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## The Manifestation Challenge: The Debate between McDowell and Wright\*

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### **Abstract**

*In this paper, we will discuss what is called “Manifestation Challenge” to semantic realism, which was originally developed by Michael Dummett and has been further refined by Crispin Wright. According to this challenge, semantic realism has to meet the requirement that knowledge of meaning must be publically manifested in linguistic behaviour. In this regard, we will introduce and evaluate John McDowell’s response to this anti-realistic challenge, which was put forward to show that the challenge cannot undermine realism. According to McDowell, knowledge of undecidable sentences’ truth-conditions can be properly manifested in our ordinary practice of asserting such sentences under certain circumstances, and any further requirement will be redundant. Wright’s further objection to McDowell’s response will be also discussed and it will be argued that this objection fails to raise any serious problem for McDowell’s response and that it is an implausible objection in general.*

**Key words:** Dummett, Wright, McDowell, Manifestation Challenge, Semantic Realism.

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### **The Later Wittgenstein vs. Frege on Linguistic Understanding**

Frege introduces two important semantic properties for linguistic expressions; sense and reference (see Frege, 1892). The reference, or *Bedeutung*, of a name is the object designated by the name, and the reference, or as it is sometimes called the semantic value, of a sentence is one of its truth values (see e.g. Frege, 1892: 63). On the other hand, the sense of a sentence is what is grasped by a speaker when he understands the sentence, and understanding the senses of the sentence's parts is fulfilled by a grasp of their contribution to the sense of the sentence as a whole. The sense of a linguistic expression is said to be a way of representing, describing, or determining its semantic value. The sense of a sentence is what is called "thought" by Frege (see Frege, 1892: 62; 1956: 292). For him, one of the most important features of senses is their being objective, which in turn points to the features such as being timeless, unchangeable, existent independently of the subject or thinker, and communicable between speakers.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, if we take the sense of a sentence to be the conditions under which the sentence is true, i.e. its truth-conditions, the Fregean "semantic realism" can be summarized as the view that our understanding of the meaning of sentences consists in our knowledge of their objective truth-conditions.<sup>2</sup>

The early Wittgenstein was inspired by Frege. As Kripke summarizes his view, the most basic doctrine in *Tractatus* is that: "a declarative sentence gets its meaning by virtue of its *truth conditions*, by virtue of its correspondence to facts that must obtain if it is true" (1982: 72). Although there are differences between the early Wittgenstein's and Frege's philosophy,<sup>3</sup> it is important to note that, for Wittgenstein, proposition should be conceived of as being intrinsically a picture of reality, states of affairs, or facts. Because of that, "to understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true" (Wittgenstein, 1922: §4.024). This means that, generally speaking, understanding a sentence consists in knowing its truth-conditions. As a result, the sort of truth-conditional approach to meaning is, in one way or another, admitted by the early Wittgenstein and, insofar as this truth-conditional approach and the reality of the realm of senses are concerned, we can say that Wittgenstein is following Frege's main doctrines on meaning and linguistic understanding.

The later Wittgenstein, however, is taken to be proposing a completely different picture of meaning and understanding.<sup>4</sup> In Malcolm's view (1986), the later Wittgenstein attempted to criticize the view that understanding the sense of a sentence is to understand the contribution of its constituent parts, that is, that our understanding is hidden within the words of language. Instead, according to the *Investigations*, what we need

is the knowledge of the circumstances under which the sentence is used. As a consequence, “the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (Wittgenstein, 1953: §43). According to this alternative Wittgensteinian picture of linguistic understanding, our understanding of words does not anymore consist in our knowledge of the truth-conditions of the sentences in which they occur; rather, as Wittgenstein points out, “to understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to master a technique” (Ibid, §199). To learn such a technique, one must grasp the wide agreement across a speech community on that activity: “Here the term ‘*language-game*’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity” (Ibid, §23). This activity requires the presence of other speakers, as Malcolm clarifies, “if there was no *we* – if there was no agreement among those who have had the same training, so to what are the correct steps in particular cases when following a rule – then there would be no *wrong* steps, or indeed any *right* ones” (1986: 156).<sup>5</sup> As a result, for a solitary speaker considered in isolation, there would be no genuine distinction between what seems right to him and what is actually right. Rather, we need a speech community for such correctness conditions to appear: a speaker can be judged to be correctly following a rule only if his linguistic usage conforms to the customary pattern used by other users of that language. In this way, there can be no private language. As Wittgenstein states, “‘following a rule’ is a practice. And to believe one is following a rule is not following the rule. Hence one cannot follow a rule ‘privately’: otherwise believing he was following a rule would be the same as following it” (Wittgenstein, 1953: §202).

