reiterate, what I call ‘hallmarks’ correspond to what Wright calls ‘cruces’.

the intelligible, and then compare the subdivisions in respect of their clearness and want of clearness, and you will find that the first section of the sphere of the visible consists of images. And by images I mean, in the first place, shadows, and in the second place, reflections in water and in solid, smooth and polished bodies and the like [...] Imagine, now, the other section, of which this is only the resemblance, to include the animals which we see, and everything that grows or is made [...] *Would you not admit that both the sections of this division have different degrees of truth, and that the copy is to the original as the sphere of opinion is to the sphere of knowledge?* (Plato 1892: Part VII: Book VI) [emphasis added].

Plato claims that we can divide up different intellectual subject matters in what turn out to be remarkably similar ways to those of contemporary pluralism. Somewhat loosely speaking, we find in Plato's final taxonomy distinctions between aesthetics, physical science, geometry, (other) mathematics, politics and ethics. Second, according to these different subjects there are apportioned different epistemic, ontic and alethic standing. As Plato puts it at one point, again noting the alethic dimension:

[C]orresponding to these four divisions, let there be four faculties of the soul—reason answering to the highest, understanding to the second, conviction to the third, and perception of shadows to the last — and let there be a scale of them, and let us suppose that the several faculties have clearness *in the same degree that their objects have truth* (Plato 1892: Part VII: Book VI) [emphasis added].

Now, it would of course be false to claim that contemporary truth-pluralism was what Plato had in mind when he spoke of different grades of truth. In particular, contemporary pluralism uses the resources of philosophical accounts of truth that postdate Plato by, in some cases, millennia. It would also be false to claim that contemporary pluralists see themselves as pursuing Plato's project.<sup>2</sup> They are for the most part unashamedly modern. But the rough idea, and indeed a large part of its intuitive appeal, exhibits a great

<sup>2</sup>Although Wright credits Plato with the 'Euthyphro contrast' (Wright 1992: 79).

deal of continuity. Moreover, it is helpful to view the pluralist project as part of this longer tradition. In that way we see it as on the one hand more profound in its aims and thus worthy of greater interest, and on the other as less of an innovation and more of an appeal to certain recurrent philosophical sympathies. One might correspondingly urge on the one hand enthusiasm and on the other caution. It is, alas, the vice of all to occasionally take as well-founded what is merely oft-repeated.

To press the case for the recurrent appeal of truth-pluralism, we may note its fleeting appearance in the work of a philosopher who in other regards shows no proclivity to Plato, or indeed to Wright. No better example can be provided than a cameo in the writings of W.V.O. Quine, who stated that “[s]cience, thanks to its links with observation, retains some title to a correspondence theory of truth; but a coherence theory is evidently the lot of ethics” (Quine 1979: 478). Quine’s idea, one with which others would sympathise, is that ethics is a matter of conformity to artificially imposed standards, whereas science tries to represent what there is. This general thought is for a moment transfigured into a definite theoretical proposal regarding types of truth, where those types are aligned with specific positions in a developed debate between correspondence and coherence theorists. Truth-pluralism in its contemporary guise is best seen as a like crystallisation of this recurrent thought. What it adds is a more sophisticated framework in which to make sense of the basic idea. With that in mind, let’s look at the precise structure of Wright’s account.

The main innovation that Wright makes is *minimalism*. In Wright’s particular formulation, minimalism is defined as the thesis that truth is anything that satisfies a collection of platitudes that make up a minimal specification, a non-exhaustive list of which is as follows:

- To assert is to present as true;
- ‘S’ is true if and only S (the Disquotational Scheme);
- Statements which are apt for truth have negations which are likewise;
- Truth is one thing, justification another.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Wright also distinguishes between a platitudinous notion of correspondence and a more metaphysically robust notion. See e.g. Wright 1992: 25-7. For current purposes, we can ignore the platitudinous notion.



Wright's contention is that many different syntactic disciplines will contain a predicate that satisfies the platitudes, or will allow one to be defined upon them. A discourse that allows the minimal predicate is 'truth-apt'. On Wright's view, a discourse that has typically been ripe for anti-realism, for example discourse about colour, may nonetheless be apt for truth, providing it can satisfy the platitudes. The important point for Wright is that once this minimalist characterisation of truth is in play, we can then denote increasing candidature to realism by fortifying the *constitution* of the truth-predicate.

Wright makes this distinction by direct analogy with identity. Identity can be formally defined by Leibniz's law. It is an open question, however, as to how this relation is constituted in different cases. In vegetables, it is plausibly constituted by organic unity; in physical objects, it is plausibly constituted by spatio-temporal unity; in people, it is plausibly constituted by a mixture of psychological and bodily unity (Wright 2003b: 78-9).

Applied to truth, the idea is that truth may in one discourse, for example physics, be constituted by *correspondence to the facts*, in some suitably robust notion of correspondence and facthood (Wright 2003c: 245). In other discourses, where such realism is not appropriate, it might be that truth consists in *coherence*. In arithmetic, for example, it may be that truth reduces to coherence with the Peano-Dedekind axioms (Wright 2003d). For another discourse, for example discourse about the comic, it may be that truth consists in a brand of warranted assertibility (Wright 1992: 7-9). If, then, the differing constitutions of truth reflect the philosophical insights they are designed to encapsulate, then by applying them to different discourses we fulfill the initial promise to be various types of 'realist' or 'anti-realist' in regard to the differing subject areas in question.

It's important to disambiguate what is meant by 'minimalism'. One can be a 'minimalist' in Wright's sense insofar as one accepts the platitudes are (roughly) individually necessary and jointly sufficient to characterise truth, whilst also being a robust realist about truth in a particular discourse. That would simply be to say both that satisfying the platitudes is what characterises a property as a truth-property, but that the property that does in fact do so is (robust) correspondence with reality.

This is not to be confused with the idea, which Wright also holds, that it is at least possible that truth in a discourse is constituted by a brand of warranted assertibility—*superassertibility*, which Wright describes thus:

A statement is superassertible, then, if and only if it is, or can be, warranted and some warrant for it would survive arbitrarily close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily extensive increments to or other forms of improvement of our information (Wright 1992: 48).

Superassertibility is an attempt to isolate a truth property in keeping with traditional Dummettian motivations, i.e. motivations that view truth as a form of, or at least coextensive with a form of, warranted assertibility. Claiming that truth in a particular discourse is constituted by superassertibility is, perhaps, to be a ‘minimalist’ in a more conventional sense.

In order, however, to avoid any possible confusion, let us scrupulously avoid this sense of the term, and stipulate instead that in what follows the relevant terms will be used in the following way: ‘Minimalism’ will be used to mean the position that truth can be characterised by the minimal characterisation, or platitudes. The thesis that truth is in a particular discourse constituted by superassertibility will be called ‘anti-realism’, or sometimes ‘Dummettian anti-realism’ in deference to its Dummettian heritage.

As a final introductory observation, what is sometimes misleading about Wright’s presentation of these issues is the persistent phrasing of the debate in terms of truth-*predicates*. Though Wright doesn’t mean it, this makes it sound like the problem is about how many words we should have for truth. To avoid any confusion about this the present chapter will from now on talk of sorts or types of truth, not of sorts or types of truth-predicates. By this will be meant correspondence, coherence, and so on.

Summing up, the idea is this: If the sentences of a discourse obey the platitudes then those sentences are apt for one of a possible variety of sorts of truth. As to which one in particular, that will depend on the discourse. The problem, as we will now see, is that the model is fundamentally flawed.

## 2.2. THE TWELVE TORTURERS

Truth-pluralism is subject to a crippling objection, which can be traced back to some reservations offered by Williamson (1994). He writes:

Wright treats discourse as divided into a variety of separate discourses [...] There is moral discourse, mathematical discourse, discourse about the past, discourse about the funny, discourse

about pain and so on. Wright is by no means the originator of this conception (Wittgenstein on language-games is one ancestor). At first sight it looks entirely natural. After all, we can separate the sentences in which a past tense is used from all others, and so on.

Doubt begins to seep in when one notices that the discourses are not disjoint from each other. The sentence ‘Yesterday only five of the twelve torturers inflicted pain, but the other seven who amused them with funny stories were equally bad’ concerns morality, mathematics, the past, the funny and pain together (Williamson 1994: 141).

Unfortunately, when developing this thought, Williamson assimilated it with a problem akin to that which has come in the literature to be known as ‘the problem of mixed conjunctions’.<sup>4</sup> That problem, however, is relatively easily solved and is a false lead. In order to develop Williamson’s initial insight, therefore, we need to take it on under our own steam.

The problem, quite simply, is that sentences cannot be sorted one-one into discourses like ethics, mathematics, physics, and others in which the pluralist is interested. Truth, however, is a property of sentences (or sentence-like things such as propositions or statements, a qualification I shall from here on omit). Sorts of truth, therefore, cannot be aligned one-one with discourses. More to the point, we cannot make generalisations of the form: all ethical sentences take one type of truth and all statements about physical objects take a different type of truth. This is because some ethical sentences will also be about physical objects. Consider, for example ‘He is a good father’. Consequently, a plurality of types of truth are not suitable hallmarks for a taxonomy of the discourses that the pluralist wants to distinguish. Truth-pluralism is useless as a tool in the realism debate.

The extent of this problem, which will shortly be developed, has been overlooked because writers have focussed on truth-functional complexes like the following:

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<sup>4</sup>Williamson, in the above cited paper, phrased the problem in terms of mixed disjunctions. Along with the related problem of mixed inferences, the problem of mixed conjunctions has been made independently by Christine Tappolet (1997, 2000), to which several responses have been given, notably Beall 2000. Beall’s response to Tappolet is largely in tune with Wright’s original response to Williamson and provides an interesting way of seeing what is at stake in the disagreement.

(CON:)  $2+2=4$  and leptons have negative charge.

Correspondingly, they have seen the main problem as turning on the compatibility of different sorts of truth within the context of a single sentence. Supposing, for example, that the pluralist claims that mathematical discourse is apt for coherence and physics is apt for correspondence, then the question has been, how can one sentence be apt for truth in both these competing ways?

This question admits refinement into at least two more precise objections. The strongest is what we might call ‘the malformation objection’. On this line, given that the sentence as a whole cannot both be apt for coherence and correspondence, the conjunction is malformed. It can no more be apt for these two kinds of truth than a single colour can be both dark and light. Given that we know that, in actual fact, the conjunction is perfectly well formed, we have a *reductio* of truth-pluralism.

A slightly more subtle criticism is what we might call the ‘redundancy objection’. On this line, the conjunction is not strictly speaking malformed, but the fact that it isn’t shows us that we need a single type of truth to apply to the whole, in which case the sorted types are redundant. As Christine Tappolet put it in her presentation of the difficulties, why do we need the sorted types of truth rather than just “the unique inferentially relevant truth predicate that we need and are lucky enough to have?” (Tappolet 2000: 385).

Both of these lines of objection have been extensively developed in the literature, and admit of a variety of solutions. Wright, for example, simply reinvokes the pluralist’s initial distinction between the minimal characterisation of truth on the one hand and its varying constitution on the other. To CON as a whole, we can only ascribe truth as minimally characterised. That is, all we can say of it is that it conforms to the platitudes. Of the conjuncts, however, we can say something more; we can describe their constitution in terms of correspondence to reality on the RHS, and coherence with the Peano-Dedekind axioms on the LHS. (That is the strategy at least.) The truth-pluralist need recognise no further demand for an explanation of the constitution of the conjunction *qua* conjunction.

This being so, neither the malformation nor the redundancy objection carry much force. The malformation objection relies on the idea of incompatible sorts of truth, for example correspondence and coherence. It is the fact that one and the same sentence cannot simultaneously possess both that makes for malformation. But whilst that would be quite correct if the pluralist were attempting to assign a single sorted type of truth to the sentence as a whole, it has no application to the current proposal since the current proposal makes no such claim. Wright's contention is not that the conjunction has a single sorted type of truth that somehow synthesises the others, but rather that all we can say about *it* is that it satisfies the minimal characterisation (the platitudes). If it is asked how it does this, then a more detailed answer can be given in terms of the type of truth applicable to the individual conjuncts. If the truth-pluralist is pressed as to what their relation is to the truth of the conjunction, then an answer can be given in terms of a platitudinous description of the truth-table for conjunction. Roughly speaking, it will tell us that any conjunction with conjuncts apt for any particular sort of truth will be true just in case they are both true in their appropriate sort of way. In response to the further question as to what type of truth the table assigns to the conjunction the answer is that it assigns no particular sort at all. The question, claims the truth-pluralist, is inappropriate.

In an early defence J.C. Beall (2000) drew an analogy with many-valued logics. Suppose that, according to the truth-pluralist, we have several values that sentences can take, according to their differing types of truth-aptitude. Nothing then stops us from classifying those many possible values into a single class of *designated* values. So, we can count every appropriate way of being true as a designated value. Lack of the appropriate value, i.e. being false in the relevant way, can in the same manner be classed as being undesignated.<sup>5</sup> We can then define the truth-table for conjunction not with the two values of true and false but with the two classes of values, designated and undesignated. A conjunction will be designated if and only if both its conjuncts are. Of any given conjunct, a further question may be asked as to what sort of value it takes in order for it to be designated. The pluralist may respond to such a question by citing the relevant sort of truth. Of the

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<sup>5</sup>It is unlikely that the truth-pluralist thinks there are different types of falsity in anything but a derivative sense, but for present purposes it doesn't matter either way.

conjunction, no such further question may be asked. The standard many-valued machinery that Beall utilises can thus be used to model the structure of the pluralist position. Indeed, perhaps the best way of taking Beall's defence is as elaborating the platitudinous specification of truth. Different sorts of truth, on this line, are to be understood as fitting into a calculus of truth-functions in the same way that many-valued logics fit different types of designated value.

The redundancy objection is, as previously mentioned, more subtle. If tailored to suit the distinction that Wright draws – between the minimal characterisation and the plurality of types – it amounts to the complaint that we would do just as well to posit only one sort of truth, saying about it merely that it fits that characterisation. Further distinctions between coherence, correspondence, and so on, would, on this line of objection, be explanatorily useless. Drawn out into the open, however, the redundancy objection is very weak. It would be analogous to the complaint that given that we can specify identity by Leibniz's law, it is explanatorily useless to say anything further about identity. Pending some reason as to why we can't say anything further, the complaint has no force whatsoever.

The real problem, however – not the problem of mixed conjunctions – is of an entirely different magnitude. It does not turn on the compatibility of different types of truth, but rather on the fact that we can't assign different types of truth to sentences belonging to different discourses in the first place. There are no components of a sentence like that which Williamson gives us (the 'Twelve Torturers' as we may call it) that correspond both to the desired topics of ethics, mathematics, physics, and others, and that are apt for any type of truth *at all*. This is for the simple reason that those components are not themselves sentential, and by a mere fact of grammar only sentences are apt for truth of any kind. For future reference:

**The Twelve Torturers:** Yesterday only five of the twelve torturers inflicted pain, but the other seven who amused the prisoners with funny stories were equally bad.

'Discourse' is a term of art, and there is nothing wrong with using it in such a way that the above sentence falls into a number of different discourses corresponding to the divisions of the realism debate. But whatever

signals its participation in these discourses is not the fact that it can be decomposed into sentences belonging exclusively to each. In that regard it is different to CON, which can be decomposed in exactly that way. With the Twelve Torturers, not only can the pluralist not apply a sorted type of truth to the whole, just as in the problem of mixed conjunctions, but nor can one be applied to any of its components. The relevant subcomponents are not even grammatically truth-apt. There is thus no room at any level for categorisation in terms of a plurality of types of truth.<sup>6</sup>

In order to get an idea of the scale of the problem, it should be observed that difficulties of this kind are not the exception but the norm. Consider, for example, the following declaration by Sancho Panza, chosen more or less at random from *Don Quixote*. It ought to be explained that the Countess Trifaldi has just unveiled to reveal a full beard, alleged to have been put there by the evil Malambruno:

May a thousand Satans keep you, because I wouldn't want to curse you for the enchanter and giant that you are, Malambruno; couldn't you find any other punishment for these sinners except bearding them? (De Cervantes 2005: 712).

Reading this as an assertion rather than a rhetorical question, what kind of truth would it be apt for? What, pre-theoretically, are the kinds of discourse intermingled here? Naturally, this depends on what kinds of discourse the pluralist wants to distinguish, but if we work in familiar terms, we find enough to show that there are going to be enormous problems. We find reference to a 'thousand Satans', which might be taken as an instance of discourse about both the mathematical and the supernatural or the religious. This is then linked to a claim regarding Panza's own intentions to curse Malambruno. So we are also dealing in discourse about the psychological, specifically the thorny issue of first person avowals. Worse still, Malambruno himself is referred to as a giant, which puts us in the realm of the medium, or perhaps medium-to-large, -sized dry goods. Worst of all perhaps, Malambruno is fictional even within the context of Cervantes' fiction. So we have fictional discourse too. The clause after the semi-colon could

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<sup>6</sup>That is a bit quick, because it appears to be a conjunction thanks to 'but', but it won't decompose into sentences corresponding to each and every discourse involved, not at first sight at least.

be treated as a sentence in its own right, and thus dealt with separately, but even then it contains the anaphoric ‘you’, which can’t be made sense of without referring back to the content of the prior clause, thus loading at least some of those earlier commitments under the aegis of a single type of truth.

As a brief digression, we might also observe that our intuitions as to the kind of content contained, or sphere of discourse to which a given utterance belongs, do not begin at the capital letter and end at the full stop. We interpret sentences within the context of longer tracts of speech or writing. Truth, on the other hand, understood in the way in which philosophers ordinarily think of it, is primarily a property of individual sentences. The intuitions that lead us to categorise in terms of different discourses, where discourses are aligned with our pretheoretic ideas of a topic of conversation, area of interest, or more generally, ‘what something is about’, are not therefore ideally suited to a corresponding taxonomy in terms of truth. Consider for example the way that Panza continues:

Wouldn’t it have been better, and more to the point, to take away half their noses from the middle on up, even if they talked with a twang, instead of putting beards on them? I’ll wager that they don’t have enough money to pay for someone to shave them (De Cervantes 2005: 712).

Even if we can, grammatically, partition off these further sentences from the earlier, and thus deal with them separately, it is nevertheless plausible that our views about the topic of Panza’s speech are not naturally bounded in this way. Rather, we are invited to update and develop our opinions about the subject-matter of his ramblings in the light of further utterances he makes. Perhaps, for example, when asked what it is that Panza has been speaking about, we could eventually report him as having described the childish arbitrariness with which Malambruno has acted. This is despite the fact that there is no explicit mention of childishness or arbitrariness in any of the sentences that Panza utters. The further worry for the truth-pluralist, then, is that unless the topics into which we divide up the realism debate do not float free of individual sentences in this way, then, once again, taxonomy in terms of truth is not the right kind of taxonomy.



Let us, however, leave that further concern to one side, and concentrate on the clearer and more present danger of the intermingling of discourses within one and the same sentence. It's worth noting that the problems don't rely on convoluted examples. Even relatively pared-down sentences present them. Consider for example:

1. The lepton was in orbit. (The past? Physics?)
2. I hope he doesn't leave the cooker on. (The future? Psychology? Medium sized dry goods?)
3. The atomic weight of gold is 72. (Mathematics? Physics?)
4. She continues to be a better juggler than Raymond. (Valuational? Medium-sized dry goods? Persistence of persons?)

There is no obvious way in natural English that one could disentangle the various types of commitment expressed by these sentences into individual sentences. Nor does this appear to be a contingency of syntax, that might be rectified by formalisation or revealed to be otherwise at a deeper level of grammar. Instead, the semantics themselves appear to be deeply inter-related. The whole purpose of past tense discourse, for example, is that it can cover a variety of events described by other discourses. We say in a single breath both *what* happened and *when*. Likewise, ethical discourse is designed to attribute value to objects that we describe in non-ethical terms, terms like 'father' in,

5. He is a good father.

The same goes for modal discourse, the very title of which is a giveaway; it is designed to tell us the modality in which something otherwise characterisable happens, for example,

6. It would have been possible for kangaroos not to have had tails.

Psychological discourse also essentially involves talking about our attitudes to non-psychological matters, as in,

7. Terry believes that the shops are shut on bank holidays.

This indefinitely extensible collection of examples shows that any attempt to factor out the commitments of different topics of interest into unmixed classes of statements would be misguided. We would end up with only navel-gazing uses like,

8. The past precedes the present. (Pure temporal?)

9. The actual is possible. (Pure modal?)

10. Virtue is a good. (Pure ethical?)

11. To believe is to hope. (Pure psychological?)

But the kinds of sentence truth-pluralism must deal with includes mixed uses like the above (1-7). These different topics were *made* to be mixed.

That is not to say, however, that in some cases we have a way of talking in unmixed discourse that doesn't reduce to navel-gazing uses like the above (8-11). Mathematics is a good candidate. The language of pure mathematics can perhaps be considered a self-enclosed discourse, that need not incorporate other terms in order to credit its assertions with their proper and characteristic use. There's clearly nothing degenerate about,

12.  $7+5=12$ . (Pure mathematics.)

It might be, then, that there are some plausible examples of reasonably self-contained classes of statements that bear generalisation in terms of the type of truth applicable to each and every one of them. It might, for example, be argued that all statements of pure mathematics are to be given a broadly speaking constructivist reading, and thus an anti-realist type of truth.

Some cautionary remarks, however, might still be made. First, and most importantly, truth-pluralism fails to be a general way of structuring the realism debate. In most cases of traditional interest, as we have seen, we have to take account of irremediably mixed discourse. Second, even in regard to the case of pure mathematics, there is something rather unsatisfactory about the fact that when mathematical terms are applied outside the pure discourse, the problems immediately recur. They would, for example, apply in the following case:

13.  $1000 \text{ Satans} + 1 \text{ Satan} = 1001 \text{ Satans}$ . (Applied mathematics.)

Unless, then, we want a very different story for applied mathematics to that given for pure mathematics, it seems once again the account shouldn't be phrased in terms of truth.

That, however, is as may be. We needn't push the point here. Instead we can concentrate on the objection to truth-pluralism as a general framework for structuring the realism debate. In Williamson's early presentation of the Twelve Torturers, he summarised his misgivings with the words "Our language is strongly unified in syntax and semantics. Any finite set of its words can be combined within the unity of a sentence. The notion of truth must respect and reflect this integrity. Truths are many; truth is one" (Williamson 1994: 141). Whilst in the development of his criticisms he overlooked the distinction between easy problems regarding sentences like CON, and hard problems regarding sentences like the Twelve Torturers, his basic contention indicated something profound. If Wright wants to graft his distinctions between different sorts of truth onto the convoluted weave of our language – the language within which we make the commitments he wishes to theorise over – he needs to acknowledge the inter-relation of its parts and explain how his system deals with them. In the light of the above problems, it seems unlikely that this can be done.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.3. A COMPOSITIONALLY ENLIGHTENED TRUTH-PLURALISM?

The truth-pluralist, on the other hand, is likely to claim that the above objections call more for the refinement of his position than its rejection. What we need, he may say, is a compositionally enlightened pluralism, one that retains the correlation of different types of truth with differing topics in the realism debate, but doesn't rely on the simple model of isolated classes of statements criticised above. The above objection, this reply goes, has mistaken the difficulty of the task for its impossibility.

The question, then, is in what directions a compositionally enlightened

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<sup>7</sup>N.B. I don't want to endorse Williamson's further or more detailed views on the topics in question. Indeed, even the precise way in which he works out his objection to Wright is not one I am happy with. I doff my cap to him here because I think that his example – the Twelve Torturers – and his initial observation regarding non-disjoint discourses first picked the thread that the above arguments purport to unravel.

truth-pluralism might proceed. It seems clear that it needs to correlate discourses not just with entire sentences but also with predicates. In that way we acknowledge the pre-theoretic idea that words like ‘good’ tend to signal a certain topic or subject matter, for example ethics. It is surely an idea along these lines that lies behind our concerns regarding the Twelve Torturers. With its mix of varying types of vocabulary, it presses on us the realisation that the topics with which the realism debate deals are not sorted one-one into different classes of sentence. Solving those problems, then, must proceed by sorting in a more discriminating way.

Filling out the sketch a little, we might add an account of predicate modifiers, as ‘good’ works on the predicate ‘is a man’ to form the structured predicate ‘is a good man’. Again, this lets us get our hands on the subsentential components and correlate them, rather than just whole sentences, with the topics in question. We can also avail ourselves of the standard formalisations of modal and temporal operators. We can mark the presence, for example, of past tense discourse by the occurrence of the relevant tense operator, just as we can mark the presence of a particular modality by the occurrence of the relevant modal operator.

With these first steps we see that there is no principled bar to working at a subsentential level so as to produce a set of what we might call ‘markings’ associating the various elements, be they certain predicates or operators, with the divisions of subject matter that structure the realism debate. In the execution of any particular programme, of course, there would be inordinate details to clarify, but there is certainly no argument to suggest that it couldn’t be done, and there is, indeed, some reason to think it could.

That, then, may provide succour to the truth-pluralist. Following this observation, we can imagine him replying, “*The previous objection relied on a crass naiveté regarding the tractability of the logical structure of natural languages. Indeed, upon reflection, we can see that things are bound to work out well for the truth-pluralist. The distinctions between different subject-matters in the realism debate must be, if they are to be distinctions we can talk about at all, reflected in possible articulations of the language. It is the articulation of the language, after all, that makes the distinctions between those subjects possible in the first place.*”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Perhaps this last claim is an unnecessary flourish, but why not let our *dramatis personae* have a sense of the dramatic.

The problem, however, occurs when we try to trace back the markings that we have assigned to our subsentential elements to the pluralist's sorted types of truth. If, after all, our pluralism is to be pluralism about truth, and not pluralism about something else, then this needs eventually to be done in some way or other. As soon as we see this, however, the correlation of subsentential elements with particular topics is shown to be of dubious utility. Truth only applies to sentences. So the discursive markings only serve the truth-pluralist's purposes insofar as he can explain them as eventually having some bearing on different sentences, which in turn may be related to different sorts of truth. And at this point he runs into the same difficulties by which he was initially afflicted. Insofar as we compose given elements into a sentence like the Twelve Torturers, there is nothing to which he can apply the sorted types of truth. He can't for example simply say that it corresponds to reality, because he doesn't want to claim that discourse about the comic corresponds to reality. But for the same reasons, he can't say that it is merely superassertible, because he doesn't want to claim that the existence of torturers is something that is true or false independent of corresponding elements of reality, i.e. burly men with thumbscrews. The classification of subsentential elements and modes of combination then turns out to be an idle wheel. We can mark the subsentential elements if we like, but this marking ends up having no bearing on different sorts of truth.

The reader will note that what has happened here, and was really always bound to happen, is that the pluralist has been thrown back into the jaws of the initial problem. The root difficulty is that different types of truth are incompatible, and at some point the pluralist must choose, of an irremediably mixed sentence like the Twelve Torturers, which type should apply. But given that there can be no good choice, the pluralist position collapses. Moreover, unlike in the case with CON, the distinction between the minimal characterisation and the sorted types cannot come to the rescue. Admittedly, the pluralist may apply the minimal characterisation to the Twelve Torturers, declining to classify it in terms of sorted truth. In this regard, he is in the same position as with CON. The problem is that he can't then go on to categorise even the components of the Twelve Torturers in terms of sorted truth. They are not of the right grammatical category to take truth of any type as a value. Truth-pluralism thus cannot be applied at any level of the analysis. Unlike in the case of CON, it is wholly redundant.

## 2.4. GRASPING THE BULL BY THE HORNS: SYNTHESISING TRUTH

In the solution of the problem of mixed conjunctions, it was claimed that the truth-pluralist could dodge a bullet by refusing to categorise CON in terms of which sort of truth it as a whole is apt for. The truth-pluralist is at liberty simply to claim that it fits the minimal specification. Pluralism only kicks in at the level of the individual conjuncts. The reasons for making this move are easily enough understood and were outlined above. It seems that there are no principled rules for calculating what the particular sort of truth applicable to the mixed sentence as a whole is.

If the truth-pluralist is to get out of the current fix, however, he must do just this. He must dispute the claim that there can be no good choice as to which sort of truth the Twelve Torturers is apt for. There *is*, on this line, a way of determining whether an irremediably mixed sentence like the Twelve Torturers should, in the final count, be apt for correspondence, or superassertibility, or coherence, or another type of truth. He must, so to speak ‘synthesise’ truth. In order to give truth-pluralism a fair run, it is only right to explore this possibility. To that end, let us grasp the bull by the horns and propose the following:

Suppose we posit a rule of ‘weakening’, where there is a hierarchy of types of truth with, say, superassertibility as the weakest and correspondence as the strongest, and a sentence is apt for the weakest type of truth permitted by what, in the general sense, it is ‘about’. As an example, suppose we are pre-theoretically anti-realists about the past, but realists about physics. We then sort the following two sentences thus:

14. Present tense physics: The lepton is in orbit - Correspondence.
15. Past tense physics: The lepton was in orbit - Superassertibility.

The reason why we sort these two sentences in the above way – on this strategy – is that we think that by putting (15) into the past tense we make the sentence apt only for superassertibility. This is despite the fact that it is also about physics. If it was in the present tense, as in (14), then we treat it as apt for the stronger, correspondence type of truth.

According to this version of truth-pluralism, then, the truth-type we associate with claims about, say, leptons, varies depending on, say, which

tense we use. If, for example, we describe the state of an lepton over the course of an extended period of time, we begin by making claims that are true just in case a certain warrant exists, then, when our assertions turn to the present tense, suddenly we are making claims that are true just in case parts of the sentence correspond to certain aspects of reality.

What this shows, the truth-pluralist might think, is that the various topics of the realism debate are related in a more complicated way than first thought. One might here draw a parallel with reactions to indispensability arguments in the philosophy of mathematics. Such arguments claim that mathematics, being indispensable to physics, must be treated as realistically as the latter. This, in turn, comes as a shock to those of a materialist disposition, who want on the one hand to think of physical objects as real, and on the other hand of mathematical objects as not so real. If the arguments go through, then the game is up for the materialist. But what he need not concede is that the very idea of holding realist views in some areas and non-realist views in others is misguided. He needn't, for example, accept the reality of ethical, semantic, or comic properties in the same breath in which he ushers in the mathematical. The current response, then, can be considered on this analogy. Compositionality provides us with something rather like a web of indispensability arguments. It shows, for example, that using different different tenses is indispensable to physics, and that sometimes the use of non-ethical vocabulary is required when using ethical discourse, and so on for modal statements, and so on (see the earlier 1-7). But this, the defence goes, is to complicate rather than ruin things. If this is so, then the difficulties claimed to have been posed by compositionality are not as damaging as have been claimed.

Further reflection, however, puts pressure on this thought. The above response is conditional on an ordering of types of truth. More generally, what the truth-pluralist needs is a set of rules for deciding which types of truth are applicable to mixed sentences depending on the topics they cover. It was floated that one avenue would be an ordering based on a principle of weakening. But this, as the reader will have suspected, is too simple-minded. Suppose, for example, that we had a sentence that pre-theoretically indicated discourse to be associated with truth-as-coherence, but also truth-as-correspondence. What plausible rule could there be for deciding what sort of truth was applicable to the whole? Let us suppose, following Quine's

earlier suggestion, that a sentence that mixed ‘science’, as Quine called it, with ethical discourse would be an example of this kind. Suppose, then, we are engaged in a debate as to whether the extinction of the Neanderthal was caused by bloody encounters with homo sapiens.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, let us consider the claim,

16. Homo sapiens cruelly and without moral justification extinguished the Neanderthal.

Insofar as this is a matter of coherence with other statements forming the corpus of our moral beliefs, then this is apt for coherence, but insofar as it speaks of violent clashes between primates, it is apt for correspondence. How are we to choose which sort the sentence is in fact apt for? In this case there seems no good answer. A decision either way would be *ad hoc* at best. That, at least, is surely where the presumption must lie, prior to the truth-pluralist providing us with a worked-out strategy explaining otherwise.

One response would be for the truth-pluralist to keep on back-peddling. He might try arguing that in some instances, there is no way of applying sorted types of truth. Instead, we merely fall back on the minimal specification, and pluralism goes idle. But in other cases, it doesn’t. In other cases, for example sentences like ‘The lepton was in orbit’, there is a rule to be found as to which type of truth applies to the whole given the discourses to which it pertains. Again, there is nothing strictly incoherent about this. If the truth-pluralist is willing to accept that this is what his position amounts to, then there is nothing in the argument presented to refute him.

There comes a point, however, when the truth-pluralist framework becomes so unsuitable for the purposes for which it was intended, and so full of apparently *ad hoc* amendments, that the only plausibility it can be apportioned stems from a failure to imagine any alternative. The question, then, is whether there are pluralisms that are not truth-pluralism. And the answer is that there are. It would be better then, to cast around for new ways of formulating the issues. This dog has had its day.

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<sup>9</sup>See e.g. “Human suspect in Neanderthal murder mystery”, Jeanna Bryner, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/32042037> updated 2:39 p.m. ET July 21, 2009. Nothing hangs, of course, on whether this theory is true or even whether anyone has made the claim.



## 2.5. OBJECTIVITY-PLURALISM

It might be objected that the previous criticisms take Wright too much at his own word. On this rather odd sounding complaint, it is wrong to put too much weight on Wright's claims to be offering a pluralism about truth itself. Rather, this response goes, *Truth and Objectivity's* important contribution should be seen as on the one hand, minimalism about truth, and on the other, pluralism about possible hallmarks. If this view is taken, then the theses about the 'constitution' of truth, and the sorting of different types, can be abandoned if it leads to the problems here raised. What matters, this idea goes, is merely that under the umbrella of a uniform specification of truth, we can make further interesting generalisations regarding the realism appropriate to particular discourses.

Hand in hand with this defence goes the thought that the preceding arguments were cheap shots. The problems presented have all stemmed from foisting upon Wright a rigid demand that his hallmarks are to be applied at the sentential level. This has been justified on the basis that insofar as Wright commits to pluralism about truth itself, the sentence is the only appropriate unit. Sentences (or things of comparable shape like propositions or statements) are, after all, the bearers of truth. If a response of this kind had been predicted, the thought goes, Wright might have evaded them by limiting his claims about truth to what he says about minimalism. This would still leave him the resources, the objection goes, to draw many further distinctions.

It's important, in assessing this complaint, to realise that it demands at the very least a concession from the bold statements of *Truth and Objectivity*, and those that Wright has reiterated since. Some of his hallmarks, for example superassertibility and coherence, are straightforwardly theses about truth. They do not have an obvious extension to anything else. Consequently, it is not merely incidental to the view that it is pluralism about truth itself. Or rather, Wright has offered too few clues as to how these hallmarks might be brought into play in ways that avoid the above objections, which the framing of his position in terms of types of truth invites.

However, Wright does introduce further criteria for realism that seem in principle to be dissociable from truth-pluralism. Two prominent examples are *cognitive command* and *wide cosmological role*. Wright's own views re-

garding the standing of these criteria in regard to truth itself are somewhat unclear. On the one hand, Wright sees them as ways of showing what it is for truth in a discourse to have a certain character. On this way of looking at things, to show that a discourse satisfied the relevant criteria would be to show something about what truth is like in that discourse. So, for example, Wright describes cognitive command as “beefing up” a trivial sense of correspondence that is given by the mere minimal characterisation of truth (Wright 1992: 175). At slightly more length, the idea is that the correspondence theory of truth aims to provide a dyadic account of representation and the world. There is a world that is represented on one side, and a way of representing it on the other. Cognitive command, for reasons that will shortly be given, is supposed to ‘beef up’ the representing side of the dyad, and width of cosmological role is supposed to ‘beef up’ the worldly side of the dyad.<sup>10</sup>

However, it isn’t clear whether these criteria need to be viewed as applying in this indirect way, i.e. via what they tell us about truth. Instead, they might simply be viewed as hallmarks in their own right. That is to say, we could drop the question as to whether they tell us anything about truth-in-the-discourse, and simply ask whether they tell us anything about the discourse. Now, this distinction isn’t of much importance if there are no general problems in characterising the realism debate in terms of truth. But as we have seen, truth is a poor fulcrum on which to lever the debate. It is best, therefore, if we simply consider the further criteria that Wright applies in their own right. The important question, then, is how they fare as a result of compositional intermingling. Let us call the view that accepts Wright’s minimalism about truth, and then goes on to ask questions in terms of these further variety of hallmarks but with questions about their relation to truth put to one side, ‘objectivity-pluralism’.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>See e.g. the summary in Wright 2003a: 7-8.

<sup>11</sup>The name of this position also pays homage to Wright’s description of the framework of *Truth and Objectivity*. And of course, if the above misgivings about truth-pluralism could be solved, then we could straightforwardly reinterpret these further hallmarks in terms of what they tell us about truth as Wright initially intended. The reader who has not been convinced by the arguments of the previous section need therefore take no umbrage at this dissociation.

## 2.5.0.1. COGNITIVE COMMAND

[A] discourse exerts Cognitive Command if and only if it is a priori that differences of opinion formulated within the discourse, unless excusable as a result of vagueness in a disputed statement, or in the standards of acceptability, or variation in personal evidence thresholds, so to speak, will involve something which may properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming (Wright 1992: 144).

Cognitive command is supposed to reflect the idea that some discourses and not others purport to be genuinely representational. This being so, standards of correctness in those discourses integrate with the correct functioning of our representational apparatus, or more generally, the cognitive mechanisms with which we apprehend the facts in question. This distinction may, for example, map the traditional differentiation between primary and secondary qualities. It may be that we can disagree regarding a secondary property, colour, without either of us suffering a cognitive flaw. Suppose for example that some industrial solvents leak into the water supply, inverting the visual spectra of half the population. The contention might be that any dispute about what colour things were would be a matter over which neither party need be at fault. If, on the other hand, half the population were as a result of the poisoning unwilling to agree on judgements of shape, the poisoning would be adjudged to have damaged (or perhaps cured) their shape-recognition capacities.<sup>12</sup>

It's unclear whether the objections of the previous section carry over to cognitive command. A reason for thinking they do is that the claims that form the subject matter for the relevant test are, it seems natural to assume, to be formulated as entire sentences. Consequently, the kind of admixture that results from compositional considerations above can initially be transported over wholesale in order to pose analogous difficulties. If, for

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<sup>12</sup>Wright does not use this example. He introduces cognitive command as a replacement for the more traditional hallmark of convergence, the requirement that realistic discourses tend to converge towards agreement. For several reasons that needn't concern us here, Wright believes that the intuitions that motivate convergence are better satisfied by cognitive command. I am not sure that the intuitions that motivate each are in any clear sense the same, it seeming rather that both hallmarks form part of a large family of possible hallmarks that all have some affinity with each other. For present purposes, therefore, cognitive command will simply be treated on its own terms. The reader is invited to relate it to other positions in the realism debate as he or she sees fit.

example, we take a sentence like the Twelve Torturers, we face a tangle in deciding whether disagreement over it as a whole is to be subject to cognitive command or not. This is because the different discourses in which it participates (different topics it covers) for example discourse about the comic and about physics, indicate resolution in different directions.

