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THE METAPHYSICS OF CLASSICAL LOGIC:
SEMANTIC ANTI-REALISM, QUASI-REALISM
AND LOGICAL REVISIONISM

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University

1999

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1999
ABSTRACT

The project is to demonstrate important connections between our metaphysical views and the logical principles we endorse. For example, acceptance of the principle that every proposition is determinately true or false commits us to certain "metaphysical realist" views about the existence of mind-independent facts. Conversely: acceptance of certain metaphysical views (e.g., "irrealist" views that deny the existence of certain kinds of facts) necessitate rejection of certain logics in favor of others.

Current debates offer several views about the relation between logic and metaphysics. "Semantic anti-realism," says that truth is essentially constrained by possible knowledge: that is, that all truths are knowable, and that once this is acknowledged, we must revise classical logic. The arguments for this view are not compelling; I suggest that Dummett and others do not provide a precise enough account of the relation between logic and semantic anti-realism. My main positive contribution is a revised formulation of the purported connection. It establishes, in a way that others have not, that semantic anti-realism does issue a demand to revise our principles of logic.

Another form of anti-realism suggests that certain indicative statements (e.g., statements of moral appraisal) serve not to represent facts, but rather to express sentiments. Such "irrealist" metaphysical views (Simon Blackburn's expressivism in ethics, for example) are said to be compatible with classical principles of inference.
I argue that this is a mistake: despite Blackburn’s “quasi-realist” attempts to show that the expressivist can consistently accept the Excluded Middle, the expressivist cannot consistently endorse the possibility of unknowable moral truths. So this form of metaphysical irrealism (viz., rejection of “moral facts”) entails an important form of semantic anti-realism (i.e., that all truths are knowable), and therefore, shares the its consequences for logical revision.

One general result is that various metaphysical theories necessitate radical revisions in our inferential rules. Another result is that endorsement of classical logic implies acceptance of various forms of metaphysical realism (some of which rule out “projectivist” or “expressivist” theories). Upshot: our logic really does, in some important sense, guide our metaphysics, and vice versa.
For Daniel
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Daniel Kolak opened to me the door to philosophy. To him this manuscript is dedicated.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Charlie Rose: You ever been in therapy?
David Lynch: One time.
CR: What happened? ...
DL: Well, I had a reason, you know, for going in. ...And I asked him straight out, right up front, “Could this process that we’re going to go through affect creativity?” And he said, “David, I have to be honest with you, it could.” And so then I had to shake his hand and—
CR: And say, “Goodbye, this not for me”?
DL: Yes, yes, because it’s a magical thing, and you don’t want to know so much that would, you know, stop it from happening.
CR: Do you understand creativity?
DL: No.

—“The Charlie Rose Show”

Sometimes a better understanding of a practice affords radical revision therein. We unveil the causes or the real meanings behind our moves, only to find that it no longer makes sense to go on as before. The present investigation concerns one species of this phenomenon. It concerns and aims to demonstrate our inability to sustain certain inferential norms (viz., those associated with distinctively classical rules of logic) in the face of a properly defended anti-realism about truth-value. The claim is that some philosophical commitments about the relative mind-dependence of truth in
an area forge changes of inferential commitment within the area. That is, they force changes in our classical standards of correct argumentative thought and talk. Or conversely, our study is of the philosophical costs of classical logic. It will be argued that one's unyielding commitment to distinctively classical principles of reasoning (such as the law of excluded middle or any principle equivalent to it) reflects, in the interesting cases, an implicit commitment to certain brands of realism about the underlying matters that one is reasoning about. For instance, granting that every mathematical claim is either true or false even if we can never know which, commits us to the possibility of unknowable truths (i.e., truths that are not constrained by possible evidence).\(^1\) And supposing that every moral claim is either true or false even if we can never know which, entails that there are moral "facts of the matter" that make those claims true. We will say more about the specific brands of realism that are of interest here. For now, I only want to state the general thesis, which is this. Logic is a guide to metaphysics, and vice versa.

Two clarifications: First, I will discuss anti-realism as it concerns a given range of judgements (e.g., moral, mathematical or modal judgments), since our favored anti-realism may not have global scope (i.e., may not be about all judgments unrestrictedly). Berkeley's Idealism is a brand of global anti-realism, since it claimed that all things depend for their existence on the mind—hence his slogan, "To be is to be perceived." And though contemporary anti-realisms avow various kinds of mind-dependence, not all anti-realists take things this far. For instance, it is thought that we might embrace a realism about the physical world but deny that there are

\(^1\)Strictly speaking the principle of bivalence (i.e., that every claim is either true or false) is not intersubstitutable with the law of excluded middle (i.e., p or not-p, for all p). Nevertheless, we may treat them as equivalent just as long as we help ourselves to Tarski's platitude "p iff 'p' is true."
mind-independent facts about what is beautiful or morally right, since (in a very important sense) physical facts obtain irrespective of our beliefs about them and aesthetic and moral facts (to some interesting degree) are in the eye of the beholder or society that avows them. Or we might be realists about shape and anti-realist about color, since, as is alleged, colors (but not shapes) depend for their existence (at least in part) on certain perceptual responses to the world. We shall focus primarily on anti-realist strategies with local, rather than global, scope. So we shall talk about various forms of anti-realism with respect to an area or discourse (e.g., moral, modal or mathematical discourse).

Second, it should also be noted that the focus of this project is not so much on the proper outcome of any particular realism debate (say, over morals or modals) as it is on the various strategies for denying realism and on the consequences for their going on as before, with respect to the inferential practice.

What then is realism? The realism/anti-realism distinction is carved in many ways, and a precursory survey of the terrain reveals but a quagmire of apparently unrelated points of contention. For there is tremendous disagreement about how best to understand the thesis that anti-realism opposes. The interest here is with a family of anti-realist views, marked by a positive and negative view. The positive claim is that the target utterances are truth-evaluable, that the statements in question are capable of being true or false and properly appraisable by us as such. The negative view is that these truth-values are not fixed independently of the conceptual resources of the speakers that avow the propositions in question. Such claims to mind-dependence, if at all interesting, include an account of what is meant by 'independence.' And the
literature diverges radically on how best to understand this notion. There are a host of divergent slogans:

- The truth-values in question are *response-independent*, in that they would be as they are even if nobody perceived them that way.
- The truth-values in question are potentially *recognition-transcendent* — that is, some of the relevant indicatives may be true or false, even if in principle we never could know which.
- Every statement of the chosen class has a *determinate* truth-value, true or false.
- There are *facts of the matter* of the given kind.

And this latter claim to factuality (whose opposition is sometimes called *irrealism*) is explicated in a number of ways, for instance,

- The best explanation of our, say, moral thought requires an appeal to distinctively moral facts.
- Fully informed opinion must converge upon a single verdict.

The present project will consider anti-realist responses to all but one of these varieties of realism. Owing mostly to limitations of space, we shall not consider response-dependency theses. These other forms of anti-realism will keep our hands full as it is. One subsidiary question here is whether a careful study of these theories will reveal logical connections between them, and perhaps, some shared theses among them. The present investigation is optimistic on this score, and aims to develop a more unified picture of the anti-realist terrain, a picture that reveals interesting logical connections among the various metaphysical theses, some of which have not been emphasized in the literature. For instance, it is thought by some that to deny that there are facts of the matter of a given kind is not necessarily to reject any realist imagery (such as the determinacy of truth-value, or the potential recognition-transcendence of truth).
But, as will be shown, such brands of non-factualism do in fact have consequences for the propriety of various realist pictures of reality.

We will also deny some of the purported incompatibilities between these metaphysical theses. For example, as it initially seems, an interesting debate can be had about the potentially unknowability of a given range facts, only after one has admitted that there are facts of the matter to begin with. If this is right, the non-factualism has no business entertaining the question of potential unknowability, but instead precludes a coherent discussion of this latter realism-relevant feature. But ultimately whether this is right depends on what we mean by 'fact' in its various applications. As we will see, questions of unknowability do make sense even for the non-factualist.

Let us not begin by trudging over the vast anti-realist landscape. There will be time enough to do so. Instead let us begin by uncovering the motives for treating an area anti-realistically. Perhaps there is less initial divergence about what the general problems are that drive philosophers to anti-realism than there is about which anti-realist paradigm best serves to resolve them. At the very least we may locate the family of anti-realist views, related by the puzzles they aim to resolve, around which we shall center the focus of our study.

1.1 Some Philosophical Problems

As our opening dialog suggests, we need a reason for going in—in our case, for philosophical analysis. Certain philosophical problems motivate the theorizing. What these problems reveal is our lack of philosophical understanding of a given assertoric practice. And anti-realist interpretation is supposed to deliver that understanding, so that these problems are resolved. And it is supposed to do so in a way that
realism (and some radical alternatives to realism) cannot. Let us consider the relevant philosophical problems.

Take for example our everyday moral, modal, or mathematical practice. Each is problematic, from a philosophical perspective, because it involves metaphysical, epistemological and/or semantic anomalies. The anomalies, respectively, consist in our pretheoretic ignorance about (i) the underlying nature of moral, modal and mathematical reality, (ii) how (or whether) we can acquire knowledge of such unique or apparently unobservable states of affairs, and (iii) what the meanings (or, at least, the truth conditions) of the corresponding class of statements consist in.

Consider the following moral, modal and mathematical statements, respectively:

- Burning down orphanages is wrong.
- Necessarily all contradictions are false.
- 5 + 7 = 12.

These claims are not controversial, but are mere truisms. So clearly we think that there are moral, modal and mathematical truths. Hence, it is clear that we are committed (at some level) to the existence of moral, modal and mathematical facts. Less clear is a non-trivial answer to the questions of what it is (if anything) that makes these judgments true, and how it is that natural organisms such as ourselves can access, and acquire knowledge about, such abstract or unobservable states of affairs. Answers to these questions must also explain non-trivially any special feature of these states—whether it be, respectively, their objectively prescriptive, non-contingent, or abstract nature.

The truth-makers of our mathematical claims are perhaps mathematical objects standing in various mathematical relations. But mathematical truths are not physical, since they would be as they are, were the physical world different. So they are
non-physical. But what then is their nature? And, given that our known senses are limited to perception of the physical world, how is it that we can know where mathematical objects stand in relation to one another? What exactly is the epistemology of such non-empirical discourse? And, if knowing the meaning of a statement requires knowing what it would be for that statement to be true, then how is it possible for finite minds to grasp the meanings of mathematic statements that purport to describe an infinite and unsurveyable state of affairs (e.g., that every even number greater than two is the sum of two primes, or that there exist inaccessible cardinals)?

Our moral and modal judgments are also philosophically peculiar, for they involve some metaphysically perplexing features. Moral claims are thought to be "objectively prescriptive" in that they demand that we behave in certain ways, no matter what we happen to believe about how to act. If I think that burning down orphanages is wrong, then I think that we ought not to burn them down, and that we ought not to burn them down even if I were to believe it permissible (even if everyone were to believe it permissible). And moral judgements are said to be inherently "action-guiding" in that we are moved to act (or refrain from acting) simply upon judging that a moral property is satisfied. Thinking that cow-tipping is immoral, for instance, would give me sufficient motive (all else being equal) to avoid pushing over helpless cows in the night. It is said that one is so moved because a judgment of the form 'action \( x \) is immoral' conceptually entails 'one ought not to do \( x \)', and to judge the former is also to judge the latter. But what accounts for this essentially action-guiding character of morality? Why is moral reality such that our recognition of it binds and moves us to act in accordance with it?
And consider modal necessity—a claim of the form ‘It is necessary that P.’ If it has objective truth conditions at all, they are either contingent or necessary. But contingent states of affairs (i.e., those that need not obtain) do nothing to explain why it is that the state of affairs expressed by ‘P’ must obtain. And appeals to necessary states of affairs presuppose an understanding of the very feature that we set out to elucidate. So, if our modal utterances have objective truth conditions, it appears absolutely mind-boggling as to what they might consist in.

And morals and modals have their epistemological problems, since neither modals nor morals are observable in the standard sense. We cannot simply open our eyes to determine whether the law of non-contradiction is necessarily true, or to determine whether cow-tipping is really immoral. Moral and modal properties are not to be observed in the states of affairs to which they apply, and yet, we attribute them so confidently throughout our daily lives. How is it possible that we get it right (if in fact we do get it right)? What faculties do we turn toward which aspects of the world?

Additionally, such metaphysically peculiar areas are especially susceptible to the problem of skepticism. The epistemological skeptic claims that the given subject matter is totally unknowable via human experience or reasoning, either because there is too much epistemological “distance” between the subject matter and our belief forming processes (as would be the case for numbers, if they existed in their own non-physical and non-mental realm) or because the subject matter is too mysterious to exist in the world as we know it (as would be the case for morals, if the complete description of a morally relevant action could not account for the objectively prescriptive and inherently action-guiding features that are essential to moral judgment). The skeptic advances the unknowability thesis, and challenges the philosopher to prove
him wrong. We must believe that the skeptic is wrong about the chosen discourse, if we are trying to make better sense of that discourse. But it is no trivial task to show that he is wrong, as is revealed by the fact that philosophers continually feel the need to take on the skeptical challenge.

So much for a brief discussion of some relevant philosophical problems. It should be noted that they hang together. For if we could only explain the nature of moral reality, we might better put ourselves in a position to explain how it is that we come to know things about it, and what it is that makes my moral claims true or false. And if we could better tackle the semantic problem of what it is that the meanings of the problematic statements consist in, we might be better placed to meet the skeptical challenge.

The basic problem then is that we often find ourselves in ordinary practice committed to facts of a given kind, while nevertheless remaining hopelessly confused about their nature and our relation to them. Perhaps we do not understand the nature of these facts in a way that explains their special features; or know (non-trivially) what makes true the judgements that purport to describe these facts; or have a detailed epistemology for them. In some cases realism appears only to aggravate these problems. For instance, if mathematical facts are totally mind- and language-independent (but are not physical) then they reside in their own realm, and their metaphysics and epistemology becomes frustratingly intractable. In other cases realism appears only to clutter our ontology and epistemological theory. Modals and morals, because of their special normative features, are not easily reducible to physical facts (in the sense of being able to formulate their truth conditions in a purely physicalistic vocabulary). And so, in the hands of the realist we are owed a detailed story about the nature of
these features, and the detection mechanisms we employ in our appreciation of them. In the case of morals, as the moral intuitionist will argue, this involves positing a new faculty of detection—a faculty of moral "intuition" whose purpose is to detect moral properties and their special features.\(^2\) Such theorizing requires an excess of epistemological faculties, and furthermore, does not clearly elucidate the special features of morality. And rarely does realism deliver a non-trivially understanding of what it is that is doing the explanatory work.

1.2 Radical Alternatives to Realism

Alternatively, there are very radical responses to these problems. One may argue that, in light of the philosophical puzzles, the entire discourse is illegitimate in some important respect. Consider some of these views.

J. L. Mackie argues for error theory about moral discourse.\(^3\) Error theory is the view that, for whatever reason, all assertions in the area are false. On Mackie's view, moral properties are much too weird to exist in the natural world, owing to the "objective prescriptivity" that they foster. He concludes that, since our ordinary moral judgments involve an implicit commitment to such prescriptivity, all moral claims are false, and so, involve grave error.

Still others take such error to obligate the total elimination of moral discourse.\(^4\) Such eliminativism is also motivated by other factors. Richard Rorty and Paul Churchland, for instance, argue that the best explanation of our folk-psychology does

\(^2\)The origins of this line of thought are found in G. E. Moore Principia Ethica (Cambridge University Press, 1903).


\(^4\)See, for example, Richard Garner's Beyond Morality (Temple University Press, 1994).
not (or will not) require an appeal to distinctively folk-psychological entities.\(^5\) Therefore, much like the once popular belief in the existence of witches, belief-desire talk should be jettisoned (or replaced with something more accurate and informative).

Another radical response to realism is traditional non-cognitivism, the view that our moral attitudes are not really beliefs in the standard sense, since they are not capably of being true or false. Bertrand Russell and A. J. Ayer espouse this view about moral discourse.\(^6\) Ayer argues that despite the declarative forms of moral claims, they do no more than express our own sentiments. For example, to say “stealing is wrong” is not to claim that something is true of the act of stealing, but merely to utter “Stealing” with a certain expression of disapproval. To say “stealing is wrong” is not to describe the act of stealing at all, but only to vent feelings about it. Ventings have no truth-values. And most of our moral utterances, according to Ayer, are like this. A consequence of this view is that a great deal of our moral disputes are nonsensical, since genuinely to disagree presupposes that at least one disputant is uttering something false. This view does violence to ordinary moral practice, since it follows that many of our moral disagreements are non-sensical, hence, should not be entertained.

Anti-realism, in our sense of the thesis, is a more attractive alternative if it can be properly defended, for it aims to occupy the middle ground between resolving the philosophical puzzles and rendering infelicitous the discursive practice. If successful,


it will have the virtue of ontological economy over realism, for it will offer an understanding of the given range of facts in more familiar, less problematic terms, and the positing of special epistemic powers will not be required in an explanation of how we come know them. The task here is elucidate the contemporary schools of anti-realist thought that aim to pave this middle ground between realism and radical error, and to determine the consequences such theories have for our logical practice.

The job of anti-realism is to make better sense of the practice, and to preserve as much of it as possible. Our task will be to determine just how much of the inferential practice can be salvaged on various anti-realist interpretations of the declarative discourse. As we shall discover, several forms of anti-realism cannot preserve all classical norms of rationality. To this extent anti-realism is a brand of revisionary metaphysics, even if it does not aim to undermine the the very possibility of rational discourse altogether.

1.3 The Project

The goal, then, is to demonstrate important connections between certain metaphysical theories and the logical principles we endorse. For example, acceptance of the logical principle of bivalence (that every proposition is either determinately true or determinately false) commits us to certain "metaphysical realist" views about the existence of (potentially) recognition-transcendent facts. Conversely: acceptance of certain metaphysical views (e.g., "irrealist" views that deny the existence of certain kinds of facts) necessitates adoption of certain logics rather than others.

Current debates offer several views about the relation between logic and metaphysical anti-realism. We begin in Chapter 2 with the metaphysical position that inspired
these discussions. The position is called “semantic anti-realism,” and is grounded in Michael Dummett’s work. Our main focus will be Crispin Wright’s developments in the area. Semantic anti-realism suggests that truth is essentially constrained by possible knowledge, that is, that all truths are knowable by us in principle. The suggestion is that, in the interesting cases, an epistemic constraint on truth entails an obligation to revise classical logic. But the arguments for this view are not compelling; I suggest that neither Dummett nor Wright provides a precise enough account of the relation between logic and semantic anti-realism. In fact it is not clear that either philosopher begins with a consistent set of anti-realism assumptions. My main positive contribution is a revised formulation of the purported connection. It establishes, in a way that neither Dummett nor Wright have, that semantic anti-realism does issue a demand to revise our principles of logic.

Three principles that play a central role in the philosophical argumentation are an undecidability assumption; a suitably modalized form of the anti-realist’s knowability principle; and a suitably modalized form of the exclusively classical principle of excluded middle. The key is to regiment these principles in such a way as to validate the revisionist’s argument, while at the same time meeting the minimal adequacy criteria on an interesting and coherent dispute. The basic argument is that if every claim is true or false (the classical principle), even if we could never know which (undecidability), then some truths may be unknowable. I argue that Dummett’s and Wright’s versions of this argument are not compelling, since their formulations of the undecidability assumption are problematic. I propose my own formulation of the assumption that is strong enough for the purposes of revising classical logic, while weak enough to be attractive and acceptable to both the anti-realist and the realist. It can
be shown that this formulation of the undecidability assumption is even acceptable to those realists who accept Gödel's or Hilbert's optimism about the eventual solvability of those problems hitherto undecided.

My findings are that it is the extra expressive power of quantified propositional logic (in addition to standard modal resources), and the weakest possible expression of the undecidability assumption, that allow us properly to characterize the thesis of anti-realist revisionism. My view is that the minimal adequacy criteria ultimately can be met only on this regimentation. My local conclusion, then, is that choice of logic is a realism-relevant feature of a discourse, since semantic anti-realism does entail logical revision. Throughout the dissertation, this result will serve as our model of the connection between our logical and metaphysical commitments.

In Chapter 3 and 4 we explore another form of anti-realism (sometimes called "non-factualism" or "irrealism"), which suggests that certain indicative statements (e.g., statements of moral appraisal) serve not to represent facts, but rather to express sentiments or manifest stances. A leading advocate of this view is Simon Blackburn. He claims that such "irrealist" metaphysical views (expressivism in ethics, for example) are compatible with classical principles of inference. I argue that this is a mistake, despite Blackburn's gallant "quasi-realist" attempts to show that a moral expressivist can consistently accept the law of excluded middle.

We shall focus on two central theses of Blackburn's quasi-realism. The first is his claim that one may legitimately embrace all of the resonant imagery normally associated with realism while remaining true to a metaphysics that is at bottom "anti-realist." This claim is the focus of Chapter 3. The idea is that we may treat the target assertions as expressions of internal sentiment (rather than as descriptions
of fact), while at the same time "earning the right" to all the talk normally associated with realism. For example it is thought that this type of anti-realist may coherently embrace the possibility of unknowable truths (the view that opposes the semantic anti-realism of Chapter 2). But Blackburn does not show how the quasi-realist may accommodate this thesis on expressivistic grounds, but rather hypothesizes that it can be done. In Chapter 3, we test this hypothesis. To do so requires a better understanding of the quasi-realist's notions of truth and knowledge. The bulk of the chapter attempts to uncover just how these notions are to be treated by the quasi-realist. What we shall find is that, for the quasi-realist, "truth" is at bottom "that which would be established by the best use of the best methods." And given Blackburn's treatment of the normativity therein, it is impossible that a claim may be true in this sense, and yet unknowable by us in principle. But then the quasi-realist cannot coherently endorse the possibility of unknowable truths. This form of metaphysical irrealism entails that all truths are knowable in principle; quasi-realism entails semantic anti-realism.

A second thesis constitutive of quasi-realism will be explored in Chapter 4. It is the claim that the ordinary practice under quasi-realist interpretation must (and can) be conserved. This includes a conservation of the logical principles that govern right reasoning within the discourse. Blackburn's view then is that choice of logic has nothing to do with one's metaphysics, that adherence to the law of excluded middle simply does not commit one to there being determinate facts of the matter that make each of those claims true or false. This is the claim that will be questioned. What we shall find is that quasi-realism, in that it entails semantic anti-realism, cannot coherently embrace classical rules of logic (given the main result of Chapter 2). We
shall discuss at length Blackburn’s resistance to the revisionist thesis to analyze where he goes wrong.

Blackburn’s resistance basically is that the revisionist thesis denies that the relevant classical principle has a special epistemic status (namely, that it is *a priori*), and that the quasi-realist need not honor it with such formality. All the while, he argues, the quasi-realist need not deny that classical principles govern the inferential practice. He need only demonstrate that they play an important pragmatic role. The task, then, is to determine whether the argument for revision works, once a uniform reinterpretation the modal status of the central principles is in place. In Chapter 4 I try to show that in some cases even this quasi-realist commitment to distinctively classical principles is inconsistent with quasi-realism.

We see that the issue of realism sometimes lies in the question of whether there are any facts there to be detected. The question becomes, not “how metaphysically rich are the facts of the pre-specified kind?”, but “are there any facts of this kind to begin with?” For obvious reasons we have labeled this type of realism “factualism,” and its opposition “non-factualism.” The quasi-realist offers one theoretical account of this fact/non-fact dichotomy. And, as Chapters 3 and 4 are supposed to show, non-factualism can carry with it an obligation to revise the inferential practice under non-factualist interpretation. But there are alternative accounts of the distinction in question. And so, whether my proposal about the connection between non-factualism and logical revision is correct depends on whether the alternatives do a better job than quasi-realism in their efforts to explicate the fact/non-fact distinction. And it depends on whether such alternatives best serve to facilitate our philosophical decision-making about whether a suspected area is non-factual.
In Chapter 5 we investigate an alternative brand of non-factualism. My claim is that it ultimately fails to develop an adequate philosophical understanding of the fact/non-fact distinction. The view is that convergence is a guide to factuality, that fully informed interlocutors would converge on a single verdict if there were objective facts of the matter. We shall discuss Crispin Wright's theoretical account of this pretheoretical intuition. What we shall find is that his account of the distinction is not principled, hence, will not best serve to deliver an objective test for non-factualism.

