

The Relevance of Realism



Any general statement of realism, however, inevitably obscures the great variation in focus in controversies between realists and antirealists from antiquity to the present day. In some controversies, what is primarily at issue is a question of [ontology](#), concerning the existence of entities of some problematic kind. In others, the opposition, while still broadly ontological in character, concerns rather the ultimate nature of reality as a whole, a historically important example being the controversies generated by various forms of [idealism](#). In yet others the dispute, while not entirely divorced from questions of [ontology](#), is primarily concerned with the notion of [truth](#), either in general or in application to statements of some particular type, such as [moral](#) judgments or theoretical scientific claims about unobservable entities.

One of the earliest and most famous realist doctrines is [Plato](#)'s theory of [Forms](#), which asserts that things such as "the Beautiful" (or "Beauty") and "the Just" (or "Justice") exist over and above the [particular](#) beautiful objects and just acts in which they are instantiated and more or less imperfectly exemplified; the Forms themselves are thought of as located neither in space nor in time. Although Plato's usual [term](#) for them (*eido*) is often translated in English as Idea, it is clear that he did not think of them as mental but rather as abstract, existing independently both of mental activity and of sensible particulars. As such, they lie beyond the reach of [sense perception](#), which Plato regarded as providing only beliefs about appearances as opposed to knowledge of what is truly real. Indeed, the Forms are knowable only by the philosophically schooled intellect.

Although the interpretation of Plato's theory remains a matter of scholarly controversy, there is no doubt that his promulgation of it initiated an enduring dispute about the existence of [universals](#)—often conceived, in opposition to particulars, as entities, such as general properties, which may be wholly present at different times and places or instantiated by many distinct particular objects. Plato's pupil [Aristotle](#) reacted against the extreme realism which he took Plato to be endorsing: the thesis of *universalia ante res* (Latin: "universals before things"), according to which universals exist in their own right, prior to and independently of their instantiation by sensible particulars. He advocated instead a more moderate realism of *universalia in rebus* ("universals in things"): While there are universals, they can have no freestanding, independent existence. They exist only in the particulars that instantiate

them.

In the [medieval](#) period, defenders of a broadly Aristotelian realism, including William of Shyreswood and [Peter of Spain](#), were opposed by both [nominalists](#) and [conceptualists](#). Nominalists, notably [William of Ockham](#), insisted that everything in the nonlinguistic world is particular. They argued that universals are merely words which have a general application—an application which is sufficiently explained by reference to the similarities among the various particulars to which the words are applied. Conceptualists agreed with the nominalists that everything is particular but held that words which have general application do so by virtue of standing for mental intermediaries, usually called general ideas or concepts.

Although medieval in origin, the latter view found its best-known implementation in the English philosopher [John Locke](#)'s theory of abstract ideas, so called because they are supposed to be formed from the wholly particular ideas supplied in experience by "abstracting" from their differences to leave only what is common to all of them. Locke's doctrine was vigorously criticized in the 18th century by his empiricist successors, [George Berkeley](#) and [David Hume](#), who argued that ideas corresponding to general words are fully determinate and particular and that their generality of application is achieved by making one particular idea stand indifferently as a representative of many.

The term "[Platonism](#)" has often been used, especially in the [philosophy of mathematics](#), as an [alternative](#) to the correspondingly wider use of "realism" to denote ontological views to which such nominalism stands opposed. Nominalists have often recommended their rejection of abstracta on grounds of ontological economy, [invoking](#) the methodological maxim known as [Ockham's razor](#)—*Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem* ("Entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity"). The maxim is problematic, however, for at least two reasons. First, it gives a clear directive only when accompanied by some answer to the obvious question, "Necessary for what?" Although the answer—"Necessary to account for all the (agreed upon) facts"—is equally obvious, it is doubtful that there is sufficient agreement between the nominalist and the realist to enable the former to cut away abstracta as unnecessary. The realist is likely to suppose that the relevant facts include the facts of mathematics, which, taken at face value, do require the existence of numbers, sets, and so on.

