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Response to Commentators

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I. On the instability of classical deflationism

The 'inflationary' argument of chapter 1 of *Truth and Objectivity*—the argument that the classical deflationary conception of truth must, on its own assumptions, inflate into something more substantial—is puzzled over by James Van Cleve and, unsurprisingly, roundly rejected by Paul Horwich. Van Cleve wonders about the precise role in the argument of the normativity of the truth-predicate, and wonders what exactly it is about deflationism, in contrast with minimalism, which puts it in tension with the existence of distinct norms of truth and warranted assertibility. Horwich too complains that the argument is structurally unclear and unconvincing, charging that it turns on a *non sequitur* and that even if it could engage the traditional form of deflationism which holds that truth is not a property, it would pass by the version of the position which he himself has defended at length. And he too is puzzled about the role of normativity in the inflationary argument, since he thinks that those aspects of the truth-predicate which reflect its normativity may straightforwardly be accounted for by appeal to the Equivalence Schema (or, presumably, the Disquotational Scheme). I shall first offer some remarks by way of clarification, hoping thereby to speak to Van Cleve's queries, and then respond to Horwich's objections.

Classical deflationism is the view that there is no legitimate subject matter for the debates between correspondence theorists, coherence theorists, pragmatists (at least, the ones who intend to say something about what truth should be held to consist in) and those philosophers who, like Frege, hold that truth is a substantial, though indefinable characteristic of the items—be they sentences, propositions, or attitudes—which have it. For the classical deflationist, these misbegotten debates arise because of a misunderstanding of the role of the truth-predicate: it functions as an adjective, so one naturally expects its function to be to ascribe a property. But that is not its function, and there is no such property. Its real function is as a device of *endorsement.* In general, such endorsement can be achieved, without using any special device, just by asserting, or assenting to a particular proposition (say). The need for the truth-predicate arises only because endorsement can sometimes be

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indefinite ("Something he said is true"), or generalised ("Everything he said is true"), and because we sometimes may wish to endorse a proposition by name ("The Axiom of Constructibility is true") without specification of its content.

That this is the central point of of our having the word "true" is emphasised by Horwich.[1] And while he officially disclaims the contention that truth is not a property,[2] this does not in fact mark any significant divergence between his position and that of classical deflationism, since in allowing truth to be a property, he means only to acknowledge that the syntactic role of "true"—as determined by how best it is formalised in order to recover the validity of certain intuitive inferences containing it—is that of a predicate. It remains that, like the classical deflationist, Horwich still intends to deny that there is any proper philosophical question about what fits a proposition to be characterised as "true", any legitimate general question concerning in what the truth of a proposition consists. And against those who think otherwise he wants to set the standard deflationist idea that there is essentially no more to the truth-predicate than the role imposed upon it by the Disquotational Scheme—or, on his own account, by the counterpart Equivalence Schema for propositions.

My inflationary argument is to the effect that this is an incoherent package. More specifically, it contends that any predicate whose role is (all but) fully characterised by the Disquotational Scheme (or the Equivalence Schema) cannot be a predicate about which the philosophical question, wherein consists a sentence's satisfaction of it, is misguided in the way in which the classical deflationist and Horwich agree in supposing. In other words, to think of the truth-predicate as explained via the Disquotational Scheme is to leave no room for the idea that it is *merely* a device of endorsement. There has to be something in which being true consists, even if, as it may be, Frege was right that nothing analytically illuminating can be said about what that is.

The argument proceeds by two lemmas. The first is a lemma about normativity. It is argued that any predicate which is explained by stipulating that it is to be subject to the Disquotational Scheme, will function normatively over assertion/acceptance of the range of sentences for which it is thereby defined, and will indeed coincide in normative force with warranted acceptance/assertibility for those sentences: that is, to have reason to think that the predicate applies to a sentence will be to have a warrant for accepting that sentence; and to have a warrant for accepting the sentence will be to have reason to think the predicate applies.

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1 See his *Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) at pp. 2–3.

2 Op. cit. p. 38.

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Now, if a predicate functions normatively over a given practice—that is, if moves within the practice can be justified by reason to think that the predicate qualifies them, and if refraining from or, where appropriate, cancelling them can be justified by reason to think that it does not—then there are just two possibilities. One is that the predicate in question serves to record a norm that is peculiar and distinctive to it. The other is that it is a device whereby one may indirectly signal moves' satisfaction of *other* norms, characteristically expressed in other words. What would the second option come to when the practice in question is the making and acceptance of statements? The practice is unquestionably highly normatively constrained. If "true" is not to mark a distinctive, *sui generis* norm, then what remain are the context-sensitive standards of acceptability which we can lump under the catch-all term, "warrant". So the second option comes to the thought that "true" is a device for registering the acceptability of a statement by those standards—for registering the possession of warrants. But this proposal is ruled out by the second lemma of the inflationary argument, that "true" and "warranted" are liable to diverge in extension over any discourse which allows the possibility of neutral states of information—states of information which, for a particular statement, warrant neither its assertion nor its denial. And this potential extensional divergence is, again, shown to be a consequence directly of the Disquotational Scheme. (I take it as obvious that a predicate cannot simply be a device for registering the acceptability of a particular move in the light of a certain norm, ϕ, if it may properly be applied in circumstances where the predicate which actually expresses that norm fails to apply or conversely.)

The upshot is accordingly that any theorist who holds that the Disquotational Scheme (or the Equivalence Schema) is explanatory of the truth-predicate is committed to the first option: the truth-predicate has to be associated with a distinctive kind of critical or commendatory claim—there is a way in which a statement can be in, or out of order which is not the same as its being warranted or not, and which it is the role of "true" to mark. The question is whether that reflection can sit well with deflationism. My contention is that it cannot.

Notice, though, that the issue is *not* whether the truth-predicate's possession of this role can be fully accounted for just by appeal to the Disquotational Scheme. Horwich tends to write as though in order to show that some aspect of the use of "true" poses no difficulty for his views, it suffices to indicate how the Disquotational Scheme (or in his case the Equivalence Schema) contains the resources to explain that particular aspect. But that's an *ignoratio elenchi*. The whole point of the inflationary argument is that that does not suffice—that to suppose that "true" is explained by the Disquotational Scheme is *already* to suppose something inconsistent with the official deflationist line on "true". That what we might call the *sui generis normativ-*

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ity of "true" follows from the role the deflationist assigns to the Disquotational Scheme is the whole point of the argument. It has no tendency to show that the point is harmless to deflationism.

Still, what makes it *not* harmless? Well, once it is recognised that, as I expressed the matter a moment ago, there is a way in which a statement can be in, or out of order independently of whether or not it is warranted, I do not see how it could fail to be reckoned a real property of a statement that it was, or was not so in order, nor how the question could be deflected: in what does being in order, or out of order, in that kind of way, consist? Once it is granted that the role of "true" is to mark a particular kind of achievement, or failing, on the part of a statement, distinct from being warranted or not, there has to be a place for the question: what does such an achievement, or failing, amount to? The question may have no very illuminating answer in general, but that, if so, would tend to corroborate Frege's indefinabilist realism about truth, rather than deflationism. In brief: if a term registers a distinctive norm over a practice, the presumption has to be that there will be something in which a move's compliance or non-compliance with that norm will consist. And whichever state it occupies, that will then be a real characteristic—property—of the move. It is mere word-spinning to deny it.

Now there is, to be sure—though I did not remark on this in *Truth and Objectivity*—an assumption made in this line of thought. It might be contended that what, strictly, has been shown is only that, if the truth-predicate is explained via the Disquotational Scheme, then a use is imposed upon it which *calls for* a norm over the making and acceptance of statements distinct from warrant. It is another question whether there *really is* such a norm—whether there really is such a way for a statement to be in, or out of order. It is one thing, in other words, for an expression to be used in the making of a distinctive kind of normative judgement; quite another matter for there to be such a thing as a bearer's *really deserving* a judgement of that kind. An error-theorist about ethics, for example, may readily grant that ethical terms are used normatively—are used to applaud, and censure, particular episodes of conduct, for instance. But he will deny nevertheless that there are any real characteristics by its possession of which an episode of conduct may qualify for such appraisal.

This, however, need not delay us. The deflationist cannot intend any counterpart of this line of thought. He is not an error-theorist about truth. For he will be quite content to allow that all manner of statements *really are true*—when the right circumstances obtain: "Grass is green", for instance really is true just when grass is green; "Snow is white" really is true just when snow is white; and so on. For the deflationist, there is, for each meaningful statement—or at least, for each with an objective subject matter—an objective condition under which the word "true" is rightly applied to it. So he can take

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no refuge in error-theory.[3] It is this objectivism about the conditions of rightful application of "true" to particular statements, coupled with the distinctive normativity of the predicate, which enforces the recognition that there really is such a thing as a statement's complying, or failing to comply with the norm of truth. The inflation is thereby accomplished.[4, 5, 6]

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3 Or, for that matter, in expressivism. The context, "'P' is true", if governed by the Disquotational Scheme, has all the features required to qualify for assertoric content, at least by the lights of the minimalism concerning that notion advocated in *Truth and Objectivity*. Indeed, Strawson's 'performatory' theory of truth was one of the principal targets of P. T. Geach's classic argument in his "Assertion" (in *The Philosophical Review* LXXIV (1965), pp. 449–65).

