

Objectivities

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I argue that one in particular of Crispin Wright's attempts to capture our common or intuitive concepts of objectivity, warrant, and other associated notions, relies on an ambiguity between a given constructivist reading of the concepts and at least one other, arguably more "ordinary", version of the notions he tries to accommodate. I do this by focusing on one case in point, and concluding with a brief argument showing how this case generalises. I demonstrate why this ambiguity is unacceptable and also that its resolution undermines the aim it serves: to account for and accommodate our ordinary conception of (at least) objectivity, warrant (or justification) and truth.

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If, on the other hand, the Cantorian severs the connection between property and possible predication, he is open to the charge that he is obscurantising the notion of a property and thus *can use it to explain nothing*. (Wright 2001, 401, italics mine)

I will argue in this paper that one in particular of Crispin Wright's attempts (Wright 2001) to capture our common or intuitive concepts of objectivity, warrant, and other associated notions, relies on an ambiguity between a given constructivist reading of the concepts and at least one other, arguably more "ordinary", version of the notions he tries to accommodate. Although that paper was written some time ago, I think that it can be argued that the problems it faces are generic across similar attempts some of which can be found in some of Wright's more recent work (see, for an example of these, Wright 2004a,b).

In (Wright 2001), Wright attempts to show that we do not need to regard meaning as objective in order to retain the ability to regard our beliefs or judgements as objective. A secondary aim in the paper is to show that a

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belief in the objectivity of meaning necessarily scuttles a “natural” idea of what it is to be “correct” regarding the meaning of a term—to claim, say, that ‘this is ϕ ’ and be warranted in our belief that we are using ‘ ϕ ’ correctly. In conjunction with this point Wright also argues that a belief in the objectivity of meaning similarly undermines our warrant to believe in the correctness of our judgements, namely that such a belief undermines the natural and appealing idea that a genuine warrant to believe p is also a reliable indication that p is true.

In short, Wright wants to show that if we do not believe that our meanings are essentially constructive and *not* objective, then we necessarily lose an ordinary, natural idea of what it is to get our application of a concept “right”.

His argument, very briefly put, begins with a proposed set of basic statements about a basic concept ϕ . A basic judgement/statement is one:

made responsively, without articulated reasons, under the impact of those aspects of our environment we can most directly perceive . . . e.g. form, pattern, colour, loudness, pitch, texture etc [Wright notes that it is a plausible pre-condition of] our reciprocal intelligibility [that we] share a system of basic concepts, furnishing corresponding agreed basic statements [more precisely] . . . if we do succeed in understanding each other, we will share some basic concepts. (Wright 2001, 59) (for the full definition of basic statements/judgements, see Wright 2001, 60–62)

Now, for the proposed set of basic statements about ϕ , Wright supposes “near universal” consensus. He then introduces the following problem: first, if we begin with a belief in the objectivity of meaning, we are necessarily committed to the idea that “there has to be a possibility that this consensus is, in any particular case, misplaced” (Wright 2001, 65).¹

There are, Wright then points out, two ways we could think about this concept of “misplaced meaning”:

1. For each statement in question, it is possible that our verdict and the truth status diverge.
2. It is possible that, for each statement in question, our verdict and the truth status diverge.

[where 1 and 2 are about objectivity of judgement, and can be formalized as follows]

(x)Possibly Fx
Possibly (x) Fx

¹ An interesting further question, indirectly addressed in this paper, is whether this is because such a notion is constitutive of the notion of objectivity or entailed by the notion.

[and, for the believer in the objectivity of meaning] Fx = the community's assessment of x is out of accord with the requirements of the meaning of ϕ . (Wright 2001, 66)

At this point Wright notes that, if we *do not* believe in the objectivity of meaning for the set of statements, we can nonetheless help ourselves to objectivity of judgement for them—we get this from considering their definition, and noting that:

individuals can, of course, be ignorant of or mistaken about the truth status of a basic statement. ... Accordingly, to have grounds for thinking that a communal consensus on some basic statement is, or was, mistaken is a remote but real possibility. (Wright 2001, 64–65)

The crucial element of the claim to objectivity, though, is that the believer in objectivity of judgement need not commit beyond (1)—i.e Wright claims that (1) is enough to capture the notion of objectivity of judgement.