The main thing happening here is a shift in the meaning of terms. Specifically, the word "realist" has had many many different uses over time. The basic idea is that a realist believes something is real, i.e. that such entities do in fact exist, that they are metaphysical objects in their own right (rather than existing as modalities on the mind). Realism when used in reference to mathematical realism and Plato is that X believes Y do in fact exist. So Plato is a realist about Platonic Forms. Mathematical realists believe numbers do in fact exist. Plato's view stands in contrast to Aristotle's view -- which while also realist with respect to forms does not think the forms exist as *ideas*. Instead, they exist as essences in substances. In contemporary language, this is the debate over universals. Anti-realist views think that these things only exist in our heads as words or concepts. (Realist views can of course accept that we also make words or terms for these things).

The term idealism doesn't generally occur in this debate. Idealism instead refers to views where things only exist due to the mind. It's a partial offshoot of rationalism generally associated with Schopenhauer. Hegel is often called an idealist as well, but I would argue this is a misnomer.

A strong argument against extreme realism is the third man argument which was first offered by Plato in his Parmenides dialogue. It runs as follows: a man is a man because he partakes in the form of 'man'. For a form to be 'man' it has to be 'man' itself (principle of self-predication). But for that the form 'man' has to partake in a third form of 'man' which explains the man-ness of both the man as a particular and the man as a form. This leads to an infinite regress. The third man argument is a powerful argument against Plato's extreme realism.

According to Plato, it would continue to exist even if all red objects were to vanish from the spatio-temporal world. Similar to numbers, these forms are abstract, immaterial and unchanging entities; they transcend the spatio-temporal world.

The Realist perspective is what the both personalities have. Aristotle is known to be a critic of his teacher Plato, who is known to be an Idealist. Plato's prescriptions are collectively recorded in 'The Republic'. Aristotle's reaction to the recommendations of Plato possesses an indication of disagreement that does not conform to idealist perspective. According to Irwin (1988, p.5), [Aristotle](#) commits to a metaphysical realist notion of what knowledge and reality is. This shows the Aristotelian [philosophy](#) is heavily committed to concept reality in the context of their time. Aristotle's realist perspective may not be applicable to the modern day standards of realism, however his realist

view stood out beyond his time where in the philosophers' inclination is to idealism. Aristotle's idea of the truth is the reason why he is committed with the realist perspective. "Aristotle's remarks about truth show his commitment to metaphysical realism". (Irwin, 1988, p.5) This statement explains why the truth is an important concept in Aristotle's Realist view, because it boils down to the collection facts that will be the basis of his inquiry that will create an objective reality. What also sets the Aristotelian realist view to the Thucydidean is its triviality.

The attempt, however, to render life as it is, to use language as a kind of undistorting mirror of, or perfectly transparent window to, the "real" is fraught with contradictions. Realism in this simplified sense must assume a one-to-one relationship between the signifier (the word, "tree" for example) and the thing it represents (the actual arboreal object typically found in forests). Realism must, in effect, disguise its own status as artifice, must try and force language into transparency through an appeal to our ideologically constructed sense of the real. The reader must be addressed in such a way that he or she is always, in some way, saying, "Yes. That's it, that's how it really is."

Realism can never fully offer up the world in all its complexity, its irreducible plenitude. Its verisimilitude is an *effect* achieved through the deployment of certain literary and ideological conventions which have been invested with a kind of truth value. The use of an omniscient narrator who gives us access to a character's thoughts, feelings and motivations, for example, is a highly formalized convention that produces a sense of psychological depth; the characters seem to have "lives" independent of the text itself. They, of course, do not; the sense that they do is achieved entirely by the fact that both the author and the reader share these codes of the real. The consensual nature of such codes is so deep that we forget that we are in the presence of fiction. As Terry Eagleton notes, The sign as "reflection," "expression" or "representation" denies the *productive* character of language: it suppresses the fact that what we only have a "world" at all because we have language to signify it. (136)

The realist novel first developed in the nineteenth century and is the form we associate with the work of writers such as Austen, Balzac, George Eliot and Tolstoy. According to Barthes, the narrative or plot of a realist novel is structured around an opening enigma which throws the conventional cultural and signifying practices into disarray. In a detective novel, for example, the opening enigma is usually a murder, or a theft. The event throws the world into a paranoid state of suspicion; the reader and the protagonist can no longer trust anyone because signs--people, objects, words--no longer have the obvious meaning they had before the event. But the story must move inevitably towards [closure](#), which in the realist novel involves some dissolution or resolution of the enigma: the murderer is caught, the case is solved, the hero marries the girl. The realist novel drives toward the final re-establishment of harmony and thus re-assures the reader that the value system of signs and cultural practices which he or she shares with the author is not in danger. The political affiliation of the realist novel is thus evident; in trying to show us the world as it is, it often reaffirms, in the last instance, the way things are.

