OBJECTIVISM VERSUS REALISM

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I. THE GENERAL IDEA

Realism and objectivism about a given subject matter are often taken as equivalent, and the tacit assumption that one cannot have one without the other is widespread. Yet some philosophers resist this trend, even though it might not be obvious from their terminology. Berkeley advocates idealism over realism about material objects in order to avoid skepticism and secure the possibility of objective knowledge. Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, pursues an avowedly antirealist account of the supposed objectivity of synthetic *a priori* judgments about nature. More recently, John Mackie's error theory of moral discourse[1] claims that moral judgments are to be understood realistically, but that this provides no basis for moral objectivism. As we will see, it's not difficult to come up with other examples.

In this paper, I advocate a distinction between realism and objectivism. My main goals are to clarify the distinction, make it plausible that it is legitimate, illustrate its applications in various fields of philosophy, and draw attention to its value. I take a wide perspective, and, although I do some preliminary groundwork on the underpinnings of the distinction, I do not seek either ultimate foundations or anything approaching the full degree of precision that the subject matter may allow.

In broad strokes, my approach is as follows. I treat realism about affirmations of a given type[2] as the view that these affirmations are to be understood as factual

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[1] John Mackie. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977): ch. 1.

[2] The proposal that the concept of realism and others like it should be applied primarily to types of sentences or sentential speech acts is due mainly to Dummett (see e.g., Michael Dummet, "Realism," 1963. *Truth and Other Enigmas* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978]: 145–65, 146 and "Realism,"

assertions that attempt to describe features of a largely independent reality,[1] and that they are correct if and only if they manage to do so. I treat objectivism about affirmations of a given type as the view that they are subject to adequate, nonarbitrary standards of correctness, and that there are a significant number of nontrivial affirmations of this type that can be known to be correct.[4] So understood, realism and objectivism about affirmations of a given type agree that these affirmations can be correct, and that correctness is determined by nonarbitrary standards. They differ potentially on the nature of the standards and on the possibility of knowing that the standards are satisfied. Realism endorses a particular standard, viz., the standard of what we could call *robust truth*—which could be cashed out as descriptive adequacy, fact fitting, or something of that ilk. An important part of what this requires is that the truth-values of the affirmations concerned depend upon the references of their constituent terms (including their predicates). Realism, however, leaves open the possibility that speakers can never know whether a nontrivial affirmation of the relevant type is correct. Objectivism does not require the standards of correctness to be of any particular type, but—unlike realism—is committed to the possibility of knowing that they are satisfied in some nontrivial cases. On this understanding, realism, objectivism, and their denials can be combined in four possible ways: realism with objectivism, realism with antiobjectivism, antirealism with objectivism, and antirealism with antiobjectivism. It is also possible to endorse or reject either realism or objectivism on a given subject matter while remaining neutral on the other.

This picture has useful applications in several fields of philosophy, not least metaethics, where a yearning for objectivity all too often prompts a hasty commitment to realism. Korsgaard provocatively asserts that, "Having discovered that he needs an unconditional answer, the realist concludes straightaway that he has found one."[5] Although this is unfair to normative realists who argue for their

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1982, *The Seas of Language* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993]: 230–76, 230). Although I often follow this norm, I do not always find it sufficiently accommodating. As we will see, it is possible to be a realist with respect to a type of sentence—by counting sentences of that type as broadly descriptive—without being a realist in relation to a class of apparently referential terms that may occur in them—by declining to count them as robustly referential. Note also that it is possible to take different positions on affirmations of a given type with respect to different speech communities on the basis of differences in their linguistic and nonlinguistic practices. This point is, however, easy enough to accommodate, and I will not pursue it further.

[1] I say "largely independent" rather than "independent" *tout court* to leave room for the possibility of realism about, for example, self-ascriptions of the agent's current mental states.

[4] I take it for granted that for any class of affirmations with respect to which talk of correctness makes any sense at all, it will be possible to know that some trivial affirmations in the class (e.g., tautologies) are correct. If this were all that objectivism required, it would be much too easy to secure.

[5] Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, ed. Onora O'Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996): 33.

position, many writers and teachers in ethics simply assume that realism must be correct, or that it is an obvious fallback position that bears no burden of proof. I suspect that in many cases, such attitudes are best explained by a commitment to ethical objectivity coupled with the assumption that objectivism requires realism. As we will see, this is an avoidable error. In a recent paper that makes the case for a new form of normative expressivism,[6] I suggest without pushing the point very far that it is possible for expressivists to do justice to the thought that normative judgments can be objective. Since expressivism is a kind of antirealism, this implies that it is possible to be an objectivist without being a realist about the normative. At least two normative realists accept this possibility, or something very much like it: Railton, who describes his own position as "stark, raving moral realism,"[7] does not rule out "a position that combines Literal Truth with anti-realism about morality"[8]; and Scanlon, who is a realist about normative reasons, allows that objectivism about normative reasons does not require realism.[9] Prompted by Scanlon's discussion, in another recent paper[10] I defend the claim that practical reasons can be objective in a way that is consistent with both realism and antirealism. Apart from its wider interest, the present paper provides a frame-work and general theoretical back-up for these earlier pieces.[11]

Let me add at this point that different approaches to first-order normative ethics, such as utilitarianism and Kantianism, could be combined with either metaethical realism or metaethical antirealism—as well as with either metaethical objectivism or metaethical antiobjectivism. For those who reject antiobjectivism, this allows for the possibility of underwriting the authority of the fundamental normative principles of the first-order theory by treating those principles as expressions of objectivist standards of correctness rather than as expressions of criteria of robust normative truth. This strategy would be less demanding than the realist alternative. The question of whether it might succeed is beyond the scope of this paper.

Because my conceptions of realism and objectivism are in part revisionary, they are at odds with some everyday and philosophical intuitions. This includes the widespread intuition that realism and objectivism go together. I nonetheless believe that my conception of realism captures most of the philosophical positions that are widely labeled as "realism," and excludes most of their contraries. But it

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[6] Michael Pendlebury, "How to Be a Normative Expressivist," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 80 (2010): 182–207.

[7] Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," 1986, *Fact, Values, and Norms: Essays toward a Morality of Consequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003): 3–42, 5.

[8] Railton, "Subject-ive and Objective," *Ratio* (New Series) 8 (1995): 200–76, 262.

[9] T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998): 58–64.

[10] Pendlebury, "Objective Reasons," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 45 (2007): 533–63.

[11] It also develops and improves significantly on the account of the requirements of objective standards of correctness invoked in Pendlebury (2007).

does not do full justice to everyday nonphilosophical usage.[12] If someone sincerely says "As exist," "As really exist," "There are As," or "There really are As," then she is, in an everyday sense, a realist about As. It does not, however, follow that she is a realist about As in terms of my conception of realism, because it remains a question whether her assertion is best understood realistically. To illustrate, in my terms, it is not possible to establish realism about normative reasons merely on the ground that "in deliberating, you commit yourself to there being (normative) reasons relevant to your deliberation."[13] There are, indeed, at least two good reasons to question this argument. First, realism cannot be a very substantial or interesting philosophical position if it can be bought so cheap. Second, most normative antirealists would readily accept that deliberation involves a commitment to reasons while denying that this commitment is to be understood realistically as a robust factual belief.