Now, there are two readings of the term 'objectivity' in operation at this stage. The first (attributed to the believer in the objectivity of meaning) is that objectivity is essentially ambiguous between (1) and (2). The second (attributed to the notion of objectivity of judgement) only endorses (1). This raises the question: can objectivity, broadly construed, properly be understood in either one of these two ways, or is it only properly understood as the latter? Much of the rest of Wright's argument rests on an ambiguity between these conceptions of objectivity and yet resolving the ambiguity in either direction undermines the argument overall. To see this, we need to outline the rest of Wright's argument in some detail.

1. Wright's Argument

Returning to the claim touched on above, Wright takes it that objectivity of judgement can be granted for the set of statements *just because* (1) alone is sufficient to capture the relevant notion of objectivity (or, alternatively, that the relevant notion of objectivity need only entail (1)).

This is on the basis that an essential element in the very concept 'objectivity of judgement' is:

[that] there must be an appropriate contrast between:

- (a) X believes that P is true, and
- (b) P is true. (Wright 2001, 64)

I will return to this below.

Wright points out that there is a crucial difference between holding (1) and holding (2) above. For the case at hand, then, there is a crucial difference between holding the meaning version of (1) and the meaning version of (2).

Holding (1) (for meaning) would be to say that for each statement it is possible that it may not adhere to the (objective) meaning of ϕ , and this idea might seem quite reasonable (just as it seems reasonable to hold (1) for the objectivity of judgement). (2), though, says it is possible that for each statement this scenario holds—that is, the possibility extends over the entire set of statements. But, Wright says, so long as (1) is held for meaning, (2) has also to be admitted. That is, (2) could only be blocked by the believer in objective meaning by stipulating that all the statements x play a constitutive role of “the requirements of the meaning of ϕ ” (Wright 2001, 66).

Thus, the way to block (2) is by allowing that, if, over a large enough class of statements, the statements themselves constitute the concept: ‘*the correct application of/the requirements of the meaning of ϕ* ’. In this case it is impossible that for all of the statements, the community’s assessment of x is out of accord with the meaning of ϕ . But, according to Wright, the believer in objective meaning does not, in fact, have this option. They have to accept that (2) is a possibility if (1) is. But why should this be the case? So far, it looks as though the ambiguity between (1) and (2) is as much a part of the notion of objectivity of judgement (aside from the stipulation that it is not—and in so far as the notion has been spelled out) as it is of the objectivity of meaning. Specifically, Wright says that the believer in the objectivity of meaning ought to hold that

the considerations which determine whether or not ϕ applies in any particular case will concern nothing other than the relevant facts about it . . . and those episodes in the linguistic and intellectual history of the community which constituted the determination of the (‘objective’) meaning of ϕ . (Wright 2001, 67)

The problem for the believer in the objectivity of meaning is that the objective meaning may have been constituted entirely before the set of statements were made—and in this case, the possibility of “getting it wrong” holds for all the statements—so we are back to (2).

But why is this not the case for the objectivity of judgement? Wright specifically claims that a believer in the objectivity of judgement need only endorse (1) in order to retain his right to his use of the term ‘objective’ for the set of statements at hand. Why does this claim not suffer the same fate as the similar claim for meaning? Clearly, the only way a believer in the objectivity of judgement could prevent a similar slide would be to stipulate that “truth status” is constituted by the set of statements. But in this case, such a believer would need to stipulate that truth status cannot be fixed before the set of statements existed. If indeed this is what Wright has in mind, we must allow that at this stage, his notion of objectivity of judgement necessarily involves this caveat—that the truth status is not thus fixed. Again, we will return to

this later.

To recap: Wright argues that the problem with believing in the objectivity of meaning is that such a belief allows the possibility that the whole process whereby meaning is constituted was established first i.e whatever the objective meaning is; it is or can be, closed or fixed. And, according to Wright, belief in the objectivity of judgement does not need, or in fact allow for, this idea, which means it can be articulated in an open (unclosed/unfixed) way. As he argues later, what turns out to be true or false is also a function of what constitutes meaning. Thus truth status itself is open.