As Catherine Belsey notes, classic realism is "still the dominant popular mode in literature, film, and television drama" (67). It has been denounced as the crudest form of the [readerly text](#), and its conventions subverted and parodied by the [modern novel](#), [the new novel](#) and [postmodern novel](#). However, the form, like the capitalist mode of production with which it is historically coincident, has shown remarkable resiliency. It will no doubt continue to function, if only anti-thetically, as one of the chief influences on the development of [hypertext fiction](#).

Although his fiction represented all classes of French society, Balzac was one of the first authors to focus his work on the lives of ordinary French citizens. He tried to depict life and society as they truly were. He used detail to great effect, and he was also one of the first authors to make character and psychology one of the central concerns of his writing. It's no wonder that he influenced a huge number of important authors, from Fyodor Dostoevsky to Marcel Proust.

Balzac is best known for his 'Human Comedy,' a collection of more than ninety novels and essays concerning French society in the early nineteenth century, This really cemented his reputation as a literary realist, which is what makes his foray into travel writing all that more fascinating."

This fascination with the exotic prompted Balzac to depart from his established role as novelist and embrace the realm of fantasy travel-writing. "This was a departure from his usual style in another sense too, in that it was a work of considerable humor, almost tongue-in-cheek."

To the European armchair traveler of the 1830s, Java was as remote as the moon. Balzac seemed well aware of this as he gave free rein to his imagination. Alongside true descriptions of Java, gleaned from the real-life traveler he had interviewed, Balzac concocted stories of a magical land inhabited by civilized monkeys, where coconuts were in fact dragon eggs, and where women could conceive by being exposed to the heat of the sun.

Novelist Honoré de Balzac is generally hailed as the grandfather of literary Realism in the long series of novels and

stories he titled *La Comédie humaine* (The Human Comedy), and which attempted systematically to render a portrait of all aspects of the France of his time from the lowest thief or prostitute to the highest aristocrat or political leader. The title of the series was chosen to contrast with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which had portrayed everything except the earthly human realm.

His attention to detail was obsessive, with long passages of description of settings being a characteristic feature of his work. Today readers resist such descriptive writing, but before films and television were invented, it had a magical effect on people, causing the world depicted to explode from the page in an almost tangible fashion. ... [19th century readers] welcomed lengthy novels (often published serially, over a series of weeks or even months) in the same way we greet a satisfying television series which becomes a staple of our lives. Like such a television series, [Balzac's] works also incorporated a device for maintaining his audience: the continual reappearance of certain characters from one work to the next – now as protagonists, now as secondary figures. The idea is an old one, going back to classic bodies of work such as the Homeric epics and the Medieval Arthurian romances; but it had a different effect in Balzac's work: readers could recognize a slightly altered version of the world they themselves inhabited as they moved from story to story.

What is not realistic about Balzac's fiction is his plots, filled with sensational conspiracies and crimes and wildly improbable coincidences. Balzac's works are still essentially Romantic creations with a Realistic veneer.

Gustave Flaubert

It was Gustave Flaubert who in 1857 produced the seminal work from which later literary Realism was to flow: *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert had begun his writing career as most young authors in his time did, as a Romantic, laboring on a tale of Medieval mysticism which was eventually published as *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (The Temptation of Saint Anthony). When he read an early draft of this work to some friends, they urged him to attempt something more down to earth. He chose the story of an adulterous woman married to an unimaginative country physician unable to respond to – or even comprehend – her romantic longings. Drawing on the real-life stories of two women – Delphine Delamare and Louise Pradier – whose experiences he was intimately familiar with, Flaubert labored to turn journalism into art while avoiding the romantic clichés he associated with his heroine's fevered imagination.