Matters are, however, perhaps better here than in the earlier cases. Specifically, it seems that there is a coherent strategy of synthesis, and in particular weakening, that can be prosecuted. What was too simple-minded in the earlier case might not fare so badly here. For example, it seems reasonable to suppose that our attitude toward the Twelve Torturers should be that it *fails* of cognitive command. If, as is plausible, any disagreement over whether stories are funny is not something that can be put down *a priori* to a cognitive shortcoming, then nor can disagreement over the sentence as a whole. This is because two parties may disagree over it only in regard to this one issue. The terms in which the hallmark is phrased, then, don't lead to the kind of terminal problems that occur when we try to imagine a sentence that is putatively apt for both truth-as-coherence and truth-as-correspondence or truth-as-superassertibility.<sup>13</sup> We have, that is, seemingly coherent and relatively clear principles guiding us as to the results of compositionally mixed discourse.

#### 2.5.0.2. NOISE

There is, however, a further problem, which we might call the objection from 'noise'. It is surely a remarkable fact, for a pluralist who is pursuing the current strategy, that in a sentence like the Twelve Torturers, we can downgrade the type of objectivity applicable to a statement regarding in part realist discourse simply by adding reference to funny stories. This follows from the rule of weakening. This entails that actual instances of discourse won't always display their characteristic hallmarks. Talk about the physical won't always exert cognitive command; nor will talk about the arithmetical, and so on.

How bad a problem this is depends on what we want from the pluralist theory. If we want a way of classifying actual linguistic utterances, then it

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<sup>13</sup>Of course, if Wright takes cognitive command as itself partially definitive of correspondence then the independent problem case to focus on is truth-as-coherence and truth-as-superassertibility.

is troubling. The classifications we end up with will include vast disorderly swathes of anti-realism, according to all the occasions on which for whatever purposes it is convenient or necessary to simultaneously mention something that does not exert cognitive command. On the other hand, however, if the purpose is to reveal further, broadly speaking metaphysical, insights, then this appears less troubling. What we actually say is not, on this view, the important thing. The important thing is what we *could* say if we were to properly police our utterances. If, for example, we were careful only to mix discourses when absolutely necessary, then we would be subject only to the problems previously compared to indispensability arguments. That is, we would only be concerned about cases, like that in which we want to describe the course of an lepton over a period of time, where mixing the relevant discourses is unavoidable.

Depending on the aims of pluralism, either of these options may be taken. Specifically, there is nothing to stop the pluralist taking the second, favourable one. It is worth noting, however, what this tells us about the aims of he who so chooses. Specifically, he is not someone who is interested in describing language use as it actually tends to occur. Instead, he is concerned more with often obscured facets of the reality our speech depicts. The methods, then, are reminiscent of a Quinean regimentation of language. Just as Quine was concerned to conduct ontology by way of formulating minimally committal languages for the operation of science, the pluralist here is concerned to reveal something about the topics of ethics, physics, mathematics, and other discourses, by showing how minimally mixed utterances regarding them display certain hallmarks. What is not shown in any direct way is the sorts of property that actual uses of ethical, physical, and mathematical discourse ordinarily have. Or rather, the properties or hallmarks that they are shown to have are not distributed in such a way as to divide those utterances into the classes that display the hallmark with which they are peculiarly associated. A lot of what is actually talk about the physical, for example, will be anti-realist, simply by an accident of the sentential context in which it is discussed.

That, however, clearly need not be an objection; it merely narrows down what pluralism might achieve and the kinds of philosophical projects it affiliates with. If those are one's projects, then all well and good; if not, not. In general, though, there is nothing more to be said. Let us turn, then, to

another of Wright’s hallmarks.

### 2.5.0.3. WIDTH OF COSMOLOGICAL ROLE

Let the *width of cosmological role* of the subject matter of a discourse be measured by the extent to which citing the kind of states of affairs with which it deals is potentially contributive to things *other than*, or *other than via*, our being in attitudinal states which take such states of affairs as object (Wright 1992: 196).

Wright’s example is a comparison between the Wetness of These Rocks and the Wrongness of that Act. Citing the former can figure in an explanation of the following:

- (i) My perceiving, and hence believing, that the rocks are wet.
- (ii) A small (prelinguistic) child’s interest in his hands after he has touched the rocks.
- (iii) My slipping and falling.
- (iv) The abundance of lichen growing on them. (Taken from Wright 1992: 197.)

Citing the Wrongness of the Act, on the other hand, “would seem to have no part to play in the *direct* (propositional-attitude unmediated) explanation of any effects of the latter three sorts [ii-iv]: precognitive-sensuous, interactive, and brute” (Wright 1992: p.197). Though this would be over simple, a rather nice way of initially appreciating what Wright is getting at is by relating it to traditional concerns regarding mind (in)dependence. One might think, for example, that what is brought out in the above example is the large number of ways in which some states of affairs and not others can affect us other than by our merely thinking them to be so.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>As in the case of cognitive command, Wright introduces width of cosmological role a replacement for a longer standing hallmark—this time the Best Explanation Constraint, the principle that ‘real’ things, like protons, best explain why we believe in them, whereas putatively not so real things, like justice, don’t. Again, it isn’t clear to me whether width of cosmological role is best considered as somehow answering the specific intuitive motivation for the Best Explanation Constraint, or whether it is simply an alternative, perhaps superior, hallmark. And once again, the reader is left to decide this on his or her own terms.

Does compositionality cause problems for width of cosmological role? It would seem that insofar as states of affairs are those things that our sentences describe, then once again the initial difficulties, stemming from mixed sentences like the Twelve Torturers, are liable to recur. There will be correspondingly ‘mixed’ states of affairs. The question, then, is whether, as in the case of cognitive command, we can prosecute a strategy for determining the width of cosmological role of an irremediably mixed sentence.

In the case of cognitive command, as we saw, something rather like a rule of weakening plausibly applies. Lower grades of discourse debase the sentence as a whole. Arguably, in the present case the converse applies. If we can cite, say, the presence of physical objects in a ‘wide’ explanation, then presumably we can cite any more inclusive state of affairs in the same explanation. Suppose, for example, that we can cite the presence of the torturers in the explanation of why the waterboarding takes place. Then it would seem that we can, albeit with some redundancy, say not only this but also that at some point they were amusing the prisoners with funny stories. We give all the information required along with some that isn’t.

Whether this is correct or not depends on what makes for good explanations. It might be that, contrary to the above suggestion, good explanations mustn’t contain unnecessary information. If this is the case the Twelve Torturers wouldn’t have wide cosmological role, because it contains a redundant component – the bit about humour – that won’t figure in streamlined wide explanations. What is important for current purposes, however, is that there seems to be no incoherence in a synthesising approach of one form or another. Like cognitive command, therefore, the situation seems less dire than in the earlier cases.

In regard to the noise objection, the complaint that in many cases of actual conversation the hallmarks will apply in a haphazard way, similar remarks go to those in the case of cognitive command and needn’t be repeated here. Once again, whether this is problematic depends on the aims of project.

#### 2.5.0.4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The above remarks offered provisional responses to the aforementioned problems of compositionality when applied to two of Wright’s further hallmarks.

They raise the question as to whether there is any generalised way of assessing the consequences that compositional admixture of discourses has for the realism debate. The answer, as we have seen, is no. The way in which compositionality compromises the debate is specific to the hallmark under consideration. Moreover, it would not be surprising if once we have opened the doors to a variety of different hallmarks, there is no end of variations we could formulate in order to ask pertinent realism-relevant questions. This being so, there is no end of ways and cases in which compositionality might be either problematic or unproblematic. So whilst attention to the topic of compositionality ought to be of general concern to the pluralist, it is best to view the arguments of this section as showing that it supplies decisive arguments only against truth-pluralism, and moreover, only to versions of it that resist defusing by the synthesising strategies employed with cognitive command and width of cosmological role.

More generally, however, I hope that the preceding discussion has shown that postulating a plurality of discourses is a non-trivial assumption, and must be measured against the system of categorisation that the pluralist then wants to erect. If seeds of doubt have been planted in this one case, then perhaps they can serve the purpose of making us more cautious in others. The value of that insight is to me more prized than the question of whether the above arguments show that truth-pluralism is, in the final count, undermined.



## Chapter 3

# : Global non-factualism

**S**AUL KRIPKE INTERPRETS the *Philosophical Investigations* as providing an argument for semantic ‘irrealism’ or ‘non-factualism’. Wright and Blackburn (among others) have since investigated whether semantic non-factualism inflates to global non-factualism—that is, non-factualism about all regions of discourse: ethics, mathematics, physics, and so on. If this were so, then statements from all discourses would suffer a uniform defect that would threaten to undermine any further generalisations the pluralist might wish to make.

The aim of the chapter is to a large extent conditional; the question is *if* Kripke’s argument goes through, what are the globalising consequences? It will be argued that it poses a dilemma for pluralism, one that has not been satisfactorily acknowledged by Wright and Blackburn. On the one horn, Kripke’s argument may be taken to force what is here called *meaning nihilism*. This is a hardnosed non-factualism, according to which Kripke’s argument has utterly wrecked everything semantic. If this is the case, it is argued, then the pluralist’s hallmarks offer only a pretense of philosophical analysis. On the other horn, it is argued that if a form of non-factualism can be resuscitated that preserves more of what we would intuitively like to think of as the semantic, then it brings in tow the possibility of *alternative concepts* (or perhaps better, semantics) to our own: an alternative physics, an alternative mathematics, an alternative ethics and so on. On either view, the cat is thrown amongst the pluralist pigeons.

## 3.1. KRIPKENSTEIN AND THE SCEPTICAL CHALLENGE

As will be familiar to the reader, Kripke's dialectic is set up in regard to 'quaddition', a process that is like addition for numbers smaller than 57. For sums involving numbers equal to or greater than 57 their quum is 5. Let us suppose, then, that you have never computed sums involving numbers equal to or greater than 57. The sceptic's question is what fact determines whether, when summing  $68+57$ , you go on in the same way by answering 125 rather than 5. That is to say, what makes it the case that you previously meant addition by '+' rather than quaddition? According to the sceptic, *nothing at all*. The point, moreover, is not merely one of conformity with past usage. The problem is that if there is no such thing as conforming to the same rule on different occasions, there is no such thing as conforming to a particular rule on even one occasion. After all, if there were a fact that you meant addition at the earlier time rather than quaddition, then there would be an analogous fact as to what you mean at the later time, and together they would answer the question as to whether you were following the same rule on both occasions.

However, Kripke adds to non-factualism a 'sceptical solution'. The non-factualist reconstrues talk about semantic facts in some suitably non-realist way—that is to say, a way that recognises that there can be no facts such as our initial philosophical search aimed to reveal. Having destroyed a certain conception of semantics there is supposed to be an alternative, vindictory conception that can be put in its place (Kripke 1982: e.g. 66-68, 73-8). The complete package, non-factualism with the sceptical solution, can be summed up as follows:

On Wittgenstein's conception, a certain type of traditional – and overwhelmingly natural – explanation of our shared form of life is excluded. We cannot say that we all respond as we do to ' $68+57$ ' *because* we share a common concept of addition. (Frege, for example, would have endorsed such an explanation, but one hardly needs to be a philosopher to find it obvious and natural.) For Wittgenstein, an 'explanation' of this kind ignores his treatment of the sceptical paradox and its solution. There is no objective fact – that we all mean addition by '+', or even that a given individual does – that explains our agreement in particular cases.

Rather our license to say of each other that we mean addition by ‘+’ is part of a ‘language game’ that sustains itself only because of the brute fact that we generally agree (Kripke 1982: 97).

When introducing the sceptical solution, Kripke makes an allusion to Dummett’s claim that the later Wittgenstein wanted to replace the truth-conditional conception of meaning in the *Tractatus* with an assertibility-conditions account (Kripke 1982: 73-4). The sceptical solution, however (as I understand it at least) is crucially different to the Dummettian proposal, in ways that will become important to us later. Although this will later turn out to be too simplistic, the difference can in part be understood by asking whether one accepts the following Nagelian biconditional (Reduction) or merely the weaker conditional (Veridicality):<sup>1</sup>

Reduction: For any ‘*S*’ that is a meaning attribution: ‘*S*’ is assertible if and only if *S*.

Veridicality: For any ‘*S*’ that is a meaning attribution: If ‘*S*’ is assertible then *S*.

Both these principles agree that if assertibility-conditions are met, in whatever the relevant sense of ‘assertibility’ turns out to be – perhaps superassertibility in the Dummettian case – then *S*.<sup>2</sup> In this regard they both offer speakers a guarantee of veridicality under certain conditions. If they can meet assertibility-conditions then they are guaranteed to be right. The difference between the two positions comes out in regard to the converse implication. Does *S* entail that ‘*S*’ is assertible? That is, can we rule out non-assertible (recognition-transcendent) meaning attributions?

On the first, reductive account, we can. And this, of course, is roughly what the standard Dummettian account aims at. It entails that it isn’t just that the existence of assertibility-conditions entails truth, but crucially also that truth can’t outrun assertibility. That is, if it is true that ‘Jones means  $7+5=12$  by ‘ $7+5=12$ ’ then it is assertible, in some relevant sense of ‘assert-

<sup>1</sup>This is a reduction in the Nagelian sense, involving a mere material biconditional.

<sup>2</sup>Of course, the details of the Dummettian account are thorny. In particular, we need to make the relevant notion of assertibility timeless and stable in the way that truth is usually thought to be. But these details don’t affect the important point here.

ible', that 'Jones means  $7+5=12$  by ' $7+5=12$ '. It is this converse implication that makes truth epistemically constrained in the way that Dummett's anti-realist advocates.

The point, then, is that the Kripkean account doesn't commit to the biconditional (Reduction) but only to the conditional (Veridicality), or so I'll now suggest. That is to say, the sceptical solution commits only to the claim that if standard conditions of assertibility are reached, then there is no further question as to whether the relevant meaning attribution holds. In fact, even this turns out to be too strong. It is rather that the meaning attribution is defeasibly correct, given the rules of the game. Further evidence might come to light that would show that a speaker had not in fact meant addition in previous cases. The point is merely that there is nothing above and beyond evidence of this type, and the rules linking it with the relevant assertions that Jones means addition by '+' to appeal to. In other words, if we follow Kripke's thought that assertibility-conditions consist in some form of communal agreement then what this means is that if the community agrees that a certain utterance signifies addition rather than quaddition then they are *ipso facto* defeasibly right. That is a rule of the game. It *isn't* guaranteed, on the other hand, that every meaning fact entails a fact about assertibility, i.e. the existence of an assertibility-condition.

That there should be this difference is strongly implied, or again so it seems to me, by Kripke's opposition to dispositional reductions. The dispositionalist reduces the fact as to whether someone means, e.g. addition by '+' to facts about what answers they are disposed to utter in regard to all possible sums. These accounts, even if they incorporate communal dispositions, and stringent statements of optimality conditions, are famously rejected by Kripke for (at least) two reasons. First, he thinks that we don't have the relevant dispositions, and second, even if we did, their presence would not by itself explain why certain answers were the *correct* answers to given sums, rather than simply the answers that we were disposed to give.

If we accept this, then it is tempting to think that biconditionals of the Dummettian form are ruled out for the same reason. An assertibility-condition is, on the Kripkean view, simply an occasion on which we are disposed to agree. But by the objection to dispositionalism, there aren't enough facts of this sort to account for the extension of addition. Whatever makes it correct to assert that we mean addition by '+', isn't constituted

by there being conditions, even in *potentia*, under which we would go on as the adder rather than as the quadder. For Kripke, that we are adders, though in a certain sense grounded in our dispositions to assert, does not imply that truth-conditions are equivalent to assertibility-conditions in the way the Dummettian proposes.

Or more circumspectly, we might say that if the sceptical solution does not rule out the Dummettian account, it must nonetheless precede it. Specifically, the Dummettian account only gets going once we have the idea of potentially infinitary and normative assertibility-conditions in place. It is one of the features of the sceptical solution that we can't derive such conditions directly from any of the usual sources, for example our dispositions, or traditional ideas of what it is to possess a proof or cognise a rule. Instead, we need to establish them via the sceptical solution itself.<sup>3</sup>

So even if the Dummettian account isn't committed to the existence of an infinite list of counterfactuals about how we would apply a given method, e.g. addition, it nevertheless appears committed to some relevantly infinitary aspect to the method we possess. And at this point it seems as though Kripke's sceptic will ask what the possession of *that* method and not some other by, say, Jones, consists in. And it seems that if we are to take that question seriously then we need to appeal to something outside the Dummettian account.<sup>4</sup>

All this, of course, leaves open the question as to what makes our practice that of addition - with its apparently infinitary and normative character - in any sense at all. That is, how is the sceptical solution a solution? The answer (again as I understand it at least) is that in offering each other our agreement, by saying things like 'you are adding', or more generally performing the relevant behaviour that signals agreement, we are offering a default veridicality to the relevant ascriptions of meaning. It is, by analogy, rather as though we were to chance upon a child drawing a circle, and then

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<sup>3</sup>In holding that the sceptical solution is different to the assertibility-conditions approach of the Dummettian I think I am at one with Jim Edwards 1994, though it may be that the path by which I propose to get there is somewhat distinct.

<sup>4</sup>It is commonly remarked that there is nothing wrong with infinite dispositions *per se*. For example, we each have an infinite disposition to indent in a variety of ways under an infinite variety of possible proddings simply by virtue of our precise physical make-up. The point is really that we don't have the relevant disposition in the addition case, a fact that I follow Kripke in thinking comes out especially vividly when we consider the infinite character of addition.

asking her what she is drawing, she might reply ‘a bubble’, ‘a ghost’, or ‘a man so fat you can’t see his head or limbs’. Her testimony, of course, is defeasible. Perhaps if she tells us it is the bubble but then surrounds it with pictures of half-eaten cakes, we have been deceived. But the point is simply that we do not require her to do anything that conclusively determines what she has drawn, beyond the fulfillment of these ordinary open-ended criteria. There is no possible evidence of a significantly different kind, nor any further fact beyond the obtaining of relevant evidence that might make the relevant judgements false. Defeasibility is as good as it gets, and once we retune ourselves to this way of looking at things, it’s good enough.<sup>5</sup>

The sceptic, then, can be treated in kind. Each time he asks us which rule we are following, or the answer to a particular sum, we may, like the child, merely respond as we ordinarily happen to, and we are guaranteed to be (defeasibly) right. The difference, moreover, between these two pictures is not merely the reflection of a technical fix, or an *ad hoc* formulation of semantic fact to accomodate the sceptical challenge. Instead, it offers, in outline at least, a radically humbled notion of how far meaning facts extend. It vindicates our practice, but not the highly realist conception of it as having *already* laid ‘rails to infinity’.<sup>6</sup>

Seen through the lens of his own philosophy, the non-factualist position might initially be thought to be meat and drink to the pluralist. What Kripke’s non-factualism comes to, he may think, is a primitive stab at what

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<sup>5</sup>Since the time of writing it has been put to me that my emphasis on defeasibility in the sceptical solution is misplaced. It could be that a certain type of evidence counts, by the rules of the game, as conclusive. This might be our ordinary attitude in cases like addition. We don’t allow the possibility that some people might have been quadding all along. This now seems right to me, though I have trouble balancing it with the demand that there can be no superlative fact that makes meaning attributions true in the sense that the sceptic denies. The contrast relies on the idea of the rules of the game being definite, such that they can conclusively determine when a speaker has conformed to addition as opposed to quaddition. I think that whilst this is in one sense a possibility, it needs to be balanced against the idea that the fact that the game has one set of rules rather than another can’t itself be a definite matter in the relevant sense, or if it is, then the further matter as to whether that is definite can’t, and so on and so on. Everything is contingent on how we are disposed to go on, and this introduces an iradicable species of open-endedness that my above talk of defeasibility was intended to capture. My current inability to clarify these thoughts properly does not, or so I hope, compromise the basic line of argument of this chapter.

<sup>6</sup>The issues dealt with in this chapter will largely ignore the debate, often seen as central to Kripke’s solution, between individualist vs. communitarian accounts. Instead, the answer will be phrased in terms of practice, endorsement etc. and nothing hangs on whether those can be individualistic or require interpersonal communication.

has since been perfected. The point is that traditional categories like ‘truth’ and ‘fact’ admit a plurality of readings. Kripke’s argument shows us that what it takes for a semantic fact to be a fact is different to what, say, it takes for a fact of physics to be a fact. Or equivalently, what it takes for a statement of semantics to be true is different to what it takes for a statement of physics to be true. It will later be suggested that this impression is misleading. Whilst it’s perfectly consonant with the sceptical solution to talk of two senses of ‘fact’, one that is scuppered by the sceptical challenge, and one (which I’ll resist calling a ‘non-fact’) that is not, it doesn’t follow that this division is ultimately compatible with the other aims of Wright and Blackburn. This will come out as our discussion proceeds. For now, though, we can turn to globalisation arguments.

### 3.2. GLOBALISATION ARGUMENTS

Several variants of globalisation argument have been presented in the literature. The central thought is put by Wright as follows:<sup>7</sup>

*Whatever* exactly Wittgenstein’s dialectic accomplishes, it surely imposes *some* kind of qualification to a realist conception of rules and meanings. And now, whatever that qualification is thought to be, it has to go through—since truth is a function of meaning—for ascriptions of truth as well. At the least, then, the rule-following considerations set an *upper bound* on the robustness of realism which is available anywhere: the bound is set by the robustness of realism which, after those considerations, it is appropriate to apply to judgements concerning meanings, rules, and what complies with them. And if in addition we take it, as Kripke did, that Wittgenstein’s argument imposes irrealism—or minimalism—about meanings and so on, then irrealism, or minimalism, is the upper bound everywhere (Wright 1992: 212-13).

It’s worth stressing that the aim of the globalisation argument is not a form of ontological idealism. It’s not, for example, well expressed by instances like the following:

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<sup>7</sup>Wright calls this the ‘Intuitive Version’ of the objection.

MATHEMATICAL IDEALISM: Whether or not  $57+68=125$  depends on a brute fact of human agreement.<sup>8</sup>

The globalisation thesis ought instead to be stated in terms of the deficiency of any representation, be it in the language of physics, mathematics, or any other, to attain a certain level of ‘realism’ or ‘factuality’. That is to say, it should primarily be understood as a criticism of our representative capacities, rather than as directly about what those representations purport to depict. It is global in the sense that it applies to *all* discourse, not that it applies not only to discourse but also to things ‘out there’.<sup>9</sup> The above thesis doesn’t adequately reflect this because it makes it sound as though the sentence ‘ $68+57=125$ ’ makes sense in just the same way we unreflectively thought it did, but that the mathematical reality about which it speaks is somehow dependent upon us. This is if anything the very opposite of what the argument should be trying to convey, which is rather that the sentence is, quite incredibly, ‘non-factual’. If a reality stands behind our representations then *it* is wholly unaffected. The problem, however, is that any attempt to comprehend that reality – even by saying ‘the reality that stands behind our representations’ – must go by means of representation, and that representation will fall foul of the intended argument.<sup>10</sup>

Wright phrases the thesis in terms of truth, which makes it clearer that the problem is linguistic or conceptual and not ontological. On this approach globalisation is the following thesis:

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<sup>8</sup>Matters here are slightly complicated by the fact that previously authors have investigated whether a conclusion along the lines of ontological idealism can be derived from Wittgenstein’s later work. Williams 1991: 162 for example appears to entertain an argument along these lines, before going on to develop his more sophisticated ‘Transcendental’ reading. Whether or not even contemporary authors have seen a conclusion along the above lines as the intended upshot of the argumentative considerations her adduced is, perhaps, a rather more open matter than I suggest. The ultimate justification for seeing things in the terms here given is that only they seem to promise to supply an argument that is any good.

<sup>9</sup>As I understand it, this is the point lurking at the root of Wright and Blackburn’s protracted disagreement about semantic descent in Blackburn 1990, 1998, and Wright 1992, 1998.

<sup>10</sup>There might be complications for a view such as this on an identity theory of truth or on direct realist views, but for present purposes we’ll assume that we are not working with such a theory.



GLOB 1. For all  $S$ , whether or not ‘ $S$ ’ is true is a non-factual matter.<sup>11</sup>

This way of stating the thesis is an improvement, but we must be careful to avoid a banal misreading. It is a trivial commonplace that the assignment of meanings to particular signs is arbitrary. ‘Car’ means car in English and bus in French. In this regard the above claim can be taken to reflect merely syntactical contingencies. The intended thesis of globalisation, on the other hand, differs from this in that it states that no matter what other contingencies are cleared up, for example the interpretation of ‘ $S$ ’ in a particular language, say English, its truth will still be a non-factual matter.

One could try to make this explicit by making the relevant statement of globalisation in terms of propositions or sentences in languages:

GLOB 2. For all  $P$ , whether or not  $P$  is true is a non-factual matter.

GLOB 3. For all  $S$ , whether or not ‘ $S$ ’ is true-in- $L$  is a non-factual matter.

These are, however, not altogether happy reformulations. Invoking the notion of propositions as in GLOB 2 shouldn’t be taken to suggest that there are such things as propositions. It is the point of meaning non-factualism to contest exactly this. Similarly, relativisation to a language suggests that there are such things as languages and relative interpretations, but if these are to be the kinds of semantic phenomena they are usually taken to be, then they are as much the intended target of non-factualism as propositions.

How, then, are we to understand the thesis of globalisation? Despite the caution recommended by the above remarks, the general import of the argument is easy enough to understand. The rule-following considerations threaten to undermine the representative capacity that we attribute to our utterances, or inscriptions and signs more generally. Insofar as we relate to the world via representations, our relation to the world is thus uniformly compromised. It is like trying to hold water in a sieve; our tool is not up to the task. In order to develop this general thought, then, we need to better understand the nature of the restriction that the rule-following

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<sup>11</sup>A similar way of putting it is also used by Paul Boghossian in his presentation of these problems in his 2001, 1990. Wright and Boghossian equate the idea of being a factual matter with being truth-conditional. I agree with this but put it in terms of being ‘non-factual’ to avoid the temptation of seeing the issue as turning on semantic descent, which I think is a confusing way of thinking about it.

considerations put on our semantic representations, and see whether that prejudices the issue in regard to any of the pluralist's many hallmarks.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.3. SHUTTING ONE'S EYES IN THE FACE OF DOUBT

On the pluralist framework there are many ways of construing the denial of realism. This is done in terms of what we have so far been calling different hallmarks. The question of globalisation, in this more variegated framework, thus pertains to a variety of different properties that discourses may have. Wright believes that for at least some of his favoured hallmarks, globalisation can be domesticated if not wholly resisted. His general strategy involves qualifying his hallmarks in such a way as to bracket the effects of the rule-following considerations. We can illustrate the strategy by looking at a particular example—cognitive command, the revised statement of which is as follows:

If a case be made that a certain class of judgements—let P be a representative—exert Cognitive Command, then the same case is available for the claim that any difference of opinion concerning whether “P” is true, where not excused by vagueness (in any of the relevant ways) or by *divergent understandings of the meaning of “P”* or *confusion concerning any matters knowable a priori on the basis of knowledge of the meaning of “P”*, must involve something worth regarding as a cognitive shortcoming (Wright 1992: 227).

The rule-following considerations, thinks Wright, show that there can be nothing more to making a semantic mistake than veering off course from the best opinion of one's peers. Wright's idea, which initially seems perfectly natural and coherent, is that supposing that you didn't veer off in this way, there would be a further question as to whether or not the discourse in which you were operating exerted cognitive command. Assuming, then, that the rule-following considerations leave our ordinary distinction between semantic and non-semantic mistakes intact—a distinction we undoubtedly make, then, on this view, we'll be able to determine whether or

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<sup>12</sup>I ignore the interesting question as to whether semantic non-factualism and globalisation are internally coherent, since that is well discussed elsewhere, for example Boghossian 2001, 1990, Wright 1992, 1998, Blackburn 1990, 1998 and Hale 1997b.

not the hallmarks apply, carrying on our pluralist business as usual. To make the strategy painfully obvious, let's lay out these two questions side by side:

The Bracketing Strategy:

Q1: Is Jones (e.g.) an adder?

Q2: Does addition exert (e.g.) cognitive command?

Wright's idea, then, is that we must remember that answers to Q2, when directed to any particular individual, are dependent on an affirmative answer to Q1. There's no point in asking whether what Jones is doing exerts cognitive command until it's settled as to what he is doing. But whilst this qualifies the answers we get to Q2, it doesn't make the process of asking the questions wholly redundant or somehow pointless.

Blackburn gives a similar, though slightly more developed response to the same problem. The trick, for him, is to distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' mistakes, soft mistakes being those where we veer off from the rule, and hard mistakes being those where we are following the rule but simply, say, get our sums wrong (Blackburn 1990). The threat of globalisation is to be understood as the threat that the apparently soft matter of which rule we happen to follow makes all matters equally soft. In reply to this he considers someone who denies the utterance 'Glaciers flow downhill'. Suppose we clear up all the everyday criteria for 'semantic' mistakes. For example, we establish that the speaker can use the component words in predictable ways in other contexts. He has not, for example, confused the name for glaciers with the name for icebergs. At that point, a possible response is to give his words a non-standard interpretation. We might suppose that he is going on in accord with a different rule to the rest of us; that is to say, he is quadding when we are adding. Blackburn's idea, however, is that this is not, in the general case, how we are inclined to respond. We do not doubt that he is aiming to follow the normal rule; instead we treat him as though he has made a plain (non-semantic) mistake. The sceptical challenge, then, as Blackburn conceives it, should be understood as the challenge to justify the fact that we treat certain mistakes as hard, even given the soft background. As he himself puts it:

It may seem surprising that we so often shut our eyes to the possibility of reinterpretation, or so seldom avail ourselves of it as an excuse when we make mistakes. It is only when scientific or historical change forces us to think of meanings as flexible. Schoolteachers never think of “quus” type hypotheses in connexion with the mistakes of their pupils [...] The defense is that we only dignify a dissident as in command of a different concept when we can admit his sayings to be part of a technique – a way of classifying things that has a use. And experience suggests that the mistakes of schoolchildren do not have this property. Since they remain irregular, forgotten, part of no practices, questions of reinterpretation do not arise, and we take ourselves to be in the realm of mistakes (Blackburn 1990: 24).

So for Blackburn, as for Wright, it is simply a fact about our practice that we distinguish between two types of mistake. One comes from veering off in regard to a rule, and another comes from making plain (hard) mistakes. Moreover, according to Blackburn, we can justify why we don’t usually see mistakes in the former light, i.e. as soft. In Blackburn’s explanation, the potentially deviant behaviour is, from our point of view, irregular. Since we can’t do anything with an attempt at reinterpretation using a quus-like hypothesis, at that point it’s a good idea simply to shut our eyes to the sceptical doubt. Blackburn concludes:

The upshot is that a community can perfectly well distinguish in its attitudes between the embedding of one classificatory scheme or another – something that may in principle be a “soft” question of decision, and that in any case will depend upon human nature and human interests and the use or misuse of a classification that is embedded – something that may well be hard and enable us to conceive of truths and falsehoods which are themselves independent of any such foundation. Perhaps before Wittgenstein, we might have wanted more – not just rails to infinity, which we can have, but rails laid by no human practice, which we cannot (Blackburn 1990: pp.24-5).

There is however something deeply unsatisfactory about both Blackburn’s and Wright’s response from a Kripkean point of view. It is no doubt a

fact that in ordinary cases we tend to bracket certain errors as semantic, in the way that they require. In other words, in ordinary cases we distinguish between Q1 and Q2 above. Moreover, there may be a pragmatic justification for that bracketing, such as that which Blackburn outlines. (No one is seriously supposing that we adjust our practice to allow for quaddition.) The problem is in assuming that the distinction we draw is sufficient to then ground the questions as to whether or not certain hallmarks apply. On Blackburn's view, as on Wright's, the mere fact that we are intuitively able to make a distinction between the two is supposed to be sufficient to safeguard the validity of further questions of realism, for example the role of cognitive command in Wright's case.

This view is questionable because the problems are not exhausted by our tendency to draw such a distinction, between when someone is following a deviant rule and when they are making a plain mistake. Rather, the problems also concern the *status* of a distinction drawn in that way. If we avail ourselves temporarily of the oft-used and sometimes misleading metaphor of internal and external perspectives, we might say that Wright and Blackburn have succeeded in showing that from the internal perspective, as users of, say, addition, we have explained and offered an internal justification for distinguishing semantic from non-semantic mistakes. But insofar as we are concerned with questions of realism – highfalutin philosophical questions if you will – then such a justification begs the question. The concern regarding globalisation applies to the problems caused by having to retreat to the internal perspective in the first place.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>It's worth noting that both Wright and Blackburn seem wary, at various points, about these kinds of concern, so I don't want to suggest that they are blind to the difficulties, just that those difficulties demand reconsideration. For example, in the closing passages of *Truth and Objectivity* Wright states:

[The] concern is whether, even if the key distinctions [e.g. cognitive command] can be formulated in ways that allow the status of a discourse to be determined independently of the rule-following dialectic, their serviceability as vehicles for the expression of realist intuition may be so severely compromised by a proper understanding of that dialectic that there is no longer any *point* to the taxonomy which they might enable us to construct (Wright 1992: 229-30).

Wright's concerns take a rather different shape to those here considered, because he construes the upshot of the rule-following considerations differently to the way Kripke does, as will shortly be discussed. The unease, however, is shared.

It's important to note in this connection that Wright, at least, doesn't seem to take the import of the rule-following considerations in quite the same way that Kripke does. Specifically, Wright seems to view them as recommending a broadly speaking Dummettian assertibility-conditions approach (which will be discussed later). If the remarks in the opening section of this chapter are to be believed, however, this is not the way that Kripke sees the upshot of the rule-following considerations. For him, it was argued, even the infinitary character of assertibility-conditions, conceived of in a broadly Dummettian way, should be subject to the sceptic's argument, and are in no way a direct response to it. So there is a dialectical misfit between the terms in which Kripke conducts the debate and those in which Wright conducts it. We'll later look at the the question on Wright's terms. For now, however, we'll look at it on Kripke's.

### 3.4. MEANING NIHILISM

As stated earlier, the problems of globalisation stem from the idea that we relate to facts via the medium of representation. Not for us unbridled access to the world itself. This being so, it is troubling that the very nature of these representations is intimately related to a privilege that is only ever offered by default, as the sceptical challenge and solution suggest. It is somewhat as though we were to dignify ourselves as rendering the *Moonlight Sonata* when all we ever do is hum the first few bars. It is little reassurance to be told by someone else who we recognise is in a parallel situation, 'Yes that's right, you are humming the *Moonlight Sonata*'. There is a doubt as to whatever it is that is established by the process of giving the kinds of response that we in fact do, combined with this default privilege, is capable of effectively determining something that is worth considering meaningful speech. For all that has been shown, it seems equally plausible to take our utterances, for example '68+57=125' as the mere illusion of such speech.

So speaks the position that we can here call 'meaning nihilism'. According to the nihilist, the moral of non-factualism is that we have been mistaken in attributing to ourselves the capacity for meaningful speech, at least insofar as we have traditionally understood what it is for something to be 'meaningful'. The nihilist, on hearing the sceptical solution, replies '*You can keep it; maybe you've vindicated our practice, just as perhaps you*

*can vindicate the practice of crossing fingers when you need some luck, but crossing fingers doesn't bring you luck and our practice doesn't bring us semantics.*<sup>14</sup>

If nihilism is correct, then a radical globalising consequence has already been provided. No matter which discourse we consider, be it mathematics, ethics, or another, the utterances we make in regard to it are no more than self-satisfied grunts and scribbles. It is then thoroughly misguided to ask any further questions about the realism attributable to these syntactic excretions. Something like the nihilist concern is present in Kripke's text when he writes:

[...] I choose to be so bold as to say: Wittgenstein holds, with the sceptic, that there is no fact as to whether I mean plus or quus. But if this is to be conceded to the sceptic, then is that not the end of the matter? What *can* be said on behalf of our ordinary attributions of meaningful language to others? Has not the incredible and self-defeating conclusion, that all language is meaningless, already been drawn? Kripke (1982: 70-71).

The thought, or perhaps attitude, driving nihilism – here expressed by Kripke's interlocutor – is that any further attempt to vindicate a notion of 'factuality' in semantics, or explain and justify our linguistic practice after accepting the sceptical challenge, would be to rescue an imitation too pale to be fit for the kinds of discussion that pluralists want to conduct. What would be the point, for example, of asking whether a form of words is a genuine description as opposed to an expression of attitude, as the quasi-realist does, if all the form of words under discussion amounts to is, roughly speaking, no more than that—a form of words? If we accept meaning nihilism then those words are not backed by anything meaning-conferring. They may be 'assented to', in the sense that we nod and smile when they are enunciated, but beyond this, there is little more to them. Similar concerns would go for Wright's hallmarks, for example Cognitive Command: what would be the point of asking whether disagreement over a certain claim 'involves cognitive shortcoming' if the claim itself is meaningless? The answer

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<sup>14</sup>A less forceful sounding name would be 'meaning eliminativism'. I go one step further in order to emphasise that we haven't just eliminated a certain, perhaps robust, notion of 'factuality', but that we have *nothing* left that will serve the relevant pluralist purposes.

at best would be a resounding no. If meaning nihilism is correct, then the sceptical solution will rescue only a pretense of philosophical analysis, just as it rescues only a pretense of meaningful discourse.

### 3.5. RESPONSE DEPENDENCE

As noted previously, It is important to clarify that Wright and Blackburn are not themselves Kripkeans. Instead, they have their own views about how semantics can be built on a platform that is, in the broader sense, non-realist—a way which is informed by the rule-following dialectic. For this reason, it's worth briefly looking at Wright's account of semantic facts as *response dependent*, and seeing where it runs into difficulties.<sup>15</sup>

The key difference between Wright's account of semantic facts and Kripke's sceptical solution is that Wright's is a development of a broadly speaking reductive view. The classic statement of the latter goes by way of what Wright calls 'basic equations':

BASIC: S means addition by '+' if and only if in optimal circumstances best opinion would judge that she means addition by '+'.

The basic equation offers us a biconditional as the dominant connective. For various reasons, not to do with those that Kripke produced against dispositionalism, Wright abandons this in favour of the following:<sup>16</sup>

PROVISIONAL: If circumstances are optimal, then S means addition by '+' if and only if best opinion would judge that she means addition by '+'.<sup>17</sup>

This is a kind of son-of-reduction. It states not that truth is equivalent to best-opinion-in-optimal-circumstances, but rather that providing we can get ourselves into optimal circumstances, best opinion and truth will co-vary. As Wright puts it "what is in prospect here is a framework for making a case that truth within a particular discourse is *partially* determined by best opinion" (Wright 1992: 120).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>From Blackburn's position there would no doubt be an alternative strategy, but I concentrate on Wright as he has offered the most thoroughly worked-out account.

<sup>16</sup>Wright is keen to avoid the 'conditional fallacy'. See e.g. Wright 1992: pp.108-39.

<sup>17</sup>See e.g. Wright 2002.

<sup>18</sup>N.B. Even the basic equation is circular, and thus perhaps doesn't deserve to be called



There are many further conditions that have to be added to get the finished view. A crucial constraint is that the specification of optimal conditions is non-trivial; there can be no whatever-it-takes formulations. Instead, in the case of semantics, those conditions will be just those that we ordinarily take to be sufficient to know what someone means by their words, i.e. that they've been through the ordinary training, agree with the community in previously encountered cases, and so on.