4 Someone who conceded, for these reasons, that truth is a real property would so far still be at liberty to question whether the property in question is ever in common between different statements. If it were not, that might save one remaining deflationary thesis—the emptiness of the classical debates about the constitution of truth. A deflationist, that is, could now grant that her traditional account of the role and purpose of "true" is misguided but still insist that the traditional debates are bad since they overlook that truth is, so to speak, *nothing which true statements share*: the truth of "Snow is white", for instance, consists in snow's being white, whereas that of "Grass is green" consists in grass being green, etc.

This thought is challenged at pp. 29–31 of *Truth and Objectivity* where it is observed that one who accepts the Disquotational Scheme as explanatory of "true" must also allow that truth admits of a uniform characterisation (the principle there called DS*). But let me here say a little more. The consideration that truth is, in the way illustrated, constituted differently for different statements is actually a very bad reason for thinking that it is not a uniform property. The pattern illustrated is a commonplace. Many properties are such that their satisfaction-conditions vary as a function of variation in the character of a potential subject. Consider, e.g., "has fulfilled his educational potential". What it takes to instantiate this will depend on other aspects of the nature of the individual concerned; yet that ought to be consistent with there being a clear sense in which it expresses the same property in all cases, which may yet be open to an illuminating general account. In general, how x has to be in order to be F can depend in part on how it is with x, and vary accordingly, without any motive being provided thereby for regarding it as an error to try to provide some illuminating general account of a condition which being F involves satisfying. *Of course* what statements have to do in order to be true varies: for their meanings vary and truth-value is a function of meaning. But it would be an egregious *non sequitur* to infer that there is no one condition which, modulo their meaning, their being true consists in satisfying.

5 Perhaps I might here take the opportunity to counter a response to the inflationary argument offered by Ian Rumfitt in his review of *Truth and Objectivity*, "Truth Wronged" in *Ratio* VIII (New Series), 1995, pp. 100–7. Rumfitt maintains that the divergence in the behaviour of "true" and "assertible" constituted by the former's compliance with the Negation Equivalence,

'Not P' is true $\leftrightarrow$ Not: 'P' is true,

while the corresponding

'Not P' is assertible $\leftrightarrow$ Not: 'P' is assertible,

fails, right-to-left, in any discourse which permits neutral states of information, may straightforwardly be accommodated in a fashion entirely consonant with the "spirit" of deflationism, without admission of a distinctive norm of truth, if the deflationist is prepared to allow primitive norms of *warranted denial* to operate alongside those of warranted assertion. Rather, that is, than restrict his distinctive deflationary claims to the word, "true", the deflationist should contend

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II. Superassertibility and related matters

Van Cleve, Horgan and Pettit are each unpersuaded of the credentials of superassertibility to serve as a truth-predicate. I'll review their doubts in turn.

Van Cleve suggests, to begin with, that the biconditional—what I termed the Negation Equivalence—derived from the Disquotational Scheme, which enjoins the potential extensional divergence of truth and assertibility, viz.

'Not P' is true if and only if 'P' is not true,

is already inconsistent with any evidentially constrained conception of truth—superassertibility being, of course, an evidentially constrained notion—since, he takes it, the right-to-left ingredient must surely be disallowed in such cases.

> that 'is true' and 'is not true' function purely as devices for endorsing *and rejecting* assertions, beliefs and so on ... and which therefore register no norms distinct from justified assertibility *and justified deniability* ("Truth Wronged", p. 103; compare *Truth and Objectivity*, p. 30).

How would this help with the Negation Equivalence? Rumfitt is not entirely explicit, but the point may seem clear enough. Since denying a statement is asserting its negation, a primitive warrant—an *anti-warrant* is Rumfitt's term—for the denial of "P", registered by a sentence of the form, "'P' is not true" or, equivalently, "Not: 'P' is true", will be *eo ipso* a warrant for asserting "Not P", so—via the Disquotational Scheme—for asserting "'Not P' is true". So the validity of the Negation Equivalence, right-to-left, is easily explained, while the invalidity of the corresponding principle for assertibility is secured, as before, by the possibility of states of information in which one has neither warrant nor anti-warrant for P.

What, though, about what we get by negating both halves of the Negation Equivalence,

'Not P' is not true ↔ Not: 'P' is not true?

Now the effect of the proposal, that the role of "is not true" is to register the presence of an anti-warrant, is merely to reinstate a form of the original difficulty. For the principle

'Not P' is anti-warranted ↔ Not: 'P' is anti-warranted,

is no less unacceptable if neutral states of information are possible than is

'Not P' is assertible ↔ Not: 'P' is assertible.

In short, for any discourse in which neutral states of information are a possibility, the Disquotational Scheme imposes a potential extensional divergence both between "is true" and "is assertible"; *and* between "is not true" and "is anti-warranted". Rumfitt's proposal that the deflationist should recognise anti-warrant as primitive—whatever its independent problems and interest—thus provides no counter whatever to the inflationary argument.

6 Van Cleve wonders what, if any, stand I would take on the issue whether instances of the Disquotational Scheme are *contingent* truths. I am not sure that I need to take a view, though it might ring oddly to some ears if someone, be they minimalist or not, who viewed the Disquotational Scheme as among the determinants of the concept of truth, were to accept the contingency of instances of it. Still, I think it clear they are contingent, for a simple reason—"Grass in green" might have had a different meaning, and thus been true in a grassless world, for instance—but that contingency for this reason is consistent with their being *a priori*, in a suitably relaxed sense which would allow a priority to any truth available to reflection on meanings alone.

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I'm not sure why he thinks so. If truth is evidentially constrained, then, certainly, the failure of a statement to meet the constraint—whatever exact shape the latter takes—will be sufficient for its untruth, and hence, moving across the biconditional, sufficient for the truth of its negation. And this implication will no doubt be uncongenial to one of realist inclination, for whom the possibility will seem evident that a suitably selected statement might be true even though no evidence for or against it is available in principle. But of course *that* possibility will not be at all evident to one who thinks of truth as evidentially constrained. Van Cleve writes as though there is here a difficulty which should be appreciated even on a Dummettian anti-realist perspective. Unfortunately, he does not say enough to make it clear what the difficulty is. In section III of chapter 2, I argued that the correct response to the Negation Equivalence for such an anti-realist is to see it as imposing on the concept of negation generally an analogue of that feature of Intuitionistic mathematical negation which has it that a proof of the unprovability of a statement is a proof of the negation of that statement. So far as I can see, Van Cleve says nothing to disturb the stability of that response. To be sure, it involves revising ordinary habits of thought and speech involving negation. Dummettian anti-realism is a revisionary doctrine.

Van Cleve has, however, a more specific argument about superassertibility in particular. He reasons as follows. By the failure of the Negation Equivalence, right-to-left, for warrant (because of the possibility of neutral states of information), we have (this is Van Cleve's notation) that

(i) $\sim(\sim WP \rightarrow W\sim P)$

We also have that superassertibility implies warrant:

(ii) $SP \rightarrow WP$

It therefore follows that superassertibility, too, cannot subserve the right-to-left direction of the Negation Equivalence; that is, that we have

(iii) $\sim(\sim SP \rightarrow S\sim P)$

For otherwise we could pass from $\sim WP$ to $\sim SP$, via (ii) and thereby to $S\sim P$, and thereby—substituting 'not~P' for 'P' in (ii), to $W\sim P$, contrary to hypothesis. Since it is granted that the Negation Equivalence must hold for any truth-predicate, it follows that superassertibility isn't one, just provided we are concerned with a discourse which allows of neutral states of information and no matter what its other properties.

This fallacious reasoning is the product of an insufficiently articulate symbolism. Warrant is relative to a state of information. For a particular subject matter to allow of neutral states of information is for it not to be the case

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that any possible state of information which fails to warrant a particular statement concerning that subject matter thereby warrants the negation of that statement. So, letting 'I' range over possible states of information, we may represent the failure of the Negation Equivalence for warrant like this:

(i)' $\sim((\forall I)(\sim W_I P \rightarrow W_I \sim P))$

By contrast, the sense in which superassertibility implicates warrant is only that if a statement is superassertible, then it is warranted in some state of information:

(ii)' $SP \rightarrow (\exists I)W_I P$

If we now essay the purported reductio of $\sim SP \rightarrow S\sim P$, it works out like this:

(1)	$\sim SP \rightarrow S\sim P$	assumption for reductio
(2)	$\sim(\exists I)W_I P \rightarrow \sim SP$	from (ii)'
(3)	$\sim(\exists I)W_I P \rightarrow S\sim P$	from (1) and (2)
(4)	$S\sim P \rightarrow (\exists I)W_I \sim P$	'~P' for 'P' in (ii)'
(5)	$\sim(\exists I)W_I P \rightarrow (\exists I)W_I \sim P$	from (3) and (4)

Line (5) is what, in Van Cleve's notation, is represented as inconsistent with (i)—the failure of the Negation Equivalence for warrant. But of course it is not so inconsistent. What line (5) says is that the unattainability of any state of information warranting P suffices for the existence of a state of information warranting not-P. Since the former is something for which it must be possible, at least in principle, to accumulate inductive grounds, and since those grounds will be—in the presence of an account of negation of the kind which, as just argued, a proponent of an evidentially constrained conception of truth must give in any case—grounds for the negation of P, this consequence is entirely valid in the relevant setting. And it is in no way inconsistent with the possibility of the neutral states of information, as affirmed by (i)'.

