

Replies Part III: Truth, Objectivity, Realism, and Relativism

Blackburn, Shapiro, and Rovane

Background

The metaphysical debates about realism are some of the oldest in philosophy, and some of the most intractable. And although the specific emphases and titles of realism's many antagonists over the years—the idealist, subjectivist, non-factualist, expressivist, non-cognitivist, constructivist, projectivist, instrumentalist, nominalist, quasi-realist, irrealist...—have varied with the period and the subject-matter, the analogies are striking enough to have encouraged Michael Dummett to hope that there might be a single underlying issue whose proper clarification could serve both to fix the right rules of engagement wherever such a debate is joined and to determine winners and losers. Dummett's proposal, famously, was that this one single, underlying issue—the “Key to All Mythologies”—concerned the proper model of meaning, that is, the form that should be assumed by a theory of meaning for discourse concerning the subject-matter concerned, with the prototype for such a debate supplied by the opposition between classical realism in the philosophy of mathematics and the constructivism of the Mathematical Intuitionists, which Dummett reformed as a contest between truth-conditional and proof-conditional accounts of mathematical propositional content.

As mentioned elsewhere in these Replies, my own first research interest in philosophy was the issue between Platonism and constructivism about pure mathematics. And on first encounter, Dummett's proposal had all the resonance of a major breakthrough. Indeed, the experience of first reading Dummett's early papers on these issues was, as the late David Pears once remarked, akin to having someone remember to turn on a light in a darkened cellar in which one had been groping around looking for the way out. Dummett's model thus became for a time my major philosophical preoccupation and many of my early papers focused on the sympathetic criticism and development of his marquee ideas about ‘anti-realism’, the connections with Wittgenstein's later ideas about meaning, assertibility-conditions versus truth-conditions, and the meaning-theory based revision of classical logic.

But many problems emerged with this approach. Although, as I still think, the Dummettian anti-realist had the better, albeit by a close decision on points, of the critical general debate about the global adequacy of semantic theory informed by classical (bivalent, or evidence-transcendent) truth-conditions, no general systematic assertibility-conditional approach was ever developed to oppose the classical style of semantic theory.¹ And there seemed good reason for that. For one thing, the conditions of epistemically proper assertion of empirical statements generally are *contextual*: they depend on variable features of a thinker's collateral beliefs and information. So the meaning of a statement has to be thought of as just one parameter whose values feed into the determination of its assertibility in a context, rather than as constituted in its assertibility-conditions themselves. For another, the connection between statement meaning and truth-conditions seems, at one level, to be merely the stuff of platitude: to know the meaning of a statement *S* is to know what it says—to know, for some content *P*, that *S* says that *P*. But if *S* says that *P*, then if and only if it is the case that *P* will *S* be true. So a theory that determines what *S* says will, willy nilly, settle a truth-condition for *S*. This simple manipulation of truisms seemed to imply that any general model of statement meaning could not avoid truth-conditionality—there seemed to be no other option if a systematic theory was to be possible at all.

Now, the last line of thought is something that contemporary deflationists about truth, like Hartry Field and Paul Horwich, and assertibilists like Robert Brandom, perceive themselves as needing to resist, and of course alternative—inferentialist, conceptual role, and use-theoretic—conceptions of meaning are developed and supported in the writings of these philosophers (though the charge of asystematicity does, I think, remain largely unaddressed). My own eventual reaction to it, though, was different. Broadly, it was that Dummett had been right to discern an implication of realism, intuitively understood, in the idea that the statements of a discourse might allow of evidence-transcendent truth-values, but mistaken to suppose that the discarding of this idea should enforce a departure from truth-conditional semantics. Rather, the question should be: granted that meaning should everywhere be construed truth-conditionally, what *specific conception* of truth should the statements in a given contested region of discourse be regarded as subject to? The Intuitionists, in particular, should be interpreted not as supporting a local case of a generalized assertibility-conditional semantics, but a non-classical conception of mathematical truth.

There were other reasons for dissatisfaction with the Dummettian paradigm. Dummett himself always wrote as if anti-realist views might be merely locally correct, and it seemed essential that a good account of the debates should safeguard this possibility. But the arguments he proposed for 'dethroning' classical truth-conditional semantics—especially, the considerations about the acquisition and manifestation of a grasp of evidence-transcendent truth-conditions—seemed globally effective or not at all. Of

¹ As Timothy Williamson has never tired of complaining. See e.g. his notorious Williamson 2006.

course, that still left open the possibility of other more local considerations that might justify selectively opposing the idea that truth could intelligibly outrun all (in principle available) evidence—special considerations available for judgments of humour, for example, or colour. But, even acknowledging that, the preoccupation with evidence-transcendent truth (or even more committally, as Dummett himself preferred, Bivalence) seemed foreign to many of the targeted debates in any case: those between realists and instrumentalists about science, for example, or realists and projectivists about ethics, or modality. The unreconstructed idea that in a given region of discourse, we make judgments that purport to represent and are answerable to facts that are ‘not of our making’ didn’t seem to depend on the conviction that those facts may transcend the evidence. And the various anti-realists seemed, very often, to be targeting not that conviction but the idea that the discourse in question was in the business of hitting off facts at all.

The programme of *Truth and Objectivity* grew out of these concerns. My overall aim was to develop a framework to build on Dummett’s proposal but accommodate the fact that a number of different cruxes seemed to be discernible in the various discourse-local contests about realism and to integrate the debates more tightly with the metaphysics of truth. One key element in the new project was a conviction that the traditional debates about truth—the contests between correspondence, coherence, pragmatism, deflationism, and all that—had suffered from a conflation of concept with property. The deflationists, it seemed to me, had been more or less right about the thinness of the *concept* of truth—though wrong, perhaps, in the suggestion that it is *quite* simple enough to allow of all aspects of its employment to be fully captured by the Disquotational Scheme. But they were mistaken in moving from that to the claim that truth, as a *property* of sentences, or propositional contents, could have no metaphysical substance. Rather, my idea—the key idea in what has come to be known as *alethic pluralism*—was that truth could have variable substance in different regions of discourse, with any property a candidate to constitute truth in a given region which, when constrained by additional principles specific to it, provided a model of the distinctive behavior of the concept. And the differences among these local properties might then serve to interpret the realism debates: in effect, what would be at issue would be the character of the truth-property *actually implicit* in the practice of a certain discourse or—when the debates take a potentially revisionary cast—the truth-property *appropriate* to that discourse.

This proposal reflected a degree of attraction to deflationism—though an official deflationist would naturally scorn the indulgence not just in a substantial property of truth but a potential multiplicity of them! Another thinker who has been unwilling to sign up to deflationism proper—to “minimalism” as, following Paul Horwich, he likes to style it—but whose very influential writings in the area also reveal such a qualified attraction is of course Simon Blackburn. But Blackburn has little sympathy for the idea of pluralism about truth, preferring instead to look for ‘metaphysical contour’ in distinctions between different kinds of truth—apt *propositional contents*. It may be of some interest to dwell a little on the issues here and the options available.

Deflationism and Expressivism

Deflationism about truth endorses each of three claims:

(1) First, the concept of truth is exhaustively characterized by its role in the Disquotational Scheme, 'P' is true if and only if P.²

(2) Second, there is no *property* of truth save in the 'abundant' sense in which any significant grammatical predicate may be associated with a property whose nature is fully transparent in the satisfaction-conditions of that predicate, so that no interesting question can arise about the nature of the property, or what possession of it consists in.

(3) Third, truth-aptness travels in tandem with what Blackburn has nicely called "propositional surface": any properly intelligible discourse deals in truth-apt sentences if it provides the resources for their embedding in the familiar ways under, *inter alia*, negation, the conditional, modal operators, and propositional attitude constructions.

The minimalism of *Truth and Objectivity*—contrast the 'minimalism' of Paul Horwich, which is simply deflationism by another name—endorsed the third of these claims, qualified the first and, *en route* to the alethic pluralism proposed in that book, flatly rejected the second.³ But the early prototype of expressivism—about, say, ethics or aesthetics—advanced in the writings of some of the logical positivists and their immediate successors, but traceable perhaps to the *Tractatus*, rejected all three claims, denying that the apparent 'statements' made in the discourses in question were so much as truth-apt at all, and dismissing the appearance to the contrary as grammatical illusion. Notwithstanding that such sentences indeed displayed "propositional surface", their actual use was not to state anything true or false, even deflationarily true or false, but merely to give vent to attitude and feeling.

As is long familiar, this kind of proposal runs headlong into a serious problem: what can it say about the role of ethical, or other allegedly purely 'expressive' sentences, when embedded—and unendorsed—in the wider range of kinds of constructions that go with propositional surface, most notoriously in the context of reasoning from and to statements in which they occur under negation or as the antecedent of a conditional or as mere suppositions? Blackburn's landmark discussion in *Spreading the Word*⁴ was

² Or in Horwich's version, the Equivalence Schema for propositions,

It is true that P iff P.

³ The argument for doing so, in brief, was that deflationism can consistently countenance no norm over the acceptance of sentences that qualify by its lights as truth-apt other than warranted assertibility; but that the Disquotational Scheme itself, while requiring that we think of truth as normative, also enforces a potential extensional contrast between 'true' and 'warrantably assertible'. It's my impression that this line of argument, developed in Wright 1992, Chapter 1, has generally been found persuasive by non-deflationists and neutrals, but has had little impact on the thinking of the committed, like Horwich and Harry Field.

⁴ Blackburn 1984.

I think one of the very first attempts to take this 'Frege–Geach' problem head-on and try to show how an expressivism worth the title could handle it.⁵ But the 'quasi-realism' he offered there importantly qualified the original expressivist stance, since it was part of its project that *even the application of the truth-predicate* to ethical sentences might have a kind of earned intelligibility.

Note that the intelligibility had to be *earned*: it would need constructive philosophy to justify the display of propositional surface by a discourse that was not in the business of representing facts. The primary use of the truth-predicate still remained its annexure to linguistic representation. So the predicability of 'true' was not, in *Spreading the Word*, the relatively easy, promiscuous thing that deflationism, and *Truth and Objectivity*, took it to be. Still, the concession was implicitly made that there could be legitimately propositionally surfaced discourses in which the function of the truth-predicate—or a predicate behaving just like it—was detached from the marking of correspondence between thought and reality: a concession that marked at least a small step in the alethic pluralist direction, and away from the original expressivism of the positivists.