The term "objectivism" does not occur much in either philosophical or everyday discourse,[14] but when it does, it often expresses a commitment to the possibility of objective inquiry that could yield knowledge, and, along with that, opposition to subjectivism, relativism, and skepticism. My conception of objectivism is intended as a reconstruction of this usage. In elaborating this conception, I will be guided by the assumption that one should be an objectivist about mathematics, modern science, and responsible everyday discourse concerning straightforward matters of fact,[15] but an antiobjectivist about mere expressions of feelings (because they make no claim to objectivity) and astrology and creation science (because their standards of correctness are arbitrary).[16] This suggests two

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[12] The same applies to some other philosophical conceptions of realism, including those of Dummett and Wright, which I discuss briefly in section II, and that of Kit Fine ("The Question of Realism," *Philosopher's Imprint* 1.1 [2001] <www.philosophersimprint.org/001001>).

[13] David Enoch, "An Outline of an Argument for Robust Metanormative Realism," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Volume 2*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007): 21–50, 38.

[14] I set aside its use as a name for the views of Ayn Rand (see, e.g., Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* [New York: Penguin/Meridian, 1993]).

[15] As this suggests, objectivism is consistent with fallibilism and hyperbolic skepticism.

[16] In order to keep things simple, I will bracket off something that I am inclined to accept, viz., that there are degrees of objectivity corresponding roughly to the relative size of the class of nontrivial affirmations in the field of discourse that could be known to be correct. If so, then objectivism is also a matter of degree. This seems right. It would, for example, make sense to be more of an objectivist about mathematics or chemistry than about psychology or sociology. However, in this paper, I write as if that there is an absolute divide between objectivism and antiobjectivism, and assume that objectivism involves a commitment to a class of affirmations that can be known to be correct, which is of significant but otherwise indeterminate size.

In an interesting and suggestive paper, Josuah Gert ("Cognitivism, Expressivism, and Agreement in Response," in Shafer-Landau [2007]: 77–110) argues for degrees of realism corresponding to degrees of agreement in response, but does not distinguish between realism and objectivism (or realism and cognitivism). Although Gert's arguments could be adapted to help support the view that

key conditions for objectivity in a given field.[17] First, whether an affirmation in the field is correct should be independent of whether it is affirmed, whether it is judged to be correct, and whether it is a consequence of the views of the speaker or of speakers who participate in the discourse.[18] In other words, objectivity involves the possibility of robust ignorance and error. This rules out subjectivism and relativism. Second, it should be possible to identify a significant number of nontrivial affirmations in the field as correct. This rules out total skepticism. It is clear that these conditions of objectivity capture the commitments of objectivism that I have mentioned.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. I begin by illuminating my conceptions of realism and objectivism and drawing attention to some of their attractions in two ways: first, by comparing and contrasting these conceptions with those of Michael Dummett and Crispin Wright (section II), and, second, by illustrating how they could be used to classify and make sense of different positions that philosophers have taken or might be tempted to take on various subject matters (section III). I then add some further flesh to my conceptions of realism and objectivism (sections IV and V), primarily by discussing criteria for evaluating realist and objectivist theses. I end with a brief illustration of how these criteria can be applied to support objectivism without realism in one small corner of the normative domain, viz., that of theoretical reasons for beliefs about the macro-physical environment (section VI).

II. COMPARISONS

My conceptions of realism and objectivism are, I hold, preferable to those of Dummett and Wright insofar as they are more flexible.[19] Although Dummett

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there are degrees of objectivism (and to reconcile expressivism with objectivism), I do not think that they provide a good case for degrees of realism.

[17] There are overlaps between the following conditions and Nozick's conditions of "objective facts" (Robert Nozick, *Invariances: The Structure of the Objective World* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001]: 75–79). However, Nozick (94–99) operates with two distinct notions of objectivity, viz., that of an objective fact and that of an objective belief (which he treats as a belief that is unbiased). Notwithstanding some common ground between Nozick and me, neither of his two notions corresponds very closely to my conception of objectivity, which applies to subject matters or types of discourse rather than states of affairs, beliefs, or individual assertions.

[18] This formulation applies to the basic case. Additional qualifications would be necessary to accommodate special cases, including those of assertions with implications about what is asserted, what is judged to be correct, or what is a consequence of the views of either the speaker or speakers who participate in the discourse.

[19] See for example Dummett (1963); "The Reality of the Past" (1969), *Truth* (1978): 358–74; "What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)" (1976), in *Seas* (1993): 34–93; 1982; "Realism and Anti-Realism" (1993), in *Seas* (1993): 462–78; and *Truth and the Past* [New York: Columbia UP, 2004], and

entered the field much earlier, I will consider Wright first because his views seem easier to pin down.

Wright does not distinguish between realism and objectivism,[20] and so provides no room for either realism with antiobjectivism or antirealism with objectivism. Realism according to Wright's account is something like the disjunction of realism and objectivism according to mine. For, in Wright's terms, the distinguishing mark of realism about affirmations of a given type is a commitment to the view that these affirmations, as he puts it, "exhibit . . . Cognitive Command."[21] This is roughly equivalent to my saying that they are governed by nonarbitrary standards of correctness.[22] Wright restricts his distinction between realism and antirealism to types of assertions, as reflected in his view that both realists and antirealists have access to a minimal notion of truth.[23] My two distinctions—between realism and antirealism, and between objectivism and antiobjectivism—apply more extensively to types of "affirmations," which is my term for a broad but not very well-defined class of sentences (or sentential speech acts) that includes assertions, directives, and exclamations.[24] Thus I can count ethical emotivism as a form of antirealism, but Wright cannot, because emotivism denies that moral affirmations are assertions. It will soon become evident that this limitation also applies to Dummett.[25]

Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) and *Saving the Differences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003). For a useful critical overview, see Bob Hale, "Realism and its Oppositions," *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Bob Hale and Crispin Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997): 271–308. The claim that my conceptions are preferable to those of Dummett and Wright with respect to their greater flexibility is intended to be modest: I do not come close to either of these authors in subtlety or depth, and am content to work much closer to the surface. I should also emphasize that the following comparisons are based on selected features of Dummett's and Wright's positions that I take mostly at face value. I do not deny that some details of their work may be in tension with some aspects of my interpretations, which are intended mainly to cast light on my own position.

[20] I do not know whether Wright ever uses the word "objectivism," but he clearly associates realism with a commitment to objectivity. This shows up in the title of the book in which he develops his account of realism, viz., *Truth and Objectivity* (Wright 1992), and more explicitly in his claim that "Realism about a discourse involves the conviction that, in its proper practice, we attain to a desirable objectivity" (Wright [1992]: 229).

[21] Wright (1992): 92.

[22] In Wright's ([1992]: 93) words, the claim that a discourse exhibits Cognitive Command "means that any disagreement within the discourse involves something worth describing as a *cognitive shortcoming*."

[23] Ibid: esp. 71–76.

[24] This broad use of "affirmation" contrasts with the very narrow use in Dummett ([1993]: see esp. 466), where the term covers only assertions with realistic truth conditions.

[25] Wright and Dummett are of course aware of this sort of limitation and would see it as consistent with their purposes. It should also be recognized that it is possible to remove the limitation without doing violence to their positions.

Dummett has a conception of realism plus at least two distinct conceptions of objectivism, one broad and one narrow. In terms of either of these conceptions, objectivism can apply only to types of assertions. On Dummett's broad conception,[26] which I take as primary, an objectivist about assertions of a given type in effect holds that these assertions are governed by nonarbitrary standards of truth.[27] Thus, Dummett's broad conception of objectivism is roughly equivalent to Wright's conception of realism/objectivism. Dummett restricts his distinction between realism and antirealism to types of assertions that are objective in this sense.[28] This allows for the possibility of antirealism with objectivism, but rules out realism with antiobjectivism. It will soon become evident that the same applies on Dummett's narrow conception of objectivism.