If superassertibility is to be defensible as a truth-predicate, whether globally or locally, then it must, globally or locally, satisfy the minimal platitudes. Van Cleve next worries about a turn taken by my discussion[7] of the claim of superassertibility to satisfy the Equivalence Schema. The relevant principle is

(E^S) It is superassertible that P if and only if P

[7] *Truth and Objectivity*, pp. 51–2.

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and what bothers Van Cleve is my suggestion that what may seem to be the obvious kind of counter-examples to the necessity of that biconditional—viz. instances of 'P' which, we might think, could be true even though no stable justification of them is attainable—would be question-begging. My point was simply that in order to appreciate how such a case—Goldbach's Conjecture, perhaps—might provide for the truth of the right-hand side of E^S while falsifying the left-hand side, we need to be using an evidentially unconstrained notion of truth to begin with, which is therefore already recognised as distinct from superassertibility. We haven't shown that superassertibility fails to satisfy the platitudes if, in order to construct a purported counterexample, we need to invoke a notion of truth for the relevant range of statements which is *already* distinguished from superassertibility. In order relevantly to counter-exemplify E^S, we need instead to produce a case where one side, but not the other, is *superassertible.*

If I read him right, Van Cleve isn't quite sure whether to cry "Foul" here or not. So he contents himself with an argument that, if the point is not a foul, then theories of truth, consistently adhered to, may be very difficult to refute—at least in a way mutually acceptable to the disputants. I am not sure that that is quite the right conclusion to draw, so a little comment may be useful.

First, I want to insist that there is no foul. The minimalist about truth holds that, to the extent that the concept is determinate, it is fixed by the minimal platitudes—a range of basic, a priori principles. So he's offering in effect what Michael Smith, following through on an idea original to Frank Ramsey and developed by Carnap, David Lewis, Frank Jackson and others, has called a "network analysis" of the concept.[8] Consider a putatively comprehensive enumeration of those platitudes, from which all occurrences of the word "true" are omitted, and replaced by a variable. Then the gist of the network analysis is that a truth concept is any which is, a priori, a satisfier of the open sentence—call it the *network condition*—which conjoins each ingredient sentence in this enumeration. Clearly, it must be a constraint on this kind of approach that the network condition not be permitted to retain residual occurrences of the definiendum. If not, then, first, the result will be circular in the way that any analysis is which makes essential use of the very term being analysed; and, second, in cases where we are characterising a *role* which may have a number of distinct satisfiers, we run the risk of barring perfectly good candidates by, in effect, distorting the import of the network condition through reading certain of its ingredient conjuncts in terms of other—perhaps, on their own terms, perfectly good—candidates.

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8 See Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), especially ch. 2.

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That said, I think what follows is not that theories of truth, however bizarre, may now be much more difficult to refute than perhaps they ought to be, but only that their refutation may have to look elsewhere than to the way they handle themselves in relation to the basic platitudes. And indeed theories of truth have, of course, more to do than to conserve a priori principles involving the notion. They have also to succeed in characterising something which may plausibly be taken to be normative over the (relevant local) practice of statement-making and belief-formation, and they have to answer to, though not necessarily be perfectly congruent with, our antecedent ideas about the extension of the notion. The oracular view of truth proposed in Van Cleve's example, however well or badly it fares in the matter of platitude-conservation, and however difficult a staunch adherent of it might be to refute on his own terms, is certain to do very badly when it comes to making sense of the assertoric practices of ordinary folk to whom that conception has never occurred, and of the range of statements which they are prepared to allow to be true or to be at least possibly true.

I turn now to a misunderstanding. Terence Horgan, in section 3 of his comments, attributes to me an across-the-board identification of truth with superassertibility. Likewise, Philip Pettit takes it to be my view that superassertibility is at least an across-the-board satisfier of all the minimal platitudes—so that if the truth-predicate in some particular discourse is best *not* interpreted as superassertibility, it will be for reasons independent of the constraints imposed on truth-predicates by those basic platitudes. Neither of these is my view. I do indeed canvass the global identification of truth and superassertibility as one way of interpreting the import of Dummettian anti-realism; but *Truth and Objectivity* does not argue for Dummettian anti-realism as a global thesis and is concerned, to the contrary, to advance a framework in which it might coherently be espoused locally, without commitment to a similar view about other areas of thought.[9] To be sure, the view which Pettit ascribes to me, that superassertibility is always a satisfier of the platitudes for truth but may be ruled out as an interpretation of the truth-predicate in certain areas on other grounds, is consistent with this qualification. But that is a position which would demand that truth and superassertibility were everywhere necessarily coextensive, since otherwise the Equivalence Schema for superassertibility, E^S above, could not hold a priori.[10] In general, realism about a given discourse may well, depending upon its exact form, entail that superassertibility is *not* there a satisfier of the basic platitudes. So I want to distance myself from Pettit's description of me

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9 I am not, in saying this, now formally withdrawing any sympathy for the global view. But it is important to understand that the programme of *Truth and Objectivity* is not hostage to such sympathy's being justified.

10 Cf. *Truth and Objectivity*, p. 53.

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as "forced to think of realists as saying that what identifies a suitable truth-property for any discourse is the common platitudes plus something else: plus some other discourse-specific principles".[11]

Horgan doubts that there is a plausible case for identifying truth with superassertibility anywhere. He takes it as evident that the extensions of the two concepts fail to coincide in cases like his example concerning the population of Tennessee in 5000 BC; and even where there is a, perhaps necessary, coincidence, he takes it that the modes of evaluation implicated in the two concepts are quite different: superassertibility is an epistemic norm, truth is not. It would be quite unfair to complain that he does not, in his necessarily very brief remarks, provide any argument for the latter, unqualified claim. The question is how someone who thought of truth in ethics, say—or perhaps in philosophy—along broadly superassertibilist lines, with the true identified as that which survives the most careful and well-informed disputation, would be handicapped in the prosecution of those discourses. Horgan's view must be, it seems to me, that there would have to be a handicap. For if there need be none, if such a misunderstanding could be operationally quite idle, it is going to be a very nice question in what its being a *mis*understanding could consist. As for the particular case of statements concerning the past, I think all, including myself, who have felt some sympathy with Dummettian anti-realism have been prepared to grant that they surely provide one of the most fraught areas for the semantic anti-realist thesis. I do not think that the debate is by any means closed, though here is certainly not the place to try to take it further. But I repeat that the global identifiability of truth with superassertibility is not a thesis defended in *Truth and Objectivity*.

Pettit has a more radical misgiving about superassertibility, writing that he is not convinced "that superassertibility is defined for every discourse, so that some statements there are superassertible, others not".[12] The characterisation is a little misleading, since the way he goes on to develop the worry makes it clear that it is not about whether superassertibility is well defined, but about whether it has a *non-empty extension* in ordinary discourses—whether there really are any superassertible statements. He first sketches the doubt for probability statements, then extends it to any statements based on inductive warrant, and finally argues a related point for comic discourse.

To begin with, does any possible warrant that we could have meet the condition required for the superassertibility of the statement that a particular coin is fair (i.e., that the probability of its landing heads is close to a half)? Pettit answers,

> I don't think so ... Even in a world subject to the actual physical laws, it is always going to be possible for [a substantial series of trials corroborating the fairness of the coin] to be

[11] This volume, p. 887.
[12] This volume, p. 888.

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followed by a freak sequence—say, a long run of heads—that would deprive [that series] of its warranting force.[13]

Moreover

The lesson of the example clearly extends to all claims that are based on inductive warrants; with any warrant for such a claim a freak run of observations would undermine it. Superassertibility does not seem to be satisfied, then, for the discourses associated with such claims.[14]

I find it hard to see the force of this. In order for it to be superassertible that the coin is fair, there has to be some state of information which warrants that claim and which continues to do so no matter how enlarged upon or improved. The immediate conclusion, then, if a favourable initial series of trials goes on to be swamped by a freakish run, is only that the favourable initial series does not *per se* provide for a superassertibility-conferring state of information. That is still consistent with the claim about the fairness of the coin *being* superassertible. Pettit seems, moreover, to think it sufficient for his point that, no matter how extended the favourable series, a subsequent freak sequence is always *possible*. Not so: to claim superassertibility for the proposition that the coin is fair is only to claim that there is some sequence of trials which supports that claim and which is such that, *as a matter of fact*, any enlarged sequence will continue to support it. There is no denial that a freakish subsequent run is possible. On the contrary, the claim of fairness is defeasible: the possibility of defeat by a larger sequence of trials is admitted all along.[15]

Actually, so far from providing a problem case, it seems to me that probability-discourse is an especially attractive candidate for superassertibilist construal. For consider what it would be for *no* particular numerical probability statement, even a very approximated one, to be superassertible. That would mean that, no matter which such statement we took, any series of trials which more or less corroborated it would be but a proper initial segment of a larger series in which that corroboration was lost. What could it mean in such a predicament to say that there *was* a determinate probability associated with, say, a particular coin's turning up heads—in what could consist the fact that such a statement was *true*?