It is hard to see, though, how this argument warrants its conclusion, i.e. it is unclear how Wright can claim his objectivity of judgement does not, or need not meet the same fate as the objectivity of meaning. Recall that an essential ingredient in the argument Wright puts forward is that truth status turns out to be open—i.e it is currently being constituted, and never closed or fixed. But if the ongoing openness of truth status is granted, have not we in fact lost the notion of objectivity of judgement? It seems we have—at the very least the “objectivity” of judgement now looks quite different from the “objectivity” of meaning that Wright initially attributes to the believer in the objectivity of meaning. *That* objectivity is supposed to essentially involve the notion of that meaning is fixed: “[that meaning is a] finished design.” (Wright 2001, 55). But why should it?

2. Will the Real Objectivity Please Stand Up?

One reason it should would be if (2) somehow captures this notion; say, that the possibility of error must be granted over the entire set of statements if we are to be using the term ‘objectivity’ correctly. Thus (at a minimum) the ambiguity between (1) and (2), if not a full endorsement of (2), would itself be an essential element of the concept of objectivity. If this is the case, then when it comes to considering the objectivity of judgement, the analogous ambiguity between (1) and (2) should (at minimum) remain (if not rather a full endorsement of (2)) in order to ensure the correct concept of objectivity.

If, on the other hand, we say that the notion of the objectivity of judgement need not endorse (2) or even retain the ambiguity between (1) and (2), then we could ask why the objectivity of meaning should. But if the believer in the objectivity of meaning is committed to the ambiguity or the full endorsement of 2, while the believer in the objectivity of judgement is only committed to (1) and need not retain ambiguity between (1) and 2; then we do indeed have two ideas of objectivity in play.

To reiterate: the idea of “objectivity of judgement” grants (1) but denies (2). But Wright says that this sense of objectivity is *not* what is meant in the idea of “objectivity of meaning”. According to Wright, the believer in

the objectivity of meaning *is* committed to (2) (to the possibility that “the” objective meaning was finished before the set of statements were made) *just so long as* they want to grant (1).

It seems, though, that there is no principled reason why the believer in the objectivity of meaning cannot take Wright’s open-style objectivity (of judgement) for their standard, when it comes to meaning. That is, the believer in the objectivity of meaning could, as does the believer in the objectivity of judgement, simply stipulate that the constitution is ongoing—that “the” meaning cannot have been in place before the set of statements, so (1) holds and (2) fails. But, in this case, by Wright’s standard for “*objectivity of judgement*”, they would now have *objectivity of meaning*.

It is interesting to ask (supposing they should want to), how the believer in objectivity of meaning might then regain some of the original idea Wright attributes to them, i.e. of fixedness, or finished design. One thing they could do, perhaps, is note that for different ϕ , different degrees of openness hold; say, in cases where it seems consensus is settled, over a long enough period of time, we might feel confident to conclude that meaning is “the” (finished/fixed) meaning.

But surely this is exactly the case here. We are talking about basic statements: if meaning is closed for anything, it is closed for them! But, by this way of thinking, so too should the *truth* value of such statements be fixed. That is, wherever we could argue that it seems likely that the meaning of a set of statements is fixed by virtue of an unchanging consensus over time, we could equally plausibly argue that the truth status of such statements is similarly fixed, and so objectivity of judgement should similarly fail to stop the transition from (1) to (2).

In fact, this is the problem of correctness Wright highlights: that, as soon as we want to say there is some objective meaning, settled and fixed (possibly) in advance of things we may do and say in the future, then we must grant (2), and as soon as we grant (2), we grant the possibility of radical error (in precisely the application of those concepts we wanted to say were not only very likely settled, but also obvious, recognitional, responsive, primitive and so on—i.e. basic).

The believer in the objectivity of meaning could go two ways at this point. First, they could resist (2) (and this is a perfectly acceptable thing for them to do, according to Wright’s own standards) and second, they could grant (2) and argue it is not a counter-intuitive conception of correctness after all. Note that resisting (2) amounts to saying that what is settled still could change—that we could constitute it differently; in which case what we are imagining is a community shift in one of our basic concepts (perhaps over time). What exactly would this amount to, for basic concepts? Perhaps

it would amount to the world itself changing and thus too our set of basic responses to it, or to a community wide meaning corrupting illness, etc. It seems that the sorts of scenarios we have to propose in order to imagine a basic concept changing its constitution are remarkably similar to the sorts of scenarios we have to imagine when we come to ask what it would be like for (2) to hold at all.