The thought, then, is that if we took a realist view of semantic facts, then given the fact that these conditions are non-trivial, and given that we don't view ourselves as independently equipped with a perfect detective capacity, the covariation would be unexplained. For the realist, it would seem, error should still be possible under these circumstances. Instead, then, we are invited to think that best opinion somehow determines semantic facts, although in a more subtle way than that rendered by the old-fashioned reduction.<sup>19</sup>

So far, so good, but problems crop up when we follow the implications of partial as opposed to complete determination through. Wright notes this in regard to the treatment of colour as opposed to semantics, the provisional equation for which is as follows:

PROVISIONAL COLOUR: If circumstances are optimal, then X is green if and only if best opinion would judge that X is green.

Of the colour case, Wright notes the following consequence:

[T]he shift from basic to provisional equations carries in train the penalty of a loss of generality. Provisional equations say nothing about the constraints on P's truth or falsity under *non*-[optimal]-circumstances. Yet we conceive, things are, for example, determinately coloured under lighting conditions of whatever sort (Wright 1992: 120).

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'reductive' in the ordinary sense. This needn't worry us here.

<sup>19</sup>The idea of a perfect detective capacity might, for example, be more plausible in a case like pain, where it might seem that the provisional equation will hold, but precisely because we have a Cartesian access to our own pain (contra Wittgenstein). The thought is, then, that in the case of semantic facts, the non-realist doesn't think of herself as possessing any such detective faculty, so the provisional equation must suggest something else.

The point, then, is that provisional equations tell us nothing about the facts in question when conditions are sub-optimal. In the case of colour, as Wright notes above, this seems to leave out an important part of the account. This is because, on one natural view at least, we think of things as coloured even in the dark.

There should, then, be a parallel with semantic facts insofar as they too are described in terms of provisional equations. *Viz.*, an account in terms of partial determination won't tell us anything about semantic facts outside optimal conditions for deciding upon them. There is a question, of course, as to whether, from an independent viewpoint, we think that as in the case of colour there is a fact of the matter as to whether there are semantic facts in sub-optimal conditions. (As we may put it, are there semantic facts in the dark?) The point, however, is that just as the provisional equation for colour leaves it an open question as to whether objects are coloured in sub-optimal circumstances, so too do they leave it an open question as to whether semantic facts obtain in sub-optimal circumstances.

With that in mind, let's now look at how Wright's response dependent account of semantic facts deals with the issue of globalisation. As we saw in the previous section, Wright thinks that the rule-following considerations permit, in the general case, a bracketing response. In one case, however, Wright believes that such a response is not available. This is with the Dummettian hallmark of epistemic constraint:

How can a sentence be undetectably true unless the rule embodied in its content—the condition the world has to satisfy to confer truth upon it—can permissibly be thought of as extending, so to speak, of itself into areas where we cannot follow it and there determining, without any contribution from us or our reactive natures, that a certain state of affairs complies with it? [...] More specifically: what conception of such matters can both allow them to be determinate in ways which human beings cannot, perhaps in principle, acknowledge and yet leave space for the idea that their very constitution somehow depends on contingencies of human subcognitive propensity? For anyone inclined to doubt that there can be a satisfactory positive answer to that question, the possibility should loom large that the rule-following considerations resolve the issue between Dummett and

his opponent (Wright 1992: 228).

According to Wright, then, the rule-following considerations threaten to force global victory for Dummett's anti-realist. But the cautious reader may wonder why Wright thinks that the bracketing strategy is supposed to work with other hallmarks and not this one. Why not say, as in the previous cases, that there are two separate questions: First, we ask on the basis of our agreement in a finite number of cases, whether a certain person, say Jones, is veering off from our usual pattern of use. That is, we first and foremost have to decide whether Jones is an adder like us, or a deviant. Once this is settled, however, there is then a further question as to whether the semantics that are thus conferred on his utterances are epistemically constrained. I.e., having bracketed off deviance, we ask whether the hallmark applies. That would be the analogue of the bracketing response in this case. Why, then, feel a tension in this instance and not the others?

An obvious reason to feel a tension would be if we thought that the rule-following considerations imply the basic or reductive equation of truth with the verdicts of best-opinion-in-optimal-circumstances. If truth is in this way equivalent to best opinion, then in recognition-transcendent cases, where best opinion has no footing, there is no truth. We cannot therefore presume Jones' utterances to be on the one hand constrained by the verdicts of best opinion in this (reductive) way and also to have recognition-transcendent truth-conditions. We would be thrown directly into the anti-realist's luke-warm embrace.

Matters, however, are different if we think that the rule-following considerations imply not reductive or basic equations but Wright's very own provisional equations. According to them, truth is not equivalent to best-opinion-in-optimal-circumstances. Just as the provisional equation tells us nothing about what colour things are when we can't see them, it tells us nothing about the truth-conditions of our statements outside our methods for establishing them. This is because in both cases, circumstances are in the relevant ways sub-optimal. Or at least this is so on one intuitive reading of what it would be for conditions to be relevantly 'sub-optimal'. Our standard methods of reaching a verdict aren't applicable, or at least not in a decisive way. In this regard, then, provisional equations are of dubious consequence for anti-realism. They don't appear to prohibit there being truths that we can't recognise.

If this is the case, however, then there seems to be an unanswered question as to which type of semantic fact is implied by the rule-following considerations. Depending on which it is, the consequences for global anti-realism differ. Wright's above presentation of the argument blurs the issue, saying that semantic facts 'somehow depend' on our propensity, rather than straightforwardly 'wholly depend' or 'supervene', or 'reduce to'. So it isn't clear, from what he takes the argument to have shown, whether it favours the anti-realist or not. Moreover, his own favoured proposal for treating semantic facts seems to offer precisely the way out he appears to think is unavailable.

On Kripke's version of the argument neither of these positions – neither basic nor provisional equations – are compatible with the sceptical solution. Even if the covariation of semantic facts and best opinion is conditional upon the satisfaction of optimality conditions, it still requires an infinitary basis of an as-yet-to-be-explained kind, and hence the objection of the earlier section (3.1) against a broadly Dummettian assertibility-conditions based approach recurs. This is not to say that Kripke is right, but merely that if Kripke's argument is to be taken seriously in the first place, neither is acceptable. Or, on the more circumspect view, if an assertibility-conditions based position is to be introduced, it needs to be preceded by the sceptical solution, in the sense discussed earlier. It won't help us clamber out of the sceptical abyss to begin with. For that, we need a sceptical solution that can make possible even the requisite infinitary and normative assertibility-conditions.

### 3.6. ALTERNATIVE SEMANTICS/CONCEPTS

What other positions are on the table? We might recoil into realism. For Paul Boghossian, for example, the moral of the rule-following considerations is that we need to adopt "robust realism", the thesis that "judgements about meaning are factual, irreducible, and judgement-independent" (Boghossian 1989: 185). In his own way, Boghossian sympathises with the meaning nihilist view previously voiced, insofar as he thinks that anything short of realism is inadequate to support the kinds of semantic feature that are worth considering properly semantic. He does not, that is, think that there is a sceptical solution to be put in place after accepting scepticism. McDowell, within the context of a very different background philosophy, shares a similar

thought. For him, the moral of Kripke's work is that if we initially accede to the sceptical challenge then all is lost. There is no route back to the intentional. But all the more reason, holds McDowell, to reject the Kripkean challenge in the first place.<sup>20</sup>

The problem for Wright and Blackburn is that they don't want to recoil into either of these forms of realism. Instead they want to hold onto the view that meaning somehow depends intimately, in a way that Boghossian and McDowell don't recognise, on our mere patterns of contingent response. Their view, therefore, needs to tread a middle-ground between realism of these sorts, and meaning-nihilism. Laid out for ease of reference, the options as previously discussed are as follows:

1. Semantic realism(s) (e.g. Boghossian or McDowell).
2. The sceptical solution.
3. Meaning nihilism.
4. A broadly Dummettian assertibility-conditions approach (e.g. Wright's response dependent account).

The first option is out of bounds for present purposes. The problem with the sceptical solution is that it isn't wholly clear how firm a conception of semantics it provides. The worry is that it comes too close to the third option, meaning nihilism, which is perhaps too strong to be plausible (but certainly enforces globalisation). The fourth, according to the arguments offered, doesn't take us anywhere, or more modestly, it isn't clear where it takes us. On the one hand, it isn't a satisfactory solution to the problems of the rule-following dialectic, not in their Kripkean guise at least, and on the other, it isn't certain, even if it is, what its consequences are. Specifically, Wright's argument from it to global Dummettian anti-realism is inconclusive. But if this is the case, then we are in a quandary. We seem to have no

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<sup>20</sup>See especially McDowell 2002: p.57, where we are told, echoing the meaning nihilist's objection, that "The problem for Wright is to distinguish the position he attributes to Wittgenstein from one according to which the possibility of going out of step with our fellows gives us the *illusion* of being subject to norms, and consequently the *illusion* of expressing meanings." Instead, McDowell thinks, we should view the rule-following considerations as showing that we need not perform anything akin to interpretation when engaging in linguistic activity. For McDowell, we can instead just 'see' meaning in nature. We have a kind of post-Aristotelian realist innocence. Boghossian's explicit comments on Wright's position are from the current perspective muddled because he thinks Wright's position is incoherent for independent reasons, reasons that needn't detain us here.

promising options.

For this reason, in this closing section, I'll try a slightly speculative tack. Suppose, then, that we simply assume for the sake of argument that the sceptical solution doesn't lead to meaning nihilism, and we leave response dependence to one side. Are there any general conclusions we could draw? One plausible thought is that insofar as we can view our contingent and finite responses as a suitable basis for semantics – of some sceptically acceptable kind – we must also suppose it possible for there to be alternative sets of semantics, or concepts.<sup>21</sup> Insofar as we can view the finite case of non-intentionally specified, seemingly contingent patterns of response as determinative of meaning, we preclude ourselves from viewing those same patterns as exclusively capable of doing so. For if we *did* try to view these responses as exclusively capable of generating semantic content, then there would be an outstanding question as to why *just these* patterns were thus capable and others weren't. Pending an answer to that question, the belief that they were unique in this way would, one should worry, be no better motivated than unreflective realism—the view that our language use simply happens to latch on to the unique set of real concepts.

This is a burden of proof argument. It's not inconsistent for the proponent of the sceptical solution to claim that there is only one possible constructible semantics, and it just so happens that our contingent pattern of responses constructs it. The objection is merely that the onus of proof is then on the advocate of the sceptical solution to explain why this is so, given that the suggested dependence-base for our semantics contains seemingly accidental features of us and our way of life. Why shouldn't the quadder be seen as constructing quaddition just as we construct addition?

To illustrate by contrast, the realist, insofar as he claims that semantic facts are ontologically independent of our responses to each others' utterances, does not have this burden of proof on his shoulders. For him, the potential variability of our responses need not imply a corresponding variability in possible semantics, since the latter do not depend on the former. *His* problem, one that his opponents are keen to stress, is explaining why the contingent responses that seem to make up our epistemic route to these

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<sup>21</sup>There are no doubt distinctions to be drawn between semantics and concepts, but the two are closely enough related to treat them interchangeably in what follows. I choose to speak of concepts at points here in order to connect the debate with the traditional discussions of alternative conceptual schemes.

putative facts should be sensitive to those facts. That is to say, for the realist, the parallel problem is as to what makes it the case that we are latching on to the correct concepts and not him.

The parallels with the argument against the realist aside, the above objection can be paired with the earlier objection from the meaning nihilist to form a dilemma for the pluralist: Either he thinks there is a bridge to be made from the contingent setting of defaults to fully-fledged semantic activity or he does not. If there is not, then meaning nihilism threatens to undermine the entire purpose of the pluralist discussion of hallmarks for particular discourses. If there is, then there should be alternative bridges to alternative concepts, corresponding to an alternative set of responses and an alternative setting of defaults.

As well as offering some support for the nihilistic view, as discussed above, Kripke himself also expresses some partiality to this alternative concepts view:

The set of responses in which we agree, and the way they interweave with our activities, is our *form of life*. Beings who agreed in consistently quus-like responses would share in another form of life. By definition, such another form of life would be bizarre and incomprehensible to us. (“If a lion could talk, we could not understand him” [...]) However, if we can imagine the abstract possibility of another form of life (and no *a priori* argument would seem to exclude it), the members of a community sharing such a quus-like form of life could play the game of attributing rules and concepts to each other as we do. Someone would be said, in such a community, to follow a rule, as long as he agrees in his responses with the (*quus*-like) responses produced by the members of *that* community (Kripke 1982: 96).

Neither Wright nor Blackburn have denied, nor have appeared inclined to deny, that alternative concepts are possible.<sup>22</sup> But then it is somewhat strange that they haven’t spent time discussing the possible consequences of this, for it is, one would think, relevant to the realism debate. *One* consequence, for example, would seem to be that their possibility rules out

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<sup>22</sup>To my knowledge, at least. Wright has attacked relativism about truth, but that is rather different (Wright 2008).

the kind of realism that Hilary Putnam has called ‘metaphysical realism’, the view that “there is a totality of Forms, or Universals, or “properties,” fixed once and for all, and that every possible meaning of a word corresponds to one of these Forms or Universals or properties” (Putnam 1999: 6). For the metaphysical realist there is a totalising and absolute conception that can be drawn in special terms that suit every purpose, or perhaps better, are indifferent to whatever purposes any particular creature has. The alternative concepts view here countenanced rules out this kind of realism. There is, on the alternative concepts view, no unique, absolute, privileged set of concepts. Instead, there is a variety of possible concepts, corresponding to the variety of ways that different creatures in different *Lebenswelten* might deal with their environment.

It’s a notable fact, however, that neither Blackburn nor Wright are especially interested in this kind of realism, not explicitly at least. There seems no obvious reason, for example, why the kind of contrast between expressive claims and descriptive claims (*à la* quasi-realism) can’t be framed even within a worldview that rejects the very strong form of realism outlined above. It seems that the formulation of the alternative concepts view is committed to the possibility of different kinds of description and expressive attitude, but not that there can be no distinction between the two. Similar considerations suggest themselves for Wright’s hallmarks, such as cognitive command and width of cosmological role; it’s by no means clear from the outset that the dissolution of metaphysical realism would remove the point of Wright’s desired distinctions. (We’ll look at this in a bit more detail shortly.)

In this regard they are in a better position here than they were in regard to meaning nihilism. Specifically, the idea of a bracketing strategy seems to hold out much more hope. The reason for this is fairly clear. It is a presupposition of the idea of alternative concepts that each concept is just that—a concept. Or equivalently, the presupposition is that there are alternative possible languages that support alternative sets of semantics, with the view specified so that the usual semantic trappings are available. In a nutshell, unlike the case of meaning nihilism, we get more, not less—more concepts as opposed to no concepts. Whether this is ultimately coherent is not at this point settled, but one can see that it is one of the assumptions of formulating such a view that the pluralist can evade the brutal objections



of the nihilist.

A quick inspection of examples illustrates the good news. Consider, for example, Wright's hallmark of width of cosmological role. His revised (bracketed) statement of it is as follows:

[W]here the states of affairs apt to confer truth on a class of judgements exhibit [...] width of cosmological role [...] then the *non-semantic* states of affairs which enter into the determination of the truth-value of the claim that "P" is true will do the same (Wright 1992: 227).

Wright's idea, as with the bracketed formulation of cognitive command, is that we have to factor out the kinds of mistakes one might make regarding the description of a given type of state of affairs, for example the charge of leptons, that would be attributable to what we would call by ordinary standards 'semantic' mistakes. Once those are factored out, we ask how the states of affairs thus described would affect other states of affairs, other than by our cognisance of them. Now, if we have already accepted meaning nihilism, then this qualification is as useless as it is in the case of cognitive command (as discussed earlier). But relative to the concerns about alternative concepts, the apparent threat is diluted. To take an example, even if we granted that some other community has a different set of concepts to those of our physics and our psychology, there would still be a good question as to the relation between the objects and properties posited by, say, our physics on the one hand and our psychology on the other. This relation might be different to that which allegedly holds between the posits of our psychology and those of our talk about what is funny. It's conceivable, for example, that the first of the following claims is true and the second isn't:

(WIDE PHYSICS:) The fact as to whether leptons have negative charge affects the cosmos independently of our psychological appreciation of that fact.

(WIDE HUMOUR:) The fact as to whether John Cleese is as funny as he used to be affects the cosmos independently of our psychological appreciation of that fact.

The standard pluralist thought (here crudely put) is that there is a difference

between discourse about physics and discourse about humour that may show up in dependence claims of this kind. And then the point to be made is that whatever the other problems with this thought, there doesn't seem to be a devastating objection to be found in the idea that the concepts used to formulate them admit of alternatives. To use the metaphor of perspectives again – though in a different way – the idea is that even supposing that the two claims need to be relativised to our perspective, providing we see the claims as meaningful, we might still see the relevant asymmetry as significant in roughly the way Wright intends. This seems to be an issue that can be addressed independently of whether there is an alternative discourse about physics or about humour that operates differently. In other words, providing that our concepts in physics, psychology and humour are admissible in even a qualified sense – a sense that does not pretend to metaphysical realism – there seems to be an equally good question about what those discourses have to say about the objects of the other, which is in the end what width of cosmological role comes down to.

There is, naturally, some uncertainty here. This is first because there is still unclarity regarding what 'alternative concepts' really come to. Second, there are issues attending the best formulation of the pluralist's hallmarks, decisions about how best to tease out the relevant features of discourses that correspond to our informal realist and non-realist sentiments and views. Resolving these issues in any number of ways might have any number of consequences. The point, however, is that in the necessarily general terms with which the problems have here been presented, there is some reason to suppose that the qualifications added by inviting the possibility of alternative concepts can be domesticated in something like the manner that Wright and Blackburn's bracketing strategy proposes. In this case, shutting one's eyes in the face of doubt might work.

#### 3.6.0.5. SUMMING UP

Summing up, then, the examination of semantic non-factualism has left Blackburn and Wright with a dilemma that they have failed to sufficiently appreciate. On the one horn, there is the thesis of meaning nihilism, which it was argued scotches all attempts to draw interesting distinctions between different discourses. On the other horn, it was argued that they avoid mean-

ing nihilism at pain of admitting alternative concepts. This, it is claimed, deserves a more careful response than has yet been given. However, it has been suggested that an adequate treatment of it need not be fatal to either of their projects. Whilst alternative concepts appear to rule out metaphysical realism as described by Putnam, there seems to be a prospect of drawing further distinctions along roughly the lines Blackburn and Wright desire. More specifically, the bracketing strategy that they propose as a general tonic to the rule-following considerations has decent prospects for success.

For purposes of clarification, we might appeal to a distinction between two sorts of pluralism, which Huw Price has called ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’. The kind of pluralism that is offered by alternative concepts is horizontal. Horizontal pluralism allows different forms of the same kind of discourse—different types of physics, different types of ethics, and so on. The kind of pluralism that Wright and Blackburn seem more interested in is vertical. It consists of a functional differentiation between what to the horizontal pluralist will look like wholly different types of discourse, for example ethics and mathematics, and is, at first blush at least, tangential to horizontal pluralism. Whether this distinction is ultimately well founded, and how it finally bears on Blackburn and Wright’s projects, are open questions. But for now let us move on.

## Chapter 4

# : Context-sensitivity

ACCORDING TO CHARLES TRAVIS our language is radically context-sensitive.<sup>1</sup> The truth-conditions of all our sentences, and their correctness-conditions more generally, vary depending on the contexts in which they are uttered and assessed. It is a feature of Travis' view that it promises to have deep and interesting consequences for the realism debate, but it is difficult to pin down precisely what they are. This chapter will be an attempt, at times a somewhat speculative one, to do just that. To this end, I'll place Travis' views under the auspices of a more general pragmatism, which claims that the hallmarks do not have the deep-rooted significance that are attributed to them. Pluralists, on this line, are wedded to distinctions that only appear important given an overly constricted view of semantics. Once the full variability of utterance functions is clearly in view, the generalisations of Dummett, Wright and Blackburn are, the objection goes, misguided. Metaphorically, the distinctions they draw in terms of the hallmarks and the division of different discourses are washed out by the more general variability of semantic function that context-sensitivity entails.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Terminology is controversial here. At points, Travis has accepted being labelled a proponent of radical contextualism (Travis 2008). In fact, however, Travis' views might at times be better captured by what the literature has elsewhere called 'relativism' (see e.g. Kölbel 2008). For present purposes, however, 'radical contextualism' or even merely 'contextualism' is as preferable as any. These are chosen over simply calling Travis a proponent of 'occasion-sensitivity' – his term of art – for the reason that there is no nominalisation 'occasion-sensitivist' as easy on the ear as 'contextualist'. A classic and concise statement of Travis' view can be found in Travis 1997.

<sup>2</sup>N.B. Little should be placed on the homonymy between 'pragmatics' in the philosophy of language and 'pragmatism' in the realism debate. They cross over here, or so I say, but this is supposed to be a substantive claim, not one presupposed by their names.

Travis himself focusses on Dummettian anti-realism, and consequently I'll initially address his arguments against that position in particular. Having done so, however, I'll try to turn the tables on the contextualist-pragmatist alliance more generally. Whilst there are plausibly some areas in which the pluralist may have overlooked context-sensitivity, there appear to be variations in the degree of context-sensitivity attributable to different discourses. This in turn seems to be due to their differing functions or subject matter. Consequently, far from being undermined by phenomena of context-sensitivity, pluralism (of some sort at least) appears required to explain them.

#### 4.1. SHADOWS AND CONTEXT-SENSITIVITY

A key idea for Travis is that of *shadows*, ways of representing “which determine [...] all that is determined as to when what so represented would be true (or false)” (n.d.: 147-8). At more length, on the traditional – shadowed – view of the linguistic sign, held for example by Frege, and by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, there is a way of manufacturing a representation that is utterly world-independent. That is to say, nothing about the way things are, or how people would react to that representation, affects what it represents. Its content is, in a way to be made clear shortly, invulnerable. On Travis' view, there are no such representations, or shadows. Whatever is done to manufacture a representation of any kind, the world may always play a further role in determining *what* it represents, not just whether it is true or false. For Travis, this follows from the fact that the representative capacity of sentences (and anything else) is grounded in the dispositions of people to take them as correct in certain cases and incorrect in others. There is nothing one can do, when uttering a given sentence, that can legislate for all possibilities of its application and the responses people may make to it. Consequently, something is always left to the world and to other people even in regard to the determination of *truth-conditions*, not just in regard to the determination of *truth-value*.<sup>3</sup>

There appears to be a metaphysical strand to Travis' opposition to shadows. That is to say, he seems to be partly influenced by the idea that there

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<sup>3</sup>N.B. It is not here suggested that this is an incontestable chain of reasoning. Many would accept that semantic facts depend on our dispositions and yet not think that representation was open-ended in the further way that Travis does.

couldn't be the requisite type of semantic entities to play the role that they purport to. But perhaps the more characteristic part of his view is the association of unshadowed representations with what is elsewhere known as a radically context-sensitive representation. To accept unshadowed language is to accept that all utterances vary truth-conditions depending on context. To get an idea of what this comes to, let us consider two prototypical cases of context-shifting, modelled on Travis' standard format for such cases:

**Case A. Jones is brave:** Jones is eight years old and has just had a tooth out without making any fuss. The dentist remarks 'Jones is brave'. Minutes later, Jones is kidnapped, along with the dentist and his family, by a band of guerillas. Held hostage in the camp, it is decided that they will try to fight their way to freedom. The first person will try to disarm the guards. It requires someone with steely nerve—if they panic it's curtains for everyone. The dentist cheerfully intones 'Jones is brave'.

**Case B. I know there's a tree in front of me:** In his elementary botany class, Smith is told that the elm in front of him is a type of tree, and he impatiently declares 'I'm not stupid; I know there is a tree in front of me'. Later, facing the very same elm, Smith is discussing scepticism with René, and in response to the latter's invocation of the possibility of a *malin génie*, Smith impatiently declares 'That isn't a problem for me; I know there is a tree in front of me'.

The contextualist thinks that in case A the truth-conditions for 'Jones is brave' shift between the two contexts. What the dentist initially said was true but is false when he repeats it. It is claimed that this happens for broadly speaking pragmatic reasons. It is because the surrounding purpose of the linguistic exchange alters that the truth-conditions do. For Jones to count as 'brave' in the surgery is for him to be able to suffer the drill without complaint. In the hostage situation this is not enough; Jones must be able to risk his life without trepidation. More controversially, a contextualist about the word 'know' may also say the same about case B. He might claim that when working in the high standards context of discussing the *malin génie*, Smith does not have what it takes to count as 'knowing' that there is a tree in front of him. This is despite the fact that he does have what it takes

relative to the ordinary context of botanical study.

The important thing is that the pragmatic shift influences the truth-conditions of the utterance, not just what it takes for it to be usefully assertible. This is what marks the contextualist out from the more traditionally minded invariantist, who, like Grice, claims that whilst the conditions for assertion may be influenced by pragmatic factors, the truth-conditional content cannot. N.B. the sense of ‘truth-conditional’ used here is not supposed to rule out verificationist theories. It might be, for example, that the truth-conditions are superassertibility conditions. The point is that even on a superassertibilist account there will be a distinction between superassertibility conditions proper, and the warrants for assertion provided by constraints of politeness, conciseness, etc. The contextualist/invariantist divide initially cuts across the realist/anti-realist divide.

The background thought that guides the contextualist is that it is the primary purpose of our language to adapt to any number of novel situations. It is our good fortune to be able to creatively manage our language use to communicate a wide variety of information with a relatively limited vocabulary. Grice got halfway to realising this by emphasising the role of pragmatic features governing assertion. But where Griceans go wrong, claims the contextualist, is in thinking that at bottom sentence types are associated with unique sets of truth-conditions. For the Gricean, it is this invariant substratum that makes possible the further communication of pragmatically valuable information. For the contextualist, on the other hand, the substratum is not itself truth-conditional. To suppose it is would be to posit something we didn’t need, and in fact couldn’t manufacture anyway.

No argument will here be provided for the claim that the contextualist is right. Instead, the question will be whether, supposing one is broadly sympathetic to his claims, they have a negative bearing on various species of pluralism.

#### 4.2. A SERVANT OF PRAGMATISM?

One naturally striking albeit highly general thought is that the variety in function that the contextualist in Travis’ mould posits threatens to wipe out the kinds of generalisation that pluralists desire to make over particular discourses. Perhaps the contextualist shows us that the best we can say

is that all language is underwritten by pragmatic constraints. Instead of having a plurality of discourses, we have a uniform instrumentalism. In what follows, I will try to develop this claim.

Before trying to set out such an argument in detail, it is worth sketching a little background motivation in terms of a larger picture within which its conclusions may be set. We may begin by marking certain points which are supposed to fall within its compass and certain others that fall without. In this connection, Travis is adamant that meaning-theories, of the kind that Dummett and Davidson have proposed, are deeply misguided because they have underestimated the extent to which pragmatic factors enter into language use. It is the task of the contextualist, following the later Wittgenstein, to remedy this (Travis 2006: 27-28). Travis writes:

If the driving idea here were put into a slogan, it might be this:  
Content is inseparable from point. What is communicated in *our*  
words lies, inseparably, in what we would expect of them. How  
our words represent things is a matter of, and not detachable  
from, their (recognizable) import for our lives (Travis 2006: 33).

The idea is that any account of language that starts with a small and largely traditional stock of semantic concepts, for example truth, reference, satisfaction, and even verifiability, and then tries to explain on this basis the actual use of language will never get to its destination. To borrow a phrase from William James (that James borrowed from Clerk-Maxwell), the contextualist accuses orthodox accounts of language use as failing to explain “the particular go of it” (James 1975: 95). In resorting to a parsimonious vocabulary of highly abstract theoretical terms, we end up immersed in gaseous fantasy that clouds rather than reveals the real workings of our language.

Now, thus stated, the only victim of such a view would appear to be a global non-realist/realist—someone who thought that the function of language was in the requisite sense unitary and who sought to make a generalisation across it. The pluralist, like the later Dummett, Blackburn, or Wright, might however be heard to echo much of the above expression of the contextualist view. They too believe that the surface appearance of uniformity gives way to a functional plurality. The contextualist view here proposed diverges, however, in holding that language has not calibrated it-



self into *discourses*, the nature of which have been crafted to reflect the part of reality or unreality with which they exclusively deal. What the pluralist scents as hallmarks are not in fact metaphysically revealing features of regimented discourses, but rather fleeting qualities of conversation, alternatively possessed or lacked depending on the whims of context. Properties such as bivalence, cognitive command, and the like, are not features carved solemnly on the megalithic heads – ethics, mathematics, physics – laid across the pluralist coastline, but are instead the patterns of sunlight, frost, and guano that by turns decorate them.

This view is to some degree consonant with certain pragmatist criticisms. Richard Rorty has written:

Wright's suggestion [...] is that we should use different truth-predicates for different kinds of discourse [...] correlated with various *a priori* determinable relations between other discourses [...]. But of course, for pragmatists, what Wright thinks of as permanent *a priori* determinable relations are just local and transitory historico-sociological differences between patterns of justification and blame. These differences, sub-patterns within the single overall pattern justification makes, should not, pragmatists think, be imported into the concept of truth (Rorty 1995: 297).

Rorty's view diverges from the standard contextualist examples by incorporating historical and cultural relativism into the reasons one may have to oppose the pluralist, but perhaps we can spin a common thread. The broader objection is that there is a lack of fit between the hallmarks the pluralist applies and the discourses he divides. For both the radical contextualist and Rorty, there are innumerable distinctions between the way we use words; so many that any lines one were to attempt to draw would not be of an appropriate sort to answer traditional philosophical concerns—or at least not as the pluralist conceives them.

A similar thought occurs in the work of another 'pragmatist', Hilary Putnam.<sup>4</sup> In the passage below, he criticises the quasi-realist for making too much out of the difference between factual judgements and value judgements:

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<sup>4</sup>N.B. Whilst they count as friends here, it is not suggested that the fact that Putnam and Rorty are both at times called 'pragmatists' signals that they have a great deal in common.

If we *disinflate* the fact/value dichotomy, what we get is this: there is a distinction to be drawn (one that is useful in some contexts) between ethical judgements and other sorts of judgements. This is undoubtedly the case, just as it is undoubtedly the case that there is a distinction to be drawn (and one that is useful in some contexts) between *chemical* judgements and judgements that do not belong to the field of chemistry (Putnam 2002: 19).

Putnam's idea, again not explicitly linked to contextualism, is that whilst there might be some differences between the two classes of judgement, the quasi-realist conceives of those differences in unnecessarily stolid terms. There are all kinds of difference between ways in which we talk about different things, and in some contexts these differences are important and in others they aren't. It is a mistake to get hung up on a few favoured and strict divisions. Instead, we should try to appreciate the menagerie in all its multiplicity.

I introduce this somewhat loose alliance as a portent of things to come. For now let's examine two of Travis' specific arguments against Dummettian anti-realism. They can, I think, be put under the more general auspices of the above-outlined position, but for the sake of the following discussion, we'll examine them on their own terms.

#### 4.3. TRAVIS' SPECTACULAR THESIS

As stated above, Travis claims that contextualism reveals semantic facts to be highly dependent on speaker dispositions. The correctness conditions for our utterances depend on what members of our community take to be reasonable in particular circumstances. This entails the "spectacular thesis" that revisionary positions in the realism debate are incoherent (Travis 1989: 308). Allying himself with Wittgenstein, Travis puts it as follows:

If there is anti-realism in Wittgenstein, it cannot be of a sort that [...] proposed conditions that a practice must meet in order to count as sufficiently coherent—for example, that for an item within such a practice, 'the condition which must, in general, obtain for it to be true' be 'one which we are capable of recognising whenever it obtains, or of getting ourselves in a position

to do so' [...] If we did take an item to be a [realist] truth-bearer, and were unimpressed by its failure to satisfy that requirement, then it is the requirement that would have to go (Travis 1989: p.327).

Travis' anti-Dummettian claim is that were ordinary speakers predisposed to act as though their statements were epistemically unconstrained, in the face, say, of whatever arguments Dummett would adduce, then those speakers would be beyond criticism. This is because there are no further facts to appeal to that might overturn their verdicts. This is a version of a more familiar objection. The question is how, if we abandon robust realism about semantics, we are then justified in claiming that certain linguistic practices are incorrect, despite their acceptance by a given speech community. At best, it seems that we would have to relativise the notion of correctness to our own standards. There is no independent standpoint from which to derive any further justification.<sup>5</sup>

The question is as to why contextualism aids the argument. This is pressing because even Dummett himself accepts that the correctness of linguistic moves is ultimately accountable to nothing other than the dispositions of primary speakers:

The paradoxical character of language lies in the fact that while its practice may be subject to standards of correctness, there is no ultimate authority to impose those standards from without. The only ultimate determinant of what the standards of correctness are is the general practice of those recognised as primary speakers of the language (Dummett 1991: 85).

Dummett himself thinks that admitting this is consistent with then demanding that certain moves those speakers might be disposed to make would be criticisable. Specifically, he thinks that classical rules of inference, notably those involving Excluded Middle, are criticisable if they are not conservative. That is, a rule for inferring  $S$  must not provide wholly independent grounds for asserting  $S$ . The independent grounds need not, of course, be actually possessed by the person making the inference. Otherwise such

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<sup>5</sup>In its general guise, this objection is discussed in Wright 1987a, with reference to Dummett's presentation of the problems in Dummett 1978c ("Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mathematics").

rules would be wholly redundant. The point is merely that the independent grounds must exist in principle. There must, for example, be some canonical verification not requiring Excluded Middle that could be carried out in principle, even if for ease the verification procedure used relies on Excluded Middle.<sup>6</sup>

As mentioned earlier, there is a good question as to whether Dummett's position is ultimately stable, given the fact that the highest court of appeal is, on Dummett's own admission, the dispositions of primary speakers. If, that is, the ultimate basis of correctness lies in speakers' dispositions to accept certain assertions and reject others, then it is somewhat unclear by what standards we might impugn a community who accept non-conservative inferences. The important question, however, is what Travis thinks the contextualist brings to the table that goes beyond the more general form of the objection. The answer appears to be that in reconfiguring our picture of what competence in a language consists in, there is even less room for the justification that Dummett's anti-realist requires.

Travis is keen to stress that operating a language is not to be characterised by following through the kind of deductive procedures suggested by meaning-theoretic approaches. When, for example, a child – Ghislaine – learns the word 'shoe' she must pick up a skill set that allows her to apply it in a context-sensitive manner. She must know, for example that whilst sandals may count as 'shoes' when she is told 'shoes off before entering the bouncy castle', they do not count as 'shoes' when she is told 'shoes must be worn to school'. Only smart shoes count in this second case. Travis thinks that that these skills are part and parcel of the general applications of rationality that make up all our purposive behaviour. In order to master the use of 'shoe' we need to utilise our capacities to recognise the aim of given utterances within the novel situations in which they occur. As Travis puts it, "Content is inseparable from point" (Travis 2006: 33).

This being so, the contextualist picture demands that more is left open than on the standard invariantist account. On the Gricean view, for example, there is a fact as to whether the sandal counts as a shoe that is

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<sup>6</sup>Of course, the in principle possibility is hard to define, but that is a separate worry. N.B. The reader may also wonder why there is no mention of holism here, which Dummett thinks is important in giving his response to the general objection. I defer to Wright 1987b in thinking that Dummett's explicit views on this issue are unsatisfactory. There is no problem of holism, or so it seems to me, independent of the problem of conservativeness.

independent of whatever practical features Ghislaine cottons on to in the different contexts (barring other reasons for failure, like vagueness). For Griceans, those features might determine whether Ghislaine should usefully assert that her sandal is a shoe, but they won't affect whether what she says is strictly speaking true. That will be decided by the invariant meaning of the term.

Similarly, on the standard Dummettian view, whilst the ultimate court of appeal is the verdicts of primary speakers, the manner in which their verdicts determine truth-conditions (or verification-conditions) goes by way of determining conventions that are in large part invariant. Travis' train of thought appears to be that insofar as introducing context-sensitivity reduces the extent to which the invariant semantics determine correctness conditions, it should to a proportionate extent reduce that to which the revisionist might claim that a given inference is or is not allowed. The balance between meaning-theoretic and other kinds of knowledge in determining the correctness conditions of statements is very differently proportioned between Dummett and Travis.<sup>7</sup>

If that is as far as the argument goes, however, it remains inconclusive. There is no clear reason why Dummett's demand for conservativeness should depend on the invariant semantics that the contextualist denies. In other words, if the demand for conservativeness can be defended against the more general objection – that semantic norms ultimately depend on speaker dispositions – then it isn't clear why the curtailment of what is invariant about those norms should make it indefensible. Having said that, Travis' conception of linguistic rationality does seem to moderate the force of any proposed constraint on linguistic usage in favour of context-dependent applications of good sense. One can see the direction in which Travis is pushing, but it isn't clear that we reach his destination.

#### 4.4. A DILEMMA OF TWO PERSPECTIVES

In a later work Travis goes some way towards tightening the net. He claims that there is no principled resting point for the anti-realist, where one might reject bivalence without rejecting a weaker principle—*tertium non datur*.

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<sup>7</sup>That isn't to say that there is anything to prevent context-sensitive anti-realism. It is merely the case that anti-realists have traditionally been as much a part of the invariantist orthodoxy as realists.

But if one rejects *tertium non datur*, claims Travis, then anti-realism cap-sizes. Laid out for ease of reference:

Bivalence: Every statement is either true or false.

*Tertium non datur*: No statement is neither true nor false.<sup>8</sup>

The anti-realist position, as characterised by Dummett, takes the following stance, which we can for present purposes call ‘the anti-realist pair’:

**The anti-realist pair:**

*Tertium non datur*: ACCEPT.

Bivalence: REJECT.

Travis’ argument is that the anti-realist tries to maintain an incoherent middle position between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ perspectives regarding language use ( n.d.: 143).<sup>9</sup> These are perspectives that Dummett, misled by an invariantist or shadowed view of semantics, does not distinguish. From the external perspective, not only bivalence but also *tertium non datur* fails to hold. From the internal perspective, on the other hand, even bivalence holds. Either way, the anti-realist loses; there is no middle ground. Laid out for ease of reference:

**Travis’ external perspective:**

*Tertium non datur*: REJECT.

Bivalence: REJECT.

**Travis’ internal perspective:**

*Tertium non datur*: ACCEPT.

Bivalence: ACCEPT.

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<sup>8</sup>The principles are stated this way in Dummett 1978b: xix.

<sup>9</sup>N.B. This use of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ has nothing to do with the use of these terms elsewhere, for example as they were used in the previous chapter, or as Putnam uses them to describe ‘internal’ realism.

Now, there is a tricky question as to whether Dummett views the acceptance of *tertium non datur* as something that is important to the characterisation of anti-realism *per se*, or whether he just thinks that it is vital to any acceptable semantics. If Dummett merely thinks that it is necessary on independent grounds, then it would seem that his position might be modified so as to take account of the fact that, on further reflection, it too fails (if indeed it does). If, after all, it is the rejection of bivalence that is the important thing for the anti-realist *qua* anti-realist, then perhaps Travis' external perspective will suffice for a modified form of anti-realism. We'll return to this later.

The important point for now, however, is that according to Travis, the same basic feature of our language that allows it to operate so fluidly at the best of times introduces the possibility of certain kinds of failure. These failures would not occur if our language were not context-sensitive. So, context-sensitivity has pros and cons. On the one hand it allows us to use our language with the kind of flexibility that novel situations demand. On the other hand it makes it susceptible to certain hazards.