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13 This volume, p. 888.

14 This volume, p. 888.

15 The reader should be reminded that the range of the states-of-information quantifier in the characterisation of superassertibility does not comprise all merely possible states of information—if it did, Pettit's point would be entirely just—nor is it restricted to actually occurring such states. Rather it comprises an intermediate set: the *actually accessible* states of information—states of information which this world, *constituted as it is*, would generate in a suitably receptive, investigating subject.

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For his third type of example, that of comic discourse, Pettit argues rather differently. He takes it that the funny is what would amuse people meeting certain standard conditions of normality—people who "are not lunatics that would laugh at anything, for example, nor melancholics that would laugh at nothing". His thought is then—I take it—that the best type of ground we could have for the claim that a particular joke, say, is funny would be evidence of a positive comic response from normal folk. And his objection is that if—as he believes—the satisfaction of normality conditions does not lend itself to superassertibility, then neither in consequence will claims about what is funny.

However, closer scrutiny of the worry would seem to disclose essentially the same misunderstanding as before. Pettit's idea about normality is, approximately, that the conditions under which I give a comic verdict are normal just when there is nothing about them which, in the event that my verdict clashes with that of others, would be received (by somehow idealised judges?) as sufficient reason to discount my verdict. This is a condition which, in the nature of the case, cannot be guaranteed to obtain—

> later discrepancies [may always lead us] to indict any present circumstances as having been faulty and misleading in some way. And so under this approach no warrant for the claim that a joke is funny is such that it would survive any arbitrarily close scrutiny or any arbitrarily extensive information.[16]

But again, the conclusion is unwarranted. The lack of guarantee that conditions are normal implicates merely an epistemic possibility. Lack of superassertibility for that claim, by contrast, would demand that the possibility obtained.

III. Alethic pluralism

As remarked earlier, one who takes the minimalist line about truth, that the concept is fixed by a set of basic platitudes about it, ought to be open to the possibility, prior to any demonstration of categoricity, that it may prove to have a variety of models, as it were. It is a central contention of *Truth and Objectivity* that the notion of truth is in just this situation. For instance, the core platitudes may consistently be supplemented both by the supposition that all truths are knowable, and by the supposition that some truths are quite beyond evidence. Under the former, superassertibility may be shown to be a model of truth; under the latter, it is not, and truth will presumably require interpretation in terms of some form of robust correspondence. It is a key suggestion of the book that this potential plurality reflects the distinctions that are relevant to realism/anti-realism debate: that the justification of a

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16 This volume, p. 889.

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broadly realist or anti-realist view of a given discourse turns on the character of the local truth-predicate.

A key thesis but, it would seem, one of the more contentious. Three commentators—Horwich, Pettit and Sainsbury—are expressly negative about it, though each allows that the broader framework of the book, and particularly the suggestion that there is no single, simple crux between realism and anti-realism but a variety of relevant considerations, could survive the reinstatement of the usual monism about truth.

I am happy to accept the last point—indeed, it is in effect acknowledged in *Truth and Objectivity* when I allow in the first chapter that the deflationary conception would serve the project were it not for its internal difficulties.[17] I maintain, nevertheless, that a pluralist view of truth, properly understood, is correct—and ought to seem less controversial than *Truth and Objectivity* perhaps allowed it to seem. In particular, the understanding of pluralism rejected by Sainsbury and Pettit is nothing that I want it to maintain.

I have already had the opportunity for additional remarks on this matter,[18] so here I shall be brisk. Briefly, I am very content to accept Sainsbury's "friendly emendation" as a clarification. The contention of *Truth and Objectivity* is not that "true" is ambiguous, that it means different things as applied within different regions of discourse. On the contrary, the concept admits of a uniform characterisation wherever it is applied—the characterisation given by the minimal platitudes, which determine everything that is *essential* to truth. Parallel contentions would be that everything essential to the concept of identity is determined by the principles that it is reflexive and a congruence for an arbitrary property, and that everything essential to the concept of existence—to take Sainsbury's own example—is determined by its being subject to the standard rules for the introduction and elimination of the existential quantifier. The form of pluralism for which space is allowed by this overarching uniformity is one of, roughly, *variable realisation*. What constitutes the existence of a number may be very different to what constitutes the existence of a material object. The identity of persons is generally held to call for a special account, contrasting with that appropriate to the identity of material continuants generally. And what constitutes truth in ethics may be quite different to what constitutes truth in theoretical physics.

This pluralism seems hardly distinguishable from the view expressed by Pettit in the following admirable passage:

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17 *Truth and Objectivity*, pp. 12–13.

18 See my "Response to Jackson": reply to Frank Jackson's Critical Study of *Truth and Objectivity*, in *Philosophical Books* 35 (1994), pp. 169–75; also pp. 213–16 of my "Truth in Ethics", *Ratio* VIII (New Series), 1995, pp. 209–26.

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Under the envisaged scenario, there remains only one sort of truth: that which is defined by the platitudes-satisfying role. It is just that what truth involves in one area—what realises the appropriate role—may be different from what it involves in another. The difference between what truth involves in the different areas will be explained by reference to the different subject-matters: the different truth-conditions, and the different truth-makers, in each discourse.[19]

I have to accept that *Truth and Objectivity* should have done more to explain the view being proposed. At any rate, I do not think I have any real quarrel with either Pettit or Sainsbury on this matter—except to demur at Pettit's retention of the term "monism" for the broad position on which we agree. (Would someone who knew that either of two quite different physical constitutions can be involved in a substance's being jade helpfully describe herself as taking a "monistic" view of jade?)

Horwich's criticisms are a different matter. Good deflationist that he is, he is in no position to accept pluralism about truth, even so qualified. Truth cannot admit of variable realisation if, as for the deflationist, there is nothing substantial in which it *ever* consists. For deflationism, pluralism will seem merely to compound the errors of its more traditional antagonists. However, it should be clear that Horwich's suggestion that the pluralist idiom of *Truth and Objectivity* is merely a matter of "unorthodox terminology", a "cheap pluralism" generated by an "idiosyncratic" decision to regard as truth-predicates expressions for concepts which merely have some points of analogy with truth, is a serious misrepresentation. It is not a mere terminological decision to call "superassertibility" a truth-predicate—in areas where it behaves like one—but a substantial thesis, involving substantial contentions concerning the appropriateness of a "network"-type account of truth, the right things to count as basic platitudes in this particular case, and the behaviour of "superassertibility" in the discourse in question. It is, rather, Horwich himself who engages in terminological legislation when he insists that nothing should count as a truth-predicate unless its satisfaction of the Disquotational Scheme may be appreciated non-inferentially.[20]

Horwich charges me with the "more serious mistake, going beyond terminological naivety" of supposing that

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19 This volume, p. 886. Compare Sainsbury: "In the case of 'exist' the obvious move is to take a minimalist line about its content, so that it is topic-neutral, fit to be appended to any kind of designator, and then tackle the questions about what is involved in the existence (thus minimally and uniformly understood) of different kinds of things. Wright's position is surely analogous: he takes a minimalist line about truth, equipping himself with a notion which ought to be usable, in the mouths of philosophers of many persuasions, with respect to a wide variety of sentences. The questions to be tackled are questions about what is involved in the truth (thus minimally and uniformly understood) of sentences of different kinds." (This volume, p. 900)

20 This volume, p. 880.

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just because certain general facts about truth (i.e. general facts articulated by means of the truth-predicate) vary from one domain to another, there must be various concepts of truth or, perhaps, various concepts that constitute truth. We don't suppose that the concept of *left*, or the property constituting *leftness*, undergo a transatlantic shift in virtue of the variation in driving laws; we characterise that variation with a single concept and refer to a single property.[21]

I hope there is no instance of that transition in *Truth and Objectivity*. I do not, of course, suppose that if different things are true of truth in different areas of discourse, that suffices for differences between the local concepts of truth, or between what constitutes their instantiation. What I do suppose is that the *particular* differences marked by the various realism-relevant cruces distinguished in *Truth and Objectivity* sustain the idea that truth is variably constituted in discourses which respectively pass or fail the associated tests; that there is, for instance, every point in thinking of truth as constituted differently in discourses where it respectively can and cannot be interpreted as superassertibility, or in discourses where the Correspondence Platitude respectively has, or lacks the additional substance associated with the cruces of Cognitive Command and Wide Cosmological Role. I do not see that Horwich says anything to disturb this.[22]

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21 This volume, p. 881.