So is (1) (for basic concepts) very different from (2) after all? Either we allow that all the statements constituting the correct application of the basic concept ϕ rearrange, change or whatever, to constitute a new or different concept, say ϕ' , or we allow that the fixed requirements of the meaning of ϕ make a large set of subsequent statements all wrong. If we try to imagine what is involved in the first option, the difference between these two positions seems to fade. On the other hand, taking the other option, and endorsing (2), has problems of its own.²

Beside the choices available to the believer in the objectivity of meaning, there is also an alternative available for the believer in the objectivity of judgement (specifically, in this case, Wright): he could take on board the same (potentially) closed objectivity that he attributes to the believer in the objectivity of meaning, for his objectivity of judgement. But if one of these versions of objectivity is *not* settled on—in particular, if neither the believer in the objectivity of meaning adjusts their notion of objectivity to match Wright's for judgement, nor Wright adjusts his objectivity of judgement to match that he attributes to the believer in the objectivity of meaning—then Wright's ensuing argument is threatened.

3. No Case

This is because, if neither version is chosen, Wright is talking about two quite different notions when he uses the term 'objectivity'. And his (disambiguated) conclusions become: if the believer in the objectivity of meaning is using, say, objectivity_x (the closed or fixed sense), then they become vulnerable to a (potentially) radical scepticism; namely (2). Whereas, if we hold that meaning is not objective_x but perhaps objective_y (the open sense, in which the constitution of the concept is constantly ongoing), then we are entitled to use only objectivity_y for judgement. Put another way, if we start with objectivity_x for meaning, we (potentially) get radical scepticism. If we start *without* objectivity_x for meaning, we are entitled, at most to objectivity_y for judgement.

² Though the apparent similarity between resisting and endorsing (2) does have some bearing on what our correct notion of 'objectivity' should be, it is not the main point of this paper. At this stage it is just an interesting side issue. It will be discussed further later, but I think it deserves a full discussion in its own right.

If the option to chose objectivity_y for meaning is open to the believer in objectivity of meaning, (and, as previously noted, it seems it *should* be, given that it is open to Wright for his objectivity of judgement), then the argument dissipates. This is because what we finish with (after removing the relevant *x*s and *y*s) is objectivity of meaning without radical scepticism and *with* objectivity of judgment. This contradicts Wright's second aim. Alternatively, we can wind up with (again with the *x*s and *y*s removed) objectivity of judgement necessarily entailing objectivity of meaning, which contradicts the first of Wright's aims.

We could perhaps try at this stage to withdraw from the believer in the objectivity of meaning the entitlement to call their objectivity of judgement 'objectivity', and hope thereby to show that believing in the objectivity of meaning results in at least something like radical scepticism (we would end up with something more like a rampant relativism than radical scepticism, but, for this purpose, it would do). In this case, though, it seems that we should similarly withdraw from the believer in the objectivity of judgement (*y*-sense), the entitlement to call the (*y*-sense) objectivity of meaning 'objectivity'. But in this case we would have no objectivity of meaning and, with that scenario, no objectivity of judgement.

4. Solutions and Implications

Perhaps one way forward would be to inject Wright's objectivity of judgment with something like *enough* strength, but not *too* much. But this strategy (supposing it could be implemented) would fall short, since in equal measure, the objectivity of meaning could similarly be rescued. Specifically, it could be weakened to match exactly the degree to which objectivity of judgement is strengthened. Before accepting this apparent stalemate, though, it is worth taking a look at exactly how Wright spells out the two sorts of objectivity in play, to see if anything forces these disparate readings in any way.