The question now is whether Frege’s/the early Wittgenstein’s conception of meaning is compatible with the later Wittgenstein’s. This leads to the question whether the sort of realism, which, regarding its different strengths, Frege and the early Wittgenstein advocated, can be seen to have any compatibility with the later Wittgenstein’s main doctrines about meaning properly conceived? As we saw, the standard reading of the early and the later Wittgenstein’s views treats them as radically divergent so that the later Wittgenstein seems to be entirely abandoning Frege’s main doctrines on meaning and linguistic understanding, together with the metaphysical view, i.e. realism, which he himself allegedly held in the *Tractatus*.<sup>6</sup> However, while the standard interpretation of the early Wittgenstein/Frege and the later Wittgenstein takes them as proposing incompatible views, it is not the thought that all philosophers commonly endorse. Dummett/Wright and McDowell are the two main figures in the contemporary philosophy of language supporting a different reading of Wittgenstein’s works, though the way they allow

Frege's and the later Wittgenstein's views to be put together amounts to different interesting views. We will start by introducing Dummett's view first.

### **Dummett on Semantic Realism**

Michael Dummett and, following him, Crispin Wright are the philosophers who think Frege's and the later Wittgenstein's main theses on meaning and linguistic understanding are not necessarily incompatible, though if they are combined, the outcome of such a combination is an "anti-realist" theory of meaning. Dummett was inspired by both Frege and the later Wittgenstein. His extensive writings on Frege's philosophy cover both criticism as well as admiration of the main doctrines of Frege on meaning (see e.g. Dummett, 1973a, 1973b, 1991a, 1991b, 1981a). At the same time, he appreciates the later Wittgenstein's slogan that "meaning is use" (see e.g. Dummett, 1976: 36, 91; 1979: 108, 113, 116; 1989: 179-180; 1991c: 305-306). Dummett believes that "Frege's thesis that sense is objective [in the sense of being intrinsically fully communicable] is thus implicitly an anticipation [...] of Wittgenstein's doctrine that meaning is use [...]: yet Frege never drew the consequences of this for the form which the sense of a word may take" (1976: 91; see also Dummett, 1981b: 245; 1973a: 682). Although Dummett is considered as one of the most important admirers of Frege's philosophy, his theory of meaning, or better, his theory of understanding,<sup>7</sup> is a full attempt in rejecting the realistic view of meaning and understanding, that is, a rejection of the realist belief that truth-conditions can be considered as evidence-transcendent.

Dummett starts his criticism of realism by saying that realism problematically implies a notion of evidence-transcendent truth, which is a highly controversial claim for him. According to Dummett, first of all, realism can be defined "as the belief that statement of disputed class [undecidable sentences] possess an objective truth-value, independently of our means of knowing it: they are true or false in virtue of a reality existing independently of us" (Dummett, 1963: 146). This definition can indeed be regarded as the definition of semantic realism, which, for Dummett, is the only sense in which we can investigate realism.<sup>8</sup> On his account, semantic realism is the doctrine, associated with Frege, that our sentential understanding consists in our knowledge of sentences' truth-conditions, where truth is treated as potentially evidence-transcendent or epistemically unconstrained. What is Dummett's problem with such a view?

Dummett rejects the claim that our understanding of sentences can consist in a grasp of their potentially evidence-transcendent truth-

conditions. Dummett's version of anti-realism implies the view that our understanding of a sentence should be characterized in terms of the way that sentence can be properly used, or more particularly, in terms of the conditions under which its truth or falsity can be verified or its assertion can be warranted by the availability of enough evidence.<sup>9</sup> For Dummett, the realist conception of the meaning of certain sentences cannot be reconciled with Wittgenstein's widely conceded insight about linguistic understanding. Dummett reads Wittgenstein's slogan that "meaning is use" as the doctrine that "the knowledge in which a speaker's understanding of a sentence consists must be capable of being fully manifested by his linguistic practice" (1979: 116). However, semantic realists defend the view that understanding a sentence consists in our grasp of its potentially evidence-transcendent truth-conditions. To see the problem better, we should consider the way Dummett distinguishes between decidable and undecidable sentences: decidable sentences are the sentences "for which a speaker has some effective procedure which will, in a finite time, put him into a position in which he can recognize whether or not the conditions for the truth of the sentence is satisfied" (Dummett, 1976: 45). In contrast, for undecidable sentences, we do not have such defined procedure, for example, the sentence "Cyrus the Great smiled before his death", by supposing that he dies alone, is an undecidable sentence. Dummett's concern now is: how can we grasp the truth-conditions of undecidable sentences if such conditions are potentially evidence-transcendent? If our linguistic understanding is defined as above, it is implausible to think that we can fully manifest our knowledge of such sentences' truth-conditions.<sup>10</sup> Dummett, at some point, completely rejected the idea that our understanding of declarative sentences consists in a grasp of their truth-conditions. He, hence, by appealing to Wittgensteinian conception of linguistic understanding, tried to show that semantic realism presents a wrong picture of sentential understanding. We can summarize these remarks into Dummett's "Manifestation Argument",<sup>11</sup> which aims to reject semantic realism altogether, as Dummett points out "it is, in fact, plain that the knowledge, which is being ascribed to one who is said to understand the [undecidable] sentence, is knowledge which transcends the capacity to manifest that knowledge by the way in which the sentence is used. The [semantic realist's] theory of meaning cannot be a theory in which meaning is fully determined by use" (1973a: 225). Hence, according to the manifestation argument as proposed by Dummett, (1) if (undecidable) sentences had evidence-transcendent (i.e., realistic) truth-conditions, we could manifest our knowledge of these conditions in our use of these sentences; (2) such knowledge cannot be so manifested; (3) therefore, (undecidable) sentences have no evidence-