The general result of my overall project is that various metaphysical theories necessitate a revision of our inferential principles. Another result is that the endorsement of classical logic has metaphysical costs; a commitment to classical logic implies acceptance of various forms of metaphysical realism (some of which rule out "expressivist" theories). The upshot is that our logic really does, in some important sense, guide our metaphysics, and vice versa.
CHAPTER 2

SEMANTIC ANTI-REALISM
AND LOGICAL REVISION

2.1 Introduction

Michael Dummett’s realism debate is a semantic dispute about the kind of truth conditions had by a given class of sentences. According to his semantic realist, the truth conditions are potentially verification-transcendent in that they may obtain (or not) despite the fact that we may be forever unable to recognize whether they obtain. According to Dummett’s semantic anti-realist, the truth conditions are of a different sort. Essentially, for the anti-realist, that the truth conditions obtain (whenever they do) is a matter that is always recognizable by us in principle. On this view, truth cannot outrun all possible human knowledge. Unsurprisingly, the outcome of the debate is sometimes said to hinge on whether all truths are knowable. More carefully the point of contention is the following knowability principle:

\((KP)\) All understood truths of the given class are knowable by us in principle.

Here are some statements of \(KP\) in the literature. Crispin Wright says,

Dummett’s anti-realist famously ... denies that, in anything justifiably regarded as representational discourse, we can intelligibly make semantic
provision for the depiction of states of affairs whose obtaining, or not, is beyond our detection.\(^7\)

And Neil Tennant writes,

> Every understood indicative \(p\) is such that (i) if \(p\) is true then it is possible for someone to know that \(p\) is true and (ii) if \(p\) is not true then it is possible for someone to know that not-\(p\) is true.\(^8\)

Dummett’s defense of anti-realism—i.e., some version of \(KP\)—relies crucially upon a certain semantic molecularity thesis and upon Wittgensteinian considerations about the publicity of meaning. The defense I shall not discuss, since Dummett’s argument for \(KP\) is not the centerpiece of the present essay. My primary concern is with the consequences of adopting a Dummettian anti-realism, in particular the consequences that its adoption has for logical reform. To this extent my conclusions bear on any theory for which truth is taken to be constrained by evidence.

Dummett’s anti-realism is most notoriously associated with the revision of classical logic. Dag Prawitz says of anti-realism that

> any such theory must lead to a revision of our ordinary logic.\(^9\)

And according to Crispin Wright,

> the thesis . . . that truth is essentially evidentially constrained must enjoin a revision of classical logic.\(^{10}\)

Yet, it remains unclear how anti-realism is supposed to motivate this obligation to revise. Does the obligation arise in light of a refutation by the anti-realist of a classical principle? Or does it arise because once we embrace anti-realism some classical


\(^{8}\)Neil Tennant, *The Taming of The True* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 204. (my paraphrase of Tennant’s formal elucidation)


principles turn out merely to lack a certain kind of justification or privileged epistemic status that logicians standardly claim for them?

The primary aim here is to determine whether and how Dummettian anti-realism yields a commitment to revise classical logic. It seems that important attempts to make the revisionist’s point fail. These are the attempts made by Michael Dummett and Crispin Wright. The negative thesis is that, given the resources provided by either Dummett or Wright, choice of logic is not a realism-relevant feature—i.e., logical revision is not a consideration that is enjoined by one’s stance on the possibility of verification-transcendent truth. In fact, it is not clear that either Dummett or Wright provides a consistent set of anti-realist commitments from which to argue. The positive thesis is that anti-realism does entail revision. The task is to get the logical structure of the argument straight.

I shall suppose, as Dummett does, that any discourse in dispute consists entirely of meaningful and understood indicatives that are neither vague nor ambiguous. Partly for this reason, partly for the sake of simplicity, and partly to track Dummett’s original interests, I focus my discussion on mathematical discourse.\textsuperscript{11}

\subsection*{2.2 Restriction On A Meaningful Semantic Debate}

Dummett mentions the following by way of preserving a meaningful semantic debate:

\textsuperscript{11}Innovative accounts of how to extend the discussion to empirical discourse are presented by Crispin Wright with his notion of superassertibility, op. cit. (1992), Chapter 2, and by Neil Tennant with his notion of constructive falsifiability, op. cit. (1997), Chapter 12.
... the dispute can arise only for classes of statements for which it is admitted on both sides that there may not exist evidence either for or against a given statement.\textsuperscript{12}

Dummett’s claim is that both the realist and the anti-realist are committed to the undecidability of some sentences of the disputed class. The reason, according to Dummett, is that only with the possibility of undecidable sentences can the philosophical difference be discerned between the realist and anti-realist. The realist will be the one asserting that the undecidable sentence has truth conditions that determinately obtain or fail to obtain despite evidential deficiencies. The anti-realist will demur on this score.

Given a class of sentences each of which is decidable, in contrast, the knowability principle is neutral on the metaphysical nature of the truth conditions for those sentences. In such cases robust truth conditions just are (or at least, are co-present with) verification conditions. And so, to characterize a difference that makes a meaningful difference, the adoption of an undecidability thesis (or some relevant degree of epistemic modesty) is required by those participating in the debate.

Formal characterizations of Dummett’s undecidability thesis (\textit{Und}) and the knowability principle (\textit{KP}) will be helpful.

Let \( \varphi \) and \( \psi \) be place-holders for mathematical sentences.

Let \( P\varphi \) mean \( \varphi \) is mathematically verified', i.e. ‘There is a proof of \( \varphi \) that has been correctly recognized as such by now, or at least, we have at present a proof of the fact that we can construct a proof of \( \varphi \).’

\textsuperscript{12}“Realism” in Dummett’s \textit{Truth and Other Enigmas} (Harvard, 1978), p. 155. (my emphasis); first presented to the Philosophical Society in Oxford in 1963.
Let $\Diamond P \varphi$ mean '\( \varphi \) is mathematically verifiable', i.e. '\( \varphi \) is a consequence of our current mathematical knowledge, or of what is mathematically known at some future time.'

Here is a first stab at the logical form of the undecidability requirement, suggested by the Dummett quote above:

$$(Und) \quad (\exists \varphi)(\neg \Diamond P \varphi \land \neg \Diamond \neg P \varphi).$$

In this context a mathematical indicative is \textit{undecidable} just in case it is independent of all possible mathematical knowledge. The undecidability requirement tells us that there exists a sentence that cannot in principle be proved or disproved.

The knowability principle, which says that all truths are knowable, may be expressed as follows:

$$(KP) \quad (\forall \varphi)(\varphi \to \Diamond P \varphi).$$

2.3 Dummett's Argument for Logical Revision

In light of the above considerations, Dummett's argument for revision may be reconstructed as follows.\(^{14}\) Let us suppose that some indicative of the given class is undecidable. By accepting the law of excluded middle, one accepts the truth or falsity of every sentence, so the undecidable sentence is either true or false. First, suppose it is false. Then it follows from the knowability principle that we could prove it false. But, we cannot prove it false, since it is undecidable. Second, suppose the

\(^{13}\)I leave the notions of proof and consequence unarticulated for the time being. One might run the revisionist's argument with either classical or intuitionistic notions. For more specific varieties of the knowability principle see Tennant, \textit{The Taming of the True} (Oxford University Press, 1997), Chapter 7.

\(^{14}\)An expression of the following argument may be found in "The Philosophical Basis of Intuitionistic Logic," essay 14 in \textit{Truth and Other Enigmas} (Harvard University Press, 1978); first presented to the Logic Colloquium in Bristol, 1973.
undecidable sentence is true. Then it follows from the knowability principle that we could recognize it as true. Again, this is in contradiction with its undecidability! But then we have absurdity resting on excluded middle, the knowability principle, and the undecidability thesis. Something must go. Recall that for Dummett, rejecting the undecidability thesis renders the debate meaningless. So the anti-realist must reject the generalized form of the law of excluded middle.\textsuperscript{15}

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{LEM}^{(1)} \\
\hline
\hline
\text{KP} \\
\hline
\text{Und} \\
\hline
\vdots \\
\hline
\bot^{(1)} \\
\hline
\neg\text{LEM}
\end{array}
\]

Despite appearances, this logical strategy ends in disaster for the revisionist. As it turns out, an \textit{intuitionistically} acceptable reductio exists resting merely upon $KP$ and $Und$.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15}The underbrace and ellipsis indicate where I have compressed a proof for economy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assn.#Line</th>
<th>Justification on which line rests</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  (1)</td>
<td>$(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \rightarrow \Diamond \varphi)$ Assn. $KP$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  (2)</td>
<td>$(\exists \varphi)(\neg \Diamond \varphi \land \neg \Diamond \neg \varphi)$ Assn. $Und$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  (3)</td>
<td>$\neg \Diamond P \varphi \land \neg \Diamond \neg \varphi$ Assn. for $\exists E$ (parametric instance of 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  (4)</td>
<td>$\neg \Diamond P \varphi$ $\land E 3$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  (5)</td>
<td>$\neg \Diamond P \neg \varphi$ $\land E 3$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  (6)</td>
<td>$\psi \rightarrow \Diamond P \psi$ $\forall E 1$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 3 (7)</td>
<td>$\neg \psi$ $MT 4, 6$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  (8)</td>
<td>$\neg \psi \rightarrow \Diamond \neg \psi$ $\forall E 1$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 3 (9)</td>
<td>$\neg \neg \psi$ $MT 5, 8$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 3 (10)</td>
<td>CONTRADICTION $\neg E 7, 9$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 2 (11)</td>
<td>CONTRADICTION $\exists E 2, 3–10$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Importantly, the contradiction resting on $KP$ and $Und$ is intuitionistically acceptable. No exclusively classical principles are employed.

Notice that it does not help the anti-realist to weaken the statement of undecidability to $\forall(\exists \varphi)(\neg \Diamond \varphi \land \neg \Diamond \neg \varphi)$, where $\forall$ is read as the epistemic operator 'for all we know.' Call this alternative reading potential undecidability, or $\forall Und$. We now know, via the above proof, that it intuitionistically follows from $KP$ that there does not exist an undecidable sentence. And we know that there is no such sentence, if we know that $KP$ is true. This is simply an instance of the principle that if we currently know $\varphi$ and we currently know that $\psi$ is a consequence of $\varphi$, then we currently know $\psi$. (I will call this inference form $K$-introduction—or $KI$ for short.)<sup>17</sup> Dummett of course will suggest that we know $KP$ from Wittgensteinian considerations about the

<sup>17</sup>See appendix p. i, rule 1 for further justification.
publicity of meaning. Granting this, it follows that we now know that there does not exist an undecidable sentence. But then it is not the case that, for all we know, there is such an undecidable sentence.\textsuperscript{18} So, weakening the undecidability requirement to \(\nabla (\exists \varphi)(\neg \varphi \land \neg \neg \varphi)\) does not rescue the revisionist.

Alternatively, the intended interpretation of the potential undecidability is this: \((\exists \varphi)\nabla (\neg \varphi \land \neg \neg \varphi)\). But, a similar logical objection is forthcoming. I leave that reductio to the reader.

Since the anti-realist must deny even a relatively weak formulation of the undecidability thesis, the meaningfulness of the debate is threatened. That is to say that Dummett does not satisfy his own necessary condition on a meaningful semantic debate. But there are alternative formulations of the debate. I want to turn now to Crispin Wright's formulation of the revisionist's argument.\textsuperscript{19}

### 2.4 Wright's Argument for Logical Revision

In Chapter two of *Truth and Objectivity*\textsuperscript{20} Wright begins his characterization of the argument for revision with a valid proof of a decidability thesis resting on excluded middle and the knowability principle. I represent these assumptions using

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\textsuperscript{18}See appendix p. i, rule 2 for a further justification of this move.

\textsuperscript{19}For the sake of simplicity and to bypass a number of red herrings, I take a few liberties in reconstructing the argument from Chapter 2 of Wright's *Truth and Objectivity*. I diverge from the text in that I focus only upon the debate over the class of meaningful, unambiguous, non-vague, mathematical indicatives. Also, for those of us harboring a Quinean discomfort with talk of the a priori, I make no use of the concept of a priori knowledge. And for those of us suspicious of an anti-realist who readily avails himself of Tarski's T-schema and the 'commutation of truth and negation,' I make no important use of the truth-predicate. But my criticisms do not depend on taking these liberties. I thank Stewart Shapiro and William Taschek for prompting these emendations.

schematic letters, as Wright does. Wright calls the knowability principle ‘the epistemic constraint on truth.’ The constraint is this:

\[(BC) \quad \phi \rightarrow \Diamond \neg \phi\]

which says ‘\(\phi\), only if it is possible in principle for us to prove that \(\phi\).’ The decidability thesis may be represented in the following way:

\[(Dec) \quad \Diamond \neg \phi \vee \Diamond \neg \phi\]

which says either \(\phi\) or its negation is provable. Here then is the overall structure of Wright’s proof:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Instance of LEM:} & \quad \Diamond \neg \phi \vee \neg \Diamond \phi \\
\text{(EC)} & \quad \phi \rightarrow \Diamond \neg \phi \\
\vdots & \quad \Diamond \neg \phi \\
\text{(Dec)} & \quad \Diamond \neg \phi \vee \Diamond \neg \phi
\end{align*}
\]

We may grant, on behalf of the anti-realist, that we currently know that the epistemic constraint is true. Again, my interest is more with the consequences than with the motivations for anti-realism. If it is true that we currently know that the law of excluded middle obtains, then (in acknowledging the above proof) it follows that we currently know that every mathematical indicative or its negation is in principle provable by us. That is, we know that the above decidability thesis obtains.\(^{21}\)

So what does this result have to do with logical revision? Well, Wright tells us that the above conclusion - viz., that \(Dec\) is currently known—is

in contradiction with the a priori unwarrantability of the claim that the scales of in principle available evidence must tilt, sooner or later.\(^{22}\)

\(^{21}\)This is an instance of the non-contentious modal inference here called \(KI\). See appendix p. i, rule 1 for justification.

\(^{22}\)Wright, op. cit. (1992), p. 42.
That is, having knowledge of the truth of the decidability thesis is inconsistent with some other debate-neutral commitment (which Wright expresses as the 'a priori unwarrantability' of the decidability thesis). The task then is to get clear on what exactly this debate-neutral commitment comes to. What is this form of epistemic modesty that is endorsed by both the realist and the anti-realist but is inconsistent with decidability? The text underdetermines the answer to this question.

I think Wright is saying that the decidability thesis does not really have the epistemic status that the above result attributes to it. This of course would cast doubt on the epistemic status of the law of excluded middle for the anti-realist. So, the ultimate strategy is not that the decidability thesis is provably false, and so the law of excluded middle is false. Rather, the strategy is to say that since for all we really know the decidability of the discourse could be false, the exclusively classical principle is not currently known to be true.

The intuition behind Wright's debate-neutral commitment, at first glance, appear to be that undecidability is epistemically possible. This commitment is very intuitive. Most of us endorse the humble admission that as far as we can at present tell 'the scales of in principle evidence [may never] tilt one way or the other, between each [mathematical] statement and its negation.' In other words, upon perusal of our current set of things known, we find nothing that explicitly contradicts the negation of the decidability thesis. But this very fact contradicts the above result, which says that we do currently know that decidability obtains. The reasoning is, simply, that it is absurd to think that some claim is known (by us right now), if as far as we can
at present tell the negation of the claim is consistent with what is known (by us right now).\(^{23}\)

So we have a contradiction resting on three assumptions: (i) it is known that the law of excluded middle obtains, (ii) it is known that the epistemic constraint obtains, and (iii) for all we know, decidability is false:

\[ \frac{K(LEM)}{K(EC)} \]

\[ \vdots \]

\[ \frac{K(Dec)}{\triangledown \neg(Dec)} \]

\[ \bot \]

where \( K(x) \) means ‘\( x \) is currently known by us’ and \( \triangledown(x) \) says ‘as far as we can at present tell, \( x \) is consistent with what is at present known’—i.e., ‘\( x \) does not explicitly contradict any \( y \) such that \( Ky \)’ (whence, ‘\( \triangledown \neg Dec \) entails \( \neg K(Dec) \) and \( \neg K\neg Dec \)).

Assumption (iii) is supposed to be debate-neutral. So, it follows for the anti-realist that the law of excluded middle is not really a known law of logic.

My objection to this characterization of the argument for revision, which I am here attributing to Wright, is that the anti-realist cannot endorse the epistemic possibility that decidability is false. He cannot, because his epistemic constraint on truth is inconsistent with that possibility. Here is the proof.

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>( \neg(\Diamond \varphi \lor \Diamond \neg \varphi) ) Main Assn. for reductio (( \neg Dec ))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>( \varphi \to \Diamond \varphi ) Instance of ( EC )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>( \neg \varphi \to \Diamond \neg \varphi ) Instance of ( EC )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>( \varphi ) Subordinate Assn. for reductio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{23}\)See appendix p. i, rule 3 for further justification.
2, 4 (5)  \( \Diamond P \varphi \)  
\( \text{MP 2, 4} \)

2, 4 (6)  \( \Diamond P \varphi \lor \Diamond P \neg \varphi \)  
\( \text{\lor I 5} \)

1, 2, 4 (7)  CONTRADICTION  
\( \neg \text{E 1, 6} \)

1, 2 (8)  \( \neg \varphi \)  
\( \text{Subordinate \neg I 4-7} \)

1, 2, 3 (9)  \( \Diamond P \neg \varphi \)  
\( \text{MP 3, 8} \)

1, 2, 3 (10)  \( \Diamond P \varphi \lor \Diamond P \neg \varphi \)  
\( \text{\lor I 9} \)

1, 2, 3 (11)  CONTRADICTION  
\( \neg \text{E 1, 10} \)

The gist is that EC intuitionistically contradicts the negation of the decidability thesis, \( \neg(\Diamond P \varphi \lor \Diamond P \neg \varphi) \). Granting, on behalf of the anti-realist, that EC is currently known, it follows that it is not epistemically possible that \( \neg(\Diamond P \varphi \lor \Diamond P \neg \varphi) \)—i.e., we cannot possibly know that Wrightian decidability is false. And so, we have failed to locate the debate-neutral commitment that is needed to ground the debate. A clearer account of revisionism remains wanting.

2.5 Revising the Logic of Logical Revision

My present goal is to offer such an account—to show that the logical constraints on a meaningful revisionism debate can be met. It will suffice to provide formal characterizations of an exclusively classical principle of logic, the anti-realist’s thesis, and some degree of epistemic modesty, such that

(i) jointly these three commitments entail absurdity through reasoning that both parties accept,

(ii) no proper subset of these three commitments entails a contradiction through reasoning that both parties accept, and

(iii) the epistemic modesty or ‘undecidability’ in question is of a form that both the classicist and the anti-realist could and do readily adopt.
Conditions (i) through (iii) are ineliminable adequacy criteria on any characterization of a coherent and interesting argument for revision. My efforts above aimed to show that it is all but clear whether either Dummett or Wright has met condition (ii) and condition (iii).

Nevertheless, I believe these three criteria can be satisfied. One needs to begin with the following jointly inconsistent commitments to characterize the debate: with respect to the given class of mathematical indicatives \( \varphi \),

1. We know that for all \( \varphi \), \( \varphi \) or \( \neg \varphi \),
2. We know that if \( \varphi \) is true, \( \varphi \) is provable, and
3. It is not currently known that every indicative is such that it or its negation can be proven by us in principle.

Commitment (3) says that \( (\forall \varphi)(\diamond P \varphi \lor \diamond P \neg \varphi) \) has not yet been explicitly verified, and is meant to capture the anti-realist's very weak obligation to demur at the decidability of the discourse. Commitment (3) may be what Wright had in mind when he declared the 'unwarrantability of the claim that the scales of in principle available evidence must tilt, sooner or later.' And so, commitment (3) perhaps serves as a logical clarification of Wright's logically ambiguous declaration.

Formally, I express the three commitments as shown:

- Exclusively Classical Thesis \( K(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \lor \neg \varphi) \)
- Dummettian Anti-Realism \( K(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \to \diamond P \varphi) \)
- Epistemic Modesty \( \neg K(\forall \varphi)(\diamond P \varphi \lor \diamond P \neg \varphi) \).

It can easily be proven that the exclusively classical thesis and anti-realism jointly entail a new expression of decidability, \( K(\forall \varphi)(\diamond P \varphi \lor \diamond P \neg \varphi) \). But this formulation
of decidability—\(K(\forall \varphi)(\Diamond P \varphi \lor \Diamond P \neg \varphi)\)—and of modesty—\(\neg K(\forall \varphi)(\Diamond P \varphi \lor \Diamond P \neg \varphi)\)—contradict each other. The anti-realist, at this point, denies the exclusively classical thesis.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Anti-Realism:} & \\
\hline 
K \forall \varphi (\varphi \lor \neg \varphi) & \quad K \forall \varphi (\varphi \rightarrow \Diamond P \varphi) \\
\hline
\vdash 
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Epistemic Modesty:} & \\
\hline 
K \forall \varphi (\Diamond P \varphi \lor \Diamond P \neg \varphi) & \quad \neg K \forall \varphi (\Diamond P \varphi \lor \Diamond P \neg \varphi) \\
\hline
\vdash 
\end{align*}
\]

Revisionism

This result appears unabbreviated in the appendix.

Importantly, both the anti-realist and the classicist would endorse this new form of modesty. They would endorse it, just because it is so modest. The principle simply amounts to the humble recognition that we have not yet confirmed that each understood mathematical claim or its negation is humanly provable in the long run.

How is it that this new formulation of epistemic modesty succeeds where our original formulation of Wrightian modesty fails? Notice that it is the extra expressive power of quantified propositional logic that blocks the anti-realistically unwelcome contradiction between the modesty principle and anti-realism. The Wrightian understanding failed to bring these further resources to bear, and as a result leaves itself vulnerable to the aforementioned inconsistency. We now see that the proper interpretation of the revisionism debate must utilize, not only standard modal, but also quantified propositional logic.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24}Risto Hilpinen has objected (as commentator to an earlier presentation of this material to the Eastern Division meeting of the APA, 1997) that even these resources are not sufficient to characterize the debate. His view is that a satisfactory resolution to the Fitch Paradox of Knowability "requires conceptual resources beyond the standard modal logic and quantification theory." Nevertheless, there are several solutions to the paradox, not all of which require the employment of further conceptual resources. See the discussion below about the Fitch Paradox.
It appears then that these two principles (anti-realism and modesty) are intuitionistically consistent with one another. Though there is a classical proof of absurdity resting on the new formulation of modesty and anti-realism, the result is not intuitionistically acceptable.\footnote{The said classical reasoning goes like this. Modesty tells us that we do not currently know that decidability obtains. So, for all we know decidability is false; it is epistemically possible that $\neg (\forall \varphi) \Psi(\varphi)$. But then it follows classically that it is possible that $(\exists \varphi) \neg (\Diamond P \varphi \lor \Diamond \neg P \varphi)$. And, as we saw earlier, the existential formulation of undecidability is inconsistent with anti-realism.}

The reason is that the classical proof of absurdity requires that we infer the existence of an undecidable sentence from the claim that not all sentences are decidable. And simply, the negation of a universal $\neg (\forall \varphi) \Psi(\varphi)$ does not intuitionistically entail an existentially quantified negation $(\exists \varphi) \neg \Psi(\varphi)$.\footnote{The point is that a reduction of some universally quantified statement $(\forall \varphi) \Psi(\varphi)$ to absurdity does not entail, for the intuitionist, that we have constructed some instance and effectively shown that it fails to satisfy the relevant open sentence $\Psi(\varphi)$. Blocking this move from $\neg (\forall \varphi) \Psi(\varphi)$ to $(\exists \varphi) \neg \Psi(\varphi)$ allows the anti-realist to assert the modesty principle without fear of the unwelcome contradiction.} So the reductio analogous to the one wielded against Wright is blocked in this new context. Thus, we may finally have an intuitive expression of epistemic modesty (or undecidability) that the anti-realist can live with.

