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## What Could Antirealism about Ordinary Psychology Possibly Be?

Crispin Wright

### 1.

If you cannot lucidly doubt that you exist as a thinking thing, then nor can there be a lucid doubt about the reality of those psychological states and attributes whose possession is distinctive of thinkers, *par excellence* their being subject to the various kinds of doxastic and conative states involved in goal-directed thought. Thus, it seems a short step from the *Cogito* to at least a limited application of the categories of ordinary attitudinal psychology. Yet many leading modern philosophers—for instance, Dennett, Stich, the Churchlands and, above all, Quine—have been united, notwithstanding other differences, in a tendency to skepticism about the reality of (explanation in terms of) attitudinal states.

The connection with the *Cogito* is one reason why such skepticism seems like a denial of the inescapable. More generally, skepticism about the states invoked in ordinary psychology seems to flout their characteristic *self-evidence* to their subjects—the fact that, typically, someone's being in such a state is, as it seems, effortlessly, non-empirically and non-inferentially available to them. Surely each of us does have—really have—beliefs, desires, hopes, intentions, wishes, and so on. Can't we each just tell that we do? Don't we do so all the time? Besides, how, save in ways which involve self-ascribing such states, are we to make sense of most of what we do? And how else are we ever to take decisions about what best to do?

These reservations may seem compelling. But they are more protest than argument. For the “self-evidence” of ordinary psychological states to their subjects really comes to no more than a symptom of the entrenchment of the phenomenon of psychological *avowal*: the fact that people acquire a propensity, on being educated in ordinary psychological talk, spontaneously to affirm claims concerning their own attitudinal states which for the most part, both to themselves and others, seem—by the standards of the practice—to make decent sense of their behavior and projects. But how we talk, it may be said, is one thing and what the world is really like is another. It is, so it may be contended, quite another matter what metaphysical status should be accorded to

our ordinary psychological claims: whether anything real answers to them. And if not, it's a further question again whether the linguistic practices in which they feature are thereby shown to be somehow essentially corrupt or whether, rather, they have a legitimate content and purpose which can be dissociated from a realist view of ordinary psychology.

Confidence in the integrity of ordinary psychology certainly has challenges to answer. My focus in what follows, however, will not be on the pros and cons of the debates those challenges provoke but on the generally unquestioned presupposition that there *is* any such thing in the first place as a coherent anti-realist view of ordinary psychology. In other areas, antirealism has assumed each of a variety of—error-theoretic, expressivist, instrumentalist, fictionalist, and verificationist<sup>1</sup>—shapes. I shall review reasons to doubt whether, when it comes to ordinary psychology, there *is* any form of antirealist thesis that is both internally stable and rationally tenable. Some of the listed types of view about psychology—I am thinking particularly of error-theory and instrumentalism—have, of course, already provoked complex and unsettled disputes in a very extensive literature. I make no pretense to settle these disputes here. But I do think the views in question confront much more immediate *structural* difficulties than is often realized and I will outline some of what I take the most serious such difficulties to be. Others of the possible antirealist positions have received much less attention. The principal contention of the latter half of the paper will be that what, as it seems to me, is actually the most attractive antirealist option in the area faces a potentially lethal problem.

The effect of the discussion as a whole, in my own estimation, will be that we do not, at the present time, have any clear understanding of the shape that a dialectically coherent—let alone cogent—psychological antirealist position might assume: that the arguments of the skeptics about ordinary psychology, whatever credibility they may or may not seem to possess, have nowhere—or anyway nowhere obvious—to lead.

## 2.

Philosophers understandably worry about the looseness and multiplicity of understandings of the terms 'realism' and 'antirealism'. Fortunately, we do not need to attempt a precise characterization here. It will suffice to structure the discussion to follow that any realist about a

given region of discourse is likely to want to maintain versions of two claims:

*A semantic claim:* something to the effect that statements in the discourse have a content that fits them for representation of aspects of the real world;

*A metaphysical claim:* something to the effect that the real world comes furnished with states of affairs of the kind that such statements are fitted to represent.

Whatever precise cast particular realists may choose to give to these claims, each will be distinctively denied by some of the well-known antirealist paradigms listed above, which correspondingly group themselves into metaphysical and semantic forms of antirealism. Classical ethical expressivism and scientific instrumentalism, for instance, are semantic antirealisms: they deny that their respectively targeted discourses deal in genuinely representational—truth-apt—contents. Mathematical fictionalism and error-theoretic views of ethics, by contrast, are metaphysical: they allow that their targeted discourses are representational in content but deny that the characteristic objects, states or properties, purportedly denoted, or attributed, within the discourse are to be found in the real world.

Modern antirealists about ordinary psychology have mostly been of the metaphysical stripe, marshaling concerns that call into question whether there are genuinely any such things as the states that ordinary intentional psychology characteristically calls for. But a successful attack on realism's semantic claim—the representationality of psychological discourse—would presumably enjoin rejecting any corresponding category of psychological states in any case. For if there were such states, what could be the barrier to their representation in thought and speech? So it might seem that antirealists of both kinds must converge on denial of the metaphysical claim. One attractive feature, in my view, of the antirealist position—minimalism—on which we shall eventually concentrate is that it avoids such a denial.<sup>2</sup> But for the time being we may focus our attention on antirealist views that, whether for specifically metaphysical or semantic motives, do reject realism's metaphysical claim.

## 3.

The perhaps most influential metaphysical challenges to ordinary psychological realism are posed by metaphysical *naturalism*. One—in the aftermath of the famous skeptical arguments of Kripke, Quine, and Putnam<sup>3</sup>—derives from a lingering concern about what content-bearing states might amount to in a world conceived of as, ultimately, allowing of complete characterization in the vocabulary of a fully developed physical science, together with the conviction that such a world is what we actually inhabit. Another closely related challenge worries about the prospects for integrating the (apparently causal) explanations of ordinary psychology within the explanatory framework of a fully developed physical science. We will need to keep the general character of these challenges in mind in what follows but, as I said, I do not propose to add here to the extensive and complex literature that develops and responds to them.

There is, however, a different line of argument towards psychological antirealism—this time a semantic rather than a directly metaphysical argument—that, because it exploits an idea that will be important to us later and also emphasizes a tactical lesson for the discussion to follow, I will briefly review. This argument takes it for granted that psychological interpretation is *indeterminate* in some important and extensive way—a claim I will not here further consider—and moves from there to an antirealist conclusion. Some important philosophers—notably Quine and Davidson—have of course been drawn to this transition. What has not always been clear is how exactly the passage from indeterminacy to antirealism is supposed to be facilitated.

Here is one way of doing it. It derives from considerations of *cognitive command*.<sup>4</sup> As remarked, realism about a discourse is in part a view about representation. Unless pessimistic enough to think that its subject matter is altogether beyond our ken, a realist views a discourse as providing for the proper expression of a representational mode of cognitive function, rather as a film provides for the expression of the representational function of a camera. To submit oneself, under conditions of normal cognitive functioning, to the standards of belief-formation and appraisal appropriate to the discourse, is—for the realist—to receive impressions, as it were, of self-standing states of affairs that are then expressible by the linguistic resources it provides. This is, no doubt, a vague idea. But even so, it does have certain quite definite obligations. If exposures taken of the *same* scene somehow turn out to

represent it in incompatible ways, there has to have been some kind of shortcoming in the function of at least one of the cameras, or in the way it was used. The tariff for taking the idea of representation in the way the realist wants is that when representations prove to conflict, there has to have been something amiss with the process that produced them or with their vehicle—with the thinker or with the way she went about forming her impression.<sup>5</sup> A realist about ordinary psychology is accordingly obliged to hold that if you and I disagree about a subject's attitudinal states, then defects of process or thinker have somehow to be involved in our disagreement.