22 Perhaps I could here take the chance to correct an error, noted by Horwich, in the presentation of an argument—(not, I think, *pace* Horwich, in the argument itself)—concerning superassertibility at *Truth and Objectivity*, p. 59. The issue there concerns the status of the Equivalence Schema for superassertibility,

(E^S) It is superassertible that P if and only if P.

and the argument offered is to show that, on the assumptions that we are concerned only with epistemically accessible matters—in particular, that each such statement in the range of 'P' satisfies

$P \leftrightarrow$ P is knowable

and that what is knowable is superassertible, the supposition of counterexamples,

P and P is not superassertible,

or

P is superassertible and Not P

to either of the ingredient conditionals in E^S gives rise to contradiction. Showing this in the second case involves appeal to the commutativity of superassertibility and negation as propositional operators (effectively, a version of the Negation Equivalence for superassertibility), one half of which—the direction

Not (P is superassertible) $\rightarrow$ Superassertible (not P)

—is established on the stated assumptions. However it is actually the other direction,

Superassertible (not P) $\rightarrow$ Not (P is superassertible)

which is wanted for the immediate purpose; and this is not discussed. True, I refer to the authority for the relevant step as provided by the "commutativity lemma", so may be presumed—at least by a charitable reader—to have had something more than a one-way conditional in mind! It remains that the half of the lemma wanted for the immediate purpose is not proved, and that the half that is proved is not to the immediate purpose.

The unsatisfactory state of the presentation at p. 59, first pointed out to me by Christopher Gauker and, independently, by Bernhard Weiss, seems to have been the result of a less than properly attentive compression of the relevant discussion in the sec-

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IV. Cognitive Command

Outside professional philosophical circles it would pass for the merest common sense that there is a distinction between discourses in which disputes may answer to no real "fact of the matter" and discourses whose subject matter is substantial enough to guarantee the correctness, or incorrectness, of a contested claim. *Truth and Objectivity* proposes the exertion of Cognitive Command as a necessary condition for a discourse to fall in the latter camp. The idea is, roughly—though I nowhere put it quite this way in the book—that the presence of a real "fact of the matter" must impinge on the range of admissible explanations of a dispute, since one or another antagonist will have to have been imperfectly appreciative of it. Assuming that each has a cognitive endowment sufficient, in the best case, for the appreciation of such matters, the implication has to be that one or other has employed this endowment in a less than fully satisfactory way—something worth describing as a "cognitive shortcoming" has to be involved.

This simple line of thought needs to be complicated to allow for the role that vagueness, of one or another kind, may play in the generation of disputes. But we don't need to engage that complication now. It also assumes that the putative fact of the matter is within the cognitive reach of the disputants. But if it is not—if it is a potentially evidence-transcendent fact—then that will suffice in any case for the involvement of cognitive shortcoming in the dispute, since the best cognitive efforts of the disputants will then perforce come short. (That may sound sophistical but it isn't: the limitations of our cognitive powers are quite properly regarded as shortcomings.)

It is vital to the project of *Truth and Objectivity* that a discourse can be minimally truth-apt and yet fail this condition, so that disputes within it do not have to implicate cognitive shortcoming (or else be excusable by vagueness). However the immediate effect of the formulation given is only to tie the commonsensical distinction to the notion of cognitive shortcoming; no control has yet been imposed on the responsible application of the latter, and there is accordingly nothing to stop an awkward customer—whom I called the "trivialising theorist"—from admitting the tie but then deflating the concept of the cognitive to the point where whatever propensities—the sense of humour, or of the ridiculous, or of the disgusting—are at work in a particular discourse count as fully cognitive, and clashes between them accordingly as cognitive shortcomings. If this move cannot be prevented, then the contrast between minimal truth-aptitude and Cognitive Command is lost.

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ond Waynflete lecture, in which the two halves of the "commutativity lemma" were addressed separately. The needed half,

Superassertible (not P) → Not (P is superassertible)

is equivalent to the inconsistency of 'P is superassertible' and 'Not P is superassertible', and is therefore uncontentious so long as any two states of information are conceived as mutually accessible.

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One response would be to seek the needed control by attempting a direct, independent account of what should qualify an opinion-forming faculty as cognitive. But, first, that looks a dauntingly difficult task and, second, it is hard to see how the story could proceed without *prior* verdicts about the factuality or otherwise of the opinions which the faculty in question enabled one to form. My suggestion in *Truth and Objectivity* was, instead, that this mistakes the onus of proof. The trivialising theorist should be made to face up to his responsibilities. To think of the subject matter of a particular discourse as exerting Cognitive Command is to enter into certain quite definite theoretical obligations which are not to be lightly undertaken.

We can cut short the long story given on pp. 48–56 of *Truth and Objectivity* by focusing on the case where the disputed matter is agreed on all hands not to be evidence-transcendent, where the opinions of the antagonists are not inference-based, and where the dispute can be confined to the immediate issue and need ramify into no other subject matter. Disputes about comedy can, and often do meet each of these three conditions. To suppose that cognitive shortcoming is at work in such a dispute is to be committed, I suggested, to a *sui generis epistemology*—to the idea that opinions on the relevant subject matter are generated, in basic cases, by the operation of a special faculty which is directly receptive to the kind of state of affairs in question. And in that case, there had better be a story to be told about how the faculty works, about what its operations consist in and how it is keyed to the relevant subject matter. Moreover this story, I suggested, must be at the service of the *best* explanation of our practice of the discourse and especially of cases of non-collusive agreement in opinions expressed within it. Since a best explanation will need, naturally, to be both detailed and convincing in detail, this is not an obligation which can be met by mere "trivialisation" of the concept of the cognitive.

Mark Sainsbury doubts that the trivialising theorist can be shaken off so easily. He contends, first, that their very disagreement commits each antagonist to regarding the other as in error; second, that in terms of an appropriately "lean" concept of a faculty—"an inner state which systematically, for some range of impinging inputs, disposes a subject to respond in a certain way"—each must accordingly regard the other as the victim of a less than perfectly functioning faculty; and, third, that it cannot be right to refuse to qualify such a faculty as "cognitive" just on the ground that we cannot foresee any account of the detail of its workings.

Perhaps such reserve would be justified if, as assumed in my discussion, the relevant faculty would have to be *sui generis*—a faculty which, as Sainsbury rightly describes my intent, "if its output is best characterised as judgements in an area of discourse for which the concept ϕ is distinctive, has inputs best described in terms of the impingement of the property ϕ". But, he

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contends, not every intuitional faculty—one whose output is non-inferential opinion—is "sui generis" in that sense, and in many cases we rightly regard such intuitional faculties as cognitive without any detailed conception of their working.[23]

The nub of Sainsbury's objection comes, I'm taking it, with the last consideration—the availability, to the trivialising theorist, of the paradigm of intuitional cognitive faculties which are not sui generis and whose status as cognitive needs no vindication by the provision of a detailed account of their operations. Now, I do not feel compelled to dispute the first part of this: the claim that when a range of opinions are formed otherwise than by inference, it is not necessary, in order for the faculties involved to rank as cognitive, that they be sui generis—that they involve direct receptivity to "impingements" best characterised in terms of the concepts distinctive of opinions in that range. In Sainsbury's view, it is not required, for instance, of someone who wishes to make a case that the sense of humour should count as cognitive, that they show that it should be conceived as working on inputs best described in terms of the impingement of the properties of being funny, or unfunny. He offers the counter-examples of chicken-sexing, and the detection by taste of the region of origin of a wine. Neither case is, I think, completely clear-cut. It might be contested whether a wine-taster's abilities are entirely non-inferential, since he presumably needs experience of the various resonances of odour and taste associated with different regions. And even if chicken-sexers need have no idea how they do it, and little if anything to say about what perceptual features of the chicks they are responding to, I do not know whether, in mastering the skill, a period is necessary when they subject

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23 Sainsbury's objection should be contrasted with a rather different form of attempted destabilisation of the minimal truth-aptitude/Cognitive Command boundary, which also exploits the thought that the mere existence of a disagreement is in tension with the idea of an absence of shortcoming on either side. This other line of thought (put forward by Timothy Williamson in his Critical Study of *Truth and Objectivity* in the *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* XXX vol. 1 (1994), pp. 130–44 and, in a related form, by Stewart Shapiro and William Taschek in their "Intuitionism, Pluralism and Cognitive Command", *Journal of Philosophy* 93 (1996), pp. 74–88) argues that since I am committed, merely by my acceptance of P, into holding that you, who accept that not P, are guilty of shortcoming, it follows, under the hypothesis that our dispute involves no shortcoming, that I cannot be right in accepting P; but then *I* am guilty of shortcoming!—contrary to hypothesis. Accordingly—as Williamson's version of the objection runs—the idea that a disagreement might involve no *cognitive* shortcoming (contrast: mere shortcoming), must demand a special account of what a cognitive shortcoming is—a demand which *Truth and Objectivity* accordingly had no business in trying to finesse. I have discussed this version of the objection elsewhere ("Realism, Pure and Simple?", *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* XXX vol. 2 (1994), pp. 147–61) and hope to respond to the Shapiro-Taschek version (which purports to demonstrate that minimal truth-aptitude plus Epistemic Constraint ensures Cognitive Command) on another occasion. I mention these arguments only to signal that I am taking Sainsbury's point to be distinct.