transcendent (realistic) truth-conditions.<sup>12</sup> In the next section, we will get to Wright's more accurate and plausible characterization of this argument and, in Section 4, we will see that the main debate between McDowell and Wright concerns the second premise of this argument.

Therefore, Dummett's manifestation argument against semantic realism aims to show that our sentential understanding does not consist in a grasp of potentially evidence-transcendent truth-conditions.<sup>13</sup> Rather such an understanding should be associated with assertability conditions, i.e. the conditions under which that sentence can be properly used for the purpose of asserting something specific. In fact, in his view, what should be constrained in the truth-conditional conception of meaning is the concept of truth, which is, in the realistic view, an epistemically unconstrained notion.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, he adheres to both the truth-conditional conception of meaning and the manifestability principle, while he limits the concept of truth and treats the truth of a sentence as evidentially constrained. This is the reason why Dummett claimed that, although a plausible theory of meaning can have as one of its main components a theory of Fregean sense, the idea that the concept of truth can be taken as a primitive and epistemically unconstrained concept should be rejected (see Dummett, 1976: 35; 1979: 116). Thereby, he defends "full-blooded" theories of meaning, in contrast with "modest" ones, regarding the way the concept of truth is deployed in such theories. In modest theories, the famous proponent of which is McDowell, truth is treated as a primitive concept, no explanation of which is forthcoming (see e.g. McDowell, 1977). In Dummett's favored full-blooded theory, however, the key facts about content must not be presupposed in advance; instead, the theory has to provide us with an account of the basic predicates and referring terms of the language (see Dummett, 1975: 5-6, 21). Dummett's considerations on this matter require us to search for a theory of meaning in which, firstly, "meaning is not directly given in terms of the condition for a sentence to be true, but for it to be verified; and, secondly, that the notion of truth, when it is introduced, must be explained, in some manner, in terms of our capacity to recognize statements as true, and not in terms of a condition which transcends human capacities" (Dummett, 1976: 75).<sup>15</sup> In what follows, we will consider the way Wright characterizes Dummett's challenge for semantic realism.

### **Wright on the Manifestation Challenge**

Wright, however, does not see the manifestation "argument" as entirely ruling out semantic realism. According to Wright's reading, Dummett's manifestation argument can be regarded as a "challenge" for semantic

realists, a challenge concerning whether a coherent and consistent realistic view can be extracted from a combination of the following beliefs:

(I) *The Truth-Conditional Conception of Understanding*: “the thesis that what constitutes an understanding of any declarative sentence is a knowledge of its truth-conditions” (Wright, 1993: 247-248). To illustrate, in Frege’s view, the sense of a sentence is what is grasped by someone who understands the sentence. The sense of a sentence, or its thought, was considered by Frege as the way the sentence’s reference is presented, i.e. its truth or falsity (Frege, 1892: 62; 1956: 292). Thus, we can take the sense of a sentence as its truth-conditions, the conditions under which the sentence is true or false (see Miller, 2007: 34). Therefore, the truth-conditional conception of meaning and understanding turns into the doctrine that our understanding of a sentence consists in our knowledge of its truth-conditions.

(II) *The Wittgensteinian Conception of Linguistic Understanding*: Wittgenstein’s view of meaning as use leads to a particular conception of the nature of understanding, according to which linguistic understanding consists in a practical knowledge, or an ability about how to use a language: “To understand a language means to be master of a technique” (Wittgenstein, 1953: §199); it is not, thus, something like a hidden mental process, but a know-how ability that has to be displayed in our actions. Therefore, “understanding an expression is knowing its proper use, and such knowledge consists in a complex of practical abilities [... which] are essentially abilities to perform appropriately in public” (Wright, 1993: 247). The key point here is that exercising the practical abilities to use a language must be publicly evaluable as correct or incorrect, right or wrong, by others. Linguistic understanding, therefore, should be associated only with the abilities which we are capable of publicly manifesting, as Wright points out:

The performance abilities that constitutes an understanding of an expression count for nothing unless associated with the ability to *evaluate* one’s own and other’s performance with that expression. So understanding, if it is to be viewed as a practical ability at all, has to see as a complex of *discriminatory* capacities: an overall ability intentionally to suit one’s use of the expression to the obtaining of factors which can be appropriated by oneself and others to render one’s use apt. (1989: 247)

Now, as discussed above, we can summarize this commitment as follows: understanding a sentence consists in having certain practical abilities to use that sentence, e.g., to recognize whether and how the use of the sentence is appropriate and justified; Wright calls this belief the “*Manifestability Principle*” (Ibid, 247).