It follows that if there is no assurance to be had that any particular disagreement about a subject's attitudinal states will always involve such a defect, then there is correspondingly no assurance that a realist—seriously representational<sup>6</sup>—view of intentional psychological discourse can be sustained. Just here is the bearing of the thesis of the indeterminacy of radical psychological interpretation. It enjoins exactly that there can be no such assurance.<sup>7</sup> The claim of the indeterminacy thesis will be that, in the nature of the methodology which they follow, interpreters of a given subject's sayings and doings who proceed irreproachably can nonetheless wind up with mutually inconsistent yet respectively unimprovable conceptions of that person's overall psychological set. But if nothing in the methodology of psychological interpretation guarantees convergence among ideal interpreters, then it would appear to follow that forming opinions in a manner constrained by that methodology should not be viewed as, in the sense the realist intends, a representational mode of cognitive function.

To be sure, there was an escape route left open in the possible combination of realism with pessimism. The escape is to allow that the truth values of the conflicting opinions may transcend decision by the methods of radical interpretation. In that case the price of psychological realism becomes what Quine once famously stigmatized as the "Myth of the Museum."<sup>8</sup> The basic thought behind the idea of cognitive command is that a discourse counts as seriously representational—and the formation of opinions expressible within it counts correspondingly as a representational mode of intellectual function—only if disagreements betoken cognitive shortcoming. But such a shortcoming need not pertain to the way in which opinions are formed unless the truths in question are ones that best methods, properly pursued, invariably suffice to disclose. The so-styled Myth of the Museum is just the specialization to psychology of the ordinary realist idea that some domains of

fact may strictly transcend the available evidence, which may allow of radically different constructions—theories—of how the facts in question stand. If such were the correct understanding of ordinary psychological claims, then the present semantic antirealist argument could not get a grip—the indeterminacy of psychological interpretation would just be an instance of the under-determination of empirical theory by evidence: a consideration that, of itself, has no evident immediate bearing on the viability of a realist view of empirical theory.

To be clear: The indeterminacy thesis says that conflicting views about a subject's attitudinal states may each be impeccably arrived at. But according to the constraint of cognitive command, realism about psychology—specifically, the conception of psychological claims as seriously representational in content—requires that conflicting views about a subject's psychological states cannot all be impeccably arrived at, *unless* the relevant subject matter is beyond our ken. The Myth of the Museum allows that it may be. So the semantic argument can work only by jettisoning the Myth of the Museum.

To jettison the Myth is to go for a broadly *interpretationist* view of ordinary psychology. On the interpretationist view, a *true* account of a subject's motives for an action is just whatever proves to belong with the best (by whatever criteria) overall interpretation of her attitudes and other psychological states—and there is no presumption that there will *be* any particular uniquely best overall interpretation, nor that there is any further fact of correctness when there is none. The metaphysical concerns, by contrast, were driven by the belief in an objective, comprehensive, natural causal order and a view of psychological explanation that sees it as, above all else, an attempt to tell truths about aspects of that objective order. They thus presuppose a view of psychology that is actually *in tension* with the implicit interpretationism of the semantic argument.

Indeed, to sustain the semantic antirealist argument is to cut the ground from under the metaphysical concerns. To sustain the semantic argument is to conclude that ordinary psychology is not really in the business of depiction of the world, that the products of psychological interpretation are not fitted to represent or misrepresent anything real. But the worry of the metaphysical antirealist was precisely, in effect, one of *misrepresentation*: it was the misgiving that ordinary psychology calls for states and processes whose nature cannot be reconciled with the (assumed) physicality of the world, and the actual natural etiology of ordinary behavior. One in the grip of the assump-

tions that spur these complaints will be regarding ordinary psychology as *incredible*. But if the semantic antirealist argument is right, credibility—that is, plausibility as serious representation—is simply not psychology's stock-in-trade in the first place.

Hence the advertised tactical lesson about our leading question. That question is, What should a psychological antirealist best say—positively—about ordinary psychological discourse and the purported explanations it provides for? But now we see that this question needs to be taken with care, for there is reason to expect that the answer may vary, depending on the motivation for the antirealism: on whether it is metaphysical, driven by the pressure put on the *prima facie* ontology and explanatory claims of ordinary psychology by a background naturalism; or *noncognitivist*, driven by consideration of the constraint on representational content involved in the idea of cognitive command, an acceptance of the (extensive) indeterminacy of radical interpretation and a repudiation of the Myth of the Museum. The complaints of the metaphysical antirealist implicitly involve taking a stand on something—the representational ambitions of ordinary psychological discourse—that the noncognitivist rejects. So we must be wary of assuming that all the options open to them are the same.

#### 4.

With that caveat noted, let's first review the options for metaphysical antirealism. On this outlook, ordinary psychological ascriptions concern nothing real, and ordinary psychological explanations depict no genuine causes. That would seem to leave a choice between, on the one hand, viewing ordinary psychology as, like phlogiston-theory or any discredited empirical theory, hopelessly compromised—the well-known *eliminativist* response—or, on the other, a *conservative* response, broadly comparable to expressivist construals of the “statements” of ethics, or fictionalism in the philosophies of science and mathematics, which will try to make a case that ordinary psychological discourse remains acceptable, even while conceding that it serves to represent no real matters of fact, by finding for it some other validly heuristic or instrumentally valuable role.

I do not think that the special obstacles to reconciling any such conservative proposal about ordinary psychology with a metaphysical antirealist motivation have been sufficiently appreciated. What sort of purpose might intentional psychology, divorced of any claim to repre-



sent reality, really serve? One immediately thinks of the kind of instrumentalist or fictionalist "stance" idea, associated with the writings of Dennett.<sup>9</sup> Dennett's key thought, familiarly, was that the rationalization of others' behavior within ordinary intentional psychological categories can prove an economical way of anticipating it—that it is, for instance, much easier to predict the moves of a good chess-playing computer if you just *treat it* as an intentional strategist rather than merely as a physical mechanism, and that the utility of such treatment is quite independent of its fidelity, presumed or otherwise, to anything that is happening with the machine.

The question is whether this idea can offer a fully general account of the role of intentional psychological idiom. One obstacle emerges as soon as one puts aside the other-directed uses of ordinary psychology—with which Dennett himself was preoccupied—and focuses instead on one's own case. To attempt to think of the detail of one's own self-conception as likewise accepted merely as a self-directed "stance," designed to minimize surprises in one's subsequent behavior, is bizarre and would seem to involve abrogating the intuitive asymmetries between self-knowledge and knowledge of others—asymmetries that are plausibly essential to our ordinary conception of the mental. But there is a more basic structural difficulty. For, even in the other-directed case, is not such a stance itself individuated by its content—by the complex of attitudes one ascribes to the subject? And must the Dennettian theorist not take it as a *matter of fact* that—when one is—one is taking such a stance? According to the proposal, we can somehow deflate the realistic purport of ordinary psychological attributions by viewing them merely as entertained as part of an instrumentally useful stance. But it is thereby presupposed that one does—or can—really take such a stance. So that is then a bit of intentional reality that there is no remaining room to construe as fictional or merely instrumental. To deploy a complex of supposed fictions in the Dennettian manner is already to enter into a complex attitudinal state—in no relevant way distinguishable from regular intentional states like hope, belief, and desire. Taking the intentional stance is entering into an intentional state.<sup>10</sup> So the Dennettian antirealist account winds up with a presupposition at odds with itself.

