

The prima facie availability of (D) complicates the issue slightly. For according to (D), it will be remembered, grasping the central core of the assertibility-conditions of a verification-transcendent sentence, and its use in compound contexts, *is* grasping its truth-conditions. So the question, how is the latter grasp made manifest, is already answered. But the essence of the realist view is, as Strawson puts it, that the conception of truth-conditions *governs* the use, that from this conception both our view of what constitutes good evidence for a sentence and our use of it in compound contexts – in particular, the logic which we regard ourselves as validly applying to it – flow; it is something ulterior which informs and, in so far as we use language correctly, vindicates our use of such sentences in both atomic and compound contexts. In this way it is quite literally the core of our understanding of the sentence. Whereas, according to (D), that we e.g. accepted such-and-such as evidence for a particular sentence and that we also e.g. accepted Excluded Middle as valid in application to it, would be essentially independent aspects of our ‘grasp of its truth-conditions’.

The challenge is to explain how a full-blooded realist conception of truth-conditions in this sense can be manifested in a person’s use of his language; to explain, that is, what, if anything, he could do to distinguish himself from a man whose competence was completely described by saying that he had grasped the assertibility-conditions both of the sentence and of all, or enough, compound sentences in which it was a constituent. One finds in Strawson’s remarks no clear indication of how he thinks this challenge ought to be met.

If Strawson does not meet this challenge, still less does he make out his claim that

the conception of verification-transcendent truth-conditions, at least in one or another of the relatively stringent senses of ‘verification-transcendent’ which Wright’s anti-realist seems to favour – this conception, and its link with that of meaning, is an essential part of a general view of the world which is no way contrary to reason and to which we are in any case inescapably committed.

It would undoubtedly have demanded excess of a chairman’s licence to make *that* claim good! Let me conclude by recording the suspicion, rather than arguing, that the implicit epistemology of realism involves in all essential respects the same difficulties which Wittgenstein exposed in the old idea that a shared grasp of ‘universals’ *explains* our propensity to agree in our use of attributives.¹⁶

16 Let’s not imagine the meaning as an occult connection the mind makes between a word and a thing, and that this connection *contains* the whole usage of a word as a seed might be said to contain the tree.’ *Blue Book*, penultimate paragraph.

3

Realism, Truth-value Links, Other Minds and the Past

1

Realism about a particular class of statements is, for the purpose of this paper, the view that we so understand those statements as to render intelligible to ourselves the possibility that any of them be true without our being able to recognize that it is so. If the statements in question are not effectively decidable, then, obviously, we commit ourselves to realism in this sense if we hold of each of them that either it, or its negation, is determinately true.¹ So one who endorses the Principle of Bivalence for non-effectively decidable statements of a particular kind commits himself – provided he intends a truth-distributive interpretation of disjunction – to realism about them.

The converse connection is less obvious and has been argued, indeed, by McDowell² to fail. Let a *classical realist* be one who endorses the principle of Bivalence for a particular class of non-effectively decidable statements; and let a *bare realist* be one who takes it that there is no important objection to the idea that we can understand what it is for these statements to be true in a manner transcending our capacities for knowledge. Then – putting considerations to do with vagueness on one side – it may be unclear what *objection* the bare realist might have to classical realism; but McDowell is surely on strong ground in claiming that it is unclear that the bare realist suffers any commitment to classical realism.

1 Later this ceased to seem obvious to me. See section I of Essay 10 and, especially, section I of Essay 11.

2 §6 of ‘Truth-conditions, Bivalence and Verificationism.’

In his published writings,³ Dummett has tended to equate realism with classical realism. But the anti-realist polemic which he has expounded aims in essentials as its bare-realist core. The polemic consists in a twofold challenge: first that the realist should explain how, when our training is necessarily restricted to confrontation with experienceable situations, we are supposed to be able to form a conception of what it is for an experience-transcendent situation to obtain; and, second, that the realist should explain what evidence there is that we actually possess any such conception – what in our use of any particular statement would distinctively manifest that we understood what it was for that statement to be true in a manner transcending our capacities for verification.