Positions that are objectivist in Dummett's broad sense include the following: all forms of realism; what Dummett regards as weak forms of antirealism, such as behaviorism and phenomenalism; and the strong forms of antirealism that especially interest him, such as verificationism and mathematical intuitionism. These are marked by a commitment to an epistemic notion of truth, and, along with that, the possibility of truth-value gaps and indeterminacies that are radical in the sense that they are not due to linguistic factors, such as ambiguity, vagueness, and presupposition failure.[29] As Dummett sees it, the main difference between realism and weak antirealism is that realism involves a commitment to bivalence, while weak antirealism, like strong antirealism, does not. But he thinks that the similarities between realism and weak antirealism run much deeper, because both are committed to a robust nonepistemic and nonminimalist notion of truth, as well as to what he calls the "principle of valence," in terms of which (vagueness and ambiguity aside) every meaningful assertion is either determinately true or determinately not true.[30] He therefore groups them together by counting both as objec-

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[26] Dummett (1993): esp. 466–67.

[27] As illustrated by this sentence, when the affirmations under consideration are assertions, I often use "truth" as equivalent to "correctness." Thus "truth" should not be understood as the robust descriptive truth of realism unless this is signaled either explicitly or contextually. It is also worth noting here that my notion of correctness is not the same as that of Dummett (1976): 48–50, where correctness is identified with warranted assertability.

[28] Dummett (1993): 467.

[29] See for example Dummett (1982): 258–63. Most of the time Dummett simply assumes that readers know he is not concerned with truth-value gaps and indeterminacies that are due to linguistic factors. When he says this more-or-less explicitly, he usually mentions vagueness and sometimes ambiguity. As far as I know, he does not mention presupposition failure explicitly. It should, however, be included given his claim that "There is really nothing to choose between the Russell view and the Frege-Strawson view of sentences containing empty proper names in respect of realism" (Dummett [1982]: 269).

[30] Dummett (1993): 467.

tivist in his narrow sense, which stands in opposition to strong antirealism.[31] .
Dummett is, indeed, sometimes ambivalent about his distinction between realism
and weak antirealism,[32] and on occasion he even assimilates them.[33]

Notwithstanding the affinities between positions that Dummett counts as real-
istic and those that he counts as weakly antirealistic, from my perspective it makes
good sense to group his weak and strong antirealism together. The reason is that,
just as strong antirealism involves a commitment to radical truth-value gaps, weak
antirealism involves a commitment to radical failure of reference. Consider the
case of a phenomenalist who holds that there is nothing in reality, either simple or
compound, for ordinary physical-object terms to refer to, and who therefore
proposes to use techniques of contextual definition to replace ordinary physical-
object assertions with assertions about actual and possible experiences in which
there are no terms that correspond to the original physical-object terms. Regard-
less of whether such a phenonenalist thinks that his counterfactual substitutes for
physical-object assertions are subject to the principle of valence, he is committed
to the view that because ordinary physical-object terms are pervasively liable to
radical reference-failure, it is better not to understand them as referential expres-
sions that occur as proper constituents of the relevant assertions.

This case also illustrates the important point that it is possible to be a realist
about assertions of a given type without being a realist about everything concern-
ing assertions of that type. If our phenomenalist is an analytical reductionist who
holds that assertions in his hypothetical phenomenalist language express the same
contents as the physical-object assertions for which they are substitutes and is
committed to these assertions being realistically true or false, then he is, at one
level, a realist about physical-object assertions. But he remains an antirealist about
physical objects inasmuch as he holds that physical-object terms are not, after all,
referential. This suggests that it may be possible to reinterpret Dummett's distinc-
tion between strong and weak antirealism as a distinction between antirealism
with respect to whole assertions (or the kinds of states of affairs that a realist might
take them to represent) and anti-realism with respect to terms (or the kinds of
things that a realist might take as their references). This would, incidentally, allow
us to make sense of Dummett's odd remark that "We do not take either . . . [the
Russell or the Frege-Strawson view of empty singular terms] as anti-realist,
because we no longer take Meinongian realism seriously"[34]—which suggests that
he thinks that there is a way in which they *are* anti-realist. On my interpretation,
that is just what they are with respect to nonexistent-object terms (or the non-

[31] Dummett (1982): esp. 235.

[32] See for example Dummett (1982): 269.

[33] See for example Dummett (1993): 467–468.

[34] Dummett (1982): 270.

existent object that Meinongian realists take as their references).³⁵ And this holds regardless of whether we "take Meinongian realism seriously."

In this light, I see my distinction between realism and antirealism as fairly similar to Dummett's except that mine is not restricted to assertions, but applies more broadly to all types of affirmations. However, I hasten to add that since realism requires the possibility of truth, it can never be justified with respect to affirmations other than assertions unless they can be reconstructed as assertions. I will draw attention to what could be the most important difference between Dummett's conception of realism and mine later. It is clear that Dummett's two conceptions of objectivism both differ from my conception of objectivism inasmuch as neither involves the commitment to the possibility of substantial knowledge that is crucial to mine.³⁶

Stepping back from the details, I think that my conceptions of realism and objectivism are preferable to those of Dummett and Wright to the extent that they are more broadly applicable and provide space for two important questions, viz., whether realism can be combined with antiobjectivism (which is excluded by both Dummett and Wright) and whether antirealism can be combined with objectivism (which is excluded by Wright).

III. EXAMPLES

Before unpacking my conceptions of realism and objectivism with a view to establishing their credentials and making good on the claim that they are independent, I would like to illustrate their use in classifying and making sense of different positions that philosophers have taken or might be tempted to take on various subject matters.

It is easy enough to find good examples of antirealist antiobjectivism. Anyone who has thought about the matter is both an antirealist and an antiobjectivist about exclamations that are mere expressions of feelings—like "Boo!", "Hurrah!", "Wow!", and "Yuk!"—which make absolutely no pretense at either describing reality or meeting standards of objective correctness. Wright³⁷ adopts the same position on what he calls "positive claims about comedy,"³⁸ that is, assertions to the effect that something is funny. This is a reasonable position for anyone who

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³⁵ Here I understand Meinongian realism as a commitment to a realistic relation of reference between nonexistent-object terms and nonexistent objects. I do not know Meinong's work well enough to be sure that he is a Meinongian realist in this sense.

³⁶ A commitment to the possibility of substantial knowledge is, however, involved in Dummett's conception of strong antirealism.

³⁷ Wright (1992): 7–11, 100–07.

³⁸ Ibid: 102.

thinks that a judgment that something is funny amounts to little more than an expression of amusement accompanied by the sense that others whose sense of humor one admires would also find it amusing. Emotivists (e.g., Ayer[39] and Stevenson[40]) and moral relativists (e.g., Harman[41]) are committed to both anti-realism and anti-objectivism on moral affirmations.

At the other extreme, realist objectivists include Platonists, such as Frege, on logic and mathematics; Leibniz on ultimate metaphysical reality; Kant on every-day judgments about nature[42]; Meinongian realists on nonexistent objects; com-monsense realists, like Thomas Reid, John McDowell,[43] a recent stage of Hilary Putnam,[44] and myself[45] on claims about the world around us; scientific realists on the theoretical claims of natural science; David Lewis[46] on assertions about pos-sible worlds; and most of those who are usually counted—or who count themselves—as moral realists, including Moore,[47] Sturgeon,[48] Railton,[49] Brink,[50] Scanlon,[51] and Shafer-Landau,[52] on moral affirmations.