When it is applied to ordinary psychology under the aegis of metaphysical antirealism, there is a broadly similar kind of problem with another very familiar antirealist paradigm—that of the expressivism in ethics classically championed by such writers as A. J. Ayer and R. M.

Hare.<sup>11</sup> It might be thought that the expressivist idea is a non-starter in this context in any case since, as remarked above, the dominant motivation of the metaphysical antirealist presupposes a representational interpretation of psychological discourse. But that thought is too quick: it overlooks the possibility that the metaphysical antirealist's arguments be viewed as a *reductio* of the representational interpretation, with expressivism then proposed as a saving—perhaps revisionary—account. However the real problem is only a little less immediate. It is, naturally, of the essence of any expressivist view to rely on a distinction between genuine assertions and other forms of speech act that have the surface grammar of assertions but in fact have a different semantic function. But how are such deeper differences in function to be described? The characteristic expressivist answer has standardly been: by reference to the *dominant intentional states* of participants in the discourse in question. Moral expressivists, for instance, have thought they could excuse ethical pronouncements any genuinely assertoric role on the ground that they are—allegedly—characteristically aimed at the expression not of *beliefs*, apt to be true or false, but of certain distinctive *feelings* and at shaping the corresponding feelings of others. However, the details of any particular such proposal do not matter. So long as expressivism accepts that genuinely assertoric discourses are marked off from merely expressive discourses by systematic differences in the psychological attitudes which competent practice of the discourse is constrained by and which it serves to communicate, the very claim that a discourse is expressive will presuppose an underpinning in facts about aspects of the characteristic attitudinal psychology of its participants. But facts of that genre are just what metaphysical anti-realism about psychology is unwilling to countenance. So expressivism can offer it no consistent outlet.

There will be, no doubt, more to say. But the foregoing observations, brisk though they may be, make at least a strong *prima facie* case: each of the two classic conservative antirealist options about a discourse—conceding the large-scale literal falsity of its statements but making a case for it as instrumentally useful fiction; and denying that it deals in genuine (truth-apt) assertions at all—would appear to involve presuppositions that are unsustainable within the context of a systematic metaphysical antirealism about intentional psychology. So neither can present a coherent account of psychology itself from that standpoint.

Such considerations may incline an antirealist to nonconservatism—to regarding ordinary psychology simply as a primitive and discreditable mode of explanation of human behavior, which we should aim to supersede. This view—psychological *eliminativism*—has achieved something of a reputation for dialectical resilience. But I think it is moot how deserved this is. Once again, there is a serious question whether the very statement and development of the view can avoid presuppositions that are inconsistent with it. One such presupposition—for a reason I'll give in a minute—would seem to be the existence of *linguistic content*. But how does linguistic content fare on the psychological eliminativist view? Wouldn't one intuitively suspect that the reality of linguistic content must depend on that of intentional states?

Such a dependence would be immediate on a broadly Gricean account of meaning. According to the Gricean account, the meaning of any expression is actually constituted in certain characteristic self-reflexive intentions possessed by those who use it. But the intuitive suspicion does not need so much. A sufficient but less committal reflection would be merely that, whatever the correct account in detail, linguistic meanings depend for their existence on *conventions*. For whatever its proper analysis, convention is an intentional notion. Conventions, as opposed to mere regularities, have somehow to be constituted in the beliefs and intentions of those who are party to them. So strip the world of intentional states and properties and you strip it of semantic ones too.

If that is right, then notice that what eliminativism puts in jeopardy is not (merely) the legitimacy of treating meanings as *objects*—the point on which Quine's own early critique of the intensional was largely focused—but the whole idea of expressions' *having meaning at all*, that is, their being semantically differentiated in specific ways. But the eliminativist view is that ordinary psychology is massively false. That fact has to consist in the falsity of the overwhelming majority of its *characteristic type of claims*, and those claims are identified precisely by their *characteristic type of content*. If there is no such thing as linguistic content, how is eliminativism to explain what exactly are the limits of the proposal—which precisely are the kinds of spurious explanatory claim that it is proposed we should try to supersede and which we may retain?

There is a related, more general awkwardness. How, once linguistic meanings are jettisoned along with intentional states, how we are to conceive of the determinants of *truth value*? It is—or so one would suppose (with Aristotle)—the merest platitude that the truth of a state-

ment depends on whether what it says is so, is so. So its truth depends on what a statement says. If there is no such thing as what a statement says, how can there be any such thing as its truth or falsity (let alone the massive falsity of an entire discourse)?

Some (Quineans) may have thought they can finesse this point by an emphasis on the Disquotational Scheme

'P' is true if and only if P

as putatively capturing the determinants of truth independently of any play with meaning or cognate notions. But if so, they are deluded. The Disquotational Scheme is merely another way of articulating the Aristotelian platitude, made possible by the unstated schematic assumption that 'P' says that P.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, the worry is that eliminativism about ordinary psychology requires eliminativism about linguistic content, and that the latter then has two subversive consequences for a proponent of the former: first, it throws away the materials for a proper circumscription of the discourse to be supplanted; second, it undermines the truth predicate—thus again, in another way, leaving eliminativism without the conceptual resources to identify its own central contention, the massive falsity of ordinary psychology.<sup>13</sup>

An eliminativist might reply that, as far as the first point is concerned, the thrust of the objection is only that our *ordinary notion* of linguistic content has a dependence on convention that in turn, as ordinarily understood, implicates intentionality—and that eliminativism is accordingly in the clear if it can somehow recover a notion of convention, or more generally of linguistic content, that involves no such implication.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, as far as the second point is concerned, the reply may continue, all we really have any right to conclude is that any psychological eliminativist—if indeed committed to dispensing with linguistic content—owes an account of what determines truth value that implicates no parameters of meaning: in effect, that she needs to be able to provide room for *truth values* without appeal to *truth conditions*, semantically conceived. In brief: some kind of intentionality-free ersatz for the notion of linguistic content, and (thereby) some kind of intentionality-free explanation of the determinants of truth value, will indeed need to be supplied if the view is to retain the resources for its own statement. But it has not been shown that these needs cannot be filled. Eliminativism is anyway up to its neck in explanatory debts. What are two more? Add them to the slate.

But these are not just any old explanatory debts. The fact is that we have not the slightest inkling of the needed explanations nor any reason whatever to think that they can be given. Accordingly, the idea that there *is* any such identifiable contention as that of the massive falsity of ordinary psychology becomes, for the eliminativist, a mere article of faith. This is not, it is crucial to appreciate, the familiar grumble that eliminativists are characteristically content to make it a matter of faith that some non-intentional explanatory theory will somehow one day supplant psychology as an account of the sources of human action. The point is that their “faith” has to extend further: it has to extend to *the very existence of the trademark claim*, namely, that ordinary psychology is massively false. It has to extend to the very existence of the eliminativist position itself. Until at least *prima facie* viable, intentionality-free reconstructions of linguistic content and the determinants of truth value are available, a systematic doubt about the reality of ordinary psychological states is a commitment to holding that there is no good reason to think that any such thesis as that psychological discourse is massively *false*, and should be abandoned, can be so much as formulated.