When Wright spells out the objectivity of meaning that is to be his target in the paper, he does so by drawing an analogy between meaning and a person's character:

[the objectivity of meaning] is the conception that the meaning of an expression stands to the unfolding tapestry of the way it is used in linguistic practices as a person's character, according to a certain misconception of it, stands to his or her unfolding behaviour. The misconception would have it that character is, as it were, a finished design for a person's life which they usually act out, but which their behaviour may, at any particular stage, somehow betray. (Wright 2001, 55)

The alternative ("correct") view is that character is determined by behaviour and that this determination is ongoing—that there are "conceptual

limits to the extent and variety of ways in which a person can act out of character” (Wright 2001, 55). Specifically:

a proper account of the relations between character and behaviour would have to display both how the nature of someone’s character is a conceptual construct from what is said and done, and how it is nevertheless intelligible and fruitful to allow for the sort of contrast which we describe as ‘acting out of character. (Wright 2001, 56)

When he comes to spell out objectivity of judgement, Wright says:

to think of a class of statements as apt to express objective judgements is to conceive of them as having a real subject matter, as dealing in genuine matters of fact, as apt to be correct or incorrect by virtue of how matters stand in certain objective states of affairs which may be the objects of human cognition. (Wright 2001, 63)

And:

such sensitivity must be conceived of as essentially fallible—whatever the details are of the process which induces in a subject a belief that *P*, it must be conceivable—at least with the simple empirical judgements which basic statements serve to express—that the process should on occasion misfire. (Wright 2001, 63–64)

Thus we get that there needs to be an “appropriate contrast” between (a) and (b) from before. (That is, between ‘that *X* believes that *P* is true’ and ‘*P* is true’.)

But if this latter conception does indeed count as objectivity, then the meaning theorist can surely utilise it. In fact the “correct” characterisation of meaning above details just how this might be achieved. In short, a meaning theorist could utilise this conception just by claiming (1) from before—that for each statement it is possible that the community’s assessment of *x* is out of accord with the requirements of the meaning of ϕ . If we require anything stronger than that for what should count as objectivity of meaning, then it seems we would also need to supply an argument as to why objectivity of judgement escapes the requirement. Say, we want to claim that objectivity of meaning just does involve the notion that meaning is fixed—a finished design which, at any particular stage, our use of a concept ϕ “may betray”. Then in this case, we should also require that objectivity of judgement essentially involves the notion that ‘independent state of affairs’ is also fixed, and that, for all the relevant statements, our opinion and the facts of the matter may diverge.

Recall that, ultimately, Wright wants to hold that we make true statements about anything, (including meaning) just because meaning is *not* objective (on the assumption that if it were objective it would be fixed). But if

we grant this, then these true statements are either not objective, or it is not the case that ‘objectivity’ actually entails this “fixedness”.

5. Why the Problem Matters

This problem matters for the claims Wright then goes on to make about meaning and judgement. In particular, for the question: what is wrong with (2)? As a first answer, Wright offers that (2) seems incoherent. How could anyone communicate that a group has gone radically wrong across all basic statements involving ϕ , with the application of the concept ϕ ? It seems that there would need to be a shared understanding of the statements in order for this to be a possibility. But with basic concepts, a shared understanding is precisely the disposition to agree in basic judgements involving those concepts.

According to Wright, if we try to account for everyone having gone wrong in this way, we come up with “fantastic” thought experiments (see Wright 2001, 68–69).³ Of course with the sorts of scenarios imagined we get an infinite regress—our belief in the reliability (and consequently the unreliability) of a physical parameter itself may have been the result of one of the divergences imagined, and so on. Now a crux of Wright’s argument is, first, that such thought experiments appear foolish. And, second, that the reason they do is that we have a fundamental conviction as follows:

Suppose a subject sincerely assents to a statement S in circumstances C in which we have adequate reason to believe the following hold:

1. The subject has had a normal teaching in the concepts involved in S , and has given every indication of a normal understanding of them.
2. The subject is functioning normally in C —is unaffected by drugs, disease, etc.
3. The perceptual conditions obtaining in C are normal—no funny lighting, tricky mirrors, etc.

[Supposing S is a basic statement, 2 and 3] constitute conditions which are optimal for the subject’s exercise of the relevant recognitional capacities, and ... (1) suggests that it is indeed those capacities which the subject is attempting to exercise ... [so] adequate reason to believe each of 1-3 must be, it appears, adequate reason to believe S .