To illustrate the cons, consider for example a scenario in which Max is describing his new pet rabbit, Zoë, to his friend Sydney. Max asks whether Sydney wants to see the rabbit, in the context of which, Max innocently asserts 'Zoë is in the garden'. No sooner has Max said this, however, than there is a problem. Unbeknownst to all, Zoë has just died, and in the garden there is now only her small furry corpse. The question then is, is what Max said true? Is it false? Travis thinks that we can't say either. On the one hand, Zoë's mortal form is within the garden walls, but on the other, Zoë is not really there, for — as Travis puts it — the departed are no longer with us. If we say that Max's assertion is true then we fail to do justice to the second thought, but if we say it is false then we fail to do justice to the first. So, on Travis' view we ought to conclude that Max's utterance was neither true nor false. Given the unexpected turn of events, his utterance was what J. L. Austin would have called a misfire. This being so, the anti-realist pair can't be established. We don't have a guarantee of *tertium non datur*, let alone bivalence.<sup>10</sup>

The point here is that the requirement that pragmatic factors play a role

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<sup>10</sup>The version here offered is a trivial variation on Travis' own, in which Zoë is a person and not a rabbit. Travis calls these cases instances of 'natural *isostheneia*'.

in determining semantics leaves open the possibility that those pragmatic features fail to do their job properly. The price of having a great deal of flexibility in our language is that sometimes it gets bent out of shape. At times like this, *contra* Dummett, we have counterexamples to *tertium non datur*.

One way of trying to retain *tertium non datur* would be to claim that on this occasion Max's words didn't express a proposition, i.e. a truth-apt entity, at all. On this line of response, they should be treated like stars, stones, hats and utterances like 'Lilliburlero', things of which the question of truth does not properly arise. Travis' response to this relies on the idea that what happened to Max could have happened to any of us. The only reason to claim that his utterance was not truth-apt would be if we could contrast it with a kind of semantic entity that was not subject to the possibility of such misfortune. But the only kind of entity that would be thus immune would be a shadow, and according to Travis we have no right nor need to assume that there could be such things.

This, really, is the decisive move in Travis' argument, or so at least it seems to me. A proponent of the traditional or shadowed view of propositions is liable to try any number of strategies to explain away the Zoë case. A standard response, for example, is to dismiss the above thought on the grounds that there is a deep structure in what Max said. On this view, we incorporate the salient presupposition into the propositional content. So, for example, we read it as 'Max said that Zoë is *alive* in the garden', and so strictly speaking he did say something false. The problem with this view is that there is an indefinite variety of errors that could befall Max's speech-act. Perhaps Zoë has mutated into a fly-like creature, as in the famous film, or perhaps Zoë has been duplicated, and one of the duplicates is in the garden and one has gone next door. Or she and the entire garden have been picked up by a hurricane and deposited wholly intact in Kansas, or she is at home but just about to leave, etc. There is no end to the unforeseen permutations that may make Max's speech-act inept, but would make the same words uttered in a different context perfectly apposite. To attempt to load them all into the deep structure of Max's utterance would be to commence on a never-ending series of *post hoc* emendations. Nor are these cases to be explained away as common-or-garden instances of vagueness. If things had gone well, the sentence 'Zoë is in the garden' would have been



perfectly precise.<sup>11</sup>

Travis thinks that sooner or later we should admit that cases like this display one of the central mechanisms of language (albeit one that is malfunctioning). To explain it away, therefore, is misguided from the start. Rather, we need to recognise that it happens, and it happens precisely because of the dependence on pragmatic factors that allow all language to work.

That, then, is the first horn of Travis' dilemma, pertaining to the 'external' perspective of language use. The external perspective is that which takes into account the kinds of linguistic misfortune that can always befall us. If we think that semantic principles like bivalence apply from this perspective, then we shouldn't accept the anti-realist pair.

For Travis, however, there is some uncertainty as to whether that is the perspective from which we should adjudicate semantic principles. This is open question for him in a way that it isn't for Dummett, because for Dummett, or so at least thinks Travis, there is a pre-eminent location for semantic principles, and that is at the level of shadows. If there are shadows, then it is irresistible to think that our fundamental semantic principles should be phrased in terms of them. Roughly speaking, bivalence would be the principle that every shadowed utterance is true or false. There would be no further interesting question of 'perspective' in Travis' sense.

What, then, is Travis' alternative perspective? The (contrasting) internal perspective is that from which we assume things are going to go well. We close our eyes to certain doubts, assuming that we won't be left in the lurch by an unexpected turn of events. So, in the above example, we presuppose that Zoë will still be a live rabbit, wherever she is. This perspective offers the Dummettian some hope, because from it, according to Travis, we accept *tertium non datur*. The reason why is precisely because we have deliberately sectioned off the worries that led us to reject it.

The problem for the anti-realist, however, is that according to Travis, "as long as we see statements from an object-level, internal perspective [...] we see them in a way that assumes, or presupposes, bivalence" (Travis 2008,

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<sup>11</sup>This isn't of course to claim that phenomena of context-sensitivity couldn't be brought under a general heading of 'vagueness' if we liked, nor even that there mightn't be theoretical gains in doing so. The important point is merely that the phenomena Travis has in mind have a peculiar character that not all those who accept what is commonly called 'vagueness' would endorse.

p.143). To elaborate, Travis thinks that if we make even the minimal presuppositions that are required in order to allow us to assert *tertium non datur*, we should go the whole hog and presuppose bivalence too. So one would, on this view, make a mistake if one were to say something along the following lines:

**Rejecting bivalence from the internal perspective:** I wonder whether Zoë is in the garden, but concede that it needn't be either true that she is nor false that she is.

The idea is that when we use our words, even to entertain a supposition, we assume that context will be favourable enough to give us an answer one way or the other. Using a sentence indicates a form of optimism, such that conditions will arrange themselves so as to make its use felicitous. That optimism extends, however, not just to *tertium non datur* but to bivalence too. The anti-realist is therefore in a dilemma. From the external perspective, we shouldn't just drop bivalence but also *tertium non datur*, and from the internal perspective we shouldn't even drop bivalence. At no point do we get the anti-realist pair, the acceptance of *tertium non datur* and the rejection of bivalence.

Is Travis right in thinking that from from the internal perspective we presuppose bivalence? Regarding everyday conversation, which is that with which Travis is primarily concerned, the claim seems reasonably plausible. If I boldly declare to you 'The man outside is wearing an orange hat', you may assume that for all the many ways in which my words could be taken, and for all the ways the world may conspire to make it impossible to assign a coherent content to them, I am trying to place a condition that world-willing, is true or false.

You may of course respond to the awareness of the multiple possibilities of my failure by dropping bivalence. The *primâ facie* justification for this is precisely the fact that the world may be arranged such that my pronouncement is inept. Perhaps the man has, like, Zoë, shuffled off this mortal coil unbeknownst to us both. Travis' idea appears to be that a response of this kind is unnecessarily churlish. If you are willing to do me the provisional charity of granting that my utterance is not inept – not a misfire – you may as well also grant bivalence. There is no middle position, whereby you grant

my assertion sufficient felicity to assume *tertium non datur*, but hesitate as to whether the world will make it true or false. Again, Travis' justification for this claim relies heavily on the unshadowed view of language. Given the fact that we must always cross our fingers when we sail a representation off into the world – even to avoid failure of *tertium non datur* – the suggestion is that we may as well cross them for bivalence too.

#### 4.4.0.6. OPTIMISTIC ANTI-REALISM

That, then, is Travis' argument as I here take it to be. The question is how the anti-realist, set in Dummett's mould, should respond to it. I am going to argue that the consequences are rather more limited than Travis appears inclined to allow. Specifically, the anti-realist can broach the second horn of the dilemma: he may establish the anti-realist pair from the internal perspective. In Travis' terms, the position argued for is:

#### **From the internal perspective:**

*Tertium non datur*: ACCEPT.

Bivalence: REJECT.

The general point is as follows: Travis' argument relies on the anti-realist being unable to draw a viable distinction between the utterly general pitfalls that imperil all language use, and the special reasons that might be adduced by anti-realist arguments. It is on the assumption that no such distinction can be drawn that the reasons for rejecting bivalence that the anti-realist typically adduces are simply agglomerated with other reasons, reasons which are supposed to tell in equal measure against *tertium non datur*. Conversely, if the anti-realist can draw that distinction then he can broach the second horn of Travis' dilemma; he can argue that from the internal perspective at least, we can establish the anti-realist pair.

The issues then turn on what reasons the anti-realist may give to favour his position. Travis has the global anti-realist as his main target, and so we should consider the global anti-realist argument.<sup>12</sup> It states that if we

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<sup>12</sup>One might worry that in so doing we stray from the intended topic of the dissertation—pluralism. But Travis' argument, if successful, would have correlates in local cases, responses to which might be informed by the response to be given here.

suppose ourselves to be able to grasp a particular meaning for our words that attached to a recognition-transcendent condition then the whole practice of language use would go on the same even if we had got it wrong. Recognition-transcendent conditions would be like the beetles in boxes that Wittgenstein mentions at §293 of the *Investigations*. There Wittgenstein considers the situation where we all have a box, the contents of which are hidden from each other, and whose contents we call, each in our own case, a “beetle”. Wittgenstein’s claim is then that the actual contents of our boxes are irrelevant to the use of the word. Since they could vary unnoticeably or even be wholly absent and still the practice would continue regardless, they play no role in the game. But this, the argument goes, is to posit a difference that makes no difference. Consequently, it drops out of consideration as irrelevant. So, the Dummettian thought concludes, the truth-conditions that attach to our statements must be recognisable.<sup>13</sup>

The question, then, is not whether this line of argument is independently plausible, but whether Travis’ dilemma shows that it can’t be applied from the internal perspective. With that in mind, let us consider a case where Max’s presuppositions are not yet defeated; he has not, up until now at least, been presented with a rabbit-corpse. The anti-realist’s first question, then, is whether, generally speaking, the notion of truth attaching to the statement, ‘Zoë is in the garden’ can be recognition-transcendent. Could it be, for example, that by the name ‘Zoë’, we referred to the hidden soul of Max’s rabbit, a soul that could perhaps transmigrate without our knowing? (Max, for example, might like to think this given the circumstances.) The interesting thing here is that the Dummettian can still presumably argue that what it takes for the statement ‘Zoë is in the garden’ to be true can’t go beyond recognisable criteria, for example the appearance of her munching lettuce by the rosebush. Otherwise there would have to be a difference that made no difference, and that, he thinks, is not how language works. So Dummett’s initial argument for the recognisability of truth-conditions seems at first pass to be unaffected by Travis’ argument.

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<sup>13</sup>Dummett, of course, has a more precise version of this argument, based on ideas of manifestability and acquisition. I choose to here go with the more general thought because it isn’t clear to me that these more precise versions improve it. Indeed, Dummett at points prefers to put it in the general rather than more specific terms (Dummett 1993, pp.312-14). What follows is an attempted defence of Dummett, so if the reader thinks that these do improve the argument, then all the better.

On the standard Dummettian view, the denial of recognition-transcendence implies the rejection of bivalence. This is for the simple reason that because we can't in general guarantee that a given statement is recognisably true or false, we shouldn't commit to the principle that it *is* true or false. Truth and falsity are, after all, now taken to be coextensive with recognisable truth and falsity. It's notable of course that 'Zoë is in the garden' is, in ordinary circumstances, recognisable as true or false, so it isn't a good illustration of this. But any problems that thereby arise are analogous to those that pertain to the application of bivalence to effectively decidable statements in general. Nothing that Travis adduces makes these problems any better or worse. (Consider, perhaps, 'Zoë's descendants will one day populate every continent on earth'.)

The case seems even clearer when we turn our attention away from the global anti-realist towards the local anti-realist. Suppose, for example, that the anti-realist proposes that our mathematical statements are true in virtue of the proofs that we are able to construct, not the existence of Platonic objects. This being so, he argues, we have a direct route to the principle that their truth is coextensive with recognisable truth (i.e. provability). Given, then, the additional premise that we can't guarantee that we have proofs for the truth or falsity of every mathematical statement (consider e.g. Goldbach's conjecture), we shouldn't accept bivalence. It seems implausible to me that this line of argument becomes any less convincing even if we factored in the presupposition that we weren't going to encounter a misfire.

One may have lingering doubts – Travis clearly intends that we do – as to whether somehow in all of this the characterisation of realism and anti-realism by acceptance or denial of bivalence is undermined. It was earlier claimed that the decisive move in Travis' argument is the claim that these kinds of misfire, cases which violate *tertium non datur*, should be taken more seriously once we realise that we operate a radically context-sensitive or unshadowed language. That is to say, they shouldn't be seen as marginal cases that deserve to be explained away. Rather they exhibit one of the fundamental mechanisms of language, albeit in the course of a malfunction.

But in the dawning light, it seems that one may accept that *in some regard*, it is wrong to explain these cases away as deviant, and still accept the characterisation of (anti-)realism as well motivated. The kind of presuppositions that the (anti-)realist must make in order to frame his position in

semantic terms doesn't rely on treating these cases as deviant in the broader sense, but merely as unlucky. It merely requires that the realist is able to say '*Yes, I appreciate that those kinds of misfire may occur, but what I am saying is that providing they don't, the world will answer me one way or another*'. The anti-realist, on the other hand, merely need say '*Yes, I too appreciate those misfires may occur, but I think that even if they don't the world can't be guaranteed to answer me either way*'. And of course the whole issue turns on whether 'those misfires' form a class that the realist and anti-realist can distinguish from their own concerns in a principled way. It seems to me that at worst the jury is still out. The kinds of misfire that Travis presents can be grouped together for these purposes with problems of vagueness, and other cases where semantic principles appear to be compromised but for reasons that seem to be isolatable from deeper metaphysical concerns.<sup>14</sup> Now whether this isolation can ultimately be well motivated is still an open question, but a proponent of the Dummettian position will argue that the permanent possibility of misfires here contemplated does little to make the problem more extreme. For all that has here been shown, Dummett's anti-realist need have no stake in shadows. Travis could be right to be sceptical about them and still anti-realism would be as viable as it ever was.

So at least a committed defender of the Dummettian approach may maintain. I confess to having reservations. The radical transformation of our conception of semantic facts that Travis' views imply is extremely hard to properly fathom. The distinction between the two perspectives offered above is just one, rather simple-minded, way of trying to capture it. On those terms, I do not think that Travis' arguments are decisive, but I am left with the sense that there is more to be said. However, I do not know quite what it is, so let us now move on.

#### 4.5. A SERVANT OF PLURALISM?

Having tried to deflect the above arguments against one aspect of the pluralist project, let us now try to turn the tables. Might it be that far from undermining pluralism, context-sensitivity can be marshalled in favour of it? There is, I'll suggest, some reason to believe so.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>For Dummett's attitude towards vagueness see e.g. Dummett 2003b: 469.

<sup>15</sup>I reiterate the qualification that the connection between the precise arguments against Dummett and pluralism more generally is not wholly clear, but rather than than try to

A notable fact is that context-sensitivity appears to be a highly variable phenomenon. There is a big difference as to how context-sensitive different discourses are. For example, consider the following, constructed along the lines of one of Travis' ordinary cases:

**7+5=12:** Jay has seven measures of uranium secreted in his wardrobe, and another five under the bed. Damien wants to make a twelve-measure uranium sculpture for his latest exhibition at the *White Cube*—'Powers of Twelve'. Unfortunately for Damien, the twelve measures put together would reach critical mass and detonate, ruining his plans. But Damien doesn't know this. He has his hands on the uranium, and enthusiastically calls to Jay 'Great—you have just the right amount of uranium for my new sculpture'. Jay urges Damien to stop, saying 'No I don't, put that down before...'. But Damien interrupts, 'Of course you do, everyone knows that  $7+5=12$ '. 'Not in this case it won't' cautions Jay, as Damien melds together the metals, eager-eyed.

Whatever the pragmatic reasons warranting Jay's assertion, there is little intuitive pull to thinking that his denial of the claim that ' $7+5=12$ ' is a denial *both* of a genuine mathematical claim *and* true. It is far more plausible to hold that either Jay is asserting a true claim that is really about combining uranium or asserting a false mathematical claim for good pragmatic reasons. That is to say, the claim he denies is better expressed by a statement of the form '7 measures of uranium combined with 5 measures of uranium won't make 12 measures of uranium (for long)', or he is simply saying something false but useful. Moreover, this doesn't seem to be a contingent feature of the above case, but rather seems bound up with general facts about the peculiar character of mathematics.

Before going on, it's worth distinguishing arguments like the above, and the attendant conception of context-sensitivity it is designed to engender, with other more plausible cases that might suggest being described as examples of 'context-sensitivity' in mathematics. These include those that have traditionally been dealt with under the auspices of open texture and indefinite extensibility. Dummett, for example, has argued that Gödel's Incompleteness theorem is to be explained by the indefinite extensibility of our

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argue at length why it is I'll rely on the reader's imagination.

notion of proof. The fact that given any axiomatisation we can recognise a further claim not entailed by those axioms as intuitively true shows, for Dummett, not that Platonism is true, but rather that our concept of proof is open-ended. We can always apply it to new mathematical statements. When confronted by the Gödel sentence, we extend our notion of proof to include a demonstration of *it* (Dummett 1978a).

A similar, though slightly different and certainly less controversial, example can be made with regard to non-standard geometries. If, for example, we are treating of curved space, we may define a triangle with interior angles of 270 degrees. This, however, goes against the prior conception of triangles having by necessity interior angles summing to 180 degrees. According to the idea of open texture, our concepts have a species of indeterminacy in them when it comes to certain novel cases. When confronted by the figure that has three interior angles which add up to 270 degrees, our previous use of the term ‘triangle’ and attendant conception fails to decide how we should proceed. At this point we make a (presumably largely pragmatic) judgement as to how to use our terminology in the new case. It is clear to us, one way or another, that when previously generalising about triangles, we weren’t thinking about applications to curved space. Consequently there is some kind of freedom here.

It’s worth bracketing off these kinds of case from those that Travis ordinarily deals with under the remit of context-sensitivity. Open texture and indefinite extensibility, as illustrated by cases like the above, are best considered as phenomena that occur fairly rarely, when a new type of datum appears. The reason why, at that point, previous usage fails to determine the application of the term is largely, so to speak, an accident. When encountered, a decision is made, and that then stands as a stable precedent for classifying that case (or a permanent species of vagueness is admitted). For example, once it is decided that figures in curved space may count as triangles despite having interior angles of 270 degrees, that then serves as an invariant proposition. Similarly, when the concept of proof is extended to cover the Gödel sentence, that proof stands with a kind of impermeability foreign to the spirit of Travis’ cases.

Context-sensitivity, characterised by Travis-style context-shifting cases, trades on the pragmatic utility of varying the semantic content of syntactic forms conditional upon relatively fleeting conversational purposes. In claim-



ing, for example, that the word ‘know’ may change truth-conditions depending on the epistemic standards in play, we view that term as having a permanent species of variability that is keyed to its more or less invariant purpose. That purpose is arguably connected in some highly complex way to the transmission of information. Its context-sensitivity is connected to its teleology, and its *telos* is to be flexible.<sup>16</sup> The same is true to a greater extent with the classic case of context-sensitivity—the basic set of indexicals (‘I’, ‘you’, ‘here’, etc.). These terms are clearly ‘designed’ to adapt their reference to highly variable contextual parameters, e.g. speaker identity, location etc. When focusing on phenomena of this kind, the new case does not play an analogous role to that which it does in the case of open texture.

There is obviously some artifice involved in drawing a line which has the basic set of indexicals and the word ‘know’ one side and the words ‘triangle’ and ‘+’ on the other. It is hoped, however, that the reader will go along with an initial division along these lines. That distinction, it is here suggested, should keep mathematical discourse on one side, the side for which context-sensitivity is highly restricted.<sup>17</sup>

The question, then, is why mathematics should display less context-sensitivity than ordinary discourse about, say, whether Jones is brave. Given that even if we acquiesce in the contextualist view for meat-and-drink cases we can’t plausibly summon up the same sympathies in the ‘ $7+5=12$ ’ case, an explanation is demanded as to the difference between the statements in each. Why does mathematics resist the kind of fluctuation that other regions of discourse permit? Once this question is on the table, it seems that rather than form an objection to pluralism, context-sensitivity might itself require explanation in terms of discursive function. It might even be treated alongside the other hallmarks of realism that the pluralist makes it his business to document.

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<sup>16</sup>An approach that could be used to try to explain what this purpose is in more detail, and why it might enforce context-sensitivity to the extent that it does, might be found in Craig 1990. For Craig, we can begin to explain why our concept of knowledge has the characteristics it does by comparison with the possible evolution of a concept that begins life with the purpose of marking reliable informants. Regardless of whether that particular account is correct, one can readily see that its truth or falsity would in principle bear on the issue of context-sensitivity as presented here.

<sup>17</sup>I certainly don’t want to suggest is that there isn’t an important distinction between the basic set of indexicals and other context-sensitive terms. Nor do I want to undermine the idea that these different positions might all be united under a single, albeit broad, pragmatist front.

In order to see how an answer along these lines might go, let's consider a particular account of mathematical discourse, albeit a highly controversial one. It is the account that Wittgenstein gave in the *Big Typescript*:

The proposition “corresponding angles are equal” means that if they aren't found to be equal when they are measured I will declare the measurement incorrect; and “the sum of the angles of a triangle is 180 degrees” means that if it doesn't turn out to be 180 degrees when they are measured I will assume there has been a mistake in the measurement. So the proposition is a postulate about the way of describing facts, and therefore a proposition of syntax (*BT* 567).

Or again,

You can describe a circular surface divided by diameters into 8 congruent parts, but it makes no sense to give such a description of an elliptical surface. And therein is contained what geometry says in this respect about circular and elliptical surfaces (*BT* 567).

Wittgenstein's point is that the statements of mathematics are roundabout ways of stating the boundaries of what we are sensibly able to say, and should not be understood as describing properties of the objects, in this case circular and elliptical surfaces, themselves. On this view, then, propositions of mathematics are propositions of syntax. They are instructions or metalinguistic claims about how one is to use words. More specifically, they express retraction criteria, or are at least best explained by appeal to a certain view of retraction criteria. If one asserts that ‘ $7+5=12$ ’, then one commits to taking back the judgement that there are say, one group of seven children and one group of five, if it is established that there are not twelve in total.

To suppose that a proposition of syntax were context-sensitive would be to suppose that in the kind of *ad hoc* scenarios ordinarily used to define context shifting, it would be worthwhile to offer a rule governing the use of the relevant terms. So, for example, for Jay to deny ‘ $7+5=12$ ’ in the above context would be for Jay to claim precisely that there are exceptions to the convention of accepting that there are 12 things in all and only cases in

which it is also accepted that there are  $7+5$  things (or something similar). One can see that this would be an assertion of scant purpose. The account of mathematical propositions as grammatical, or as postulates of syntax, makes it unlikely, albeit not impossible, that they would exhibit a great deal of context-sensitivity. If they did, then on this view of their primary purpose, they would be useless.

That, of course, is only one way, and not necessarily a very popular one, of trying to explain why mathematical statements appear intuitively less susceptible to context-sensitivity. The point here, however, is that regardless of whether or not *it* is promising, it clearly occupies an explanatory role that could be filled by any number of candidate explanations, explanations with a distinctly pluralist timbre. That is to say, what seems required is precisely the kind of generalisation in terms of discourse function, or peculiar topic with which the discourse deals, that explains why context-sensitivity is exhibited to the degree that it is. The idea, then, that context-sensitivity might undermine the possibility of pluralism in this general and direct way seems mistaken.

When trying to sketch the larger picture within which context-sensitivity might enter the realism debate, I suggested two points of contact. First, there is an anti-Platonistic strand. There are no ‘shadows’ as Travis calls them, that somehow stand above our words and confer upon them meanings that are radically independent of our on dispositions to accept certain linguistic moves as correct and others as incorrect. Second, the role of context-dependent applications of human rationality is given a more prominent role than even other anti-Platonistic accounts, for example Dummett’s, tend to have supposed.

I suggested that out of these two broad strands might be woven something rather like ‘pragmatism’ as it occurs in the work of other authors. And to this, in some degree, I still cleave. But it is important to see, if the current considerations are in some measure persuasive, that there is no obvious reason why anything thereby established should undermine the pluralist positions against which such a form of pragmatism might be set. This in turn is in part owing to the fact that pluralism, as found in the work of authors like Dummett, Wright, and Blackburn, is itself anti-Platonistic. Nor, perhaps notwithstanding the above arguments against Dummett, is there any independent project on the part of the latter three authors to downgrade

the role of human rationality in its more parochial forms. To some extent, therefore, they bear an affinity with the pragmatist project, even if not all its ramifications. It is therefore of less surprise than it might otherwise be that the clash between the views is less than bloody.

Moreover, the previously mentioned pluralist-friendly idea, that context-sensitivity intrudes to the degree that we demand flexibility in our language is one that Travis himself appears willing to adopt. He cites with approval the following passage in Frege:

The above-cited defects [of natural language] have their source in a certain plasticity and mutability of language, which, on the other hand, is a condition of its ability to develop and its many sided usefulness. In this respect language can be compared with the hand, which, despite its ability to apply itself to various tasks, does not suffice. We create for ourselves artificial hands—tools for particular purposes—which work more precisely than a hand could. And how is this precision possible? Through just that rigidity, inflexibility of the parts, whose lack in the hand makes it suitable for so many different things. So, too, natural language does not suffice. We need a system of signs from which ambiguity is banned, the stricter logical form of whose content cannot slip away (quoted in n.d.: 134).

This passage gives powerful expression to the considerations that are here being used to defend the pluralist. The point is that when we treat a language as an instrument, like a hand, we may measure its desired plasticity relative to the tasks to which it may be applied. Transposed to the current case, the context-sensitivity of discourse about, say, bravery, knowledge or mathematics is proportional to the variability of the factors that provide the ultimate explanation of its function. That same conditioning, applied to mathematical discourse, doesn't import that level of context-sensitivity, precisely because the purposes to which it is put are better suited by rigidity.

There is, of course, a question still to be asked whether any particular pluralist account of a given region of discourse is correct. It isn't clear, for example, whether the kind of variation in function here described can be traced back to any of the characteristic generalisations that pluralists make. That would seemingly have to be established on a case by case basis.

The point remains, however, that the prospect of a general argument from context-sensitivity against pluralism seems no more likely than its contrary, and this can to some degree be made unsurprising if we see the common anti-Platonistic background shared between the various views.

The search for conflict might therefore usefully be pursued elsewhere. Specifically, let us turn to a particular case where the pragmatist cause, in the guise of Putnam, clashes with a particular brand of pluralism—Blackburn’s quasi-realist. This will give us a better idea of how the issues turn out in at least one particular area, and perhaps might reveal some interesting parallels too. Working through this will occupy us for the remainder of the dissertation.

## Chapter 5

# : Facts and values

PUTNAM OPPOSES METAPHYSICAL OR BIG ‘R’ REALISM. But he is no keener on standard alternatives. His most vocal opposition has been to quasi-realism, which he dislikes because he takes it to be a degenerate *form* of metaphysical realism. For it incorporates the kinds of large scale distinctions, or ‘Dichotomies’, that go to make up metaphysical realism more broadly understood. In this chapter, some background on Putnam’s views will be presented along with an in-depth examination of his treatment of the fact/value distinction. This is a central case for both Putnam and the quasi-realist, and is, when held by the latter, one of the most stark instances of the discourse-pluralist thesis. The quasi-realist believes that there is a fundamental distinction between valuational and non-valuational discourses. If Putnam’s arguments aimed at this distinction are sound, then this prominent form of pluralism is undermined.

### 5.1. DICHOTOMIES AND DISTINCTIONS

Despite their many differences, Putnam shares with Richard Rorty the belief that philosophical concepts are not fit for the purposes which they ought to serve. They both endorse the Heideggerian thought that philosophy is part of a larger ‘onto-theological’ tradition, which has enshrined certain distinctions that, when properly observed, lead to a certain form of metaphysics—what followers of Derrida call a ‘metaphysics of presence’, and what pragmatists like Putnam and Rorty call the ‘myth of the ready-made world’.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See e.g. Putnam 1992: 123, Putnam 2004: 16, Rorty 1999a: 12. As a point of terminology, I have chosen to call Putnam and Rorty ‘pragmatists’, or ‘neo-pragmatists’.

There are, however, different accounts as to the details of the error. For Heidegger, there was an emphasis on a mistaken view of Being and time. Our old philosophical concepts present time as a succession of instances, over the course of which are distributed in space various scientifically appreciable objects in their relations. This is, in part, to see the world as full of things present-at-hand (*vorhanden*), as opposed to ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*). This involves a falsification of how (and when) things are, and the only way to avoid it is to replace those concepts with new ones. Echoing this strategy, Rorty claims the “views we hope to persuade people to accept cannot be stated in Platonic terminology, so our efforts at persuasion must take the form of gradual inculcation of new ways of speaking, rather than of straightforward argument within old ways of speaking” (Rorty 1999b: xix).

This thought, for Rorty, goes hand in hand with ‘antidualism’, an idea that he sees as uniting “philosophers as diverse as William James and Friedrich Nietzsche, Donald Davidson and Jacques Derrida, Hilary Putnam and Bruno Latour, John Dewey and Michel Foucault” (Rorty 1999b: 47). He goes on to write:

[The above] are trying to shake off the influences of the peculiarly metaphysical dualisms which the Western philosophical tradition inherited from the Greeks: those between essence and accident, substance and property, and appearance and reality. They are trying to replace the world pictures constructed with the aid of these Greek oppositions with a picture of a flux of continually changing relations [...] [This] panrelationism [...] lets us put aside the distinction between subject and object, between the elements in human knowledge contributed by the mind and those contributed by the world, and thereby helps us put aside the correspondence theory of truth (Rorty 1999b: 47).

Conversely, pluralists like Dummett, Blackburn and Wright, are cast as holding on to the traditional dualisms, albeit in novel and convoluted forms. It is in this regard that they are, allegedly, throwbacks to an age that should

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I contrast this with the name ‘pluralist’, in order to mark the point of disagreement here outlined. This is not supposed to be in competition with other ways of naming the positions. For example, Cheryl Misak has recently referred to Wright and Blackburn as ‘new pragmatists’ (Misak 2007), distinguishing them from Rorty who is a ‘neo-pragmatist’. Blackburn himself has also suggested that his view can be placed under a more general heading of ‘pragmatism’.

by now be bygone. Their error has been to be insufficiently revisionary, and it is the intent of authors like Putnam and Rorty to expose them for being so.<sup>2</sup>

Despite their affinities, however, Putnam does not see the primary job of philosophy as inventing new concepts, at least not in the bulk way in which Heidegger did, nor does there appear to be any self-conscious drive to inculcate Rorty's "new ways of speaking", at the expense of straightforward argument. Instead, he views philosophical concepts in a way more akin to that of the later Wittgenstein. He sees them as overblown and acontextual variants on our ordinary concepts—those that help us get around the world and which, in a pragmatist spirit, ought to be cherished. The task, as he sees it, is to limit the application of these concepts to their familiar or well understood uses – which may in some instances be highly abstract (for example in science or mathematics) – instead of corrupting them into metaphysical 'super-concepts', whose 'super-order' describes the fundamental nature of reality.<sup>3</sup>

It is along these lines that Putnam formulates his philosophy in terms of a distinction between *Dichotomies* and *Distinctions* (which will be capitalised when used in Putnam's technical sense). Dichotomies are what we get when metaphysicians run wild with what would otherwise be perfectly sensible Distinctions. At one point Putnam describes a Dichotomy as a distinction to "be applied to absolutely *every* meaningful judgement in absolutely every area" and such that "if one accepted that distinction [...] then all philosophical problems would be solved at once" (Putnam 2004: 10-11). Seen in this light, Dichotomies are the handmaiden of metaphysical realism, the idea that "there is a totality of Forms, or Universals, or "properties," fixed once and for all, and that every possible meaning of a word corresponds to one of these Forms or Universals or properties" (Putnam 1999: 6). The idea is that there is a totalising and absolute conception that can be drawn in special terms that suit every purpose, or perhaps better, are indifferent to whatever those purposes may be, but are rather such as a god may use for her disinterested cognition.

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<sup>2</sup>For example, against Blackburn, this is the general thrust of Putnam (1994a); against Wright, Rorty (1995).

<sup>3</sup>I pinch this way of putting it, as a 'super order' of 'super concepts' from *PI* §97. Rorty, on the other hand, sees Putnam's privileging of the everyday, or the Ordinary with a capital 'O', as itself a throwback to metaphysical realism (Rorty 2008: 90).



For an outsider, it is not hard to believe that any Dichotomy, when described in the terms Putnam uses, is misguided. It is harder to believe that pluralists like Dummett, Wright and Blackburn believe in such things, and consequently that Putnam's attack has any real targets.<sup>4</sup> However, he pinpoints a few specific cases, and so we may test his arguments as they apply to those. In particular, he cites the Dichotomies between the Subjective and the Objective, between the Property and the Thing in Itself, the Projection and the Thing in Itself, and between facts and values.<sup>5</sup> It is because of his opposition to these latter two that Putnam comes into conflict with the post-Humean projectivism of the quasi-realist.

The problem, however, that naturally arises when assessing the significance of Putnam's work, is to establish when we have a Dichotomy and when we have a mere Distinction. Since Putnam will accept, for example, that there is a valid Distinction between facts and values, we must be alive to the possibility that his opponents may be able to make do with *that*, and not the inflated Dichotomy.

## 5.2. LOCATING THE DISAGREEMENT

It's worth clarifying the original motivation for the quasi-realist position. He believes that moral realism, as a metaphysical thesis regarding the independent existence of moral properties, is false. That is to say, he believes that whereas reality contains physical objects mind-independently, and therefore in such a way as can be described in the deeper sense, reality contains no moral objects or properties. It is only because we approach the world in a certain way, with certain interests, that we think of it as having value. In this regard, the quasi-realist is somewhat like a traditional error theorist. We make claims ostensibly about mind-independent moral properties, but in fact there are none.

One of the central purposes of quasi-realism, however, is to avoid error theory. It does so by reconstruing the function of valuational discourse, primarily along the lines offered by Hume. It is, roughly speaking, not designed to describe the world but rather to express our attitudes towards it. There is thus a vindicatory aspect to the quasi-realist project. It is

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<sup>4</sup>There are however cases of philosophers outside the pluralist school who seem to be unabashed metaphysical realists. David Lewis might be an example.

<sup>5</sup>See e.g. Putnam 1987: p.28 and Putnam 2002: p.1.

designed to show why, once the purpose of ethical discourse is properly understood, its correct use is indifferent to the existence or non-existence of ethical properties in the realist sense.

Insofar as the above two strands go, quasi-realism is thoroughly Humean. The supposed advance beyond Hume is to reconcile the above functional claim with the proper assertoric form and truth-aptness of moral statements. In this regard it is consonant with Wright's minimalism. The quasi-realist can be viewed as working with a minimal specification of truth that applies even to moral claims, but that is underwritten in various different ways in different discourses. Where it differs from Wright's position is that the functional plurality is not keyed to differing types of truth. For the quasi-realist, there is only one type of truth. The further differences come from elsewhere. They come from the expression/description contrast.<sup>6</sup>

There are familiar tensions in the quasi-realist position centring on the issue as to whether this contrast can be maintained once the minimal specification of truth is in place. Wright's fundamental reason for preferring his framework over Blackburn's appears to be based on just this concern. Once we accept that moral claims are truth-apt assertions in even the minimal sense, the motivation and perhaps even the coherence of then claiming that in some other sense they aren't really descriptions is lost.<sup>7</sup>

For Putnam, on the other hand, the objection to the quasi-realist is that by founding his position on the divide between a Projection and the Thing-in-Itself, he falls prey to an unacceptable dualism. However, as was previously noted, a criticism of this kind is difficult to assess at face value. In particular, it isn't clear whether the quasi-realist needs the kind of inflated Dichotomy that Putnam shuns, or whether a mere Distinction would suit his purpose equally well. The task for a distinguishing quasi-realist would not be to establish a distinction that can be "applied to absolutely every judgement in absolutely every area" and that means that "all philosophical problems would be solved at once" (Putnam 2004: 10-11). Nor need he require the idea of a ready-made world, a world populated by elite classes and natural kinds, magnetically attracting the meanings of our terms. Instead,

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<sup>6</sup>See e.g. Blackburn 1984: 170-171. It should be noted that Blackburn and Wright dispute 'minimalism' about truth. But the substance of their dispute doesn't turn on the fact that one can be a minimalist about truth, in roughly the way that Wright elaborates. It is more a contest over what the consequences of this are.

<sup>7</sup>See e.g. Wright 1998: 191-5 for a statement of these concerns.

the aim would be to form a generalisation over valuational as opposed to non-valuational discourse that describes the difference in function between the two in an adequate manner, one that bears affinity with quasi-realism's Humean roots.

### 5.3. THE ENTANGLEMENT OF FACT AND VALUE

It is worth initially differentiating between two ways in which the fact/value distinction itself can be held. On the one hand, one may believe that values can't be facts, and on the other hand that facts needn't be values. The first was held by old fashioned expressivists, who claimed that valuational judgements were to be thought of as mere expressions of attitude along the lines of 'Boo!' and 'Hurrah!' The second is more common, and is held by anyone who believes that certain claims, perhaps for example those of science or mathematics, are value-neutral. On the standard characterisation, Hume held both these views; Putnam holds neither.<sup>8</sup> The quasi-realist holds, roughly speaking, one-and-a-half of these views. He believes that values can't be facts in the sense of 'facthood' associated with deep-level descriptions. At that level, they are merely expressions of attitude. On the other hand, he believes that value judgements are, *contra* Hume, apt for a minimal notion of truth and consequently may count as 'facts' in that sense. Moreover, they may thereby figure in inference, be subject to standards of rationality, and generally possess many characteristics 'facts' ordinarily understood may possess. In Wright's way of putting things, the quasi-realist claims that moral statements satisfy the platitudes, or minimal specification of truth. In regard to the other part of the thesis – the claim that facts needn't be values – the quasi-realist is a staunch upholder of the distinction. Propositions of physics, for example, are for him value-neutral. It is on this point that the quasi-realist is squarely opposed to Putnam. Putnam's claim is that epistemic values are 'entangled' in every scientific judgement. The current discussion will therefore initially focus on the second way of holding the distinction, where the explicit disagreement takes place.

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<sup>8</sup>How accurate a representation this is of Hume is an interesting question.