So, the expressivism of *Spreading the Word* affirmed both that the truth-predicate sometimes marks a substantial correspondence property (contrary to the second deflationary thesis) and hence, since the Disquotational Scheme is powerless to explain the distinction between such uses of 'true' and others, that there is more to truth than is captured by that Scheme (contrary to the first deflationary thesis). Finally, aptitude for characterization as 'true' or 'false' was allowed to spread across propositionally surfaced discourses only to the extent that their propositional surface could somehow be legitimated.⁶ All three characteristic theses of deflationism were still repudiated.⁷

What is the relation of Blackburn's current expressivist views, a quarter of a century later, to those of *Spreading the Word*? His very welcome present essay starts out with what he confesses he feels as a dilemma. The dilemma is that, on the one hand, expressivism is all about making a distinction between those regions of discourse which are in the business of genuine representation and whose truth-predicate is accordingly to be understood in correspondence terms, and those which are not—

⁵ The general reception of Blackburn's book was that this effort was not successful. Blackburn himself in effect acknowledged this when he revisited the issue in Blackburn 1988, which offers significantly different proposals. But these too ran into technical snags. See Hale 1993.

⁶ One radical such form of legitimation would be the provision of a systematic reductive paraphrase whereby the appearance of propositional surface would be eliminated, so that one might, e.g., attempt a systematic reconstrual of moral discourse as a whole into a language of imperatives, say. But an informal philosophical account of how talking 'as if' there were moral facts could achieve certain characteristic purposes of moral discourse—in effect, a kind of fictionalist account—would presumably also be *a propos*. I think it is fair to say that the project of quasi-realism, in the hands of its author, has shifted over the years from the former paradigm to the latter.

⁷ The position of *Truth and Objectivity* was thus, on these issues, intermediate between that of hard-line deflationism and Blackburn's original expressivism, endorsing the promiscuity of truth-aptitude but agreeing with Blackburn that the predicate, "true", functions differently in different regions of discourse, sometimes denoting a property in the Church of Correspondence, sometimes belonging only to the trappings of propositional surface.

and any such distinction is beyond the pale for deflationism. But on the other hand, he professes himself drawn to the resource of deflationism which is—he suggests—only too convenient for the expressivist when he is challenged to explain—or explain away—the nature of the truth-values and truth-makers that seem to be called for merely by the propositional surface of moral discourse or other expressivist targets. On a deflationary understanding of truth, and truth-aptitude, the answer to this challenge can be very brisk: nothing substantial—non-disquotational—need be said. By contrast, the position of *Spreading the Word* involved a commitment to give a non-deflationary, philosophically constructive response.

Now, there is, of course, a *philosophical* dilemma here only if one has a lingering shine for the notion that the deflationary answer might after all be fit for the purpose. If so, and if expressivism too incorporates insight, then there has to be a way of reconceiving the expressivist proposal so as to finesse the clashes reviewed above between the two views. Is there a possible revision in the conception of the obligations of expressivism, properly consonant with its central ideas, which would allow an expressivist to avail himself of the promiscuity of truth and truth-aptitude, shared by hard-line deflationism and *Truth and Objectivity*? Can an expressivist be a deflationist after all?

The root problem for the combination is that expressivism wants to make a distinction, between representational and merely expressive discourses, which the promiscuity of truth and truth-aptitude generated by deflationism seems certain to obliterate. Obviously, there can be only one possible general form of accommodation: to make the relevant distinction in some way that does not commit one to thinking of truth everywhere as representation. The alethic pluralism of *Truth and Objectivity* is exactly one way of doing that, whereby the contrast between genuinely representational and expressive discourses is carried not by a difference between truth-aptitude and the lack of it but by the character of the truth-properties respectively associated with them. But that, of course, is not an accommodation that a real deflationist can make. And Blackburn does not want to be an alethic pluralist. So the interesting question is: is there another way, consistent with the operation of a deflationary truth-predicate across the board?

The greater part of Blackburn's present essay is taken up with criticism of the ramification of deflationary conceptions of truth into deflationary conceptions of semantic notions generally that one finds in the developed work of Hartry Field and Paul Horwich on these issues.⁸ Blackburn's basic point is that deflationism needs to say something about the *truth-bearers* as well as about truth. And the challenge for deflationism, when this need is taken seriously, is that the bearers of truth will presumably be, one way or another, *semantically* individuated (at least on any plausible account).⁹ If the principles of semantic individuation—what determines the distinction between what is said by one sentence and what is said by another, for example—involve appeal

⁸ See for instance Field 1994 and Horwich 1998.

⁹ Propositions for Horwich, sentences individuated by meaning for Field.

to real semantic word-world relationships, then much of the metaphysical motivation for deflationism in the first place—the attempt to finesse such questions insofar as they seem to be forced on us by the traditional issue concerning the nature of truth—will be frustrated. The problems will, in effect, recur at, so to say, the sub-sentential level and will promise to be no more tractable than before.

I cannot attempt to elaborate or engage with this major issue here, except to say that the challenges Blackburn outlines to this more general deflationism strike me as sharp. It is, of course, because they are sensitive to this general kind of worry that deflationists tend to propose the kind of non-referential semantic theories that they do, in terms of conceptual or inferential role (Field, Brandom) or regularities of use (Horwich). Blackburn's suspicion is that such proposals cannot prove satisfactory, or at least not comprehensively so. And the reason, if I read him correctly, is broadly because there is no evident alternative to a referential semantics if we are to have the resources to draw certain distinctions which, at least in certain regions of discourse, seem fundamental—for example, the distinction between the kind of situation which someone's applications of a particular shape-predicate may characteristically reliably indicate (because of the likelihood of illusions of perspective, say) and the kind of situation which actually suffices for its application.

Whether or not ultimately compelling, what is striking is that the kind of objection that Blackburn here lodges against a generalized deflationism highlights a possibility, or so it might be thought, for selectively combining expressivist views of different regions of discourse with an across-the-board deflationism about truth. The idea would be that propositional surface, and with it deflationary truth-aptness, may be common to very different kinds of sentential contents, some grounded in the referential semantic properties of the constituents of the sentences which express them, and others belonging with an expressive, or otherwise functional, characterization of the role of, for example, the signature predicates of the discourse concerned. If this were so, then when an expressivist is challenged to explain what constitutes the difference between those regions of discourse which serve our attempts to represent objective matters of fact and those where we give vent, rather, to our attitudes and values, and to do so in a way consistent with both types of sentence being alike apt just for deflationary truth, he can reply that the difference is grounded in the differences between the two kinds of proposition concerned, which are in turn reflected in the ways in which the meanings of the sub-sentential constituents of statements in the two kinds of discourse are respectively determined.

Both this proposal and that of *Truth and Objectivity* would separate the idea of serious representation from that of truth-aptness. But whereas I proposed to leave in place the connection with a certain *kind* of truth-aptness, the outlined proposal breaks the ties altogether: the contrast between the kinds of discourse for which an expressivist view is apt and others is to be made by reference to the kinds of propositional contents in which they deal, and the taxonomy of these kinds in turn is to be charted by reference to distinctions in the ways in which the meanings of sentences in the kinds of discourse concerned are respectively determined by the kinds of semantic properties possessed by their sub-sentential features.

If this is not a complete misinterpretation of Blackburn's intent, then it is notable—perhaps ironic—that it represents what is in effect a reversion to a variant of Dummett's master thought, that the real issues here have to do with the proper model of meaning. Of course, a semantic theory which delivers the kind of contrast that Blackburn—so interpreted—wishes to make will have to be very different from the usual kind of homophonic, truth-theoretic line of goods on which debate was centred in the 1970s. That style of compositional semantics will mask the kinds of distinction that Blackburn is anxious to see drawn, so the relevant sort of theory will have to be, in the terminology of that time, immodest or “full-blooded”.

I have no wish to prejudice what might be accomplished by serious theoretical endeavour in this direction. But I do remain sceptical about the *consistency* of drawing the contrasts that expressivism needs in this kind of way while clinging to a purely deflationary conception of truth. The evident difficulty of such a view will be that when a discourse receives a properly referential semantics, it's going to be hard to interpret the truth of, say, a simple singular term-predicate sentence in purely deflationary terms, in the presence of the consideration that the sentence will be true just when the object denoted by its subject term possesses the property associated with its predicate—which, where substantial referential relationships are involved, amounts to correspondence to the worldly situation of the relevant real object's having the relevant real property. And that is precisely what won't be said when, by contrast, the semantics of a given predicate is explained expressively from the start, rather than in terms of reference to a worldly property. In short, my expectation is that Blackburn's own canvassed style of objection to deflationary semantics, will come back—if good—to bite him and enforce his adoption of a non-deflationary conception of truth in all cases where it grips, that is, in all cases where, there is theoretical need for referential semantics, non-deflationarily construed. Truth for those discourses cannot be deflationary if semantics is not. Granted only, then, that this does not happen exceptionlessly—that such discourses contrast with others for which an expressivist semantics is apt—the result is going to be to impose a form of alethic pluralism, at least to the extent of the concurrence of correspondence and deflationary conceptions of truth.

I therefore think that the differences between Blackburn's present conception of these matters and that proposed in *Truth and Objectivity* have effectively become quite small. If the distinctions between regions of discourse which, according to the vision of *Truth and Objectivity*, involve different truth-properties are to be sustained by differences in the kinds of propositional contents involved—well, I have just argued that a systematic account of those differences in kinds of propositional content will itself impose corresponding differences in one's conception of truth and truth-makers for the contents in question, ensuring in particular that a deflationary conception of truth will be at most only locally correct. Conversely, alethic pluralism of the stripe proposed in *Truth and Objectivity* will have to address the question of what it is about a discourse that fits its characteristic statements to qualify for one rather than another among the

plural kinds of truth—and the answer to that, whatever the detail, will presumably have to advert to systematic differences in the kinds of sentential content trafficked in.

Maybe, then, there is still a debate to have about what comes first: whether it is differences in the kinds of propositional content concerned, independently explicable in terms of semantic theory, that ground the applications of different truth-properties; or whether it is, rather, the applicability of different truth-properties, grounded in the discriminations made by various cruxes of the kind that *Truth and Objectivity* tries to describe, that imposes differences in the way we should think of the contents concerned and hence—perhaps—the style of systematic semantic theory that should account for them. I confess to a continuing inclination to the *Truth and Objectivity* form of view, since I remain a little sceptical about the prospects for systematic but immodest expressivist semantics. But the matter is for further attention.