\section*{2.6 Some Problems, Old and New}

\subsection*{2.6.1 The Fitch Paradox of Knowability}

The \textit{Fitch Paradox of Knowability} has threatened the knowability principle for decades. What the paradox teaches us is that the knowability principle is inconsistent with a very weak commitment to our own non-omniscience—viz., that there is a sentence $\varphi$ such that $\varphi \land \neg P \varphi$.\footnote{See Frederic Fitch, “A Logical Analysis of Some Value Concepts,” \textit{The Journal of Symbolic Logic} 28 (1963), p. 138.} The inconsistency follows once we derive the following instance of the knowability principle, $(\varphi \land \neg P \varphi) \rightarrow \Diamond (\varphi \land \neg P \varphi)$. For it follows that...
\( \Diamond P(\varphi \land \neg P\varphi) \). And if it really is possible to prove that conjunction, then it is possible
to prove each of its conjuncts: \( \Diamond(P\varphi \land P\neg P\varphi) \). And since proof yields truth, we may
replace the right conjunct to derive \( \Diamond(P\varphi \land \neg P\varphi) \). But this result is clearly absurd.
Therefore, the knowability principle is threatened. There appears to be a truth that
we cannot know—namely, that we are non-omniscient.

There are several solutions to this paradox in the literature,\(^{28}\) and we need not
concern ourselves here to weigh their relative merits. One solution in particular
suggests itself here. I make a formal distinction between something that has been
proven by now, and something that is provable in principle. It is the difference here
made between \( P\varphi \) and \( \Diamond P\varphi \). \( P\varphi \) loosely says that \( \varphi \) is proven at the present time,
or has been proven by now. I might better represent this with the subscript \( n \), for
‘now’: \( P_n\varphi \). \( \Diamond P\varphi \) says that \( \varphi \) is a consequence of what is mathematically proven at
some future time. As Timothy Williamson has shown, the paradox of knowability
can be blocked by temporally indexing the knowledge operator in this way.\(^{29}\)

Perhaps a more attractive solution has been to make explicit our reference to
states of information, rather than to times. The solution goes through analogously,
so we will describe Williamson’s solution mutatis mutandis. Let us say that to
claim non-omniscience is to say that for all states of information \( s \), there is some \( \varphi \)
such that \( \varphi \) is true, but \( \varphi \) is not known in \( s \): \( \forall s \exists \varphi (\varphi \land \neg P_s\varphi) \). Let \( s \) be a state of
information, and let \( \varphi \) be chosen for \( s \). Applying the knowability principle, it follows

\(^{28}\)See, for instance, Crispin Wright’s Realism, Meaning and Truth (Blackwell, 1986), pp. 426-427.,
and Tennant’s, op. cit. (1987), esp. Chapter 8.6., and Sten Lindström’s “Situations, Truth and
Knowability: a Situation-Theoretic Analysis of a Paradox by Fitch,” in E. Ejerhed and S. Lindström
(eds.), Logic, Action and Cognition: Essays in Philosophical Logic (Kluwer Academic Publishers,

\(^{29}\)See his “Intuitionism Disproved?”, Analysis 42 (1982), pp. 203-207.
that $\Diamond P(\varphi \land \neg P_s \varphi)$. This conjunction is provable in some state of information, but not necessarily in $s$. In some state $t$ it is knowable. So it is possible to know at $t$ each of the conjuncts: $\Diamond(P_t \varphi \land P_t(\neg P_s \varphi))$. Since proof entails truth, we may replace the right conjunct to get a more accurate reading of the Fitch result. We derive this: $\Diamond(P_t \varphi \land \neg P_s \varphi)$. But this result is not absurd. It just says that it is possible both to have a proof of $\varphi$ in some state of information $t$ and to have lacked a proof of $\varphi$ in some other state of information $s$. By bringing forth implicit reference to time or states of information, the knowability principle is guarded against Fitch’s Paradox of Knowability.

### 2.6.2 The Problem of Not Knowing

A similar problem exists for epistemic modesty. It is not clear that the revisionist can accept the principle. Modesty says that we do not know that decidability obtains. But developments in revisionary anti-realism are advanced by those embracing a constructive interpretation of negation. And so, the modesty principle, $\neg K(Dec)$, says that a proof of $K(Dec)$ can be reduced to a proof of absurdity. In other words, it says that it is impossible to know that $Dec$. Not knowing, on this reading of negation, appears to collapse into ‘not being able, in principle, to know’. But then the epistemic modesty principle is much too strong to serve its purpose. The anti-realist cannot embrace it without the relevant undecidability result, i.e., without a disproof of $K(Dec)$.$^{30}$ And this is not something that he has in most interesting cases.

This problem has the same solution as the Fitch Paradox—by making explicit our implicit reference to time (or “states of information”). We interpret $K(Dec)$ as ‘it

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$^{30}$A version of this worry was put to me by Michael Potter at a presentation of this material to the Eastern Division of the APA, December 1997.
is known at present that $Dec$. A proof of $\neg K(Dec)$, then, is a procedure that can transform any proof of $K(Dec)$ into a proof of absurdity. Of course, to reduce to absurdity '$Dec$ is known at present' is not necessarily to have shown that 'for all times $t$, $Dec$ is not known at $t$'. It is merely to notice that none of the finite number of constructions that exist in the literature by now has $Dec$ as its conclusion. And so the collapse that we envisioned from $\neg K(Dec)$ to 'it is impossible to know that $Dec$' is not something the anti-realist need accept. Therefore epistemic modesty retains its appeal for the anti-realist.

2.6.3 The Problem of Shared Content

A deeper problem remains for any characterization of the revisionism debate. It is the Problem of Shared Content. In the context of this chapter, the problem rears its head in the following way. The theses of anti-realism and epistemic modesty classically, but not intuitionistically, entail absurdity. To the extent that these two principles incur different logical commitments for the classical realist than they do for the intuitionistic anti-realist, the realist and anti-realist mean different things by 'anti-realism' and 'epistemic modesty.' The participants in the debate are talking past one another.\footnote{This formulation of the problem was put to me by Crispin Wright during the 1997 Graduate Symposium, held in his honor at Ohio State University.}

Recall that the debate is to be constrained by the aforementioned adequacy criteria (last section), if it is to make sense at all. A disagreement is not genuine if it does not occur against a backdrop of agreement. In particular, the Dummettian participants (or any opposing interlocutors who wish to disagree) must agree, for the sake of meaningful disagreement, to share standards of rationality. Our adequacy conditions

\footnote{This formulation of the problem was put to me by Crispin Wright during the 1997 Graduate Symposium, held in his honor at Ohio State University.}
(i) and (ii) remind us of this important fact. And any differences in interpretation (of
the logical constants) that do not violate these conditions are not differences that make
a relevant difference, since they do not affect the outcome of the debate. Importantly,
the problem of shared content, as formulated above, focuses on reasoning that is not
acceptable to both parties. So, it focuses on reasoning that is not acceptable to either
party in the context of the Dummettian disagreement. A classicist sincerely and
meaningfully disagreeing with the anti-realist about anti-realism cannot invoke logical
norms that the anti-realist finds unfavorable. But, to the extent that the participants
agree to have their dispute against a backdrop of shared logical commitments, they can
ward off criticisms about shared content that are grounded in differences of logical
commitment. Any interesting solution to the problem of shared content (i.e., any
solution that preserves a point of contention while retaining interest for both the
classical realist and the revisionary anti-realist) will have to begin there.

Now one may reply that my solution begs the question in favor of the anti-realist,
since it is question-begging to motivate intuitionistic restrictions on a coherent revi­sionism debate. But I must object that intuitionistic restrictions do not necessarily
beg the question. They would beg the question, only if in accepting the restrictions
we would, in effect, decide the debate in favor of the revisionist. And such intuition­
istic restrictions would beg the question, only if there were no independent reasons
for embracing them.

32This point is made by Crispin Wright in “Three Problems: Relativism, Vagueness, Logical
Revisionism” (unpublished typescript).
But there appear to be good independent reasons for motivating the aforementioned restriction. On my view, for instance, intuitionistic restrictions on the revisionary debate are necessary if the disputants are to communicate at all. To the extent that both parties debate only using patterns of inference that both parties accept, their preferred semantics will not mark a difference (say, in interpretation of the logical constants) that makes a relevant difference. It will not make a relevant semantic difference, since in this context their inferential behavior will not reflect one semantics at the cost of another. And most importantly, such inferential restrictions will not load the dice in favor of the revisionist, since in this context the realist will still have the option of embracing the law of excluded middle and rejecting anti-realism in the face of the basic (semantically neutral) aporia.³³

2.6.4 The Problem of Gõdelian Optimism

Another problem remains for the above account of the Dummettian disagreement. There is logical space for the epistemically optimistic classicist to advocate KP while embracing the full range of classical principles. This position goes at least as far back as Descartes, in his Discourse on Method, where he says,

there is nothing so far removed from us as to be beyond our reach, or so hidden that we cannot discover it . . . ³⁴

³³Pierluigi Miraglia has convinced me that the problem of shared content has other manifestations that perhaps are not soluble by the above means. We attempt to resolve this semantic conundrum more systematically in our “Dummettian Anti-Realism and the Problem of Shared Content,” (unpublished typescript).

Or more recently, as Stewart Shapiro has emphasized, the position is adopted by Hilbert:

However unapproachable these problems may seem to us and however helpless we stand before them, we have, nevertheless, the firm conviction that the solution must follow by logical processes. This conviction of the solvability of every mathematical problem is a powerful incentive to the worker. We hear the perpetual call: There is a problem. Seek its solution. You can find it... for in mathematics there is no ignorabimus.

And the position is adopted by Gödel:

[T]hose parts of mathematics which have been systematically and completely developed... show an amazing degree of beauty and perfection. In those fields, by entirely unsuspected laws and procedures... means are provided... for solving all relevant problems. This fact seems to justify what may be called 'rationalistic optimism'.

Gödelian optimism, as Shapiro calls it, is marked by the joint acceptance of the knowability principle and classical logic. My worry is that the occupation of this position by eminent philosophers is itself evidence that I have gone afoul in my characterization of the Dummettian terrain. After all, if my modesty principle is as modest as I claim, then anybody would accept it. But if modesty is inconsistent with the joint acceptance of the knowability principle and classical logic (i.e., with Gödelian optimism), then the Gödelian optimist would not accept it.

So it seems that either my modesty requirement is not readily embraced by all, or it is so embraced and Gödelian optimism needs to be re-evaluated for coherence. If


36Hilbert's "Mathematical Problems" lecture, 1900.

modesty is not readily embraced, then it is not clear that both the realist and the anti-
realist endorse it. But then, the meaningfulness of the semantic debate is threatened;
aeacy condition (iii) on a meaningful semantic debate will not have been satisfied.
On the other horn of the dilemma, if the modesty in question is readily adopted,
then it is readily adopted even by the Gödelian optimist. But the argument for
revision provided above apparently shows that a commitment to Gödelian optimism
plus modesty is logically inconsistent. But then positions occupied by Descartes,
Hilbert and Gödel are a priori untenable.

The solution is to accept the second horn of the dilemma and make one clarifica-
tion. Modesty is perfectly modest, and so is probably embraced even by the optimist.
The optimist will admit that we do not currently know that all meaningful mathe-
matical claims are decidable by us one way or the other. But this is not necessarily
inconsistent with his position. In the face of the above argument for revision the
Gödelian optimist can deny that the knowability principle has the epistemic status
that the anti-realist supposes it to have. The optimist says that the knowability prin-
ciple is not known but, rather, is avowed for pragmatic reasons, or just plain gets us
up in the morning to work on our favorite mathematical problems. The suggestion
is that $KP$ serves, for the optimist, as an expression of optimism rather than as a
statement of fact. Classical optimism is not committed to the strong modalized form
of the knowability principle, $\Box\forall \phi (\phi \rightarrow \Diamond P\phi)$, required in the argument for revision.
Classical optimism, then, does not contradict epistemic modesty.

So my claim is that epistemic modesty is modest enough to warrant its endorse-
ment by the relevant parties, and it is strong enough to play the logical role that
the anti-realist intends for it. On this understanding, the above account of the re-
visionism debate evades the earlier criticisms that I used against plausible readings
of Dummett and Wright on this issue. A commitment to Dummettian anti-realism,
then, apparently does oblige us to reform our logic. This becomes clear once the
logic of the debate is made explicit—that is, once we formulate the Dummettian dis-
agreement within quantified propositional logic, while at the same time satisfying the
adequacy criteria on a meaningful and interesting debate. So, if we have succeeded
in doing this, then we now know that it follows logically from semantic anti-realism
that some logical principles—standardly taken to be known—are in fact unknown.
Or conversely, we find that an unyielding commitment to the full range of classical
principles has the metaphysical cost of semantic realism.
2.7 Appendix: Summary of Semantics, Rules, Theses and Results

2.7.1 Semantics

Let $\varphi$ and $\psi$ be place-holders for meaningful, clear, non-vague, understood (mathematical) indicatives.

Let $P\varphi = d_f \varphi$ is mathematically verified; i.e., there is a proof of $\varphi$ that has been correctly recognized as such by now, or at least, we have at present a proof of the fact that we can construct a proof of $\varphi$.

Let $\Diamond P\varphi = d_f$ It is mathematically possible that $\varphi$ be verified; i.e. $\varphi$ is a consequence of our current mathematical knowledge or of what is mathematically known at some future time.

Let $K\varphi = d_f$ It is currently known by us that $\varphi$.

Let $\nabla \varphi = d_f$ It is possible, for all we know, that $\varphi$; i.e., as far as we can tell, it is consistent with our present knowledge that $\varphi$; or, $\varphi$ does not explicitly contradict any $\psi$ such that $K\psi$.

2.7.2 Rules

1. It should be clear that anything known to be a consequence of known premises is also known. As a general rule this permits us to introduce the knowledge operator before any consequence of known premises that we know to be a consequence. Call this rule $K$- Introduction ($KI$). The general form of the rule is

$$
(KI) \quad \frac{K(\varphi_1, \ldots, \varphi_n \vdash \psi) \quad K\varphi_1 \quad \ldots \quad K\varphi_n}{K\psi}
$$
2. $\forall \varphi$ means that $\varphi$ is not in explicit contradiction with anything else known. That is just to say that we do not currently know $\neg \varphi$. But then it is absurd to think that we do currently know $\neg \varphi$, when $\forall \varphi$:

$$K \neg \varphi, \forall \varphi \vdash \bot$$

3. Consider $\forall \neg \varphi$. This means that $\neg \varphi$ is not in explicit contradiction with anything else known, which is to say that it is not known that $\varphi$ and it is not known that $\neg \neg \varphi$. So, it is absurd to think that $\varphi$ is known when $\forall \neg \varphi$:

$$\forall \neg \varphi, K \varphi \vdash \bot$$

### 2.7.3 Theses and Main Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universalized Law of Excluded Middle</th>
<th>$(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \lor \neg \varphi)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Knowability Principle</td>
<td>$(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \rightarrow \Diamond P \varphi)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Decidability of the Discourse</td>
<td>$(\forall \varphi)(\Diamond \varphi \lor \Diamond \neg \varphi)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical Revision</td>
<td>$\neg K(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \lor \neg \varphi)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Realism</td>
<td>$K(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \rightarrow \Diamond P \varphi)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>$\neg K(\forall \varphi)(\Diamond \varphi \lor \Diamond \neg \varphi)$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULT A (Excluded Middle and the Knowability Principle jointly entail Decidability):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assn. #</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Justification on which line rests</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>$(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \lor \neg \varphi)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>$(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \rightarrow \Diamond P \varphi)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>$\psi \rightarrow \Diamond P \psi$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>$\neg \psi \rightarrow \Diamond P \neg \psi$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>$\psi \lor \neg \psi$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULT B (Anti-Realism and Epistemic Modesty entail Revisionism):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assn.#</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Justification on which line rests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>$K(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \lor \neg \varphi)$ Assn. for reductio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>$K(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \to \Diamond P \varphi)$ Assn. (Anti-Realism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>$K(\forall \varphi)(\Diamond P \varphi \lor \Diamond P \neg \varphi)$ $KI$ from 1, 2 and our recognition of Result A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>$\neg K(\forall \varphi)(\Diamond P \varphi \lor \Diamond P \neg \varphi)$ Assn. (Epistemic Modesty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 2, 4</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>CONTRADICTION $\neg E$ 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, 4</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>$\neg K(\forall \varphi)(\varphi \lor \neg \varphi)$ $\neg I$ 1-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Revisionism!
CHAPTER 3

NON-FACTUALISM AND QUASI-REALISM

3.1 Introduction

Thus far we have discussed the issue of realism as an issue about the propriety of various metaphysical pictures. There is the picture of reality which has it that truth is potentially recognition-transcendent, and the picture of reality as having determined all the truth-values of our claims. In Chapter 5 we shall discuss a further picture of the facts as ascertainable by a purely cognitive mode of belief-formation. And still there are other metaphysically resonant pictures for which a proper defense is said to constitute realism. But not all interpretations of the dispute over realism have it this way. Simon Blackburn's hypothesis is that one may legitimately embrace all of the resonant imagery normally associated with realism while remaining true to a metaphysics that is at bottom "anti-realist." The primary objective of the present chapter is to clarify and test this hypothesis.

3.2 Projectivism

Let us begin with Blackburn's anti-realist starting point, which he calls *projectivism*. A projectivist theory rejects the idea that there are facts of a given kind, in some metaphysically important sense of "fact." Specifically, projectivism denies
that the states of affairs in question play an important role in an explanation of our judgments about those states of affairs. Consider some examples.

A theological projectivist may argue that Christian belief in God and transmigration of souls, for example, can be explained completely and most informatively without positing the existence of God, souls, heaven, etc. After all, the fact that every culture has their own such story, incompatible with all the others, tells us that not every folk theology can be correct. But then what independent reason do we have for thinking that the Christian faith has things right? There appears to be no such non-question begging reason. So, the best explanation for this Christian theological talk is not that there are divine facts of the matter and that Christians are more attuned to them than the the rest of humanity. There are better explanations of such faith. Perhaps it is best explained by the human need to cope with the death of loved ones, or our lack of importance in the greater scheme of things. Whatever the details, the view is (at best) that those engaged in theological discourse project theological states of affairs into existence. Such states, on this view, are "shadows cast by the social practice," the product of our "gilding and staining ... with colors borrowed from internal sentiment."

Perhaps less controversial and much less difficult to defend is a projectivism about discourse associated with team spirit. In New York the sports fans say,

"The Yankees are number one!"

At games they say this and write it on giant white cards, even when the Yankees are neither winning the game nor leading in their division. Why? Not because they are

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38 This sense of factual commitment follows Gilbert Harman in The Nature of Morality (Oxford University Press, 1977).
tracking facts of the matter about which team really rules. There are no genuine facts of the matter here. The best explanation for why they say these things has more to do with the need to express their primordial urges to take a side and kill the other for survival. Or perhaps the fans are merely venting their natural hormonal overloads, or simply their team spirit. The details of the account are not really important, since I am not here interested in defending projectivism about any particular region of discourse. The point is rather simply to outline the projectivist strategy, which is to make sense of a declarative practice without countenancing the states of affairs that that practice literally avows.

One way to understand this brand of anti-realism is to contrast it with other brands of anti-realism that it resembles. Projectivism, for example, appears to be a form of irrealism, in that it initially denies the existence of facts of the given kind. But to call the view “irrealist” is somewhat misleading, since Blackburn’s moral projectivism, for example, ultimately takes the countenancing of, say, moral facts to be consistent with a moral projectivism. And projectivism appears to be a form of error theory, since the projectivist appears to deny something that the speakers affirm—namely, that there are facts of the given kind. But the projectivist strategy need not carry with it the charge of massive error against the practitioners. Projectivism may be coupled with error theory, or some other theory that aims to legitimize the practice. Blackburn discusses the options for projectivism:

One [option] would be that [projectivism] embodies error. Ordinary talk is conducted as if there were facts, when there are no such facts. The talk is ‘fraudulent’ or ‘diseased’. The other option is less familiar, but more attractive. It holds that there is nothing illegitimate in our ordinary
practice and thought. The respects in which we talk as if there are, for instance, moral facts, are legitimate.\textsuperscript{39}

The preferred view is that projectivism should be coupled with a theory that vindicates the moves made therein, including ascriptions of truth and literal avowals of the facts in question.

The point cannot be emphasized enough, since many accounts of what Blackburn is doing, inspired by some of Blackburn's own misleading statements, claim that the indicatives up for projectivist interpretation are not capably of being true or false (let alone apt for fact-stating). After all he sometimes says that the indicatives are treated by the projectivist "as if" they were true or false and apt for fact-stating. This appears to carry the charge of error, since it implies that the indicatives are not really apt for stating facts. So we might think that the speakers are mistaken when they make such claims of truth and avowals of fact.

But Blackburn is not denying that these indicatives are apt for truth or falsity; he is only denying that they are apt for truth or falsity in some metaphysically important, realism-relevant, sense. Whether they are apt for truth or falsity in some less metaphysically important sense is supposed to be a different question. Blackburn writes,

\ldots we may end up saying that there really are values (such as the value of honesty) and facts (such as the fact that you have a duty to your children). For in this branch of philosophy, it is not what you finish by saying, but how you manage to say it that matters. How many people think they can just announce themselves to be realists \ldots, as if all you have to do is put your hand on your heart and say, 'I really believe it!' \ldots? The way I treat the issue of realism denies that this kind of avowal helps the matter at all. The question is one of the best theory of this state of commitment, and

reiterating it, even with a panoply of dignities—truth, fact, perception, and the rest—is not to the point.\textsuperscript{40}

The question of projectivism here, as a form of anti-realism, essentially depends on the aforementioned explanatory characteristics of the discourse (it is a matter of what best explains the discursive practice), but it does not decide the issue of whether the ontological commitments formulated within that discourse are mistaken. In other words, even though projectivism, as a theoretical enterprise, denies (in the relevant explanatory sense) that there are facts of the given kind, it does not disregard the non-theoretical claims about whether there are such facts. So the fact that moralizers explicitly avow moral facts tells us nothing about the metaphysics of morals. The practice, on this view, underdetermines the substantial question of realism.

Still, there is a tension that needs to be clearly resolved. How is it that the projectivist may deny the existence of the facts in question, while at the same time consistently allow for the legitimacy of the practice—and even allow for the assertion of those very facts?

It must be that there is more than one kind of factual commitment in the air. And for Blackburn there is. First there is the metaphysically neutral kind. This is just the ordinary non-theoretical sense in which a speaker is factually committed. On this interpretation of the idiom, it is sufficient for your thinking that burning down orphanages is wrong that you be committed to the existence of moral facts (e.g., the fact that burning down orphanages is wrong). And if you think it is a fact that slavery is immoral, you are committed metaphysically—on this reading of 'fact'—to no more than is required of thinking that slavery is wrong. On this reading, 'it is a

\textsuperscript{40}Blackburn, op. cit. (1993), p. 168.
fact that \( p' \) means no more and no less than \( 'p' \). Even the moral projectivist wants to be able to countenance moral facts, in this sense of 'fact.'