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their intuitive inclinations to independent corroboration. If it is, then maybe their magical-seeming opinions have an inferential component too. But let Sainsbury be granted that these are genuinely intuitional examples. In neither case, anyway, ought we to be thinking in terms of a *sui generis* capacity: ordinary perceptual capacities and training seemingly suffice.

What is not clear to me, even so, is why Sainsbury thinks that examples of this structure reinstate the threat of trivialisation, rather than merely call for refinement of the argument in *Truth and Objectivity*. If we are content, in advance of any detailed conception of how they work, to regard the relevant faculties of chicken-sexers as cognitive, it is because they are at the service of reliable detection of facts which can be routinely if less spectacularly detected by other methods involving only what are unquestionably cognitive abilities. So too with the detection of origins of wines, if that is indeed a non-inferential ability. In short, if we are sometimes content, even in the absence of any detail about their operation, to regard intuitional but non- sui-generis opinion-forming faculties as cognitive, it is because all the evidence is that they are keyed to states of affairs which we *already* conceive as open to cognition in other, less spectacular ways. And this in turn makes us confident that an account of the detail must be possible, even at a stage when we lack any inkling in what terms it might proceed. What follows is that the cognitive status of an ability, like the sense of humour, could indeed in principle be defended, without supplying the detail called for under a sui generis conception of it, by assimilating its operation to the kind of case Sainsbury calls attention to. But that is a far cry from allowing that cognitive status may be bestowed merely by trivialisation, without work. The relevant ability will have to be shown to be *reliable*, and that will demand an antecedent case that the relevant subject matter is detectable by others of our faculties, in a different way. So there is still a substantial explanatory obligation. Moreover, since this obligation clearly cannot be met by recourse to "Sainsburyan"—intuitional but non- sui-generis—faculties indefinitely, the space of alternatives for fulfilling it must, sooner or later, be confined to sui generis and to inferential abilities, when the discussion can assume the course followed in *Truth and Objectivity*.

Sainsbury's worry was that Cognitive Command is too easy a constraint. Williamson expresses the opposite concern. As the constraint is motivated in my book, the exertion of Cognitive Command by a discourse is a matter of the *content* of its ingredient statements, determined by their being fitted for the representation of self-standing states of affairs. It is thus to be *a priori* that (modulo the appropriate proviso about vagueness) cognitive shortcoming be involved in disputes about them. Williamson contends that to demand a priority here is to set an impossibly high standard. A similar difficulty, he contends, afflicts the way I draw the Euthyphro Contrast, demanding of Eu-

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thyphronic discourses, again, that it be a priori that best opinion, appropriate substantially accounted for, co-varies with the facts. In Williamson's view, this requirement "condemns the anti-realist to defeat in almost every case".

The assumption of *Truth and Objectivity* is that the objectivity of a discourse, as reflected in its status with respect to Cognitive Command, or the Euthyphro Contrast, is a matter which is available to purely conceptual reflection. But Williamson's contrasting view, it appears, is that it cannot be a priori which of human beings' characteristic forms of shared response are keyed to real features of the world and which are not. He writes

> But how could a stone age man, by conceptual reflection, have refuted the speculation that colour was as fundamental a property of things as shape, causally responsible for best opinion about it and not supervenient on other physical properties?[24]

Likewise—I imagine he would say—it is surely open to empirical investigation whether the best account of the aetiology of our comic responses, and of the degree of community in them which we exhibit, will see them as keyed to certain "fundamental" properties of the prevailing circumstances and hence as the output of a means of detection of those properties. We may indeed be quite sure that this is not so. But this certainty, rather than a priori, is a product of long-term acclimatisation to the kinds of explanatory paradigm that have proved fruitful in physical science.

This is about as profound a disagreement with the programme of *Truth and Objectivity* as it is possible to have. A proper response to it would need to confront a much more developed statement of the opposing point of view than Williamson had the opportunity to present on this occasion. Here I will mention just two relevant matters. First, Williamson's picture, that we have to approach the question of the objectivity of a discourse with our minds open to *empirical* possibilities of finding, or failing to find the ontology—of comic, or moral properties, for instance—which it distinctively calls for, begs an alternative determination of the objectivity of the discourse in which the relevant empirical questions, and the answers to them, might be expressed. In particular, if natural science is to be able to teach us whether colours, or comic, or aesthetic, or moral qualities are real, we had better have settled in advance on the objectivity of the relevant parts of natural scientific discourse. How does Williamson envisage this settlement's being reached? Is there any alternative to thinking of science's (putative) credentials in this matter as earned a priori? If there is none, what are the cruces which, a priori, it satisfies—what relation do they bear to those explored in *Truth and Objectivity*?

Second, I do not see that it is any implication of the account I proposed of the Euthyphro Contrast, that a clear-headed stone age user of colour vocabu-

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[24] This volume, p. 906.

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lary—if colour is indeed Euthyphronic—could have refuted a priori the speculation that colour is a fundamental, causally explanatory property of things. For one thing, a supporter of that proposal has no evident reason to insist that the status of a range of predicates—as Euthyphronic, or as natural kind terms, or as neither—has to be a matter of determinate intention within a particular linguistic community. But, more importantly, I am not in any case persuaded that, by treating the extensions of a range of expressions as partially determined by our best opinions, we thereby foreclose on the option, should empirical findings render it convenient, of treating them as standing for explanatorily unified kinds. This is the matter which is, in effect, under consideration on pp. 128–32 of *Truth and Objectivity*, though I cannot enlarge on that discussion here. Suffice it to say that, in my view, the contrast between natural kind terms and Euthyphronic ones emerges not in any barrier to our regarding the latter as denoting real kinds, but rather in there being no barrier to their continued use, in good faith, should it prove that they do not.

Truth and Objectivity contains a conjecture—we might call it the Cognitive Command hypothesis—that satisfaction of this constraint represents the *weakest* realism-relevant property that a discourse can enjoy over and above the characteristics involved in minimal truth-aptitude. Now, Horgan is unhappy with the epistemic flavour of most of the cruces in the *Truth and Objectivity* framework, and so finds the Cognitive Command constraint objectionable on that account. But he also thinks that, when the epistemic constraints are supplanted by, as he would prefer, semantic ones, in particular with what he terms the constraint of *tightness*, then an intermediate crux does indeed emerge, so that the Cognitive Command conjecture fails. The tightness of the semantic norms operative over a given discourse requires, roughly, that the correctness of its claims is settled just by their content and the world, in a way that is to "preclude any role for an individual's attitudes, preferences, or any other such idiosyncrasy as a permissible factor". And it would seem, so he suggests, to be a possibility that a discourse could be tight in this way and yet fail of Cognitive Command since disputants—about some theoretical scientific matter, for instance—may disagree

> about the net import of the evidence in question. ... Often enough, the various parties to [such a] dispute seem to concur about what the relevant evidence is and why, but then they part company about the right assessment of where this evidence points, on balance. Often enough, the core disagreement evidently stems not from someone's exhibiting a cognitive deficit, but from differing standards of epistemic assessment.[25]

Horgan is well aware, of course, that this possibility—of disputants differing in the weight they attach to an agreed body of relevant evidence—would pose no problem to the Cognitive Command conjecture if how much weight

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25 This volume, p. 896.

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ought to be attached to a particular body of evidence were a fully objective matter. But he points out, reasonably enough, that that is not something which the formulation of the Cognitive Command constraint can simply take for granted.

But nor did it. The fullest discussion of the constraint[26] explicitly caters for the possibility of permissible variations in what I called "personal thresholds of evidence": this is one of three kinds of vagueness—the others being vagueness in the content of the disputed claim, or in its conditions of its acceptability—intended collectively to exhaust the range of cases where the absence of cognitive shortcoming in a dispute need not reflect adversely on the objectivity of the disputed subject matter. It would be unreasonable to complain that, in the limited space at its disposal, Horgan does not make his notion of tightness completely clear.[27] But I wonder whether, rather than representing a crux intermediate between minimal truth-aptitude and Cognitive Command, the notion he has in mind is not exactly what is explicated by Cognitive Command, once the provision for the third form of vagueness is given its proper due.