Good examples of realist antiobjectivists include the stereotypical general skeptic of epistemology on claims about the external world and those who hold that theological judgments are to be understood realistically but are a matter of faith rather than reason or knowledge. Kant is a realist antiobjectivist about judgments of transcendent metaphysics inasmuch as he understands them as attempts to describe features of reality about which he thinks human knowledge is impossible. With some misgivings, I am inclined to count error theorists as realist antiobjectivists on the subject matter with which they are concerned. Think of

[39] A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd ed. (1936; London: Victor Gollancz, 1946) ch. VI.
[40] Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1944).
[41] Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended," *Philosophical Review* 84 (1975): 3–22.
[42] But Kant can be difficult to pigeonhole. My phrase "everyday judgments about nature" is meant to exclude both synthetic *a priori* judgments and transcendent judgments about nature (e.g., the judgment that the world has a beginning in time—or its denial).
[43] John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994).
[44] Hilary Putnam, "Sense, Nonsense and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind," *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (1994): 445–517.
[45] Michael Pendlebury, "Perception and Objective Knowledge," *The Proceeding of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, volume 5: *Epistemology*, ed. Richard Cobb-Stevens (Bowling Green: Philosophy Documentation Center, 2000): 29–38.
[46] David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
[47] G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, rev. ed., ed. Thomas Baldwin (1903; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993).
[48] Nicholas Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations," *Morality, Reason and Truth*, ed. David Copp and David Zimmerman (Totowa, NJ: Roman and Allanheld, 1985): 49–78.
[49] Railton (1986).
[50] David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).
[51] Scanlon (1998).
[52] Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

Hume on "bodies," Sellars on "the manifest image,"[53] and Mackie on morality.[54] The difficulty is that an error theorist may claim knowledge of the error that he posits. If he has this knowledge, there must be nonarbitrary standards of correctness for the relevant assertions which he knows not to be satisfied. This suggests that he should be treated as an objectivist. I prefer to count such an error theorist as an antiobjectivist for two reasons. First, he holds that none of the assertions concerned are objectively correct. Second, the knowledge that he claims is metatheoretical knowledge about the relevant conceptual frameworks rather than firstorder knowledge expressed by assertions made within it.

Antirealist objectivists include Kant on synthetic *a priori* judgments about nature; intuitionists and many other anti-Platonists on mathematics[55]; logical atomists on logic and modality; Kripke[56] and Stalnaker[57] on possible worlds; so-called "Humeans" on laws of nature, such as David Lewis[58]; general verificationists; instrumentalists on theoretical entities in natural science; idealists and phenomenalists on physical objects; behaviorists on mental states; Kant on maxims of conduct; Hare[59] on moral judgments; and Rawlsian constructivists on justice.[60] Robert Brandom's semantic inferentialism[61] appears to involve a commitment to global antirealism coupled with objectivism on everyday and scientific claims about the world. Anyone who thinks that recommendations are not assertions that are true or false but holds that recommendations of a given kind can be known to be objectively correct or incorrect is an antirealist objectivist about them.

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[53] Wilfred Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" (1962), *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1963): 1–40.

[54] Mackie (1977): ch. 1.

[55] This includes Hilary Putnam, despite his repudiation of the label "anti-realist" (which I take to be an expression of his rejection of mathematical intuitionism). I see Putnam's insistence that mathematical truths do not describe reality (Hilary Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004]: 52–67) as far more telling.

[56] Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (1972; Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

[57] Robert C. Stalnaker, *Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984): ch. 3.

[58] Lewis, "New Work for a Theory of Universals" (1983), *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 8–55; "Postscripts to 'A Subjectivist Guide to Objective Chance'," *Philosophical Papers*, vol. II (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 114–132; "Humean Supervenience Debugged," (1994) in Lewis (1999): 224–47.

[59] R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1963); *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Point and Method* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981); "Objective Prescriptions," *Philosophical Issues 4: Naturalism and Normativity*, ed. Enrique Villanueva (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1993) 15–32.

[60] See, for example, John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory" (1980), *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999): 303–58.

[61] Robert Brandom, *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994); *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004).

Normative expressivism is of course a form of antirealism, but the leading normative expressivists, Gibbard[62] and Blackburn,[63] are cagey about whether normative judgments are objective. Gibbard emphasizes the "objective pretensions in our normative talk,"[64] and devotes many pages to discussing how various ideas of objectivity apply to this talk.[65] But, as I read him, he does not claim that normative judgments can be objectively correct. Blackburn is quite ready to disparage relativism and skepticism,[66] but it is not clear that he thereby does any more than take a normative stance. However, an expressivist can embrace objectivism by insisting that normative stances can be objectively correct, and that it is sometimes possible to know that they are correct.[67] Ewing's "middle way in ethics,"[68] which is a conscious attempt to combine expressivism about normative judgments (which Ewing calls "subjectivism") with a commitment to the possibility of objective knowledge, is clearly a form of antirealist objectivism. The same applies to the approach to normative judgments that I begin to advance in my paper on expressivism.[69]

IV. REALISM

I turn now to the task of fleshing out my conceptions of realism and objectivism. I begin with realism in this section and proceed to objectivism in section V.

Concerning realism, what we have from sections I and II is that a realist about affirmations of a given type holds that these affirmations are "truth-apt" assertions,[70] that their primary function is descriptive,[71] that they are correct if and only

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[62] Alan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990); *Thinking How to Live* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[63] Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) pt. II; *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[64] Gibbard (1990): 155.

[65] Ibid: 153–250.

[66] See, for example, Blackburn (1998): ch. 9.

[67] The consistency of this position might be challenged on the ground that the concept of correctness is normative. If it is, then a normative expressivist is committed to an expressivist account of assertions of correctness. This implies that assertions of correctness are themselves mere expressions of normative stances, which leaves no external foothold for an account of their objectivity. I respond to this challenge in Pendlebury (2010) by arguing that "correct" in the relevant sense is not a normative predicate.

[68] A. C. Ewing, *Second Thoughts in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1959): ch. 11.

[69] Pendlebury (2010). My approach could be seen as a middle way in the spirit of Ewing even though my paper was complete before I learned of Ewing (1959). I thank Mark Timmons for drawing my attention to Ewing's work.

[70] Wright (1992): 27.

[71] This is meant to allow that they may also have nondescriptive functions.

if true,[72] and that (ambiguity, vagueness, and presupposition aside) their truth-value is determined by the state of the world understood as a largely independent reality.[73] Thus, in the absence of linguistic indeterminacies, they are either determinately true or determinately false. Call this the *Determinacy Requirement*. The realist also holds that (give or take a bit) the meanings of the assertions are fixed compositionally and constituted by their truth conditions. Thus, their truth-values depend upon the references of their constituent terms. It is absolutely crucial to the realist that reference is to be understood as a robust relation between language and reality that is not open to a deflationary account in terms of intralinguistic properties and relations. Call this the *Reference Requirement*. One key implication of the Reference Requirement is that (except in special cases) the objects of reference of the terms that occur in assertions of the relevant type are items in the world that exist independently of speakers and their states and attitudes.

However, as we know from Russell's theory of descriptions, whether a word or phrase that functions as a term in the surface grammar of an assertion is a proper constituent of its semantic structure is a matter of analysis and debate. This opens up the possibility of realism and antirealism with respect to types of terms, as well as types of assertions. For it is easy enough to stipulate, as I now do, that realism with respect to terms of a given type is to be understood as a twofold commitment to realism with respect to typical assertions in which the terms occur, and to an analysis of these assertions according to which the terms function as proper semantic constituents of the assertions. This does justice to my earlier suggestion that a phenomenalist should be seen as an antirealist about physical objects (or, strictly speaking, physical-object terms) even if he is a realist about the phenomenalist counterfactuals that he substitutes for physical-object assertions. However, a reductive analysis of assertions containing terms of a given type need not be antirealist with respect to those terms if it does not treat them as Russellian "incomplete symbols," but preserves them as proper constituents of the assertions

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[72] This clause is not trivial. Although truth usually coincides with correctness in the case of assertions (see footnote 27), we should allow for exceptions in order to accommodate the possibility of an antirealist objectivism according to which the assertions concerned have realistic truth conditions even though their primary function is not descriptive and their correctness does not depend on their being true. Van Fraassen's constructive empiricism is possible example (Bas C. Van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980] 1–13). Although Van Fraassen holds that theoretical claims of natural science have realistic truth conditions concerning unobservable entities, he is an avowed antirealist who claims that the primary purpose of scientific theorizing is not to describe the unobservable, but to construct models that are adequate to the phenomena. From this perspective, the acceptance of theoretical assertions of natural science involves a commitment to their empirical adequacy, but not to their literal truth. Thus, if constructive empiricism is committed to objectivism, then it must hold that the correctness of these assertions is not a matter of truth.