[Wright also adds]

³ Returning for a minute to the side issue raised earlier; notice, as before, we could ask how similar these are to the sorts of scenarios which we would have to imagine in order to account for a change in the way we constitute the meaning of a basic statement over time, so that the meaning is indeed practically and in actuality “open” to change. This question will, I think, prove a challenge of its own.

4. *S* expresses a basic statement for the subject—that is, his assent to it is based entirely on an exercise of recognitional capacities

[and thus arrives at]

P: If, without any form of collusion occurring, there is wide-spread agreement about the truth of an *S* which is basic for each of the judges; and if someone has adequate grounds for supposing that 1, 2 and 3 each hold of each of the judges, but no other relevant information, then he has excellent grounds for regarding *S* as true. (Wright 2001, 69–71)

And “the appeal of *P* is owing to its being analytic of a basic statement” (Wright 2001, 71).

But, if we assume objectivity of meaning for basic statements, *P* falls. That is, if we have objectivity of meaning (in the fixed or closed sense), we must further be committed to objectivity of judgement (in the fixed or closed sense). All of which puts a burden on the believer in the objectivity of meaning to give a reason why we have not all “swung away ... from the paths laid down by objective meanings and worldly facts” (Wright 2001, 71)

For good measure, Wright necessitates *P*, and notes that denying *P* is, in effect, accepting a gap between the satisfaction of the conditions detailed in its antecedent and believing that *S* is true, and that neutralizing *P*’s conditions in this way removes all but one bridge between their attaining and the truth of *S*. The remaining bridge—faith—explains nothing.

In the face of this, Wright’s alternative scenario is infinitely more appealing:

to reject objectivity of meaning for basic statements is to come to regard their content, and so their truth status, as ever open to determination by our linguistic behaviour. ... it is ... clear that we can no longer think of the truth conditions of basic statements as fixed quite independently of responses of ours, still to be elicited from us, involving the relevant basic concepts—[basic statements have an openness of content]. (Wright 2001, 72)

More specifically recall that Wright says:

rejection of objectivity of meaning for basic statements led us to the view that what it is true to say about the meaning of any basic expression, and hence the nature of that meaning, is indefinitely open to further determination by ongoing responses of members of the linguistic community; rather as what it is true to say about someone’s character, and hence the nature of that character, is indefinitely open to further determination by what he says and does. (Wright 2001, 76)

But there is a contradiction here: rejection of the objectivity of meaning is specifically spelled out as the rejection of a fixed/closed meaning—which

is precisely the kind of situation Wright has just arrived at and claimed as objective for truth status. So a rejection of the objectivity of meaning (which, presumably is the acceptance of a situation we can fairly characterise as *lack* of objectivity of meaning), leads to a situation characterised as an acceptance of the objectivity of truth status (specifically, an openness of truth status)—which is specifically the situation that has just been rejected as a candidate for the objectivity of meaning.

To give the argument point by point: first Wright claims that the truth status of basic statements depends on their content—which, he claims, is open. He argues that the truth of all more complex (non-basic) statements depends on the truth of basic statements. From these initial claims, he arrives at the idea of genuine warrant (see Wright 2001, 74), and:

*P**: Necessarily: if *X* has acquired, in context *C*, a genuine warrant for believing *S*, then it is reasonable for *X* to believe *S* to be true. (Wright 2001, 75)

But consider *S* (a non-basic statement) and the following scenario:

1. We have, in context *C*, genuine warrant for believing *S*; and
2. *S* is true. (Wright 2001, 75)

Wright points out that for a believer in the objectivity of meaning for non-basic statements (specifically one who grants that basic statements do not have objectivity of meaning), whether (2) is true is a closed question (in the *x*-sense), and whether (1) is true is open (in the *y*-sense).

This means *P** is threatened, since it now seems impossible to show:

that our primitive dispositions with basic vocabulary somehow follow suit after the requirements of objective meanings of non-basic vocabulary, engineering a sufficient measure of covariance, among statements in general, between truth and the availability of genuine warrants to give point to the practice of trying to secure genuine warrants as, where ever practicable, a precondition of belief. (Wright 2001, 76–77)

Now *P** no longer looks like a platitude, but a postulate of “an odd sort of pre-established harmony” (Wright 2001, 77). And though we can postulate such harmony obtaining, its obtaining seems inexplicable. Against this scenario, Wright suggests that *P** is attractive (and affirmable) just because (and if) “it is analytic of our ordinary concepts of truth and evidence” (Wright 2001, 77).