To have to take it on faith that empirical science can develop to repair the explanatory gaps left by a philosophical thesis is one thing; but to have to take it on faith that one so much as *has* a thesis in the first place is quite another. As things stand, a metaphysical antirealist about psychology should regard the very existence of the eliminativist thesis as something there is no reason to accept. So such a theorist cannot—rationally—be tempted by it.

## 5.

If all this is right, then one inclined to sustain any of the metaphysical challenges to realism about ordinary psychology faces a bind. For there appears to be no clearly internally stable position—since if not eliminativism, nor some form of fictionalism, nor some expressivist account, then what?—for a coherent, metaphysically motivated antirealism about ordinary psychology to assume. But how do matters play if the emphasis is on the other principal antirealist argument outlined earlier—the alleged failure of ordinary psychological discourse to satisfy the constraint of cognitive command, and hence to qualify as seriously representational? We have already observed that a side-effect of this—noncognitivist—view is to undermine the metaphysical challenges to

psychological realism, since the ontology, or explanations, of ordinary psychology can be regarded as incredible—as the metaphysical challenges suggest—only if the discourse is indeed rightly regarded as making a claim to represent what things there really are and what causally explains what. So noncognitivism does not need to worry about how those challenges might be accommodated if sustained. But what exactly should be its positive view of ordinary psychological discourse? And can it escape binds of its own?

Well, let's take stock. Since noncognitivism rejects the representationality of psychological discourse, it cannot—for all we have so far said—have any truck with an account that maintains the literal falsity of the massive majority of ordinary psychological statements. So eliminativism, so motivated, and fictionalism are out of bounds. The natural outlet might therefore seem to be some kind of expressivism. But now there will be a close relative of the problem that stood in the way of an expressivist account in a metaphysical realist setting: how could an expressivism about psychology lay claim to the distinction, needed by all kinds of expressivism, between genuinely truth-evaluable and merely expressive utterances without reliance on *statements*—that is, representational, truth-evaluable claims—about the psychological attitudes that constrain and are conveyed by the various illocutionary forces?

Prima facie, then, psychological noncognitivism seems to be no more comfortably situated than its metaphysical antirealist cousin. However that is a premature conclusion. It passes over a radically alternative kind of antirealist outlet: an antirealist account of a discourse that disputes neither the *truth aptitude* of its characteristic claims, nor the *truth* of very many of them. It is this form of proposal, rather than expressivism, that in my view should offer the first port of call for a theorist about ordinary psychology moved by noncognitivist considerations—a conservative form of proposal differing from fictionalism and expressivism in allowing that we are perfectly entitled to regard those claims that are warranted by the standards of ordinary intentional psychology as both genuine (truth-evaluable) statements and literally true.

Recent work on truth and realism offers the necessary framework for such a proposal. According to the conceptions of truth and truth aptitude defended by writers such as Paul Horwich and myself,<sup>15</sup> any sentence is a candidate for truth that is possessed of assertoric content, and possession of assertoric content is essentially merely a matter of

meeting certain surface syntactic and disciplinary constraints—in essence, assertoric contents are ones that are capable of significant embedding within constructions such as negation, the conditional, and in contexts of propositional attitude, and whose acceptability is subject to acknowledged standards of warrant. When such standards are satisfied, that will then suffice, other things being equal, (defeasibly) to justify the claim that the content in question is true.<sup>16</sup>

If this kind of approach is accepted, almost all the areas that have traditionally provoked realist/antirealist debate—ethics, aesthetics, intentional psychology, mathematics, theoretical science, and so on—will turn out to traffic in truth-evaluable contents, which moreover, when the disciplinary standards proper to the discourse are satisfied, we are going to be entitled to claim to be true.

A reader may be impatient to observe that none of this helps the psychological noncognitivist unless an acceptance that psychological claims that are warranted by ordinary standards may be regarded as literally true is somehow less than a commitment to psychological *realism*. But what, in that case, *is* realism, if it has not already been conceded with truth aptitude and truth? According to the type of account I would myself favor (and developed in *Truth and Objectivity*), the question most fruitfully taken to be at issue between realist and antirealist views about a discourse is not whether it deals in truth-apt claims, nor whether those of its claims that are justified in the light of its own standards may defensibly be regarded as true, but rather whether their being true involves anything that merits the interpretation that realism places upon it: the interpretation of fit with independent, objective states of affairs. And there are various respects in which what is implicated in the truth of statements of different kinds may so differ as to bear on the propriety of the realist's guiding image of truth as fit—including, for instance, evidence-transcendence of truth value, response-dependence of truth value, the extent of the explanatory potential ("cosmological role") of the type of state of affairs concerned, and cognitive command. The distinctive claim of the psychological noncognitivist can thus be that psychology fares relatively badly in relation to these various realism-relevant parameters; that, truth-apt and, in a wide class of cases, true though they may be, the claims of ordinary psychology are *not* apt for the kind of substantial correspondence property aspired to by realism; that when proper controls are placed on such claims, the discourse of intentional psychology proves not to deal in contents that are "apt for the representation of aspects of objective reality."

As just indicated, there are a number of plausible candidates for such controls. But the one directly relevant in the present context is, of course, the constraint of cognitive command, for it was on this that the semantic anti-realist argument pivoted. Let's look at this idea a little more closely. It is a platitude concerning convergence and representation that

representationally functioning systems, targeted on the same subject matter, can produce conflicting output only if working on divergent input or if they function less than perfectly.<sup>17</sup>

Now, in any discourse over which truth operates at all, there can be no good objection to its paraphrase in terms of "fitting the facts," "telling it like it is," and so on—but if the discourse exerts cognitive command, then an important analogy is established between the idea of correspondence between statement and world implicitly featured in such talk and the, as I should like to say, more full-blooded use of the notion of representation as it features in the representation platitude. If a discourse exerts cognitive command, that has the effect of "beefing up" the idea of truth as correspondence in just the kind of realism-relevant way needed. The idea of correspondence to fact takes on a characteristic that minimal truth aptitude does not impose, but one it had better have if there is to be real substance in the idea that, in using the discourse in ways that respect the standards of assertoric warrant by which it is informed, we function as representational systems, responsive to objective states of affairs that, when we are successful, our beliefs and statements serve to portray.<sup>18</sup>

There is no doubt much about this specific idea, and the general way of thinking about realism/antirealism debates that it illustrates, that would stand further discussion. But the relevant point for our immediate purpose is that if the misgivings bruited above about fictionalism, expressivism, and eliminativism are well founded, then this kind of truth-tolerant approach would seem to represent the only hope for a coherent psychological antirealism. So we need to consider how good the prospects really are. Let us appropriate the term *minimalism* about an assertoric discourse for the view that it carries, when correctly conceived, no realist aspiration—that its ingredient claims are merely minimally truth-apt and have no further characteristic that should encourage the idea that they are full-fledged representations, or misrepresentations, of aspects of an objective world.<sup>19</sup> The proposal to be reviewed, then, is that the proper outlet for the psychological noncog-



nativist is minimalism. Such a theorist should allow that psychological discourse is genuinely assertoric and highly disciplined and thereby sustains the introduction over its characteristic claims of a predicate with all the essential features of a truth predicate. But she should insist that nothing is true of psychological discourse that should motivate the interpretation of this predicate in terms of the imagery of correspondence to external, objective matters, in the fashion characteristic of realism.