## 5.3.0.7. EPISTEMIC VALUES

Putnam explains the notion of ‘epistemic value’ with reference to the values associated with theory selection in natural science. He cites examples such as simplicity, coherence, plausibility, and in the extreme, what Paul Dirac called the ‘beauty’ of a hypothesis (Putnam 2002: 135). These values, Putnam claims, determine which theories we choose. Those scientific theories are therefore premised on a judgement that does not itself have a good claim to be value-neutral. That this is so has been demonstrated, Putnam observes, by the history of science. The logical positivists were concerned about precisely the dependence of theory selection on seemingly subjective ‘non-scientific’ considerations. Consequently, they tried to formulate algorithms for theory selection, which would obviate the need for such procedures (Putnam 2002: ch.8). However, these attempts failed. The moral to draw, Putnam plausibly thinks, is that science must make do with epistemic value judgements, but that this is no real limitation. After all, judgements of this kind have given us the work of Newton and Einstein, so can hardly be considered detrimental or second rate. The danger, thinks Putnam, is to ignore this kind of dependence, and thereby downgrade other types of knowledge, for example knowledge in the human sciences and the arts, on the basis that *it* involves value judgements.<sup>9</sup>

Methodologically, Putnam’s view may seem salutary. To downgrade all knowledge claims outside the hard sciences, and concomitantly, to reduce all problems to problems that may be treated by the hard sciences or quantitative methods, seems not only intellectually unjustified, but also damaging in a wider sense. But whether or not one has sympathy with this line of thought, such concerns are at this stage tangential to our question, because this field of problems is more naturally seen as regarding whether or not values can be facts. If, for example, the quasi-realist can achieve his desired minimal notion of facthood, then there seems no obvious reason why he shouldn’t be able to criticise whatever pernicious trends may have crept into contemporary views about the relative statuses of various forms of knowledge in just the way that Putnam views as important. The crucial idea is that the fact a judgement is a *value* judgement need be no obstacle to treating it as truth-apt and as subject to the same or similar canons of rationality as any

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<sup>9</sup>Putnam 2002 concentrates on the example of economics, and how an undue positivism can ruin that discipline.

other.<sup>10</sup>

More generally, there seem to be many ways in which a quasi-realist might admit to ‘entanglement’, and yet not see the fact/value distinction as compromised. In particular, the quasi-realist doesn’t seem obliged to deny the claims regarding the applications of epistemic values in theory selection, nor does he seem obliged to deny that the uses to which scientific claims are put may be of better or worse value. He might, for example, when considering dental anaesthetics, claim that chemical and medical sciences are responsible for some of the greatest increases in standards of living in human history, or considering overseas drug testing programmes, claim that some of those advances have come at the cost of great injustice to the developing world. We might put these two thoughts down in terms of the following two principles, which, to reiterate, the quasi-realist ought to be willing to adopt:

**Values-as-reasons:** When choosing a theory, even in hard sciences, normative judgements are required in order to choose between rival theories.

**Values-as-consequences:** The adoption of particular theories may have consequences of particular value.

As stated above, these principles shouldn’t be especially contentious. The question, then, is whether by accepting them the quasi-realist has abandoned the fact/value distinction in any compromising sense. Not really. An important counterbalance to them, in the eyes of the quasi-realist, is the idea that for all they show, the semantic *content* of scientific judgements is nevertheless value-free. The point is that whereas non-valuational statements try to describe mind-independent reality, the function of valuational statements is to express attitudes towards those objects. This a claim about what individual statements mean. It isn’t a claim about what the promptings or further consequences of making those statements are. It’s perfectly within the scope of viewing attributions of value as expressions of approval to concede that they may be used to inform theory selection, and that the selection of certain theories may have consequences about which one may

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<sup>10</sup>There is a question, though one that won’t be gone in to here, as to what these canons might be and how they might be salvaged by quasi-realism, but the intention is to retain the need for reflection, openness to new information and discussion, and things of this nature.

want to express an attitude. The crux of the matter therefore concerns the following principle:

**Semantic Independence:** The semantic content of some, e.g. hard scientific, claims, is (specifically, epistemic) value-neutral.

Unfortunately, however, this principle is itself imprecise, because as we'll see, there is no uncontroversial notion of 'content'. But to help the discussion get going, it's also useful to have recourse to what we can call 'obviously-valuational' as opposed to 'not-obviously-valuational' judgements. These are cases where all parties agree that in a pre-theoretic sense, some judgements are valuational in a way that others aren't. Having our eye on these paradigm cases can aid us in trying to understand what is at stake in the debate. Consider, e.g.:

TRUE: The Copenhagen interpretation is true.

BEAUT: The Copenhagen interpretation is beautiful.

A central quasi-realist argument for Semantic Independence is that not-obviously-valuational statements don't entail obviously-valuational statements and *vice versa*. That is to say, it is not self-contradictory to assert the relevant scientific claims whilst denying them the relevant epistemic value, or claiming also that they have bad consequences and *vice versa*. So, for example, it is not inconsistent for someone to begrudgingly assert 'I believe that it's possible that one of the non-standard models of physics is true, even though it's theoretically unwieldy', or 'I believe that the claims of much of biochemistry are true but that they can only serve to promote the pharmaceutical industry, whose most notable effect is the exploitation of the developing world and the distortion of our understanding of the human condition.' If this is so then we have a way of trying to cash the principle of Semantic Independence, which we can call 'Moorean Independence' in honour of its connection with the open question argument:

**Moorean Independence:** Obviously-valuational statements do not imply not-obviously-valuational statements and *vice versa*. Specifically, statements of epistemic value don't imply claims of hard science, and *vice versa*.

In other words, the quasi-realist, whilst accepting that epistemic values are important in belief formation, disagrees with Dirac's claim that some results are too beautiful to be false.<sup>11</sup> It is a basic tenet of quasi-realism that no matter how beautiful a theory is, it can still be false. TRUE and BEAUT are in this regard different sorts of claim.

Do hostilities break out over this principle? They do not. Putnam himself, unlike hardline pragmatists, does not believe that the notion of truth can be *reduced* to epistemic value. That is to say, we can't equate truth with what is right in thinking, or what is reached at the ideal limit of enquiry, or what all rational members of a free discursive community would agree on, and so forth. Whilst Putnam thinks that any attempt to divorce truth absolutely from constraints of this kind would be erroneous, nevertheless he believes that truth is a distinct norm, not to be assimilated to these others. This being so, an affirmation of the possibility of a given proposition's truth whilst denying it epistemic value or meritorious consequences will never lead to strict inconsistency. In other words, Putnam accepts Moorean Independence.<sup>12</sup>

But if this is so, then the purported clash between Putnam and the quasi-realist appears to be a phony war. As soon as we break the fact/value distinction down into component theses, the disagreement vanishes. It survives at the level of content, even if the procedure of making judgements and further consequences of making them intertwines the two in a different sense—i.e. the sense given by our principles 'values-as-reasons' and 'values-as-consequences'.

#### 5.4. SEMANTIC HOLISM

However, Putnam does not think that the notion of content secured by Moorean Independence is the only relevant consideration. Putnam thinks that every judgement has something tacitly valuational incorporated in it that cannot necessarily be stated in its own terms. He quotes with approval

<sup>11</sup> "This result is too beautiful to be false; it is more important to have beauty in one's equations than to have them fit experiment" (Dirac 1963).

<sup>12</sup> Putnam moves away from an equation of truth with idealised warranted assertibility or rational acceptability over the period from *Reason, Truth and History* to *Realism with a Human Face* and *Words and Life*, coming to abandon it fully by the latter work (see e.g. p.5 of that volume).

Vivian Walsh:

To borrow and adapt Quine’s vivid image, if a theory may be black with fact and white with convention, it might well be [...] red tinted with values (Putnam 2002: 30).

If one emphasises a holistic view of content, the search for implications or entailments between particular statements may seem beside the point. The important thing is rather that the web of belief as a whole must incorporate valuational commitments if it is to incorporate any commitments at all.

Many traditional discussions of holism centre around the interdependence of observation statements and background theory. One of Putnam’s moves is to emphasise that similar considerations apply to everyday statements. He gives the example from C.I. Lewis that the statement ‘I see a chair’ commits the speaker to such generalisations as ‘If I move my eyes right, the visual image will be displaced to the left’, and ‘If I pick up a chair, other things being equal, it will not be weightless’; ‘If I sit down on a chair, other things being equal, I will be supported’ and ‘It will not turn into a hippopotamus if I smile at it’ (Putnam 2002: 58). Once we consider these initially bizarre examples, we begin to see that rational interdependence between different beliefs is far greater than we might unreflectively credit, and certainly goes beyond the implications explicitly acknowledged in established scientific laws.

A nice real life example of this phenomenon comes from Daniel Paul Schreber’s *Memoirs of my nervous illness*, first made famous by Freud. Given the centrality of this idea to the issues in hand, it is worth briefly pausing to reflect on it. Consider for example the following:

[I]n consequence of my ever-increasing nervousness and the resulting increasing power of attraction, an ever-growing number of departed souls felt attracted to me—primarily those who may have retained some special interest in me because of personal contacts with me during their life—and then dissolved on my head or in my body. This process frequently ended with the souls concerned finally leading a short existence on my head in the form of “little men”—tiny figures in a human form, perhaps only a few millimeters in height—before finally vanishing [...] On



some nights the souls dripped down on to my head, in a manner of speaking, in their hundreds if not thousands, as “little men” [...] Other rays which conducted themselves as in the manner described above as if they were God’s omnipotence itself, carried names such as “The Lord of the Hosts,” “the Good Shepherd,” “the Almighty,” etc., etc. (Schreber 2000: 74-5).

It is very difficult to read off the content of Schreber’s claims from the sentences he gives us. What are these little men like? Can the word ‘men’ really refer to things that vanish, or that can dissolve on someone’s head? What is it for these little men to have names? Can they be called by them? How can they have a causal relation to what Schreber calls his “power of attraction”? The explanation of the difficulty, of course, is that just as Putnam’s example from C.I. Lewis shows, our grasp of the meaning of terms is conditioned partly on what we expect to follow from them. Schreber’s disappearing men, like Lewis’ transmogrifying chair, are exceptions to these expectations, and we can tolerate only so many and so wide a variety of exceptions.

Attention to this kind of holistic interdependence may, then, suggest that intelligibility relies, in a quite general way, on background constraints of rationality. The reason, on this line, why we have trouble making sense of Schreber’s words is that he doesn’t appear to have a rational set of beliefs. Perhaps, then, supposing that what is rational is equivalent to or closely bound up with what is epistemically valuable, we see here an argument to show that epistemic values somehow underpin meaningful communication or thought more generally.

We see now that the issue between the pragmatist in Putnam’s mould and the quasi-realist is not a straightforward matter. There is one sense of content, and hence one way of reading Semantic Independence, that favours the latter, and another, compatible reading, that favours the former. That is to say, if we think that Moorean Independence is what isolates the relevant notion of ‘content’, then the quasi-realist appears to be in the ascendancy, but if we expand the notion of ‘content’ to cover the kinds of holistic considerations just mooted, then Putnam’s position gains credence.

A disappointing reaction to this would be to treat the two parties as simply talking past each other—to conclude that we need to disambiguate what we mean by the fact/value distinction, and once we have done so all

disagreement vanishes. It is better to think that there is still a substantive, though subtle, point of contention. There is a question as to what the *important* sense of content is for the purpose of the debate. The disagreement between Putnam and the quasi-realist itself must be taken to turn on the further significance of the kinds of independence and the kinds of entanglement that occur. In order to answer this question we need to look at another of Putnam's arguments.

### 5.5. PERMUTATION AND COMPANIONS IN GUILT

In addition to holism, Putnam criticises what he considers an overly robust notion of reference, doing so most forcefully in his *permutation argument* (shortly to be laid out). This gives rise to a *companions in guilt* argument against the fact/value distinction:

The structure [of the companions in guilt argument] is: “You [the quasi-realist] say that value judgements have no objective truth-value, that they are pure expressions of preference. But the reasons that you give [...] all apply immediately, and without the slightest change, to judgements of justification, warrant, reasonableness—to epistemic values more generally [...] But judgements of coreferentiality, and hence of reference and truth, depend on judgements of reasonableness. So instead of giving us a fact-value *dichotomy*, you have given us a reason for abandoning epistemic concepts, semantic concepts, indeed, abandoning the notion of a *fact* altogether.” (Putnam 1990b: 117).

In order to clarify the companions in guilt objection, we first need to lay out the permutation argument, and show why reference depends on reasonableness.<sup>13</sup> Consider, then, the claim ‘A cat is on a mat’. Naturally, it seems that ‘cat’ refers to cats, and ‘mat’ refers to mats. In terms of possible

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<sup>13</sup>I am here thinking of the argument as presented in *Reason, Truth and History* which Putnam seems to think is the strongest form of the argument (Cf. Putnam 1994b: 356-7). I overlook many of the further details relating to it, including for example the behaviour of terms in intensional contexts, because these are already independently well-discussed in the literature. See e.g. Hale and Wright 1997, which I follow in giving a standard interpretation in the third class of worlds. Putnam's own presentation complicates things by assigning non-standard referents in the third class too, but this is an unnecessary flourish.

world semantics, this amounts to the claim that the term ‘cat’ correlates with the cats in all the worlds, and ‘mat’ with the mats. A parallel course of reasoning goes for other claims, including ‘A cherry is on a tree’. Let’s refer to these two sentences as:

CAT: A cat is on a mat.

CHERRY: A cherry is on a tree.

But now imagine dividing all the worlds into the following three kinds:

1. A cat is on a mat and a cherry is on a tree.
2. A cat is on a mat but no cherry is on any tree.
3. All other worlds.

The crucial thought that gets the argument running is that if we restrict our attention to just the first class of worlds, we can see that if we were to stipulate that relative to those, the words ‘cat’ and ‘cherry’ had their references swapped, CAT and CHERRY wouldn’t change truth-value, providing that we also swap those for ‘mat’ and ‘tree’. Suppose, then, that we do this, and we specify that in the second and third classes of worlds, ‘cat’ refers to cats, ‘tree’ refers to trees and so on as usual. If this is done, then the truth-values of the sentences stay the same across all worlds, despite the reference relations having altered.

In essence, the permutation argument just generalises this thought. It states that in a sufficiently rich language (which doesn’t turn out to be very rich at all), there will be a permutation of this kind available for every sentence. Consequently, the truth-conditions of every sentence of the language can remain invariant under a variety of different reference assignments. Moreover, it’s not merely that we swap the extension of ‘cat’ for ‘cherry’ across the board, as though we were simply changing the name-tags. The permuted extension of the terms is different to the initial extension of either term. This is because each term refers to, as we may put it, a mixture of cats and cherries across the worlds.

The argument shows, then, that specifications of truth-conditions (in terms of truth at worlds at least) underdetermine reference assignments. We can permute the reference relations and still every sentence will be true

at exactly the same worlds that it was prior to permutation. Putnam's question, then, is what makes it a further fact, beyond the specification of truth-conditions, that the terms in question bear one reference relation rather than another.

His answer, in outline, is that the fact in question is determined merely by procedures of good theory building in semantics, which we may for example think of in terms of building a Davidsonian meaning theory for the language.<sup>14</sup> The idea is that only insofar as *our* interpretation practice finds one reference assignment more appropriate or reasonable than another permuted assignment, is our assignment correct. But the sense of correctness thereby entailed is implicitly relativised to our own predisposition to view that assignment as more appropriate.

Putnam initially designed the argument to work against the metaphysical realist, but as has been well remarked in the literature, it is rather hard to see how it could, in a direct way at least. The Realist maintains that there is a brute fact as to what the reference relations are. Moreover, he thinks that it is because there are brute facts about reference that there are facts as to what the truth-conditions for any given sentence are. Admittedly, says the Realist, those truth-conditions *could* be given by an alternative reference assignment, but that is beside the point. *I am a Realist about reference, after all*, thinks the Realist, and so it is no problem for *me*. It is a problem only for someone who already thinks that reference is somehow constructed out of the demands of giving an account of truth-conditions. So the kind of variability suggested by possibilities of permutation are worrying only for someone like Putnam, who already thinks that there can't be independent facts about reference relations. It isn't of concern to someone who has no prior scruples.<sup>15</sup>

It is best, then, if Putnam's argument is not taken to show that Realism is flatly incoherent. What the argument really shows is that we have a

<sup>14</sup>See e.g. Putnam 1994a: p.252 for a claim along these lines.

<sup>15</sup>Putnam's main response to this criticism has been the 'just more theory' response. On this reply, Putnam simply takes the Realist's words and permutes them! That is, he argues that the Realist's own description of whatever the real reference relations are can themselves be permuted. In which case, the relation the Realist singles out (by the words 'reference relation') is dependent on the same vicissitudes that the words 'cat' and 'cherry' are. This response, however, is widely recognised as question-begging. The permutation is only admissible if there is no independent fact as to what the reference of 'reference' is. And it is the claim of the Realist that there is such a fact. That isn't to say he's right, but there's nothing to show that he's wrong, and so the argument leaves him untouched.

choice: either we admit permutability, or we think reference is independent of whatever constraints are set by the mere assignment of truth-conditions. For anyone who believes that the latter is unacceptable, the argument will force its desired conclusion.

More specifically, the first question in the current context is whether the quasi-realist can make the Realist response. It seems as though he shouldn't. To accept brute reference relations would be foreign to the spirit of the broader quasi-realist view. It would show him up for what Putnam accuses him of being, a degenerate cousin of the Realist. He must, then, take the other option, and concede that reference depends, in the way Putnam maintains, on judgements about reasonableness. This being so, he must also face up to the associated companions in guilt argument. Is it the case that "instead of giving us a fact-value *dichotomy*, you [the quasi-realist] have given us a reason for abandoning epistemic concepts, semantic concepts, indeed, abandoning the notion of a *fact* altogether"? (Putnam 1990b: 117).

Putnam himself, however, doesn't give us the details of how the companions in guilt argument should apply to the quasi-realist in particular. One way, perhaps the way that Putnam has in mind, is that the quasi-realist's notion of deep level description is identical to the notion of Realist reference that the argument is aimed to undermine (or show the true price of). But that, it seems, is too quick. The argument would have to go as follows: The quasi-realist requires a notion of genuine reference to underpin his idea of descriptive content, but that is just the notion that the permutation argument has undermined; hence, quasi-realism is false. However, once again, this trades on a claim regarding the the relevant notion of 'content'. Specifically, it relies on the assimilation of descriptive content to Realist reference. But whether that is licit depends on the quasi-realist and how he wants to cash out his description/expression contrast.

The important question, then, is whether the tacit relativisation of facts about reference to what is deemed reasonable by different speech communities is consistent with the semantic independence of values and value-neutral facts, as the quasi-realist initially conceived it. In regard to *this* question, the answer appears capable of being in the affirmative. This is because there is no reason to suppose that the quasi-realist is working with any other notion of content than the one that is relativised to his speech community. That is to say, the sense in which he claims that epistemic values are independent of

the content of scientific claims seems to be relative to the content that those claims have, on our parochial way of taking them. That this is so follows from the fact that the semantic intuitions he appeals to when formulating the thesis of Moorean Independence are precisely intuitions about how we, in our parochial way, interpret the sentences in question. For example, he asks us whether ‘The Copenhagen Interpretation is the most beautiful of its kind’ entails ‘The Copenhagen Interpretation is true’. He then rests his case on assuming that we answer in the negative. At no point are we asked to back that answer up with a Realist assignment of reference relations. Instead, we are allowed to work with whatever notion of content we ordinarily do, i.e., one that by Putnam’s lights is informed by our judgements of reasonableness. The division that the quasi-realist posits is therefore one that appears initially to *already* be drawn with respect to the tacit relativisation that Putnam thinks the permutation argument enforces.

We here have an analogous situation to that which occurred earlier. Putnam’s attack on the quasi-realist relies on a particular way of construing the notion of ‘content’, and in particular descriptive content. The quasi-realist, on the other hand, appealing to the notion of content keyed to Moorean Independence, appears to have his interests elsewhere. Again, a disappointing response would be to think that the entire debate turned on a trivial, though perhaps hard-to-detect, ambiguity. It is better to think that once again we must decide what the relevant notion of ‘content’ *should* be, in order to properly decide the issue. Nothing in Putnam’s or Blackburn’s work will help us here, and we must go it alone. That is what we will now do.

## 5.6. THE TWO FACES OF ASSERTION

Neither the foregoing considerations from holism nor the permutation argument immediately refute the quasi-realist. In order to make headway on Putnam’s behalf, we need to appeal to something already hinted at, and which Putnam himself underplays but is nevertheless meat and drink to his pragmatist inclinations. This is the *constitutive* role of normative practical commitments in linguistic understanding. That is to say, we need appeal to the fact that even the plainest putatively deep-descriptive use of language is in itself a commitment to certain protocols for action.

We can think of this in terms of two different types of competence that

speakers require if they are to master the use of any given term. These two different types of competence can be thought of in terms of the speaker having answers (though not necessarily verbally explicable ones), of any given term, for example ‘elephant’, to two different questions. First, *how do you spot one?* and second, *what do you do with it?* To understand what ‘elephant’ means, you must have some idea how to gauge their presence, and also some idea of how to treat them. Truth may transcend the results of correctly exercising these capacities, but nevertheless, we only understand a given term if we possess them. (Of course, this an oversimplification, but it will not turn out to be a damaging one.)

The verificationist side of the coin is familiar. Suppose that someone confused the evidential criteria for the claim ‘That is an elephant’ with those for the sentence ‘That is a telephone’. So, for example, he would point to telephones, and call them ‘elephants’, and to elephants and call them ‘telephones’. As the familiar thought goes, barring special explanation, that person would not understand the meaning of either term. However, this is only one of two types of mistakes that can undermine competence. Suppose, for example, that someone were reliably able to perform the above tasks, but that nevertheless tried to contact distant relatives by speaking into the elephant’s trunk rather than the telephone receiver. Again, barring special explanation, such a speaker would not understand the use of the relevant terms. Or for those who prefer to think in terms of concepts, the speaker would not have grasped the relevant concepts. The failure to understand what follows from the application of the terms, both in thought and action, is just as great a failure as the former. Knowing the normal consequences – inferential and practical – of using a word are as important in determining competence as knowing the normal evidential grounds for using a word.

These remarks are of course consistent with the thought that in particular cases one may know what a word, for example ‘gasket’, means and not know how to spot one, and also that one may know what a word means and have strange beliefs or desires about the corresponding object. The point is that some constraints are in order and it’s only in virtue of these that competence is constituted. This much can be accepted by all parties. And moreover, it is consistent with rejecting a strong, reductive pragmatism or verificationism, because nowhere is it suggested that truth-conditions can be reduced to, e.g., verification conditions.

This general observation about language mastery can be used to support Putnam's thesis of entanglement. Insofar as a speaker manifests her linguistic competence by treating certain things in certain ways, i.e. in terms of what to do with certain objects, she also manifests part of what she thinks *ought* to be done. That is to say, she commits herself to certain norms regarding courses of action. To understand the structure of these norms we need to reconsider the earlier remarks on holism. These norms are not full-blown valuations, of the type that might be explicitly expressed by a claim of the form 'Telephones are to be used to call distant relatives', because in any particular case, an explicit statement of that form will far exceed whatever normative commitments are required for linguistic competence. Nevertheless, they are still normative commitments in the broader sense. They govern what a speaker of the language must think and do in order to count as a speaker of the language. In other words, the entanglement entailed by these considerations is merely holistic but real nonetheless. The example may seem trivial and humourous, but the underlying point is not, as the earlier case of Schreber shows. In order to join the community of thinkers, we must play by the rules.

To re-iterate, given enough background, strange behaviour can be explained away. A speaker does not, in knowing a language, commit herself to any particular pragmatic norm. The point, however, is that she is not free to simultaneously violate all, or perhaps even the majority of norms that partially constitute our understanding of the language.<sup>16</sup> We can see

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<sup>16</sup>This phenomenon regarding practical norms is, once again, the mirror image of a phenomenon well known in the case of verification criteria. It is generally acknowledged that for any purported list of evidential criteria for applying a certain term, for example 'gold', one may usually without self-contradiction consider a possibility where the term truly applies and yet the criteria are unsatisfied, and *vice versa*. One may, for example, imagine the possibility that gold is actually blue. Perhaps, for example, we have been fooled all along by strange lighting conditions wherever gold has been present. This in itself is consistent with our having understood the meaning, in one perfectly good sense of 'meaning' of the term 'gold'. When we claim that the gold is blue we do not commit a *contradictio in adjecto*. However, the case becomes more problematic if we try to imagine that gold, i.e. all the gold in the world, is actually the third rung on the ladder leading up to the roof of the Gibbs building in King's College Cambridge. The standard verification criteria and the thing itself, one may feel, can't come *this* far apart. Someone who thought they could would betray a misunderstanding of the term 'gold'.

Or at least, this is so unless there is a great amount of stage-setting to understand how the criteria and the facts may have diverged to such a great extent. If, for example, we imagine a science fiction scenario where the rung on that ladder was an alien object that beamed out psychic rays that were responsible for all the experiences typically associated with gold, so that rather than our experiences of gold being caused by metals in the ground



this illustrated in Putnam's example from C.I. Lewis, or more thoroughly by judge Schreber. This kind of 'entanglement' is profound; it shows that our understanding of the world is inextricably linked with the acceptance of a vast network of practical norms. The web of our belief is indeed 'red tinted' with value, in this sense at least.<sup>17</sup>

Now, once again, this tint may appear compatible with the fact/value distinction as the quasi-realist conceives it. The kind of valuations that he is concerned with are those prototypically expressed by obviously-valuational assertions, for example 'Murder is wrong' in the ethical case, and 'The Copenhagen Interpretation is the most beautiful' in the case of physics. And as we have seen, the kinds of valuational commitment entangled in the holistic web are not straightforwardly expressed by statements of this kind. That is to say, it is not merely that no individual not-obviously-valuational statement entails an obviously-valuational statement or *vice versa*; but that even the web as a whole need entail *no particular* statement of this kind. The point can be put in terms of supervenience. One could fix the web of belief of two speakers so that they mastered the same language and agreed on all the same obviously valuational claims (however many Putnam would like to adduce) and yet their views as to whether, say, the Copenhagen interpretation were true, might differ without it being entailed that either had fallen into self-contradiction.

It remains a point of contention, therefore, as to whether the quasi-realist's position is compromised by the above considerations. For all that has been said so far, it seems that if the quasi-realist wants to retain his distinction in terms of the notion of content keyed to Moorean Independence, then an appeal to holism and the above described intertwining can only qualify his position and not undermine it. He can accept that the 'lore of our fathers', of which Quine spoke, is red tinted with value in the discussed sense, without seeing that tint as obscuring the distinction he wishes to draw between paradigmatically valuational and non-valuational

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they were in fact spontaneous visions brought about by the ladder rung, then perhaps it would be right to say that gold *was* in fact that rung. The point, nonetheless, is that these strange cases can only be explained within the background of a large number of normal cases that allow the stage setting to take place. We can't also suppose that we were equally wrong about metals, colours, the Gibbs building etc.

<sup>17</sup>A conversation with Paul Boghossian convinced me that this relies on an externalist assumption about content that ought to be made more explicit. I can only note this here, and would have to leave it to other work to defend that assumption ASW 18.06.11.

commitment. We can imagine him saying, “*Okay, perhaps I can accept that normative commitment in the sense described above is ‘entangled’ in one sense of the word, in all linguistic commitments. The point remains that the separation of prototypical value judgements and prototypical factual judgements is an interestingly distinct phenomenon, and one that demands explanation along the lines that I give. By running everything together the pragmatist fails to see the wood for the trees, and simply gives up on the important project.*”

Where the new considerations increase the pressure on the quasi-realist, however, is by presenting more clearly how a certain kind of entanglement occurs. The present claim is not that Moorean Independence marks no kind of distinction at all, but rather to weaken the motivation for thinking that it is an especially important distinction. This is done by showing in more detail than Putnam does, how all semantic competence incorporates normative commitment. To push the point against the quasi-realist further, it is necessary to decide whether or not this form of normative commitment is in competition with the account that the quasi-realist gives.

As it was put earlier, the task for the quasi-realist is not merely to show that there is a distinction to be drawn between two classes of statement *à la* Moorean Independence. The task is also to explain that distinction and its significance. Moore, for example, famously thought it was to be explained by the fact that value properties were non-natural, and the importance of this fact is relatively plain. The quasi-realist, on the other hand, claims it is because one class is descriptive and one is expressive. We need to probe this claim further.

### 5.7. EXPRESSING ATTITUDES AND DIRECTION OF FIT

The pressing task for the quasi-realist, signalled by the above concerns, is to state what the description/expression contrast consists in. If we grant, for example, that Moorean Independence occurs, there is still the question as to why it occurs, and whether, given the above, it is important.

Traditionally, the description/expression contrast has been keyed to certain psychological states, description with belief or belief-like states, and expressions with desire or desire-like states. There is a question, however, as to how psychologistic the quasi-realist intends to be, and relatedly, how

narrowly he understands the term ‘psychological state’. If he is very bold, then he may key it to the independent studies of psychology, It will then become a largely empirical matter as to whether certain statements match up with the relevant states.

The quasi-realist, however, does not typically want to be as bold as this. His programme is not, on this view, one of empirical research; it is something more like the *a priori* mapping of certain forms of explanation, explanation that we sometimes call ‘psychological’, but is to be understood in a certain degree of independence from that discipline as it is often practised.<sup>18</sup>

The freedom that the distancing from, roughly speaking, empirical psychology, brings, is accompanied by a concomitant lack of substance, or rather the quasi-realist simply forgoes the additional substance that empirical psychology might have provided. One way of trying to beef up the position is by appeal to the metaphor of *direction of fit*. An assertion is said to have word-to-world (or belief-like) direction of fit if it aims to shape itself to the world. These are the deep-level descriptions. An assertion has world-to-word (or desire-like) direction of fit if it aims to shape the world according to *it*. Paradigmatic sentences with this direction of fit are imperatives like ‘Pick that up!’ The quasi-realist, however, believes that the functional generalisation needn’t be keyed to grammatical mood or similar factors, but that truth-apt declarative sentences like ‘Murder is wrong’ may also have the desire-like direction of fit.

If we key this difference to the fact/value distinction, we can frame quasi-realism as making two claims. First, at the ‘deep’ semantic level, valuational assertions always have desire-like direction of fit. Second, some non-valuational assertions, for example the claims of physics, have (purely) belief-like direction of fit. When applied to the above discussion, the quasi-realist thesis consists in the claim, considering the scientific case, that although the web of our belief is red-tinted with value, it is nevertheless worth distinguishing between explicitly valuational commitments like ‘The Copenhagen interpretation is especially beautiful’ which have desire-like direction of fit, and statements like ‘The Copenhagen Interpretation is true’, which have belief-like direction of fit. For ease of reference:

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<sup>18</sup>This sense of *a priori* can be understood as linked to the respective status of Moorean Independence. The quasi-realist does not typically think that we might one day find a new obviously-valuational statement that *did* imply a not-obviously-valuational statement.

World-to-word/Desire-like: The Copenhagen Interpretation is beautiful.

Word-to-world/Belief-like: The Copenhagen Interpretation is true.

A few preliminary points need to be clarified. First, since we are dealing with epistemic values the case is a little less stark than when dealing with ethical values. The judgement ‘The Copenhagen interpretation is beautiful’ doesn’t try to change the world in the same way that ‘Murder is wrong’ does. Nevertheless, we can think of the former judgement as aimed at changing real world intellectual or scientific practice, e.g. which theory we select, just as we think of the latter as aimed at changing moral practice. Second, a term like ‘beautiful’ introduces questions regarding ‘thick’ terms, since ‘beautiful’, whilst seemingly valuational, may appear also to have some deep-level descriptive function. At this stage, however, we’ll treat only of the term ‘beautiful’ insofar as it has at least *some* valuational content. (More will be said on thick terms shortly.)

The problem, then, comes when we try to reconcile the above characterisation of the quasi-realist view with the alleged constitutive role of pragmatic norms in language mastery. According to the arguments of the previous section, it is a general feature of language use that we need to not only understand how to marshal evidential criteria, but also practical criteria for action on the basis of that evidence. We need to know both how to spot an ‘elephant’, and what to do with one. This presents a problem because it seems to imply that *every* statement has *both* directions of fit. That is to say, in order to master any statement, one must accept both the evidential and practical norms. We may put this by saying that all statements are ‘bidirectional’. Insofar as we have any independent grasp of the distinction between the norms of verification and the norms regarding what follows in thought and action from the application of terms, it seems as though they should translate into the metaphor of direction of fit. Specifically, the very idea of a practical commitment to treat an object a certain way, e.g. as a telephone, appears to be a commitment to make the world a certain way, i.e. one in which the object is used in that way.

The point, then, is that even if we accept Moorean Independence, the quasi-realist may on reflection have poor resources for explaining what it

really comes to. This is because his metaphorical notion of direction of fit applies just as well, and with no clear variation in sense, to the more general phenomena earlier described. So the problem is not so much that the quasi-realist hasn't found an interesting distinction between different discourses; it's merely that he hasn't gone on to explain, as yet, why that distinction exists, nor why it is important.

At this point the problems intersect with those regarding 'thick terms' in ethics. These are terms like 'courageous' and 'stupid' that appear to have both directions of fit if they have either. They display more explicitly the dual nature of bidirectional concepts. The following section will examine them and relate the findings to the above concerns.

### 5.8. THICK TERMS

As just stated, the problem of thick terms regards words like 'courage' and 'stupidity', which appear to have both directions of fit if they have either. So, for example, to call Socrates courageous, on this line of thought, is to express an attitude of endorsement, and thus to try, in the broadest sense, to shape the world, but *also* to describe some independently inhering property of Socrates. This contrasts with prototypical thin terms like 'good', which according to the quasi-realist are wholly expressive. The contrast can be brought out by considering what we learn when we are told that Socrates is respectively either good or courageous. If we are merely told that he is good then all we know – on this line – is that our informant holds Socrates in high regard. If, on the other hand, we are told that he is courageous, we can form an expectation from a position of ignorance as to what he is like, even in non-valuational terms. We can rule out, for example, that he has been in a coma since birth.<sup>19</sup>

The discussion in the literature regarding thick terms is complicated, with different parties sometimes appearing to talk past each other.<sup>20</sup> Once again, therefore, it will be necessary to tease out various distinct theses, held by ostensibly opposing parties, which may not turn out on reflection

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<sup>19</sup>Putnam's discussion of thick terms is laced with the idea of context-sensitivity, and the idea that a term like 'cruel' can be an expression of attitude in one context and a description in another. This point is not discussed here because it is treated at length in ch.4.

<sup>20</sup>For an up-to-date discussion and a partial retrospective summary see Elstein and Hurka 2009.

to be incompatible. As a point of terminology, we'll use 'thick terms' to mean terms like 'courage', 'stupidity' etc., *not* as meaning any particular theoretical account of such terms, for example the quasi-realist account. That is to say, we'll speak of every side as agreeing that there are thick terms; the disagreement will simply concern what the correct philosophical account of them is.

It needs to be mentioned that Blackburn's own response to the problem is to claim that thick terms *don't* have both directions of fit. For him, the quasi-realist account should place terms like 'courage' on the same side of the fence as terms like 'big', with terms like 'good' and 'right' on the other side. In the end, this might be the only possible position for the quasi-realist, but the reason it won't be pursued from the off is that by limiting the phenomena of which it treats to thin cases, the quasi-realist loses – or so it seems to me – too much of what pre-theoretically counts as valuational discourse. The quasi-realist that we here consider will therefore be of a different sort, i.e. one who supposes that thick terms *do* have both directions of fit, or rather, if he is not to use the direction of fit metaphor, somehow can be viewed in quasi-realist terms, as expression/description hybrids.

It is sometimes argued against the quasi-realist that thick terms cannot be *analysed* into two components, one which is descriptive and one which is evaluative. We cannot, for example, analyse a speaker's utterance of a statement of form (1) as a statement of form (2) (where the '!Hurrah!' clause signals endorsement):

- (1) Socrates is courageous.
- (2) Socrates has some describable properties X and !Hurrah! for Socrates *qua* possessor of X.

Now, the analysis whose possibility is doubted may either be analysability in practice or analysability in principle. If it is the former, then the demand upon the quasi-realist is too strong. Asking for actual reductions is impossible in almost all cases of natural language terms. The practical unavailability of such a reduction – i.e. a specification of X – is no objection to the thesis that the term has two components, one of which is descriptive and one of which is expressive. If, on the other hand, the claim is that there is no possibility of an analysis even in principle, then the onus appears equally

to be on the opponent of the quasi-realist to show why this is so.

One way of trying to discharge this burden would be by citing the claim, popular amongst some opponents of quasi-realism, that learning the use of thick terms is impossible for someone who does not immerse themselves within the attitudes they are alleged to embody. The idea is that one cannot learn how to apply a term like ‘courageous’ simply by learning a descriptive specification of the conditions in which it applies, and then grafting the relevant expression of attitude on top. It is essential that one empathises with the expressive aspect in order to learn how to use it at all, even if one ultimately refuses to accept the attitude embodied by that expression.<sup>21</sup>

However, even if the claim about (un)learnability is true, it is of unclear significance for the quasi-realist. In general, we draw a line between the necessary conditions for learning the meaning of terms and the content of the terms themselves. It may be, for example, that people can only come to learn mathematics by using written signs or small plastic blocks, but that doesn’t show that the content of mathematical claims incorporates reference to such things.

It might, however, be argued that the retreat to an ‘in principle’ analysis of two types of content is a sign of desperation. If there is no *actual* prospect of analysis, then the quasi-realist needs to provide reason to believe that there is any possibility of even an in principle analysis. And matters here become complicated by the fact that without a clear explanation of what the description/expression contrast consists in, it isn’t clear what format an analysis should take.<sup>22</sup>

What is interesting here, however, is that both parties agree to a thesis that entails that a certain kind of in principle analysis is possible. This is because both Putnam and the quasi-realist agree that obviously-valuational properties (or as I’ll briefly call them simply ‘value properties’) supervene on not-obviously-valuational properties (or as I’ll briefly call them ‘value-

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<sup>21</sup>There is a well-recognised contrast here with some terms for which analyses certainly *would* work, like ‘Boche’. In these cases, one can easily learn that the term is a slur being applied to citizens of a certain nation, without making an effort to empathise with that attitude.

<sup>22</sup>Of course, matters would be clear for the quasi-realist if he accepted Putnam’s poisoned chalice of Realist reference. If he did so, then the question whether a term was somehow descriptive would simply be the question of whether it Really referred. But the quasi-realist here contemplated doesn’t accept that offer (and it probably wouldn’t help).

neutral properties').<sup>23</sup> That is to say, any two objects alike in regard to their value-neutral properties will be alike in regard to their value properties. For example, if St. Francis was a good man, then anyone who did everything that St. Francis did, insofar as it can be described in value-neutral terms, would also have been a good man.

Supervenience, however, entails analysis in principle, of a certain kind at least. We simply take the disjunction of all the possible value-neutral ways that things might be for someone to be, e.g. courageous, and label it as the descriptive content. That is to say, we go across all the possible worlds picking out all the courageous things, and then form the minimal disjunction of what value-neutral properties they have in common. Now of course, we can't do this in practice, but as long as we think there are any facts at all about the extension of 'courageousness', then there will be *these* facts, which a perfect mind could apprehend. It doesn't matter if these facts are created by a method of projection or whether they are mind-independent. It might be, for example, that the extension is only as it is because it is an expression of attitude (we'll say more about this shortly). For now, we merely need to note that by supervenience, we can then infer two things. First, anything that makes this disjunction true will satisfy 'is courageous'. Second, anything that *doesn't* satisfy that disjunction won't. The point, of course, is that what we *don't* have, given supervenience, is an individual in some world who is exactly like some other in all respects other than being courageous. That would be for there to be difference in the value facts without there being a difference in the value-neutral facts. But then as long as this is so, we can simply import that value-neutral disjunction into our analysis in place of 'X'.<sup>24</sup>

The problem for this response is that it seems to do away with the need for the valuational component altogether. The descriptive condition will itself be necessary and sufficient for the correct application of the term. Thus, an argument of this form is used by some authors, for example Frank

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<sup>23</sup>Blackburn 1993, Putnam 1994a: p.252, 1994c: p.290.