To sum up the situation thus far, I have argued that Wright’s claims in (Wright 2001) rest on the use of one term (‘objectivity’) for two different concepts, and that if one of these two concepts is chosen so that the term’s use

becomes consistent throughout, Wright's argument dissipates. If, conversely, the two concepts are retained but disambiguated throughout, his argument also dissipates.

6. How the Problem Generalises: Truth

What sort of claim is the claim that P^* looks like a platitude? It is an attempt to appeal to our "ordinary concepts of truth and evidence". Recall that Wright admits that one ordinary or intuitive idea of the objectivity of meaning involved fixedness or closure. Now even if this idea can somehow be shown to be a mistake, it is plausible that we could nonetheless (and naturally) claim that it is constitutive of (or at least to be an essential component of) the very concept of objectivity. That is, it is possible to argue that, if this (mis)conception of the objectivity of meaning (*as* objectivity) is indeed a mistake, then so too is our ordinary conception of objectivity—i.e. that the very concept 'objective' is a sort of overblown ideal, an illusion.

If there is a place for such an argument, what of our ordinary concepts of truth and evidence? If indeed (at least one of) our ordinary or intuitive concepts of objective meaning involves closure, so also it seems, must (at least one of) our ordinary conceptions of truth, and again by extension, of evidence.

Recall though, that in (Wright 2001), Wright's argument rests on a claim that the ordinary concept of (objective) truth and evidence is something quite different. There is at minimum some confusion here that needs clarifying before we can simply lay claim to 'the' ordinary conception of objectivity and with that, of truth and evidence.

It is certainly not unequivocally obvious that our ordinary conception of truth is an open one, wherein truth is constituted in an ongoing sense, and is subject to "practical controls" (Wright 2001, 77). Surely, for one thing, the eternal realism/anti-realism debate would have been resolved ages ago if there was in fact such a settled ordinary conception (and, if it was one that was open, well it too might change).

Truth, writes Boghossian "is what you ought to believe, whether or not you know how to go about it, and whether or not you know you have obtained it. That ... is what makes it the state it is" (Boghossian 2003, 39).

Boghossian's and Wright's are two different "ordinary" conceptions of truth and its objectivity. There is then the further question how each of these compares with the conception of truth as that which transcends our strongest grounds for affirmation one way or the other, and the notion that it is attaining (and by corollary, our belief in our competence to use our language correctly) is itself correctly seen as a matter of faith.

The question as to which of these notions is indeed the correct concep-

tion of truth, or even which is the most intuitive or ordinary, need not be answered one way or the other in order to establish how the problem exemplified above generalises from ‘objectivity’ to ‘truth’. To show this, we only need to point out that there are (at least) two ways of constituting an ordinary understanding of ‘truth’, and so long as this is true, the problem inherent to the project in (Wright 2001) will inhere in any similar project to capture the concept ‘truth’, just so long as these differing conceptualisations are not acknowledged at the outset.

7. Justification

On a more speculative note, it seems as though simply in order to state P^* , we act on an implicit assumption: something to the effect that the thing we respond and react to, the thing we receive and perceive (which is, perhaps, the thing we typically dub ‘the world’)—remains fixed. That is— P^* itself seems built on an underlying assumption that the only sorts of things that can “go wrong” are with us: with our receptive and recognitional capacities—rather than with the “out there” that we recognise. This is aside from the explicit assumption that the world is “co-operative” with our cognitive faculties. The implicit assumption is such that without it (i.e. without some background assumption of a fixed realm), P^* cannot so much as be articulated.

This is interesting particularly in so far as it highlights a new possible defence for the importance of the various “strong” conceptions of the terms discussed above. That is, it may be possible to show that each of the “strong” varieties of ‘truth’ and ‘objectivity’ (e.g. ‘objectivity_x’), for instance, are themselves a pre-condition for the articulation of the ‘weak’ varieties (e.g. ‘objectivity_y’).