Marks of Realism

Although it is my impression that it has sometimes been read as an anti-realist tract, the real impetus of *Truth and Objectivity* was *anti-quietist*—or metaphysically *activist*. The central idea, again, was that illumination of the issues between realism and its opponents, and a consequent vindication of the philosophical authenticity of the debates, might be found by clarifying a range of relevant variations in the local profile of truth. The main question thus became, what characteristics or marks of a region of discourse might underwrite a realist or, broadly, anti-realist conception of truth for its propositions?

I proposed four. One was the Dummettian point: we are implicitly thinking of truth in a particular discourse in a realistic spirit if we conceive that some at least of the relevant propositions may, or must, have determinate truth-values irrespective of our ability to determine what those truth-values are or even to accumulate evidence one way or the other. Such a conception leaves us no alternative but to think of the *source* of such truth-values as lying in a reality constituted independently of our cognitive endeavours. The latter notion, however, does not seem to *require* the possibility that truth be evidence-transcendent. Even in regions where, as we think, best enquiry must lead us to the truth, the essence of realism is still intact, one would suppose, if such enquiry can be conceived wholly as *responsive* to the subject-matter of the discourse, whose nature is accordingly a matter of discovery. That contrast—the contrast between enquiry conceived as wholly responsive to, and reflective of, matters constituted independently of it, and procedures of opinion-forming where, in some sense, the thinker ‘has his thumb on the scales’—seemed to me to be exactly the contrast that Plato had Socrates debate with Euthyphro. It provided a second crux whose clarification entered the agenda of my book.

Evidence-transcendence and the Euthyphro contrast both concern the nature of the relationship between best possible enquiry and its outcome. Another, older perspective on these debates, saw them as more directly concerned with the nature of truth itself.

Of course the older debate did not anticipate the possibility of alethic pluralism; for Hegel, Frege, Bradley, Russell, and Ramsey, there was a decision to be taken about the nature of truth across the board. The essence of realism was conceived as commitment to, in effect, a correspondence conception of truth—a conception of truth consisting in the successful representation by thought of a reality standing independent of it in the manner in which the scene it depicts stands independent of a photograph. But the trouble with this always was that to speak of truth as ‘correspondence to fact’ seems more of a platitude than a piece of metaphysics—a thesis that adds only a modicum of pomposity to the remark that a statement, or belief, is true if things are as it says they are, if it “tells it like it is”. Not much to disagree with there. And the classical attempts to give metaphysical substance to the platitude—to say in an illuminating, independent way what exactly the relation of “correspondence” is, and what the nature of the other term in the relation, the ‘facts’—petered out in vacuity, or implausibility, for all but the cases typified by felines on hearthrugs.

Truth and Objectivity tried to do better by canvassing two further realism-relevant cruxes, each highlighting a feature that a discourse might lack but whose possession would serve to give some additional substance to the correspondence platitude. *Cognitive Command* proposed a connection between the idea of genuine representation and the occurrence of some form of *cognitive shortcoming* in circumstances where our representations fall into conflict. *Width of Cosmological Role*, focusing on the second term of the correspondence relation, proposed that more than platitudinous substance is given to the idea of ‘the facts’—the things which our thought may serve to represent—if they can be seen to play a more active role in the life of the world than merely serving as the, so to speak, internal accusatives of those representations.

To address the spectre of quietism, a successful articulation of any proposal of this kind must pass through three stages. At the first, the task is to frame a relatively clear, relatively interesting initial characterization and show how the crux outlined connects with the characteristic intuitive realist imagery of mind-independence, answerability to a reality ‘not of our making’, and so on. At the second stage, this initial characterization should become the focus of further refinement and development; in the case of evidence-transcendence, this might involve clarifying the modalities involved in the claims that, in the region in question, truth can, or cannot, outrun all evidence, and subjecting the relevant notion of evidence to further specification; in the case of Euthyphro, it would involve doing work on cashing out the metaphor of contrasting directions of fit between best opinions and the facts.

However, both these stages might be illuminatingly accomplished and yet leave us no wiser when it comes to determining how to debate, still less settle a debate, concerning how a given, contested discourse fares in respect of the crux in question. One might for example be perfectly clear what it would be for the truth of a particular empirical scientific theory, say, to be potentially evidence-transcendent, and yet have no idea how to determine whether it would be justified to suppose that the theory in question, understood correctly, did indeed have that potentiality. It is one thing, in

other words, to achieve a relatively exact account of a characteristic whose possession by a particular region of discourse would mandate thinking of it in a realist, or anti-realist, way, but another thing to nail down how to resolve the question whether the discourse concerned does indeed have that characteristic—where this issue in turn breaks into the descriptive question whether our actual practice of the discourse manifests the implicit ascription of the characteristic, and the normative question whether it ought to. The third stage of clarification of a crux is thus to explain how to prosecute an intelligent debate on the question whether the crux is indeed satisfied by a particular region of discourse, and how in principle to determine the winner of such a debate.

There is, of course, a pessimistic induction immediately to hand about the prospects. In the case of evidence-transcendence, for example, Dummett's own third-stage suggestion was, as noted, that the debate should be taken into the theory of meaning: the way to determine whether the notion of truth engaging a given region of discourse was or was not potentially evidence-transcendent was to see whether the best theory of meaning for that region would be based on potentially evidence-transcendent truth-conditions or not. But as already noted, Dummett's own, famous anti-realist arguments—the considerations concerning acquisition and manifestation of understanding—seemed designed to show that evidence-transcendent truth-conditional theories of meaning were *never* the best way to approach the project of giving a theory of meaning, and hence that anti-realism should prevail across the board. For most of those who, in its heyday, took an interest in the Dummettian conception of the issue, this global anti-realist conclusion was too big a pill to swallow.

Dummett's perspective gives rise, in fact, to a dilemma of which that is one horn. If, as Dummett seemed to intend, the anti-realist argument is simply that there is no such thing as understanding a statement—any statement—in such a way as to grasp the possibility of its being true beyond all possible evidence, then, should the argument succeed, that seems more of a reason for misgivings about the suggestion that realism is satisfactorily explained as involving that commitment than cause to congratulate the anti-realist. The project, after all, was to give sufficiently concrete sense to the realist and the anti-realist standpoints to subserve intelligent local controversy. If, on the other hand, the anti-realist grants that a grasp of evidence-transcendent truth-conditions is possible, but contends that it is not realized in the case of a specific region of discourse, then presumably the argument must then turn on the characteristics of competent participation in discourse in that region. And that threatens to make the outcome of the debate turn on the features of the actual linguistic practice concerned, which in turn threatens to undercut, what was a central feature of Dummett's account, the potential of anti-realism to be *revisionary* of the linguistic practice (specifically, the inferential practice), concerned. Yet the revisionary potential of the anti-realism of the Intuitionists is surely a non-negotiable requirement on any satisfactory account of it.

This example nicely illustrates the potentially very tricky character of the enterprise, as one tries (i) to give sense to an original opposition largely left at the level of metaphor

and image, (ii) to provide additional clarification of what is in dispute, (iii) to underwrite significant, assessable debate about it, and (iv) to conserve any canonical implications, like the logical revisionism of the Intuitionists, of the unreconstructed initial views. The quietist charge, that the debates between “realists” and “anti-realists” are in the end without substance, or are anyway futile, is not going to succumb easily. Did *Truth and Objectivity* manage any progress?

Significant doubts are expressed in Stewart Shapiro’s characteristically trenchant essay.

Cognitive Command

The Cognitive Command constraint, recall, represents an attempt to put to the service of realist/anti-realist debate the seemingly platitudinous reflection that where devices of any kind whose function it is to represent states of affairs of a certain sort—cameras, fax machines, wax tablets—conflict in their representations of a single scene or object, it has to be true that one or another device, or process, has succumbed to some kind of malfunction or shortcoming. So too, then, if thinkers, targeted upon the same question, deliver discordant verdicts about it, and the question is one where our belief-forming methods are thought of as apt for the production of genuine representations in thought of self-standing matters: some kind of cognitive shortcoming on one, or both, sides has to be involved. Conversely where, as we conceive, disagreement need not betray such a shortcoming, it is inappropriate to think of the discourse in question as representational; and the truth-predicate which engages with its statements had better not be thought of as correspondence.

Shapiro focuses on a problem case for this idea that was already raised in *Truth and Objectivity*.¹⁰ It is generated by (one understanding of) the widely accepted thesis that the data for empirical science are ‘theory-laden’—that what a thinker may correctly report as having been observed in a particular context will be a function, in part, of the theoretical commitments that she brings to the context. This thesis opens up—or so let us grant¹¹—the theoretical possibility of a certain kind of intractable disagreement about issues in scientific theory. Two theorists may be destined to disagree, no matter how thoroughly, extensively, and well they each investigate, because they cannot agree about the data which such investigations throw up—because they begin by bringing different background theories to the interpretation of those data. Yet there might never be anything to choose between the resulting theories: each theorist might be doing as well as it is possible to do, proceeding in a methodologically unimpeachable way and achieving overall unimprovable results in internal theoretical equilibrium. If

¹⁰ He does acknowledge this (this volume, p. 232).

¹¹ The implication is certainly not immediate, but it is not implausible. There is more detailed discussion of it in Chapter 4 of Wright 1992, but I won’t attempt to take that further here.

we grant that this is possible, should we conclude, under the aegis of the Cognitive Command constraint, that theoretical science is a non-representational project?

The conclusion is certainly premature. The scenario described is one where there is indeed no *operational* shortcoming on the part of the proponents of the conflicting theories. Each is proceeding methodologically correctly by accepted standards. Each is constructing a theory which, holistically assessed, has no superior. But there will still be cognitive shortcoming if best method *itself* is here prone to cognitive shortfall. Consider a scenario where the outcome of casting dice is considered by a tribe to be a good predictor of the weather. Imagine that two members each roll a die in the appropriate manner and wind up with conflicting predictions. Neither is guilty of any operational shortcoming, but no conclusion should be drawn on that account about the representationality of their meteorological discourse. The discourse is representational, and the disagreement does involve cognitive shortcoming—it resides in reliance upon a belief-forming method whose production of results converging with the facts is in the lap of the gods and beyond the control of the investigator.¹²

However there are several matters arising. First, this way of squaring the troublesome disagreement scenario with Cognitive Command does of course *presuppose* the adoption of a realist view of scientific theory (or weather forecasting). It is because it preconceives of scientific theoretical statements as apt for the representation of matters of real fact that it is able to identify a potential cognitive shortcoming in reliance on the output of best scientific method. In short, a presupposition of scientific realism is being used to support the claim that scientific theory satisfies the Cognitive Command constraint, and hence that methods that may irresolubly lead to conflict about the scientific facts involve cognitive shortfall. That is all right. But it does mean that the grounds for the preconceived realism have to be found elsewhere. The Cognitive Command constraint is not, in this kind of case, going to deliver tools to assist the resolution of the philosophical debate about realism. The constraint is, in this kind of case, of no help in determining winners and losers.