Blackburn's favored projectivism is a form of expressivism, the view that our commitments in an area aim primarily, not to describe the world, but to express our own sentiments in response to the world. A first-order moral utterance \( 'Pz' \), on this view, does not essentially serve to describe an action \( z \) as having property \( P \). Rather, it serves to express a sentiment that the speaker has in response to \( z \). The projectivist, of course, owes us an empirical story about which attitudes correlate with which moral predicates.\footnote{Even though this is perhaps the most important element of projectivist theory, Blackburn offers remarkably little by way of elucidating the matter for any given area. Nevertheless, Blackburn's project is intended to be more a defense of the very possibility and coherence of this brand of anti-realism, than a thorough analysis of any given area.} \( 'z \) is wrong,\) it may be argued, is an expression of condemnation of \( z \). So, when I claim that cow-tipping is wrong, I am not describing the act of cow-tipping as having some mind-independent feature (viz., wrongness), but am rather venting my own disapproval of the act. Importantly, if the projectivist can show us that there are standards for appraising the having of such attitudes, then he will be well on his way to legitimizing the indicatives that serve to express those sentiments. So, he will be well on his way to legitimizing those claims to truth and factuality that serve to manifest the appropriateness of such sentiments.

### 3.3 Quasi-Realism

Unlike Michael Dummett's essentially revisionist form of anti-realism (semantic anti-realism), Blackburn goes on to defend a very conservative form of the thesis. Beginning with a fundamentally anti-realist position (projectivism), he aims to conserve all those intellectual practices that invite a realist construal. He intends to do this...
by construing all those intellectual practices as further expressions of attitude. The position, which he calls quasi-realism, is to explain and justify, not only the first-order practice that is the initial object of projectivist analysis, but also those higher-order commitments that are so often treated as being essentially realist. So, the quasi-realist not only aims to conserve applications of the truth predicate, avowals of fact, unrestricted employment of classical logic, embeddings within epistemic contexts, etc., but also aims to conserve various claims to objectivity and mind-independence. For instance, in the case of a purported quasi-realism about morality, the following kinds of claims to objectivity are alleged to be understood as expressions of attitude:

- I believe that cow-tipping is immoral, but I might be wrong.
- The entire nation might be mistaken about whether passive euthanasia is permissible.
- Some moral truths may be unknowable by us in principle.
- Every moral claim is determinately true or false.

We see then that Blackburn takes his view to be a kind of anti-realism, not because he thinks some realist thesis is false, but because the judgments of the given kind, and all such apparently realist theses about those judgments, are to be well explained as expressions of attitudes rather than as depictions of fact. This is to say that the target discourse, and all the claims to objectivity that go with it, can be adequately explained without ever directly appealing in the explanandum to the states of affairs that that discourse literally avows. This is the quasi-realist's goal. Blackburn hypothesizes that it can be successfully met. And that is what we are here to determine. But before we do so, we shall need a better of what constitutes successful quasi-realist theorizing.
3.4 When is Quasi-Realism Successful?

Two constraints on successful quasi-realist theorizing will be discussed in turn. We shall refer to them as the constraints of consistency and conservativism, and shall refer back to them throughout the remainder of this chapter.

3.4.1 The Consistency Constraint

The constraint of consistency requires that any quasi-realist theorizing about the intellectual practice must be consistent with the initial projectivist interpretation of that practice. So, any attempt to give the semantic legitimation of patterns of deductive inference, claims to objectivity or mind-independence, etc. had better not be given in terms of the vocabulary distinctive of that practice. For example, if "x is immoral" is to be understood as the expression of disapproval for x, then "I might be wrong about whether x is immoral" had better not be best understood as the expression of disapproval for x coupled with the belief that x is not immoral. For in that account of the fallibility claim, the target vocabulary ('is immoral') plays an explanatory role with respect to our moral thought. And projectivism requires that we not avail ourselves of the target vocabulary in the best account of what the speakers are up to.

Actually this formulation of the consistency constraint is slightly misleading. It is not meant simply to prohibit the quasi-realist from utilizing the target vocabulary when giving the contents of the indicatives in question, but is meant to prohibit him from appealing to moral states of affairs when giving the contents of those indicatives. If "x is good" has the truth condition that "x maximizes happiness", then one might give the content of "x is good" without appealing to our moral vocabulary.
Nevertheless, this would go against our projectivist thesis, which claims that moral states of affairs do not play an explanatory role with respect to our moral thought and talk, since—on this reductive view—moral states of affairs just are states of affairs regarding the maximization of happiness. So, even though our distinctive moral vocabulary is not appealed to in the account, moral states of affairs are. Let us then put the consistency constraint this way:

For the quasi-realist, the states of affairs of the target discourse cannot serve to give the contents of the indicatives formulable within that discourse.

3.4.2 The Conservativism Constraint

The constraint of conservativism requires that any quasi-realist theorizing about a discourse issue no obligations to revise that discourse. As Blackburn tells us,

[quasi-realist] philosophy indeed leaves everything as it is. Yet there may be reason to sympathize more with the anti-realist.\(^{42}\)

So it is part of the very project that no revisions be obligated, that it leave the ordinary practice intact. If, for instance, treating moral indicatives as expressions of attitude would renders our moral claims subjective, then—on this view—it would no longer make sense to debate moral issues. After all, meaningful disagreement presupposes that at least one speaker is wrong, and subjectivity precludes the possibility that either speaker is wrong. We would be rationally obligated to stop debating moral issues, on such a subjectivist account of our practice; and hence able to conclude that quasi-realism has failed.

Quasi-realism has its name because it aims to preserve all those intellectual practices that invite a realist construal, including various claims to realism. It aims to

\(^{42}\)Blackburn, op. cit. (1993), p.34.
preserve them without presupposing the states of affairs that serve as their literal subject matter. And so, any failure to conserve some intellectual practice along these lines is, by definition, a failure of the quasi-realistic strategy.

3.5 The Problem of Normativity

Notice that to conserve a declarative practice in the quasi-realistic fashion, one must do more than interpret the first-order claims as mere expressions of attitude. For declarative practices are normative. In the face of disagreement, questions as to who is right must make sense. But if we are merely expressing non-propositional attitudes, such questions would not make sense, for the situation would be the same as with crude questions of taste. Biting into chocolate ice cream and saying, “yuck, chocolate ice cream is disgusting” issues no demand for the chocolate lovers to agree. One might respond, “But chocolate ice cream is not disgusting; it is yummy,” and that will be the end of that conversation. This difference in taste is not a difference that constitutes an inconsistency (despite grammatical appearances), nor is it a difference that, once noted, issues a demand for the opposing speaker to change his mind as to the facts of any matter. But the quasi-realistic aims to preserve the possibility of disagreement and all those practices that have an inherently normative character.

One way to understand better the quasi-realistic attempt to explain the essentially normative character of a declarative practice is to come to terms with leading attacks on the very possibility of successful quasi-realistic explanation of this feature. One such attack is put forth by Jerrold Katz in The Metaphysics of Meaning. In this section

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we shall discuss Katz's concern, and Robert Kraut's reply.44 We shall then be in a
c better position to understand Blackburn's own discussion of the problem.

As Kraut tells us, the Katzian concern is that these types of anti-realist strategies
are descriptive, in that they merely aim causally to describe why it is that we make the
assertoric claims that we make, without grounding the correctness of these moves in
objective fact. Our moral indicatives, as we saw, may be interpreted as the expressions
of certain emotions of approval or disapproval. And if there are no genuine facts
about what is right or wrong, how can we ground claims about the correctness or
incorrectness of these moral claims? It appears that we cannot. Kraut describes the
Katzian concern:

purely descriptive accounts do not get at the normativity, since (presumably) they do not provide resources for distinguishing morally correct from
morally incorrect instances of condemnation and commendation.45

The reason that such normativity is presumed missing, according to Kraut, is that
our appraisal of social practice must be grounded in something external
to that practice.46

And, if correctness is understood in terms of the prevailing social practice (e.g., in
terms of our current set of commendations), attempts to appraise that practice (our
current set of commendations) ipso facto fail to be grounded in anything external
to the practice. On Katz's view, it seems, there is an inherent instability in the
quasi-realist program.

44 See Chapter 5 of Objects and Objectivity (Unpublished Typescript)
46 Ibid.
Kraut sketches a solution to this problem on behalf of the quasi-realist. The strategy is to ground appraisal of the group practice in terms of something external to the practice. The idea is to show that

the moral properties we attribute — against the backdrop of which we appraise the group’s behavior — are themselves reifications of the norms sustained in . . . the behavior of some idealized group.47

It makes sense, then, to honor the fallibility of the group sentiment (even supposing that there is a consensus about how we should feel), since, even from our perspective (from within the group), it is easy to see how some more advanced community might question the propriety of our judgement. Details pending, this works to preserve the normative element according to Kraut, since

the real issue is objectivity, and what it takes to secure it. If objectivity is the possibility of massive error, among other things, the explanatory theory must provide an account of what it would be for everyone to be wrong.48

And Kraut tells us what it would be for everyone to be wrong. Or, at least, he tells us what it would be for us to acknowledge the possibility of massive error. It would be to

project an idealized community, members of which condemn that which we presently praise.49

And another way that he puts it:

the account of what we are doing when we reflect upon our own lack of moral omniscience [is that] we imagine that dwellers in the asymptotic limit of our own moral trajectory look back and condemn us.50

47Ibid. p.22
48Ibid., p.24.
49Ibid., p. 23.
50Ibid., p. 24.
To the extent that such projections and reflections are justified, so are the claims to fallibility that the community humbly endorses.

Kraut summarizes his point:

[The quasi-realist strategy] provides theoretical foothold for consistently condemning massive condemnation, yet without invoking the idea of condemnation-independent moral properties to which moral practice must answer.\(^5\)

What we have then is an account which allows for something over and above the actual community standard grounding the community's judgment. So we account for the normativity that Katz thought it was impossible to account for, but without giving in to realism. The account does not give in to realism, since the normativity can be explained without positing distinctively moral facts. The community's judgment is thought to be evaluable ultimately in light of a more reflective, more informed community's judgement (perhaps in light of the judgment our own community renders at some later time).

Let us now turn to Blackburn's line of thought on the matter. For it should be more interesting now that we have discussed the skeptical criticism and the outline of how to undermine this skeptical worry.

### 3.6 Peircean Limits, and Improved Perspectives

There is a history of pragmatists who suggest that truth might be best understood as that which would be agreed upon at the asymptotic limit of our ever-improving epistemic situation. Blackburn also offers, though does not ultimately endorse, a similar idealization by way of a first approximation of quasi-realist truth. He says that we might

\(^5\)Ibid.
define a 'best possible set of attitudes', thought of as the limiting set which would result from taking all possible opportunities for improvement of attitude. Saying that an evaluative remark is true would be saying that it is a member of such a set, or is implied by such a set. Call the set $M^*$. Then if $m$ is a particular commitment, expressing an attitude $A$:

$$m \text{ is true } = A \text{ is a member of } M^*$$

Correct moral opinion, on this view, is whatever would be expressed by the most sophisticated set of attitudes. Nevertheless, Blackburn et. al. notice that one need not idealize so far. To quote the more recent Blackburn:

It may be that the notion of an improvement is sufficient to interpret remarks to the effect that my favorite theory may be wrong, but not itself sufficient to justify a notion of the limit of investigation; if these things are each so, then the notion of a limit cannot be necessary to interpret the fear that my favorite theory is wrong.

Blackburn is saying here that appeals to truth and objectivity need not be explained by appeals to limits of improved contexts. Appeals to improved contexts alone will suffice.

But of course not just any old improvement will suffice, since truth must be stable. That is how we treat truth in our assertoric practice. In Blackburn's terminology, it is not enough, to legitimate my claims that I may be wrong, that I have a notion of an improved perspective $P_1$, since an even more improved perspective, $P_2$, may overturn the verdict issued through $P_1$. But then the notion of improvement that is supposed to make sense of our epistemic humility must be fine-tuned. Blackburn suggests that

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it is ... generally true that to use a concept of truth ... requires only the concept of a point beyond which no improved perspective demands a rejection of a given previous opinion. And it may well be that serious theorizing about an opinion requires faith in the existence of such a point.  

Crudely, at the very least, to think that $P_x$ is true, in this quasi-realist sense, is to have a corresponding sentiment $A$ in response to $x$, and to implicitly believe that no further improvement to our set of attitudes will obligate us to stop responding to $x$ with $A$.

What then is an improved set of attitudes? This is an important question, for it is this notion of improvement that captures the normativity that is constitutive of declarative practice subject to a quasi-realist construal. When I think that incinerating kittens is wrong, I may be expressing my own disapproval of the act. If that were all that I was doing, then the perpetrator could say, “That’s just your opinion”, and we should be done with it. But the kind of anti-realism in question is not a form of subjectivism. It aims, with its quasi-realist emendation, to preserve those normative aspects of the practice. The only way to do this explain is to explain this normative authority as being grounded in something over and above the fact that we have the beliefs that we do.

But what is it, over and above the beliefs we do have, that explains our implicit and explicit claims to correctness (or incorrectness) of those beliefs? Blackburn’s answer, is of course, improvement to our attitude sets. “Improvement,” it seems, is an epistemic notion. On Blackburn’s view, it is an idealization of those features which lead us actually to believe that a judgment is better or worse. He says,

The sovereign proposal is to think of truth as some kind of construct out of our conception of the virtues of methods of inquiry and the consequences.

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to which they lead. ‘Realism’, in at least one good use of the term in this connexion, thinks that we can explain the virtues of method by certifying that they are midwives to truth; ‘anti-realism’ sees truth as that which ought to be established, or would be established, by the best use of the best methods. The one philosophy sees the virtues of right reasoning as a precipitate from an antecedent notion of truth, and the other reverses the priority.\textsuperscript{55}

When I think that cow-tipping is immoral, let us suppose, I am expressing my disapproval of the act. But I am also, if Blackburn’s theory of normativity is correct, committed to thinking that my attitude is objectively correct—that is, that it would be disapproved of by anyone with a more sophisticated set of attitudes than mine, which is to say that anyone using better methods for deciding moral issues, whatever those methods may be, would also disapprove. Of course, what those methods are will be highly context sensitive and will vary from discourse to discourse. There need not be, even within any one discourse, a univocal method for uncovering the truth. In moral discourse, sometimes consequences matter, but not always. Cloning would be immoral, if it inevitably led to the destruction of humanity. In other circumstances personal autonomy plays a role in deciding moral matters. For instance we think that slavery is wrong, because human beings have rights to freedom. And sometimes, the moral issues involve a number of disparate considerations.

Importantly no single consideration is sufficient to uncover the truth-conditions of “x is good”. And yet, there are several morally relevant features of our moralizing. And sometimes, whether these features are in play (e.g., whether happiness is maximized) is something that future generations will be better equipped to discover. So, when I say that slavery is wrong, I condemn slavery, but also, if Blackburn is right,

\textsuperscript{55}Blackburn, op. cit. (1993), p. 47.
I am expressing my faith in the fact that future more advanced civilizations would continue to condemn it.

### 3.7 The Frege-Geach Problem

An important problem for quasi-realism is the problem of embedded contexts. The following sections may serve as a partial solution to this problem. How do non-factual indicatives function in unasserted contexts, as in the antecedent of a conditional?

Non-factualists say that such indicatives serve primarily to do something, rather than primarily to say something. Moral and comic claims perhaps serve mainly to vent our inner feelings, rather than to describe some objective aspect of reality. To say that x is moral is not to attribute an objective property to x, but to express a certain sentiment about x. Any such account leaves us with the semantic problem of interpreting such indicatives as they appear embedded in complex contexts.

How, for instance, are we to understand this claim:

\[
(1) \text{If it is wrong to lie, then it is wrong to get others to lie.}
\]

Just as it makes no sense to embed a question or a command in the antecedent place of a conditional, it is nonsensical to embed many other doings, such as ventings. Let square brackets enclose a venting or evincing of some inner state. Notice that a sentence embedding such speech acts, such as,

\[
(1^*) \text{If [boo lying!], then [boo getting others to lie!]} 
\]

is not grammatical. But then in embedded truth-functional contexts, generally understood, indicatives do not play the role that the anti-descriptivist claims for them. No booing can be going on in the antecedent of conditional (1). But then a free-standing
instance of ‘x is wrong’ does not seem to have enough semantically in common with instances of ‘x is wrong’ as they appear embedded in conditionals. They do not appear to have enough semantically in common, that is, to legitimate simple inference patterns such as modus ponens. Suppose I think,

(i) If x is wrong, then getting others to do x is wrong.

And suppose I think that

(ii) x is wrong,

and in doing so am essentially venting my disapproval of anyone who does x. Then, since the antecedent of conditional (i) does not itself require the relevant commitment which contributes to the semantic content of (ii), I would be equivocating on the claim ‘x is wrong’ were I to deduce: Getting others to do x is wrong. So, the problem of embedded contexts is the problem of non-descriptively preserving enough of the colloquial meaning (viz., the grammaticality and logical relations) of the given class of indicatives. As it appears, the anti-descriptivist’s approach enjoins a failure to preserve either grammaticality or simple inferential relations.®®

Blackburn attempts to resolve this worry by showing that the logic of attitudes sufficiently mimics ordinary propositional logic. The key step is to demonstrate that the expressivistic understanding of non-factual judgments has resources sophisticated enough to draw a distinction analogous to that of asserted versus unasserted contexts.

Though a solution to the Frege-Geach problem is essential to the quasi-realist program, I do not intend to evaluate the latest attempts to solve it. Nevertheless, to

some extent I do want to contribute to a solution in following sections. For I want
to discuss the plausibility of embedding non-factual indicatives in epistemic contexts,
and to explore the special problems that come with an attempt to do so.

3.8 The Problem of Moral Knowledge

The goal of this chapter is to test the quasi-realist hypothesis that any claim to
mind-independence can be conserved under projectivist analysis. Recall that pro­
jectivism is a form of anti-realism about truth value, in that it denies that there is
anything more than “best use of best methods” in virtue of which the claims in ques­
tion can be treated as true, and affirms that an understanding of “best use” does not
require a commitment to facts characterized by the target vocabulary. And so, the
conservation of any claim to mind-independence must not go against this strategy.
Our present investigation concerns the prospects for conserving Dummett’s semantic
realism, the view which embraces the possibility of unknowable truths. But then, if
we think that some claims under projectivist construal might be unknowably true,
then that must be to think that it is possible that these claims are such that they
would be established by the best use of the best methods but that it is unknowable
in principle that they would be established by the best use of the best methods. And
whether this possibility can be made coherent on projectivist grounds depends on
how the theorist treats the concept of knowledge.

In this section we shall explore the quasi-realist’s concept of knowledge as it is
employed in areas treated projectivistically. We shall discuss how the basic concept
must be treated by the quasi-realist, show that the quasi-realist must preserve the
distinction between possible and current knowledge, and discuss how he can preserve
this distinction with the limited resources he sets aside for himself. This will put us in a better position to test the quasi-realist's ability to accommodate forms semantic realism—a claim to mind-independence that essentially involves these epistemic concepts in its formulation.

Let us begin by assuming that Blackburn is correct in thinking that moral discourse is best understood projectivistically, and investigate the prospects for extending this projectivism to ascriptions of moral knowledge.

Moral discourse clearly allows for epistemic embeddings of our moral claims. When we are prepared verbally to defend our moral views, we says things like,

Not only do I think that dealing crack to kids is immoral, I know that it is!

And when we are prepared to defer and consult those more sensitive than ourselves on such matters, we says things like,

She knows better than I what is right.

Such epistemic idioms make sense, and the quasi-realist need not disfavor them. After all, if our moral discourse and claims to moral truth are perfectly in order, why would not our claims to moral knowledge be as unproblematic? Moreover, the quasi-realist must accommodate these claims in order to meet his own conservative constraint, which demands that the theory issue no demands to revise the ordinary practice. The above claims are instances of our ordinary moral idioms. So, quasi-realism must accommodate the above claims.

The theory we are considering says that the given class of (say, moral, comic or aesthetic) indicatives is not apt for truth in the standard sense. But, as is clear, knowledge attributions presuppose a notion of truth, since knowing \( \varphi \) entails the
truth of $\varphi$. So how exactly is it that non-factual knowledge ascriptions make sense? Well, the quasi-realist goes some distance to convince us that a notion of truth can be constructed out of a non-descriptive practice. And to the extent that he is successful in this rehabilitation of the truth predicate, it seems likely that some notion of knowledge can be constructed thereupon. Blackburn expresses as much. He says,

Wherever there is truth and a discipline for better or worse judgment, we can in principle talk about knowledge, and such talk therefore falls as well into the quasi-realist net.\(^{57}\)

And he says,

No talk of knowledge or certainty, reason or truth ... seem[s] beyond [the quasi-realist's] grasp.\(^{58}\)

So it is evident that Blackburn's quasi-realist aims to preserve the epistemic trappings of the discourse in question.

But this should have been clear all along, since many of the original motivations for going down the projectivist's path were epistemological. Recall that the point of Blackburn's strategy is to improve the philosophy—that is, to resolve some of the metaphysical and epistemological problems that otherwise frustrate a realist interpretation of an area. On the epistemic front there are at least three philosophical problems that the projectivist aims to treat: access, economy and skepticism. There is the problem of explaining our epistemic access to mysterious subject matters—i.e., explaining how we come to know that some things are right or wrong, if not by reacting in the standard way (viz., with our senses) to chunks of space-time. Second, there is the related problem of epistemic economy—i.e., the problem of explaining


\(^{58}\)Blackburn, op. cit. (1993), p.34.
knowledge acquisition without positing mysterious belief-forming mechanisms (such as moral intuition or some other sixth sense, such as a sense of humor). A projectivist, according to Blackburn, is also meant to render us less vulnerable to skepticism, which denies that we do/can know anything at all about the matters in question, for reasons regarding either the non-existence of these matters or their mysterious undetectable nature.

Evidently, non-factual knowledge is something the quasi-realist intends to respect. And yet, little has been said about what the quasi-realist thinks we are up to when we attribute non-factual knowledge. Why has so little been said on this issue of epistemic embeddings? One answer can be found in a statement Bob Hale makes in a discussion of the more general problem of embedded contexts. He says,

Conditionals and disjunctions are not, of course, the only contexts in which evaluatives or normative sentences can figure in positions where we expect to find candidates for truth, and which must, therefore, be viewed as problematic by the expressive theorist. There is no impropriety attaching to the description of someone as knowing, or believing, that lying is wrong, that one ought to keep one's promises, etc., or in the embedding of such sentences in such contexts as 'It is true that...'. But I doubt that these other problematic contexts raise any essentially new problems for the expressivist. Once we have taken the step of expressing our attitudes in propositional style, it is only to be expected that the sentences thus employed should—in sharp contrast with, e.g., imperatives—enjoy the full range of propositional embeddings...  

The idea seems to be that once we have solved the problem of fitting expressivistic language into descriptivistic clothing (i.e., into atomic declarative contexts, semantic-attributions and, perhaps, truth-functional contexts), it should be no surprise that the same language embeds unproblematically in other propositional contexts, such

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as doxastic and epistemic contexts. In other words, it should be expected that with little discussion the quasi-realist may also legitimate freestanding knowledge- and belief-attributions, claims to the truth of such attributions, and perhaps even the construction of truth-functional compounds upon them.

But this expectation about epistemic embeddings, for two very important reasons, is overly optimistic. Embedding expressive language in epistemic contexts is tricky business. At the very least, it is not as simple as Hale’s quote might lead us to believe, since, as will be defended subsequently,

(1) the expressivist’s standard account of non-factual knowledge fails to do justice to some of the more subtle features of our basic epistemic talk.