<sup>24</sup>Some quasi-realists might claim that the description given by this disjunction won't correspond to the intuitively correct descriptive content to be imported into the analysis. I am not sure whether this is a stable position, because the extension of the disjunction will be coextensive with the extension of the thick term, and it seems that this should be necessary for descriptive correctness. If, however, the quasi-realist has an independent criterion of descriptive content then that is even better for him. If not, then perhaps the current solution is the best available.



Jackson, as a reason to think a purely descriptive reduction of moral values in precisely these terms is possible (Jackson 2000: 122-5). That, however, would be too quick. The point that the quasi-realist should stress is that, borrowing a term from Blackburn, the disjunction, when viewed solely on its own terms, would be *shapeless*.<sup>25</sup> There would be no explanation as to why these varying conditions warranted the application of a particular term, for example, ‘courageous’. The explanation, the quasi-realist may then argue, is precisely that speakers use the term partly as an endorsement, or to express an attitude. It is only when we bring the speaker as an interested party into the equation that we can make sense of courage forming a single kind. Attitude brings a design to what is otherwise without form.

Looking at matters in this way alters the appearance of the quasi-realist position from that under which it is often attacked. A common way of criticising it, one that traditional formulations invite, is as follows: The quasi-realist is seen as requiring a substantive notion of deep-level description, to be grounded perhaps by some Realist notion of reference, which he can then contrast with, say, expressive content. The attack then focuses on showing why the requisite notion of deep description is unavailable. On the current picture, on the other hand, the challenge is simply to explain why the term has the extension it does. In some cases, this kind of quasi-realist states, the extension is best explained by the role of sentiment or expressive attitude. In other cases, it isn’t. This, then, makes the important difference. What is notable is that the idea of ‘deep-level’ description turns out to be a negatively defined category. What counts as a description is not what is independently explained by, say, a fortified notion of reference, but is rather what isn’t explained by introducing human sentiment of a broadly desire-like type.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>It ought to be re-iterated that the view here attributed to the quasi-realist is not Blackburn’s own, since Blackburn does not think that thick terms have an expressive component.

<sup>26</sup>It might be thought that this equates the ‘descriptive’ component with the minimal surface level sense of ‘description’ that is given by the platitudes. If this is the case then the view here proposed comes close to one that is already present in the literature. I examine a view of this kind, that of Macarthur and Price (2007) and its relation to the current proposal in the concluding chapter. A possible difference is that the sense of ‘description’ given here appears stronger than that required for, say, satisfaction of the platitudes. It would seem, on the face of it, possible for there to be a well disciplined assertion practice that didn’t have the supervenience constraint, and thus didn’t equate to an in principle naturalistic description in the way that the above argument suggests..

This, admittedly, is only one possible way of formulating quasi-realism. I think, however, that the moral to be drawn from Putnam's arguments, and the foregoing discussion, is that it is one of the more promising ways of doing so. Or rather, it is a natural way of formulating thesis for someone who is impressed by Putnam's arguments against Realist reference.

### 5.9. PANDORA'S BOX

It might be argued, however, that the above thesis offers an explanation where none can be given. An objection along these lines will say *"If there is to be a question of truth then there is a question as to the extension of the term; once the extension is specified the predicate will be true of anything falling in that extension and false of anything else. How we specify that extension, whether it be by projecting our sentiment or whatever, is beside the point. That belongs to a different theory altogether. There is no more a general question of why the extension is as it is than there is a question as to what, say, daffodils have in common i.e. why the concept 'daffodil' has the extension that it does."*

We might call this the 'Pandora's box' objection. In more detail, it states that what gives a concept's extension its 'shape' will always be susceptible to an indefinite variety of explanations. Once we go beyond the trivial disquotational answer, for example that what 'courageous' things have in common is that they are courageous, or what 'stupid' things have in common is that they are stupid, there is no end to the variety of explanations that we will have to give, and no end to the variety of terms for which they will need to be given. For example, we will need analogous explanations for seemingly unproblematic terms, like 'table' and 'donkey'. These objects do not, after all, name themselves.

Now, it might be that there are answers for some terms that need to incorporate less information about human sentiment or attitude. But this will be only one dimension along which possible explanations may be demanded. It is not as though, for example, there are natural kind terms that carve reality directly at the joints, and then there are simply the traditional thick terms, so that we only need two basic types of story, one for the former and one for the latter. Instead, we may reasonably expect there to be an indefinite variety and gradation of cases. To explain the extension

of ‘hippopotamus’, for example, one may need to cite human relations to the animal kingdom. Otherwise one won’t explain why we distinguish them from pygmy hippopotami, when we don’t distinguish very large seas from very small seas. A size-biased alien, for example, may fail to understand why we distinguish between the hippopotamus and the pygmy hippopotamus and yet not between the Sea of Marmara (4382km<sup>2</sup>) and the South China Sea (3.5m km<sup>2</sup>), given that the size difference is far greater in the latter case than the former. Or again, to explain why hereditary monarchies such as that of the United Kingdom and elective monarchies such as that of the Vatican both count as ‘monarchies’ whereas the Dutch republic with its hereditary *stadtholder* does not, we need to cite historical and political theory. Even when considering the most elite of elite classes, for example the standard model of physics, one may hold it necessary to explain why it corresponds to the extension of one of our terms, given that it is not in general necessary for a class to do so that it be elite. The point is that once we begin to demand explanations in the way here suggested, it seems as though the quasi-realist account will be just one of a vast plurality of explanations that can be given for the many different terms of our language.

#### 5.10. SHAPELESS ATTITUDES

The quasi-realist, on the other hand, will respond that what the above shows is that his theory will be part of the story, just not the whole story. Depending on how extreme he wants his thesis to be, this may or may not stand as a problem for him. If he is of the type Putnam considers, one who requires a Dichotomy that can be “applied to absolutely every judgement in absolutely every area” and that means that “all philosophical problems would be solved at once” (Putnam 2004: 10-11), then perhaps to qualify his position in this way would be too great a concession. But as already stated, the character we are considering is a distinguishing quasi-realist, who needs have no truck with such grand ideas.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>A deflationary objection of the above form has a bad variant that goes along the lines offered by Cappelen and Lepore in regard to contextualist arguments in semantic theory (Cappelen and Lepore 2005: 155-75). The contextualist, argue Cappelen and Lepore, asks us to draw upon intuitions that belong to metaphysics rather than semantics. That is to say, he asks us whether what counts as ‘big’ in one context is really the same as what counts as ‘big’ in another. When we are stuck to say what, for example, is held in common between a big flea and a big castle, we are tempted to think that the content of the expression ‘big’ varies between the two cases. But, claim Cappelen and Lepore,

The question, then, is not whether there are other possible interesting explanations for the extensions of our terms, but whether the quasi-realist succeeds in giving his explanation as at least part of the complete story. He is committed to the claim that the extension of a term like ‘courageous’ can only have its shape properly explained if we view that extension as formed as a partial result of expressing attitudes. The problem arises when we ask him what the attitude associated with it has to unify *itself*. What attitude does one express when calling someone courageous? We may say in outline that it is a positive attitude, to be contrasted for example with the negative attitude associated with calling someone ‘cowardly’, and that perhaps is why we are reticent to apply it to someone who, for example, fought to uphold apartheid. But the distinction here between positive and negative attitudes doesn’t hold up to scrutiny. We don’t have a general idea of what it is to have a pro-attitude to the variety of different objects that constitute a particular extension, in the same way that we *do* have a purely formal idea of what it is for an object to fall under a term. It is not, for example, as though we give a mental thumbs-up to each of them. (More will be said on this shortly.)

To further clarify the nature of the problem, it is not that there is any incoherence in supposing that different thick terms don’t share the same expressive component as each other. It is perfectly okay to hold that ‘Socrates is courageous’ has one type of expressive component and ‘Socrates is kind’ has another. One might, that is, hold that the analyses go along the following lines:

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this is to make the study of semantics dependent on the study of metaphysics. If we accept the contextualist’s demands as valid then we leave all semantic questions as hostage to metaphysical fortune. Their alternative is to rely on disquotational specifications of contents. To call something ‘big’ is just to state that it is big. Questions regarding the nature of size can then be left to metaphysicians to solve how and when they choose.

The problem with this kind of response, however, is that it only possesses force insofar as it is worth distinguishing the discipline of semantics from other disciplines. It may well be that at a certain level, it is correct to give a uniform account of all terms, for the reasons suggested above. But that doesn’t show that to come to a proper understanding of the use of given terms, we shouldn’t ask further questions regarding their function. Moreover, it doesn’t ultimately matter if the specification of that function shades into the metaphysics of ethics, or psychology, or so on. What is important in the present case, for example, is whether the quasi-realist can make a philosophically interesting and sound explanation of the terms in question. If their function can be differentiated from the function of other terms along roughly the lines that he proposes, then the essential value of his thesis is preserved. Cappelen and Lepore are asking for less, but the quasi-realist is letting them have that and giving them more too.

(1\*) Socrates is courageous.

(2\*) Socrates has some describable properties X and *!Hurrah-1!* for Socrates *qua* possessor of X.

(3) Socrates is kind.

(4) Socrates has some describable properties Y and *!Hurrah-2!* for Socrates *qua* possessor of Y.

If the quasi-realist takes this option, then he strays from the simplest model, whereby the same expressive component occurs in each case. But that is not to undermine the coherence or the force of his view. It is merely to complicate it. The problem, instead, is that we have no genuine idea of what could go in the place of the ‘!Hurrah!’ clauses even in specific cases. One can see this by imagining what it would be to follow the order *Treat the courageous things as though they were kind*—i.e. treat the objects falling under the extension of ‘courageous’ according to the expressive component contained in the concept ‘kind’.

If the expressive component of the two were independently comprehensible, then one would be able to pick out the courageous things using one’s normal judgement (or whatever method), and then simply apply the world-to-word component corresponding to the word ‘kind’. But, the objection goes, we can’t imagine what it would be like to do this even in principle. Consider, for example, the actions of the Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc, who in 1963 burned himself alive in protest at the then current South Vietnam regime. This would, for many, be a paradigm example of an act falling within the extension of ‘courageous’. It is, however, not clear what one could then do to treat this as a *kind* act. To treat something as kind is something that we can only make sense of in regard to a certain range of objects or actions—those that we usually consider kind. When divorced from those objects, the world-to-word direction of fit, or the attitude, or whatever the non-descriptive component is supposed to be, itself appears shapeless. We can no more understand it as possessing unity outside its application to a particular extension than we can understand the extension possessing unity independently of it. Indeed, the problem is even more acute, since we don’t have an analogue to the idea of an *extension*, which can formally unite the

attitude in the same way that the idea of an extension can formally unite the description. I.e. we don't even have analysis in principle.

In this regard, there is an asymmetry between descriptive and evaluative content. Descriptive content, it is natural to think, can be specified, extensionally at least, simply by arbitrarily assigning a profile across possible worlds. So, for example, we can specify the descriptive content of a predicate like 'grue' by stipulating what counts as 'grue' in what worlds, according to the standard definition. Gerrymandered concepts of this kind are an illustration of the fact that our formal understanding of the notions of truth, reference, satisfaction, extension and their relatives allows us to have a highly general and abstract understanding of truth-conditional semantics. The idea of descriptive content is at home here, and can for the most part be considered as nothing over and above the kind of content that can be specified in these terms. The contrast, then, is with expressive content. There is no analogue to the standard formal machinery with which we can come to an abstract understanding of what it is to express an attitude.<sup>28</sup> With even this gone, our attempts to formulate the required analysis seem to fail of proper sense.<sup>29</sup>

### 5.11. THIN TERMS

There is a question as to whether the same problem carries over to thin ethical terms like 'good'. According to the quasi-realist, such terms serve only to express attitude, or have only world-to-word direction of fit. If this is so, then he might articulate his position by distinguishing only between those and all other terms, both thick and putatively value-neutral. The outcome would be a more limited thesis, since, as mentioned earlier, thick terms are often thought to comprise a large part of our valuational discourse. Nevertheless, he might be able to catch the paradigm cases, like 'good' in his net.

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<sup>28</sup>The fact that we have no such general idea, and the fact that that is problematic, shouldn't be masked by the use of the '*qua*' clause in our putative analysis. Whilst this signals that our attitude is specific to the descriptive properties in question, it gives us no better independent idea of what the attitude is.

<sup>29</sup>Opponents of quasi-realist treatments of thick terms, for example McDowellians, often describe their position as being that the elements of the terms aren't even 'notionally separable'. I suppose that description would fit the current conclusion, though I'm wary of assimilating the view too closely with that of, say, McDowell, because he places his views within a larger background philosophy whose bearing I am unsure of.

The quasi-realist seems to be on stronger ground in the case of ‘good’ than he is with terms like ‘courageous’, because we can readily see that its semantics are tied more closely to the function of endorsement. Indeed, we might characterise it as the most general device of approval. It is because of this that we are familiar with its role, for example, in explaining motivation. We know that if someone asserts that such and such is a ‘good’ thing to do, then we know also that he has some inclination to further its performance, or if, in terms of epistemic value, someone claims that a theory is good, then we have reason to believe he will select it.<sup>30</sup> Similar thoughts go for ‘good’ objects. If we are told by someone that a particular wine is ‘good’, then we expect that he will happily drink it, and so on. A complementary point goes in regard to what we might pre-theoretically call its descriptive aspect. Insofar as we are told only that something is ‘good’, we have very little idea what it is. It might, for all we know, be a fine wine or a winning move in a chess game. The conclusion to draw, the quasi-realist might argue, is that ‘good’ has an appreciably different function from prototypically descriptive terms like ‘square’ or ‘elephant’. The attitudinal component of ‘good’, we might say, is fairly shapely.

However, there appear to be limits as to just how different its function can be, given what has already been argued about the nature of language mastery, and even in regard to what the quasi-realist himself argues regarding the objectivity of value-judgement. In regard to the former, it would seem that deviance regarding the application of the term ‘good’ could in principle lead to unintelligibility in just the same way that deviant uses of terms like ‘elephant’ and ‘telephone’ might. If, for example, we consider someone who claims that a saucer of mud is ‘good’, we may struggle to make sense of their claim, thinking perhaps that they misunderstand the meaning of the term ‘good’. This is despite the fact that in this case as in others, intelligibility can come with adequate stage setting. If, for example, we thought that the person in question had suffered a traumatic episode and become convinced that saucers of mud were slow-moving but friendly animals, then we would be able to see her as understanding the meaning of

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<sup>30</sup>One can accept this without accepting the stronger thesis of Humean psychology – the thesis that valuation is necessary for motivation – that authors like Blackburn favour. Even if, as Putnam claims, Humean psychology is false, still judgements as to value play a special role in psychological explanation in that they offer highly general reasons for action.

the term despite her strange applications of it. We can cast our mind back to judge Schreber to see whereabouts the borders of intelligibility lie. The point, once again, however, is that these cases can only exist as part of a larger background of ordinary use.

This idea also relates to the way in which the quasi-realist deliberately shadows the realist structure of disagreement, or accepts small 'o' objectivity. The fact that this minimal level of objectivity applies limits the functional divergence of attitude-based discourse and descriptive discourse. The most obvious way in which this is so is the constraint of supervenience. Once a connection between a particular descriptive specification and the expressive claim has been made, the speaker is obliged to display the same attitude towards descriptively identical states of affairs. It is, therefore, largely as though he is operating with a term that simply describes them. This is in addition to further features, for example the fact that we share a human tendency to have similar sympathetic reactions in similar situations, a tendency that is reinforced by the processes of socialisation with which language learning is bound up. That is to say, we must be taught words like 'good' in regard to things commonly viewed as good. This is so not only because these are the things that happen to be viewed as good by our teachers (most likely our parents), as a matter of coincidence, but also because we learn to speak as part of a broader process of socialisation, in which we are taught to have certain attitudes towards certain things. If we happen to have deviant attitudes as children, we will not be taught to use the word 'good' to express them; rather, we will have our attitudes changed as we are taught to use the word 'good'.

At best, then, there is a sliding scale between expressive and descriptive discourse, with thin terms like 'good' at one end, with terms from, e.g. natural science, at the other, and with thick terms in the middle. All of these, however, will show similarities deriving from the above considerations. They limit the extent to which even the thin terms can behave differently to the paradigmatically value-neutral or descriptive terms like those of science. Moreover, the functional differences the quasi-realist attempts to explain by the differing directions of fit and different attitudes will be, as noted earlier, largely inexpressible in non-disquotational terms. It is therefore unclear as to what extent quasi-realism has any explanation at all for the difference in function.



This distinction will, furthermore, have to compete with many other explanations as to why even terms like ‘monarchy’ and ‘hippopotamus’ have the extensions that they do. Unless we are dealing with something akin to Aristotelian natural kinds, we will in principle require an explanation as to why a concept’s extension has the shape that it does. Indeed, even if we *are* dealing with natural kinds or elite classes, there will still be the question as to why our concepts have those kinds as their extension, given that in general our terms do not.

#### 5.11.0.8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The quasi-realist is liable to feel that a heavily qualified view of this kind does not constitute an authentic statement of his position. If this is so, however, then according to the arguments above, this stands as an objection to quasi-realism. If, on the other hand, the quasi-realist is amenable to a moderate position of this nature, then there is the further question as to whether the view that results is compatible with Putnam’s. Putnam himself, as has already been stated, is not opposed to a mere Distinction, but only the starker Dichotomy. His aim, as he puts it, is to ‘disinflate’ the latter and thus shrink it to the former.

Depending, then, on the extent to which ‘disinflation’ must take place before Putnam is satisfied, it may be that he and the quasi-realist can settle on mutually acceptable terms. Putnam, after all, needs to make some kind of distinction between obviously-valuational judgements and not-obviously-valuational judgements. Otherwise his view collapses into the kind of blanket monism that he wishes to avoid. For all that has been said so far, he might thus be motivated to accept the moderate quasi-realist position.

As a reminder, in the introduction to this dissertation was presented the following quote from Putnam:

[...] I shall be defending what one might call *pragmatic pluralism*, the recognition that it is no accident that in everyday language we employ many different kinds of discourses, discourses subject to different standards and possessing different sorts of applications, with different logical and grammatical features—different “language games” in Wittgenstein’s sense—no accident because it is an illusion that there could be just one language game which

could be sufficient for the description of all reality! (Putnam 2004: 21-2).

As has been noted, ‘pragmatic pluralism’ as here heralded is not the same as pluralism in the Blackburn/Wright/Dummett vein. But it is surely misguided to be in the business of anything that could be described in the terms Putnam uses above and then to simply overlook the kinds of phenomena that the quasi-realist has picked up on. Specifically, the thesis of Moorean Independence appears to indicate that there is a demand for some kind of special explanation as to the function of obviously-valuational terms. The shortcoming of the quasi-realist position, on the other hand, is to have overlooked the value-ladenness of all language. Moreover, his treatment of thick terms is deficient, and even that of thin terms is of less consequence than he would desire.

But let us now turn the tables. What does Putnam have to say about the “many different kinds of discourses, discourses subject to different standards and possessing different sorts of applications, with different logical and grammatical features”, of which he speaks?

## Chapter 6

# : Internal realism, pragmatic pluralism

PUTNAM OFFERS A RIVAL VIEW to Blackburn's. An important difference between the two camps is that Putnam often focuses on the rational standing between different worldviews. For example, whereas the quasi-realist tries to distinguish between ethical discourse and the discourse of physics, Putnam seems more concerned to adjudicate between alternative versions of physics, or more generally, different accounts of the world. The task he sets himself is to show the structure of this apparent competition and where possible, to defuse it. In that regard, his concerns lie perhaps more in the territory of alternative concepts, as that issue was outlined in ch.3. Nevertheless, in recent work he has emphasised that the problems with which he grapples are fundamental to a proper understanding of the nature of ethics.

Specifically, Putnam proposes that a proper understanding of *conceptual pluralism* (not 'pluralism' as the term has so far been used) and its more specific sub-thesis *conceptual relativity* holds the key to understanding many of the important issues. This chapter will challenge Putnam on two fronts. First, it will be argued that conceptual relativity is a damp squib. Second, it will be argued that even if it isn't, it leaves an important part of logical space unfilled. This elephantine loophole allows many of the phenomena that might initially be thought to be treatable by Putnam's approach to pass through unnoticed. This being so, it fails to be an effective rival to the views it aims to better.

## 6.1. THE VIEW FROM INSIDE NOWHERE: A PUZZLE FOR PERSPECTIVISTS

Taking a cue from Putnam's self-titled 'internal realism', Blackburn has characterised Putnam's views as a form of perspectival realism, observing that such positions have long been found attractive. The history of modern philosophy contains many attempts to accommodate some form of subjective limitation into our faculties of apprehending the world, and the associated realism that may be attributed to our judgements and their objects. Kant is the most influential proponent of such a view, and one that Putnam himself affiliates with, but there are many others.<sup>1</sup>

The problem for such views is that "two thoughts need balancing. The one is that many aspects of the world are independent of us; the other is that the world is somehow constituted by or dependent upon our conceptual scheme or point of view" (Blackburn 1994: 14). This raises a "puzzle" (Blackburn 1994: 20):

Perspectival realism offers a framework within which to reconcile apparent conflict. But the reconciliation only takes place if inconsistency can be shown to be apparent, and that means obtaining a background, different conception of how things are, whereby the initial conflicting views can be seen as only apparently in conflict. If we lack this we are simply left with conflict, and unable to think how the different views can be related at all, or even count as views. But if we get it, then we have a third

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<sup>1</sup>Blackburn suggests that similar motivations may even be found at various points in Descartes. The quote given is the following, and was Descartes' response to Mersenne's question as to whether clear and distinct ideas might not nevertheless be false:

What is it to us that someone may make out that the perception we are so firmly convinced of may appear false to God or an angel, so that it is, absolutely speaking false? Why should this alleged "absolute falsity" bother us, since we neither believe in it nor have even the smallest suspicion of it? (Blackburn 1994: 12)

Blackburn's brief list of qualified realists also contains Quine, Strawson, Kripke's Wittgenstein and Berkeley. The list, however, would probably include most modern philosophers. The German idealist and post-idealist tradition would contribute several names, and arguments could also be made for British empiricism *en bloc*. Indeed, a not too implausible view is that with the exception of the period surrounding Leibniz, it's not until the latter half of the twentieth century, with the semantic externalism of Kripke and early Putnam that the idea of a thoroughly robust realist metaphysics becomes a leading paradigm in modern philosophy.

conception, and as far as that goes, having the further doctrine that this background conception is itself only a perspective plays no part at all. This reconciliation goes just as well if we stop thinking just “This is how things are.” (Blackburn 1994: 20).

As Blackburn sees it, perspectivism holds out the promise that from differing perspectives, what in some sense are conflicting views may nevertheless both be true. This requires, he claims, a background conception of the way that things are, independent of these two perspectives. Like a plan diagram that may explain why views of the same building differ from two different points, the third conception shows why the conflict is only apparent. But of course, this way of defusing the inconsistency betrays the initial motivation for perspectivism. It introduces precisely the unified conception that is supposed to be precluded.

The perspectivist therefore needs to see this background view as merely another perspective. But at that point we lose our grip on the idea of ‘perspective’. Without an idea of a background that is not itself a mere perspective – an idea to which we appear unentitled by the thoroughgoing perspectivist’s own lights – that notion is idle.

Abstracting from the visual metaphors, the puzzle appears to take the form of a trilemma regarding the relation between judgements corresponding to each perspective:

**Inconsistency:** The claims of one perspective are inconsistent with those of the other.

**Consistency:** The claims of one perspective are consistent with those of the other.

**Incommensurability:** Both the above positions are malformed. There can be no notion of (in)consistency applied to judgements made from different perspectives.

Each of these positions fails to capture the desired perspectivist thesis. The first two are indistinguishable from any standard form of realism, which of course allows the possibility of consistent or inconsistent judgements. The third offers a genuine alternative to any standard forms of realism, but

without further explanation, the notion of incommensurability looks problematic.<sup>2</sup> Without elaboration, the relation between judgements, if divorced from constraints of consistency and inconsistency, is theoretically mysterious.

This chapter will use this trilemma as a lynchpin around which to set Putnam's views. There is a question, however, as to how well those views can be characterised by assimilation to a generic form of perspectivism. His overarching philosophy is a complex group of claims regarding a variety of topics. Furthermore, it is refined across a series of works, with different ideas coming into prominence at different points. A large part of the current task will be working out what Putnam's current view consists in, and only then will it be possible to judge its relation to the above trilemma.

The way I have chosen to do this is as follows: In terms of Putnam's arguments, the central shift is taken to be from the permutation argument to what is here called the argument from Polish logic. In terms of philosophical positions, this marks the changing emphasis from the mere rejection of metaphysical realism to the further formulation of conceptual pluralism and relativity. In terms of broader philosophical parallels, it is claimed that this bears an analogy with a movement from the mystical realism of the *Tractatus*, to the conventionalism found in some parts of the later Wittgenstein's work. It is argued that Putnam's maturing views, here tracked from *Reason, Truth and History* through *The Many Faces of Realism* and *Realism with a Human Face*, and culminating in *Ethics without Ontology* represent a failed attempt to pass from the former to the latter. This is of course but one story that could be told of Putnam's progress, and is claimed to be enlightening rather than comprehensive or definitive.

## 6.2. PERMUTATION AND MYSTICAL REALISM

The previous chapter discussed the permutation argument. That argument gives an algorithm to transform statements with specified reference relations into statements with alternative reference relations, whilst preserving truth-conditions. The important thing to note here is its conclusion, and in particular how it falls short of establishing 'conceptual relativity'. The notable

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<sup>2</sup>Blackburn's precise formulation of the difficulty is in terms of an abandonment of the Kantian regulative ideal of the unity of knowledge (Blackburn 1994: 20). But the problem is really one of incommensurability in more general terms.

point, for present purposes, is that the permutation argument, if successful, holds with near universal generality. That is to say, for any statement in a language like English, there is a permutation that assigns different reference relations but the same truth-conditions for any statement of the language. We can, for example, permute the meaning of ‘A cat is on a mat’ so that the reference of ‘cat’ in some world is to the cherries in that world, whilst making the statement still come out true in all and only worlds where a cat is on a mat.

There is a question as to how we should understand the import of this fact. For some of those who are sympathetic to it, the conclusion bears analogy with the kind of mystical realism that Wittgenstein arrives at in the *Tractatus*. There we are offered the famous analogy with the eye:<sup>3</sup>

5.633 Where *in* the world is the metaphysical subject to be found?

You will say that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. But really you do *not* see the eye.

And nothing in *the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye.

5.6331 For the form of the visual field is surely not like this

Wittgenstein shortly extends this illustration to bring out the following thought:

5.64 Here it can be seen that solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it.

Then later:

6.45 To view the world sub specie aeterni is to view it as a whole—a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical.

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<sup>3</sup>That this resonates with the permutation argument was first suggested to me by Michael Potter in his lectures on the *Tractatus* in Cambridge 2004.

Whatever the mystical is, in Wittgenstein's view, it is clearly a mark of how the Tractarian structure of understanding the world and the subject's relation to it is distinct from realism and solipsism ordinarily so conceived. We are somehow supposed to be able to arrive at an understanding of the limits of the world that is interestingly different to the conventional realist and solipsist positions. This is so despite the fact that we can't conceptualise this form of understanding in the ordinary way. That is to say, although in a certain sense we are left only with "the reality co-ordinated with" the eye, the fact that we can trace the pattern of thought from the positing of the eye in the visual field to the point where it can no longer figure in the diagram itself helps us to understand something about the nature of the field. In Wittgenstein's terms, it helps us to feel the world as "a limited whole".

Though Putnam doesn't put it this way, it is possible to read something along these lines as the real upshot of the permutation argument. One may see Putnam's position as emphasising that any attempt to formulate a side-on view of reality must fail. If metaphysical realism is defined in terms of such a side-on view, be it one that views the world as a creation of the subject or as one merely with the subject in it as part, then metaphysical realism is incoherent. 'Internal realism', on this line, simply stands as the name for the realisation that this is the case. It is 'realism' in that we can't describe it as incorporating a particular subjective contribution. But it is internal because it is nonetheless 'limited', in a sense that can't quite be stated.

It is interesting to compare the template offered here with Blackburn's puzzle for perspectivists, or what was earlier called 'the view from inside nowhere'. On one way of looking at things, we may read Wittgenstein as offering in alternative guise Blackburn's idea that since we cannot come to any background view that includes the eye as a point of perspective, we may as well just stop and say "this is how things really are". But Wittgenstein's own treatment of the issues seems to present a way out: The method by which we come to realise that we can't form a side on perspective is itself somehow supposed to reveal something of lasting importance about the structure of the world and our relation to it. Someone impressed with the permutation argument could see it as doing likewise. In showing how any putative assignment of reference relations can be permuted, we are shown something that is not quite captured by saying 'this is how things are' from



the off.<sup>4</sup>

### 6.3. THE ARGUMENT FROM POLISH LOGIC

In *Realism with a Human Face*, Putnam describes his work as having shifted away from the permutation argument towards conceptual relativity since the time of *The Many Faces of Realism* (Putnam 1990a: x). There are many possible explanations for that shift, but one *good* reason to move away from the permutation argument is precisely because it leads only in the direction of mystical realism or something rather like it. Because permutations can be performed in a mechanical way to any sentence in a language like English, the kinds of limit that are thereby placed on the interpretation of those sentences is uniform. It serves to show, in utterly general terms, that we can't view any theory or perspective as attaining a side-on view of reality, or providing the One True Description. What it doesn't show, however, is anything regarding the relation between particular perspectives or theories. It doesn't tell us anything, for example, about the relation of Newtonian mechanics to quantum mechanics, or one cultural form to another, or more generally, give us any differentiated capacity for critique and understanding. Instead we get a blanket injunction against the side-on view and nothing more.

The problems for a position exhibiting this kind of non-discriminatory attitude towards different statements are brought out by Blackburn's criticisms of Putnam. For Blackburn, the problem is not really whether the metaphysical realist can give a single privileged picture of the universe, against which he may adjudge all other pictures to be second rate, but rather whether Putnam has the resources to discriminate between his own position and a blanket realism that puts all judgements, from whatever perspective, on a par.

One may, then, see Putnam's movement away from the permutation argument towards the development of conceptual pluralism and conceptual relativity as an attempt to confront exactly this problem. The argument that Putnam develops to do this, and replaces (or perhaps better, joins) the permutation argument at the heart of his philosophy, is what we may call

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<sup>4</sup>I don't want to overemphasise this analogy. Putnam often discusses his relation to Wittgenstein and, as far as I know, has never made this analogy explicitly, which suggests there is something at best incomplete about it.

‘the argument from Polish logic’.

Putnam asks us to consider the thesis of unrestricted mereological composition as proposed by the Polish logician Lesniewski. We may compare a description of a world using this logic with the same world on an alternative description, a description given, in Putnam’s example, by Carnap.<sup>5</sup> In a world which for Carnap contains three objects, for the Polish logician it will contain seven. These seven will correspond to Carnap’s objects and the varying combinations of them. So, for example, if we imagine this world as two black spheres and one red sphere, then the Polish logician will admit an object which is partly red and partly black, corresponding to the sum of the red sphere and one black sphere, whereas Carnap would not. For him, there are only black objects and red objects, or more precisely, just the three spheres.

*A world of three spheres.*

Putnam’s way of viewing the relation between the Polish logician and Carnap plays on a way of ‘translating’, in a special sense shortly to be explained, the statements of each into those of the other. So, for example, (A) counts as a Polish ‘translation’ of (B):

(A) There is an object which is partly red and partly black.

(B) There is an object which is red and an object which is black.

The sense in which the former is a translation of the latter is perhaps best initially expressed by saying that it is true in the Polish logician’s language if and only if the corresponding sentence is true in Carnap’s language. Moreover, we can give instructions that allow us to correlate all statements of the one with statements of the other. We can view the Polish logician as saying that there is an extra ‘object’ for every (non-empty) set of ‘objects’ that Carnap claims there are.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>N.B. Putnam doesn’t hold that Carnap would have seen anything wrong with describing it in any number of ways. Indeed, there’s a question as to how far Putnam’s views on conceptual relativity are simply a re-cap of the real Carnap’s own.

<sup>6</sup>As Putnam puts it:

[T]he Polish description: the Polish logician speaks as if, corresponding to

What is the intended import of this example? Both the above features have analogues in the results of the permutation argument. But as said before, the current argument seeks to be more discriminating. The important thing, it would seem, is that it is supposed to offer a sense of ‘translation’ that applies to (A) and (B) but not to each sentence and its permutations. The translations arrived at here, whilst in a certain sense ‘mechanical’, are not to be arrived at in a wholly arbitrary way, in the way that permutations are.

What more, however, can we say about this sense of ‘translation’? Notably, it is not ‘translation’ in the ordinary sense—the sense recognised by linguists and members of the public. In this sense, as Putnam observes, (A) and (B) are clearly not translations of one another. But this then leaves the relevant sense of translatability mysterious. Putnam wants something more demanding than permutability, but less demanding than common-or-garden (‘voiture’-to-‘car’) translation.

Having said that, Putnam gives us enough examples to give a rough idea of what he is up to. The equivalences in which he is interested occur when two parties involved in a broadly speaking metaphysical debate appear to be able to shadow the moves that each other makes, but in apparently contrary terms. So, for example, Putnam elsewhere discusses the debate as to whether points compose a Euclidean plane, as Leibniz thought, or whether points are simply abstractions from it (for example a set of convergent spheres) as Kant thought (Putnam 1987: 19). The idea in this case is that what we consider as an abstract object and what we consider as a concrete object depends, loosely speaking, on how we describe things. In one case the points are the concrete particulars and the plane is abstracted from them, and in the other case *vice versa*.

But whilst this family of cases might be recognisable to anyone who has sat through a sufficient number of metaphysical debates, it isn’t clear how they might be characterised in any precise or non-question-begging way.

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any set of (more than one) individuals in a “Carnapian” universe, there is a further individual that has as parts the members of that set. As a spatial location, the Polish logician assigns to this supposed (or pretended) individual the spatial region which is the geometrical sum of the regions (which may be points) occupied by Carnap individuals in the set. *This* description is neutral as to whether there supposed or pretended individuals are “real” individuals or mere logical constructions (Putnam 2004: 41-2).

Putnam himself appears to define them wholly negatively. He writes:

It will be seen that there are a number of different stances one could take on the question of the *relation* between [A] and [B]. One could say:

- (a) The two sentences are mathematically equivalent.
- (b) The two sentences are logically equivalent.
- (c) The two sentences are neither logically nor mathematically equivalent.
- (d) The first sentence is false and the second sentence is true.
- (e) The two sentences are alike in truth-value and meaning.
- (f) The two sentences are alike in truth-value and unlike in meaning.
- (g) The second sentence can be used as an abbreviation of the first, but this is really just a useful “make-believe.”

My own position—and my own internal realism—is that there is no fact of the matter as to which of *these* positions is correct. Taking the original dispute up into the “metalevel” of properties—mathematical or logical equivalence, synonymy, or whatever—of linguistic forms doesn’t help. None of these notions is well defined enough to be a useful tool in these cases (Putnam 1994b: 103).

What, then, is the point of the argument? One purpose is to back up the results of the permutation argument—to further dent metaphysical realism. Specifically, Putnam’s use of the argument attempts to refute what he calls the ‘one dough, many cookie cutters’ variety of realism.

One version of this is resemblance nominalism. For a certain species of resemblance nominalist, the sum total of existence consists of possible worlds and individuals within them. These worlds and individuals are conceived Realistically. They are the furniture of the multiverse. There are, however, on the nominalist view, any number of ways of dividing up these individuals into classes.

One can see that the permutation argument as presented earlier might be thought to be powerless against such a form of Realism, since it assumes

a stable domain of objects to be permuted. The nominalist, then, might simply equate this domain with the multiverse. The permutation argument, he may think, presupposes his ontological conception at the most basic level, even if it then goes on to undermine Realist reference. Putnam's thought is that a view of this sort relies on at least having an independent notion of what an object is. It is this idea that the argument from Polish logic is used, in part at least, to undermine.

More generally, Putnam is keen to reject the idea that we can think of a stable reality upon which we impose our concepts, and that it is merely the contingency of that imposition that is responsible for the lack of absoluteness with which those concepts apply. Returning to the comparison with the *Tractatus*, Putnam is keen to resist the picture of the eye within the world, where the world is somehow determinate and yet the eye may only occupy a specific perspective.

Putnam gives other examples illustrating what he takes to be the same or a similar point. In *Pragmatism* he cites the example, from quantum mechanics, that a cloud of positrons need not be assigned a definite number, nor need a single positron be assigned a definite trajectory, or in general be reidentifiable (Putnam 1995: 59). Once these examples are properly appreciated, he claims, to pretend to have an idea of an 'object' that is common between them is simply to credit oneself with an understanding that one does not in fact have. Such a view "tries to preserve [...] the naïve view that at least one Category—the ancient category of Object or Substance—has an absolute interpretation" (Putnam 1987: 36).<sup>7</sup>

Earlier, however, I claimed that by shifting the focus from the permutation argument towards the argument from Polish Logic, Putnam tries to do more than just reinforce the critique of metaphysical realism; he attempts to show something more about the relation between different versions of the world, or different perspectives. But on this further front it seems that we are stalling, since even if we accept the attack on metaphysical realism, if we can't say anything of the kind (a)-(g) above, then it seems that we have nothing more to say about precisely this. Let's now chase up this issue, focussing on the exchange between Blackburn and Putnam.

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<sup>7</sup>N.B. Putnam believes that the same holds for the related concepts, 'entity', 'property', 'existence' and 'relation' (Putnam 1994a: 243).

## 6.4. BLACKBURN ON POLISH LOGIC

Blackburn writes:

The apparent inconsistency between the mereologist and the other is not very troubling if one is saying that there are seven “objects” in the room, and the other that there are three. It may appear more troubling if one says that there is an object which is partly blue and partly red in the room, and the other says that there is no such object. Insisting that they use the word “object” differently is one way of reconciling the apparent dispute and saving the thought that they are both within their rights, or that (apart from any other difficulties) we can adopt either way of speaking. But that means precisely that we are finding the opinions consistent, so that we can have both. And the question of consistency is paramount, because it is the only reason a realist of any kind must allow to stand in the way of a concatenation of perspectives. If Putnam cannot make us see that we must allow genuinely inconsistent but “internally” true descriptions of things, then we have no reason to deny the uniqueness of truth, the last hallmark of metaphysical versus internal realism (Blackburn 1994: 18).

Blackburn’s failure to be moved by Putnam’s argument ultimately stems from the fact that he is not as impressed as Putnam by the fact that our concept of ‘object’ is not determinate enough to fix whether we side with the Polish logician or with Carnap. The important thing, he suggests, is that if we see ourselves as at liberty to use the concept either way then we thereby betray the view that the perspectives under consideration are ultimately consistent. It is simply a question of refining our language in one way rather than another. The phenomenon is of no more intrinsic significance, nor threat to the (sensible) realist, than are linguistic phenomena such as open texture, vagueness and ambiguity. The idea that we haven’t refined our concepts for every eventuality is something everyone can accept, realist and non-realist alike. If one wanted to put Blackburn’s worry in a nutshell, one might say that all Putnam’s examples show is that, independent of any theory, we don’t have a notion of ‘object’, not that we don’t have the notion of an object independent of any theory. It is this latter claim, one might

think, that really characterises the realist, not the former. Now, it is clear from Putnam's tone and surrounding views that he sees a response of that kind as missing the point, but it isn't quite so clear what his point is. In order to get to it, it will be useful to look at a further part of the exchange.