## 6.

There is one very immediate challenge to the psychological minimalist proposal. Discourses for which minimalism is the correct view ought peacefully to coexist alongside others that are more realism-apt. Indeed, that is the whole point: ordinary psychology is supposed to be able, on this proposal, to be credited with *literally true* claims without any risk of competition with the truths of physical science, conceived of as by realism. The problem is that it is unclear how competition can be avoided so long as ordinary psychology is viewed as making *causal* claims. For then—so it may seem—it enters the territory occupied by physiology and, ultimately, physics. Just this was one of the principal concerns of the metaphysical antirealist noted at the start of section 3. And it is reinforced by the reflection that the causality of the explanations offered by ordinary psychology is not just an assumption of its critics but, as Davidson and others have argued, is apparently implicit in the very notion of *acting on* a specific set of motives, which seems to be an essential ingredient in ordinary psychological explanation.

The concern is thus that the causality of ordinary psychological explanations requires their hypotheses to carry a content that *already* puts them out of the running for minimalist construal: that there is an objective and at bottom wholly physical causal order in the world and that once a discourse ventures causal claims, it must be entered into the competition for correct depiction of aspects of this causal order and sink or swim accordingly. If certain of its causal claims do indeed depict such aspects, then it is—at least in that respect—providing for the expression of substantial (not minimal) truths; and if none do, then they are not minimally true but substantially false. Minimalism, the contention is, is not an option for theories of the causes of things. So ordinary psychology, to the extent that causal claims are its stock-in-trade, can no more be excused all substantial representational purport

than alchemy—and has to be vulnerable, in principle, to the same fate. Again, this is to presuppose a realist—and a monist—view of the causal order. But psychological minimalism will be the more competitive if it can finesse that presupposition.

I shall not here further consider how this concern might be satisfactorily addressed. Certainly it would be very bad news for minimalism generally if any discourse in which *prima facie* causal claims are to be found is immediately ruled to be outside its compass. Even so intuitively promising a candidate for minimalism as discourse about comedy has its share of *prima facie* causal claims. Consider, for instance:

Lord Hailsham “hogged” the conversation shamelessly but the other Fellows forgave him because he was such an amusing raconteur

and

Always remember: audiences like to laugh. They like that better than they like to hate you, even if sometimes they kinda like that too. So they're on your side, basically. They'll more than meet you half-way. And all you gotta do to make them laugh is: be funny.

Similarly causal-seeming claims are commonplace for the boring, obscene, delightful and for various kinds of value. If minimalism is ever to be an interesting option, these kinds of claim have to be shown to allow of interpretation as noncompetitive with those of natural science—and this for reasons other than the presumed reducibility (by whatever standards) of the distinctive predicates involved to predicates of (physical) nature.

If this cannot be done, minimalism offers no hope after all for a coherent outlet for antirealism about psychology—nor indeed for anti-realism about very much at all. But I am going to assume, purely for the purposes of the present discussion, that a careful examination of the *prima facie* causal-explanatory claims made in discourses, like those about the comic, obscene, and delightful, where minimalism is at its most attractive, can disclose considerations and distinctions that will allow such claims *not* to compete with natural-scientific explanations of the phenomena concerned. And I am going to assume that ordinary psychological explanations turn out to belong on the right side of those considerations and distinctions, whatever they are. In this—perhaps quite fictional—setting, psychological minimalism would indeed

seem to present itself as far and away the most promising vehicle for psychological antirealism. Or are there other drawbacks to consider?

## 7.

When minimalism is accepted as a coherent theoretical alternative, a realist view of a region of discourse may be characterized as any that holds that, in addition to the syntactic and disciplinary features acknowledged by minimalism, it is proper to think of truth in the discourse in question in robustly representational terms. So—according to the understanding of what that comes to with which we are presently working—a realist will maintain that cognitive command holds for that discourse.<sup>20</sup> The argument to be developed now proceeds through two observations. The first is this:

**Thesis 1:** It is not possible consistently to be a minimalist about intentional states but a realist about *linguistic* content—about semantics.

This parallels our earlier observation that a metaphysical antirealism about intentional states should enjoin to the same attitude to semantics. Then the thought was that linguistic meanings presuppose conventions, and hence intentions and beliefs. The present point is essentially the same, but needs to draw upon a working formulation of the idea of cognitive command. Here is one. A discourse exerts cognitive command if and only if

it is a priori that any difference of opinion formulated within the discourse, unless excusable as a result of vagueness in a disputed statement, or in the standards of acceptability, or variation in personal evidence thresholds, so to speak, will involve something that may properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming.

Thesis 1 requires that to doubt that discourse about intentional psychology exerts cognitive command commits one to doubt whether discourse about semantics does. To see why this is so, suppose we are concerned with an ascription of content to a sentence, of the form

S says that P

and assume that such claims exert cognitive command: that it is a priori that, unless vagueness is implicated in one of the ways allowed for, any disagreement about such a statement will involve some form of cognitive shortcoming—some element of ignorance, error, or prejudice.

Well, it is obvious enough—again, without presupposing the correctness of any broadly Gricean necessary-and-sufficient conditions *analysis* of what it is for an expression to have any particular specific content—that one way in which such a statement may fall into dispute—between a pair of radical interpreters, for instance—is if the disputants have arrived at quite different views about the attitudinal states that tend to provide the stage-setting for uses of S. If, for example, I believe—perhaps for reasons to do with some knowledge of their ancestry and location—that a certain subject is likely to be taboo to a certain tribe, then I may be forced to find a translation for some of their utterances that in the circumstances would otherwise go over quite nicely into statements about that subject. But it may be that you, for your own theoretical reasons, reject the suggestion that the topic in question is held in taboo and are accordingly free to treat the utterances in question as being about it. In such a case, all hands may be able to agree that we are right to hold our respective conflicting interpretations of a particular utterance in the light of our conflicting views about the tribe members' background attitudinal states. So possession of an a priori guarantee that cognitive shortcoming is involved in the semantic dispute will require a similar guarantee concerning our respective parent views about relevant aspects of the speakers' psychology.<sup>22</sup> On the assumption of minimalism about intentional psychology, however, there is no such a priori guarantee that cognitive shortcoming is involved in the conflicting parent views.

That suffices to validate Thesis 1. Minimalism about intentional psychology—whatever its motivation<sup>23</sup>—must embrace minimalism about semantics as well.<sup>24</sup>

## 8.

One consequence of Thesis 1 is that any demonstration of the *incoherence* of minimalism about linguistic content would convert to a refutation of psychological minimalism. Paul Boghossian has offered precisely such a purported demonstration: specifically, an argument to show that minimalism about linguistic content must wind up committed to incompatible claims about the interpretation of the truth predicate.<sup>25</sup> However, subsequent commentary has suggested that Boghossian's argument will not perform quite as advertised.<sup>26</sup> I will not recapitulate those discussions now.<sup>27</sup> What is germane is rather a corollary of them, which I shall here elicit in a more direct manner.

We are currently working with a distinction between truth conceived as serious representation—to which a realist about a given range of statements will have them aspire—and a more minimal conception, apt for the purpose of the antirealist, which will be some form of (tenseless) projection of the standards of acceptability governing those statements and will not sustain the realist's imagery of correspondence, or representation, except in a thin and merely platitudinous sense. Let's accordingly regiment our terminology, reserving 'true' and its cognates for the substantial, realism-importing notion, and 'correct' for the minimal conception. Minimalism about semantics may therefore now be expressed as the view that statements about linguistic content, and all cognate matters, lack truth conditions. Instances of 'S says that P' and 'S means that P', for example, while governed by conditions of correct and incorrect assertion, will not be apt for truth and falsity. Correlatively, realism about a discourse will be the view that its characteristic statements are apt for truth and falsity; or—as I shall sometimes say—that those statements (or the facts they depict) are *robust*.