(III) *Truth Is Potentially Evidence-Transcendent*: This claim states that it is possible for a sentence to have truth-conditions detecting the obtaining which may go beyond our abilities. Sentences may be true or false undetectably, i.e., even when we are not able to gather any evidence for their truth-value. In other words, sentences have realist, potentially evidence-transcendent truth-conditions, not the truth-conditions which if obtain their obtaining can be verified.

According to Wright, the first two beliefs “are not in overt tension exactly” (1993: 248). If someone wishes to reconcile these two theses, he has to show that “knowing the truth-conditions of the sentence has to be a state which somehow guarantees possession of various abilities, and the question must, therefore be acknowledged how the guarantee is sustained” (Ibid). However, while the first two principles are not in serious tension, “it is when the third ingredient [...] is introduced that a real tension is generated” (Ibid). The problem is that when we combine the first two theses with the third one, we reach the claim that understanding a sentence consists in knowing its truth-conditions that are potentially evidence-transcendent. Wright’s demand of realists is to introduce a practical ability showing our knowledge of such truth-conditions. What can such practical abilities be? And, how can having such abilities be manifested? Wright has suggestions about the general form of such ability:

The Manifestability Principle bids us to view the understanding of declarative sentences as a complex of abilities, and the truth-conditional conception seems to superimpose a unifying frame, to postulate a thread which runs through the evidence-sifting, inferential, and other abilities involve in understanding the sentence and somehow binds them together. Knowing the truth-conditions of the sentences has to be a state, which somehow guarantees possession of these abilities. (Wright, 1989: 54)

Here, we need to pay attention to Wright’s distinction between “core abilities” and “neighbourhood abilities”. Neighbourhood abilities are the abilities such as the ability to gather and select relevant evidence for sentences, to be able to recognize inferences to and from such sentences, to be able to use them to attribute proper beliefs to people, and so forth. For example, if we understand the sentence “it’s raining”, then we are able to collect some evidence for whether or not it is raining outside, we can infer that the street is thereby wet, and we are able to attribute the belief to the speaker that it’s raining, and so on. Core abilities, for Wright, seem to be *recognitional abilities*, e.g., the ability to recognize whether or not it is raining outside, which are manifestable and which guarantee the possession of the neighbourhood abilities. Regarding the sentence “that is salty”, Wright introduces the core ability to understand such a sentence as the ability to “recognize the taste of the samples by placing them in one’s



mouth, and thereby verify or falsify descriptions of their taste” (1993: 17). Using the sentence “that is salty” is, hence, a sign of having such a recognitional ability. Therefore, we can recognize what makes “that is salty” true, i.e., that thing being salty, by recognizing the taste of it. The core ability, in the case of truth-conditional conception of understanding, hence, becomes the ability to recognize the truth-value of the sentence, which can be identified with the knowledge of the sentence’s truth-conditions. Therefore, in the case of decidable sentences, the first two beliefs, (I) and (II), can be combined: “Plausibly, then, in the case of such judgements [decidable sentences], the Manifestability Principle and Truth-Condition Conception can be made to coherent perfectly. Grasp of such judgments’ truth-condition will be a manifestable, recognitional skill, and there will be a case for regarding it as constitutive of an understanding of them” (Ibid, 251).

However, Wright’s problem is that “nothing at all corresponds to abilities of this kind in the case of statements for which the anti-realist finds the realist’s account of understanding problematic” (Ibid, 17), namely, the case of *undecidable* sentences. What realists must do here is to introduce some core ability, which constitutes our understanding of the undecidable sentences as knowing their potentially evidence-transcendent truth-conditions. This is the challenge the realists should overcome if they wish to propose a consistent view: “The anti-realist challenge to the realist is now: explain how your conception of understanding can be made to harmonize with Wittgenstein’s insight” (Ibid, 16). In Wright’s view, an anti-realist does not face such a problem regarding the mentioned three beliefs and has two easy options: either a “rejection of the Truth-Conditional Conception of statement understanding [a rejection of the first belief], or its retention subject to constraint that the ‘truth’ in ‘truth-conditions’ denote an evidentially constrained notion [a revision of the third belief]” (Ibid, 249). According Wright, Dummett’s and Wright’s own earlier discussions presupposed that “truth is nothing if not classical (evidence transcendent) and hence that the Truth-Conditional Conception has to be supplanted by something in which warranted assertion, or perhaps verification, plays the central role” (Ibid, 249). Later, he decides to support a revision of our conception of truth as epistemically unconstrained, that is, he goes for the second option mentioned above.<sup>16</sup> McDowell, however, has a different way to cope with this challenge.