Blackburn considers whether Putnam's examples show us that there is an internal inconsistency in metaphysical realism:

A combination giving rise to such an inconsistency might be that of a determinate ontology, and an indeterminate or conventional identity relation. Thus we cannot both believe in a determinate, unique, mathematical ontology, containing numbers and sets, and also hold that whether we identify numbers and sets is a matter of convention. For either the ontology, which is not "up to us," has numbers as well as sets, in which case it would be a mistake to identify them, or it has only sets, in which case it would be a mistake to separate them. A determinate ontology takes away our freedom with identity; conversely, freedom with identity undermines the view that there is a determinate ontology. Similarly, if we think it's up to us whether we identify everyday objects with mereological sums of their parts, we should not also think that ontologically it is determinate whether there are objects as well as parts (Blackburn 1994: 18-19).

Blackburn is here playing devil's advocate, and he does not suppose himself to have done a very good job of it. As he immediately notes, the realist must simply, in order to remain consistent, not suppose that anything determined by reality alone, is also up to us. As long as he engages in this rather elementary piece of bookkeeping, he will remain consistent. In his own words:

The [possible inconsistency] is undeniable, but it is not clear why a realist of any kind should be troubled by it [...] the means of avoidance are to hand: one draws the ontology so that nothing genuinely "up to us" is determined by it (for example, in the numerical case, by sticking with sets and construing arithmetic as not concerned with objects at all) (Blackburn 1994: 19).

The nature of Putnam's opposition to metaphysical realism comes out most clearly in his response to this passage in Blackburn's paper. Putnam enthusiastically states,

So [Blackburn's] means of avoidance "in the numerical case" – the means of avoiding an admission that the decision to identify/not to identify numbers with sets is a matter of convention – is to "draw the ontology" so that numbers do not exist [...] What is amusing about this suggestion is that the metaphor of *drawing the ontology* suggests precisely the view that Blackburn wishes to deny – the view that the ontology is something we can "draw", i.e. that it is "up to us." I take it that this is not what Blackburn wanted to say ... I take it that what Blackburn means is that we should believe – because it is true – the view that there really are sets and there really do not exist any such things as numbers. If I thought I understood what such an assertion might mean, I would ask Blackburn how the devil he knows! But the fact is that never in my life, even when I counted myself as a metaphysical realist, did I think that kind of talk had any meaning at all. A sensible realist had better be able to allow that some ways of "drawing the ontology" [...] are equally right (Putnam 1994a: 248-9).

Putnam's claim is that we can't come to a principled decision as to what is there anyway and what is up to us. If we were to try to propose a particular answer, for example that sets exist and not numbers, we would be proposing something that is, in some yet to be specified sense, unintelligible. The related epistemic difficulty is that if we were to try to treat such a claim as though it had sense, as for example metaphysicians do, then we would quickly find that we entered into endless dialectics that never established one position over the other. A mock combat of just this sort would be a disagreement between Carnap and the Polish logician. The important point for Putnam, and one his examples are supposed to illustrate, is that the move Blackburn outlines for the realist, i.e. to draw the ontology in one particular way, is not a move that can be made.



## 6.5. CONCEPTUAL RELATIVITY AS CONVENTIONALISM

The above response, however, doesn't get to the heart of the issues. At best, it shows that realism, in a form that tries to draw the One True Picture of Reality in such a way as to privilege, for example, the Polish mereologist, is untenable. But as we noted earlier, this isn't the kind of realism that Blackburn is ultimately committed to defending, and if he has ended up defending it at this point, then it is out of step with the initial puzzle. The real problem is not to demonstrate the coherence of a discriminating metaphysical realism, but rather to show how Putnam might avoid an indiscriminating blanket realism, of whatever type.

The real problem, then, is that insofar as we take the idea seriously that the languages of the Polish logician and Carnap are intertranslatable, we can hardly view them as defining significantly opposed perspectives. To put it in terms of our initial trilemma, the Putnamian view steers dangerously close to the horn of consistency. If one sees that as a valid concern, which is precisely how Blackburn conceives it, then more needs to be said on Putnam's behalf. Putnam confronts this difficulty by recourse to *conceptual relativity*:

Conceptual relativity [...] holds that the question as to which of these ways of using "exist" (and "individual," "object" etc.) is *right* is one that the meanings of the words in the natural language [...] simply leaves open. Both the set theory that developed in the nineteenth (and early twentieth) century and the mereology that Lezniewski invented are what I will call *optional languages* [...] The optional language of set theory and the optional language of mereology represent possible *extensions* of our ordinary ways of speaking. If we adopt mereology, or if we adopt both mereology and set theory, then of course we will say that there exist mereological sums. If we adopt set theory but reject mereology as unnecessary or useless, then we will say that mereological sums do not exist, although, of course, one can use the language of mereology as a useful *façon de parler* if one wishes. But the question whether mereological sums "really exist" is a silly question. It is *literally* a matter of convention whether we decide to say they exist (Putnam 2004: 43).

And elsewhere:

[Examples of] conceptual relativity [...] all involve statements that *appear* to be contradictory (if we simply conjoin them, ignoring the different uses that they have in their respective optional languages, we get a contradiction) but *are not in fact contradictory*, if we understand each of them as belonging to a different optional language, and recognize that the two optional languages involve the choice of incompatible conventions. What are “incompatible” are not the statements themselves, which cannot simply be conjoined, but the conventions (Putnam 2004: 46).

Conceptual relativity thus avoids the consistency horn of our trilemma in the following way: Statements ostensibly making metaphysical generalisations are in fact the expression of conventions for ‘optional languages’, or statements under those conventions. They are what the later Wittgenstein would have called ‘grammatical rules’ or ‘postulates of syntax’, as mentioned in ch.4. Those languages are ways of speaking that are left as open possibilities given the pre-existing semantics of the natural language. Nothing in English, for example, shows that we must talk as Carnap or the Polish logician talks. Instead, we have the choice between two conventions. Once we adopt one or the other, however, we are bound to play the game in a certain way: that is, follow the chosen convention. This, then, is the sense in which there is disagreement between the Polish logician and Carnap. They follow different conventions.

The complementary sense in which they *don't* disagree, and thus the way in which they avoid the inconsistency horn of our trilemma, is provided by the fact that their statements are intertranslatable. We can give a rule book for translating the statements of one language into that of the other, as explained earlier. Or at least that is so for all statements except for those of the conventions themselves—claims like ‘Mereological sums exist’, or ‘Numbers are distinct from sets’.

## 6.6. DOES CONCEPTUAL RELATIVITY SOLVE THE PUZZLE?

The problem that conceptual relativity faces is in regard to the incommensurability horn of the trilemma. The initial problem is that insofar as we see two parties operating under alternative conventions, they are simply talking past each other. Moreover, they are not talking past each other in the or-

dinary sense in which we say two people talk past each other when assigning different senses to the same word, for example when I mistakenly think that ‘axolotl’ means armadillo, and disagree with you over whether ‘axolotls’ have hardened carapaces. Nor are they talking past each other in the way that may occur with ambiguous terms. Perhaps we both understand the word ‘bank’ perfectly, but I understand you to be talking about river banks when you are really talking about financial institutions. Talking past each other in this latter way can be resolved by reconciling the senses of our words, i.e. I should learn what ‘axolotl’ means, or we should clarify whether we are talking about one type of bank or the other. That is not, however, the case with conventionalism. The way in which we use our words, according to conventionalism, is fixedly at odds with one another. There is no shared norm which determines that the Polish logician or Carnap should change their language to reconcile it with the other. Or more precisely, insofar as conventionalism gives any bite to the notion of alternative perspectives, it must resist this move, since once it is made, the two logicians might as well just distinguish their claims explicitly. They should talk, for example, of ‘Polish objects’ and ‘Carnapian objects’, just as we might talk of ‘river banks’ and ‘high street banks’. Once this occurs, however, all pretense of an interesting form of relativity has gone.

The problem, then, is to see conceptual relativity as a stable phenomenon, i.e. not one that might accidentally occur when two people don’t understand each other, but one that ought to persist, even given reflective access to the differing conventions used by each party. To maintain conceptual relativity as a stable phenomenon, so that it is in some sense right for the Polish logician and Carnap to continue ‘disagreeing’, and refusing to just change terminology, is, it would seem, to import the kind of incommensurability that Blackburn considers unattractive.

There is a question, however, as to what is wrong with incommensurability. Perhaps it is precisely what pragmatist-cum-internal realists should embrace, as marking off a distinctive position from the metaphysical realist. Blackburn claims that abandoning it is to drop the Kantian regulative principle of the unity of knowledge, a charge which Putnam is keen to avoid (Putnam 1994a: 247). But the problem is in fact much deeper than that. The problem is that incommensurability is incompatible with a shared notion of content. This idea goes back as far as Socrates’ refutation of relativ-

ism in the *Theaetetus*. It will be worthwhile to look back at that argument in order to see what space it allows for the kind of position Putnam wants to formulate.

In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates amalgamates the Protagorean alethic doctrine that Man is the Measure with the Heraclitean ontological doctrine that all things are in motion (179e). The idea seems to be that if man really were the measure then the appropriate notion of being would be one in which objects and their qualities were in flux—i.e. simultaneously possessing the different properties attributed to them by each individual man *qua* measure. So, for example, the alethic doctrine that a claim ‘the stone is white’ can be true-for one thinker and false-for another, has as an ontological correlate, the idea that the stone is in a state not of *being* white but becoming or *flowing* white. Socrates holds that this problem iterates. We can’t say that something flows white, because that would be to say that something has the property of flowing white, or *is* such that it flows white. Instead we would have to say that it *flows flowingly white*, and so on and so on.<sup>8</sup> The dénouement of this stage of the refutation then goes as follows:

SOC. [S]ince not even this abides, that what flows flows white; but rather is in the process of change, so that there is flux of this very thing also, the whiteness, and it is passing over into another colour, lest it be convicted of standing still in this respect—since that is so, is it possible to give any name to a colour which will properly apply to it?

THEOD. I don’t see how one could, Socrates; nor yet surely to anything else of that kind, if, being in flux, it is always quietly slipping away as you speak?

Shortly afterwards, Socrates rounds off the argument:

SOC. A fine way this turns out to be of making our answer right. We were most anxious to prove that all things are in motion [...] but what has really emerged is that, if all things are in motion, every answer, on whatever subject, is equally correct, both ‘it is

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<sup>8</sup>The discussion itself is further complicated by the bundling in of the doctrine that knowledge is perception. For the sake of clarity, we’ll stick to the former two theses.

thus' and 'it is not thus' [...]

THEOD. You are quite right.

SOC. Well, yes, Theodorus, except that I said 'thus' and 'not thus'. One must not use even the word 'thus'; for this thus would no longer be in motion; nor yet 'not thus' for here again there is no motion. The exponents of this theory need to establish some other language; as it is, they have no words that are consistent with their hypothesis—unless it would perhaps suit them to use 'not at all thus' in a quite indefinite sense (183b).

Socrates' claim is that the relativist's desire to maintain his infeasible right to decide what is true-for him and what is false-for him violates what is necessary for us to consider his claim as a possible object of shared understanding. In the ontological guise in which the argument is presented above, by preventing the stone from having any stable property, even stably being in a state of flux, we lose the idea of what it is for the stone to be in any state at all. In its semantic guise, the "exponents [...] need to establish some other language [...] unless it would perhaps suit them to use 'not at all thus' in a quite indefinite sense." Given a certain worldly state of affairs, for example the colour of a stone, no shared truth-norm regulates how the words 'That is white' should be used. Whether you should use those words to describe the stone and whether I should use those words are wholly distinct questions. But if that is so, then there is nothing worth calling shared meaning that those words have when used by each of us. Consequently, there is nothing definite for us even to invite each other to believe by using them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>This interpretation, of course, uses a certain amount of license. It effectively reads the *Theaetetus* as presenting a precursor to later Wittgensteinian constraints on rule-following and private language. An alternative reading takes the important point to be that if relativism is true-for the relativist, then universalism ought to be true-for the universalist. But if this is so, then by the internal logic of universalism, it ought to be not only true-for the universalist, but true-for the relativist too. Otherwise there appears to be nothing universal about it. The relativist position thereby inherits its instability from the fact that faced with just one bloody minded universalist, the relativist himself must embrace universalism.

The reason why this argument is not the best argument that can be reconstructed from the text, is that it only really requires the relativist to formulate his position in a more careful way. Specifically, the relativist must block the inference from universalism being

The problem, then, with incommensurability is not just that it threatens the unity of science, but it threatens communication more generally. If the Polish logician and Carnap are talking past each other in a *perpetually irreconcilable* way, i.e. one which does not admit of defusing by speaking of ‘Carnapian objects’ and ‘Polish objects’, then not only do they not mean the same thing by ‘object’, but they can’t come to grasp the same content at all. The Polish logician has to use his concept and Carnap has to use his.

Putnam clearly doesn’t intend to accept this strong relativistic form of incommensurability. The question, then, is how conventionalism avoids it. The natural answer is that it does so insofar as the conventions used by each party are mutually appreciable from a reflective point of view. It is precisely

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true-for the universalist to the conclusion that universalism is true-for the relativist. One way would be to claim that the entailment is merely to [it is *true-for the universalist* that universalism is true-for the relativist], whilst denying that this entails that [universalism is true-for the relativist]. This is unlikely to appease the universalist, because he will argue that it fails to do justice to the universalist position being true even in a relativised sense. After all, the very content of universalism is supposed to make it incompatible with other people being able to faultlessly deny it. But it should come as no surprise if the relativist can’t perfectly accommodate the universalist position within the relativistic framework. The universalist demands a point of view that cannot, for the relativist, be had.

On a different note, it may be thought that certain contemporary forms of relativism defeat the connection forged above between relativism and the impossibility of shared content. In defending modern relativist views, authors like John MacFarlane make use of the notion of shared content, or shared propositions, used in less controversial ‘relativised’ cases (MacFarlane 2008). Consider for example the sentence ‘It is four o’clock’. On a temporalist view, this sentence expresses the same proposition whenever it is uttered. The *truth* of that proposition must, however, be indexed to a time, so that it is true at some times (i.e. whenever it’s four o’clock) and not others. This temporalist view contrasts with an eternalist view, where the propositional content of the utterance changes depending on when the sentence is uttered. This proposition, unlike the former, does not have its truth relativised to a time or times in the former way. It is true or false eternally. By appealing to an analogy with temporalism, it might be thought that, *contra* the argument attributed to Socrates, we can make sense of shared content despite relativised truth.

For reasons of space, I will not pause to discuss this line of reasoning in detail, save only to observe that whatever the function of relativisation of truth to times may play, it is *primâ facie* implausible that the template can be carried over to avoid the problem in the Protagorean case. Quite where the disanalogy arises is a moot point. Wright has suggested that it occurs when we begin ‘trumping’ (Wright 2008). According to Wright’s version of the problem, the difficulty arises when it is not only true-relative-to-X that *p* is true, but when this entails that it is also true-relative-to-X that *it is true-relative-to-Y* (for any Y) that *p* is true. That is to say, relativism becomes problematic when we can’t form an objective point of view from which to describe the relativisation of truth to particular parameters. Whilst, however, I think that the difference between trumping forms of relativism and non-trumping forms is important, I think that this is largely because trumping partly entails the problems adduced earlier. (N.B. Wright thinks otherwise) Trumping causes difficulties if and only if it entails that we cease to be able to view each other as governed by shared norms regarding the use of our words.

because each party is able to recognise that the other is operating under a different convention, and moreover one that could in principle be adopted as an alternative, that communication is possible. But the problem, once again, is that insofar as we see this to be the case, we don't really see the conventions as competing in any profound sense. Specifically, there is no explanation as to why we shouldn't just unite the conventions but frame them explicitly in terms of 'Polish objects' and 'Carnapian objects.' The point is that insofar as conventionalism gives any substance to the idea of perspectivism, it entails incommensurability of the vicious sort. If this is the case then Putnam's position seems to fall back onto the horns of our initial trilemma.

Perhaps, however, we can rescue a notion of perspective or relativity by appealing to the overlapping content in each party's use of the term 'object'. As noted above, Putnam takes it to be important that the meaning in the natural language of the term 'object' restricts what optional sublanguages we may choose, just as, for example, the meaning of 'membership' in the natural language constrains the sublanguage of set theory. Set theory may define relations of 'membership' that are inconceivable without the surrounding mathematical apparatus, but it is vital that it begins from the natural language concept that it does, and not some other (e.g. being an uncle of). Similarly, although the Polish logician and Carnap use different optional sublanguages, each sublanguage has a common root in the notion of 'object' as it stands in the natural language. This brings the two sublanguages into a special relation, and makes them mutually accountable in a way that homonyms like 'bank' (river bank) and 'bank' (financial institution), or cases of misunderstanding, such as my use of 'axolotl' in regard to yours, don't. However, whatever form of mutual accountability this overlapping of semantics gives, it is at the very least unclear what sense of relativity it entails. It seems that in whatever sense the sublanguages are *optional* they aren't in competition. We might just as well view them as dealing with 'Polish objects' and 'Carnapian objects'.

### 6.7. THE ELEPHANTINE LOOPHOLE

Let us now put aside any possible criticisms about the internal coherence or of conceptual relativity. Or in other words, let's shelve consideration of the

trilemma and how Putnam fares against it. Instead, we'll now work on the assumption that Putnam's view works on its own terms. The remarkable thing, as will shortly be argued, is that even if it did, it would fail to have the interesting consequences that it is alleged to possess. This is because the range of cases that it can be applied to is, even by its very specification, highly limited.

Reflection on Putnam's treatment of conceptual relativity shows that an important piece of logical space has yet to be filled. Let us remember that the defining mark of conceptual relativity is the appearance of disagreement, combined with intertranslatability:

**Conceptual relativity:**

Face value inconsistency: YES.

Intertranslatability: YES.

Example:

*Carnap*: There are three objects.

*Lesniewski*: No there aren't, there are lots more than that.

The pragmatist moral: Carnap and Lesniewski are operating optional sub-languages. Everything is fine.

What is important is the type of case that it is supposed to be a response to. These are like those of the Polish logician and Carnap, which first appear to be inconsistent, but allow the kind of intertranslatability that suggests the inconsistency may be of a qualified sort.

The problem is that even if we accept everything else Putnam says about this type of case, it still leaves the following type unaccounted for. Consider a situation where there is face value inconsistency but no intertranslatability:

**Putnam's loophole:**

Face value inconsistency: YES.

Intertranslatability: NO.

The important thing to note is that the overwhelming majority of disagree-



ments fit this template and not the previous one. This is for the simple reason that intertranslatability in the above sense is rare. It might exist in certain relatively abstruse metaphysical debates, like that between Carnap and the Polish logician, and between Leibnizians and Kantians over spatial points, but it clearly doesn't exist in common-or-garden disagreements. More notably, it doesn't even exist in a large range of what are otherwise fairly high-order philosophical debates. There is no way of, say, translating Marxist theory into Rawlsian theory, nor of translating use-theoretic accounts of meaning into truth-conditional accounts of meaning. The only cases where translatability is even on the table are, as Putnam himself sometimes seems keen to stress, cases where the debate already appears on the verge of being degenerate. This alone is enough to make Putnam's pragmatic pluralism a mere sideshow in regard to many of the interesting questions. In any non-degenerate case of conflict, it goes missing in action.

A defender of Putnam is liable to argue that this is a poor form of attempted refutation. We can imagine her saying something along the following lines: *"Look, this is no way to go about criticising a philosophical position. Putnam has introduced 'conceptual relativity' as a term of art; he has explained precisely what he means by it, and now you object that it doesn't do the job you want it to do. That is just as if I were to offer you a screwdriver for putting in screws and you complain I haven't given you a hammer for putting in nails."* The question, then, is whether it is legitimate to demand that Putnam be able to say something interesting about cases like the above (the loophole). In what follows some reasons will be adduced to suppose that it is.

In this connection, it's worth offering some illustrations where conceptual relativity goes astray. Putnam, remember, assures us that it is crucial for understanding the nature of ethics. One might, then, think that conceptual relativity could be deployed in cases where we have contrasting ethical worldviews. Consider, for example, Russell's story of the gentlewoman and neo-Platonist Hypatia, who allegedly had her bones stripped with oyster shells under the direction of St. Cyril. On one way of understanding a conflict such as this, there is a clash of worldviews. To see things through the lens of Christianity in fifth century Alexandria was to see things differently to how they looked through the lens of Hypatia's Neoplatonism. This is the kind of case, one might think, where understanding more about conceptual

relativity might assist us. That isn't to say that we should hope it will tell us who is right, or even give us a practical method for dealing with the conflict, but one might hope that we at least have some analytical tools to better understand its nature.

However, conceptual relativity gets no direct grip on this case. This is because there is no intertranslatability between Neoplatonism and Christianity. Even supposing that we could formulate optional sublanguages that characterised each, there would be no hope of aligning their claims so that they came out as equivalent in the relevant sense. On that front, then, Putnam has nothing to say to us.

Putnam, presumably, would accept all of this. But that is why his position is, on reflection, of narrow utility. This case slips straight through the loophole. For all Putnam's framework tells us, it is to be understood just like any other disagreement, like a controversy over the weight of leptons. The only way in which Putnam's philosophy helps us to go about understanding it is by alerting us to any presuppositions of metaphysical realism that either party might hold, or that might cloud our philosophical assessment of it.

One might, however, hold that this is the very point of Putnam's arguments: Disagreements like that between Hypatia and St. Cyril *should* be treated just like disagreements about the weight of leptons. Or rather, there is no interesting difference of the sort that many philosophers have taken there to be. The important task is to show that the pretensions of certain philosophical accounts to provide a single overarching vision or supramodel for interpreting or resolving ethical conflict, moreover one that is likely to degrade ethical discourse in comparison with, say, the discourse of physics, is mistaken. If this is the aim, then the fact that pragmatic pluralism fizzles out after it has thoroughly combusted metaphysical realism is no complaint at all. The negative project *is* the positive project. The only thing that ever stood in the way of a correct appreciation of the subtle variability of our disputes was the lumbering ogre of metaphysics past.

There is no doubt some truth both in the claim that Putnam's project can be partially characterised in this way, and also that there is some value in a project thus configured. But nevertheless, Putnam's arguments do not have the wide reaching consequences they promise. It is by no means clear that simply by slaying metaphysical realism we have gone very far towards understanding ethical discourse. Nor even is it clear that by slaying

metaphysical realism we have done much damage to standing accounts of the ethical phenomena.

It's worth adding that the loophole here adverted to is not a mere contingency of Putnam's exposition. It is not as though, for example, he simply hasn't got around to developing pragmatic pluralism so as sew it up. Rather, there is nothing in the extant resources to suggest how one might even go about expanding his position to cover the cases that pass through it. His core innovation is the indefinable sense of 'intertranslatability' that is illustrated in the argument from Polish logic. It is that alleged phenomenon that gives the pragmatic pluralist an advance over those who fail to recognise it. That is to say, pragmatic pluralism promises new solutions insofar as that insight might somehow be generalised or applied. But as it has been remarked, even insofar as we grasp that phenomenon, it is of scant application. This is for the simple reason that it only occurs in a minority of the relevant cases.

A further illustration of the loophole is provided by a very interesting non-ethical example that Putnam himself gives, but does not view as problematic. Benjamin Lee Whorf claimed that the following two sentences have a structural articulation in the Shawnee language that reveals quantification over a special type of object, a 'fork-tree' or 'fork-shaped pattern':

- (1) I have an extra toe on my foot.
- (2) I pull the branch aside.

Their structural articulation, using the component 'fork-tree', which is assigned the morpheme (l<sub>sub</sub>i-thawa) in Shawnee, is as follows:

- (3) I fork-tree on-toes (have).
- (4) I fork-tree by-hand-cause.

The idea is that Whorf, by noting the recurrence of the morpheme which he has eventually described (not translated—there is no pre-existing English concept) as 'fork-tree', posited an element in Shawnee ontology that doesn't belong in the pre-existing English ontology. This object, insofar as we understand it, seems to correspond to the shape that trees have on their branches, and six-toed people have on their feet. Putnam adds that the same phenomenon appears in more homely guise when we consider terms

like ‘mind’, ‘Geist’ or ‘esprit’, which don’t neatly intertranslate, and certainly don’t intertranslate in the sense in which the statements of the Polish logician and Carnap do. These show, for Putnam, that German, French, and English have different ontologies (in the sense of ‘ontology’ that pragmatists are allowed to admit). He continues:

[A]lthough English, Shawnee, French, etc. are not “optional languages,” the whole collection of human languages now in existence illustrates how many ways there are of “quantifying” in the process of describing very simple situations, situations as simple as someone’s pulling a branch aside. The whole idea that the *world* dictates a unique “true” way of dividing the world into objects, situations, properties, etc., is a piece of philosophical parochialism (Putnam 2004: 51).

The point here as Putnam sees it is that in whatever sense we allow ourselves to do ‘ontology’, we ought to admit that there are different equally good ways of doing it. Where pragmatic pluralism differs from metaphysical realism is in admitting this to be so.

Once again, however, the problem arises as soon as one views a case like the above as *controversial*. At that point, it slips through Putnam’s loophole. If someone views the claims of the Shawnee as face value inconsistent with, say, the claims of contemporary Western science, then Putnam has nothing more to add. As far as Putnam’s position tells us, it is a disagreement to be treated on a par with any other.

Of course, according to Putnam, neither the Shawnee nor the scientist can claim to provide the One True Description of Reality, precisely because *no one* can. But Putnam only tells us something further and distinctive about the relationship between two ontologies if they are intertranslatable, which in this case, they are not. So, in a case like this, even granting all that Putnam has told us, still the Shawnee might as well just stop and think “This is how things are”, and their opponents might as well just stop and think “No it isn’t”. But if this is the case, then the tour through pragmatic pluralism is a mere epicycle.

And to reiterate, cases like this are not the exception but the norm. Intertranslatability may occur on occasion in mathematics, physical science, and certain debates in metaphysics, but these are a minority. The above

example of the differences between Shawnee, English, French and German illustrate this well. Ordinarily understood, it is phenomena such as the difference between Shawnee cosmology and modern scientific cosmology that raise philosophical interest in the areas Putnam purports to help us understand. It is this kind of case that interests ethicists when considering the relative standing of different ethical outlooks. It is this kind of case that interests philosophers of religion when trying to reconcile different religions, and so on.

It may of course be that Putnam doesn't view Shawnee as competing with Western science, even at face value. Realising this might even be one of the central insights of pragmatism. But this is precisely what many of his (e.g. scientific) opponents *do* think, so without further argument Putnam's position is question-begging. More seriously, it's clear that the interesting cases are precisely those where there does appear to be conflict. The fact that it is in just these cases that Putnam's view breaks down is enough of an objection to it, regardless of precisely which cases these are.

It's worth adding that Putnam views conceptual relativity as a subspecies of *conceptual pluralism*. Conceptual pluralism does not, however, help with the problems here. Putnam defines it thus:

**Conceptual pluralism (without relativity):**

Face value inconsistency: NO.

Intertranslatability: NO.

Example:

*Physicist*: The room is full of protons.

*Bloggs*: It's also full of furniture.

The pragmatist moral: Only a fool would think, in this case, that the physicist and Bloggs need to commit to one of their schemes being ultimate. Everything is fine.

This is almost entirely benign, under Putnam's description at least. Because there isn't even a face-value appearance of inconsistency, the problem of reconciling the two assertions doesn't get started. If someone were to describe

the room as full of protons, only a dunderhead would say “No it’s not, it’s full of furniture.” That, at least, is what Putnam claims.<sup>10</sup> One can see, by the same token, that it doesn’t close the loophole (i.e. because it is not a case of face value inconsistency).

Now, it may be that Putnam’s pragmatic pluralism is the best that can be hoped for. But coming to see its limitations is simultaneously to understand the motivation for the rival positions held by his opponents, for example the quasi-realist. It is the hope that we can hold on longer before bottoming out into an indiscriminating realism, be it metaphysical or internal, that encourages authors like Blackburn to occupy the awkward positions that he does. It is for this reason that Blackburn plays devil’s advocate for the realist in his criticism of Putnam. For him, Putnam has failed to do justice to the interesting forms of diversity that it is the job of those engaged in the debate to highlight.

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<sup>10</sup>Of course, physicalists of a certain stripe disagree with precisely this.

# Chapter 7

## : Pandora's box

Where do the preceding discussions leave us? It has been claimed that even supposing Putnam's arguments against metaphysical realism offer us some fairly uniform reasons to cap the pretensions of any discourse, his pragmatic pluralism fails to make good on the task of further elucidating the nature of different discourses, like ethics, physics and mathematics. Nor even, as perhaps is closer to Putnam's own heart, does it give much guidance as to the different relative standing of opposing worldviews or conceptual schemes. Quasi-realism, on the other hand, whilst able to fend off many of Putnam's severest objections, was also argued to be of more modest proportions than its proponents might hope. Truth-pluralism, the reader will remember, fared worst of all, with its plainest formulations subject to what was claimed to be a near knockdown objection stemming from constraints of compositionality.<sup>1</sup>

This final chapter will look at a form of 'global quasi-realism' or 'pragmatism' recently advocated by David Macarthur and Huw Price. By discussing it I hope to leave the reader with a clarification of the position of this dissertation, along with some further reflections on the state of pragmatism and quasi-realism. Specifically, I will suggest that it is less clear than Macarthur and Price claim that we should expect to find, nor perhaps even be trying to look for, a plurality of discourses. In particular, I'll cast some doubt on whether we should be focussing on language to the exclusion or marginalisation of all else.

In the earlier discussion of the fact/value distinction I argued that the

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<sup>1</sup>This is notwithstanding the fact that minimalism about truth, plus pluralism about some of Wright's hallmarks or 'cruces' like cognitive command and width of cosmological role is still a live option.

quasi-realist line could there be pursued only at the expense of opening Pandora's box. Expressivist treatments of particular discourses would be one of a possible many types of explanation as to why our terms have the extensions that they do. In this final chapter I'll suggest that there is even more to come out of the box. Specifically, there is no reason to limit its contents to the linguistic.

### 7.1. ANTI-REPRESENTATIONALISM

Macarthur and Price oppose the 'representationalist' strand in Blackburn's formulation of quasi-realism.<sup>2</sup> Representationalism claims that there is a question, beyond that of whether a discourse is minimally truth-apt, as to whether it traffics in descriptions at the deep level. If it does, then it is genuinely representational, and if not, then not. Macarthur and Price think that this is a misguided test. On their view, there can be no question as to whether a discourse is descriptive or representational beyond its surface appearance as such. Price and Macarthur thus call themselves 'quietists' about representation in the deep sense. To avoid extra terminology, I'll say that Macarthur and Price reject *representationalism*, and that Blackburn accepts it.<sup>3</sup>

Some people, for example Putnam and Wright, think that this stymies the quasi-realist. Without the contrast between deep-level descriptions and deep-level expression, they claim, there is nothing left of the view. Price and Macarthur, however, seem to think that there is more to be said for the virtues of quasi-realism, even once representationalism is rejected. At one point, Price, writing on his own, states the following:

In white-awning representationalism, minimalism leaves the field clear for global expressivism (i.e. for a global assemblage of local expressivisms) [...] (Price 2009b).

Price thinks we can posit a variety of "expressivisms", in the broad sense of the term, to explain the functional plurality that underlies the uniform

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<sup>2</sup>There is an open question as to how wedded Blackburn now is to representationalism, as Macarthur and Price note (Macarthur and Price 2007: 118). For present purposes however, and pending a formal retraction, he will be treated as one.

<sup>3</sup>This is distinct from claiming that any discourse in particular is genuinely *representational*. Of course, to claim the latter is, when meant non-minimally, to assume representationalism, but the converse isn't true.



appearance of statements in different discourses. In this regard he is pro-quasi-realist. His problem, once again, is that he thinks that within the underlying plurality there is no further distinction to be drawn between genuinely – i.e. more than minimally – descriptive or representational discourse, and discourse that isn't. 'Global quasi-realism' is one name given by Macarthur and Price to this position, because in every discourse there is an expressivist story to tell. They also call this a form of 'pragmatism', which is somewhat confusing in the current context given the way that word has been used in the previous chapters, but their use will be deferred to from now on, with their position described interchangeably as pragmatist or global quasi-realist.

The qualified defence of quasi-realism offered in ch.5 in regard to ethical, or more broadly speaking, valuational, discourse was in one regard more generous than the Macarthur-Price account. This is because it didn't propose to rule out representationalism, but only versions of it that relied on unacceptable forms of realism. This, however, is a relatively small difference, and for present purposes it can be put to one side. On the bigger picture, the two views are similar in that they think the primary task of the quasi-realist is to cash out the functional plurality in ways that do not take genuine description as the primary category.

The difference between the view I indirectly advocated, and the view of Macarthur and Price, is in part expressible by a difference in the level of optimism as to whether suitable forms of expressivism can cash the idea of a functional plurality. Arguments were offered to suggest that whilst the quasi-realist treatment might work as a positive explanation of the function of thin ethical (or more broadly value) terms, like 'good', it doesn't work for thick terms. In the ethical case, then, a vast territory is unaccounted for by extant expressivist or quasi-realist treatments.

If that was correct, then it shows that the quasi-realist – global or local – does not yet have a way of drawing the relevant functional plurality in this case. There may, of course, be others in which we do have adequate treatments. But the point at least remains that merely by opening the door to a plurality of expressivist explanations is not itself to provide any of those explanations, nor indeed to offer any general reason why we should suppose ourselves able to. It is therefore possible to view the global collapse of anything beyond merely minimal notions of description, reference, and so

on, not so much as cause for celebration but simply as making it harder to state what one's desired pluralism consists in.

This is rather different from the criticism levelled by Putnam and Wright that the death of representationalism shows quasi-realism to be utterly ruined. It is a more moderate pessimism in regard to how explanatorily useful quasi-realism, of any form, can be. On the Macarthur-Price view “with the last gasp of representationalism [...] pragmatism [=global quasi-realism] prepares to sing” (Macarthur and Price 2007: 119). But what will it sound like? And how much air does it have in its lungs?

They elaborate their view in the following terms:

Pragmatism [...] begins with *linguistic* explananda rather than *material* explananda; with phenomena concerning the *use* of certain terms and concepts, rather than with things or properties of a non-linguistic nature. It begins with linguistic behaviour, and asks broadly anthropological questions: How are we to understand the roles and functions of the behaviour in question, in the lives of the creatures concerned? What is its practical significance? Whence its genealogy? (Macarthur and Price 2007: 95).

And elsewhere:

So our pragmatists are metaphysical quietists. But note that they are not philosophical quietists *tout court*, if there could be such a view. On the contrary, they take some relevant theoretical matters very seriously indeed: in particular, some broadly anthropological issues about the roles and genealogy of various aspects of human linguistic behaviour [...] What distinguishes pragmatism is its commitment to addressing them without the resources of a representationalist model of language (Macarthur and Price 2007: 101).

Macarthur and Price here add to the minimalist skeleton the claim that they offer to explain “some broadly anthropological issues about the roles and genealogy of various aspects of human linguistic behaviour”. They also at times call their view “anthropological pragmatism” (Macarthur and Price 2007: 104). Price (2009b) claims that “Expressivism isn't a way of doing

metaphysics in a pragmatist key. It is a way of doing something like anthropology.” They summarise the position with a formula:

PRAGMATISM = LINGUISTIC PRIORITY without REPRESENTATIONALISM  
(Macarthur and Price 2007: 97).

This formula promises to restrict the subject matter of pragmatism to eliminate some of the many questions we might ask of broadly anthropological phenomena. The focus of the pragmatist, we are told, should be on *language*, or as Macarthur and Price go on to say, thought and representation more generally (a qualification I hereon omit).<sup>4</sup> It is somewhat unclear, however, why, in the absence of any particular explanation in regard to the linguistic elements of a given broadly anthropological phenomenon, as offered, for example, by an expressivist treatment of values, language should be the focus. It isn't, for example, forced by switching our attention away from traditional metaphysics towards broadly speaking anthropological phenomena. Indeed, anthropologists themselves do not limit their study to language, so it is not obvious why philosophers, approaching the same subject matter, should.<sup>5</sup> Barring further justification, then, it is unclear why pragmatism, as a philosophical movement, should focus on language. This is not to say that language isn't important, but it isn't clear why it is pre-eminent. In the terms Macarthur and Price use, why should the pragmatist accept Linguistic Priority?

The problem can be seen more clearly when we consider a case that is presented without any reference to language. To that end, let us briefly consider Wittgenstein's discussion of Frazer's account of the killing of the priest-king at Nemi. The 'King of the Wood', according to Frazer, would live in the forest, armed with a sword, tasked with defending himself against any usurper, who, by killing him might thereby take his place.<sup>6</sup> Frazer's

<sup>4</sup>N.B. Macarthur and Price don't here mean 'representation' in the representationalist sense, just in the sense in which representations needn't be linguistic, but can take a variety of forms (Macarthur and Price 2007: 94).

<sup>5</sup>Hence e.g. biological and social as distinct from linguistic anthropology.

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The post which he held by this precarious tenure carried with it the title of king; but surely no crowned head ever lay uneasier, or was visited by more evil dreams, than his. For year in year out, in summer and in winter, in fair weather and in foul, he had to keep his lonely watch, and whenever he snatched a troubled slumber it was at the peril of his life. The least

explanandum, then, as Wittgenstein sees it, is the fact that the king must be killed in this way. The first thing to note, then, is that this is not a fact about language or any use of it—it is about a killing.

The question, then, is whether it should still come under the remit of the pragmatist's investigation. Now, of course, the pragmatist is free to set his own agenda, and he may claim that this is not the kind of thing he interested in. But if he is interested in metaethics, as any expressivist credentials would suggest, and his view is “a way of doing something like anthropology” then he ought presumably to have something to say about this practice, even if not very much.

The impression that this is a phenomenon that ought to fall under pragmatist auspices is reinforced by the treatment that Wittgenstein himself gives it, and in particular his criticism of Frazer. Frazer's explanation, according to Wittgenstein, is that the killing occurs as a result of a mistaken belief that the king's “soul would not be kept fresh otherwise” (Wittgenstein 2006: 2e). Wittgenstein's primary purpose is to dispute this explanation, and in doing so he makes some remarks that resonate with those made by pluralists and pragmatists in other contexts. He states, for example, that we can't see people as making a “mistake” unless we can also see them as putting forth a theory (Wittgenstein 2006: 1e) or offering an opinion (3e), which in this case, thinks Wittgenstein, we can't. Frazer's mistake, he claims, is to think that the practice is based on a primitive stab at science. His own explanation is as follows:<sup>7</sup>

[...] “why is this happening?”: Because it is terrible. In other words, what strikes us in this course of events as terrible, impressive, horrible, tragic, &c, anything but trivial and insignificant, *that* is what gave birth to them (Wittgenstein 2006: 3e).

That there is nothing linguistic about the explanandum is marked by Wittgenstein's posing of the question as “why is this happening?” and not ‘why

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relaxation of his vigilance, the smallest abatement of his strength of limb or skill of fence, put him in jeopardy; grey hairs might seal his death warrant (Frazer 1996: 2).

<sup>7</sup>N.B. Wittgenstein's full view is that in the end the whole purpose of trying to explain the phenomenon rather than just describe it is misguided. Macarthur and Price entertain this reading of Wittgenstein more generally, and distinguish it from pragmatism (Macarthur and Price 2007: 118-19). We don't need to follow Wittgenstein this far at present either.

is such-and-such being said?' Macarthur and Price owe us an explanation as to why the second question is the important one for the pragmatist.