I think I was under no illusion about this when writing *Truth and Objectivity*. There, I saw the problem raised by the relevant kind of disagreement scenario rather differently to the way that Shapiro sees it. In my view then, the most pressing problem was to reconcile the scenario with a scientific realism that, perhaps impressed by the Dummettian anti-realist critique of evidentially unconstrained conceptions of truth, held both that scientific theorizing was a robustly representational activity, *and* that all the truths (and all the falsehoods) in which it was competent to deal had to be evidentially identifiable. *That* kind of view is, it seems to me, in difficulty in the

¹² Of course, *we* will want to say that, in addition, there is the shortcoming of a quite irrational reliance upon a totally unsuitable method; and there isn't *that* in the case of best scientific enquiry. But remember that the Cognitive Command constraint requires that it be *a priori* that cognitive shortcoming be involved in the formation of divergent beliefs. And it isn't *a priori* that short-term weather forecasting by the rolling of dice is not a reliable, inductively supportable method.

troublesome scenario if the core idea of Cognitive Command is to be respected. The problem is that the constraint seems to jeopardize anything intermediate between science's being apt for the representation of potentially evidence-transcendent matters of fact and its being merely minimally truth-apt. It was, in other words, the more moderate, non-Dummettian forms of scientific realism that seemed to be in danger.

Shapiro suggests that the problem lies with the inability of the Cognitive Command constraint as formulated to differentiate between cases where it fails as a result of the non-objective nature of the subject-matter and cases where it fails due to the holistic character of the evidence—the circumstance that the proper acceptability of pieces of putative evidence is a function of the antecedent commitments of the enquirer. I acknowledge the distinction, of course, but it would be hasty to conclude either that failures of Cognitive Command in the latter kind of case are, so to say, realistically neutral, or that the constraint gives us no grip on the former kind of case. It remains reasonable to look askance at the claim to representationality when Cognitive Command fails in a context where cognitive access, if we had it, would be *non-inferential* (comedy). And with respect to putatively realism-neutral failures due to holism of evidence, it is exactly an alleged failure of that kind that lies at the very heart of the famous scepticism of Quine, and Davidson, about the factuality of meaning and of ordinary intentional psychology respectively. Those scepticisms are driven precisely by the thoughts first that Cognitive Command, in effect, fails, for holistic reasons, for ascriptions of meaning, and of intentional states; and second that there is no prospect of an independent account of the subject-matter of those discourses to, as it were, shore up their representationality in any case and allow us to say that the possible divergences which cause the problem are properly attributed to limitations in the method. Of course, in those two cases, there is some *independent* plausibility in the ideas, respectively, that there can be no more to the meaning of expression than somehow surfaces in its observable use, and no more to the intentional states of a subject than somehow surfaces in her observable behavior. So in those cases, the anti-realist argument runs from a failure of Cognitive Command plus scepticism that a realist conception of the subject-matter can be independently motivated.

So how do matters now stand with Cognitive Command? It was a suggestion, certainly never proved, of *Truth and Objectivity* that the constraint represents, as it were, First Base—the first test to be passed if a case is to be made that a certain discourse is more than merely minimally truth-apt. That suggestion can still remain on the table. What we learn from reflection on the troublesome disagreement scenario is that sometimes the question whether a discourse satisfies Cognitive Command may have to be explored via considerations that argue directly, and independently, for or against a more robust form of realism. Quine's view was, in effect, that no such argument could be given for the case of meaning and translation, whereas realism remained the natural and proper view for the scientific theoretic enterprise. That is the whole point, in his way of thinking, of the distinction between the arguments for the *indeterminacy* of translation and the arguments for the *underdetermination* of scientific theory by data. But

the question, of course, is what further cruces might be invoked to discipline the drawing of that distinction: which are the cases where realism is well-motivated despite the lack of any independent *a priori* guarantee that cognitive shortcoming must be involved in conflicts of opinion? That, I think, is the most important question to emerge from Shapiro's discussion.

Wide Cosmological Role

Width of Cosmological Role was originally characterized like this:

Let the width of cosmological role of the subject matter of a discourse, be measured by the extent to which citing the kinds of states of affairs with which it deals is potentially contributive to the explanation of things *other than*, or *other than via*, our being in attitudinal states which take such states of affairs as object.¹³

This proposal emerged from my attempt to refine Gilbert Harman's objection to various forms of realism about ethics that, suspiciously as he suggested, ethical "states of affairs" have no part to play in the best explanation of ethical opinion—contrary to what one would expect if such opinion was properly conceived as knowledgeably responsive to such states of affairs. As critics observed, Harman's idea is open to various, more or less lethal difficulties.¹⁴ There are, in particular, various problems with his invocation of the notion of *best* explanation. For example, the best explanation of any belief based on defeasible evidence will be the believer's possession and appreciation of the evidence, and will thus be consistent with the falsity of the belief. So in cases—for example, theoretical science—where the strongest possible evidence is invariably defeasible, Harman's constraint, conceived of as a necessary condition for the appropriateness of a realist attitude, threatens to exclude anything more robustly realist than the constructive empiricism of van Fraassen. It was this kind of wrinkle that the cited formulation of Width of Cosmological Role was designed to avoid. It seemed to me that the kernel of insight in Harman's suggestion was this: that the idea that our opinions in some region are indeed responsive to an objective subject-matter attains substance only if the subject-matter concerned is operative in the explanation (best, or merely good enough) of *more* than the formation of those opinions.

Shapiro, though, has a worry about the invocation of the notion of explanation *per se*, best or otherwise. It is that whether it is indeed a (good enough) explanation of a given explanandum, *E*, to cite states of affairs, $S_1 \dots S_n$, is a notoriously *interest-relative* matter. Shapiro gives the example of the explanation of a devastating fire in a building: a perfectly good physical explanation, such as might satisfy a chemist, in terms of a combination of evaporated petrol and ageing electrical circuitry may very well not satisfy the police. In general, whether something explains something else depends on

¹³ Wright 1992, p. 196.

¹⁴ Some details about the dialectic it gives rise to are given in Chapter 5 of Wright 1992.

the purposes, and indeed the intellectual compass, of an enquirer. Moreover purposes and intellectual compass can cut across each other: What if what I want is the best available scientific explanation of a given phenomenon, which unfortunately I am too dim to understand?

So, what exactly is the problem? Shapiro is undoubtedly right that *what we will treat* as a satisfactory explanation of a given phenomenon is surely context-sensitive in the kinds of ways thus briefly gestured at. But it is not obvious that this reflection actually does very much to draw the sting of the Wide Cosmological Role constraint, rather than merely invite a modification of its formulation. The original challenge to the moral realist, for example, was: Look, if you want to conceive of moral states of affairs as situations independent of human sensibility to which, in the best case, our moral reactions and opinions are responsive, then you owe an account of what (else) might be attributable to their influence and workings, other than those reactions and the formation of those opinions. Well, taking on board the point about interest-relativity, the challenge merely becomes that of characterizing a possible set of interests (and intellectual accomplishments) which would allow a thinker rationally to receive the citation of moral facts as explanatory of non-moral facts *other than* those constituted in the moral opinions and reactions of human subjects. That still seems to be a challenge with teeth. After Shapiro's observation, it is no clearer how to meet it than it was before.

There is, though, a deeper point that may be elicited from Shapiro's discussion. Someone who advances anything in the spirit of Harman's original proposal, or the wide cosmological role constraint, as a condition on the appropriateness of a realist view of a certain discourse almost certainly has in mind a notion of explanation that reflects a putative *objective explanatory order* of things, the notion of a cosmos in which events and states of affairs do not obtain for no reason, but feature upstream and downstream of each other in determinate explanatory relationships. It is of course quite consistent with such a metaphysical conception that what *we treat* as an explanation of a particular situation may vary with the context of our interests and understanding. But if we think of the objective explanatory order as a lattice-like structure, what will so vary as a function of the context will be what node or nodes, upstream of but variously laterally and vertically connected with the target node, we choose to cite.

On this picture, explanatory relationships are, quite consistently with the interest-relativity of explanation, wholly objective. But the picture is not forced on us. Anti-realism about explanatory relationships is one possible anti-realism. What is the status of the Wide Cosmological Role constraint, or anything of its ilk, from the perspective of such an anti-realism? One can still make a distinction, of course, between those kinds of situations, or events, of which we find it intelligible that they should have the kind of ramified explanatory connections which the wide cosmological role constraint calls for, and those where that does not seem intelligible. But, absent the framework of an underlying *objective* explanatory order of things, the distinction now seems to emerge as a fact about our *concept* of the various subject-matters in question, rather than

something fitted to underwrite well-conceived contributions to the traditional debates about realism and their metaphysical aspirations.

The point generalizes. Whatever crux is proposed as necessary, or (partially) sufficient, respectively, for the appropriateness of an anti-realist, or realist, conception of a certain subject-matter, there will be an, as it were, second-order question about the status, in the light of that and other cruces, of judgments about the satisfaction of that very crux in particular cases. The tacit aspirations of the traditional debate unite the anti-realist with the realist in a kind of underlying metaphysical realism: for each, the desired end-product is to determine the *real metaphysical status* of the subject-matter with which a particular discourse treats and our relationship to it. Shapiro's concern about the interest-relativity of explanation may be misguided in detail for the reason cited. But the concern about interest-relativity is *prima facie* gripping precisely because, as Shapiro divines, the constraint has its intended purport only if its appeal to explanatory relationships is understood to advert to objective connections that are 'out there', and interest-relativity looks as though it may subvert that. The traditional aspiration seems to demand a realist view of the satisfaction of the conditions articulated in each and every correctly conceived realism-relevant crux. It has to be a fully objective question whether Cognitive Command is satisfied, whether Wide Cosmological Role is satisfied, and so on.

Now, the objectivity of these questions is to be assessed in the light of the very same cruces? If so, then it looks as though we launch a regress. To see this, let's simplify and suppose that Cognitive Command is our sole crux. Then if P is a representative moral judgment, we have to ask not merely whether

(R) P exerts Cognitive Command

is true, but whether it is *objectively* true—at least if the answer is to have the intended metaphysical significance. That will involve asking whether

(S) R exerts Cognitive Command

—and again, it seems the answer will have the intended significance, both for R and for P, only if objective; that is only if

(T) S exerts Cognitive Command,

has an objective status . . .