[73] See footnote 3.

(although, perhaps, more complex than previously assumed). Some forms of reductionism are, therefore, compatible with realism.

As Dummett has insisted, one of the greatest challenges for a realist is to show how her account of the meanings of the assertions in question makes room for the possibility that speakers understand those assertions, or (in other words) grasp their meanings. The problem is that realism allows that the meanings of those assertions could involve "evidence-transcendent" truth conditions[74]—that is, truth conditions such that speakers lack all capacity to ascertain whether they are satisfied. This would apply if, for instance, the references of the terms occurring in the semantic structures of those assertions were completely beyond the epistemic reach of speakers. In the absence of a special explanation in such a case, it is unclear how speakers could either acquire or manifest an appreciation of evidence-transcendent truth conditions. Dummett sometimes seems to equate realism with a commitment to evidence-transcendent truth conditions, especially when he contrasts realism with mathematical intuitionism and verificationism,[75] or when he speaks with the voice of a global antirealist.[76] This is where I want to part company with Dummett—or Dummett as he is widely understood.[77]

As I see it, realistic truth conditions need only be *independent* of possible evidence in the sense that they do not directly involve, or need not be formulated as, evidentiary conditions.[78] This permits evidence-transcendent truth but does not require it.[79] More specifically, it leaves open three different possibilities: first, that *all* assertions about the relevant subject matter have evidence-transcendent truth conditions; second, that *some but not all* do; and, third, that *none* do. Dummett's challenge is greatest in cases of the first type. The challenge does not arise in cases of the third type. But given the demands of the Determinacy Requirement, it could be difficult to establish that a rich and interesting subject matter actually belongs to this type. Cases of the second type always involve a class of assertions that are taken to be verifiable in the sense that their truth conditions do not transcend all possible evidence. In favorable instances, this core of verifiable assertions could provide the basis for an adequate response to Dummett's challenge. Assume that

[74] I don't know whether Dummett himself uses the phrase "evidence transcendence" or any of its cognates, but they are pervasive in discussions of his work (see, e.g., Wright [1992]: 4 and Hale [1997]: 275) and are warranted by Dummett's ([1976]: 52) observation that "the truth of many sentences of our language appears to transcend our powers of recognition."

[75] See for example Dummett (1982): 258–63.

[76] See for example Dummett (1969): 362–63.

[77] This qualification is necessary because Dummett ([1993]: 472–73) has claimed that although he has been seen as a global antirealist, he has never been committed to this position.

[78] Thus, verificationists, who reject evidence-independent truth, are antirealist objectivists, but not all antirealist objectivists are verificationists.

[79] In this paragraph and the next, I draw significantly on Pendlebury (2000): 31–32.

the verifiable core is broad and varied, so that almost all the constituents[80] of the unverifiable, noncore assertions of the relevant type also occur in the verifiable core, or are connected with constituents of the verifiable core through systematic relations that can be appreciated on the basis of their manifestation within the core—for example, relations of time, space, composition, and dependence that are exemplified in an individual's experience, but can be extended beyond it. If this is the case, then it will be possible to make sense of how a speaker can understand the noncore assertions on the basis of, first, her presumed understanding of the constituents of those assertions that are also constituents of core assertions, and, second, her grasp of the relations between the other constituents of the noncore assertions and constituents of core assertions that belong to the same relational systems.

Consider the commonsense realist, who holds that assertions about the macro-physical environment have evidence-independent truth conditions. Such a realist could reasonably hope to meet Dummett's challenge by arguing that the members of a large class of these assertions are verifiable on the basis of perception, testing, and measurement—which also provide a foothold for an account of the satisfaction of the Reference Requirement—and that our understanding of unverifiable assertions about the macro-physical environment can be explained on the basis of their connections with those that are verifiable. To illustrate, the assertion

I. The roof of this building will be destroyed by a hurricane during the next century

is naturally understood to have truth conditions that are verification-transcendent from the perspective of the present. We could, nonetheless, explain how speakers grasp these truth conditions on the basis of their grasp of constituents of (1) that occur in or are appropriately connected with verifiable core assertions. Most of the constituents of (1)—including "roof," "destroyed," "hurricane," "during," and "next"—also occur in verifiable assertions about the present and the accessible past and future. We can, therefore, invoke the capacities and dispositions involved in a grasp of their meanings within these core sentences to explain what it is for a speaker to understand them in (1). But this may leave out some constituents of (1). For argument's sake, let us assume that this applies to "century." Even so, a speaker could still manifest an understanding of the word by displaying an appreciation of its role in our system of dates, a tendency to accept legitimate inferences grounded in the system, and a grasp of its connections with other terms in the same semantic field that also occur in verifiable assertions. Worked out carefully, these

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[80] Here I use "constituents" broadly to include not only morphemes, words, phrases, etc., but also all semantically significant structures that occur in the assertions concerned.

schematic suggestions should imply that a speaker understands (1) only if she appreciates that (1) is true at the time of utterance if and only if

2.   The roof of this building has been destroyed by a hurricane

is verifiably true in some context of utterance during the next century in which the speaker is referring to the same building. There is, therefore, good reason to believe that commonsense realism has resources to answer Dummett's challenge.

It may also be possible for a realist to answer Dummett's challenge in some cases, in which all assertions in the type of discourse in question have evidence-transcendent truth conditions—although objectivism would obviously be ruled out. The realist's best strategy in such a case is to attempt to establish that speakers could grasp the supposed realistic meanings of terms distinctive of the discourse on the strength of their understanding of language that is accepted as realistic. Consider a realist about theological assertions who holds that these assertions have evidence-transcendent truth conditions. Such a realist might argue that even though theological terms have references that are beyond the epistemic reach of speakers, their meanings are accessible because she can explain concepts of supernatural properties on the basis of the resources of realistic discourse about the everyday world. She might, perhaps, explain a creator as a cause that is not caused, a supernatural intelligence as an intelligence that is not tied to an animal body in space and time, a supernatural power of a particular kind as the corresponding natural power minus specified natural limitations, and so on. Of course, this would leave plenty of room for mystery about the operations of the supernatural. But that is no surprise, and it supports antiobjectivism rather than antirealism.

Although Dummett's challenge may, as I have suggested, be answerable by some forms of realism, it presents a far more formidable obstacle to others, including, I suspect, mathematical realism and moral realism. And, as we shall now see, there is also another equally daunting challenge that confronts every realist.