And, once we see how the account of non-factual knowledge must be developed to accommodate these subtle, but basic, features of our epistemic discourse, an essentially new problem for the quasi-realist does in fact emerge—namely, we find that

(2) there are strict limits on the amount of apparently realist thought and talk the quasi-realist can vindicate.

What will emerge from our investigation of the roles played by epistemic locutions is some clear thought, definitive of one kind of realism, that Blackburn’s quasi-realist cannot mimic. It is a kind of realism whose formulation essentially involves these basic epistemic idioms.

Result (2) is a serious problem for the quasi-realist who aims to conserve all features of the given discourse that invite a realist construal. Here is a statement that lead one to adopt this strict understanding of the quasi-realist’s goals:

the threat remains that the anti-realist blandly takes over all the things the realist wanted to say, but retaining all the while his conviction that
he alone gives an unobjectionable, or ontologically pure, interpretation of them.⁶⁰

And so we see that our quasi-realist intends to leave no realist thesis outside the reach of quasi-realist interpretation.

Even if I am right that the quasi-realist cannot preserve all the claims to realism, there may be an amended form of quasi-realism that is coherent. It would take on the less ambitious task of merely testing the limits of quasi-realism. The important question then becomes the

question of how much is actually defensible on anti-realist grounds.⁶¹

This more modest quasi-realist asks, "Just how much realist thought and talk can the projectivist earn?", and provides in advance no bold answers about the comprehensiveness of the project. This is after all the question that Blackburn takes to be most often neglected by most schools of anti-realist thought. For example, he accuses Dummett of failing to realize that one may embrace the thesis that Dummett takes to be essentially realist, while at the same embracing non-factualism—the most severe form of anti-realism.⁶² This is a point that will be evaluated in greater depth in a later chapter.

Despite the room for a more modest quasi-realism, Blackburn apparently does not opt for it. He is very quick to contend that all apparently realist thought and talk is defensible on anti-realist grounds. But if (2) is correct, that is, if there are strict limits on how much apparently realist thought and talk the quasi-realist can


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accommodate, then obviously this more ambitious project is defective from the start. Nevertheless, the result mentioned in (2) serves a positive purpose, though probably not for Blackburn. It serves to facilitate a sharper distinction between (modest) quasi-realism and the opposing realism, since, as will be shown, it delivers a proposition that, coherently and in good faith, only the realist may endorse—namely, that some truths in the area are potentially unknowable. Such a result obviously would contribute to a solution to the formulation problem—i.e., the problem of articulating a clear point of contention that the realist affirms and the quasi-realist denies. And, as will be further argued, it contributes to a solution to the Frege-Geach problem. We shall discuss the positive end of this result later. The present task is to develop points (1) and (2) above. We shall begin with the quasi-realist treatment of non-factual knowledge.

3.8.1 What is Moral Knowledge?

So what does the moral expressivist think we are doing when we ascribe moral knowledge to ourselves and others? What is the standard line about non-factual knowledge? Hale states that

we should ... ascribe to someone the attitude of disapproval for lying by saying that he believes that lying is wrong, use the form 'He knows that lying is wrong' to both ascribe the attitude and register our agreement in attitude, and use devices of truth-ascription to endorse attitudes.\(^{(68)}\)

Of course, Hale is not quite right if he means to suggest that there is no more to claims of the form 'He knows that lying is wrong' than an ascription and agreement of attitude, since we might ascribe to a person s the belief that p and register our agreement, but without thinking that s knows that p. After all, it might be clear

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to us that s does not believe that p for the right reasons, or that s lacks reasons altogether for so believing that p. Perhaps s believes that lying is wrong, because he thinks that lying will prevent him from making a profit, or will get him punched in the jaw. Or maybe s suddenly disapproves of lying without having a reason for so disapproving. Maybe s hit his head, and for the first time in his life has come to believe that lying is wrong. Though I agree that lying is wrong, I would not say in any of the above cases that s \emph{knows} that lying is wrong. He either disapproves of lying for the wrong reasons, or disapproves of it for no good reason at all. He does not have moral knowledge, but merely mimics it to some unimpressive degree. So it seems that Hale's line about non-factual knowledge is not sufficient to account for simple knowledge attributions. There is more to our ascriptions of moral knowledge than the attribution of an attitude accompanied by a registration of our agreement in attitude. There must also be an attribution of entitlement to the knower. That is the only way to preserve our ordinary commitment to the fact that there is a difference between knowing and merely believing truly.

Surely, we think that a knower of a claim is entitled to the claim (even for the case of non-factual knowledge, if there be any). To preserve this platitude about knowledge, the quasi-realist needs to fine-tune the epistemic story. Attributions of non-factual knowledge apparently involve slightly more than Hale has recognized in his passing discussion of the issue. The quasi-realist, it seems, wishes to say that, for some class of non-factual knowledge claims $\varphi$,

\begin{itemize}
\item to think that s knows that $\varphi$, where $\varphi$ is of the form, say, ‘x is immoral’ is (i) to think that s responds to x with the corresponding attitude (say, of disapproval), (ii) to think that s is justified (in some sense) in having that attitude, and (iii) to register one’s own agreement in attitude (of disapproval) toward x.
\end{itemize}
Something like this is probably what the quasi-realist seeks for free-standing knowledge attributions, since it employs no further resources than the quasi-realist has at his disposal. What resources does Blackburn tell us are at the quasi-realist's disposal?

Wherever there is truth and a discipline for better or worse judgment, we can in principle talk about knowledge, and such talk therefore falls as well into the quasi-realist net.\(^6\)

Condition (ii), added above, requires no more than is required of a discipline for better or worse judgment. Our emendation appears then to be in the spirit of the Blackburnian program.

Moreover, this basic characterization of non-factual knowledge explains our standard tripartite analysis of knowledge. Knowledge attributions involve the attribution of a commitment, that commitment is thought to be entitled (in the relevant way), and that commitment is thought to be correct (via the standards of better and worse judgment). The account preserves the uncontested entailment of truth by knowledge (or at least, it preserves the idea that if we think s knows that \(\varphi\), we think that \(\varphi\) is true).

Recall that to think that "x is immoral" is true, on this account, is to endorse the relevant attitude. Hence, such an endorsement plays the role of the truth condition on our common-sense understanding of what it is for s to know that \(\varphi\). That is precisely the insight that Hale offers. My emendation, condition (ii) above, merely fills out the account of non-factual knowledge to meet our common-sense understanding of knowledge as a justified, true belief. The quasi-realist also owes us a more detailed story about what such "justification" amounts to when we are dealing with a notion

of commitment that is broad enough to include sentiments (e.g., of approval and disapproval). Let us for now simply note that that is another quasi-realist promissory note.\footnote{Allan Gibbard, and others sympathetic with his ideas, continue to work toward fleshing out this issue of moral justification in a way that harmonizes with expressivism. For instance, see D'Arms' and Jacobson's forthcoming "Sentiment and Value."}

The above treatment of non-factual knowledge is much too simple to work as a general account of non-factual knowledge. Not only is the standard line (unamended) not sufficient to account for non-factual knowledge, it is not necessary (with or without the amendment). Though the amended treatment perhaps tells a good story about some free-standing knowledge-attributions (such as, "I know that dealing crack to kids is immoral." or "He knows that apologizing is the right thing to do!")\footnote{I am grateful to Justin D'Arms for reminding me of this important point.}, it fails to facilitate an understanding of slightly more complex attributions. This will be demonstrated presently.

But we should draw lessons from our findings very cautiously. The fact that such an account of non-factual knowledge is not comprehensive is not necessarily a criticism of quasi-realism. After all, an epistemic idiom may be put to several distinct uses in the vernacular, so we should not expect one simple account to accommodate all of them.\footnote{I am grateful to Justin D'Arms for reminding me of this important point.} Nevertheless, it will prove fruitful to look further, to see what further resources need to be employed by the quasi-realist in order to legitimate more complex attributions of (non-factual) knowledge, and to determine whether non-factual knowledge ascriptions do in fact fall well into the quasi-realist net merely with the aid of "a discipline for better or worse judgment." We shall see that there is a natural
quasi-realist way to explain these epistemic idioms, but only at the expense of being unable to accommodate certain kinds of realism.

3.8.2 Attributions of Moral Superiority

Consider the following appeal to authority—an attribution of moral superiority arises (call it MS):

\[(MS) \text{ s knows more than I about what is right.}\]

We say things of this form when we think that others are morally more knowledgeable than ourselves—when they know things about which we have no views, or about which we have incorrect views. Perhaps this just comes to saying that others have moral sensibilities more sophisticated than our own. There are people in my life whom I see as having a greater sense of what is right than I have. They may have taught me things, and may have more to teach. If this is right, then it makes sense to attribute (moral) superiority—i.e., to attribute knowledge to others, knowledge that I do not have at the time of the attribution.

There should be no reason to think that we cannot attribute moral superiority. Blackburn, after all, wishes to make room for attributions of better and worse judgment. That is necessary to preserve the normativity that is essential to the assertoric practice. And once a notion of better and worse judgment is in play, there is no principled reason to think that we could not humbly acknowledge someone else’s better moral judgment.

There is not a huge difference here with other kinds of knowledge. Surely there are issues about the state of current technology that we do not now know about, but that others (such as the U.S. President) do know about. The past is good evidence for this
claim. There have in the past been bits of technological knowledge closely guarded from the public (as they say, in the interest of national security). And so, it is safe to say that there is today technological knowledge that you and I do not currently have at our disposal. Members of the government know things about which we have no views. More simply, it is clear that my neighbor knows some things that I do not know, since she is a surgeon and I am not. She, unlike myself, has vast medical knowledge. And it would be misguided for me to claim that I know those things in virtue of recognizing her authority. After all, I do not even understand some of the medical claims that she properly accepts. *We see then that not all attributions of knowledge involve an agreement in commitment between the knower and the attributer of the knowledge.*

But then why should we think any differently about our ascriptions of moral knowledge? A notion of better or worse moral judgment is sufficient to make sense of attributions of moral superiority. Clearly, one may attribute moral knowledge without sharing the relevant attitudes with the person to whom we are attributing the moral knowledge, since inductive evidence of that person’s superior moral sensibilities is evidence that they know more than we do about moral matters. Perhaps the person was extremely reliable (more so than ourselves) on moral matters in the past. Or perhaps, they have helped us see the light on many occasions. This alone is evidence for the person’s current state of moral superiority. It legitimates the idea that that person now knows more than us in the given area.

But then our ascription of moral knowledge to that person does not essentially carry with it the expression of one’s current agreement in attitude. And so, criterion (iii) above is not essential to the attribution of knowledge; one need not register one’s
current agreement with someone (in attitude) in order to attribute to that person some moral knowledge. But this should be no surprise, since sometimes we have no views about some known matters, owing to our own lack of information or lack of interest, while knowing perfectly well that others may have some insight on the issue.

What I have argued is that the standard account of non-factual knowledge is not sufficient for treating knowledge attributions, and I have gone further to argue that the standard account is not necessary for treating some attributions of knowledge. It is not sufficient, since in some circumstances it fails to accommodate our intuition that the bearer of knowledge must be entitled to that knowledge. And it is not necessary since, in the case of attributing a degree of enlightenment to others, we may ascribe knowledge without registering an agreement in commitment.

Perhaps the above amended account of non-factual knowledge is perfectly in order for a segment of epistemic discourse. Maybe it adequately explains free standing uses of “It is known that φ”. Maybe we simply need to modify the account for other more complicated knowledge ascriptions. Let us see how this might be done.

Notice the formal difference between these two kinds of knowledge attributions. In the free-standing case it is said that s knows that φ:

\[ sK\phi, \]

for some moral indicative φ.

But in the problematic case, the thing alleged to be known is left unendorsed or unasserted by the attributer. What is said by me (the attributer), in my ascriptions of moral superiority, is that there exists some claim that is currently both known by s and not known by me:
What is the quasi-realist to say about these epistemic embeddings?

Beginning with the amended account of non-factual knowledge, it should be simple enough to say how \(\neg iK\varphi\) functions. When we state things of that form in this context, perhaps we are denying that we have a view about \(\varphi\). This can be understood easily enough in projectivist terms. We may be denying that we have the relevant attitude toward the relevant thing. The real problem is in articulating the role played by \(sK\varphi\) in the above claim, since knowing \(p\) entails the truth of \(p\) and the only thing in the standard account of non-factual knowledge of which the quasi-realist may avail himself to play the role of the “truth” condition involves the express endorsement of \(\varphi\) by the attributer.

So, what are we doing when we attribute such epistemic superiority in the moral case? There appears to be only one way to answer this question with the resources Blackburn has provided. We can answer the question with the notion of an improvement to our epistemic situation. That is, we must appeal to whatever it is that allows us to attribute “better” judgement. Consider the following example. I do not know whether I should call my sister to apologize, but I am concerned with the issue. I tell myself that I will seek Jyllian’s moral advice, because she knows better than I about what is right in these kinds of situations. I know this because in the past, she has been so helpful in getting me to see what is right. So, when I make claims about Jyllian’s current moral superiority based on past interactions, I am expressing my faith, or better, my inductive certainty in the fact that there are things that she knows but that I do not know. I am inductively certain that she will provide very good reasons for or against calling my sister to apologize. Probably I shall see that
she is right, and, in effect, I shall come to know what is the right thing to do in that situation.

When I say that Jyllian knows something about which I have no views, then, I am saying something, not only about my own current ignorance, but about the possibility of my coming to know new things. Jyllian has certain attitudes about certain things and so do I, but many more of her attitudes of moral approval and disapproval can be backed up with reasons that are coherent, convincing, and enduring under careful scrutiny. Of course if Jyllian sat me down and explained to me why I should call my sister and apologize, I would probably see that she is right. She has a way of making me understand these things. And so, I would come to agree with her in attitude.

Sometimes, then, my attributions of moral knowledge, as with attributions of moral superiority, are matters of thinking that someone is entitled to the attitudes that they have, while registering only my confidence that I too would have those attitudes were I only aware of those entitlements. In conclusion, sometimes our ascriptions of moral knowledge, i.e., our claims of the form $sK\varphi$, are used to ascribe a certain kind of attitude and to register one’s potential for agreement. So, our official line about non-factual knowledge seems to be more along the following lines (where $x$ represents an act, and $F$ represents a moral property):

- to think that $s$ knows that $\varphi$, where $\varphi$ is of the form ‘$x$ is $F$’ is (i) to think that $s$ responds to $x$ with the corresponding attitude $A$, (ii) to think that $s$ is entitled to response $A$ via acknowledged standards of acceptability, and (iii) to register one’s own actual, or potential for, entitled agreement in attitude toward $x$.

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My ascriptions of moral superiority involve knowledge attributions that commit me, not necessarily to endorse the same attitudes as the knower at the time of my attributions, but to a certain optimism about whether I would so endorse those attitudes in due course.

Claims to moral superiority bring forth the distinction between current and possible knowledge, a distinction that need not be anathema to the quasi-realist. It is just the difference between entitled commitments that one has at present and entitled commitments that one would have in an improved state of information. Loosely, possible knowledge can be treated by the quasi-realist as follows:

- to think that it is possible to know that \( \varphi \), where \( \varphi \) is of the form 'x is F,' is to think that the attitude corresponding to F (as applied to x) is enjoined by a state of information that improves one's current state—and stably so.

The need for this distinction between current and possible knowledge arises in quasi-realist explanations of other epistemic claims, such as our claims to moral non-omniscience. Let us consider this example.

3.8.3 Attributions of Moral Non-Omniscience

Clearly we are morally non-omniscient. We do not yet know all there is to know from a moral standpoint. Uncontroversially, these statements make sense, and they are true. There are moral truths that are currently unknown to us. It may be that we have not yet formulated a belief about such truths, since either we do not yet have all the physical and sociological facts that bear on the issue, or because we are not yet in a position (say, technologically) to be moved by the issue. Of course, I cannot provide examples of particular truths that I do not know to be true, but I can view
the past as a guide to my current epistemic situation. Hindsight justifies our claims to moral non-omniscience. Let me explain.

In the past we have failed to see things clearly; we realize today that some true things previously eluded us. We can say this because we know things today that we did not know at some earlier time. Therefore, in the past we have been non-omniscient. And though we have learned some things since then, there is no principled reason to suppose that our epistemic situation has suddenly become ideal. We are still the same fallible investigators, grappling with many complicated issues. It is with experience and hindsight that we can say with some authority that today we are non-omniscient.

Such inductive reasoning is necessary in order to justify our non-omniscience about "projected" matters. To show our non-omniscience about perceptually detectable matters, by contrast, we need only notice that currently we lack an informed answer to some questions which have a determinate answer. There is a fact of the matter, for instance, about how many stamps comprise my grandfather's collection, though no one has ever counted them. Without a doubt, there is an unknown truth about the number of stamps in the collection. So, some truths are unknown; we are not omniscient. But it is not clear that projected matters, such as moral matters (if they are projected), can be treated in the same way, since it is not clear that moral issues are fixed in advance of all moralizing. On the view we are considering, moral matters are not factual matters. Nevertheless, we use the past as a guide to our current moral ignorance. We have in the past come to learn new things about what is right, and so, we probably shall in the future come to learn new things—things that at present we have overlooked or have not considered. We are morally non-omniscient!

Formally, we may represent our claim to non-omniscience as follows:
This says that there is a moral claim that is true but currently unknown by us. But how are we to understand the attribution of truth in this claim? Well, it is clear that to ascribe non-omniscience is to deny that everything that is knowable is currently known. Some knowable things are unknown! If this is the best way to formulate the non-factualist’s claim to non-omniscience, then we might formally represent the claim as follows:

\[ \exists \varphi (\varphi \land \neg K \varphi). \]

There exists a knowable claim that is currently unknown.

There is an ordinary distinction here between knowing and potentially knowing a moral claim. If the non-factualist cannot find a sense for “it is possible to know that \( \varphi \)” that is distinct from the sense of “it is currently known that \( \varphi \),” then the non-factualist cannot make sense of our claim that some truths of the given kind are currently unknown. But surely we are not omniscient, and the non-factualist must parsimoniously say that our non-omniscience is a matter of not currently knowing some things that are potentially knowable (rather than a matter of some mind-independent facts out there waiting to be discovered). Without the vindication of such non-omniscience, the non-factualist is stuck with a very strong knowability principle that says that all truths of the given class are currently known. One way or another, then, the conservative non-factualist must have a sense for “it is possible to know that \( \varphi \)" — a sense that is not equivalent to “it is known that \( \varphi \).” Moreover, without this distinction,
the non-factualist cannot clearly and efficiently elucidate attributions of moral supe-
riority (discussed in the last section). In sum, possible knowledge is something the
quasi-realist can and should accommodate.

On Blackburn's view we are to understand non-factual knowledge in terms of
better or worse judgment. And, as we have seen, a richer understanding of knowl-
edge attributions requires us to distinguish between current and possible knowledge.
The distinction is required in order to legitimate one's humble admission of non-
omniscience or epistemic inferiority. And it is required in order to block the counter-
intuitive result that all moral truths are currently known. Moreover, we have dis-
covered how we might, as Blackburn had hoped, accommodate the subtleties of our
non-factual epistemic talk, merely with "a discipline for better or worse judgment"
—that is, merely with a notion of an "improved perspective." The subtle difference
between knowing p and possibly knowing p is the difference between thinking that
an attitude is justifiable via acknowledged standards of acceptability versus thinking
that it would be, given an improvement to our overall perspective.

With this development of the roles played by non-factual knowledge ascriptions,
we are in a position to ask whether there are strict limits on the amount of appar-
ently realist thought and talk that the quasi-realist can coherently accommodate. In
particular, we are in a position to determine the prospects for conserving claims to
realism that involve epistemic idioms in their formulation.

3.9 Recognition-Transcendence Revisited

Consider the thesis at the core of Michael Dummett's semantic realism—namely,
that some truths are potentially unknowable in principle. This brand of realism was
the focus of our study in an earlier chapter. And Blackburn takes it, like other claims of realism, to be coherently assertible by the quasi-realist. He says,

...it would be correct [for the quasi-realist] to allow Horatio's possibility, that there may be truths which would lie forever outside our comprehension. It would be the part of virtue to admit as much.67

Unfortunately Blackburn does not demonstrate the quasi-realist's ability to accommodate Horatio's possibility, but rather takes it for granted that this realist assertion can be accommodated (perhaps, as some sophisticated expression of attitude).

Of course, Blackburn's own adequacy criteria require that any such treatment be consistent with the projectivism at the heart of the theory, and be non-revisionary with respect to the ordinary practice under projectivist interpretation. So, if it is moral truth that is taken to be potentially unknowable, then the quasi-realist treatment of the realist commitment must not contradict the moral projectivism in play, and must not entail an obligation to revise moral discourse. These are just applications of Blackburn's consistency and conservatism constraints discussed earlier.

Let us test the prospects for pulling off this quasi-realist trick. I shall argue that the quasi-realist, in the interesting cases, must violate both conditions on successful quasi-realist theorizing. In the remainder of this chapter we shall discuss only the consistency constraint, and test the conservatism constraint in the following chapter. My local conclusion will then be that the realist thesis in question cannot consistently be embraced on quasi-realist grounds, and that its negation (i.e., an epistemic constraint on truth) is in fact an implicit commitment of quasi-realism. Quasi-realism cannot vindicate semantic realism without contradicting projectivism about the target discourse.

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The claim is that semantic realism entails factualism (the kind of realism that quasi-realism is meant to oppose). The claim is very intuitive. Surely any reason for thinking that there may be unknowably true claims (of a given kind) is reason for thinking that there are mind-independent facts of the matter that make those claims true. Consider an example. Call the following claim “\( \neg ET \).”

\( \neg ET \) There is no extra-terrestrial intelligence.

Arguably, it is possible that \( \neg ET \) be true but unknowable by any human, ever. Such a claim, it might be thought, could not be known since humans could not even in principle investigate the infinite reaches of space-time—an apparent prerequisite for substantiating \( \neg ET \). Now if we think that such a claim can be true but unknowable, then we must think that there is some mind-independent fact that makes it true. In our example, it is believed that all inaccessible chunks of space-time are involved in making \( \neg ET \) true. But then there is a substantial fact of the matter about \( \neg ET \). And so, it is incoherent to suppose that the truth of such a claim (if it is true) is potentially unknowable in principle yet not true in virtue of some mind-independent fact (i.e., some state of affairs that obtains despite our inability to acknowledge it rightly).

It may be objected that this example is misleading, since we already believe that matters concerning entities in space-time are substantial matters (if anything is a substantial matter). The objection then is that it is incoherent to suppose that \( \neg ET \) is both unknowably true and non-factual; but not because there is something inherently wrong with this conjunctive thesis, but rather because it is simply incoherent to suppose that \( \neg ET \) (a claim about entities in space-time) is a non-substantial matter.
But this is not really an objection to my point. For, even if I am right, this counter-reply might consistently be advanced in response to any example that I provide. For if I am right, any area believed to have the potential for recognition-transcendent truth may be an area that we have independent reason to suppose deals in genuine matters of fact. So, if I am right, there will always be the question of whether it is our realist (i.e., factualist) tendency about the area that drives our intuition that it is impossible for that area to be both non-factual and potentially unknowable. By contrast, an adequate refutation of my claim would involve presenting (at least in part) a quasi-realism that justifies an appeal to semantic realism (the view that there may be unknowable truths) while remaining true to its underlying projectivism (the view that there are no substantial facts of the matter). I know of no such arguments.

But there is perhaps an interesting objection to the above argument from intuition. It may be contended that there are several notions of fact in the air, perhaps not all of which corroborate my intuitions. Recall the distinction defined at the outset of this chapter between the operative kinds of factual commitment. On the one hand, we think that it is a fact that slavery is wrong when we think simply that slavery is wrong. This of course is the ordinary, theoretically-neutral, kind of fact-talk. On the other hand, there is the theoretical sense employed by Blackburn (and others) in this context, where to think that there are, say, moral facts is to think that distinctively moral properties have explanatory power with respect to our moral thought and talk. It matters which sense of “factual commitment” is employed in the above arguments from intuition.