Whether such a regress is harmless from the perspective of our philosophical aspirations depends on whether the various questions in the ascent can be answered somehow at one fell-swoop, or whether they can at best be addressed piecemeal. And of course the issue becomes yet more complicated once a plurality of realism-relevant cruces is admitted. Now, one would suppose, every ascription of satisfaction, or non-satisfaction of a given crux should itself satisfy every crux necessary, and at least one sufficient, for enough objectivity to safeguard the intuitive metaphysical realism that drives the debates. Is that aspiration at all likely to be met?

So, pressing Shapiro's concern, we uncover a complex- and awkward-looking problem. How are any of these disputes to be settled if a verdict, however apparently well motivated, must first be assessed in the light of the same constraints? How are we ever to finish the discussion?

The most basic goal of the project of *Truth and Objectivity* was that of developing a passably clear account of the content of the contrast between realist and anti-realist views of a certain subject-matter. That goal is uncompromised by the worry just developed. There is no need to despair that with care, we can indeed, via painstaking articulation of the cruces proposed, and perhaps others, provide a worked-out development of *our conception* of what is at stake in the disputes about realism. But that was hardly the limit of our ambition. We wanted to understand better how different regions of our thought may actually engage with the world in different ways. To do that, we need not merely to make concrete and specific our inchoate conceptions of differing such modes of engagement but to get into position to argue, convincingly and objectively, where the differences fall—how it is, respectively, with physics, set-theory, ethics, taste, colour, and logic. And here the traditional aspiration of the metaphysical cast of mind requires that “How it is” means: how it *objectively* is—what we, objectively, ought to recognize as the real and varying metaphysical predicaments of these various regions of discourse. The more general underlying concern provoked by the development of Shapiro's point above is that even if we can get as far as an intuitively satisfying articulation of a variety of relevant cruces, there may be no way of using it to accomplish the fully objective insights that we seek. For if, in order for our deliberations to count for anything, we have not merely to argue for particular verdicts about particular discourses, but also to determine that those verdicts themselves fall on the objective side of the relevant cruces, there is no end to what we have to determine before a final verdict can be returned.

Alethic Relativism and Faultless Disagreement

In *Truth and Objectivity* three anti-realist ‘paradigms’—Expressivism, Error-theory, and the Verificationist rejection of evidence-transcendence truth—were canvassed and criticized in preparation for the proposal of the Minimalist-cum-Pluralist conception of the realism debates there defended. With hindsight, the lack of any explicit discussion of Relativism about truth—surely one of the oldest and most natural anti-objectivist tendencies in all philosophy—may seem to have been a major omission. The broadly Protagorean idea that, whether globally or locally, the idea of absolute truth is an illusion—that there is only ‘your truth’ and ‘my truth’, or perhaps ‘our truth’ and ‘their truth’—continues to provide a standing temptation for the anti-realist instincts of freshmen and the folk. Why didn't it get a look-in, or at least a mention, in *Truth and Objectivity*?

The answer is that, with the exception, perhaps, of the debates about ethics, where relativism remained in focus largely as a result of the attention, sympathetic or critical,

by writers such as Harman and Bernard Williams, the twentieth-century debates about realism and objectivity had largely relegated the idea of relative truth to the scrapheap. Non-factualist, non-cognitivist, and error-theoretic proposals had attracted development precisely as more competitive—more resilient, and intuitively more felicitous—ways of trying to do justice to the anti-realist impulse than anything that might be provided by the dubious idea that the truth of a proposition would be best conceived as involving an extra argument place, to be filled by a culture, or society, or, worst of all, a single thinker. Had not serious doubts about the very coherence of this notion emerged as early as Socrates' dissection of it in the *Theaetetus*? And even in the case of morals, where it continued to be debated, did not even the more defensible versions of it have obviously unacceptable consequences?¹⁵

What a sea-change there has been. The second of the two decades that have elapsed since the publication of *Truth and Objectivity* has seen a giddy upsurge of interest in alethic relativism. However, as befits the contemporary philosophical *milieu*, the driving force has been not so much a renaissance of confidence in the ability of relativistic proposals to contribute to the traditional metaphysical debates—to provide a stable, theoretically coherent home for anti-realist sympathies—as the thought that relativism may have a part to play in *descriptive philosophical linguistics*; more specifically, the suggestion, elaborated in a powerful and theoretically sophisticated way by John MacFarlane and others, has been that that an empirically adequate semantics for certain areas of discourse, including knowledge-ascriptions and talk of epistemic 'mights', will need to incorporate the idea of the truth of an utterance as relative to a *context of assessment* if it is to accommodate certain *prima facie* striking 'data' concerning the linguistic practices in question. This data, principally involving retractions and reassessments, but also embracing the kinds of things that can properly be said by eavesdroppers,¹⁶ has seemed striking insofar as it apparently excludes any kind of indexical or contextualist account of constructions for which a semantic invariantist story impresses as inappropriate for other reasons.¹⁷

The issues raised by this 'New Age' relativistic tendency are in many ways orthogonal to those concerning relativism as a broadly anti-objectivist stance. New Age relativism is, as remarked, a *descriptive* thesis: a thesis that our actual discourse, in certain regions of thought, displays patterns of which the best—empirically most adequate—

¹⁵ Perhaps most salient is the concern about the recoverability of any forceful notion of moral normativity. That an argument is valid is a reason to accept its conclusion if you accept its premises. That it is valid by such and such standards is no such reason unless you think the standards are correct. That the current (as I write this) military intervention in Libyan air space is morally unacceptable is a reason to stop it, or to work to see it stopped. That it is unacceptable by such and such standards is no such reason unless you think the standards are correct. But moral relativism holds not merely that all moral truth is relative to standards but that there is no further issue about the correctness of moral standards.

¹⁶ I suspect that the importance of eavesdropping data may have eluded many philosophers. It looms large in Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherston 2005.

¹⁷ It is my impression that this part of the argument—the basis for the disjunction: either Contextualism or Relativism—has never quite received the clarity or attention needed to justify the revolution.

semantic theory will make central use of a notion of relative truth. It would be possible to accept that view and at the same time maintain a revisionary stance towards those aspects of our discourse, on the grounds that the actual subject-matter concerned was fully objective, or in other ways unsuited for articulation in terms of relatively truth-apt statements. Conversely, a traditional relativist about, say, ethics—like Harman—could perfectly properly be quite undismayed by the consideration, if true, that our actual moral discourse does not assume the patterns that would invite theoretical description by the relativistic styles of semantic theory that MacFarlane and others have developed. Traditional philosophical relativism is a *normative* thesis: a thesis about the *proper* way to think about a certain subject-matter and its claims to objectivity. New Age relativism is non-normative, and its advocates have mostly been unconcerned with issues concerning realism and objectivity.¹⁸

Still, had New Age relativism come on the scene some fifteen years earlier, it's hardly likely that my book could have proceeded as it did. For, notwithstanding their empirical semantic motivation, the ideas developed by the New Age relativists—provided at least that they are coherent; provided that it *makes sense* to think of truth as relative and to admit contents capable only of relative truth—are readily admissible within the broad pluralistic framework of *Truth and Objectivity* and have, at least *prima facie*, a natural site of application within that framework. That site is within the space occupied by what my project regarded as *merely minimally truth-apt* discourses—discourses which fail to qualify for Cognitive Command and (as the conjecture of *Truth and Objectivity* had it) thereby fail to meet any other realism-relevant constraint. Just how wide that space is, of course, is controversial but among its less controversial members would be, for example, discourse about the comic, about the obscene and revolting, and about the tasty. It is characteristic of such discourses that they may give rise to what I have elsewhere called *disputes of inclination*:¹⁹ disagreements where one thinker apparently takes the view that P and another that not P, and where there is little plausibility in the idea that further information, or sophistication of a relevant sensibility, could justifiably lead to an assessment of one view or the other as superior. Some—of course, not all—disagreements about the comic, or the tasty, seem to be like this. In such cases, folk philosophy—this is not a linguistic datum, or an 'intuition', but a piece of proto-philosophical theory—says that *both opinions can be in good standing*, and that it can be perfectly rational for the protagonists to hang on to them, undismayed by the apparently equally good standing of the dissenting opinion of the other. More specifically, the folk philosophical view is that such a case can manifest *faultless disagreement*: there can be a genuine contradiction between the opinions concerned, neither need be in error, and neither protagonist should feel that the credibility of his own opinion is weakened by the situation. (I called these features *Contradiction*, *Faultlessness*, and

¹⁸ Other aspects of the relationship between traditional and 'New Age' relativism are helpfully discussed in Boghossian 2006 and 2008.

¹⁹ Wright 2006.

Sustainability respectively, and will retain these labels here.) The question on which the idea of some form of relativization of truth might seem to hold some prospect of assistance is whether, and if so how, this adventurous piece of folk philosophizing might be developed and stabilized.

The problems about stabilizing the folk philosophical idea are obvious enough. Suppose you and I, dining out, find ourselves in a fairly vivid dispute of inclination about the merits of stewed tripe and onion in béchamel sauce. If my opinion, that the dish is delicious, and yours, that it is disgusting (and hence not delicious ☺) are genuinely contradictory, then logic decrees that they are not both true—and *classical* logic decrees that one at least is false. Either way, the opinions involved cannot both be in good standing unless ‘good standing’ is consistent with untruth. But it is no part of ordinary thought *in general* to regard an opinion as in good standing if there is no better reason to uphold it than to uphold a contrary. And by hypothesis neither you nor I can adduce any consideration to break the tie; there can be vanishingly little room for discussion in such a case, and the mere fact that an opinion is mine (or yours) is not, for me (or you), or anyone else, a *reason* to regard it as true. The problem, in short, is to make sense of the idea that logically conflicting opinions can remain in good standing and tenable, once the grounds for them are exposed and found to be in relevant respects symmetric and of matching strength. This is the problem that alethic relativism might be supposed somehow to help with. It might be supposed to help because it might be supposed that it allows us to regard each of the conflicting opinions as *true*—at least, in the only sense of ‘true’ for which they are apt.