This challenge arises from the crucially important point that regardless of the subject matter with which realists are concerned, they are all committed to there being only one fundamental, universally applicable standard of correctness for assertions of the relevant type, viz., that the supposed realistic truth conditions of assertions of that type are satisfied. The only additional standards of correctness that a realist is entitled to invoke are derived standards that follow from this fundamental standard, either on its own or relative to some feature of the assertions under consideration. For example, any realist is entitled to treat mutual consistency as a necessary condition for the joint truth of a number of assertions because this follows straightforwardly from the fundamental standard by the logic of satisfaction. And a commonsense realist is, I believe, entitled to treat a sensory experience as a *prima facie* standard of the truth of an assertion that expresses part

of the truth-conditional contents of that experience, because there is a sufficiently reliable correlation between sensory experiences and circumstances in which their truth conditions are satisfied.[81] But a realist is not, for example, entitled to treat intuitions (understood as unexplained inclinations to believe things) as signs of truth in the absence of an account of how these intuitions are connected with the satisfaction of the realistic truth conditions of assertions that express them. More generally, any realist faces the challenge of showing how particular standards of truth or correctness that they accept are rooted in the fundamental realist standard.

To sum up with the help of a phrase that I borrow from Kit Fine, realism about a field of discourse is defensible only to the extent that it is possible to provide "a representational account of what grounds our practice"[82] in that field of discourse.[83] Doing this may be no easy matter. It requires a careful examination of all aspects of the discourse and its relations with other forms of discourse, a response to both Dummett's challenge and the truth-standards challenge that does justice to this evidence, and an account of how the supposed realism of the discourse is consistent with and helps to explain the practices associated with the discourse.

V. OBJECTIVISM

This brings us to objectivism. As I put it in section I, objectivism about affirmations of a given type is the view that there are adequate, nonarbitrary standards of correctness for these affirmations, and that it is possible to know that some nontrivial affirmations of this type are correct. I will unpack this a bit by providing the main outlines of an account of how an objectivist thesis should be supported. If absolutely nothing is taken for granted, it is obviously necessary for the objectivist to begin by showing that the relevant discourse displays pretensions of objectivity. This requires at least that it has the resources to allow for the expression of agreement and disagreement, and the formulation of arguments for and against affirmations, and also to support a distinction between presumptive

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[81] No doubt some readers would prefer other formulations of the perceptual standard. This one draws on the account of perception offered in Pendlebury, "Sense Experiences and Their Contents: A Defence of the Propositional Account," *Inquiry* 33 (1990): 215–30; and "Content and Causation in Perception," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54 (1994): 767–87.

[82] Fine (2001): 24.

[83] Fine ([2001]: 25) distinguishes "two conceptions of reality—as factual and as fundamental." This yields two forms of realism: factualism and antireductionism. My conception of realism is, I think, quite close to Fine's conception of factualism. Fine's ([2001]: 21) interesting account of "how to devise a 'critical experiment' to test whether to accept whether a given proposition is factual," may, therefore, help to clarify the distinction between realism and antirealism. I am not, however, sure about this, because the account (which is presented in Fine [2001]: 16–21) depends upon assumptions of which I am skeptical.

standards of objective correctness and other kinds of standards, such as standards of sincerity, lexical appropriateness, consideration, and style.

These conditions obviously rule out objectivism about mere expressions of feeling, like "Wow!" and "Yuk!" They do not, however, require all affirmations of the relevant type to be assertions. A field of discourse in which imperatives play a central role could display pretensions of objectivity, because some imperatives are subject to disagreement and can quite naturally be spoken of as correct or incorrect. These include many imperatives that express maxims of conduct, recommendations, or candidate principles of inference. Consider the rule of Modus Ponendo Ponens: "From 'P' and 'If P then Q,' infer 'Q'." Most philosophers count this as correct, but others disagree and support their position with serious arguments (e.g., McGee[34] and Lycan[35]). Someone might suggest that such an imperative is not a good example, because it is best understood as an assertion dressed up in imperative form. However, this fails to address Lewis Carroll's famous demonstration that on pain of infinite regress, we cannot make sense of a rule's warranting an inference by treating it as an assertion that functions as a premise of that very inference.[36] This suggests that it is not obvious that affirmations other than assertions that speakers may count as correct or incorrect can always be reconstrued as closet assertions. Moreover, I cannot see why one would want to construe them thus in the absence of a commitment to the prejudicial view that correctness is always a matter of realistic truth.

Regardless of whether we are concerned with assertions or other forms of affirmation, pretensions of objectivity are required for objectivism. But they are not enough to secure it, because they can be illusory. If Wright[37] is correct, this applies to discourse about what is funny. No doubt it also applies to earnest discussion about what is "cool" or "gross." What more is required to establish an objectivist thesis?

If objectivism, like realism, were committed to just one fundamental, universally applicable standard of correctness that could be specified independently of any particular objectivist thesis, then the main challenge for any objectivist would be to show that this fundamental standard applies to affirmations of the relevant type. But it is obvious that there cannot be a universal objectivist standard, because a realist objectivist is committed to the fundamental realist standard, while an antirealist objectivist must reject that standard in favor of some other standard or standards, such as the standard of proof in mathematics. Of course, mathematical

[34] Van McGee, "A Counterexample to Modus Ponens," *Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985): 462–71.

[35] William G. Lycan, "MPP, RIP," *Philosophical Perspectives, 7: Language and Logic,* ed. James E. Tomberlin (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview Publishing Company): 411–28.

[36] Lewis Carroll, "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles," *Mind* 4 (1895): 278–80.

[37] Wright (1992): 7–11, 100–7.

realists who accept the proof standard must treat it as a derived standard, but antirealist objectivists about mathematics could treat it as fundamental. It should also be clear that antirealist objectivists cannot be bound to a single, unitary fundamental standard for any particular subject matter. For one thing, the notion of a subject matter is extremely elastic, and it is not clear why we should not allow for the possibility of broad subject matters that incorporate diverse narrow subject matters with distinct fundamental standards of correctness. For another, even a fairly unitary subject matter could involve more than one fundamental standard of correctness. Must an antirealist objectivist about number theory who thinks that proof is a fundamental standard of correctness for this field count it as the only one? If so, what should he say about basic postulates of number theory, which had better be correct? He could, I suppose, treat their correctness as a matter of their being one-line proofs of themselves. But if he finds this unsatisfactory, then he must recognize the need for at least one fundamental standard over and above the proof standard. More generally, there is no obvious upper limit to the number of fundamental standards that an antirealist objectivist can allow in any field.

In this light, the main challenge facing any objectivist is to establish that the relevant presumptive standards of correctness, whatever they may be, are sufficiently robust to secure objectivity. I propose that we count them as such only if, taken together, they meet five important requirements. I would like to make some brief methodological remarks about this proposal before I discuss the requirements themselves.

I do not present this proposal (or any other major proposal in this paper) as a true realistic assertion or as an affirmation that is objectively correct either in its own terms or any other legitimate terms. It is a recommendation. And along with many other interesting and worthwhile philosophical proposals, it is, I think, best understood as an antirealist, antiobjectivist recommendation that is not open to knock-down, drag-out proof or disproof—unless it can be undermined on grounds of internal inconsistency or logical incompatibility with undeniable truths. If it avoids these pitfalls, it should be judged on the basis of the fruitfulness of its applications. How well does it allow us to structure and integrate our thinking? Does it distinguish adequately between different kinds of commitments that address different concerns? Can it help resolve apparent tensions between our responses to different cases? And so on. And even if the proposal is adopted for some purposes, it should not be treated as sacrosanct, but should be followed only when and to the extent that it is more effective than available alternatives in addressing the sorts of questions that I have mentioned.

My proposal on the requirements of objectivity is not, of course, meant to stand independently. It is part and parcel of the broader account of the distinction between objectivism and realism that I seek to advance in the paper as a whole.

The proposed requirements of objective standards must, therefore, be evaluated largely within the context of the broader account. However, even if the requirements are considered in their own right, there is reason to think that they are satisfied by standards applicable in fields where objectivism is likely to have the broadest appeal, especially mathematics, natural science, and everyday empirical judgments about the macro-physical environment, but not by standards that are applied in fields where objectivism is obviously suspect, such astrology and creation science. This should count in favor of these requirements. With that in hand, let us move on to the requirements themselves.