Like Balzac, he engaged in systematic research, modeling the village in his novel on an actual country town and even drawing a map of it detailed enough to allow scholars to catch him when he has Emma Bovary turn in the wrong direction on one of her walks. Unlike Balzac, he avoided the sensational sort of plot lines characteristic of Romantic novels. To modern readers a married woman carrying on two adulterous affairs and then committing suicide may seem fairly sensational, but it is important to note that there was a long tradition of tales of female adultery in French literature stretching back as far as the Middle Ages. What Flaubert did with the theme was give adultery the shocking impact of the tabloids by stripping his tale of the high romantic idealism that usually justified adultery; instead he systematically satirized his heroine's bourgeois taste for exotic art and sensational stories. The novel is almost an anti-romantic tract.

Despite the fact that it is generally agreed to be one of the most finely crafted works to be created in the 19th century, it would probably never have had the impact it did if *Madame Bovary* had not also been the subject of a sensational obscenity trial. So restrained were the standards of polite fiction in mid-19th-century France that many modern readers go right past the big "sex scenes" which got Flaubert into trouble without noticing them (hints: look for Rodolphe to smoke while working on his harness just after making love with Emma for the first time while she experiences the afterglow, and for Emma to toss torn-up pieces of a note out of her carriage during her lovemaking with Léon). However, they were enough to outrage the defenders of middle-class morality. The prosecution was particularly indignant that Emma did not seem to suffer for her sins. Flaubert's clever lawyer successfully argued that her grotesquely described death made the novel into a moral tale; but the fact is that she dies not because she is an adultress but because she is a shopaholic.

It is not only the literary style of *Madame Bovary* that is anti-Romantic, it is its subject as well. The narrative clearly portrays Emma as deluded for trying to model her life after the Romantic fiction she loves. The novel is a sort of anti-Romantic manifesto, and its notoriety spread its message far and wide. It is worth noting, however, that Flaubert returned to Romanticism from time to time in his career, for instance in *Salammbô*, a colorful historical novel set in ancient Carthage.

If there are moral facts, how can we know them? For a realist, moral facts are as certain as mathematical facts. Moral facts and mathematical facts are abstract entities, and as such, are different in kind from natural facts. One cannot literally display moral facts as one could display, say, a plant. One can display a token of the type, for example one can write "lying for personal gain is wrong" or one can write an equation; however, one cannot observe moral and mathematical facts in quite the same way as one can observe, with the aid of a microscope, chlorophyll in a leaf. Such limitations of experience do not stop realists and antirealists from disagreeing on virtually

every aspect of the moral practices that seem to presuppose the existence of moral facts. The list of contested areas includes moral language, moral truth, moral knowledge, moral objectivity, moral psychology, and so on. These areas are not discrete but intermingle.

The moral realist may argue for the view that there are moral facts as follows:

(1) Moral sentences are sometimes true.

(2) A sentence is true only if the truth-making relation holds between it and the thing that makes it true.

(3) Thus, true moral sentences are true only because there holds the truth-making relation between them and the things that make them true.

Therefore,

(4) The things that make some moral sentences true must exist.

It is a short inference from the existence of the things that make some moral sentences true to the existence of moral facts.

The moral antirealist can respond to the argument by denying any of the three premises. The antirealist could be a non-descriptivist in rejecting premise (1): no moral sentences are true for they do not describe how the world is; or, she may reject a version of the [correspondence theory of truth](#) by denying premise (2): she may argue that a sentence can be true even if there holds no truth-making relation between it and the thing that makes it true. For instance, she may be a proponent of the coherence theory of truth, which holds that a sentence can be true only when there is a truth making relation between it and other sentences relevant to it. Or, she may even reject as illegitimate the inference from "things that make some moral sentences true" to the "existence of moral facts."

In the past, many antirealists were noncognitivists, holding that moral judgments are not cognitive states like ordinary beliefs: that is, antirealists hold that unlike beliefs, the essential function or aim of moral judgments is not to represent the world accurately. (A non-descriptivist claim is that cognitivism—more specifically descriptivism—is necessary, but not sufficient for moral realism, as will be shown presently.) Moral judgments are, according to the noncognitivist, mental states of some other kind: they are emotions, desires, or intentions of the sort that are expressed by commands or prescriptions.