Before turning to whether relativism really does help, let’s ask: what else might help? Well, not an invocation of *dialetheism*: that is, the idea that the disputed opinion might be both true *and* false. That would certainly allow us to say that your opinion and mine are on a par. But what about good standing? Even among those hospitable to the possibility of ‘gluts’ of truth-values, there is little support for the idea that glutty statements can be *acceptable*. The problem, rather, is to explain the sense—contrasting with denial—in which such a statement should be *rejected*. There seems no prospect that a dialetheic account can save Sustainability.

In other work²⁰ I have argued that a broadly *intuitionist* framework can conserve what might be regarded as the most important element in the folk philosophical view, namely that in such a dispute there need be no presumption that either disputant *in particular* need be at fault, either by the manner in which they arrive at their view or by its misrepresentation of the facts. Such an intuitionistic account acknowledges that your and my respective views about stewed tripe cannot both be true: that much is just a consequence of the law of Non-Contradiction. But when Bivalence, and associatedly the Law of Excluded Middle, fail for broadly intuitionistic reasons, that consideration

²⁰ Wright 2006.

does not force us to say that one in particular of the disputants has to be incorrect. The transition fails from Not-(A and B) to (Not-A or Not-B).

In effect, to say that much is just to draw out a consequence of what is involved in a failure of Cognitive Command. The intuitionistic proposal is the natural treatment of disputes of inclination for a supporter of the framework of *Truth and Objectivity*. When Cognitive Command is missing for a certain range of statements, so is any a priori guarantee that a dispute about one of them involves anything worth regarding as a cognitive shortcoming. And once there is no presumption that one or the other disputant in particular has to be guilty of such a shortcoming—no presumption that distributively, as it were, either you are at fault or I am—then there is no rational pressure on us individually to think, "... and the guilty party could as well be me", so no pressure to qualify or abandon our respective views. So there is a case that the intuitionistic proposal, if it can be otherwise well motivated, can capture (something of) each of three desiderata gestured at by the folk idea: the opinions in the dispute can be allowed to be genuinely contradictory, yet there is no justified presumption that either in particular has to involve any fault, and no reason for either protagonist not to persist, even in the face of an opposing, no less well supported view.²¹

The intuitionistic proposal is thus, or so it seemed to me, a not-bad direction by which to accommodate something close to the folk philosophical idea. But there is one respect in which it may seem to come short of what is wanted if that idea is to be fully accommodated. If my opinion is genuinely incompatible with yours, am *I* at least not committed to regarding you as mistaken (and you, me)? Maybe there is no pressure, flowing from a misguided acceptance a priori of Bivalence, to suppose that one of us in particular *has* to be mistaken. But still, do we not both, just in taking a view, commit ourselves to regarding the other as *de facto* mistaken? In short, it seems that *the disputants themselves* cannot regard the dispute as faultless, even if there is no general philosophical pressure, bearing upon a neutral witness, to suppose that there has to be fault in such a dispute. So something important in the folk philosophical idea may seem to have been lost. The scope for considered tolerance—part, plausibly, of what was meant to be implicated by Faultlessness—conveyed in the acknowledgement that *your opinion is just as good as mine*, has not yet been made available to those actually involved in the disagreement.

Call this extra ingredient *Parity*. In effect, it is the requirement that Faultlessness be appreciable, and endorseable, from the point of view not just of neutrals but of the committed parties in a dispute of inclination. The folk philosophical thought is that disputes of inclination can manifest each of Contradiction, Faultlessness, Sustainability, and Parity. The intuitionistic proposal, it seems, cannot accommodate Parity. What, I think, has not generally been appreciated with sufficient clarity is that relativism does no better.

²¹ This is very brisk, I grant. A more careful development, and some responses to objections, are offered in Wright 2006.

Actually, we need to refer to two importantly different relativistic proposals that have been distinguished in the recent discussions. MacFarlane's own preference, *Assessment-relativism*, is the proposal that, for statements in the discourse in question, truth-value is a function of parameters fixed by the context of an *assessor*. Applied to discourse of taste, this has the effect that your statement (or opinion) that tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is disgusting may be correctly assessed as false by me, but true by you, as a function of variation in the relevant parameter (standards of taste²²) in our respective contexts of assessment. According to Assessment-relativism, then, a given historical token statement, or opinion, has no settled once-and-for-all truth-value—it takes a truth-value whenever it is assessed, and what truth-value it takes depends on the value of relevant parameters determined by the operative context of assessment, which of course may vary.

The other relativistic proposal is what MacFarlane has chosen to call (most unhappily, in my view) *Non-indexical Contextualism*.²³ This is properly a version of relativism, rather than contextualism as normally understood, since it is integral to it that the content that I endorse when I affirm that tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is delicious is indeed the very content that you implicitly deny when you affirm that tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is disgusting. And the truth-value of the content so affirmed, or denied respectively, is indeed, as before, a function of variation in the value of the relevant parameter (standards of taste). What distinguishes the view from Assessment-relativism is that the truth-value of *my* affirmation is to be determined relative to *my* standards of taste, and the truth-value of your denial is to be assessed relative to yours. So we can both be right! And now a given historical token statement, or opinion, does have a settled once-and-for-all truth-value, as fixed by the values taken by the relevant parameters in the context of its actual authorship, though there may be variation in truth-value among other tokens of the same propositional content.

It is pretty immediate that Assessment-relativism is useless for the purpose of securing Parity. By its rules, I am constrained to assess your opinion in the light of my standards, rather than yours. So of course I will assess it as false. Since I assess my own as true, I can then, surely, hardly regard your opinion as just as good as mine, and Parity is surrendered from my point of view, the point of view of a participant in the dispute.²⁴

²² I do not think it is at all clear in what sense basic taste is subject to *standards*, but I leave the issue aside for present purposes.

²³ The damage is probably done, but if it is not too late, let me put in a plea for "Author-relativism".

²⁴ Mark Richard, for one, is clear about this. He writes,

Suppose I think that Beaufort is a better cheese than Tome, and you think the reverse. Suppose (for *reductio*) that each of our thoughts is valid—mine is true from my perspective, yours is from yours. Then not only can I (validly) say that Beaufort is better than Tome, I can (validly) say that it's true that Beaufort is better than Tome. And of course if you think Tome is better than Beaufort and not vice versa I can also (validly) say that you think that it's not the case that Beaufort is better than Tome. So I can (validly) say that it's true that Beaufort is better than Tome though you think Beaufort isn't better than Tome. From which it surely follows that you're mistaken—after all, if you have a false belief, you are mistaken about something. This line of reasoning is sound no matter what the object of dispute. (Richard 2008, p. 132)

It is also lost from the point of view of any third party who happens to have his own standards of taste. If they determine a view, he will be bound to disagree with at least one of us. If his standards mandate neutrality on the matter of dispute, he will regard us both as overstepping the mark. And if he has no relevant standards by which to form a view, he will be in no position to judge ours as on a par.

This limitation of Assessment-relativism when it comes to sustaining Parity should come as no surprise. It is a consequence of the very feature that MacFarlane designed into his relativism in order to enable it to accommodate the, as it seemed to him, compelling data about retractions, primarily in the case of epistemic modals. The (alleged) phenomenon of the retraction of hitherto correctly asserted epistemic modal claims purely on the ground of increased information, precisely amounts to a disavowal of Parity in a *prima facie* dispute with one's former self about the claim in question.

Prima facie, however—as noted—Non-indexical contextualism does better. Now your opinion and mine are both properly assessed relative to the standards of their authors. So my opinion may be assessed as true—and your contrary opinion can *also* be assessed as true, assuming that they are indeed sanctioned by the respectively different standards involved. And indeed this upshot seems to chime with the promise of relativism as intuitively intended: my opinion is 'true for me' and yours is 'true for you'. The trouble, though, is that this result is bought at the cost of surrender of aspects of the interaction between contexts of propositional attitude and ascriptions of truth-value which seem integral to a proper understanding of both, and whose compromise wears a face of absurdity. In considering whether *your opinion* that tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is disagreeable is true, I must answer affirmatively, since you are the author of that opinion, so the relevant standards of assessment are yours, and you are right (or so we are supposing) by those standards. But in considering whether to agree with you—whether *the proposition* is true that tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is disagreeable—I must answer negatively, since now the question is of my authorship and the appropriate standards of assessment are mine. So I wind up affirming that you believe something truly although what you believe isn't true. That sounds like pretty good nonsense, and it is certainly no intended aspect of the folk thought. But something of the form will be affirmable by each participant in a dispute of inclination if Non-indexical contextualism is correct.

Another who is clear-headed on the matter is Paul Boghossian who, citing the above passage from Richard with approval, glosses the central thought as:

just because *p* is at best relatively true, and just because it is true from my perspective and false from yours, it is not *therefore* right to say that our disagreement is faultless. For even if all of this is true, it will still be true that if I validly (that is, truly, relative to my perspective) judge that *p*, then it will also be valid for me to judge that 'It is true that *p*' and also 'It is false that not-*p*.' And if I can validly judge that 'It is false that *p*' then I must regard anyone who believes that *p* to have made a mistake. (Boghossian 2011, p. 62)

Boghossian christens this line of thought the Argument from Immersion, and regards it as finally defeating any claim of relativism to make sense of faultless disagreement.

There is a joke that the celebrated Cambridge mathematician, G. H. Hardy, once found something obvious after several minutes' hard thinking about it. It may be that it is beginning to seem obvious in that kind of way that that there is no squaring this particular circle: that once Contradiction is accepted, Parity is simply a desideratum too many. No doubt it is that thought that has prompted many philosophers to dispute the reality of the disagreement in 'disputes of inclination' by proposing various kinds of contextualist accounts of the content of the targeted claims that allow them to be compatible with each other. If you and I are not really disagreeing, then of course we are not committed, by our respective opinions, to regarding the other's opinion as inferior, and there need be no difficulty with any of Faultlessness, Sustainability, and Parity. But this move gives up on Contradiction, and that we contradict each other in such cases is as intuitive as any other datum of the problem. Is there any other Contradiction-preserving option?

This is, in effect, the main issue addressed by Carol Rovane's interesting and creative essay. Relativism has little attraction for her, but she is interested in the question, what is the most robust and potentially useful form of the view. Rovane argues that there is an alethic relativistic option, *multimundialism*, which—though she does not express herself in exactly these terms—promises to save Contradiction along with the other three constraints.