Even with 'true' and its kin so regimented, to speak of the truth conditions of a sentence (which has truth conditions) is still, arguably, simply a way of talking about that sentence's content—about the kind of content it has and the specific content of that kind. Statements of the form

S has the truth-condition that P

will thus come within the scope of semantic minimalism, which will accordingly be committed to the following:

For all S and P: "S has the truth-condition that P" is not truth-conditional.

Ascriptions of realist truth conditions are not apt for realist truth and falsity.

But this has a striking implication: that for the minimalist about semantics, the distinction between truth-apt and merely correctness-apt assertoric discourses emerges as one the details of whose extension are not themselves stateable by *truths*, but only permit of *correct* statement. For reflect that, with 'true' and its cognates now importing realism, a statement of the form 'S has the truth-condition that P' is, as it were, Janus-faced, serving simultaneously both to make a semantic claim about the content of S and to classify its subject—the statement S—as robust. So to attempt to hold simultaneously that ascriptions of

robustness are themselves robust while ascriptions of content are not would be—when possession of truth conditions is taken as a hallmark of robustness—a direct commitment to contradictory claims.<sup>28</sup>

Really, this is rather obvious. For however exactly the distinction is drawn, which side of the minimal/robust divide a given discourse falls on is going to be, in general terms, a function of the *type of content* that its sentences possess. So the minimality of claims that place a discourse to one side or the other of the minimal/robust divide must follow from a general minimalism about matters to do with content. Imagine that a Genie fixes all genuine—robust—facts, as it were, but nothing else. If such a determination would leave content undetermined, then it must likewise fail to determine anything that functionally depends on matters to do with content—including the details of the distinction between minimal and robust discourses. So there could be no *truths* about that distinction.

It may be rejoined that this conclusion follows only so far as the *metalinguistic* classification of discourses is concerned. The observation was that claims about the robustness or minimality of discourses, construed as ranges of *sentences*, cannot themselves be robust if claims about linguistic content are not. But—the rejoinder runs—nothing directly ensues about the robustness of the distinction between the minimal and the robust when it is drawn at the level of the *contents*—propositions, or Fregean thoughts—themselves. It may be a nonrobust question whether S has a robust/nonrobust subject matter only and precisely because it is a nonrobust question what S means. But there simply is no question, robust or otherwise, about what the proposition that P means: a proposition is an entity *already* individuated as a content, and nothing that has been said bears on the question whether there is not a robust distinction among such entities between those that are apt to represent robust facts and those that are not.

The rejoinder is fair, as far as it goes. But it is very difficult to see how semantic descent could make any important difference in this context. Consider any singular judgment of the form: the F is G. If such a judgment is to exert cognitive command, then so must any particular judgment about which object is the F—for manifestly, it cannot be a priori that disagreements about whether the F is G involve cognitive shortcoming unless the same goes for disagreements—which may be the whole source of the former—about which is the object they concern. Accordingly, if while "S is truth-conditional" is granted to be nonrobust for the reason given, we try to conceive of "The proposition that P is

truth-conditional" as a robust claim, then which entity *is* the proposition that P had better itself be a robust issue: an issue opinions about which exert cognitive command. But propositions, most philosophers would agree, are not entities that allow of linguistically unmediated acquaintance: an opinion about which proposition is the proposition that P can be nothing other than an opinion about what the particular form of words used to raise the issue—the that-clause, "that P"—should be taken to mean. And the latter, by Thesis 1, is a nonrobust matter.

There is more to say about this.<sup>29</sup> But enough has been done to identify a powerful case for Thesis 2:

**Thesis 2:** Minimalism about semantics enforces minimalism about the minimal/robust distinction itself.

## 9.

Putting the two theses, 1 and 2, together, the upshot is that the thesis of psychological minimalism is a commitment to its *own* nonrobustness, and that any argument for it is consequently an argument for a nonrobust conclusion. The psychological minimalist is making a claim that she should regard as no more robust than the claims of psychology itself!

Is that necessarily an uncomfortable dialectical situation? One reason for supposing so is that it seems utterly unclear what possible rationale the realist/antirealist debate can have unless we think of it as answerable to *objective* distinctions. Doesn't one have to be a *metarealist*—that is, to believe that the protagonists in realist/antirealist debates are disputing a "real issue": something where there is a metaphysical "fact of the matter"—before any interest can attach to the question which half of the distinction ordinary psychology falls on? The brisk reply would be that it need no more be a precondition of the interest of debate about realism that one take a realist view of that very debate than it is a precondition of the interest of ethics, or mathematics, or indeed ordinary psychology that one take a realist view of them. But that reply seems a little *too* brisk in the present instance: there *is* something disorienting about the thought that while there is an intelligible distinction to be drawn between minimal and robust discourses, there are no robust facts about the proper classification of discourses under that distinction.<sup>30</sup> Why would it not just be a charade to traffic in any kind of distinction between the objective and the non-objective if nothing is *objectively objective*? Besides, a fully satisfying development of the

minimalist line about ethics, or mathematics, etc., will involve explaining a legitimate role and purpose for such discourses to have, dissociated from the project of representing the world. But what role and purpose might *metaphysics* have if not the attainment of insight and understanding into how things really are? How could those benefits be the product of an enquiry of which one should take an antirealist view?

So the psychological minimalist's situation is uncomfortable. But that is hardly a decisive objection. A second, more conclusive line of criticism emerges, however, as soon as we consider the implications of the situation for the tenability of psychological minimalism *as an opinion*. Consider any statement for which one has a cogent a priori case. Presumably, it will itself be a fact available to pure reflection that one does so, and hence a priori in turn that anyone who does not accept that statement is guilty of cognitive shortcoming. For there are just two possibilities: if they are unaware of the case in question, that is a material piece of ignorance; and if they are not unaware of it, then they are guilty of failing to appreciate its force. Thus, any statement that is cogently grounded a priori will be one that exerts cognitive command. Conversely, to regard a statement as failing to exert cognitive command is to be committed to regarding it as one for which one has no cogent a priori grounds. But we have just seen that the thesis that psychology is minimal commits a holder to maintaining that it is itself minimal—that is, does not exert cognitive command. So she must also hold that she has no cogent a priori case for it.

Manifestly, that is not a scenario with which any rational psychological minimalist can rest content, since it is tantamount to something akin to Moore's Paradox. A philosophical claim about the robustness or otherwise of a discourse is, like any philosophical claim, *warranted a priori, by philosophical reflection, or by nothing at all*. So a psychological minimalist would appear constrained to concede both that her position admits of no philosophically sufficient support and that it is a view that, if it deserved to be accepted at all, could be so only by the adduction of philosophically sufficient considerations.