### **McDowell’s Response to the Manifestation Challenge**

In “Anti-realism and the Epistemology of Understanding” (1981), McDowell responds to the above anti-realistic challenge.<sup>17</sup> In order to see his response in a clearer way, we need to consider the platitude he insists

there is between the content of an assertion and the truth-conditions of the sentence we use to assert that content: “There is a truistic connection between the notion of the content of an assertion and a familiar notion of truth [...]; the connection guarantees, as the merest platitude, that a correct specification of what can be asserted, by the assertoric utterance of a sentence, cannot but be a specification of a condition under which the sentence is true” (1981: 319). In this regard, what McDowell is interested in is a platitudinous connection between what we assert and the truth-conditions of the sentence we use to make that assertion. McDowell continues: “Knowledge of what a sentence can be used to assert is knowledge that can be directly manifested, on appropriate occasions, by using the sentence in such a way as manifestly to assert precisely that” (Ibid, 321-322). We expect from a competent speaker of a language to be able to use his language’s sentences to make certain assertions. For instance, such a competent speaker by using the sentence “snow is white” asserts *that snow is white*. McDowell’s claim is that what the speaker knows when he asserts something (i.e. *that snow is white*) is simply manifestable in his ability to use that sentence for making that assertion. McDowell, then, states: “Specifications of contents of potential assertions are, by way of our platitude, specifications of conditions under which the sentences used to effect those assertions would be true” (Ibid, 321-322). By means of McDowell’s platitude and regarding his claim that our knowledge of the content of our assertions is manifestable in our use of the sentence, we reach the claim that our knowledge of the content of our assertions consists in our knowledge of the truth-conditions of the sentence, which we are using for making that assertion. Hence, when the competent speaker uses the sentence “snow is white” to assert the specific content *that snow is white*, this content of that assertion, or of the asserted sentence, is, on the basis of McDowell’s platitude, the conditions under which that sentence would be true or false. We have thereby arrived at nothing but the truth-conditional conception of understanding: if a speaker understands a sentence, he knows the truth-conditions of the sentence and the knowledge of the truth-conditions is manifested by the speaker’s ability to use the sentence to assert what he knows. McDowell’s platitude, hence, allowed us to combine the truth-conditional conception of linguistic understanding with the Wittgensteinian manifestability principle.

But, McDowell has not yet provided a justification for the inclusion of the third belief, namely, that the truth-conditions of undecidable sentences are potentially evidence-transcendent. McDowell deals with this part by making the following claim:

Now if a sentence lacks an effective decision procedure, then the condition that any competent speaker knows he would be asserting to obtain if he used the sentence in order to make an assertion – which is in fact a condition under which the sentence would be true [...] – is *ex hypothesi* not a condition whose obtaining, if it does obtain, a competent speaker can be sure of being able to put himself in a position to recognize. (1981: 322)

What McDowell, by appealing to the assertion-truth platitude, seeks to show here is that competent speakers are able to use undecidable sentences to make assertions and they thereby manifest their knowledge of the conditions under which those sentences *would* be true, although for these conditions we have no evidence or finite procedure which can help verify or falsify them. Competent speakers are able to manifest their knowledge of the truth-conditions of undecidable sentences by their ability to assert them via using those sentences, though the truth-conditions are potentially evidence-transcendent. This simply leads us to the following realistic conclusion: “we seem to have equipped ourselves with a kind of realism: a description of linguistic competence that makes central use of the idea that speakers have a knowledge of conditions that they are not, in general, capable of recognizing whenever they obtain” (McDowell, 1981: 322). That is to say, competent speakers’ understanding of undecidable sentences consists in their grasp of the sentences’ truth-conditions, which if they obtain, we may not be in principle capable of detecting. In this sense, we come up with a realistic view which most importantly accommodates the claim that undecidable sentences possess potentially evidence-transcendent truth-conditions and our knowledge of such truth-conditions is manifestable in our ability to use such sentences to make certain assertions.

### **Evaluating McDowell’s Response**

The important question I seek an answer to in this part is whether McDowell’s response to anti-realists’ challenge is successful. McDowell introduced the practical ability Wright asked for by introducing the platitude, namely, the ability to use a sentence in order to assert a specific content, which is in turn the condition under which the sentence would be true. For example, I may use the sentence “John was brave” to assert *that John was brave*. John, let’s suppose, died two years ago and I have, would have, no evidence about whether John was really brave. McDowell’s suggestion is that when I use the sentence “John was brave” to assert *that John was brave*, such a use for making such an assertion manifests my knowledge of the conditions under which the sentence *would* be true, though I do not have any specific procedure to verify it. The assertability

conditions are the conditions under which the speaker feels justified to use a sentence in a certain way to make a specific assertion, for example, when the speaker agrees with others in her speech community on how to use certain words and sentences of her language to make certain assertions. A *competent* speaker of our linguistic community, who has the ability to use “John was brave” to make an assertion, can use the sentence to assert that *John was brave* and, for McDowell, by doing so the speaker has manifested her knowledge of the conditions under which such an undecidable sentence would be true. The reason again is that there is, according to McDowell, a platitudinous relation between making an assertion and saying the truth, that is, a platitudinous relation between making an assertion and expressing the conditions under which the sentence would be true. Therefore, understanding the sentence that is used by the speaker to make a certain assertion manifests the speaker’s knowledge of the sentence’s potentially evidence-transcendent truth-conditions.