If moral judgments are expressed by commands or prescriptions, then there cannot be literal moral truths. (Cf. Wright 1993. He argues that the focal discussion in the realist/antirealist debate should be about the acceptable theories of truth.) If there are no literal moral truths, then no moral judgments may be cited as evidence for knowing how the world is. Moral knowledge can no longer be considered as descriptive or propositional; or, no one is justified in believing certain things about the world in making moral judgments. This illustrates how the noncognitivist analysis of moral judgments can be escalated into the antirealist rejection of (those good names that we take for granted when we participate in moral practices such as) "moral truths" and "moral knowledge." The antirealist's noncognitivism threatens moral objectivity as well. Objectivity is to be found within the world. If moral judgments are not about accurately describing the world—for example, if moral judgments are about us—then moral objectivity will not be found within the world. If moral objectivity is to be found within us, then it is not the same objectivity with which we began, or, so had been the old antirealist's way.

According to a platonic realist, directions exist and have a nature which is independent of anyone's beliefs, linguistic practices, conceptual schemes, and so on. But doesn't the availability of (A), (B), and (C) undermine the existence claim at the heart of platonic realism? After all, (A), (B), and (C) allow us to paraphrase any sentence whose truth appears to entail the existence of abstract objects into a sentence whose truth involves only the existence of concrete inscriptions. Doesn't this show that an analytic reduction can aid someone wishing to question the existence claim involved in a particular form of realism? There is a powerful argument, first developed by William Alston (1958), and convincingly resuscitated by Crispin Wright (1983, Ch.1), that suggests not. The analytic reductionist who wishes to wield the contextual definitions against the existence claim at the heart of platonic realism takes them to show that the apparent reference to abstract objects on the left-hand sides of the definitions is *merely* apparent: in fact, the truth of the relevant sentences entails only the existence of a range of concrete inscriptions. But the platonic realist can retort: what the contextual definitions show is that the apparent *lack* of reference to abstract objects on the *right-hand* sides is merely apparent. In fact, the platonic realist can say, the truth of the sentences figuring on the right-hand sides implicitly involves reference to abstract objects. If there is no way to break this deadlock the existence of the analytic reductive paraphrases will leave the existence claim at the heart of the relevant form of realism untouched. So the issue of this style of reductionism appears to be orthogonal to debates between realists and non-realists.

Can the same be said about non-analytic styles of reductionism? Again, there is no straightforward connection between the issue of reductionism and the issue of realism. The problem is that, to borrow some terminology and examples from Railton 1989, some reductions will be *vindicative* whilst others will be *eliminativist*. For example, the reduction of water to H₂O is vindicative: it vindicates our belief that there is such a thing as water, rather than overturning it. On the other hand:

... the reduction of 'polywater'—a peculiar form of water thought to have been observed in laboratories in the 1960s

—to ordinary-water-containing-some-impurities-from-improperly-washed-glassware contributed to the conclusion that there really is no such substance as polywater (1989: 161).

Thus, a non-analytic reduction may or may not have implications for the existence dimension of a realistic view of a particular subject matter. And even if the existence dimension is vindicated, there is still the further question whether the objects and properties vindicated are independent of anyone's beliefs, linguistic practices, and so on. Again, there is no straightforward relationship between the issue of reductionism and the issue of realism.

Views Opposing the Existence Dimension (III): Expressivism about Morals

We saw above that for the subject-matter in question the error-theorist *agrees* with the realist that the truth of the atomic, declarative sentences of that area requires the existence of the relevant type of objects, or the instantiation of the relevant sorts of properties. Although the realist and the error-theorist agree on this much, they of course disagree on the question of whether the relevant type of objects exist, or on whether the relevant sorts of properties are instantiated: the error-theorist claims that they don't, so that the atomic, declarative sentences of the area are systematically and uniformly false, the realist claims that at least in some instances the relevant objects exist or the relevant properties are instantiated, so that the atomic, declarative sentences of the area are at least in some instances true. We also saw that an error-theory about a particular area could be motivated by epistemological worries (Field) or by a combination of epistemological and metaphysical worries (Mackie).