The second challenge is, in a clear sense, the more fundamental of the two. For *if* it could be clear that we did indeed possess a realist understanding of certain statements, the question, how that understanding had been acquired, while no doubt of some independent interest, would cease to be of any importance in the – then defunct – issue between realism and its opponents. Moreover *unless* the second challenge can be satisfactorily met, nothing can uncontroversially count as a description of a route whereby a conception of verification-transcendent truth-conditions can be acquired; for we shall lack any criterion for saying that precisely that is what is acquired by that route. Be that as it may, the kind of understanding of statements about, say, the past or other minds with which the bare realist wants to credit himself is very directly susceptible to both challenges.⁴

That the manifestation-challenge is in the way described more fundamental does not mean that the acquisition-challenge may as well be disregarded. For to give an account of how a concept can be acquired, that is, a model explanation of it, is itself a method *par excellence* both of distinctively displaying ones understanding of the concept and of bringing its content into sharp relief. In any case, any philosophical account of our understanding of a concept which contrives to make it mysterious how that concept could be acquired in a, broadly speaking, empirical way is objectionable just on that account – not because some form of empiricism about concept-formation is incontrovertible, but because we have no business legislating against empiricism a priori.⁵

The anti-realist who figures in Dummett's 'The Reality of the Past' is preoccupied with the acquisition-challenge. Dummett writes:

We learn the use of the past tense by learning to recognise certain situations as justifying the assertion of certain statements expressed by means of that tense. These situations of course include those in which we remember the occurrence of some event which we witnessed, and our initial training in the use of the past tense consists in learning to use past-tense statements as the expression of such memories... on this anti-realist account, there is no way by which we could be thought to have passed from a grasp of the kind of situation which justifies the assertion of a statement about the past to a conception of what it would be for such a statement to be true independently of any such situation which would justify its being now, or subsequently, asserted. The only notion of truth for past-tense statements which we could have acquired from our training in their use is that which coincides with the justifiability of assertions of such statements, i.e. with the existence of situations which we are capable of recognising as obtaining and which justify such assertions.⁶

More generally,

What we learn to do is to accept... the occurrence of certain conditions which we have been trained to recognise, as conclusively justifying the assertion of a given statement of the disputed class and... the occurrence of certain other conditions as conclusively justifying its denial. In the very nature of the case, we could not possibly have come to understand what it would be for the statement to be true independently of that which we have learned to treat as establishing its truth; there was simply no means by which we could be shown this.⁷

Dummett proceeds by having his realist about the past attempt to meet this challenge by appeal to the truth-value links among differently tensed assertions made at different times; for example, the principle that an appropriately dated past-tense statement, uttered at the present time, is true if and only if a suitably related present-tense statement, uttered at the appropriate past time, would have been true at that time; it is, his realist claims,

from an understanding of the truth-value link, as exemplified in such a case, that we derive a grasp of what it is for a statement in the past tense, whenever made, for example one made now, to be true.⁸

3 See especially *Truth and Other Enigmas*, Duckworth 1978, essays 1, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 21; *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, Duckworth 1973, passim (see the Brief Subject Index, under 'Verificationism versus realism as theories of meaning?'); and 'What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)'.
4 For a further exposition of the latter, see Essay 1, sections II–IV.
5 Cf. my *Frege's Conception of Numbers as Objects*, chapter 1, section i; and, for an attempt to respond to a specific application of the challenge to a concept other than truth, section vii.

6 Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas*, p. 363.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 362.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 363.

How, more specifically, an appeal to truth-value links is supposed to help the realist meet the acquisition-challenge is not further considered by Dummett. Instead, he switches attention to the question how the anti-realist can make out a title to retain such truth-value links.⁹ But in 'On "The Reality of the Past"', McDowell argues that appeal to the truth-value links is actually quite impotent to meet the acquisition-challenge, and suggests quite another way of meeting it.