Wright, however, does not seem to accept McDowell’s response as plausible. It is important to note that Wright concedes McDowell’s suggested platitudinous connection between assertions and truth, as Wright says, “someone, for instance, who understands ‘Jones is in pain’ will be credited, by the platitudinous reasoning, with a conception of a specific kind of state of affairs – Jones’ being in pain – whose obtaining he conceives as necessary and sufficient for the truth of that statement” (1993: 18-19). Consequently, “the platitudes may be allowed to reinstate ‘knowledge of truth-conditions’ as a general description of the abilities which those who understand a statement thereby have” (Ibid, 19). Nevertheless, Wright raises the following objection: “How do we proceed from there to foist on him [the speaker] a conception of how such a state of affairs can obtain *undetectably*?” (Ibid). If the objection is true, then realists, especially McDowell, have failed to defend their position since the platitude does “nothing to justify the idea that the notion of truth which the reference therein to ‘truth-condition’ invokes is the realist’s *objective* truth” (Ibid). Wright’s objection, in other words, is that “somehow McDowell has – perfectly question-beggingly – run together lack of effective decidability with the capacity to be undetectably true” (Ibid, 19, fn. 7). Here is the place we can see a shift from a strong version of the manifestation argument to a weaker version of manifestation challenge.<sup>18</sup> The claim is *not* anymore that the realist’s position is wrong or that a realist cannot combine the three mentioned beliefs to have a coherent view, as Wright confesses that “I have no general, conclusive proof that it cannot” (1989: 250). The challenge is rather that the ability McDowell introduced is not the ability that must be.<sup>19</sup> Hence, McDowell

has so far achieved a success to push anti-realists back to a weaker version of their challenge. I am now going to argue that there are at least two problems with Wright's objection to McDowell: not only does Wright's objection imply an implausible demand of explanation, but it is also put forward by unjustifiably looking at the central problem from a radically different point of view.

First of all, is Wright's objection plausible? The problem, for Wright, is that McDowell's response leaves it ambiguous and unexplained whether the truth-conditions we grasp are indeed realistic, that is, whether they are potentially evidence-transcendent. Wright seems to put forward the following argument to defeat McDowell's response. Let's take for granted the truth-conditional conception of understanding, according to which a competent speaker, when he understands a sentence, knows the conditions under which the sentence is true. Let's assume McDowell's platitude too, according to which such knowledge is manifested in the speaker's ability to use the sentence to assert a specific content. In the case of undecidable sentences, such as "John was brave", McDowell's proposal was that when a speaker publically uses the mentioned sentence to assert *that John was brave*, he manifests his knowledge of this content, which is the knowledge of the condition under which that sentence would be true, though whether or not the truth-condition obtains may remain forever undetectable. Wright's objection is that if our understanding of such an undecidable sentence consists in our knowledge of its truth-conditions, then the realists must tell us not only that the speaker knows under what conditions the sentence would be true, but also that he knows or has "an understanding of how it could be undetectably true" (Wright, 1993: 248), that is to say, a conception of what it is for the truth-conditions to be evidence-transcendent. McDowell's suggestion, according to Wright, does not show that the speaker has such a conception. As a result, Wright concludes that McDowell has failed to justify his claim that our grasp of the truth-conditions is realistic or potentially evidence-transcendent.

This demand, however, seems redundant and implausible. McDowell indeed could respond to Wright by claiming that we can expect from a competent user of English to be able to use the sentence "John was brave" to assert *that John was brave*. She knows, as we expect, under what conditions that sentence would be true, though there is in principle no specific procedure to verify the truth of that sentence. While this demand or expectation from a competent speaker is reasonable and plausible, it does *not* seem plausible to ask from the speaker: Do you know what it is for the truth-condition of your sentence to be evidence-transcendent? Do you really understand what it is for truth to be epistemically

unconstrained? Do you indeed know what it is for the truth-conditions of your sentence to be realistically objective? It is *not* something that we expect from a normal, competent member of our speech community to know and, hence, it is not plausible to seek an ability to manifest such sort of knowledge, that is, it is not plausible to claim that “knowing the [potentially evidence-transcendent] truth-conditions of a sentence may require an understanding of how it could be undetectably true”, as Wright is claiming (Ibid, 248).<sup>20</sup> We should note that it is not even plausible to require something similar from an *anti-realist* account, though I think McDowell could potentially use Wright’s objection against Wright’s own view. The reason is that, according to an anti-realist account, truth is epistemically constrained so that a speaker knows a sentence is true by following a procedure which in principle guarantees a proof of the truth or falsity of the sentence. Now, having taken for granted the anti-realist view, is it plausible to demand, from a speaker, to know what it is for the truth of a sentence to be evidentially constrained or to be epistemically constrained? Is it an acceptable argument against anti-realism? The answer is negative. Neither for a realist, nor for an anti-realist, has meeting what Wright demands had any justification. This leads to the second extra problem, which I am going to discuss below and which I think is concealed in the dispute between McDowell and Wright.