68I am grateful to Robert Kraut for this point, and urging a clarification.
The quasi-realist essentially denies that there are facts in the theoretically important sense. So surely he cannot deny that there are such facts, and then turn around and claim that, for all we really know, there may be unknowable facts (in this very same sense of "fact"). So the quasi-realist will opt for some metaphysically weak reading of "fact" in his would be justification of the claim that there are unknowable facts. In this context the quasi-realist has the option of endorsing the given range of "facts" in the metaphysically deflated, theoretically-neutral sense, and to embrace the possibility that some such facts are unknowable. Without the appropriate clarification the argument from intuition, according to this line of reply, has not clearly ruled out the quasi-realist option of explaining and legitimizing claims about potential unknowability.

Even with the relevant clarification this quasi-realist strategy appears incoherent. Recall the ordinary, theoretically-neutral sense of our fact talk, and consider again the quasi-realist treatment of moral discourse. To think "it is a fact that slavery is wrong" or to think "it is true that slavery is wrong," is just to think that slavery is wrong, which is to disapprove of slavery while implicitly ascribing to one's own judgment some degree of normative force. Recall that the normative commitment is essential. Without it, as was discussed earlier, our moral judgments would be, on the quasi-realist view, comparable to crude judgments of taste—such as those expressed by "Yuck, chocolate ice cream is disgusting!" or "No, chocolate ice cream is yummy!," — for which no serious questions of correctness arise. So the moral claim is not merely an expression one's internal sentiment, but must also involve an expression of the "appropriateness" of that sentiment, where appropriateness is, as Blackburn suggests, "some kind of construct out of our conception of the virtues of
methods of inquiry and the consequences to which they lead. The quasi-realist's position is a form of anti-realism, since it goes on to claim that the best explanation of our "factual" commitments in the given case involve nothing over and above our internal sentiments and such normative appraisal thereof. Let us now reconsider the argument from intuition with this clarification.

Again the intuition is that any reason for thinking that there may be unknowably true claims (of a given kind) is reason for thinking that there are mind-independent facts of the matter that make those claims true (in the clarified sense of "mind-independent fact"). For if they are unknowably true in principle, it would follow that they must be true in virtue of something over and above the best methods for their appraisal—something independent of the standards for correct assertion that are embodied (explicitly or implicitly) by the target discourse. In other words, such claims could be true despite our inability, in principle, to stumble upon them via the best use of the best methods for determining such matters. But recall that, for the quasi-realist, truth is a construct out of our best methods of inquiry. It is incoherent, then, to suppose that some commitments interpreted quasi-realistically may be true but unknowable, since this would be to suppose that the truth of the commitments could be constructed out of our best use of our best methods for inquiry, despite our inability, in principle, to uncover these truths via our best use of the best methods for determining such matters.

There is then a very basic intuition that destabilizes the position which says that some non-factual truths (in the theoretical sense) are potentially unknowable. It is simply that if truth is no more than what would be established by our best methods

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(in the case of projectivism, by the best methods for establishing the appropriateness of various sentiments), then truth cannot outstrip that which would be established by our best methods. So any theory that denies the explanatory priority of truth over knowledge, it would seem, cannot accommodate the potentially unknowability of truth.

So, our moral judgements (if the moral projectivist is right) are not just expressions of disapproval, but are also expressions of our faith in the correctness or appropriateness of this sentiment, where "appropriateness" is matter of what would be revealed by our best methods for deciding these things. It follows then that to think "it is possible for some moral claim to be true but unknowable," is to think that it is possible for some moral claim to be correct by our best methods of inquiry, but unknowable by us. And this is a curious claim indeed. For how can a claim be correct by our best methods, and yet not knowable by us? It cannot.

We see that appeals to such transcendental circumstances are absurd, on the quasi-realist reading under consideration—a reading not only consistent with the quasi-realist program, but forced by the attempt to explain truth and knowledge with the limited resources that Blackburn has chosen for himself. So, the quasi-realist is committed to the impossibility of recognition-transcendent truth. And the impossibility of recognition-transcendent truth is (classically) equivalent to the claim that essentially all truths are knowable. \( \neg \Diamond \exists \phi (T \phi \land \neg \Diamond K \phi) \) entails \( \forall \phi (T \phi \rightarrow \Diamond K \phi) \), and conversely.

One interesting lesson is that the quasi-realist has a metaphysical view about the nature of truth in the given area. He is committed to semantic anti-realism. And to the extent that the quasi-realist aims to legitimate all those claims that invite
a realist construal, we find that quasi-realism is an untenable thesis. On the other hand, to the extent that quasi-realism distinguishes itself from realism in light of this result, a more modest form of quasi-realism emerges as a defensible thesis. For recall the problem of formulating the quasi-realist thesis without collapsing it into realism. It was the problem of locating a thesis that the realist essentially endorses and that the Blackburnian anti-realist essentially denies. Well now we learn that the quasi-realist must reject the possibility of recognition-transcendent truth, since truth for the quasi-realist is constructed out of our informed practice. The realist, however, taking truth to be ontologically prior to the practice, allows for the possibility of unknowable truth.
CHAPTER 4

REVISIONISM REVISITED

4.1 Introduction

There is an intuition, held by Blackburn and others, that choice of logic has nothing to do with one's metaphysics, that adherence to the principle of bivalence over a given set of claims simply does not commit one to there being determinate facts of the matter that make each of those claims true or false.

This intuition can be attractive only after one has made room for distinct varieties of factual commitment. We discussed this ontological division in the last chapter. With it our ordinary fact-talk (e.g., “It is a fact that there are sharks in those waters”) is no more or less legitimate than ordinary truth-talk (e.g., “It is true that there are sharks in there”), but such ordinary non-theoretical claims to truth are not equivalent to thinking that those claims deal in substantial matters of fact. If they were, then the principle of bivalence—which treats every claim or its negation as “true”—would entail trivially that every claim or its negation deals in substantial matters of fact. So we see that the above intuition, like all quasi-realist thought, forces a metaphysical wedge between kinds of factual commitment. And though this very distinction is highly controversial, and thought by the Quinean holist to be misguided, Blackburn

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70 See, for example, Quine's "On Carnap's Views on Ontology," Philosophical Studies 2, pp. 65-72.
embraces it along with his holistic tendencies. A defense of how one might pull off this trick is found in Robert Kraut's "Robust Deflationism."\textsuperscript{71} Blackburn, on the other hand, does not make great strides toward resolving this tension. But we need not dwell on that here, since an analysis of the the problem would take us too far afield, and whether the problem is resolvable is actually not relevant here. For, as I intend to argue, even if the quasi-realist can make sense of these varieties of factual commitment, the revisionist strategy still works. Distinctively classical principles do, in the interesting cases, imply some forms of realism (as was shown in Chapter 2), and in those very same cases, as will be defended here, do imply metaphysical factualism, where "metaphysical factualism" is defined as the form of realism that quasi-realism opposes—the view that there are determinate facts of the matter that make the claims in question true or false.

So, the objective of this chapter is to show that quasi-realism is incompatible with an unrestricted commitment to classical logic, even if the quasi-realist can preserve the relevant distinction over kinds of commitment.

4.2 Critique of Revisionism

The quasi-realist intuition is that the propriety of classical principles has nothing to do with the question of realist metaphysics. Of course the target here is Michael Dummett, who contends that there is a clear connection between our logical and metaphysical commitments. Chapter 2 was dedicated to the clarification and development of this connection, so we shall eventually appeal to that model in our ultimate evaluation of Blackburn's most interesting criticisms. Recall that the Dummettian

\textsuperscript{71}Kraut, "Robust Deflationism" \textit{The Philosophical Review} 102, pp. 247-263.
conclusion was that once we embrace classical logic over a sufficiently rich discourse, we are committed a certain brand of realism. If we think that every claim or its negation is true even if in some cases we could never know which, then some truths are unknowable. In these cases there would be unknowable facts of the matter. Blackburn's intuition is that one may deny that there are facts of the matter at all, while at the same time legitimating a commitment to the relevant classical principles.

Let us begin with Blackburn's formulation of the intuition. He writes,

Dummett himself talks as though 'true' and 'false' were in some sense derivative from a fundamental division of utterances into those which it is right to make and those which it is wrong to make; acceptable and unacceptable; correct and incorrect. This alone prompts the thought: Why should not such an apparently normative division be made and rigidly applied to every possible statement, regardless of any theory of what it is, if anything, that makes a statement come down on one side or the other?^^

The intuition seems clear enough. There is the question of whether a statement can be correct (or incorrect), and then there is the question of what grounds such correctness (or incorrectness). And there is no prima facie reason, according to the quasi-realist, for thinking that an answer to the former question gives us an answer to the latter. It is suggested, therefore, that one may treat correctness as bivalent (i.e., treat every statement as correct or incorrect) without being committed to one view or another about what makes these claims correct (or incorrect).

Blackburn's strategy is to show that Dummett has missed the boat in his attempt to construct a test for realism. He argues with examples that one may be a realist

without embracing the full range of classical principles and that one may be an anti-realist without having to give up the principle of bivalence. We shall consider these points in turn.

4.2.1 Does Realism Entail Bivalence?

A formulation of the first half of Blackburn’s argument involves a discourse that we should think is factual, but over which we should not expect rightly to employ bivalence. Blackburn takes the case of fiction, where we (1) assert things that are true of, say, Hamlet, for instance that he “had this or that feature: he had a murdered father, a difficult family life. He did not have a peg-leg or a harem,” (2) take these truths to be grounded in substantial facts about what was written by Shakespeare, and yet (3) fail to be justified in claiming that every claim about Hamlet has a determinate truth-value. Blackburn writes,

...remarks about ...Hamlet are true in virtue of what is written in or supported by Shakespeare’s text. There may exist nothing at all in those texts to support the proposition that Hamlet had a baritone voice, nor that he had not. It would then seem wrong to suppose that such a proposition must be true or false, even if it might also be wrong ever to be sure that it will not turn out to be, as more subtle readings of the text are made. But bivalence does not seem to be of so much use in discriminating the ontological commitment within an assertion of truth or falsity. For instance, we may be convinced that in some cases there may be nothing to make a [claim] either true or false. But we may also think that when a [claim] is true, a realist account of what makes it true...is in order and makes a genuine opposition to anti-realism.\textsuperscript{73}

The case of fiction is supposed to show that claims about what is true or false in Shakespeare’s Hamlet may be treated as factual claims, and yet leave a commitment to bivalence ungrounded. But this talk of fictional claims being factual is very

\textsuperscript{73}Blackburn, op. cit. (1993), pp. 24-25.
distracting. The idea must be that fictional claims (e.g., "Hamlet had a murdered father") are reducible to factual claims (e.g., "Shakespeare's Hamlet says that Hamlet had a murdered father"), and that the claims about what is said in the text are factual in that one cannot explain why we think the things we do about what is said in the text without appealing to the text and what is said therein. The utterances in the text must be thought to play an explanatory role with respect to why we think the text says certain things. And if we really can reduce claims about Hamlet to claims about what is found in the text, then discourse about Hamlet (and the other characters in the text) really is best interpreted realistically.

If Blackburn is right, then fictional statements state facts, in the metaphysically rich sense of the term. And some may find this too much to swallow. But whether fictional statements can be treated this way is not the important point. It is whether we can find ourselves committed to realism, but not the principle of bivalence. There are examples that do not carry the distraction that Blackburn's example presents.

If we think of personal identity as that which matters for our survival over time, then Derek Parfit has a view which reduces questions of personal identity to questions of psychological continuity and connectedness over time. He thinks that in most cases that come up there are facts about whether X and Y are psychologically connected, so that there are facts about whether X is the same person as Y. But he also acknowledges borderline cases where it is not clear whether X and Y have enough of the same interests, purposes, memories, etc. to be considered psychologically connected. If he is right, then personal identity-talk involves some claims that are grounded in fact, and yet, we would not be justified in employing unrestrictedly the principle of bivalence over such talk.
But neither the case of fictional discourse nor the case of personal identity can serve the purpose of undermining the Dummettian test for realism, even if they are cases of factual discourse that do not rightly adhere to bivalence. This whole discussion, by my lights, misses the revisionist's point, which is that adherence to distinctively classical principles (over sufficiently rich stretches of discourse) entails realism, but not vice versa. There is still debate over whether semantic realism entails a commitment to classical logic, but nothing herein hinges on the outcome. Our model of the semantic realism debate has it that the classicist must accept realism, and leaves open the question of whether realism entails a commitment to classical logic. The model I presented in Chapter 2 was not intended to shed light on this latter implication.

Let us now turn to Blackburn’s more interesting criticism that one may legitimately embrace classical principles without selling out to realism.

4.2.2 Does Anti-Realism Entail the Impropriety of Bivalence?

Blackburn goes on to argue that an anti-realist may embrace the principle of bivalence, and that Dummett’s failure to see this consists in his failure to realize that one may justify the employment of an exclusively classical principle on non-realist grounds. In Blackburn’s words,

> the discipline of moralizing may be subject to the regulative constraint that everything is either permissible or impermissible, and this may be reflected as a commitment to bivalence. . . . [The anti-realist] will happily say ‘it is either true that you did wrong or false that you did wrong’ as a

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prelude to discussion without in the least regarding himself as subject to any unfortunate lapse.\textsuperscript{75}

But this position is not quite in contradiction with the revisionist thesis, since the revisionist can admit that there are regions of discourse that, even on an anti-realist construal, rightly employ the full range of classical logic. Those are the regions for which we are in a position to state with full confidence, of each and every indicative, that either it or its negation is knowable by us. Those are regions for which epistemic modesty is inappropriate; they are the ones about which we can be sure that the grounds for deciding the claims are rich enough to facilitate a verdict on any claim in the area. As we learned earlier, the unjustifiability of classical logic is a consequence of a certain variety of anti-realism accompanied by a certain degree of epistemic modesty (or lack of justification for the claim that the discourse is rich enough to fix a verdict on any claim in the area). Blackburn is aware that revisionist anti-realism requires this addendum of epistemic modesty, and appears to find this revisionist strategy respectable up to a point. He admits that bivalent truth is something that becomes highly suspect in the hands of some forms of semantic anti-realism.

The lapse [in bivalent/anti-real discourse] would, perhaps, be unfortunate if it involved the suspect notion of completing an essentially uncompletable task. Thus, if we need an idea corresponding to God seeing the whole of the natural number series, or seeing a completed totality ... or seeing the whole of physical fact before him, and if without that idea bivalence is groundless, then we might agree that it rests on suspect imagery.\textsuperscript{76}

The admission here is this. If not all claims are decidable by us in principle (perhaps because deciding them would involve the notion of a completed infinity) but our anti-realist concept of bivalent truth equates truth with what is decidable by God, or by

\textsuperscript{75}Blackburn, op. cit. (1993), p. 23.

us at the asymptotic limit of inquiry, then surely it is not clear what the anti-realist notion of truth amounts to. Moreover, it is not clear how this notion of truth would differ from the realist notion. Such an anti-realist, as Blackburn suggests, employs suspect imagery when embracing the principle of bivalence on intractable grounds.

But Blackburn sees a path around this consequence. He responds to, and aims to contradict, the above result when he says,

But ... it is not generally true that to use the concept of truth, even to describe the result of infinite or indefinite or open-ended investigation, requires the paradoxical idea of a completion of such an investigation. It requires only the concept of a point beyond which no improved perspective demands a rejection of a given previous opinion.77

This of course is the Blackburnian notion of truth discussed in the last chapter. It is the notion that he thinks is minimally required in order to preserve the normativity of assertoric discourse. But how exactly does this more modest form of anti-realism about truth get the anti-realist off the revisionist’s hook? It is not clear that it can. After all, if recognizably not all claims are decidable by us in principle (perhaps because deciding them would involve the notion of a completed infinity; or because their grounds are not rich enough eventually to decide each of them) but our anti-realist concept of bivalent truth involves, for all claims, “a point beyond which no improved perspective demands a rejection of a given previous opinion,” then this form of anti-realism involves suspect imagery. For this would be to acknowledge that some claims are undecidable by us, while being justified in believing that these claims are true or false—that is, on this view, while being justified in thinking that these claims involve a point beyond beyond which no improved perspective demands the

rejection of a previously formed opinion. But of course if we are justified in thinking that there is a point beyond which no improved perspective demands the rejection of previous verdicts, then we have good reason to suppose that the claims involved (or their negations) are decidable by us in principle. But this of course contradicts the theorizer's assumption that not all claims need be decidable by us in principle.

At this point Blackburn’s views on the matter take a mysterious turn that apparently gets him off this hook. He says,

the quasi-realist can permit himself [the view that there is no fact of the matter], even while admitting that we will, in practice, be committed to bivalence, and while admitting that there is never a point at which we can be sure that there is no improved perspective, from which at most one side will appear to be in the right. ⁷⁸

This latter admission (i.e., that we might not be sure that there is no improved perspective, from which at most one side will appear to be right) is meant to capture the idea that we might not be sure that there is a point beyond which no improved perspective demands the rejection of a previously formed opinion. Blackburn says in the above passage that the quasi-realist might be uncertain about this, even while embracing the principle of bivalence. Blackburn, if he is right, must then have a clever response to the above revisionist argument. What is it?

4.3 The Status of Classical Logic

Blackburn’s main argument revolves around the status of the exclusively classical principle as it figures in the Dummettian argument for revision. Dummett’s strategy is to deny that the relevant classical principle is justified on the same kinds of grounds as the anti-realist notion of truth.

⁷⁸Blackburn (1993), pp. 29-30
Recall Crispin’s Wright’s account of the connection between anti-realism and logic, and his treatment of the status of logical principles. On his view it is the *a priori* status of excluded middle that is rejected on Dummettian anti-realist grounds. To this end his revisionary strategy begins with the assumption (for reductio) that excluded middle is known *a priori*. But Blackburn argues that a non-realist may embrace the principle on less privileged grounds. The hope, then, is that the Dummettian reductio will not succeed against this epistemically less privileged form of the classical principle.

This is where Blackburn avails himself of the distinction between kinds of commitment. He calls it the distinction between the *regulative* and the *constitutive*. A regulative principle is to be one that is accepted on pragmatic grounds, while the constitutive principle is supposed to be one ground in something more. For the quasi-realist the relevant classical principle functions pragmatically, as a regulative ideal. Blackburn asks us to consider the case of law, where the practice is regulated so as to refuse to accept an indeterminate status for legal evaluations:

The quasi-realist seems ... to be able to accept the regulative principle [viz., In all cases that arise we should say: either this assertion is true, or it is false], provided that the purposes of making judgement in the area in question can be seen to demand polar verdicts.\(^7^9\)

And,

We arrange things so that the law is to deliver one of two verdicts: \(p\) or \(\neg p\). Why do we not allow a judge to shelter behind incompleteness, able to deliver the answer ‘\(Dp\)’ [i.e., ‘It is discretionary whether \(p\)’]? Because \(Dp\) answers nothing: we need to know (for instance) whether the contract is valid, and one party to pay the other, or invalid, and vice versa. For this pragmatic reason a judge must think and argue as though there is one proper verdict, even if the overall theory of grounding licenses no such optimism. So some constitutions explicitly rule \(Dp\) out; the Swiss

legal code, for example, dictates that a judge shall not shelter behind insufficiencies in the law.\textsuperscript{80}

So perhaps either Clinton is guilty of perjury or he is not, and either he ought to be removed from office or he should not. All of the issues must be decided one way or the other as they come up. And so, in this sense excluded middle is pragmatically advised, or serves to regulate the practice. But that is not to say that the principle is known \textit{a priori}, or even that it is known, or that it describes some chunk of determinate legal reality out there waiting to be discovered. Rather, it is merely to say that excluded middle oils the wheels of the practice; it functions pragmatically. So even though the argument for revision maintains (perhaps rightly) that the relevant classical principle is not known \textit{a priori}, this does not serve to undermine the quasi-realist's endorsement of that very principle, which he accepts on pragmatic grounds.

In an earlier chapter it was shown that the argument for revision is valid, and that it can be employed, not only against the \textit{a priori} of excluded middle, but against \textit{weaker} modalizations of the law—e.g., "Excluded middle is currently known." Since the pragmatic advisability of a principle arguably does not entail that the principle is known to be true (i.e., it is not something that is grounded one way or the other by the evidence in the case), the quasi-realist apparently evade\bigskip{s} the characterization of the revisionist's argument found in Chapter 2. The question then remains whether a formulation of the revisionist argument threatens the quasi-realist understanding of the status of distinctively classical principles. That is what we are now pressed to determine.

\textsuperscript{80}Blackburn, \textit{op. cit.} (1984), p. 207.
4.4 A Further Consequence of Quasi-Realism

What we know from our earliest discussion of revisionism is that the exclusively classical principle (LEM) and an epistemic constraint on truth, or knowability principle (KP), together entail a certain expression of decidability.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{LEM} & \quad \text{Knowability} \\
\forall \varphi (\varphi \lor \neg \varphi) & \quad \forall \varphi (\varphi \rightarrow \Diamond \top) \\
\therefore & \quad \forall \varphi (\Diamond \varphi \lor \Diamond \neg \varphi)
\end{align*}
\]

LEM and KP jointly entail that every proposition or its negation is knowable.

In the previous section we saw that the quasi-realist understands the target discourse to be governed by excluded middle on pragmatic grounds. We have also learned in a previous discussion of quasi-realism that the quasi-realist is committed to a certain knowability principle (viz., if \( \varphi \) is true, then there is a point at which informed opinion would endorse \( \varphi \) and beyond which no improved perspective would ever demand a rejection of \( \varphi \)). It is not consistent with quasi-realism (say, about morality) that there be unknowable (moral) truths, in this sense of the knowability principle. The quasi-realist is committed to an interpretation of the relevant truth-predicate, the correct use of which is constrained by possible knowledge. But then a fortiori, it is pragmatically advisable for a responsible quasi-realist to adopt this knowability principle, since it follows logically from what he takes to be the best explanation of truth in the area.

Moreover, such a responsible theorist is committed to the recognized consequences of all pragmatically adopted claims. If he takes the statements to be true in any sense,
then he is committed to the truths that logically follow from them. And so, the quasi-realist is, at least, pragmatically committed to the decidability of the target discourse. Consider what such decidability amounts to in quasi-realist terms.

Take the case of moral discourse. Decidability says that every moral indicative or its negation can be known. The quasi-realist must understand this claim as the view that for each and every moral indicative of the form ‘x is F,’ the corresponding attitude directed at x either is acceptable by the lights of some moral perspective no improvement of which would override that judgment of acceptability; or is unacceptable by the lights of some moral perspective no improvement of which would override that judgment of unacceptability. But this result is counter-intuitive, and epistemically immodest. Moral discourse does not require that we believe that every moral questions must be resolvable one way or the other. At least currently we have no independent reason—pragmatic or otherwise—for thinking, for every issue, that there is a point at which it could be resolved, and remain so over any series of incremental improvements to our moral standpoint. Such pragmatic modesty, if part of our moral practice, which it apparently is, must be embraced by the quasi-realist, who intends to conserve the practice.

The thesis logical revision in this context (i.e., the thesis which says that even the pragmatic advisability of distinctively classical principles is inconsistent with anti-realism), then hinges for the quasi-realist, on whether there is an independent legitimatization for treating the discourse as decidable.

There is at least one good reason for thinking that this kind of anti-realist cannot provide such independent legitimatization. It is that regulative principles must be consistent with our best theory of the discourse, and this regulative principle is not
consistent with some motivations for quasi-realism (or irrealism more generally). One motivation often given for thinking that a non-factual treatment will best explain a given area is that we think informed interlocutors need not converge on a single verdict.