V. On the general framework

I have offered no proof that the general framework of my book—minimalism about truth and truth-aptitude, and pluralism about the ways to elucidate and argue for or against realist intuitions— represents the best way to look at these matters. The plausibility of its claims will depend partly on the extent to which my suggestions seem to make sense of actual debates, partly on the operational advantages that minimalism provides over other anti-realist paradigms, but ultimately on the outcome of the sort of critical discussion so usefully illustrated by my present commentators. Since philosophers are notoriously conservative when it comes to entrenched ways of thinking about old problems, I find it extremely gratifying that four of the six seem to be broadly hospitable to the general reorientation I propose. Horwich, for instance, has no major disagreement with the programme of *Truth and Objectivity*, demurring only in that he thinks his own form of deflationism can provide the necessary philosophy of truth and truth-aptitude, and in being uneasy about my tying the effect of the various realism-relevant cruces to a pluralism about truth. Sainsbury does not really disagree—I think—with the pluralism about truth and, excepting his reservations about the substance of the Cognitive Command constraint, is otherwise broadly sympathetic.[28] Horgan emphasises his attraction to the "generic conception", although he

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26 *Truth and Objectivity*, pp. 144ff.

27 He advertises further explication in the forthcoming "Taking a Moral Stance", co-authored with Mark Timmons.

28 Though were he right about the trivialisability of Cognitive Command, that would of course necessitate quite extensive changes in the argument of the book.

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has misgivings about the epistemic character of three of the particular constraints on which I focus (the exception being Wide Cosmological Role). And Pettit, too, is broadly sympathetic. Admittedly, he prefers to view the issue between realist and anti-realist as concerning what he calls the "free-standingness" of the truth-conditions of statements in a contested discourse, and he lists a variety of marks, prima facie distinct from my realism-relevant cruces, by which such free-standingness may be gauged.[29] But I see no serious differences here. As we have seen, Pettit, like Sainsbury, is not really antagonistic to alethic pluralism, as I want it to be understood. Moreover, the second and fourth (and perhaps also the third) of his marks would appear to be implicated in Cognitive Command; while the fifth and sixth connect with the issues to do with the Euthyphro Contrast and with the potential evidence transcendence of truth. In any case, the catalogue of cruces in *Truth and Objectivity* made no claim to be comprehensive; that others should seek to define cognate or complementary distinctions is a reaction I hoped to encourage.

It is different with Van Cleve and Williamson. Each canvasses a line of argument which, if sustained, would, by subverting altogether the contrast between a discourse's being minimally truth-apt and its satisfying further realism-relevant constraints, altogether block the programme of the book. I'll close by briefly commenting on these two lines of argument, though not in the detail they deserve.

Suppose P is a statement belonging to a minimally truth-apt discourse and hence subject to standards of warranted assertibility. Williamson contends that, in order to be in possession of warrant to assert a particular statement, it is not enough that speaker has evidence making it highly probable. Warrant for an assertion demands *knowledge*:

> For example, if I bought one of *n* tickets in a lottery, the fact that its chance of winning is only 1/*n* does not entitle me to say that it will not win, no matter how large *n* is. Even if, to no one's surprise, my ticket does not win, you can justly criticise my assertion by saying, 'but you didn't *know* that it would not win'.[30]

However, knowledge—Williamson continues—demands *reliability*. And one is reliably right that P

> only if, in all cases that could easily arise and that one could easily fail to discriminate from the given case, it is true that P. Reliability demands a margin for error.[31]

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29 As a reminder to the reader, Pettit's marks, each a property of the truth-conditions of the statements in a particular discourse, or a condition on (our knowledge of) their satisfaction, are six: irreducibility, non-relativity, public availability, independence of fiat, bivalence, no infallibility. His statement is at pp. 884–5 of this volume.

30 This volume, pp. 907–8.

31 Ibid.

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The thought, I take it, is that to know that P in a particular case, I have to be reliable in my judgements, whether or not P is true, across a range of cases. And if there were cases which I could easily fail to discriminate from a case where I rightly take P to be true but in which P would not be true, I would not be so reliable. It is therefore built into the concept of knowledge that if one knows that P in a given case, then P must also be true in any such relevantly similar case. But of course, as Williamson observes, the cost of supposing that one could know that P in all such cases would be to set up a Sorites paradox. In any discourse, therefore, which allows of assertible, and hence knowable statements, but which deals in imperceptibly variable, or easily mutually mistakable states of affairs, truth will have to outrun knowability, and hence assertibility. So minimal truth-aptitude incorporates, in and of itself, a potential for evidence-transcendent truth, and the whole framework of *Truth and Objectivity* is consequently undermined: if we are dealing with a discourse involving genuinely assertible contents, then we are likely to be dealing with contents for which Dummettian realism is the appropriate view. The only avenue for anti-realist intuition will be the denial of genuine assertibility.

Williamson doubtless realises that the twin premises of this rather unexpected line of argument are too controversial to allow it to be convincing without a great deal of further development.[32] The lottery example is meant to trigger the intuition that one who makes an assertion will, in normal circumstances, be taken to have laid claim to knowledge of its truth. Speaking for myself, I do not find that intuition terribly strong. There are many contexts—medical diagnosis, weather forecasting, ordinary psychology, history, economics, plant ecology, etc.—in which we conceive the primary business to be the making and reception of reliable claims, but where to claim knowledge, strictly so regarded, of the truth of such claims would often, even usually, seem inflated. But consideration of controls on the practice of *assertion* is anyway beside the point: the material notion of warranted assertion—that which goes with minimal truth-aptitude—is simply the exterior counterpart of warranted *belief* and there is, prima facie, no plausibility whatever in the suggestion that possession of sufficient reason to believe a proposition demands nothing less than knowledge of it. The long tradition in epistemology of distinguishing between knowledge and reasonable belief may indeed be misguided; but if it is, it will demand a very substantial argument to show it.

Williamson's second premise, that knowledge demands a margin of error, is only prima facie less controversial than the first. Note, to begin with, that

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32 He has fuller discussions elsewhere. The knowing/asserting link is argued for in "Knowing and Asserting", not yet published. For knowledge and margins for error, see Williamson's "Inexact Knowledge", *Mind* CI (1992), pp. 217–42, and ch. 8 of his *Vagueness* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

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it must be in jeopardy for discourses which qualify as *Euthyphronic*—at least according to the kind of understanding of that idea proposed in *Truth and Objectivity*. Presumably, one who knowingly arrives at a *best* opinion about some Euthyphronic matter—by the standards spelled out by the antecedent conditions in an appropriate provisional equation—will thereby know of its truth. It follows that an opinion cannot count as best unless in agreement with other opinions about the same matter formed under conditions which are otherwise likewise best. For suppose, as seems likely enough to occur, that a pair of visually normal, fully competent subjects, reacting to a Sorites series of colour patches under seemingly optimal conditions, etc., etc., diverge in their inclinations at some point about whether or not a particular patch can still justifiably be described as red: if both verdicts can rank as best, then the Euthyphronist about colour will be forced into allowing inconsistent claims about that particular patch to stand. So it is built into the position that there may be a *last* case in such a series which a subject knows to be red—a last case where his judgement meets all the conditions of a best opinion, including that of consensus with other judges operating under the remaining conditions of optimality—followed immediately by a first patch where the claim to knowledge lapses because the consensus amongst otherwise best judges breaks down.[33] And these two patches may, of course, be indistinguishable from—or, anyway, easily mistaken for—each other.

Notice that a reservation of this kind about Williamson's principle—that P must be true in any case sufficiently closely similar to a case in which it is known to be true—will not apply only to discourses which qualify as Euthyphronic by the rather demanding conditions proposed in *Truth and Objectivity*. Consider any minimally truth-apt discourse which fails to exert Cognitive Command. There may be no knowing whether or not a disputed claim in such a discourse is true. But there would seem to be no point in denying the title "knowledge" to an opinion which enjoyed consensus among all the practitioners of such discourse when it depends upon no collateral misapprehension and is not independently open to question. Yet such an impeccable consensus would, it is very likely, break down abruptly in the course of a series of marginal transformations of the consensual case.

There is, indeed, a different kind of misgiving about Williamson's principle which could be felt even by one utterly out of sympathy with the ideas of *Truth and Objectivity*. The idea is unquestionably appealing that knowledge requires reliability. But reliability over *what range of cases*? Why, in order for my opinion that P in particular circumstances, C, to pass this test, is it necessary that I be a reliable judge about P in *other* kinds of circumstances, how-

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33 The response to the Sorites paradox for colour implicit in this thought is further elaborated in section VII of my "Further Reflections on the Sorites Paradox" in *Philosophical Topics*, XV, 1, 1987, pp. 227–90.