The manifestability principle, it is conceded by Dummett, Wright, and McDowell, is a Wittgensteinian doctrine. McDowell, it seems, would claim that not only do I respect the Wittgensteinian manifestability principle, but I am also a believer of another fundamental doctrine of the *Investigations*, that is, Wittgenstein’s therapeutic approach to philosophical problems, which seems to be neglected by Wright in this dispute. Wittgenstein’s therapeutic or diagnostic view can be taken as a rejection of “the view that there were any real philosophical problems to be solved. They were themselves the result of misunderstanding language and could be eased or explained away by proper attention to our use of words, rather than answered on their own terms” (Thornton, 2004: 2). This therapeutic view does not allow for theorizing and philosophizing beyond what can be achieved from concentrating on actual linguistic practices in our linguistic community. What competent speakers of our linguistic society manifest is their ability to assert something by using a certain sentence. McDowell’s platitude just implies that this manifestation is a manifestation of the knowledge of the truth-conditions’ of the used sentence. Once we are in agreement with this platitude, Wittgenstein’s therapeutic view prevents us from going any further and asking for a sort of knowledge more than that. By insisting on more explanation, we will inevitably engage ourselves in philosophical misunderstandings.

McDowell seems to stop explaining anything else after proposing the platitude, as his Wittgensteinian therapeutic approach implies. We may clarify this idea by emphasizing that what the competent speakers of language are required to know is a know-how, rather than a know-that kind of knowledge: they have the ability, or *know how*, to use a sentence to assert something specific; they are not required to *know that* the truth-conditions of those sentences are potentially evidence-transcendent. It seems that Wright by the demand of introducing a manifestable ability constituting our knowledge of what it is for truth-conditions to be evidence-transcendent violates this Wittgensteinian therapeutic principle, a principle that underlies McDowell's philosophy. As anti-realists accuse realists to be violating the manifestability principle, which indeed McDowell respects, McDowell could accuse anti-realists to be violating Wittgenstein's therapeutic view, that is, to accept a part of Wittgenstein's view but unjustifiably abandoning the other interconnected part. Now, if Wright wishes to challenge Wittgenstein's therapeutic approach, it is Wittgenstein, rather than McDowell, that he has to face with. McDowell's view, hence, keeps its coherence and consistency, unless Wright can justifiably convince us that the Wittgensteinian therapeutic approach is to be rejected and that the other parts of the later Wittgenstein's view can be kept and defended by the anti-realists after the therapeutic approach is excluded.<sup>21</sup>

### **Conclusion**

We can conclude that the debate between McDowell and Wright may not be simply settled by asking, from McDowell, to do more or, from Wright, to give up on some of his claims. This debate discloses a radical divergence between two readings of Wittgenstein, one of which attempts to revive Wittgenstein's therapeutic view and the other resists it. If Wright really tends to challenge McDowell's response, he should challenge either McDowell's platitude or McDowell's therapeutic view. But, Wright accepts the former and if he is challenging the latter, i.e. the Wittgensteinian therapeutic view, then it is one of the most important theses of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, rather than McDowell's, which he is challenging. Finally, Wright's objection, even if successful, does not show that semantic realism is wrong. Rather, it can only show that further attempts to resist the manifestation challenge is required.

### **Notes**

1. We might separate the latter feature from the rest and thereby commit to two claims with different strength about the objectivity of senses: the weaker Fregean thesis states that we cannot successfully communicate with other people, unless we all grasp the same sense of sentences we utter. The stronger Fregean thesis

implies the idea that thoughts are strongly objective in that they can exist even without the existence of any speaker or communicator (see e.g. Frege, 1956: 308, 311).

2. Though, considering the above footnote, the strength of such a view depends on the strength of the concept of objectivity employed in the characterization of this view.

3. For example, for Frege, sentences and names have sense as well as reference, while, for Wittgenstein, names have reference only (not sense). For instance, see (Wittgenstein, 1922: §3.203; §3.3; §4.001).

4. However, it is not the case that there is a widespread consensus between philosophers on this matter; for a different view, see (Horwich, 2013).

5. Malcolm praises Kripke's claim that, for Wittgenstein, a speech community, or a social aspect, is essential, though he criticizes Kripke's claim that Wittgenstein's remarks lead to scepticism about meaning. Malcolm believes that the sceptical paradox is resolved by appealing to speakers' action, rather than interpretation. See (Malcolm, 1986: 155).