It seems ... that the best use to make of convergence is not as a phenomenon of which a realist has a superior explanation but rather as one in which he alone has faith. If we use our faculties properly, and reality is determinate, then surely opinion must converge. Equally, if it is decided that even in the long run opinion need not converge, then to many people this is a powerful argument—perhaps the argument—for denying that there is a reality which that opinion is purporting to describe.81

The intractability of informed but divergent opinion also appears to be one of Quine’s motivations for treating semantic discourse non-factually,82 and perhaps Kripke’s.83 Crispin Wright’s account of non-factualism, as we shall see in the next chapter, is also motivated by the thought of intractable disagreement. The problem is that such motivations presuppose a rejection of this form of decidability. That is, they entail the form of modesty that drives the argument for logical revision.

Here is the argument. Suppose that there are divergent opinions that are equally admirable from an epistemic standpoint: person A responsibly thinks that p, and person B responsibly thinks not-p. Now suppose for reductio the decidability thesis—that every indicative or its negation is knowable. Then p is knowable or its negation is knowable. Suppose the left disjunct, that p is knowable. Then person B fails to know something that can be known, so B’s opinion is less admirable than A’s


83See his Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language (Harvard University Press, 1982).
Contradiction! Now, suppose the right disjunct, that not-p is knowable. Then of course person A fails to know something that can be known. Hence, A's opinion is less admirable than B's from an epistemic standpoint. Contradiction! But then we have a contradiction resting on two assumptions—viz., that there are divergent opinions that are equally admirable, and that decidability is true. The non-factualist who is moved by the possibility of intractable disagreement must deny that every indicative or its negation can be known. And since decidability is inconsistent with his motivations for irrealist interpretation, he cannot adopt the decidability thesis even for pragmatic reasons. For surely any thesis that facilitates absurdity is not pragmatically advisable.

We see that the quasi-realist who is moved by these intractability theses is committed to epistemic modesty (and the relevant analog, pragmatic modesty). He is committed to a thesis that contradicts the relevant decidability thesis, which we found to be a consequence of a quasi-realism that embraces distinctively classical principles over the discourse under investigation.

But in all fairness, Blackburn is somewhat schizophrenic about whether intractability theses are defensible, and in light of this, it is not clear that his brand of irrealism is motivated by them. Nevertheless, epistemic modesty must be embraced by a quasi-realist, if it is embraced by the practitioners of the discourse that he is legitimating. Otherwise he violates his own conservatism constraint. And in the interesting cases modesty is endorsed. We do not currently know that every moral claim, for instance, will be grounded by some evolution of our ever improving moral thought (if it is in fact improving). Perhaps this is something that could not be known. Moreover, we currently have no independent reason for believing in such decidability. It does not oil
the wheels of our moralizing. In fact, our moralizing is usually much more humble, and we often admit that there may be unresolvable moral issues, especially across cultures.

Importantly, the revisionist paradigm is only interesting in the face of a modesty principle; the paradigm alleges that classical principles are unjustified only in face of such modesty. So, if Blackburn's criticisms of the revisionist's paradigm are interesting, he must be arguing that anti-realism *accompanied by the relevant form of modesty* fails to obligate logical revision. The quasi-realist tries to demonstrate this failure by invoking the regulative/constitutive distinction. He argues that even though we can be sure that practice is rich enough to ground each and every claim (that is, even though we can be sure that the epistemic methods of the practice will yield a single verdict on each claim), we might treat each and every claim as if we will find a verdict on every claim. Those claims which the epistemic methods of the practice would ground are said to be commitments that are constitutive of the practice, while those that we endorse for pragmatic reasons are said to be regulative. But this is surely an untenable distinction for the quasi-realist. In the case of legal discourse, as with other cases, if the principle of bivalence regulates the practice (for instance via the Swiss constitution which "dictates that a judge shall not shelter behind insufficiencies in the law") then such regulations are part of what grounds the practice. Quasi-realist knowledge just is whatever is justified by informed practice. If part of what it is to justify involves embracing these regulative principles, then such regulative principles should not be excluded from that which grounds the practice, so should not be excluded from an account of what is knowable by the lights of the non-factualist.
The quasi-realist then must give up something. What choices does he have? Epis­
temic modesty (i.e., the view that it is consistent with our all theory that not all
indicatives are decidable) appears to be modest enough not to reject. And it must be
endorsed if the idea is to show that logical revision does not follow from anti-realism
in the way that the Dummettian paradigm suggests. And in some cases, there ap­
pear to be non-factualist motivations for adopting it, if non-factualism is motivated
the possibility of intractable disagreement. And lastly, in regions of discourse where
epistemic modesty is a natural thought, the quasi-realist must (in light of his conserva­
tivism constraint) preserve this thought. The quasi-realist then must either deny
the knowability principle or his pragmatic avowal of excluded middle. To reject the
knowability principle is to reject quasi-realism, since knowability is a consequence of
quasi-realism. The only choice left is to let go of the pragmatic endorsement of the
classical principle—to deny that distinctively classical principles are warranted, even
on pragmatic grounds.

4.5 Afterthoughts

We see that the expressivistic commitment to an epistemically constrained notion
of truth is interesting for several reasons. First, it shows us that the expressivist has a
metaphysics; he does have a substantive view about the metaphysical nature of truth
as it applies in normative discourse. Secondly, it tells us that the inferential norms of
the target practice are not to be governed by classical logic. The law of excluded mid­
dle is not warranted in a practice that is justifiably regarded as non-descriptive. After
all, if a commitment to the law of excluded middle and a commitment to an epistemic
constraint on truth are both justified, then so are we justified in believing that every
indicative or its negation is knowable. And this is clearly absurd. We currently have no independent reason to believe that our standards of warrant are strong enough eventually to secure a verdict on any issue. And so something must go. If quasi-realism best explains moral discourse, then exclusively classical principles do not best reflect the inferential norms that we are justified in applying when we moralize. The third point of interest, then, is that an unyielding commitment to classical logic renders a linguistic practice ineligible for expressivistic analysis. An unrestricted license to classical logic is a test for descriptivity. It marks the realism-relevant property that the non-factualist denies of the target discourse. We are warranted in taking, say, moral discourse to be descriptive, when the law of excluded middle is legitimate for rational criticism in the moral arena. Fourth, the commitment shows us that in those regions of discourse where we do apply classical logic without restriction, quasi-realistic analysis cannot make sense of the practice without issuing a demand to radically revise the inferential practice. Contrary to its spirit, quasi-realism does in such cases attribute systematic error to the practitioners of classical discourse, and so breaks the global conservatism constraint that it ideally imposes.
CHAPTER 5

NON-FACTUALISM, CONVERGENCE AND COGNITIVE COMMAND

5.1 Introduction

Sometimes the issue of realism lies, not in the question of whether truth conditions might transcend all possible detection (as it does with semantic realism), but in the question of whether there are any truth conditions there to be detected. The question becomes, not “how metaphysically rich are the facts of the pre-specified kind?”, but “are there any facts of this kind to begin with?” For obvious reasons we might label this type of realism “factualism,” and its opposition “non-factualism.” The quasi-realist has on offer one theoretical account of this fact/non-fact dichotomy. And we found that on this account, non-factualism carries with it an obligation to revise the inferential practice under non-factualist interpretation. But there are alternative accounts of the distinction in question. And so, whether my proposal about the connection between non-factualism and logical revision is correct depends on whether the alternatives do a better job than quasi-realism in their efforts to explicate the fact/non-fact distinction. And it depends on whether such alternatives best serve to facilitate our philosophical decisions about whether a suspected area really is non-factual. I want to show that one very popular opposing theory of non-factualism is a
non-starter—that it fails to develop an adequate philosophical understanding of the fact/non-fact distinction.

One pre-theoretic test for factualism is convergence. It is often thought, by philosophers and non-philosophers alike, that the best explanation for the convergence of informed opinion is that there are facts of the matter that command this convergence, and that the best explanation for intractable disagreement is the fact that there are no underlying facts with which objectively to arbitrate the dispute. Moral opinion, for instance, consistently fails to converge across diverse populations. And this is at least partially responsible for the very popular view that there are no moral facts of the matter.

There are several terms often used interchangeably with 'factualism' (such as 'representationalism' and 'descriptivism'), none of which at the outset is any more illuminating than the others. It may be found that these terms are treated synonymously by the present author as well. But no harm is done in thinking that the given indicatives are in the business of fact-stating, if and only if they are apt to represent, and if and only if they play a descriptive role.

One philosophical task is to illuminate theoretically the above pre-theoretic intuitions. When does our declarative thought and talk serve essentially to describe, represent or state facts, and how are we objectively to decide the issue for areas that we find suspect? One proposal on how best to develop this anti-factualist program is provided by Crispin Wright in *Truth and Objectivity*. There the test for non-factualism revolves around the notion of “Cognitive Command.” He writes,

Thinking of the judgements to which we are moved in any particular discourse as constituting the output of... a seriously representational mode
of intellectual function is justified only if we are justified in supposing that
the discourse satisfies the Cognitive Command constraint...\textsuperscript{84}

In other words, Cognitive Command is necessary for factualism. So whenever a
discourse fails to exert a cognitive command on its participants, that discourse is
non-factual.

But when does a discourse exhibit cognitive command? He says it exhibits \textit{Cognitive Command} if and only if

[It is obvious, or known in advance,] 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
[sic] evidence thresholds, so to speak, will involve something which may
properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming.\textsuperscript{85}

Let us say that

an interlocutor is a "cognitive saint" (on a matter) just as long as that
interlocutor has no cognitive shortcomings (i.e., has not failed to exercise
sufficiently his cognitive abilities).

Then we might put Wright's view this way: if X and Y disagree over some claim,
and they are both cognitive saints, then the discourse in which that disagreement
is formulated lacks Cognitive Command. In these circumstances X and Y "blame-
lessly disagree," to use a popular Humean phrase. They blamelessly disagree, since
neither of them has failed to exercise sufficiently his cognitive capacities (and yet
they continue to disagree). The possibility of such blamelessness, apparently, consti-
tutes a failure of Cognitive Command, and so, is said to constitute a commitment to
non-factualism.

\textsuperscript{84} Truth and Objectivity (Harvard, 1992) p. 93.

\textsuperscript{85} Wright, op. cit. (1992), p. 144. I take the liberty of replacing Wright's talk of "knowing such
matters \textit{a priori}" with the less distracting talk of simply "knowing" such matters. Nothing herein
turns on this terminological substitution.
After properly exploring this notion and the current debate over its effectiveness as an anti-realist paradigm, it will be argued that Cognitive Command cannot fail. There is a very important sense in which all rational discourse exerts a cognitive command on its participants. Cognitive Command is trivially satisfied. And so, Cognitive Command fails properly to distinguish the representational from the non-representational camp (if both camps are thought to be inhabited).

As we shall see, the spirit of this objection is not unfamiliar to Wright. Other critics have argued that this realism-relevant feature is trivially satisfied by every discourse. But their arguments have failed to sustain themselves against Wright's own clarificatory responses. Nevertheless, since there is something very important and correct in those objections, the point needs to be re-argued.

There are a number of reasons for thinking that Wright's cognitive command constraint does not best illuminate a serious descriptive/non-descriptive distinction. The main worry is that the constraint is trivial — that is, that every discourse satisfies it. There are a number of ways to argue this point. For instance, it may be argued that all discourse is consensus driven. Thus, there are no blameless disagreements.®®

On this line, we are asked to reflect on the phenomenology of disagreement, and notice that as participants we are essentially intolerant. When we debate moral, aesthetic, and even comic issues, we do not merely note our interlocutor's difference and accept it for what it is. We never treat dialectical opposition blamelessly. In aesthetic, comic and moral contexts, we say such things as, "Ornette Coleman does not stink, and if you think that he does then you missed the point." *Beevis and

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®®This line was suggested by Robert Kraut at Wright's presentation of "Intuitionism and Indeterminacy (II)," at OSU, December 4, 1998.
Butthead does have deep comic value; you’ve simply failed to track the underlying social commentary,” “But assisted suicide really is the only humane and dignified option in some cases,” etc. Such moves in the dialectical game carry with them overtones of blame. We are not relativistic about such matters even if our tendency is to be anti-realist about the area. Competent interlocutors debating such matters, it is suggested, do not (even implicitly) agree to disagree without imputing error. That, according to this line, is how things look from the inside; in actuality our practice does not reflect attitudes of discursive tolerance.

In sum, we naturally strive for agreement, so never blamelessly disagree. If this is right, then the cognitive/non-cognitive distinction collapses (i.e., it is not clear that a discourse can fail to exhibit a cognitive command over its participants). Hence, if it is thought that some stretches of discourse are descriptive and others not, then it seems that Cognitive Command is not a feature on which this question of realism turns.

I do not know if all discourse is consensus-driven in this sense. But even if it is, I think it falls short of collapsing the Wrightian distinction. The failure of a discourse to satisfy the cognitive command constraint is consistent with its being consensus-driven. After all, the kind of blame that we attribute in our drive for consensus, in some cases, may not be cognitive blame.

Are we not, in many cases of moral, aesthetic and comic dispute, attributing to our opposing interlocutors a “defective sensibility” —a non-cognitive shortcoming? Perhaps no informed disagreements are blameless. Wright can agree with this; after all, coherent disagreement presupposes the possibility of error (in some sense of the term). What he may deny is that the blamefulness in question reflects a cognitive,
rather than a non-cognitive, defect. So to deny that moral discourse exhibits Cognitive Command does not commit one to the view that there is nothing that the interlocutors may criticize each other about, though it may commit one to the view that any such criticisms are of the interlocutor's sensibilities and not of his perceptual or intellectual abilities.

Consensus in many cases is driven by a long and complicated process of environmental conditioning. The kind of intolerance that guides this conditioning may involve seeking always to attribute blame, but perhaps not cognitive blame. And so, the failure of CC is most charitably thought of as involving only "cognitive blamelessness," rather than "blamelessness" more generally. But then the failure of a discourse to exhibit Cognitive Command does not necessarily involve a failure to exhibit trappings for achieving consensus.

It is perhaps easy to be misled by Wright's discussion of Cognitive Command. Whether a disagreement may properly be regarded as involving a cognitive shortcoming depends, according to Wright, on the source of the disagreement. His view is that a disagreement is grounded in a cognitive shortcoming when and only when the source of the difference of opinion (say, some mistake or ignorance) is "identifiable independently of one's view of the disputed statement."\(^{87}\) Accordingly,

\[\text{attribution of mistake [or ignorance] will not count as a satisfactory explanation [of a cognitive shortcoming] so long as the sole ground for the attribution is the subject's view of the disputed statement.}\] \(^{88}\)


\(^{88}\)Ibid.
But this account is inadequate if it means to suggest that the only way to account for a non-cognitive disagreement is by appealing solely to the subject's view of the disputed statement. And Wright might be thought to intend as much when says,

debates about non-factual matters are ... never susceptible to rationally compelling resolution— ... to characterize a question as non-factual, if it means anything at all, must carry the implication that opinions about it are at bottom rationally unconstrained— ... competent interlocutors must be willing, if need be, to agree to differ without the imputation to each other of errors of reasoning or cognition.\(^8\)

Prima facie, the view seems to be this. A disagreement between well-informed interlocutors does not hinge on a cognitive shortcoming when they each have no leverage with which to argue their side of the issue. But this interpretation is less than adequate, even by Wright's own lights. After all, he believes that every declarative practice is governed by, at least, a minimalist conception of truth, which essentially carries with it acknowledged standards of warrant.\(^9\) So, it is natural to be misled by Wright's discussion and to suppose that Wright is committed to the view that some stretches of discourse are not consensus-driven at all.

Some of Wright's remarks may unintentionally mislead. But a more careful reading of the last quote may suggest that non-factualism (or a failure of Cognitive Command) involves, not blameless disagreements, but perhaps blameful disagreements of a non-cognitive sort. Non-factual opinion is normatively constrained, but competent interlocutors who disagree about such opinions, if they are to impute error or ignorance at all, must be criticizing something other than their interlocutor's rational or perceptual abilities. Perhaps instead, as I have suggested, they are at least implicitly

\(^8\)"Doubting the Reality of the Intentional" OSU colloquium 1997, p. 20.

criticizing their interlocutor's affective sensibilities or the stances which they manifest. So there is logical room to maneuver.

Perhaps the argument from consensus may be reformulated still to suggest that there are no instances of cognitive blamelessness. After all, it is arguable that any error may, with little creativity, be dressed in cognitive clothing. This, I think, is the serious problem that is brought forth by the argument from consensus.

5.2 Is the Distinction Principled?

The problem is this: How are we to tell in a principled way whether something may properly be regarded as a cognitive versus non-cognitive shortcoming? Wright seems to be closer to an answer when he suggests, for the case of comic discourse, that

disputants may be in agreement about all features of a situation except whether it ... is amusing; and all the cards may be on the table—no further consideration need be available which, once apprised of it, would bring the disputants into agreement.\(^9\)

Apparently, a disagreement hinges on a cognitive shortcoming just in case there is information that, once presented, would bring the disputants into agreement. In the case of comic discourse, competent speakers X and Y may disagree about whether the situation is really funny without there being any information, presentable to the disputants, that would cause them to converge on a verdict about the situation's comic value. Even if X is justified in criticizing Y (perhaps simply on grounds of Y's inability to appreciate humor), there is no reason to think that Y will, or even could at that moment, overturn his opposing view. Y might not be able (then and there)

to change his belief, even upon learning that his sensibilities are defective. Wright's view about cognitive shortcomings (call it "CS") seems to involve the following claim:

(CS) A disagreement between competent interlocutors X and Y obviously hinges on a cognitive shortcoming, if it is obvious that there is some information about the matter at hand that would, once presented, bring X and Y into agreement (some information, that is, over and above that characterized by the disputed view).

But the reader may reply that it is always obvious that some "information" about the matter at hand would, once appreciated, bring competent epistemically responsible interlocutors into agreement. Perhaps then it does not take much work to construe any coherent disagreement as hinging on a cognitive shortcoming. In Robert Kraut's words:

Anytime I want to configure Jones as cognitively [defective]—i.e., as failing to believe something he should believe, or unable to track some parameter he ought to be able to track—it doesn't take much work. An insensitive person is one who doesn't know certain things he should know. And so on. ... whether one's incapacities are rooted in defective cognition/perception, or rooted in bad sentiments or deplorable stances, requires a more robust notion of 'cognitive' than is presently available.92

The idea here is that any disagreement can be construed as hinging on a cognitive shortcoming in the above sense. If you do not think the joke was funny, one might say that you failed to track the innuendo or the underlying commentary. This failure may be attributable to your lack of knowledge, say, of current events, or your less than pristine ability to process information quickly. It might then be said that you would think the joke was funny, were you only fully to appreciate the information (i.e., the underlying commentary or the implicit connections made for purposes of innuendo).

92Robert Kraut, in private correspondence.
If this is right, then the cognitive command constraint is trivial. We may account
for the quintessentially non-cognitive errors in exactly the same kinds of ways that
we are said essentially to account for cognitive mistakes — viz., by locating some
declarative point (over and above the view in question) that the erroneous speaker has
failed to acknowledge. And so, it is suggested that, pending a more robust notion of
"cognitive," it will always be obvious or known in advance that differences of opinion
will involve something which may properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming
— i.e., Cognitive Command is satisfied by every discourse!

The objection is that still we are in no position to get the Wrightian distinction off
the ground. (CS) cannot help us to decide the issue of cognitive versus non-cognitive
shortcoming, for the following reason. At best, a failure of the disputants to be moved
in the relevant way reveals either that there is a non-cognitive shortcoming or that
at least one of the players is incompetent. And, most importantly, no method has
been suggested for determining which of these disjunctions obtains (i.e., for determin­
ing whether it is a non-cognitive error or some "incompetence" that is preventing
convergence). But then we are back to where we started, seeking an account of the
difference between these two kinds of shortcoming.

On the present reformulation of what it is to be in cognitive error, we have yet
to put on offer a principled procedure for deciding whether a failure to converge
(at the relevant time) is the result of incompetence or a non-cognitive shortcoming.
Well, what do we mean here by "incompetence"? We cannot mean "a failure to
exercise one's cognitive abilities to their fullest potential," since that would render
CS blatantly unsatisfiable. CS would then say the following:
A dispute among people who have not failed to exercise fully their cognitive abilities involves a cognitive shortcoming iff they have failed to exercise fully their cognitive abilities.

So, to say the speakers are “competent” cannot just be to say that the speakers fail to have any cognitive shortcomings (i.e., it cannot be to deny the right-hand side of CS).

Perhaps “is competent” just means “knows how to engage in the relevant discourse intelligently—i.e., fully grasps the meanings of the terms, knows a good deal of truths in the area, and knows how to argue against a backdrop of acknowledged standards of warrant, etc.” But then it seems that we have merely moved the discussion to the question of how to recognize, in a principled way, the difference between linguistic and factual error—a question which has no answer, according to those with Quinean concerns about the analytic/synthetic distinction. The cognitive command constraint is only as principled as the analytic/synthetic distinction, so our willingness to use the constraint in our metaphysical inquiries will only be as strong as our faith in analyticity.93

Of course, Wright does not harbor such Quinean reservations. But, while discussing a slightly different version of the trivialization argument, Wright admits that we may ultimately lack an objective procedure for deciding the cognitive/non-cognitive question. He says,

we need some independent controls on what is to count as a cognitive shortcoming. How is that to be done without begging the substantial question in any particular case? ... How can this trivializing response be tackled? Naturally, it simply presupposes that we may think of comic statements as recording “facts of the matter”, which the opinions of the

93 For this observation I am indebted to Robert Kraut.
disputants merely reflect or misrepresent. And that is just the idea on which the Cognitive Command constraint is meant to exercise control. But how can it be made to do so unless we tackle head-on the hard question: what makes an opinion-forming faculty genuinely cognitive...? The situation looks like a bind. But in fact it makes all the difference here how we conceive of the rules of debate. If the trivializing response may, as it were, be presumed innocent until proved guilty, then its critic has to make the running, and the hard question may well be impossible to avoid—and maybe to answer. But matters look different if the theorist who offers the trivialising response is held to owe a defence. That will seem plausible in the present instance, in which instinct—"common sense"—already recoils from realism about comedy. But I would suggest that the general rule should be that realism must be earned.94

In other words, despite our lack of a general answer to the question of how to draw the cognitive/non-cognitive distinction in a principled fashion, the onus is on the trivializing theorist to defend the existence of a "cognitive process" that we employ in the detection of comic (or any other suspect) qualities. This, on Wright's view, must include a detailed account of the qualities in question, the detection mechanism we employ in our appreciation of them, and an argument to the effect that we could not appreciate comic truths without such qualities and mechanisms in place. So even without a clear cognitive/non-cognitive dualism in place, trivialization may be resisted by claiming that the onus begins with the would-be trivializer. He is asked to defend in a detailed fashion a cognitive understanding of any discourse in question.

Now I do not know where the burden of proof initially resides, and I am not sure how to decide this issue in a non-question-begging way. Nevertheless, Wright's response to the would-be trivializer is highly suspicious in light of the role that is supposed to be played by his form of non-factualism. After all, Wright suspects that

all roads to realism have to go through Cognitive Command—whether it is a necessary feature of any discourse about which the basic anti-realist view is to be exceeded, and is hence implicated in any sufficient case for going beyond that view. I suspect that it is. ... If I am right, then of course Cognitive Command becomes a point of great strategic importance for the opponent of realism: show that a discourse lacks it and you will blow away with one stroke all conceivable forms of realist resistance.95

Wright’s suspicion is that a failure of Cognitive Command entails the impossibility of recognition-transcendent truth. And that this in turn commits us (in the interesting cases) to deny that reality must be determinate. Wright believes that if this is correct, then a failure of Cognitive Command is evidence for the rejection of realism, in the most general sense. But how can Cognitive Command be a point of such great strategic importance for the anti-realist, without knowing what counts as a non-cognitive shortcoming? Without such knowledge, we have no method for objectively deciding the cognitive/non-cognitive issue. Hence, the non-factualist has no leverage with which to argue forcibly against a local realism of any stripe, let alone against a local realism of every stripe.