To see why this is a pressing matter, we can compare some of the questions that on their view would count as pragmatist questions with those that wouldn't:

Non-linguistic: Why did they do that? (Invade Tajikistan.)

Linguistic: Why did they say that? ('Down with Tajikistan!')

Non-linguistic: What was the function of that action? (Sending a letter.)

Linguistic: What was the function of that speech act? ('Please can you make sure this gets there by Wednesday?')

Non-linguistic: What are the causes and effects of gender discrimination?

Linguistic: What are the causes and effects of assertions of 'That is gender discrimination'?

The list, of course, is endless. The point the examples emphasise is that on the face of it, it is not clear what binds together the linguistic questions other than that they are linguistic. What is it about Macarthur and Price's pragmatist that makes him primarily interested in those and not the others?

Traditional quasi-realism had good reason to isolate language as a particular object of study. Representationalism forges a direct link between some of our statements and underlying reality, whilst denying that link to others. This puts it squarely in a tradition of what have long been taken to be deep and important philosophical questions. To ask what can genuinely be Represented in the big 'R' sense, is just another way of asking what is Real, in a corresponding big 'R' sense. If, contra Macarthur and Price, such a question could be asked, then its importance would be self-evident. But if it can't, then why constrain our focus to language at all? Why look for a plurality of discourses, as opposed to also looking for a plurality of things, or non-linguistic practices? This isn't of course to say that finding an expressivist treatment of a particular discourse wouldn't be a valuable pragmatist advance, on some readings of what pragmatists are interested in.<sup>8</sup> But Macarthur and Price need to show why it is the *only* or central

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<sup>8</sup>Given Putnam's views, a pragmatist of his stripe presumably wouldn't see expressiv-

task.

Elsewhere, they write:

[A] pragmatist about causation asks not about the role of causation itself in human life, but about the role and genealogy of the notion, term, or concept 'causation'. (The former question may be an interesting one, from some philosophical or scientific standpoints, but it isn't the pragmatist's question.) (Macarthur and Price 2007: p.94).

In this case, the distinction Macarthur and Price maintain seems relatively clear and appealing. For example, on one side – the non-pragmatist side – we might place the metaphysics of David Lewis, which gives us an explanation of the nature of causation in terms of counterfactuals regarding possible worlds. On the other side, we might consider an explanation in terms of, say, the production of expectation by habituation, roughly on the model of Hume. There is perhaps a clear sense in which the first account – Lewis' – aims to tell us about causation itself, and the second – Hume's – aims to tell us about our concept of causation or our beliefs about it.<sup>9</sup>

There is a relatively transparent sense in which causation itself simply isn't what Hume was interested in (or wasn't all he was interested in). Thus, a defender of the Macarthur and Price line might try to appeal to the intuitive sense in which we can contrast discussion of the function of language, meaning, concepts, and their kin, with explicit discussion of the things that those representations (even in the non-representationalist sense) represent. Perhaps, then, the objection relies on picking difficult examples, like the killing of the King of the Wood. Applied to the more straightforward cases, the cases that Macarthur and Price are primarily interested in, it becomes clear why pragmatists should prioritise the study of language. If this is the case then there is a way of justifying the commitment to Linguistic Priority.

But the mere fact that the distinction is only intuitively well-grounded in some cases and not in others, others that are intuitively relevant to the broader debate, e.g. the King of the Wood, casts doubt on whether it is a good way of defining pragmatism as a philosophical movement, rather than

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ism as any advance at all.

<sup>9</sup>Price's own account, as laid out in Menzies and Price 1993, explains our concept in terms of our ability as agents to intervene in the world.

just a distinction to be exploited in some cases in which a pragmatist might be interested. It isn't in the least clear, for example, why the practice of the killing of the King of the Wood should be off his radar.

One can see, moreover, that there are many intuitively pragmatist-relevant cases in which there is no substantive distinction between what people say or think and the phenomenon in question, and hence on which Linguistic Priority gets no grip. Consider, for example, the financial economy. On the one hand, to explain the nature of any aspect of the economy, or transaction within it, one needs to account for what people think about it. The economy is not wholly mind-independent. But on the other hand, the economy is not reducible to what people think about it. Interest rates are as they are, and the debts are written up in one way and not another. Similar things could be said about the law and politics. Neither are wholly independent of what we say and think about them, but nor are they constituted by it. It would be strange view that tried to account for ethics but had nothing to say about these related fields, so it would be surprising if Macarthur and Price intend to rule them out. Instead, the likely conclusion is that they have overgeneralised from the clear cases, like that of causation, without paying due heed to the consequences.

The other option, of course, is to take 'language' so broadly as to encompass everything that is not as thoroughly mind-independent as causation and like topics. But at this point the thesis of Linguistic Priority becomes almost vacuous. It would be wrong to further characterise the position in terms of a study of the plurality of linguistic functions. It would do just as well to simply call it the study of pluralities.

## 7.2. NATURALISM AND PHILOSOPHY'S DEBT TO SCIENCE

Price's focus on language is embedded within a subtle form of naturalism, which he expounds as an answer to the question as to what debt philosophy owes science. In order to clarify and evaluate the present objections to Price's (or the Price-Macarthur) view it is necessary to see the differing roles that the focus on language plays in his overall project. To this end, I'll consider the role of language, and the justification given for its prominence, as laid out in his 2008 *René Descartes Lectures* at Tilburg (Price 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). I'll argue that nothing in the justification of the project

there provided vindicates the claim that the focus of the investigation can or should be linguistic.

Any form of naturalism is beset by what Price calls the 'placement problem'. This is the problem of accomodating non-scientific, or as we may call them 'exotic' facts, like those of modality, value, probability, and the like, into a worldview that assigns the claims of science a distinguished place.<sup>10</sup> For Price, the way that philosophy has typically sought to do this is by what he calls *object naturalism*. The object naturalist claims that there really exist only the objects and properties described by science. Exotic facts must be reduced or eliminated, or perhaps retained simply as useful fictions. The bottom line is that there is a putative totality of natural facts, and these are all the facts that there are. Equally, the object naturalist may say that there is a totality of things, and those are the natural things and nothing else, or that there is a totality of truths and those are the statements of science. Everything else is, one way or another, beyond the pale.<sup>11</sup>

Price gives two main reasons as to why object naturalism is a bad form of naturalism. The first is that it closes the door to expressivist proposals regarding placement problems. By concerning itself merely with what exists, or what is true, or what the facts are, it renders invisible the naturalist-friendly project of reconstruing some of our apparent non-natural ontological commitments as having alternative functions that can be best explained using naturalistic means. A smart naturalism is one with its eyes open to expressivism.

But once the naturalist's eyes are open, he must accept, according to Price, Linguistic Priority. He must realise that unless he is to beg the question against his friend the expressivist, he should see the task of naturalism as primarily directed at statements, for example 'Murder is wrong' instead of at the facts themselves—whether, say, murder is wrong. Price calls such an approach *subject naturalism*:

We have [...] been offered the prospect of a (subject) naturalistic account of the relevant aspects of human talk and thought, from

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<sup>10</sup>There's a complication, and one that Price happily recognises, due to the fact that science itself may well incorporate many of these exotic facts, for example those of mathematics and probability, but we can waive this for now.

<sup>11</sup>There is of course a problem of working out what the limits of science are and what counts as paradigmatically 'natural'. However, we can waive these problems here.



the perspective of which the material question (what are “Xs?”) simply doesn't arise (Price 2008a: 14).

In Price's view, the mere possibility of expressivism, coupled with the view that there are minimal notions of truth, facthood, reference etc. – is enough to ‘let the cat out of the bag’, as he puts it (Price 2008a: 14). The mere theoretical possibility of subject naturalism puts it first on the grid.

The second main reason for the priority of subject naturalism is closely related to the first. Price appears to think that once he has seen the possibility of expressivism, the scales should fall from the object naturalist's eyes. He ought to realise that his previously blasé attitude overlooked the possibility that he presupposed a conception of semantics that was not itself naturalistically acceptable. In Price's words “Object naturalism [...] rests on substantial theoretical assumptions about what we humans do with language – roughly, the assumption that substantial “word-world” semantic relations are a part of the best scientific account of the relevant terms.” This being so, it may seem that in quite general terms, the self-aware naturalist must recognise that his project is anchored in the semantic.

The object naturalist might try to investigate whether there are such semantic relations as he requires using his own object naturalistic methods. Or so at least one might think, but Price has an ingenious argument to show why he can't. To try to use object naturalism to ground itself would be to ask whether it is really a (naturalistic) fact that there is a suitable notion of, for example, reference. This in turn would be to ask whether the term ‘refers’ refers to a naturalistically acceptable relation, for example a certain causal relation. But this is methodologically circular, for reasons that I think can be summed up as follows: Suppose the answer to the investigation was yes. Then this could be true either because the term ‘refers’ refers in a naturalistically acceptable way to the relation in question, or because it refers in a way that is not acceptable, or what amounts to the same thing, refers to a non-naturalistically acceptable relation. But how does the object naturalist tell which it is? To answer that question he needs to know the nature of the reference relation, but that is what he is trying to find out! So we end up going in circles.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Price's argument is more complex than this, and he also entertains the claim as to whether object naturalism is not only unable to check its own presuppositions but is also incoherent. I think, however, that the above line of argument is a decent representation

Price is keen to stress that object naturalists shouldn't be offered a cheap victory by what he sees as a corruption of broadly speaking Quinean views about the nature of ontology. One of Quine's great insights was that we can climb up and down disquotational ladders in order to move from talk about 'X's to talk about Xs. To say that 'Snow is white' is true, is for Quine to say something about snow, i.e. that it is white. Price thinks that contemporary metaphysicians have abused this privilege, and in the current context, this accusation takes the following form: Object naturalists – who are held to be metaphysicians in the questionable sense – think that subject naturalism can simply be collapsed into object naturalism by climbing down the semantic ladders that the subject naturalist has so painstakingly erected. They will always transform a question about language into a question about objects.

The purported reality of this threat is based for Price on a broadly *ad hominem* observation of the practice of contemporary metaphysicians, a fact that is important if we are to understand the way in which Price goes about defending against it.<sup>13</sup> In particular, empathy with Price's particular understanding of the public dialectic is required if we are to understand what his worry is, given that he too accepts the Quinean moral of ontology, at least insofar as he accepts that the ladders are there for us to climb up and down as we choose. Given this, one may ask, isn't the conclusion to be drawn that there is no important distinction between a methodology starting at the linguistic level and one starting at the object level? Or in other words, isn't the moral of semantic ladders that there is no important difference between subject naturalism and object naturalism?

Not for Price. He thinks that the awareness of the expressivist/quasi-realist proposal shows us a sense in which the linguistic starting point offers a genuine alternative to traditional object naturalism. It is this that gives substance to the claim that the subject naturalist starting point is genuinely linguistic, in one sense at least (we'll shortly come to another). Given, then, that there is this difference, and given also that, by the above argument, subject naturalism takes priority for the naturalist, the onus is on the object naturalist to show that when he climbs down the relevant ladders he does so in a way that genuinely changes the terms of the debate. That is to say, his semantic descent must be "a *genuine* logical descent, then, and not a mere

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of the main strand of his view, as offered in e.g. Price 2008a: 11-14.

<sup>13</sup>This thought is developed extensively in Price 2009a.

reversal of Quine's deflationary "semantic ascent". Quine's semantic ascent never really leaves the ground." (Price 2008a: 7). For Price, we might say, the subject naturalist has picked Quine off the floor. Whereas Quine purported never to leave the ground, in the hands of the subject naturalist he never reaches it.

The object naturalist, then, in Price's view, needs to do something more in order to reach that ground. He needs to show that a semantic descent can make what starts out as a linguistic matter into an issue about objects in some theoretically weighty sense. He needs to effect a genuine transition. The way he must allegedly do this is by appealing to representationalism. According to Price, it is representationalism that would allow the object naturalist to claim that when he makes a semantic descent he drops right to the floor, fully equipped to explore the basement of reality.

It is evident that Price's plan relies heavily on the methodological consequences of the bare theoretical possibility of quasi-realism, and the demand that naturalism must be aware of its own semantic presuppositions. It is this possibility that determines whether we start on the floor or in the air. It is only this distinction that prevents subject naturalism from collapsing into object naturalism, or for the distinction between allegedly bad metaphysics and good pragmatic naturalism to break down in the face of semantic ladders. This is a heavy weight to bear, and there is perhaps some doubt as to whether it can be supported. But that is not the point I want to take up here. I am happy, for the sake of argument, to grant Price everything he desires in regard to the above issues. In that regard, I accede to Price's argument that naturalism requires a linguistic focus *in the above sense*. What I am not happy to grant is a further implication to another sense in which naturalism might be said to require a linguistic focus, one that I think Price believes simply follows from the above claims.

Specifically, the above arguments do not justify us in positing, or trying to investigate, a plurality of discourses, or a plurality of linguistic functions, as the further component in Price's view suggests. In order to see this clearly, it's necessary to distinguish between two ways in which Price's view is language-focal. On the one hand, it is language-focal in the above sense, stating that any open-minded form of naturalism will need to be alive to the possibility that certain forms of it, for example object naturalism, demand a particular conception of semantics, viz. representationalism. In that regard,

all forms of naturalism are beholden to views in the philosophy of language, and so an unreflective object naturalism may need to be abandoned, or at least subordinated to subject naturalism. Furthermore, we know from the possibility of expressivism that not all sentences need wear their logical form on their sleeve. However, it doesn't follow from recognising this, and indeed it doesn't even follow from rejecting representationalism, that the project of naturalism ought then to be the investigation of a plurality of linguistic functions. These two senses in which there might be a linguistic focus are disjoint. It is quite consistent with the rejection of representationalism to then go on to claim that the job of pragmatists or naturalists is to investigate non-linguistic, or not pre-eminently linguistic, practices, like the killing of the King of the Wood, or the nature of the economy or of law, not merely our talk about them. This investigation, needless to say, does not revert to object naturalism unless we think that it can only be conducted by giving yes/no answers to existence questions, or answers to questions like 'must the King of the Wood *really* be killed in his prime?' But there is no reason to think we need to be as heavy handed as that just because we aren't examining language. (I'll say a bit more about this later.)

The question, then, is whether there is any independent reason to suppose that naturalists, and the pragmatists that follow them, should above all else be interested in a plurality of discourses or linguistic functions. Price seems to take the transition as obvious. Indeed, he seems to take it as read that the only options on the table are either object naturalism, or a subject naturalism that sees as its main task the investigation of the variety of our linguistic practices. Here is a passage, as typical as any, where the transition is made:

Given a naturalistic conception of speakers, the addition of a representationalist conception of speech makes the object naturalist's ontological interpretation of the placement problem almost irresistible [...] Somehow, the resulting multiplicity of kinds of entities – values, modalities, meanings, and all the rest – needs to be accommodated within the natural realm. To what else, after all, could natural speakers be related by natural semantic relations?

Without a representationalist conception of the talk, however,

the puzzle takes a very different form. It remains in the linguistic realm, a puzzle about a plurality of *ways of talking*, of forms of human linguistic behaviour (Price 2008a: 18).

For Price, the naturalist is given two options for dealing with placement problems. The first is to accept representationalism, in which case the way to deal with them is object naturalism. The second is to reject representationalism, in which case – and this is the startling transition – we are assured that naturalism without representationalism “remains in the linguistic realm”, and focuses on a “plurality of *ways of talking*”. The question I urge once more is: *why?* Admittedly, to have followed Price this far is to have accepted that in one sense our starting point is ‘linguistic’. But all this means is that we keep our eyes open for possible expressivisms, and we don’t see our capacity for climbing down semantic ladders as compromising this, or giving us a sure route to the kind of metaphysics that Price thinks is bad. This doesn’t imply that the puzzle remains essentially about language use, i.e. that only in finding a variety of forms of expressivism could we pursue the naturalist project.

To think that it does is to suffer a hangover from the positions that Price has rejected, in particular old-fashioned quasi-realism. Having imbibed from this cup, he is, I suggest, still reeling from its effects. This illusion Price, on this line, labours under can be put in his own terms as follows: The old naturalist positions, those that are to be rejected, are object naturalism and representationalist quasi-realism. Both of these offer general strategies for naturalism, and for what Price would call solving placement problems. On the object naturalist view, we skip along the claims of our various disciplines and ask which of them really refer to various bits of the world, or which statements are really true, or describe the real facts, and other cognate questions. The object naturalist’s answer, of course, is that it is the naturalistic claims that fit the bill; the others must be reduced, eliminated, or treated as convenient fictions. For the quasi-realist, we get an approach that is nearly as neat. We can do this, or something rather like it, but with the added extra that in some cases we can state that the claims in question serve a rather different function to straightforward representation. We can describe them as expressing, say, attitudes of endorsement, in the case of values, or credences in certain outcomes conditional on certain events, in the case of probabilities. In that way we reserve the unqualified legitimacy

of the discourse. It is working exactly as it should. Nevertheless, we don't expand the ontology.<sup>14</sup>

Why is it important, for traditional quasi-realism, that the thesis is made at the level of language? Partly because the representationalist strand in the total view, the strand shared with object naturalism, threatens to ontologically commit us to the existence of anything that we can't explain away, and yet persist in apparently quantifying over, for example moral values. Given representationalism, this is a big worry for naturalists. They risk populating the world with exotic objects.

Price wants to take away this representationalist strand. In doing so, one might think – Price appears to think – the right aim is to continue the good work the quasi-realist started, whilst abandoning the bad part of his view—representationalism. That is, we pursue the naturalistic project of explaining why certain assertoric practices, apparently referring to exotic objects, can be explained without positing those objects in any more than the minimal sense.

The problem for Price, as I see it, is that the minute we give up representationalism altogether, the spectre of ontological commitment ought also to stop haunting us. And consequently it becomes questionable as to whether this is the right way, or at least the only right way, to carry on the task in hand—to pick up the standard laid down by the old quasi-realist. How can one coherently think, as Price would have us do, that naturalism is interestingly located as an issue regarding the explaining away of quantification over exotic objects, and whose chief task is to reinterpret the apparently existential statements we make regarding, e.g. values? What are we supposed to be worried about? We've already been told that quantification and its cousins aren't a big deal, or at least not as big a deal as the old representationalist views suggested.

Concisely put, traditional representationalist quasi-realism had two aims:

1. Pruning the ontology: You don't need to populate the world with non-natural (exotic) entities.
2. Vindicating the practice: The function of the discourse can be under-

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<sup>14</sup>It's perhaps worth noting, as Price does, that fictionalism is different to quasi-realism. Fictionalism is committed to the idea that in a literal sense, the claims of, say, ethics, are false. The quasi-realist thinks that the claims of ethics are literally true. It is just that they are not made true by describing the deep facets of reality.

stood in independent (meritorious) terms.

The first aim is shared with object naturalism. The second is the great advance of quasi-realism. It is what Price is chiefly interested in retaining. But what does Price think about the first? Insofar as the populating to be avoided presupposed an attempt to draw the One True Picture of Reality, a project that presupposes representationalism, then Price can't think of it as a good theoretical aim. It relies on a mistaken view of language and metaphysics, or at least not a naturalistically acceptable one.

But does Price then reject it outright? Specifically, if he rejects it then what happens to placement problems? How can there be even a *primâ facie* tension between the posits of science and those of, say, ethics? Neither (can even) try to limn reality, and neither explicitly contradict each other. 'Leptons weigh about four to five pounds' is not a statement of ethics, and 'Murder is permissible on Wednesdays' is not a statement of physics. Price underestimates the extent to which placement problems are themselves displaced if we buy the surrounding claims he tries to sell us.

Price described the motivations of his new form of naturalism – and hinted at its novelty – when he phrased the basic issue as the payment of philosophy's debt to science. I think if we are to take the rejection of representationalism and concurrent forms of ontology and object naturalism seriously, then we need to focus on what this demand means, when considered on its own terms, and not in the shadow of the history in regard to which, if the above criticisms are correct, he still sees it. In its upmost generality, Price claims that "to be a philosophical naturalist is to believe that philosophy is not simply a different enterprise from science, and that philosophy properly defers to science, where the concerns of the two disciplines coincide" (Price 2008a: 1). Once representationalism has been abandoned, I think that this constraint is more open-ended than Price would have us believe.

For one thing, it presumably entails that philosophers shouldn't deny scientific claims. But this is not hard to avoid, since philosophers don't typically challenge scientific claims, any more than they challenge the claims of historians or lawyers. What it is to believe that philosophy is not simply a different enterprise from science is harder to define. It presumably means that philosophers should take scientific claims as relevant to their own pur-

suits, as perhaps learning more about psychology might inform the philosophy of mind, and understanding more about physics might inform our philosophy of causation. Again, however, it might be hard to find a philosopher who was not a naturalist in this sense.<sup>15</sup> The project becomes more ambitious if, like Price, and indeed Blackburn, one attempts to explain, say, moral talk in terms of categories that are themselves not moral, and are closer to the studies of science. Whenever this is achieved, the explanatory categories gain a certain theoretical pre-eminence at the expense of the explanandum, and the province of science is expanded accordingly.

But once again, there seems no reason why the province should expand to cover only, or have special interest in, linguistic practices. Why not think that if the naturalist can explain, say, the practice of having a justice system, as opposed to merely the function of making the judgement 'That is a just act', in naturalistic terms, then he has paid his debt to science in the same way that an expressivist treatment of the linguistic act might. In both cases it appears that the same thing is achieved. We have an explanation as to why creatures like us – human animals – might go in for a particular kind of practice, one that is not directly accounted for by present science. Or again, if he can explain why we have religious institutions, why we baptise children, marry in churches, give alms, feel enmity to other creeds, go on crusades, pray, and so on—if he can explain all that without invoking notions from the catechism, as opposed to saying, for example that we do it all because we have been touched by God, then he has to that extent naturalised our practice. We have been able to make sense of it in naturalistic terms.

Again, I do not see why we should suppose there to be a significant divide between a naturalistic explanation of a linguistic phenomenon and a naturalistic explanation of a non-linguistic phenomenon. Instead, I conjecture that the only motivation for positing this divide is the reverberation of the representationalist project to draw a unique or fundamental ontology—a project that Price himself has rejected. On the old views, language was the medium of the practice of ontology, and since ontological commitment was the bugbear, language needed to be attended to. But if Price is right, then language is not the medium of the practice of ontology in any sense worth

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<sup>15</sup>There are of course borderline cases, like the positing of possible worlds. But even these are of somewhat unclear relation to science. Does physics claim that there aren't such worlds?



being afraid of (capital 'O' Ontology). So there is nothing special about it that demands attention over anything else.

Price has to choose. Either he must reject the coherence of placement problems given the rejection of representationalism, or he must reconstrue them more radically than he does. If he does the latter, then the job of 'placing' the exotic within the natural world is not to be understood as limited to explaining a plurality of linguistic functions. It is rather to commit to trying to explain a variety of practices, linguistic and non-linguistic, in naturalistic terms. Indeed, there is no reason even to limit it to *practices*. There is no fundamental cleavage between our practices and the institutions that many of them involve. Our legal practice cannot be made sense of without legal institutions. Our medical practice cannot be made sense of without medical institutions. These in turn are best examined in tandem with 'objects' of such abstraction as the *law* and *medicine*. Aside from the mistaken view that one is performing ontology in the sense that Price rejects, there is no clear reason why these connections should be severed for the purposes of investigation. To retreat to the linguistic seems to me to retain the fear of making ontological commitments to which one has already supposed that one cannot in actual fact commit.

There is one more reason for Price to swallow the pills here peddled. This stems from his distinction between *i-representation* and *e-representation*, and concomitantly between the *i-World* and the *e-World* (Price 2008b, 2008c). Price thinks that we have two different notions of representation, which it is important that we separate. The first aligns with what Hartry Field calls 'indicator relations'. This is the sense of representation best given by analogy with fuel gauges, thermometers, and the like. These devices 'represent' their objects, fuel level and temperature, by co-varying with them. More is required, of course, but this is the essence of it. This is e-representation, where the 'e' stands for 'environmental' or 'external', and is closely linked to the kinds of detection mechanisms that we might suppose ourselves, as natural organisms, to possess. We are hooked up to the world in this brute and direct way, and thank goodness we are, because we wouldn't last long if we weren't.

Contrasted with this is i-representation, where 'i' stands for 'internalist' or 'inferential'. This is a theory of representation heavily influenced by Robert Brandom, and is paradigmatically conceptual. Suppose, for example,

we take the claim 'That is a chair'. This will have certain (non-logical) inferential connections with other concepts, like 'sittable-on', and the structured way in which these concepts inter-relate is partly constitutive of their content. A creature that has a rich cognitive i-life does much more than merely co-vary with his environment. Though Price does not put it this way, he above the lower animals has the capacity to be an *idler*. He can muse, ruminate, fantasise, and so on. His capacities far exceed those of thermometers.

For Price, this distinction provides a platform for the investigation of a plurality of discourses. I'll shortly argue that it does the opposite, but first let's see how Price reaches his conclusion. The key is the focus on i-representation. As Price puts it:

According to [i-representation], the internal logical machinery of language creates packets of information, or contents, but these may be associated with many different functional relationships, in the complex interaction between language users and their physical environment.

From the inside – as ordinary language users – we don't notice these differences between one sort of content and another. We talk about 'facts' of many different kinds – e.g., about tastes and colours, or right and wrong, as easily as about shape and position. The differences are only visible from a theoretical perspective, by asking about the different roles that commitments about these various matters play, in the lives of creatures like us [...] Facts thus become a kind of projection of informational structures made possible by language [...] and there is a plurality in the resulting realm of facts, reflecting the underlying plurality of functions of assertoric commitments (Price 2008c: 16).

The vision is familiar and I won't state once again how it corresponds to the pluralist template. The important thing in the current context is a further use that Price goes on to make of the *i*-as-opposed-to-*e* distinction. Corresponding to the two types of representation, and the world as represented by the 'projection of informational structures' that constitute them, there are e-Worlds and i-Worlds. These are, however, not disjoint, in the way that, say, Lewis' possible worlds are. Rather, i-Worlds are worlds as

represented simply by disquoting the relevant uses of some i-vocabulary. So our i-World(s), moral, mathematical, political creatures that we are, is one of morals, mathematics and politics. I-worlds, in a manner of speaking, are rich in wonder, and cheap in price. The e-World is the world as represented by our naturalistic or scientific claims alone. It is relatively sparse. It is what a naturalist should think of as the “natural environment” (Price 2008b: 11).

Price is adamant about the following, which signals his break from naturalist orthodoxy: Neither world is ontologically privileged, or more real than the other. Indeed,

I want to stress that there is nothing metaphysical about this notion [of the e-World]. It doesn't presuppose an Archimedean viewpoint, outside thought and language altogether, but simply an ordinary, first-order scientific viewpoint. Roughly, the e-World is visible only from within science in precisely the same sense as the i-World is visible only from within the viewpoint of users of assertoric vocabularies in general. *Indeed, the e-World simply is the i-World of the scientific vocabulary* (Price 2008b: 11) [emphasis added].

In other words, the e-World is what we get if we disquote the true claims of the naturalistic vocabulary. The lovely thing about this way of putting it is that it leaves the reader in no doubt as to how far Price thinks he has come from object naturalism and associated forms of representationalism. The e-World has the same status as the other i-Worlds. Or better, there is no way of according statuses that isn't itself i-perspectival.

Seen against this backdrop the idea that we are (only) to investigate a plurality of linguistic functions looks odd, to say the least. This is because the explanation of, say, value talk, would itself be relativised to a further i-World, the natural world—the world of science. This would not be, in any independent sense, the real world. ‘Naturalising’ in this way would be nothing more than to disquote the relevant scientific vocabulary, and use it in the explanation, whilst keeping the moral vocabulary on the side of the explanandum. Nothing wrong with that, of course, but why restrict the explanandum to the linguistic? Why not explain moral practices and not just moral judgements. Why not also use the i-World of science to explain

non-linguistic phenomena?

One worry is that even if we abandon representationalism, there is a purely naturalistic incentive not to use non-naturalistic vocabulary in disquoted form. So whilst abandoning representationalism will protect us from trying to offer any truths from a God's eye perspective, it doesn't rid us of the proper concern, when wearing our naturalist hat, not to quantify over non-natural entities. For this reason, if we are working from the i-World of science, the e-World, we shouldn't use disquoted vocabulary from other i-Worlds, even in the explanandum. So, for example, we should explain 'causation', but not causation, and 'wrongness' but not wrongness. Otherwise we are committing, in a minimal but nonetheless compromising way, to the existence of causation and wrongness, something that the naturalist, if he has no need for such notions in science, shouldn't do, not when he is wearing his naturalist hat at least.

If this is the motivation for keeping the explananda at the linguistic level, then I think that the subject-naturalist is being too precious. The gain for naturalism is already achieved by using only naturalistically acceptable vocabulary in the explanation (the explanans). In this regard, as was noted a few pages previously, the province of science is expanded at the expense of what it is used to explain. To think that a further significant gain could be made by refusing to talk in the object language of the explananda would, I think, be to be scared of something that only representationalists should be scared of. It would be to think that we start limning reality in the deep metaphysical sense. But this is something we can't do anyway.

Moreover, unless the naturalist is willing to explain claims made using the object language of the exotic discourses, he won't be able to account for all the exotic facts, for reasons we'll now see: Let us introduce the term 'i-facts' to mean facts that are simply reached by disquoting the truths of any (even exotic) discourses, and 'e-facts' for those reached by disquoted uses of the claims of science. We can also introduce the notion of an i- or e-*judgement* to refer to the actual process of making the relevant judgements, as opposed to the facts themselves. Even a non-representationalist must of course distinguish between the judgement and what is judged. You might, for example, judge that murder is right, when in fact it is wrong. Consider, then, the following i-facts:

i-fact: The King of the Wood must be killed in his prime.

i-fact: Murder is wrong.

i-fact: The Queen is the sovereign.

The above are not on the face of it linguistic facts. They are not, that is, facts about uses of language in any transparent sense. One could of course judge that they are the case – i.e. that the King must be killed in his prime, that murder is wrong, and that the Queen is the sovereign. But as noted above, that does not imply that there is no distinction between the fact and the (linguistic) judgement. The Queen is sovereign even if you think she isn't. Instead, it ought to be agreed by all parties that substantial philosophical work is to be done if one is to show that these facts can be explained away in terms of 'projection of informational structures', as Price called them. Or in other words, it can't be assumed that the facts can be given an expressivist treatment. To clarify to the point of tedium, it cannot be assumed on any non-question begging ground, that explaining these facts is the same task as simply explaining what the function of the following judgements is, or indeed any related judgements:

i-judgement-by-Jones: 'The King of the Wood must be killed in his prime.'

i-judgement-by-Jones: 'Murder is wrong.'

i-judgement-by-Jones: 'The Queen is the sovereign.'

That is not to say that in some cases, the fundamental explanation of one of the i-facts will be in terms of related i-judgements. This might be the case with the second i-fact, if expressivism about ethics is correct. But there is no reason to assume that a similar project would work with the other two. Imagine, then, that you are Price's naturalist. By Price's programme you are only allowed to explain the i-judgements and not the i-facts directly. If the i-facts turn out to be explicable in terms of the function of i-judgements – not necessarily the very i-judgements listed above – then all well and good. But what if they aren't? That is to say, what if not every single i-fact receives an effective expressivist treatment? Indeed, what if, as seems at least as plausible as the contrary, there is no general reason to suppose that all these facts can be explained away on expressivist terms? You – Price's naturalist – are left with unsolved placement problems. Your i-world (the

e-world) hasn't accounted for all the facts in all the other i-worlds, or put differently, all the facts in the most inclusive of i-worlds—the world with facts about sovereigns and values and the like. What does this mean for your naturalism?

One possibility is that it is no problem at all. Given that there is no single real world, but only differing i-worlds, of which the e-world is but one, the fact that all the other i-worlds can't be explained in terms of the e-world is no worse than the fact that not all cardboard boxes fit inside one another. The problem, however, is that this doesn't amount to naturalism as we might pretheoretically understand it. This is because it seems to leave vast sections of the i-World(s) untouched. Not all the facts get placed.

Price has, as far as I can see, two options. The first is to claim that there aren't really such things as sovereigns, or sovereignty, supposing for example (as is plausible) that these are not the kinds of things of which he can give an expressivist treatment. But whilst this is an option available to the old fashioned object-naturalist or representationalist quasi-realist, it doesn't seem available to Price. It effectively amounts to the claim that there is no such property of being a sovereign, or there are no genuine truths of the form 'X is a sovereign'. But these are the deep notions of truth, existence, property, and so on that Price rejects. So unless he is going to deny the i-fact on its own terms; unless he is directly contesting the right of Elizabeth II to rule the nation, he cannot say anything at all. And of course, he does not want to deny that Elizabeth II is the sovereign in this i-sense. (Or if he does, it is no part of his naturalism.)<sup>16</sup>

The only other option, then, is to expand the terms of naturalism. He needs to view placement problems as extending beyond the plurality of discourses – i-judgements – and into the realm of the i-facts themselves. He needs to forget about the 'projection of informational structures', and try instead to investigate constitutional and monarchical structures. Only then does he have a chance of reconciling the apparently non-natural i-fact that the Queen is the sovereign with the broadly naturalistic worldview that he privileges.

I don't say that this will work. But that would sound the death knell

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<sup>16</sup>N.B. There is of course an open question as to what the i-facts are. One might for example think that it's a plain falsehood that the King of the Wood must be killed in his prime. But there will be plenty of i-facts, for example that the Queen is the sovereign, that will cause the relevant problems.

for non-representationalist naturalism. The claim is simply that if non-representationalist naturalism is to be successful it shouldn't restrict itself to the investigation of a plurality of linguistic functions, or a plurality of discourses. To do so would be to place a bet on the total success of expressivism—the hope that all i-facts could be explained in terms of the naturalistically appreciable function of i-judgements. This is a poor bet to place.

### 7.3. CONCLUDING REMARKS TO THE CHAPTER

To conclude, then, in some respects the position indirectly suggested by the latter parts of this thesis (chs. 5 and 6) is akin to 'global quasi-realism' or 'pragmatism', as presented by Macarthur and Price. The important similarity is that not everything about quasi-realism lives or dies with representationalism, and certainly doesn't live or die with metaphysical realism. The problem, however, one which according to the above arguments, Macarthur and Price don't fully appreciate, is that there is considerably less left of quasi-realism (or their pragmatism) once representationalism is abandoned than their programmatic comments suggest. In particular, there seems no good reason to restrict the field of explananda to language, and a functional plurality of discourses.

In this regard, it would be advantageous if other areas of the pragmatist philosophy might be utilised to flesh out the minimalist skeleton. But some sources of promise, for example Putnam's conceptual relativity, aren't as substantial as purported. There is a lingering worry, therefore, that the resources of both pragmatism and quasi-realism are exhausted more quickly than any of their proponents suggest. This is not, in the end, bad news *per se*. In the myth, Pandora opened her vessel to release the ills of the world, but perhaps this is a rather misleading analogy. In this case what is let out is simply an almost unrestricted possibility of differing types of explanation for an almost unrestricted variety of phenomena. Depending on how you look at it, this may be considered a bounty.

To reiterate, however, what we don't get is an explanation of the differing "discourses subject to different standards and possessing different sorts of applications, with different logical and grammatical features—different "language games" in Wittgenstein's sense" (Putnam 2004: 21-2). There

may indeed be such things, and the pragmatists and quasi-realists may eventually be able to track many of them down. But less has been achieved than we have been led to believe. The problem, then, is perhaps with the last thing that Pandora found—hope. There is, one may feel, a little too much of it.

Moreover, if the above arguments against Macarthur and Price are correct, then their hopes are misguided. There is no coherently motivated project that on the one hand eschews representationalism and the kind of ontology that goes with it, and at the same time wants to keep its hands clean of ontology by dealing only with language. Making one's pragmatism naturalistic doesn't help. The old projectivist metaphor that governed quasi-realism, and that Price sometimes uses himself, would have us think of a naturalism that on the one hand delineated the world as it is in itself—the natural world, and then presented everything else as projections of our own minds, or our own linguistic judgements, or “informational structures” gilding and staining that reality. This is a metaphor that non-representationalist views can't help themselves to in anything like the same way. This is because they forbid themselves the totalising statement that *the natural facts are all the real facts*. If you can say this, then you can shortcut to the idea that everything else, if it is to be a fact at all, must be a projection. After all, what else could it be?

The anti-representationalist can only say *the natural facts are all the natural facts*. And then what happens to the idea that all the other facts must be projections? It too must disappear in the absence of any concrete proposal as to how the facts in question are in fact projections, or more precisely, are explained in terms of an expressivist construal of a region of discourse. Barring such a proposal, there is no reason to think that the facts are not just facts of a different sort to the natural facts. There is, that is to say, no parallel chain of reasoning that goes from the claim that they are not natural to the idea that they *must* therefore be projections, or shadows of our linguistic constructions.

Where does this leave us in regard to the plurality of discourses? What role can it play in positions of a broadly pragmatist stripe? I finish with a few remarks.



## 7.4. CONCLUDING REMARKS TO THE DISSERTATION

I have argued in various ways that prominent conceptions of a plurality of discourses and their role in the realism debate fall short along two dimensions. First, there are many more complications regarding the individuation of different discourses – the pulling of each apart from the others – than authors usually suppose. The example given in the first chapter regarding Wright's truth-pluralism, and its difficult relation to compositionality, is a clear example of this. The criticisms of thick terms and various other kinds of entangling given in regard to Blackburn's quasi-realism is another. In this concluding chapter more has been said about a second point—the assumption that the requisite field of dispute should be the linguistic, i.e. that we should be worried about discourse and not about its objects.

If I were temporarily to allow myself the luxury of a Grand Vision, it would have two corresponding principles: First, as it was put in the introduction, the postulation of a *plurality* of discourses lining up with the divisions in the realism debate is a *fait incomplet* and not a *fait accompli*. Any postulation of such a plurality needs to be won through to in each case, relative to each hallmark the pluralist might wish to test for. Though I can present no reason for it here, this thought might have a more general resonance. Perhaps the very divisions between these topics is overblown. In other words, Plato's Line might be as misleading in its division of spheres of thought and reality as many people take Plato's philosophy to be in other respects. Perhaps those divisions just aren't there. This isn't to recommend quietism, or monism; there could be divisions, and presumably the traditional borders have something right about them – mathematics isn't much like ethics – but it might be that the traditional syllabus of ethics, mathematics, physics and so on, turns out not to be of much significance except as, well, a 'syllabus' in the ordinary sense of the term. This is something I wanted to press more from the outset, but now we are at the end and there is no more time.

Second, we needn't and shouldn't draw a programmatic distinction between the study of language and of the world. Not at least if we believe the anti-representationalist strand pressed by various parties in the debate. If we can give, in any particular case, an explanation that is primarily located as a thesis about language use, then all well and good, but if we cannot, then this

is of no special consequence. Wittgenstein once tried to investigate language as bound up with the actions into which it is woven. If what is argued above is correct then we needn't stop with actions, but could also include objects, institutions, and other things besides. If we have convinced ourselves that there is no way of making the kinds of ontological commitments that representationalism supposes possible, then we should be relaxed about talking in the object linguistic mode. We have already convinced ourselves that there is no danger in so doing; there is no *possible* danger. And what could be more pragmatist than such a hands-on approach to philosophy?

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