The *Coherence Requirement* is that the standards must demand consistency and coherence in sets of affirmations that they treat as mutually acceptable,[88] as well as good epistemic practice in the inferential moves between them that they require or permit. In these respects the standards should approximate those of rudimentary empirical science. I will not dwell on this requirement, which is both obvious in its own right and necessary to distinguish standards of correctness from standards of other values that do not require epistemic virtue, such as sincerity, consideration, and style. I would, however, like to suggest that the Coherence Requirement should be taken to imply a commitment to a principle of universalizability in terms of which an affirmation can be correct in given circumstances only if relevantly similar affirmations are correct in relevantly similar circumstances.[89]

The *Independence Requirement* is also necessary to distinguish standards of correctness from other kinds of standards. According to this requirement, whether an affirmation is correct in terms of the standards must be largely independent of whether it is judged to be correct, or of whether it is a consequence of the beliefs of either the speaker or speakers who participate in the discourse. This is not intended to exclude the possibility of correctness relative to what is presupposed in the context of utterance. Given these presuppositions, the standards should yield the same results regardless of who applies them. In other words, whether an affirmation is correct should be determined by the standards themselves rather than by the views, tastes, interests, sympathies, predilections, or cultures of those who apply them. Thus, if people who are very different in any of these respects apply the standards honestly and well, and they agree on the relevant background facts, then there should be significant agreement between the conclusions that they would draw in like cases.

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[88] A set of affirmation is consistent in the sense I have in mind if and only if it does not imply both an affirmation and its negation. This is not a very demanding condition, and it quite appropriately leaves plenty of room for indeterminacy.

[89] I will not attempt to formulate this more precisely in general terms. For an account of what the principle of universalizability requires in the case of judgments of practical reasons, see Pendlebury (2007): 541–43.

Note that this does not rule out the possibility that an affirmation is correct because of features of a person whom it is about, even if she is the speaker. To illustrate, in a recent paper[90] I argue, in effect, that if a person, x, desires to do something, A, then (in the absence of certain disqualifying factors) the assertion "x's desire to A is a reason for x to A" is correct. This desire standard is meant to express only a sufficient condition for the correctness of certain assertions of practical reasons. Whatever its merits or deficiencies, it is consistent with the Independence Requirement, because when the standard determines that an assertion is correct, this does not depend on whether anyone makes the assertion, and it also does not depend on the views, judgments, tastes, interests, or predilections of anyone who might make it, including the speaker. Given the standard, the correctness of the assertion depends only on the subject's having the relevant desire. If the subject is also the speaker, then the desire makes a difference to the speaker's interests and predilections. However, the correctness of the assertion will not depend upon this difference, but only on the subject's having the desire itself. This is evident from the fact that in terms of the standard, the correctness of the assertion does not require the speaker (as speaker, rather than as subject) to have either the desire or any related interests or predilections.

The *Effectiveness Requirement* is an epistemic condition according to which the application of the standards must not transcend the abilities of speakers. This is not to suggest that the standards should provide an infallible decision procedure, which would inappropriately rule out some forms of proof as standards of correctness in mathematics, and sensory experience as a prima facie standard of correctness for assertions about one's surroundings. Such standards satisfy the Effectiveness Requirement because it is often possible for speakers to apply them effectively. This requirement is not always satisfied by the fundamental realist standard, because realism allows for the possibility of verification-transcendent correctness. The Effectiveness Requirement is, however, the only one of my five requirements for objectivity that the fundamental realist standard may not satisfy. The reason for this is that it is possible to explain how realist correctness could be completely beyond our reach. I cannot, however, imagine why anybody might want to invoke nonrealist standards of correctness that can never be effectively applied, or how it might be possible to explain antirealist correctness that can never be grasped.

The *Output Requirement* is that the standards should determine a fairly extensive set of nontrivial affirmations as correct.[91] The need for this requirement is obvious, for if objectivism were consistent with the possibility that only trivial

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[90] Pendlebury (2007): 545–54.

[91] This Output Requirement is not the same as the broader "output requirement" of Pendlebury (2007): 540, which incorporates the Independence and Effectiveness Requirements, and is treated as if it incorporates what I will shortly introduce as the Grounding Requirement.

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affirmations are correct, it would be much too easy to secure. It would also fail to address significant concerns at which the idea of objectivism is directed. What is the point of a so-called objectivism if it leaves open the possibility that no interesting or debatable affirmations of the relevant type are actually correct?

It is important to recognize that the Output Requirement goes beyond the first three requirements. Standards of mere consistency and coherence could satisfy the Coherence, Independence, and Effectiveness Requirements, but cannot on their own determine any particular set of nontrivial affirmations as correct, so cannot satisfy the Output Requirement. Let us call standards that are concerned only with possible combinations of affirmations *secondary standards*, and those that assign some positive status to particular nontrivial affirmations *primary standards*. It is evident that a set of standards cannot satisfy the Output Requirement unless it includes at least one primary standard. A comprehensive primary standard is one that can do all the work on its own, without help from secondary standards. The only good candidate I can think of is the fundamental realist standard, which is in principle sufficiently powerful to fix all the correct affirmations in any field to which it applies. Other primary standards yield sets of nontrivial affirmations to serve as inputs to the applicable secondary standards. These primary standards could be of different types. Some will yield a base set of correct nontrivial affirmations that can be expanded into a larger set of correct affirmations by application of the secondary standards. An antirealist standard of number theory that yields the basic postulates would be of this type. Other primary standards will yield sets of *presumptively* correct affirmations for the secondary standards to weed and extend. Primary standards that count either intuitions or sensory experiences as prima facie signs of the correctness of affirmations that express part or all of their contents are of this type. Yet other primary standards might yield only large sets of mere *candidates* for correctness, most of which are supposed to be weeded out by other standards so that only the correct ones remain. If empirical adequacy is taken as a primary standard by an antirealist objectivist about theoretical assertions of natural science, then it is of this type. I am not, of course, endorsing any of these standards, but only using them to illustrate possible types of primary standards. The key point is that a set of standards can satisfy the Output Requirement only if it includes at least one primary standard.

There is nothing very original about the four requirements of objective standards that I have been discussing, and it is not unusual for philosophers to draw on considerations like those specified by these requirements in defending objectivist theses. One very clear example is Scanlon, who sums up his case for objectivism about reasons for action as follows.

I have argued that we have a general method for thinking about reasons for action in the right way that is similar to the method employed in regard to beliefs of other kinds, that is stable in its results,

and that supports wide interpersonal agreement on a significant range of issues. All of this taken together provides ample ground for saying that judgments about reasons for action are the kinds of things that are correct or incorrect, even though there are many cases in which we may continue to disagree about which of these is the case.[92]

Given a pinch of salt, this seems roughly equivalent to claiming that objectivism concerning discourse about reasons for action is warranted because it employs standards of correctness that satisfy the Coherence, Independence, Output, and Effectiveness Requirements.[93]

Unfortunately, many sets of standards that are dubious or worse will pass this test. Consider the most sophisticated standards of astrology or creation science—or, more dramatically, a primary standard according to which any affirmation made by Bin Laden (or anyone else) is correct. We need a mechanism to exclude such standards. This is the function of the *Grounding Requirement*, according to which the standards should not be arbitrary, but well-founded. This formulation of the requirement is, admittedly, unclear. I will clarify the requirement by indicating how to establish that a set of standards satisfies it. The way to do this comprehensively is by showing that the standards can be explained on the basis of the main functions of affirmations in the relevant discourse as revealed by a careful examination of all aspects of the discourse and its relations to conduct; that the standards validate most affirmations that are widely accepted as platitudes and most patterns of inference that are widely taken as obvious; and that rational and reasonable participants in the discourse would, on reflection, accept them. I will use two examples to illustrate, all too schematically, how some of this might be applied.