Perhaps ultimately one can distinguish kinds of error in such a way as to make the difference that here is alleged to make a difference. But that check has not yet been cashed. At the very least this problem serves as a challenge to anyone wishing to put the cognitive command constraint to use. Let us simply note the problem and move on. For it can be shown that the constraint is trivial, even if one can make out a principled difference between cognitive and non-cognitive error.

5.3 The Shapiro-Taschek Problem

Stewart Shapiro and William Taschek have pointed out in "Intuitionism, Pluralism, and Cognitive Command" that Wright is committed to the view that there can be no blameless disagreements. And so, it would seem, Cognitive Command is trivially satisfied. Their reasoning involves Wright's epistemic constraint on truth, which says, "all truths of the target discourse are knowable." Importantly, Wright takes the epistemic constraint to be satisfied when the issue of cognitive command arises. The Shapiro/Taschek criticism is that the existence of a blameless disagreement is inconsistent with Wright's epistemic constraint on truth. If they are right (and the existence of blameless disagreement is a fair characterization of the failure of cognitive command), then the notion of cognitive command is not of any use to Wright in determining the fact/non-fact status of a given stretch of discourse.

The Shapiro/Taschek argument is this:

Suppose that the epistemic constraint obtains (that all truth is knowable). And suppose that there is a cognitively blameless disagreement — i.e., that there is a difference of opinion between two cognitive saints A and B about some matter p. Now suppose for reductio that p. Then, by the epistemic constraint, it follows that p is knowable. But then one of the interlocutors not only believes something that is false, but fails to believe something that can be known. Hence, that interlocutor is not a cognitive saint. Contradiction! Let us then reject our assumption that p. But then it is knowable that ¬p, again by the epistemic constraint. And so, the other interlocutor fails to believe something that can be known — viz., ¬p. And so, he is not a cognitive saint. Contradiction!


This is the basic argument as presented in Shapiro and Taschek, op. cit. (1996), p. 85.
It follows then that there are no cognitively blameless disagreements (when the epistemic constraint is satisfied). Shapiro and Taschek conclude that the failure of Cognitive Command is inconsistent with an epistemic constraint on truth. Hence, CC appears to be trivialized.

Wright responded to the Shapiro/Taschek problem in Lecture II of “Intuitionism and Indeterminacy”, presented at OSU in December 1998. His claim was that Shapiro and Taschek have misinterpreted their own result. Yes, Wright is committed to the non-existence of blameless disagreements (and even to the impossibility of blameless disagreement). But this, as Wright notes, is — at least intuitionistically — consistent with the failure of Cognitive Command. Remember, Wright conceives the negation of Cognitive Command to be that it is not obvious, or known in advance, that differences of opinion (within the given discourse) involve a cognitive shortcoming. For present purposes, we may simplify this to “not all differences of opinion involve a cognitive shortcoming.” This commitment has the following form:

**The Failure of CC:**

\[-(\forall p)Bp,\]

where our quantifiers range over differences of opinion (of the Wrightian sort) between competent interlocutors, and where B is the predicate “is cognitively blameful.”

The denial of CC says that not all differences of opinion (of the relevant sort) are cognitively blameful. Whereas, the Shapiro/Taschek result says that there are no instances of cognitive blamelessness among these disputing parties. Here is the logical form of the S/T result:
S/T Result:

\[ \neg(\exists p)\neg Bp. \]

And though the S/T result intuitionistically entails \((\forall p)\neg\neg Bp\) [that all such differences of opinions are not not cognitively blameful], it only classically, and not intuitionistically, entails \((\forall p)Bp\) [that all such differences of opinion are cognitively blameful]. Importantly, Wright believes that the epistemic right to employ classical logic cannot be earned in this context. It cannot be earned because, as can be shown, in all interesting cases where the epistemic constraint governs, distinctively classical principles of reasoning are not properly justified (See Chapter 2 of this manuscript). In the present context, it is supposed that the epistemic constraint governs. And so, Wright is not overly worried about such exclusively classical results.

So it seems that Wright’s reply to the Shapiro/Taschek problem is essentially this:

The failure of Cognitive Command is not that we may construct an instance of blamelessness, but that it is wrong to think in advance that all differences of opinion are constructively blameful.

Clearly, it does not follow that

we can pin-point an instance of blameless dispute between subjects,

from the fact that

not all differences of opinion are blameful in a way that allows us to locate the blame.

Once this latter thesis is (re)emphasized as the failure of cognitive command, the failure of Cognitive Command can be seen to be consistent with the S/T Result. Wright’s clarification (in the December 98 lecture) served to bring forth this intended
interpretation of the thesis. And so, Cognitive Command gets a second wind against
the Shapiro/Taschek objection.

Let us summarize. Wright’s theory of non-factualism gets has been defended. As
Wright sees it, that which is actually shown in the Shapiro-Taschek result falls short
of that which its authors thought it had shown; the failure of Cognitive Command
can, once clarified, be consistently avowed by the believer in epistemically constrained
truth. And, as we have seen, the failure of Cognitive Command may be embraced
while saving the dialectical phenomenon of blamefulness that some may expect to be
involved in any true disagreement. And so the failure of Cognitive Command remains
a viable anti-realist option, and a good candidate for marking the point of contention
between the factualist and the non-factualist. For now.

My present concern is to determine whether a S/T-like trivialization objection
can be sustained in light of this clarificatory response. I would like to test one such
argument, but, to appreciate it, we shall need a slightly clearer sense of what it is, on
Wright’s view, for a disagreement to hinge on a cognitive shortcoming.

5.4 A Further Trivialization Objection

Recall that Wright claims that a commitment to an epistemic constraint on truth
is required to get the cognitive/non-cognitive distinction off the ground. He remarks
that

The idea of the realist about a given region of discourse—unless pessimistic
enough to think that its truths are altogether beyond our ken—is that
soberly and responsibly to practice in that region is to enter into a kind
of representational mode of cognitive function, comparable in relevant
respects to taking a photograph or making a wax impression of a key.98

98“Doubting the Reality of the Intentional” OSU colloquium, June 1997, p. 5. (My emphasis)
So, the realism-relevant feature under discussion is alleged by Wright to be an interesting characterization of the factual/non-factual distinction only after an epistemic constraint on truth is adopted. After all, only with an epistemic constraint on truth would we think that a failure of competent well-informed disputants to converge is an indication that there are no facts of the matter. If truth in the given area may outstrip our abilities for coming to recognized truths in the area, then the fact that smart people cannot converge on a verdict is not a litmus for non-factualism. The important point for present purposes is that Wright is committed to the view that an epistemic constraint on truth is in operative whenever the question of Cognitive Command arises.

Now recall that Wright’s view about cognitive shortcomings involves the following claim:

(Cs) A disagreement between competent interlocutors X and Y obviously hinges on a cognitive shortcoming, if it is obvious that there is some information about the matter at hand that would, once presented, bring X and Y into agreement (some information, that is, over and above that characterized by the disputed view).

On this reading the failure of cognitive command consists in the failure of cognitive saints to be moved in the relevant way by new data. At the very least, the failure of cognitive command implies the following claim:

(C*) Not all differences of opinion among cognitive saints will involve some information that, once acknowledged, would cause them no longer to dispute the issue.

My claim, which I would like now to defend, is that cognitive command never fails. The reason is that C* is not satisfiable. Consider the following argument.
Suppose that competent speakers X and Y have a difference of opinion formulated within the given discourse, and that the difference is not excusable as a result of vagueness in the disputed statement, or in the standards of acceptability, etc. And let us suppose that X and Y are cognitive saints with respect to the matter at hand (i.e., independently of one another X and Y have fully exercised their cognitive capacities). So CC should fail, and it should not be known in advance that there is some information about the matter at hand that would, once presented, resolve their disagreement. But in fact, whenever cognitive saints disagree, it will be known in advance that there is some information that, once present to X and Y, would bring them out of disagreement—namely, the information that cognitive saints have failed to converge on a verdict. For it is part of the scenario that they are in this predicament, and that it is knowable that they are in this predicament (by the epistemic constraint), and that cognitive saints (by definition) would know everything relevant to the matter at hand. And this information alone (viz., that X and Y are cognitive saints who fail to converge) would bring X and Y out of dispute, since, once this state of affairs is appreciated, X and Y would realize that either verdict is no better than the other. And so they would realize that their disagreement is not rational.\footnote{A formal characterization of this argument appears in the appendix to this chapter.}

So the claim is that the initial state of cognitive blamelessness, once appreciated by epistemically ideal interlocutors, would destabilize into a state a cognitive blamefulness. Neither party would assert his view, in the normal sense, for he would no longer take seriously the idea that his interlocutor is in error. Therefore, it is known in advance that any such difference of opinion between competent interlocutors will give rise to, and so will essentially involve, something which may properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming. Cognitive Command cannot fail, and the cognitive command constraint does not best serve to carve a useful fact/non-fact distinction.

\footnote{A formal characterization of this argument appears in the appendix to this chapter.}
5.5 Final Responses to Trivialization

It may be remarked that only “cognitive saints” would withhold from forming an opinion upon observing that a divergent opinion has no less merit. Therefore, since there are virtually no such epistemological saints in the world, it is not clear that this new information would bring the disputing parties to converge on the verdict “undecided”, even though such suspension of judgment would be the epistemically responsible thing.100

I think that this worry can be resolved by noticing that Wright’s cognitive command constraint is an idealization. He is talking about cognitive saints. And his question is this:

What is revealed by the failure of cognitive saints to converge on a verdict?

Well, if they truly are cognitive saints, then it reveals that there is no fact of the matter out there waiting to be detected. But if they are not cognitive saints, then—for all we know—one of them has not exercised his cognitive abilities to its fullest potential. And a failure of non-saints to converge would not be evidence for non-factualism, since the lack of convergence may be attributable to cognitive error. So, yes, my example requires that the interlocutors are taken to be cognitive saints, but that is required anyway if the cognitive command constraint is to do the work that was intended for it.

Let us consider a distinct objection to my trivialization argument. My argument suggests that a failure of saints to converge will always involve a cognitive shortcoming, and Cognitive Command is therefore trivialized. But one might wonder whether

100I am grateful to Neil Tennant for raising this concern.
a convergence on a verdict of "undecided" is a convergence in the operative sense—i.e., a convergence that warrants our treating the issue as a factual matter. If we agree that our divergent verdicts are equally good, from an epistemic standpoint, then they are equally bad since they cannot both be right. But then the obligation to remain undecided suggests that the issue does not have an answer, that there is no fact there to be discovered. It suggests that the issue is non-factual, contrary to what the above argument suggests. In other words, this is not the kind of convergence that Wright would take to warrant an attribution of cognitive error; it is not a failure to converge on a verdict of "true" or "false."

Nevertheless, all divergences of the sort in question are blameful, since there will always be in these circumstances a state of information $i^*$ that is more informed than either disputant's initial state of information $i$, since $i^*$ includes the further appreciation of the opposing interlocutor's equally sound position. So, whenever interlocutors have yielded equally respectable views and in fact have exercised their cognitive capacities to their fullest potential, ipso facto they cannot take their own position to be epistemically better than the opposing view. Therefore, Cognitive Command is trivial, not because both parties would converge on a "true" or "false" verdict in said circumstances, but because said circumstances will never be satisfied. Whenever there is a lack of convergence, someone, it seems, must be failing to track some data, whether it be information that confirms or infirms the statement in dispute, or information about the apparent lack of substantial evidence for only one side. What this shows is that, if there is an adequate test for non-factualism, the cognitive command constraint has not pinned it down.
5.6 Quasi-Realism, and the Collapse of the Fact/Non-Fact Distinction

The aim of this chapter has been to consider the theory of cognitive command as an alternative to the quasi-realist’s account of how best to elucidate the fact/non-fact distinction. As we have seen, Cognitive Command collapses the distinction, and so, fails to do demarcate an interesting dichotomy. But some have argued that a similar collapse threatens the theory of quasi-realism.

The worry is presented in the form of a dilemma, introduced by Crispin Wright and discussed further by Bob Hale. It is the problem of formulating the thesis of Blackburnian anti-realism. What realist thesis is being denied? Either there is some apparently realist idiom that this quasi-realist is rejecting, or there is not. If there is not, then he has made good on all the things that he started out wanting to deny—for instance, that the discourse is truth-conditional or fact-stating. But if there is some such apparently realist idiom that the quasi-realist cannot accept, then, quasi-realism is dead in the water. After all, quasi-realism is alleged to be so encompassing that it is able to accommodate all features of the discourse that might inspire a realist construal. And so, the thesis appears unsatisfiable.

One thing that we determined in Chapter 3 was that, to the extent that the quasi-realist aims to legitimate all those claims that invite a realist interpretation, quasi-realism is untenable. After all, it appears that the quasi-realist cannot accommodate semantic realism—the view that some truths may be absolutely unknowable. But this need not undermine the quasi-realist project, if we put the theory in a more

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modest light. The original hypothesis was that the quasi-realist could conserve all
the trappings of realism; but it is not essential to the theory that it accomplish
this task. Modest quasi-realism, we might say, takes on the project of determining
just how much realist thought can be vindicated on expressivistic grounds, without
requiring (in advance) that it be able to vindicate all such thought.

And so, even though quasi-realism—defined by a certain direction of explanatory
priority—can vindicate claims of realism (including perhaps those that boast the
opposite explanatory priority), it cannot vindicate them in a way that goes against
the epistemic constraint on truth. That is, it cannot vindicate them on grounds over
and above those that the theory has set aside for constructing the notion of truth
in the area. Such grounds, for the quasi-realist, are limited to (and simply consist
in) the best use of our best methods. For the expressivist, the best use of the best
methods is a matter of what attitudes we endorse along with finite and accessible
improvements to those attitude-states. So the expressivist cannot argue that such
claims to realism are legitimate in virtue of something over and above our own attitude
sets and improvements thereupon, since it is only such attitudes (and improvements
thereupon) that constitute the grounds for the target claims. And it is this limitation
on quasi-realist theorizing that distinguishes it sharply from realism. Quasi-realist
theorizing embraces a certain direction of explanatory priority without violating the
epistemic constraint on truth. All attributions of truth (including those that boast
the opposite explanatory priority) can be vindicated without appeal to anything over
and above the limited resources that the quasi-realist begins with, which happen to
be resources that constitute the entitlements of non-factual knowledge.
This commitment to an epistemic constraint on truth, in effect, blocks the threat of collapse that Hale and Wright were so concerned with. By embracing the epistemic constraint the quasi-realist denies the realist thesis that there may be some unknowable truths. More precisely the quasi-realist thesis is this: all truths in the target class are knowable, and the best account of what knowability consists in does not require us to posit the existence of the target facts (but rather only requires an appeal to our internal sentiments and improvements thereupon).
5.7 Appendix: Main Result

Let 'z' be a place holder for disputes of the Wrightian sort (i.e., differences of opinion formulated within the discourse that are not excusable as a result of vagueness in a disputed statement, or in the standards of acceptability, or variation in personal evidence thresholds).

Let 'i' be a place holder for accessible states of information.

Let 'i*' be a place holder specifically for accessible states of information that include information about accessible states of information.

Let 'Sz' = "z is had by cognitive saints (i.e., by disputants neither of whom have failed fully to exercise their cognitive abilities)."

Let 'iCz' = "once acknowledged i would cause dispute x to collapse into a state of convergence on a verdict of 'true,' 'false,' or 'undecided.'"

Cognitive Command may be formally characterized as follows:

\[(CC) \quad \forall x(Sx \rightarrow \exists i(iCz))\]

It is known that all differences of opinion among cognitive saints will be able to be resolved in an accessible state of information that, once acknowledged, would cause them no longer to contest the issue.

The Failure of Cognitive Command, then, would be its denial:

\[\neg \forall x(Sx \rightarrow \exists i(iCz)).\]

Main Result: CC is trivial.

\[
\begin{align*}
(1) & \quad Sx & \text{(Assump for Conditional Proof)} \\
(2) & \quad \neg \exists i(iCz) & \text{(by df. of 'cognitive sainthood')} \\
(3) & \quad \Diamond K[\neg \exists i(iCz)] & \text{(by epistemic constraint)} \\
(4) & \quad \exists i^{*}(i^{*}Cz) & \text{(by acknowledgement of line 3, and the df. of 'cognitive sainthood')} \\
(5) & \quad Sx \rightarrow \exists i^{*}(i^{*}Cz) & \text{(CP 1-4)} \\
(6) & \quad \forall x(Sx \rightarrow \exists i^{*}(i^{*}Cz)) & \text{(UI 5)} \\
(7) & \quad \forall x(Sx \rightarrow \exists i^{*}(i^{*}Cz)) & \text{(since 1-6 form an a priori argument)}
\end{align*}
\]
The proof reads as follows. Suppose (1), a dispute of the relevant kind is had by
cognitive saints. Then by definition, (2) there is no state of information $i$ that would
cause them to stop disagreeing. Cognitive saints, after all, have not failed fully to
exercise their cognitive capacities. By the epistemic constraint, it is knowable that
there is no state of information $i$ that would cause them to stop disagreeing. Now,
since our disputants are cognitive saints (and so, have not failed to acknowledge any
relevant information), they would know that there is no state of information $i$ that
would cause them to stop disagreeing. But once aware of this new development
(call it $i^*$), our cognitive saints would stop disputing the issue in the normal sense
(since they would no longer take their “opposing” interlocutor to be incorrect). So,
there is a knowable piece of information $i^*$ that would cause our interlocutors to stop
disagreeing (viz., that characterized by line 2). By conditional introduction we get
line 5, and discharge our assumption at line 1. Since our arbitrary names do not
appear in undischarged assumptions, we may introduce the universal quantifier at
line 6. And since this argument rests on no contingent assumptions, we may conclude
at line 7 that it is known by us (a priori, if you will) that line 6 is true. But line
7 is inconsistent with the failure of cognitive command. Therefore, the failure of
Cognitive Command is impossible.
I have argued that there are important connections between our metaphysical theories and the logical principles we endorse. We found that certain forms of expressivistic irrealism entail certain forms of semantic anti-realism, and that these forms of anti-realism in turn entail that distinctively classical principles of inference are not properly grounded. These forms of irrealism suggest that all judgments formulable within a chosen discourse can be semantically grounded without an appeal to the states of affairs that those judgements literally avow, and that they can be grounded with the limited resources that the expressivist has set aside (viz., internal sentiments and finite and accessible improvements thereupon). All attributions of "truth" in the given area, then, are to be explained in terms of (or, as Blackburn puts it, "constructed" out of) these resources. And since, for this expressivistic irrealist, it is essential that none of these resources outstrip the practitioner's best methods for grounding such judgments, all truths in the area must be treated as knowable in principle. That is, it entails semantic anti-realism. And, as we found, semantic-anti-realism entails for sufficiently rich regions of discourse that bivalence is not properly justified. For if every claim is such that either it or its negation is true even if (in some cases) we cannot know which, then it must be that some truths are unknowable.
Our model of the connection between anti-realism and logical revision has virtues over earlier models, even if our model was inspired by them. For without the richer expressive resources that we brought to bear (viz., quantified propositional logic), it is not clear that the anti-realist has a formulation of the undecidability assumption that is meant to drive the argument for revision. The epistemic modesty thesis, developed in Chapter 2, appears to serve the anti-realist's purpose, since it is strong enough to facilitate the argument for revision, weak enough to be acceptable to both the realist and the anti-realist, and provides the anti-realist with an intuitionistically acceptable position. The modesty principle also turns out to be acceptable to both the Gödelian optimist, who believes in the solvability of every problem hitherto undecided (Chapter 2), and those irrealists who where led to their view by the possibility of intractable disagreement (Chapter 4).

Moreover, our model locates an objective point of contention between the realist and the anti-realist. There was the problem (in Chapter 2) of shared content that threatened to leave the realist and anti-realist entertaining distinct interpretations of the principle $\varphi \rightarrow \Diamond K\varphi$. They do, after all, espouse distinct semantic theories. This would have the realist affirming a thesis distinct from that which the anti-realist denies, and would therefore have them talking past one another. Our model, with its explicit requirement that neither party utilize principles of reasoning that are not acceptable to both parties, independently motivates a common interpretation of the thesis that retains the interest for both parties. Importantly this requirement does not beg the substantial question in favor of either side. And if it is met, then any semantic differences that the participants implicitly harbor will not constitute differences that
make a relevant difference in the context of the debate, since these difference will not be made manifest in their debate-relevant inferential strategies.

Our model of Blackburn's expressivistic irrealist strategy has similar virtues, for it brings out subtleties of quasi-realism that resolve similar problems. Quasi-realism requires that the target vocabulary not be used to characterize the semantic content of the target judgements. The theory boasts that it can characterize, in this way, the semantic content of all claims that traditionally inspire a realist interpretation. And this claim threatens outright to collapse quasi-realism into realism. For if the quasi-realist can secure the propriety of any realist thesis, he can embrace the very realism that he set out to oppose. Our account of the quasi-realist thesis dissolves this problem. The innovation is to make explicit the quasi-realist's commitment to an epistemic constraint on truth. For then quasi-realism may distinguish itself from realist reductionism with the following modified requirement: a characterization of the semantic content of the target judgments must not utilize the target vocabulary, but must appeal only to the the expressivistic vocabulary of internal sentiments and (a context sensitive) notion of finite and accessible improvement thereupon. We learned that this involves no more and no less content than can be given by the best use of our best methods—no more and no less, that is, than can be given by a concept of (non-factual) knowability.

The quasi-realist may be able to secure the propriety of any realist thesis (perhaps, any realist thesis other than the one that opposes the epistemic constraint on truth), as long as it clearly specifies what such security amounts to. It can secure the intelligibility of such realistic endorsements, without invoking mind-independent facts
of the matter—that is, with nothing over and above those virtues of the knowledge seeking enterprise.

In sum, the knowability principle that we found to be a consequence of quasi-realism, can (once made explicity) be invoked to ward off various criticisms of the theory that imply that the quasi-realism/realism distinction cannot be made out. This was a problem that we could not resolve for other accounts of non-factualist theory—namely, Wright's theory of Cognitive Command. As it turned out, there was no interesting characterization of cognitive command that left us with a thesis that the factualist could endorse and the non-factualist could deny. We concluded that Cognitive Command was not the best way to demarcate the distinction between factual and non-factual discourse.

Our findings provide a new map of the anti-realist terrain, one that makes out more connections among the various forms of anti-realism than have been clearly developed in the past. Nevertheless, some have hinted at these connections. Robert Brandom, for instance, calls "phenomenalism" those theories that involve irrealist notions of truth. And he suggests that

Phenomenalism, in general, is a structure that anti-realist accounts of many different subject matters may exhibit. It elaborates one way of taking seriously what Dummett calls the issue of 'recognition transcenden[

Dummett’s issue of recognition transcendence is the question of whether it is possible for some truths (of a given class) to outstrip our epistemic capabilities. Dummettian anti-realism denies the potential for recognition transcendence, and equivalently,

\footnote{102 "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk" in Midwest Studies in Philosophy XII (1988), p. 82.}
claims that essentially all truths are knowable. Brandom, it seems, takes his own and other such views about truth to be an elaboration of the Dummettian thesis.

If such irrealisms (in virtue of this connection with Dummett's anti-realism) really do force an obligation to reject distinctively classical principles, then logic plays a very important role in our metaphysical inquiries. In the interesting cases, we need only show that unrestricted application of excluded middle, for instance, is properly grounded in order to have properly secured all the relevant forms of metaphysical realism.
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