It may be objected that this reasoning depends on a quite mythical view of the kind of persuasiveness exerted by typical philosophical argument. Argument for a philosophical view—for instance, for antirealism about ordinary psychology!—is no doubt a priori in some good sense of that term. But in contrast with a mathematical proof, say, philosophical argument need not be such that, if it can be rationally sufficient for a certain view at all, it must be acknowledged as persuasive



by any thinker on pain of cognitive shortcoming. The difference is that, unlike a mathematical proof, a good philosophical argument can be *defeasible*—can be rationally persuasive in one informational setting but cease to be so when further considerations are marshaled. Most philosophical arguments make, implicitly or explicitly, assumptions that, for one reason or another, are found attractive; but their attractiveness may wane when certain of their consequences are elicited. Indeed the dialectic of this paper—if sound—may provide an example: the naturalistic doubts about psychological realism, for instance, might justifiably be found quite forceful just so long as one has not yet bothered to inquire exactly what account of psychological discourse they should motivate.

However it does no harm to grant this. The argument merely has to cover an additional case. The position becomes that, presented with what are, in my informational context, persuasive a priori grounds for a statement, I have to reckon with *three* possibilities where any dissenter is concerned: that she does not know of these grounds, that she knows of them but underestimates them, or that she rightly discounts them in the light of further considerations. If either of the first two possibilities obtains, she is guilty of cognitive shortcoming; and if the third obtains, I am—*qua ignorant* of the further considerations in question. The characteristic defeasibility of most philosophical argument thus poses no threat to the original conclusion, that to possess a rationally sufficient a priori case for minimalism about psychology is to be entitled to regard that thesis as exerting cognitive command.

Is the upshot we have achieved as strong as the result aimed at by Boghossian's argument in "The Status of Content"? Not quite. The conclusion of Boghossian's argument was to be that semantic minimalism is *contradictory*—that it is committed to incompatible claims about the concept of truth. This would go for psychological minimalism as well if Thesis 1 is correct. The present argument, by contrast, is that the thesis of psychological minimalism is *rationaly untenable*—that it is inconsistent with its own philosophical warrantability. For it entails (via Theses 1 and 2) its own nonrobustness, whereas the existence of philosophically (hence a priori) sufficient grounds for a thesis entails its exertion of cognitive command. This is a weaker conclusion than Boghossian's; untenability, it hardly needs saying, is consistent with truth. But it is dialectically devastating for psychological minimalism all the same.

## 10.

Our question has been, What positive account should an antirealist offer of the status and character of ordinary psychological discourse? Boghossian divided the options into essentially two: error-theory and nonfactualism. I have suggested we need to distinguish four: expressivism, eliminativism, and fictionalism—each of which might belong with a metaphysical antirealist motivation—and in addition, minimalism, which goes naturally with a noncognitivist motivation (though that might encourage expressivist proposals as well.) Each of the four, however, has given rise to antinomy. Expressivism about any discourse needs illocutionary distinctions whose characterization, it would seem, must draw on the *statement* of features of speakers' characteristic attitudes (the ones they are characteristically “expressing” in that discourse.) Fictionalism about any discourse needs the reality of the attitudinal state of working with a (disbelieved) fiction. Eliminativism about psychology is in unresolved difficulty over the circumscription of the discourse to be eliminated and, even more seriously, over its right to the notions of truth and falsity—and can accordingly offer at present no reason to believe in its own very formulability. And psychological minimalism, finally, relatively attractive as it may be, has emerged as no better than the others; for it follows from its truth that it admits of no cogent philosophical support and hence is strictly rationally untenable.

So—unless some further, quite novel anti-realist paradigm is proposed, distinct from these four—we seem to have psychological anti-realism penned within a complete ring-fence of aporia. A resourceful friend of psychological antirealism will no doubt identify places at which pressure may be put on the fence. But enough has been done to substantiate my original claim: the arguments of the skeptics about ordinary psychology, whatever credibility they may seem to have, have nowhere—or anyway nowhere obvious—to lead.

But we must end on a cautionary note. Our considerations, even if they prove to stand the closest scrutiny, are not of the right kind, properly understood, to make a case for realism as the *metaphysical truth* about ordinary psychology. What they collectively tend to show is rather that there can be no rationally compelling argument for psychological antirealism, in any of its usual guises. That need not be the same thing. For one thing, there may be unforeseen guises. But even if not, the considerations marshaled tend to establish—if correct—not the

reality of ordinary psychological categories but that an acquiescence in ordinary psychology is a *commitment* of fictionalist, expressivist, and eliminativist positions about *any* region of thought; and that the belief that support for a minimalist position can be rationally cogent anywhere is a *commitment* to regarding psychological discourse as robust. The effect of our arguments is thus that ordinary psychology has a kind of diplomatic immunity in realist vs. antirealist debate, at least as conducted in any familiar form. They drive a conclusion about the *investment* in ordinary psychological discourse to which the various antirealist paradigms are committed, not one about the soundness of that investment. That, and more generally the significance of the dialectical situation that has emerged, is a further matter, for further consideration.

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#### Notes

The argument of this paper has been leisurely in arriving at its present form. A first version of it was presented at a Birkbeck College reading party held at Cumberland Lodge in May 1993. It developed through presentations at the SOFIA conference in Lisbon in 1994, at the Cincinnati conference on *Significance in Semantics* in the same year, and at subsequent colloquia at Durham, Birmingham, the Irish Philosophical Society, the University of Kansas, Kings College London, MIT, Ohio State, the conference *Being Committed* at St. Andrews, a Summer School at Parma in the summer of 2000 and, most recently, at the NYU *Mind and Language* seminar in spring 2001. My thanks to the discussants on all those occasions and especially to Paul Boghossian, Bob Brandom, John Campbell, Jim Edwards, Bob Hale, Paul Horwich, Christopher Peacocke, and Barry C. Smith.

This paper pursues a line of enquiry complementary to that of Paul Boghossian's "The Status of Content," *Philosophical Review* 99 (1990): 157–84—the first sustained discussion known to me of the general issue of the possible varieties, best formulation, and dialectical stability of antirealist views of content. While Boghossian focused on linguistic rather than psychological content, and the overview of the possible positions that his paper utilizes is significantly qualified and extended in my discussion, it is appropriate to register a special acknowledgment of my debt to it.

<sup>1</sup> The widespread association of "antirealism" with verificationist ideas is due, of course, to the work of Dummett. But verificationism is not really to our purpose in the present essay since it would be quite consistent with holding—what is perfectly plausible—that psychological truth cannot outrun verifiability (by all subjects, in principle) to think of the psychological in an intuitively realist way, as an objective domain to which best opinions faithfully correspond. The antirealist position—minimalism—to be reviewed in the second half of the paper seems to me to incorporate what is right about the idea that there is a connection between verificationism and antirealism. But verificationism as such will not feature further in our discussion.

<sup>2</sup> I must ask the reader's indulgence at this point if it seems puzzling how anything deserving the title 'antirealism' can avoid such a denial. I'll return to the matter explicitly in note 19 below.

<sup>3</sup> The principal sources are Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982); chap. 2 of W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960); and chap. 3 of Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). (The latter is in many ways a more satisfactory argument than that of Putnam's famous "Models and Reality," *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 45 (1980): 464–82.)

<sup>4</sup> This notion is introduced in my *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). See chapters 3 and 4 for discussion.

<sup>5</sup> Qualifications are needed here to accommodate the possibility of vagueness in the content of conflicting representations. However it would take us too far afield to go into the details. For some discussion, see *Truth and Objectivity*, 144–45.

<sup>6</sup> 'Seriously' (like 'full-blooded') here marks a contrast whose fuller explanation it will be convenient to reserve until section 5 below.