It is, to be sure, a tinge disappointing to realize that this salvage will be bought at the cost of surrender of the connection, so far taken for granted, between Contradiction and *disagreement*. Rovane is explicit that, in her view, there *is* no saving faultless disagreement. But even allowing that we are affirming contradictory opinions in our dispute about tripe and onion in béchamel sauce, it does not follow—it is now suggested—that we contradict *each other*. Let it be that our opinions are mutually contradictory in the sense that neither of us could consistently add an endorsement of the other to an endorsement of our own. Still there can be daylight between that admission and the claim that we disagree: that is, the claim that we are committed to regarding each other's opinions as false, and hence rejecting Parity. Parity can be saved if, although I could not add an endorsement of your opinion to an endorsement of my own and remain consistent, still I am not, in endorsing my opinion, repudiating your endorsement of yours. What is needed is that, where our standards vary, our taking the views that we respectively do is simply to have no bearing on the propriety of the other's view. Our views are to be, in Rovane's terminology, *alternatives* to each other and thereby normatively insulated from each other.

How is this to work? According to multimundialism—as according to anything worth calling relativism—the very content, *tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is delicious*, that I affirm does indeed recur embedded in your denial. Our dispute does not have us talking past each other in any sense that would be gratifying to contextualism. But we are talking about *different worlds*. The multimundialist takes seriously—and must in due course explain—the idea that relativistic parameters, for example, standards of taste, literally contribute to the constitution of a world: a domain of facts, to which

statements informed by those standards are then answerable, but which is merely one among a range of *alternatives*, constituted by differing standards, to which judgments informed by *those* standards will answer in their turn. So we are talking past each other in the sense that our claims, though semantically contrary, are answerable to different worlds. And for relativism of this kind, in Rovane's handling of it, there are no relations of entailment or incompatibility between what is true in one such world and what is true in another. That is why your opinion can be just as good as mine.

Rovane's proposal highlights something interesting that has, in effect, been noted by other recent commentators,²⁵ viz. that, contrary to its standard presentations, alethic relativism need actually involve no adjustment in traditional conceptions of the *degree* of the truth-predicate—there need be no raising of the 'adicity' of truth. Someone who is attracted to the idea of truth as consisting everywhere in correspondence, for instance, can still be a relativist about certain kinds of truth if she is prepared to make the metaphysical multimundialist move of abandoning the conception of a single Tractarian all-encompassing totality of facts in favor of a many-worlds view of the relevant subject-matter.

There is a wave of obvious concerns about the interpretation, and legitimacy, of this metaphysical move. How can there not be a single totality of all the facts that there are—if the various denizens of the many worlds are indeed all *facts*? How are they, as it were, to be segregated except notionally, by some form of subdivision of a more comprehensive world? If that is how it goes, will not that more comprehensive world then lurk in the background and offer absolute truth-makers after all? But if, more exotically, we try to think of our respective worlds of taste, for example, as more than notional segregations of the facts—as genuinely alternative complete determinations of reality—what does that mean and how can we accomplish it? And even if we can, how exactly would that ensure the normative insularity that Rovane canvasses? Don't we have to take it that our respective worlds somehow coexist if we are to regard each other's opinions as no worse than our own—as true of the world to which they relate?

To fix ideas, we can turn to the model of a *prima facie* similarly relativistic view of weather reports. In Aberdeen, Scotland, on 23 January 2010 I report that it is snowing hard with visibility down to less than 50 metres. In New York City on the same date Rovane reports that it is sunny, crisp, and clear. Setting aside any semantics of these remarks that interprets them as containing some form of inexplicit indexicality of place, let us take it that the content of Rovane's statement is the very same content that I would affirm if I were to use her words in my location, and that it is a complete, truth-evaluable content—something that can contribute, for instance, to a complete specification of the content of a wish, or a belief. And let us assume the same, *mutatis mutandis*, for my statement. So we are affirming contradictory contents. But, the

²⁵ For example, by Beall 2006 and Fine 2005.

relativist proposal is, these are contents that take a truth-value only relative to a parameter of place.

Multimundialism is one option for the interpretation of this weather-report relativism. The idea of the many worlds required by the view may here be interpreted perfectly straightforwardly. Rovane's and my respective remarks are answerable to different *locations*. Our remarks are mutually incompatible insofar as they cannot both be true when directed at any single location. But that element of contradiction is quite consistent with there being no good sense in which we disagree. Genuine disagreement involves at least the potential, perhaps stubbornly unlikely to be realized, of change of mind if one comes to see merit in the opposing view. But there is nothing for me to learn about the status of my report by coming to know that Rovane is speaking truly.

The model is coherent enough—provided of course we grant the coherence of its play with trans-locally invariant weather-report contents. (And, it hardly needs emphasis, such semantic invariance is a feature of any interesting alethic relativism.) But it had better not represent the multimundialist's best attempt at doing justice to the folk philosophical idea about disputes of inclination. Of course, it was announced in advance that we were going to give up on the idea that genuine disagreement is involved. But this model saves not even a *vestige* of the idea of disagreement. If, sitting in the restaurant, menus in hand, we take ourselves to be discussing, and disputing, a mutually understood topic, the merit of choosing stewed tripe and onion, we are as confused—on this account of the matter—as Rovane and I would have been if our remarks had been part of an argument on the telephone about the weather on 23 January 2010. Normative insularity, as captured by the weather-report model, is nothing more surprising than what is involved between opinions about *logically independent subject-matters*. In effect, the model loses contact with the idea that the original *prima facie* dispute about taste does after all occur in what is conceived to be a single, mutually understood conversation, directed at a single dish and its merit. It is one thing to surrender the idea that real disagreement is involved in disputes of inclination. But if an account is to do that, it had better do so in a way that avoids convicting the antagonists in the dispute of purposes so egregiously crossed.

So I am inclined to raise the stakes. The folk philosophical thought is yet more demanding than we thought: it demands each of Contradiction, Faultlessness, Sustainability, Parity, and *No Egregious Misunderstanding*—a satisfying, stable account of it must be consistent with the possibility that the participants in a dispute of inclination mutually know what they are doing.

If multimundialism can do better in this last respect, it will be required that something more be made of Rovane's proposed idea of our respective worlds of taste as *alternatives*. The weather-report model offers nothing by way of interpretation of that. Different locations are not, I believe, in the sense that Rovane intends, alternative. She insists at several places in her discussion that normative insularity, as she intends it, is to involve *suspension* of relations both of incompatibility and compatibility. But her and my imagined remarks about the weather on 23 January 2010 are, on

the contrary, perfectly compatible. In the weather-report model, the locations are *partial*: they coexist alongside each other, and there really is no conceptual difficulty involved in, as it were, amalgamating the bodies of meteorological information respectively associated with them. True, we cannot accomplish that amalgamated body of information when the mode of expression is restricted to the (putatively) relativistic propositions. But when I accept that it is clear, crisp, and sunny *in New York*, I am *agreeing* with what Rovane says when she simply affirms it is clear, crisp, and sunny. By contrast, I do not, in granting that tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is disgusting by Rovane's standards effectively agree with what she is saying when she affirms the statement, unqualified, that it is disgusting.

The point on which the weather-report model breaks down most fundamentally is that if gustatory standards may indeed be conceived as somehow determining a 'locality' of fact, they are not to be thought of as doing so in the way that places do. If there are indeed permissible alternative such sets of standards, they are potentially permissibly alternative ways of determining *all* the facts about what is tasty or not, and in that sense compete over the determination of those facts. Nothing analogous to that is involved in the restriction of claims of a certain kind to one location or another. New York City and Eastern Scotland are different actual locations, and truths about the weather conditions respectively obtaining at them hold of a single actual world. The same point, granted, holds for truths about, respectively, what is sanctioned by your standards of taste and what is sanctioned by mine, even if there is contradiction between the propositions that our standards of taste respectively sanction. That my standards validate the proposition that tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is delicious and that yours validate its contradictory are both truths about the actual world. But the, so to say, corresponding relativistic truths, that tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is delicious, and that it is not, are, when conceived as by multimundialism, truths about *different* complete worlds—albeit worlds that must in some sense be conceived of as simultaneously real and existing. (For as noted, Parity, taken under the aegis of multimundialism, requires that we each think of the other's view as sustained by his/her world of taste. And for that to be so, the worlds concerned must both exist.)

In summary. New York City and Eastern Scotland are simply different places, disjoint regions of a single spatial reality. By contrast, the worlds of taste that Rovane's multimundialist is postulating had better be alternatives precisely in the sense that there is no larger truth-making reality of which they are disjoint regions. This feature both defeats the weather-report model and offers a promise that something might be said to save the sense of difference of opinion—as opposed merely to opinion about different subject-matters—that the folk philosophical idea about disputes of inclination involves. Parity will require that the disputants each recognize that the other is, or anyway can be, judging truly concerning his/her world of taste. The weather-report model has no trouble with that. But the salvaging of the sense of disagreement requires that the worlds be at the same time exclusive and, after a fashion, potentially complete. That aspect totally eludes the weather-report model.

Can it be captured? Well, maybe, if we can understand our respective standards of taste as fashioning worlds of which *each is taken, by its occupants, to exclude the other from any role in the business of truth-making*. Something like that, it seems to me, has to be the point of the terminology of ‘alternatives’: there are many worlds of taste but, for each of the disputants, only one that is empowered to determine the truth-values of judgments of taste.

A partial precedent for what the multimundialist seems to need is provided by the way that a modal realist of the stripe of David Lewis thinks of possible worlds. For such a modal realist, there is a sense—a transcendental sense—in which all possible worlds are on a par: each is actual *for its denizens*, and the truths in each are as robust as the truths in any other. For *us*, though, situated in *the* actual world, as we like to think, real truth is truth at our world, the only truth-making world that there is, and truths at other worlds are merely *possibilities*. On this conception, the opinion, of my Lewisian counterpart in a world in which there are talking donkeys, *that there are talking donkeys* is as robust a truth as my own opinion that there are none. Faultlessness, Sustainability, and Parity hold from the transcendental perspective. But from the perspective of a station at a particular world, only that world is actual and the truths that distinguish other worlds from it are merely possible, actually false propositions. Contradiction, and disagreement, belong with a committed, intra-world perspective.

Is this a chink of light? The obvious limitation for present purposes of the Lewisian model of modal truth is that it is multimundialist precisely in the sense that it allows, for compelling reasons, for no transworld travel, so no provision for dialogue, let alone apparent dispute, between my counterpart and me. But maybe it could be argued that there is no good reason to retain that feature when we are aiming for an account not of modality but of disputes of inclination. Still, there remains no obvious prospect of saving all the five facets of the folk philosophical idea at one pass, as it were. If we are to adapt these ideas to the consolidation of that idea, we will have to say that the *collective* appeal of the five facets results from a switching between committed and transcendental perspectives. From my—committed—perspective as we sit, looking at our menus, there is only the world of taste that I inhabit: and, regarding our conversation from that perspective, the fact is that we disagree, and you are wrong about stewed trip and onion in béchamel sauce. But then I, as it were, sit back, and slipping into a transcendental perspective, recognize a plurality of worlds of taste in which none is privileged for a truth-making role, and each makes only for its local truths; and I recognize that, from this perspective, neither of us is at fault, that both our views are, or can be, locally correct, and just as good as each other.