Another way in which the existence dimension of realism can be resisted is via expressivism. Whereas the realist and the error-theorist agree that the sentences of the relevant area are *truth-apt*, apt to be assessed in terms of truth and falsity, the realist and the expressivist (alternatively non-cognitivist, projectivist) disagree about the truth-aptness of those sentences. It is a fact about English that sentences in the declarative mood ('The beer is in the fridge') are conventionally used for making assertions, and assertions are true or false depending on whether or not the fact that is asserted to obtain actually obtains. But there are other grammatical moods that are conventionally associated with different types of speech-act. For example, sentences in the imperatival mood ('Put the beer in the fridge') are conventionally used for giving orders, and sentences in the interrogative mood ('Is the beer in the fridge?') are conventionally used for asking questions. Note that we would not ordinarily think of orders or questions as even apt for assessment in terms of truth and falsity: they are not truth-apt. Now the conventions mentioned here are not exceptionless: for example, one can use sentences in the declarative mood ('My favourite drink is Belhaven 60 shilling') to give an order (for some Belhaven 60 shilling), one can use sentences in the interrogative mood ('Is the Pope a Catholic?') to make an assertion (of whatever fact was the subject of the discussion), and so on. The expressivist about a particular area will claim that the realist is misled by the syntax of the sentences of that area into thinking that they are truth-apt: she will say that this is a case where the conventional association of the declarative mood with assertoric force breaks down. In the moral case the expressivist can claim that 'Stealing is wrong' is no more truth-apt than 'Put the beer in the fridge': it is just that the lack of truth-aptness of the latter is worn on its sleeve, while the lack of truth-aptness of the former is veiled by its surface syntax. (There are some very important issues concerning the relationship between minimalism about truth-aptitude and expressivism that we cannot go into here. See Divers and Miller (1995) and Miller (2013b) for some pointers. There are also some important differences between e.g. Ayer's emotivism and more modern forms of expressivism (such as those developed by Blackburn and Gibbard) that we gloss over here. For a useful account, see Schroeder 2009). So, if moral sentences are not conventionally used for the making of assertions, what are they conventionally used for? According to one classical form of expressivism, *emotivism*, they are conventionally used for the expression of emotion, feeling, or sentiment. Thus, A.J. Ayer writes:

If I say to someone, 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money', I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, 'You stole that money'. In adding that this action is wrong, *I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval about it.* It is as if I had said, 'You stole that money', in a peculiar tone of horror, or written with the addition of some special exclamation marks. The tone, or the exclamation marks, adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence. *It merely serves to show that the expression of it is attended by certain feelings in the speaker* (Ayer 1946: 107, emphases added).

It follows from this that:

If I now generalise my previous statement and say, 'Stealing money is wrong,' I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning—that is, expresses no proposition that can be either true or false (1946: 107).

Emotivism faces many problems, discussion of which is not possible here (for a survey, see Miller 2003a Ch.3).

One problem that has been the bugbear of all expressivist versions of non-realism, the 'Frege-Geach Problem', is so-called because the classic modern formulation is by Peter Geach (1965), who attributes the original point to Frege. According to emotivism, when I sincerely utter the sentence 'Murder is wrong' I am not expressing a belief or making an assertion, but rather expressing some non-cognitive sentiment or feeling, incapable of being true or false.

Thus, the emotivist claims that in contexts where ‘is wrong’ is being applied to an action-type it is being used to express a sentiment or feeling of disapproval towards actions of that type. But what about contexts in which it is not being applied to an action type? An example of such a sentence would be ‘If murder is wrong, then getting little brother to murder people is wrong’. In the antecedent of this ‘is wrong’ is clearly not being applied to anything (compare: in uttering ‘If snow is black then it is not white’ I am not applying ‘is black’ to snow). So what account can the emotivist give of the use of ‘Murder is wrong’ within ‘unasserted contexts’, such as the antecedent of the conditional above? Since it is not there used to express disapproval of murder, the account of its semantic function must be different from that given for the apparently straightforward assertion expressed by ‘Murder is wrong’. But now there is a problem in accounting for the following valid inference:

1. Murder is wrong.
2. If Murder is wrong, then getting your little brother to murder people is wrong.

Therefore:

1. Getting your little brother to murder people is wrong.

If the semantic function of ‘is wrong’ as it occurs within an asserted context in (1) is different from its semantic function as it occurs within an unasserted context in (2), isn’t someone arguing in this way simply guilty of equivocation? In order for the argument to be valid, the occurrence of ‘Murder is wrong’ in (1) has to *mean the same thing* as the occurrence of ‘Murder is wrong’ in (2). But if ‘is wrong’ has a different semantic function in (1) and (2), then it certainly doesn’t mean the same thing in (1) and (2), and so neither do the sentences in which it appears. So the above argument is apparently no more valid than:

1. My beer has a head on it.
2. If my beer has a head on it, then it must have eyes and ears.

Therefore:

1. My beer must have eyes and ears.

This argument is obviously invalid, because it relies on an equivocation on two senses of ‘head’, in (4) and (5) respectively.

It is perhaps worth stressing why the Frege-Geach problem doesn’t afflict ethical theories which see ‘Murder is wrong’ as truth-apt, and sincere utterances of ‘Murder is wrong’ as capable of expressing straightforwardly truth-assessable beliefs. According to theories like these, moral *modus ponens* arguments such as the argument above from (1) and (2) to (3) are just like non-moral cases of *modus ponens* such as

1. Smith is in Glasgow;
2. If Smith is in Glasgow then Smith is in Scotland;

Therefore,

1. Smith is in Scotland.

Why is this non-moral case of *modus ponens* not similarly invalid in virtue of the fact that ‘Smith is in Glasgow’ is asserted in (7), but not in (8)? The answer is of course that the state of affairs asserted to obtain by ‘Smith is in Glasgow’ in (7) is the same as that whose obtaining is merely entertained in the antecedent of (8). In (7) ‘Smith is in Glasgow’ is used to assert that a state of affairs obtains (Smith’s being in Glasgow), and in (8) it is asserted that if that state of affairs obtains, so does another (Smith’s being in Scotland). Throughout, the semantic function of the sentences concerned is given in terms of the states of affairs asserted to obtain in simple assertoric contexts. And it is difficult to see how an emotivist can say anything analogous to this with respect to the argument from (1) and (2) to (3): it is difficult to see how the semantic function of ‘Murder is wrong’ in the antecedent of (2) could be given in terms of the sentiment it allegedly expresses in (1).

The Frege-Geach challenge to the emotivist is thus to answer the following question: how can you give an emotivist account of the occurrence of moral sentences in ‘unasserted contexts’—such as the antecedents of conditionals—without jeopardising the intuitively valid patterns of inference in which those sentences figure? Philosophers wishing to develop an expressivistic alternative to moral realism have expended a great deal of energy and ingenuity in devising responses to this challenge. See in particular Blackburn’s development of ‘quasi-realism’, in his (1984) Chs 5 and 6, (1993) Ch.10, (1998) Ch.3 and Gibbard’s ‘norm-expressivism’, in his (1990) Ch.5, and further refined in his (2003). For criticism see Hale (1993) and (2002), and Kölbel (2002) Ch.4. For an overview, see Schroeder (2008) and Miller (2013a), Chs 4 and 5. For very useful surveys of recent work on expressivism, see Schroeder (2009) and Sinclair (2009).

[Plato](#)'s solution is that universals **do** indeed exist, although **not in the same way** that ordinary **physical objects** exist, but in a sort of **ghostly** mode of existence, **outside** of space and time, but not at any spatial or temporal distance from people's **bodies**. Thus, people cannot **see** or otherwise come into **sensory contact** with universals, and it is **meaningless** to apply the categories of space and time to

them, but they can nevertheless be **conceived** of and exist.

One type of universal defined by [Plato](#) is the **Form**, which is not a mental entity at all, but rather an **idea** or **archetype** or **original model** of which particular objects, properties and relations are **copies**. The \"forms\" (small \"f\") or appearances that we see, according to [Plato](#), are not real, but literally mimic the real \"Forms\" (capital \"F\"). Forms are capable of being **instantiated** by one or many different **particulars**, which are essentially material **copies** of the Forms - the particulars are said to **participate** in the Forms, and the Forms are said to **inhere** in the particulars.