<sup>7</sup> There are relevant issues here, of course, about the extent of the indeterminacy that the thesis claims. The antirealist argument under review applies no further than the range of cases about which interpreters may blamelessly disagree. We must finesse this matter here.

<sup>8</sup> See 27–28 of W. V. O. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> See especially chapter 1, "Intentional Systems," of Daniel C. Dennett, *Brainstorms* (Montgomery, Vt.: Bradford, 1978) and his *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, Bradford Books, 1987.) There is room for some debate whether Dennett himself really intended his ideas to be taken in an antirealist spirit. But whatever the view of its author, the idea of "the intentional stance" has been widely regarded as epitomizing a kind of antirealism about psychology, supposedly apt for a situation in which the *real* explanations of the behavior of certain "agents" would be too complex to be useful for practical purposes.

<sup>10</sup> For an elaboration of related doubts about Dennett's proposal, see Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 58ff.

<sup>11</sup> The loci classici are of course the famous "Critique of Ethics and Theology" offered in chapter 6 of Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936); and R. M. Hare's *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952). Ayer and Hare proposed the strict expressivist view that moral discourse, properly understood, is only apparently assertoric, and that moral utterances are characteristically governed by a different kind of illocutionary force, serving to fit them for a role quite different from the statement of fact—the expression of attitude, endorsement of norms, or whatever. This strict expressivist line is softened in the more recent treatments of Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard. Chapter 6, "Evaluations, Projections and Quasi-realism," of Blackburn's *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1984) remains the best introduction to his view; Alan Gibbard's ideas are developed systematically in his *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). It may be wondered, however, whether their proposals would not do better to travel under the banner of 'minimalism' in the sense shortly to follow.

<sup>12</sup> There are, no doubt, ways of concealing the semantic character of that necessary assumption—for instance, one may express it as the assumption that "the metalanguage contains the object language." But for languages to overlap in the relevant way is just for *lexically* equivalent expressions within them to be *semantically* equivalent.

<sup>13</sup> The contention that error-theoretic views in general are committed to the reality of content—specifically, truth conditions—and that this leads error-theory about semantics in particular into aporia is nicely made in Boghossian's "The Status of Content"; see 167 and 174.

<sup>14</sup> Of course, the prospects for a "naturalized" account of content are more than usually dim in cases where what has to be recovered is a demarcation of the distinctive content of a discourse dealing in *non-existents* (which therefore sustain no causal relations.)

<sup>15</sup> Paul Horwich, *Truth*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1998) and my *Truth and Objectivity*. There are however important differences between the views of truth proposed. Horwich outlines some of them in his "Realism Minus Truth," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56 (1996): 877–83.

<sup>16</sup> These claims would also be accepted by more traditional *deflationary* conceptions of truth, according to which the word 'true' expresses no real attribute of the items in its range of predication. Horwich and I are not deflationists in that sense.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Truth and Objectivity*, 146.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>19</sup> Recall here the idea mooted in section 2 above that anything worth regarding as a form of psychological antirealism will involve denial of the reality of psychological states of affairs. If, as just observed, the identification of truth with "correspondence to fact" is at one level a platitude, then to grant, in a minimalist spirit, that we are justified in taking certain psychological claims to be true is already a commitment to recognizing the existence, in some sense, of psychological states of affairs. The necessary qualification, then, has to be that it is *only* in a platitudinous, metaphysically noncommittal sense that an antirealist may countenance such states of affairs.

In general, once it is granted that 'true' is open to variously more or less robust— that is, realism-implicating—interpretations, the same will go for its cognates, 'fact', 'state of affairs', 'correspondence to fact', 'real', and so on; and it will no longer do to identify antirealism about a discourse with the range of views converging on the simple denial of the reality of the germane kind of states of affairs. What all such views must deny, rather, is their reality in a sense—not necessarily the same in every case: realism may admit of kinds and degrees—cognate to a realist interpretation of 'true'.

<sup>20</sup> Note that it is not being claimed that its exhibition of cognitive command *suffices* for a discourse to be robustly representational: the claim is that cognitive command is a commitment of realism, not that it is constitutive.

<sup>21</sup> *Truth and Objectivity*, 144.

<sup>22</sup> This claim assumes, of course, that their semantic dispute not merely commits the interpreters to the psychological one but wholly turns on—is fully rationalized by—their conflicting beliefs about speakers' attitudes.

<sup>23</sup> This is important. Lemma 1 might seem unsurprising, even obvious, to someone for whom the only envisaged motivation for psychological minimalism specifically concerned psychological *content*, for it is indeed obscure what sort of argument could select for that while leaving linguistic content alone (cf. note 25.) However, the considerations just sketched are not so specific but would be good—if good at all—if it were, for example, skepticism about the *attitudes* themselves—hope, belief, desire, and their kin—rather than their content, that drove a psychological minimalist.

<sup>24</sup> For complementary considerations in this direction, see pages 170–73 of Boghossian, "The Status of Content." Boghossian's observation is, more generally, that the characteristic arguments for antirealism (of whatever stripe) about psychological content—or at least the best of them—all extend undiminished to linguistic content.

<sup>25</sup> "The Status of Content," at 175–76. To be specific: the *official* target of Boghossian's argument is what he terms a "non-factualism" about meaning and content generally. There may be significant philosophical differences between non-factualism as Boghossian conceives it and the kind of position I have introduced as minimalism. However, Boghossian's non-factualist grants both that discourse about linguistic content can quite properly assume an assertoric surface and that a notion of correct assertability will

operate over it. Such is the detail of his argument that that is enough to ensure that there is no difference relevant to our purposes between semantic non-factualism as Boghossian conceives it and semantic minimalism—no difference that might enable his argument to succeed against the former but not the latter.

<sup>26</sup> See for instance Robert Kraut, "Robust Deflationism," *Philosophical Review* 102 (1993): 247–63, and the appendix to chapter 6 of *Truth and Objectivity*. For further discussion, including formal regimentation of Boghossian's argument, see chapter 3 of Neil Tennant's *The Taming of the True* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> For an indication, see note 28.

<sup>28</sup> It is this point, in effect, that provides the loophole in Boghossian's argument observed in the discussions referred to in note 26. Boghossian notes that his semantic nonfactualist is committed both to the *selectivity* of the truth predicate—since, on his characterization, all nonfactualists hold that some target class of significant declarative sentences do not have truth conditions—and to holding that ascriptions of truth denote no real facts (since ascriptions of truth conditions do not, and how could factual matters functionally depend on nonfactual ones?). He takes the first point to imply that truth must be a real property—it cannot allow of deflationary construal since not all indicative discourses are apt for it—and the second to imply that it is not a real property (since ascriptions of it are not factual). But the contradiction is arguably an illusion and disappears under disambiguation of "real property." In one—we can call it the "anti-deflationary"—sense 'true' expresses a real property if it is not promiscuous across indicative discourses. In another—the "nonfactualist"—sense 'true' expresses a real property if ascriptions of it generate factual claims. Boghossian shows that, for the content nonfactualist, 'true' expresses a real property in the first sense and it fails to express a real property in the second sense. This is however—at least *prima facie*—a perfectly consistent combination. Truth and truth-aptness can be both selective and nonfactual. It is that combination that is shown by the argument in the text to be not just a saving option for content nonfactualism (minimalism) but actually integral to the view.

<sup>29</sup> For further discussion, see *Truth and Objectivity*, chap. 6.

<sup>30</sup> For forceful expression of a different view, see Robert Kraut's "Robust Deflationism."