6. For other important interpretations of Wittgenstein, see e.g. (Hacker, 2001) and (Kenny, 2006).

7. For Dummett, a theory of meaning has to be taken as a theory of understanding so that, in supplying a theory of meaning for a language, we must provide an account of "what is that someone knows when he knows the language, that is, when he knows the meanings of the expression and sentences of the language" (Dummett, 1975: 99).

8. For Dummett, we cannot simply evaluate realism as a metaphysical doctrine since, in his view, pure metaphysical discussions are more metaphorical than philosophical (see Dummett, 1993a: xxv). Therefore, he prefers to discuss realism as a doctrine about our linguistic understanding of the sentences which, for semantic realists, have potentially evidence-transcendent truth-conditions.

9. As Dummett describes, "For the anti-realist, an understanding of [...] a statement consists in knowing what counts as evidence adequate for the assertion of the statement, and the truth of the statement can consist only in the existence of such evidence" (1963: 155).

10. See (Dummett, 1993b: 98) for his discussion of what it is to be able to use the word "square" and what manifests this ability.

11. See, e.g., (Dummett, 1973a, 1976, 1969, 1963, and 1959).

12. Dummett at least has two, and on some readings three, different arguments against semantic realism: the acquisition argument and the manifestation argument, and a third argument which is called the endowment argument. According to the acquisition argument, (1) semantic realism implies the claim that our understanding of (undecidable) sentences is constituted by our knowledge of their potentially evidence-transcendent truth-conditions. (2) Our linguistic abilities are necessarily learnt by training from other speakers, where this training has taken place by engaging in recognizable situations, that is, by engaging in learning the use of our linguistic expressions in public situations. (3) Therefore, our linguistic abilities cannot go beyond what we were taught, that is, we cannot grasp evidence-transcendent (realistic) truth-conditions (see, Dummett



1969, especially 363-364). See also (Miller, 2003b). A third argument has also been attributed to Dummett in defense of anti-realism, which is called “the argument from endowment” (see Gifford, 2017: 82-88). According to this argument, (1) “if undecidable sentences have realist truth conditions, then we can endow undecidable sentences with realist truth conditions through the way that we use them. [(2)] We cannot endow undecidable sentences with realist truth conditions through the way that we use them. [(3)] Therefore, undecidable sentences do not have realist truth conditions” (Gifford, 2017: 88). See also (Dummett, 1978: 24).

13. Michael Devitt is one of the most important commentators on Dummett’s anti-realist view. For Devitt, Dummett’s concern is whether statements of the one kind are determinately true or false (1983: 79). Devitt, however, sees the dispute between realism and anti-realism as an essentially metaphysical dispute, rather than a semantical one (see Devitt, 1997: 40). See also (Devitt, 1997, Chapter 2, especially 13-14; 1983).

14. For more discussion, see (Miller, 2003a).

15. We should note that one of the main consequences of Dummett’s anti-realistic view is a rejection of the principle of bivalence, according to which all well-formed sentences in a particular discourse are determinately either true or false. See (Dummett, 1969: especially 246).

16. See also (Dummett, 1979: 116).

17. McDowell, in this paper, is originally responding to Dummett’s manifestation argument. See also (McDowell, 1989 and 1987).

18. Miller (2002) draws a distinction between a “strong” and a “weak” version of the manifestation argument, and Byrne (2005) draws a parallel distinction between the “manifestation argument” and the “manifestation challenge”. Although it should be noted that this difference is essentially nothing more than a verbal one, it is important to take into account the fact that the manifestation argument (in Byrne’s terminology) or the strong version of the manifestation argument (in Miller’s) seeks to show the falsity of semantic realism; in contrast, the weak version of the manifestation argument or the manifestation challenge aims to establish the much more modest conclusion, according which we cannot accept or justify semantic realism solely on the basis of the practical abilities – introduced by realists – which constitute linguistic understanding.

19. Faced with this challenge, a number of realists, for example Colin McGinn and Peter Strawson, suggests a variety of practical abilities to deal with this problem. For more, see (Miller, 2002: 358-362).

20. Miller puts this point in a different way by saying that what Wright’s demand requires of the speakers seems to be that they must have a conception of something very theoretical, that they must “*also manifest an understanding of realism*” (Miller, 2002: 371).

21. Wright is against Wittgenstein’s therapeutic approach (see, e.g. Wright, 2001a, p.373; see also Wright, 2001b). Whether or not he is successful in this resistance against such an approach is a question that can be approached in a separate investigation. My point here is to raise the question whether Wright is justified to criticize McDowell’s response on a ground that is radically far from

McDowell's philosophy. For McDowell, Wittgenstein's therapeutic approach to philosophical perplexities is one of the most vital doctrines of the later Wittgenstein and an inseparable part of his own philosophy.]

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