According to [Plato](#), Platonic Forms possess the **highest** and most **fundamental** kind of reality. They are **perfect** because they are **unchanging**. The world of Forms is **separate** from our own world (the world of **substances**) and is the **true** basis of reality. Removed from matter, Forms are the most **pure** of all things. True **knowledge** or **intelligence** is the ability to grasp the world of Forms with one's **mind**.

[Plato](#)'s main **evidence** for the existence of Forms is **intuitive** only, arguing from **human perception** (a generalization which applies equally to objects which are clearly **different** e.g. blue sky and blue cloth), and from **perfection** (a perfect model for various imperfect copies, which are **different** but recognizably copies of the **same thing** e.g. flawed circles must be imperfect copies of the same thing).

[Plato](#) himself was well aware of the **limitations** of his theory, and in particular concocted the **Third Man Argument** against his own theory: if a Form and a particular are **alike**, then there must be **another** (third) thing by possession of which they are alike, leading to an **infinite regression**. In a later (rather unsatisfactory) version of the theory, he tried to **circumvent** this objection by positing that particulars do not **actually** exist as such: they **mime** the Forms, merely appearing to be particulars.

[Aristotle](#) points out that proof of Forms and universals rests on **prior knowledge**: if we did not **know** what universals were in the first place, we would have no idea of what we were **trying to prove**, and so could not be trying to prove it. He also asserted that universals and particulars **imply each other**: one is logically **prior** or **posterior** to the other and, if they are to be regarded as **distinct**, then they cannot be \"universal\" and \"particulars\".

Other critics have argued that Forms, not being **spatial**, cannot have a shape, so it **cannot be** that a particular of, say, an apple is the **same shape** as the Form of an apple. They have also questioned how one can have the **concept** of a Form existing in some **special realm** of the universe, **apart** from space and time, since such a concept cannot come from **sense-perception**.

Modal Realism is the view, notably propounded by **David Lewis** (1941 - 2001), that **possible worlds** are just as real as the **actual** world we live in, and not just **abstract possibilities**. The **term** goes back to [Gottfried Leibniz](#)'s theory of possible worlds, which he used to analyze **modal** notions of **necessity** and **possibility**.

Lewis claimed that:

- Possible worlds **exist**: they are just as **real** as our world.
- Possible worlds are the **same sort** of things as our world: they differ in **content**, not in **kind**.
- Possible worlds cannot be reduced to something more **basic**: they are **irreducible entities** in their own right.
- When we talk of our \"**actual**\" world, the term \"actual\" is **indexical** (merely indicating some particular **state of affairs**): it does not mean that our world is any **more real** than any other.
- Possible worlds are **spatio-temporally isolated** from each other: they do not exist in the same space or time.
- Possible worlds are **causally isolated** from each other: they do not **interact** with each other.

Lewis himself raises several lines of **argument against** the theory, and then proceeds to **counter** them, and it has proven to be remarkably **resilient**, despite its apparent affront to **common sense**.

Moral Realism (or **Moral Objectivism**) is the **meta-ethical** view (see the section on [Ethics](#)) that there are **objective moral values** which are **independent** of our perception of them or our stance towards them. Therefore, moral **judgments** describe moral **facts**. It is a **cognitivist** view (cognitivism being the view that ethical sentences express **propositions** and are therefore **truth-apt** i.e. they are able to be **true or false**), and it contrasts with **expressivist** or **non-cognitivist** theories of moral judgment, **error theories**, **fictionalist** theories and **constructivist** or **relativist** theories.

[Plato](#) and (arguably) [Immanuel Kant](#) and [Karl Marx](#) were moral realists, as well as more contemporary philosophers such as [G. E. Moore](#) and [Ayn Rand](#) (1905 - 1982).

Moral Realism purportedly allows the ordinary rules of **logic** to be applied straightforwardly to **moral statements**. It also allows for the **resolution** of moral disagreements, because if two moral beliefs **contradict** one another, Moral Realism (unlike some other meta-ethical systems) says that they **cannot both be right** and so there should be some way of resolving the situation.

Critics have argued that, while Moral Realism may be able to explain how to **resolve** moral conflicts, it cannot

explain how these conflicts **arose** in the first place. Others have argued Moral Realism posits a kind of \"moral fact\" which is **non-material** and **unobservable** and therefore not accessible to the **scientific method**.