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ever apparently similar or easily confused with C? The idea is, presumably, that if I were prone to error about other such cases, I would be bound to be unreliable in any circumstances easily confused with them, as C are by hypothesis. But that's just an assumption. And the kind of local reliability it precludes may be readily envisaged. Consider an instrument—a digital speedometer on a car, say—whose function is to register, using a finite range of possible outputs, inputs of continuously variable magnitude within a finitely bounded range. Such a device may be so constructed that, when functioning properly, it gives a specific reading—say "10 m.p.h."—whenever the input corresponds to anything within some fixed margin of that particular road speed, but sometimes gives the same reading to inputs outside that range, depending on what reading it was giving before, on whether the car is accelerating or decelerating, and so on. The reading "10 m.p.h." would thus be reliable over one range of cases, and unreliable over another, notwithstanding the fact that some of the latter would approximate some of the former as closely as you like, so that the differences between them would certainly lie within the threshold of sensitivity of the device, whatever it was.[34] I can see no conceptual objection to the idea that a device might have this pattern of responses. And if, for example, the device was a human being, and its responses judgements, I can see no objection to the suggestion that its correct responses in the good cases—the analogues of the inputs within the specified margin of a road speed of ten miles an hour—ought, at least as far as considerations of reliability are concerned, to count as knowledge. Again, it is no obstacle to this thought that the difference between some of the good cases and some of the others will be indiscriminable to such a judging subject. There is nothing conceptually absurd in the idea that a subject may have different patterns of response to presentations which are very similar, or even indiscriminable to him. Indiscriminability is one thing; identity of causal powers is another.

Van Cleve argues in the final section of his remarks that for a discourse to contain minimally truth-apt claims is for it to contain claims apt for *realist* truth—that any truth-predicate complying with the Equivalence Schema will be resistant to all the classical anti-realist interpretations of truth. At this point he does not have superassertibility in mind—having already disposed of its alethic pretensions, he considers, by the considerations reviewed in section II above—but is thinking instead of proposals like that of (sometime) Hilary Putnam,[35] and traditional forms of coherence theory, which involve proposing

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34 There is an issue, of course, about how exactly to interpret the idea of such a device's having a sensitivity-threshold. For more on this kind of example see section III of my "Further Reflections on the Sorites Paradox".

35 The locus classicus, of course, is ch. 3 of *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Putnam himself has recently shown signs of a cooling in his attraction to an epistemic conception of truth. See for instance his

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an analysis of truth in terms of subjunctive conditionals. For Putnam, the relevant conditional would be something like: "If epistemically ideal circumstances were to obtain, we would judge that P". For the type of coherence theory explicitly addressed by Van Cleve, the relevant conditional would be, in his formulation, "If there were a controlled, coherent and comprehensive set of beliefs, the proposition that P would belong to it".

The problem Van Cleve has in mind is presented by an intriguing argument of Alvin Plantinga's going back some fifteen years.[36] Here is (a modest simplification of) Plantinga's argument in outline: assume any purported analysis of truth of the form

$$P \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow Q \mathrel{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} Z(P),$$

where Q is an idealising hypothesis, Z(...) is any condition on propositions—for instance, being judged to be true by the ideally rational and informed thinkers whose existence is hypothesised by Q, or cohering with the maximally coherent set of beliefs whose existence is hypothesised by Q, etc., etc.—and '$\Box\!\!\rightarrow$' expresses the subjunctive conditional. Since this is an analysis, it presumably holds in necessitated form:

(i) Necessarily: $(P \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow (Q \mathrel{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} Z(P)))$

Now suppose

(ii) Possibly (Q & Not Z(Q))

Then, by the Equivalence Schema,

(iii) Possibly (Q is true & (Q & Not Z(Q)))

But (iii) contradicts (i), which therefore entails

(iv) Not possibly (Q & Not Z(Q))

So (v) Necessarily $(Q \rightarrow Z(Q))$

A strict implication ought to be sufficient for a subjunctive conditional, so

(vi) $Q \mathrel{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} Z(Q)$

So, from (i)

"Sense, Nonsense and the Senses: An Enquiry Into the Powers of the Human Mind", *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (1994), pp. 445–517, at pp. 503 and 510–11.

36 Alvin Plantinga, "How to be an Anti-Realist", *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 56 (1982), pp. 47–70.

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(vii) Q is true

So by the Equivalence Schema again

(viii) Q

The upshot is, it seems, that Putnam must accept that conditions are *already* "epistemically ideal", and that a coherence theorist must accept that there already is a controlled, comprehensive and coherent set of beliefs.[37]

Obviously this is absurd. Note, however, that the reasoning in no way depends upon what is offered being an *analysis,* but will go thorough for any suggested equivalent of 'P is true' of the appropriate form. So a *realist* who accepted that, while not an analysis of truth, there is a necessary biconditional link between 'P is true' and some subjunctive conditional about the beliefs of a suitably idealised subject—perhaps because the idealisation would ensure that the thinker in question would *track* all truth—is on the face of it put in difficulties too. What, then, if we take Q as: "There is a unique omniscient being"—one who believes all truths and no falsehoods—and Z(...) as: "... would be believed by the unique omniscient being"? Are not the true propositions exactly those which would be believed by such a being? If so, we have another instance of (i), and Plantinga's argument, if good, apparently lends itself to a proof of the existence of the Christian God, or at least of a being possessing His traditional epistemic powers. (Plantinga himself might welcome that finding; but not, surely, by this route.)

In fact, of course, we are here running foul of a version of the Conditional Fallacy.[38] No subjunctive conditional can be strictly equivalent to a categorical proposition if the realisation of its antecedent cannot be guaranteed not to impinge on the truth-value of that proposition. So an instance of (i) has a chance of being correct only if P and Q are independent. If there were an omniscient being, He would indeed believe exactly the truths. But it cannot be correct to represent the purport of that by something of the form of (i) if we want both "There is an omniscient being" and its negation to be admissible substituends for P. If the range of P is to be unrestricted, then the claim must be, rather, that an omniscient being would believe all and only the truths *that would then obtain*; not (i) but the corresponding

Necessarily: $(Q \mathrel{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} (P \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow Z(P)))$

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37 Notice that Plantinga's reasoning after line (vi) depends upon a biconditional principle and thus cannot engage an anti-realist who proposes merely a one-way evidential constraint on truth rather than an analysis.

38 The term originates in Robert K. Shope's "The Conditional Fallacy in Contemporary Philosophy", *Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1978), pp. 397–413.

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is what is wanted.[39]

The obvious next question is: why should a supporter of (putative) Putnam not make the same adjustment? What would be the cost to such a philosopher if what were proposed were not

(P1) Necessarily: a proposition is true if and only if, were conditions epistemically ideal, it would be believed

but

(P2) Necessarily: if conditions were epistemically ideal, then the true propositions would be all and only those which were believed?

The matter needs a fuller discussion than I can embark on here. But I do not think it is clear that there would be *any* significant cost. Note to begin with that (P2) is still inconsistent with the conception of truth and truth-conferrers beloved of Putnam's ("metaphysical") realist antagonist, for whom it can be no necessity, even under the very best epistemic conditions, that the truth is available. So much is implicit in the idea that an ideal empirical theory can be false. To be sure, (P2) would, even so, still fail to capture the intention of a proponent of (P1) if it was fair to summarise its gist as being that, under the conditions depicted by its antecedent, the truth *would be* evidentially constrained—so leaving room for the thought that, *as things are*, it is not. But note in that connection that the intended interpretation of the obtaining of ideal conditions invoked by (P1) always had to be that it would occasion *no disturbance* in the actual distribution of truth-values among propositions—it was to be their *actual truth-values* that would be available to us under epistemically ideal conditions. If there is indeed an interpretation of what it would be for conditions to be epistemically ideal which can honour that requirement, it is available to condition the reading of (P2) as well. Of course, it was just on that point that (P1) foundered—when applied to the very proposition that conditions are not epistemically ideal. That, and anything entailing it, would, we know, have different truth-values if the antecedent of (P2) were true. So (P2) fails to impose an epistemic constraint on the truth-conditions of that family of propositions. But it is not clear that any serious limitation of the generality of the anti-realist thesis has to be to be occasioned by that: that conditions are not epistemically ideal is something we know now! In short: if (P1) would do what is wanted of it up to the point where it trips over the Conditional Fallacy, then there is no obvious candidate for an evidence-transcendent truth that slips past (P2).

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[39] This will all be very familiar to a reader who is au courant de the move from "Basic Equations" to "Provisional Biconditionals"; cf. *Truth and Objectivity*, pp. 117–20.

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I continue to think that, by invoking "epistemically ideal" conditions, the discussion in *Reason, Truth and History* idealised assertibility in the wrong direction—contrast the turn taken by the idealisation involved in superassertibility. But there seems to me to be every chance that the essence of the *Reason, Truth and History* proposal—as, rightly or wrongly, commonly interpreted—can at least be stabilised against Plantinga's argument.[40, 41]

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40 Plantinga's argument has not received the same degree of attention as another purported short way with Evidential Constraint—the argument, originally due to F. B. Fitch (see his "A Logical Analysis of Some Value Concepts", *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 28 (1963), pp. 135–42), that to restrict the truths to what it is possible to know must have the unwelcome consequence that they are restricted to what is actually known. I must defer to another occasion the question whether, if the anti-realist may indeed meet Plantinga's objection by retreating to something akin to (P2), a response to Fitch might be made by essentially the same manoeuvre.

41 I am very grateful to my commentators for the work they have expended in generating so interesting a set of critical reactions. Thanks also to Alvin Plantinga for a stimulating electronic exchange on the matters of the last section, and to Bob Hale and John Skorupski for helpful discussion of many of the other points raised.

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