Setting aside the question whether or not such (x -variety) assumptions (or conceptions of truth and objectivity, especially with regard to reality) are necessary pre-conditions for the articulation of their y counterparts; the presence of this sort of implicit assumption in all of our cognitive projects is noted in Wright’s (2004a, 2004b). The task he sets himself in these works is no less than the justification of such assumptions.

Again, though, we can ask, what is our “ordinary concept” of justification here? What would the justification of this sort of assumption look like?

Allowing that the stuff we recognise could shift and change is one version of a challenge to the uniformity thesis: “that the world abounds in natural regularities” (Wright 2004b, 170). When it comes to justifying this thesis, Wright proposes ways in which we might be justified in assuming it and in trusting that assumption. Crucial to his project here is the notion that we are entitled to certain assumptions and beliefs as a “strategic policy” (Wright 2004b, 194). And that this entitlement is an entitlement to *trust* (say, that the

world is such and such a way). Specifically, he argues that we have a strategic entitlement to accept the uniformity thesis in so far as this entitlement amounts to rational trust. But does our entitlement to the assumption of the uniformity thesis necessarily tally with our ordinary concept of the justification of our belief in the uniformity thesis?

Entitlement to assume the uniformity thesis does not (at least on one natural conception of ‘justification’) lead to the justification of our belief that the world abounds in natural regularities (nor, in analogous cases, do our relevant entitlements lead to the justification of our beliefs that there is a material world or that the material world “co-operates” with our cognitive capacities). On this (*x*-version) conception of justification, such an entitlement can, perhaps, be argued to justify our *having* the relevant beliefs, but when we ask after a justification for our beliefs, this is not what we are after (at least it is not on one natural conception (*x*-version) of the very concept ‘justification’).

According to this conception of justification, what we are after is, rather, the justification of the content of the belief itself. And this can attain only if the proposed “justifier” is in actuality, present (as opposed to absent). That is, on this conceptualization of justification, justification has to do with the presence or absence of the subject of our belief rather than with our entitlement to have the belief.

Thus, on this conception of justification, we are justified in believing the world abounds in natural regularities iff the world abounds in natural regularities; we are justified in our belief that there is a material world iff there is a material world, and so on. The justificatory event—the actual presence of the subject of each belief; or, put another way, the conclusion ‘and there is’ that is needed to justify each of these sorts of beliefs; is quite different from the conclusion ‘and we can assume there is’ that Wright argues for (in Wright 2004a,b).

That is, it could be argued that a natural part of our concept of justification is the actual attainment of the content of our belief. Thus it could at least be argued that part of our ordinary conception of justification is the necessary presence of the supposed justifier.

Gödel’s conception of justification approaches this sort of idea:

I come now to the second part of our problem, namely, the problem of giving a justification for our axioms and rules of inference, and as to this question it must be said that the situation is extremely unsatisfactory. Our formalism works perfectly well and is perfectly unobjectionable as long as we consider it a mere game with symbols, but as soon as we come to attach a meaning to our symbols serious difficulties arise. (Gödel 1995, 49)

The justification Gödel seems after is one that is directly opposable to considering the formalism as “a mere game with symbols”. It is worth asking just what a direct opposition of that notion consists in. It may embody a scenario wherein what we recognise is only part of the picture, or, say, one in which the independent reality that we can cognitively grasp, and which we suppose remains just as it is, is actually a mode of presentation of some necessarily unreachable “other”. Possibly, this amounts to the supposition that there is an external reality—beyond our knowledge, but nonetheless somehow intimately involved with what we can know. So long as such a supposition can be seen as tied into at least one of our “ordinary” notions of justification, the problem for ‘objectivity’ generalises to justification also.

8. Conclusion

The strongest claim one could make against Wright’s program discussed here is that it is a misappropriation of the term ‘objective’ or ‘objectivity’. Whether or not such a characterisation seems fair, will, of course, depend on one’s initial conception of ‘objectivity’. Thus the weaker claim one could make is simply that such a project succeeds in capturing a concept, just not the one it aimed for. But this claim is enough to establish the point that the argument fails as an attempt to save the notion as it is ordinarily used, and this is especially the case if its ordinary use is more closely affiliated with objectivity_x than with objectivity_y.

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