That, roughly, is how I would myself propose to understand multimundialism. I am not sure if Rovane would acknowledge any of it. In any case, I think a supporter of the folk philosophical idea should find it wanting. For one thing, Parity was supposed to hold from the perspective of the disputants, not a transcendental perspective whose adoption involves disengaging from the dispute. I want to say, even while recognizing that we are disagreeing, that your opinion is as good as mine. More, I want to say that it is as good as mine *on the matter in hand*—and so that there is simply no analogue here of

weather-report locality, no proper place for the idea that we are speaking in, or of, different worlds. To the extent that an account finds work for anything of that kind, it is going to be in conflict with No Egregious Misunderstanding. After all, when I take us to disagree, what do I think you are doing? What perspective, at that moment, do I take you to occupy? Do I suppose that you intend to make a judgment about what holds good in *my* world? Then I egregiously misunderstand. Do I suppose that you intend to make a judgment about what holds good in your world? Then why am I taking us to disagree?

Each of the three relativisms so far distinguished—assessment relativism, non-indexical contextualism (author-relativism), and multimundialism—variously stumbles here. So, it is worth noting, does a fourth relativistic proposal which I mooted in the last section of my 2006. That was the proposal to construe truth, in discourses apt to give rise to disputes of inclination, as a form of superassertibility but then to allow (ordinary) assertibility to fragment into a range of properties determined by the relevant non-cognitive propensities of different participants in the discourse. Thus, very crudely: let amusement be a non-cognitive response, and let claims of the form, ‘X is funny’, be, absent reason otherwise, default assertible just when one finds oneself amused by X. Since senses of humour may vary, and vary, by hypothesis, without cognitive defect, ‘X is funny’ may be properly assertible by you but not by me. Assertibility thus becomes a context-relative—indexical—property for reasons other than variation in one’s information. Superassertibility idealizes away that latter kind of indexicality, by requiring that in order to be superassertible, a statement must remain assertible under arbitrary additions to, and improvements of, one’s information. But no matching idealizing effect is thereby exerted on a non-cognitive assertibility base. So superassertibility potentially fragments too.

This fragmentation will allow us to give a quite literal construal of “true for me” and “true for you”, and will make straightforward theoretical sense of the notion that your verdict about stewed tripe and mine, though contradictory, are each true for their respective authors. But again, the proposal limps when it comes to accounting for Parity and No Egregious Misunderstanding. Suppose I bring an explicit clarity about the superassertibilist-relativist proposal to the dinner table. When you affirm that stewed tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is disgusting, you present your opinion as true. How, when I take it that we are disagreeing, do I understand that claim? If I take it that it is answerable to superassertibility on the basis of *your* relevant affective propensities, well, that is certainly an opinion which I can regard as no worse than my own, but why should I feel that that is anything with which I should want to disagree? So understood, you are claiming that *stewed tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is disgusting* has a property which, in denying that claim, I am not denying that it has. But if I take it that your claim is answerable to superassertibility on the basis of *my* relevant affective propensities, then I egregiously misunderstand.

So, no progress. Rovane herself, to stress, would probably say at this point that, “I told you so.” Her express view, recall, is that alethic relativism, in its best form, must

give up on the disagreement in ‘faultless disagreement’. How we react if we think she is right will very much depend on what, in this area, we think that philosophy should try to accomplish, and what should constitute satisfaction with its products. If our priority is to articulate, in the sharpest possible theoretical form, what we conceive as the *wisdom* incorporated in our ordinary take on the various issues that engage our philosophical interest, then we will go on trying to understand and stabilize what I have called the intuitive folk idea, and will merely dismiss the claim of relativism to be of any value in that project. But we may be more doubtful of the claims to intuitive wisdom. If we think it likely that folk philosophical ideas—slowly and haphazardly evolved under the successive influence of the more or less primitive, often superstitious, variously theological and scientific images that have enjoyed temporary hegemony over the centuries—are as likely to spawn paradox and incoherence as wisdom, then we may be inclined to regard the various relativistic offerings as falling short merely of elements in the folk thought that betray confusion, and the remaining question as being only which of the relativisms is the best of an acceptably sub-optimal bunch.

Personally, I vacillate. But I still think it likely we can do better than relativism, in any of the four forms proposed, for the purpose in hand. The matter demands a fuller discussion, but let me close by outlining why.

The problem which seemed to require that we look past the intuitionistic proposal, recall, was Parity: in opining that stewed tripe and onion in béchamel sauce is delicious, I opine that it is false that it is disgusting, and hence that your opinion is false. So how can I regard it as no worse than my own? But regarding your opinion as false compromises its parity with my own only if ‘false’ carries its normal normative punch. And a central contention of *Truth and Objectivity*, was that—at least over merely minimally truth-apt discourses, where Cognitive Command fails—truth need carry no payload of accurate substantial representation. When merely minimally truth-apt claims are at stake, to regard a statement as false need not be to attribute any cognitive fault to someone’s acceptance of it. So if there need be no other kind of fault, the way is open for the idea that, in such a case, to describe an opponent’s view as ‘false’ is, in effect, merely to record one’s disagreement with it, with no implication of any further deficiency. There would be an imputation of fault, and hence a compromise of Parity, only when ‘true’ demands a richer interpretation or when the disagreement itself has to indicate fault. But that, where merely minimally truth-apt discourses are concerned, is just what there need be no reason to suppose.²⁶

Nor, on this account, is there any evident difficulty with finessing any issue of Egregious Misunderstanding. The relativistic proposals all tried to accommodate Parity

²⁶ The idea that a rescue of the idea of faultless disagreement might be accomplished by disarming the truth-predicate of its usual ‘normative punch’ is also canvassed by Boghossian in section II of his 2011. However, it is there developed under the aegis of explicitly relativistic norms of belief and assertion and, as he in effect argues, thereby runs into the same difficulties in conserving the disagreement component that multimundialism meets with.

by, in effect, one way or another, compatibilizing the disputants' claims: by construing the kind of truth they enjoy, or the kind of truth-makers that bear on them, as capable of peaceful coexistence, even though the claims themselves are contradictory. It then followed that in taking you to be making a claim that disputes mine, I have to misunderstand the constraints to which, if you are clear-headed, you intend it to answer. That, in essence, is the point that persuades Rovane that, for any viable relativism here, disagreement has to go. But the minimalist proposal avoids this bind. No relativized notions of truth now feature. When you affirm the truth of your view, you are not to be interpreted as committed merely to its satisfaction of a truth-concept that simply has no role in my assessment and whose application I do not dispute. Rather just as, on the surface, it appears, you are committed to an appraisal of stewed tripe that I do indeed reject. But, again, your commitment to its truth need be no imputation of fault to me. You are indeed committed to the falsity of my opinion. But, since this is merely minimal falsity, and tagging my opinion as false is simply another way of expressing your disagreement with it, with no implication of cognitive shortcoming, my view can be none the worse for that.²⁷

So, not only does relativism fail to improve on the intuitionistic view. It takes a step back. But much more needs to be said. For one thing, not all the regions of thought that may be taken to qualify as merely minimally truth-apt are liable give rise to disputes in which we feel there is no good sense to be attached to the idea of better and worse among conflicting opinions. Morals is an obvious exception, for it is no part of folk philosophy to think of fundamental moral disputes as disputes of inclination. There are variations in 'metaphysical contour' even among merely minimally truth-apt discourses, and *Truth and Objectivity* did too little to explore them. Still, I continue to think that the framework it outlined does provide a good place to start, and in particular that it affords the best extant prospect of making sense of aspects of our folk philosophical ideas about, as it were, *merely* merely minimally truth-apt discourses. And I think, for the reasons that I have tried to bring out, that alethic relativism has no part to play in that project. The twentieth-century metaphysical debates were right to set it aside. Whether it is better fitted for its more recently acquired linguistic-philosophical purposes is a different question.

²⁷ A full development of this 'minimalist' way with faultless disagreement will need to address the point, argued for in chapter 1 of Wright (1992), that any truth-predicate must function normatively in a way that contrasts with the normative role of warranted assertibility. The question is whether truth's possession of an intrinsic normative role must vie with the thought that judging an opinion false need impute to criticism. I do not think so, but must reserve the issue for treatment elsewhere.

Bibliography

- Beall, JC 2006 "Modelling the 'Ordinary View'", in P. Greenough and M. Lynch (eds.) *Truth and Realism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 61–74.
- Blackburn, S. 1984 *Spreading the Word*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Blackburn, S. 1988 "Attitudes and Contents", *Ethics*, 98/3, pp. 501–17.
- Boghossian, P. A. 2006 "What is Relativism?", in P. Greenough and M. Lynch (eds.) *Truth and Realism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 13–37.
- Boghossian, P. A. 2008 "Epistemic Rules", *Journal of Philosophy* 105/9, pp. 472–500.
- Boghossian, P. A. 2011 "Three Kinds of Relativism", in S. Hales (ed.) *A Companion to Relativism*, Oxford, Blackwell, pp. 53–69.
- Egan, A., Hawthorne, J., and Weatherson, B. 2005 "Epistemic Modals in Context", in G. Preyer and G. Peter (eds.) *Contextualism in Philosophy: Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 131–68.
- Field, H. 1994 "Deflationist Views of Meaning and Content", *Mind* 103/411, pp. 249–85.
- Fine, K. 2005 "Tense and Reality", in *Modality and Tense*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 261–320.
- Hale, B. 1993 "Can There Be a Logic of Attitudes?", in J. Haldane and C. Wright (eds.) *Reality, Representation, and Projection*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 337–64.
- Horwich, P. 1998 *Meaning*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Richard, M. 2008 *When Truth Gives Out*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Williamson, T. 2006 "Must Do Better", in P. Greenough and M. Lynch (eds.) *Truth and Realism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, pp. 177–87.
- Wright, C. 1992 *Truth and Objectivity*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- Wright, C. 2006 "Intuitionism, Realism, Relativism and Rhubarb", in P. Greenough and M. P. Lynch (eds.) *Truth and Realism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 77–99.