Consider, first, the fundamental realist standard. In favorable cases, this satisfies the Grounding Requirement if anything does. For, if the primary function of an assertion of the relevant type is to make a commitment to the truth of a realistic proposition that it expresses, then the fundamental realist standard is obviously well-founded. But the fundamental realist standard does not get a free pass, because it remains a question whether the type of discourse in question is indeed a favorable case. Proving that it is will require a full-scale defense of realism with respect to that type of discourse. Given the challenges discussed in section IV, this could be a formidable task.

Consider, next, the case of a theorist who does not wish to be a realist about certain conditionals because she is not sure that they satisfy the Determinacy Requirement for realism. This theorist could still be an objectivist about these

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[92] Scanlon (1998): 70.

[93] I do not, however, think that the standards of correctness that Scanlon describes do satisfy the four requirements. Indeed, in Pendlebury (2007): 543–45, I argue that Scanlon's standards are inadequate on grounds that imply that they do not satisfy the Independence and Output Requirements.

conditionals because she holds that many of them are objectively correct or incorrect relative to particular contexts of utterance. Suppose she proposes the following as a primary standard of correctness for these conditionals: A conditional of this type, "If P then Q," is true in a context of utterance if "Q" is a consequence of "P" and truths presupposed in that context.[94] Taken together with reasonable secondary standards, this will satisfy the Coherence, Independence, Effectiveness, and Output Requirements. To show that the primary standard also satisfies the Grounding Requirement, our theorist must explain how it makes sense of the ways in which the conditionals are used in rational discourse. One way of doing this would be to present strong evidence that the primary function of these conditionals is to express the consequences of an assumption, for if this is so, then the standard is not arbitrary, but well-founded.

As I see it, the greatest challenge for an objectivist is to show that the relevant field of discourse is governed by standards of correctness that satisfy the Grounding Requirement. In some cases, this challenge might be quite manageable; in others, formidable; in yet others, insurmountable.

Although the proposals concerning the requirements of realism and objectivism that I have advanced in sections IV and V do not go very deep and are obviously subject to improvement, they at least make it clear that neither realism nor objectivism can be justified merely on the strength of their benefits in the case at hand. The proposals also do justice to the thesis that realism and objectivism are independent. The reasons are as follows. The fundamental realist standard might satisfy or fail to satisfy the Effectiveness Requirement; sets of standards that satisfy all five requirements of objectivity might or might not derive from the fundamental realist standard; and (to cover all the bases) it is obviously possible for there to be affirmations that are not subject to either realist or objectivist standards of correctness.

VI. A BRIEF ILLUSTRATION

Because many philosophers would regard objectivism without realism as suspect, I will close with a brief sketch of an argument based on the above proposals for objectivism without realism about one small part of the normative domain, viz., that of theoretical reasons for beliefs about the macro-physical environment. I will not make a final commitment to antirealism, but will claim only that while realism is not warranted in this case, objectivism is. I have chosen to discuss the case of theoretical reasons for beliefs about the macro-physical

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[94] This is something like the sufficient condition incorporated in the necessary and sufficient conditions for subjunctive conditionals advanced in John Carroll, "Boundary in Context," *Acta Analytica* 20 (2005): 43–54.

environment in part because it allows for a straightforward illustration of the application of the above requirements of realism and objectivism, and in part because it suggests that if we want to be objectivists about practical reasons or normativity in general, then we would do well to make the case for this objectivism without regard to the question of realism.

I will assume that, in general, a reason for something is, in Scanlon's words, "a consideration that counts in favor of it"⁹⁵—but to this, I want to add the important rider "however slightly." This allows for the possibility of a reason's not being a good or compelling reason,⁹⁶ for it could be outweighed or trumped by other considerations. Theoretical reasons are *veritistic* considerations in favor of beliefs—in other words, considerations that count in favor of those beliefs being true. Here, as in the general case, I want to insist on the possibility of what we could call minimal reasons, as well as good and compelling reasons.⁹⁷

Now, despite advances in epistemology and related fields over the centuries, we still do not have an adequate general account of the conditions under which a consideration or set of considerations is either a good theoretical reason for a belief, in the sense that it is sufficient to justify it, or a compelling reason, in the sense that it requires it. Such conditions depend in part on how minimal reasons combine, compete, and are influenced by circumstance; they are a matter of ongoing disagreement among experts; and, for all we know, they could be massively indeterminate. Thus we are not in a position to claim with any confidence that assertions of theoretical reasons for beliefs about the macro-physical environment satisfy the Determinacy Requirement for realism. This is enough to establish that realism about such judgments is not at present warranted.⁹⁸

But it is still plausible that the standards of correctness that we apply to judgments of theoretical reasons satisfy my five requirements of objectivity. These standards include not only standards of consistency and coherence, but also standards in terms of which (among other things) reasons for beliefs are also reasons for believing their logical consequences, and, other things being equal, a sensory experience of something's being the case is a reason for believing that it is the case. These standards obviously satisfy the Coherence, Independence, and

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⁹⁵ Scanlon (1998): 17.

⁹⁶ This is at odds with Scanlon's ([1998]: 19) identification of normative reasons with good reasons, which I see as a significant error. See Pendlebury (2007): 550–51, and Mark Schroeder, *Slave of the Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 92–97.

⁹⁷ So understood, minimal reasons are equivalent to what Dancy dubs "contributory reasons" (Jonathan Dancy, *Ethics without Principles* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004]: 15). However, I do not like this terminology because (as Dancy knows) minimal reasons cannot be defined in terms of their actual or potential contribution to "overall reasons" (Dancy [2004]: 16), and they do not contribute towards overall reasons in cases in which they are outweighed or trumped.

⁹⁸ This paragraph reiterates thoughts expressed in Pendlebury (2007): 537–38.

Effectiveness Requirements. If we set aside the sensory-experience standard, it is not clear that they satisfy the Output Requirement, for somebody could reasonably hold that although the other standards yield a fairly extensive set of judgments that are correct, these judgments are all relatively trivial. Even if we make allowance for the sensory-experience standard, the indeterminacy argument against realism being warranted may, perhaps, leave open the possibility that the Output Requirement is not satisfied with respect to judgments of good and compelling theoretical reasons. However, the Output Requirement is satisfied if we take both minimal reasons and the sensory-experience standard into account, for it is clear that indefinitely many nontrivial judgments of minimal theoretical reasons are correct in terms of this standard.

The remaining question is whether the Grounding Requirement is satisfied. I claim that it is, because the standards are not arbitrary, but are appropriately connected with the truth of beliefs about the macro-physical environment. In particular, other things being equal, a sensory experience of something's being the case increases the probability that it is the case, and it therefore counts veritisti-cally in favor of the belief that it is. Don't get me wrong. I do not think that judgments of minimal theoretical reasons can be reduced to judgments concerning increases in the probability of truth, in part because this would threaten their normative force. I do, however, claim that reasonable, competent, and well-informed judges who recognized that a consideration increased the probability that a belief is true would count the consideration as a minimal theoretical reason for the belief, and that this makes sense given the nature of discourse about theoretical reasons. The Grounding Requirement is, therefore, satisfied.

My schematic arguments for the view that realism about theoretical reasons concerning the macro-physical environment is not warranted but objectivism is are, of course, liable to challenge, and I am open to the possibility that I may be wrong in this case. But even if I am, it still holds that, in general, you do not need realism for objectivism, and cannot secure objectivism simply by helping yourself to realism.*

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