It is with these suggestions that the present paper is mainly concerned.

II

It is usually assumed that there will be a wide class of statements for which the anti-realist will find the truth-conditional account of meaning unproblematic – statements for which the notion of truth will not be interpreted in recognition-transcendent terms. (It is worth emphasis that this is an assumption, for it remains to be demonstrated both how best to generalize the notion of effective decidability in mathematics to ordinary statements, and that a truth-conditional account of the meaning of statements in the resulting general class will be acceptably non-transcendent.)¹⁰ Let us characterize as a *truth-value link realist* anyone who holds that bare realism about a particular class of anti-realistically problematic statements can be protected against the acquisition-challenge by systematically linking their truth-values with those of statements in the assumed anti-realistically unproblematic class. Provided, then, that we can take it that the latter class includes a broad range of present-tense statements, truth-value link realism about an appropriately corresponding class of past-tense statements is certainly something which, via the orthodox liaisons between the past and present tenses, a would-be bare realist about the past might essay. The attraction of truth-value link realism is that it really does promise to meet the acquisition-challenge head on. For, by hypothesis, it will build only upon circumstances which can feature as the truth-conditions of statements of an anti-realistically unproblematic kind: circumstances which can be given as embraceable objects of ostension within a trainee's experience; and it will then seek to explain, via certain truth-value links, how a bare-realist conception can be formed, on that basis, of the truth-conditions of certain anti-realistically problematic statements. But to do that is to do precisely what the acquisition-challenge demands should be done: explain how an understanding of certain possibly

verification-transcendent circumstances could be acquired from a training in which contact took place – naturally – only with non-transcendent ones.

Obviously, a similar ploy might be attempted in support of realism about the remote future – the future, that is, remote enough to transcend the capacities of verification of anyone now living. And, as McDowell observes,¹¹ a kind of truth-value link realism is implicit in that lay-philosophical conception of the content of ascriptions of sensation to others which Wittgenstein challenged in the *Philosophical Investigations*. The relevant link would be that an ascription of, for example, pain to someone else is true just in case a *self-ascription* of pain by him would be true; where it is taken that the content of a self-ascription of pain can be given unproblematically in terms of truth-conditions, since circumstances of the appropriate kind can indeed have been wholly embraced within the language-learner's consciousness – namely, on occasions when the self in question was himself. The described truth-value link thus enables the language learner to form a conception of another's pain – that which makes 'Y is in pain', said of another, true – which both makes it an instance of the very same kind of thing as that which he experienced in the course of his training, and makes it lie beyond Y's detectable behaviour. A kind of inchoate truth-value link realism is thus the kernel of the idea, which comes so easily to us, that each of us understands what pain is from his own case.

The foregoing characterization of truth-value link realism is non-specific in what may seem an important respect. Consider any universally quantified statement, $(x)Fx$, whose range is an effectively enumerable infinite series and whose predicate is effectively decidable of each element in that series. Traditional mathematical platonism would regard it as a perfectly satisfactory explanation of the truth-conditions of such a statement to stipulate that it is true if and only if each member of the infinite series of statements is true, whose n th member is to the effect that F is truly predicable of the n th element of a particular effective enumeration of the range of the quantifier. Now, this sort of stipulation certainly systematically links the truth-values of statements in an anti-realistically problematic class with those of statements of which, since effectively decidable, we can for present purposes take it that a truth-conditional account will be anti-realistically acceptable. So, in terms of our characterization anyway, a sort of truth-value link realism is possible with respect to this particular kind of infinitely quantified statement. The crucial respect in which it would differ, however, from the kind of move adumbrated in the cases of the past tense and ascriptions of sensations to others is just this: in those two cases, the truth-conditions were actually specified as being those of

⁹ See also my *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics*, chapter X and Essay 5 below.

¹⁰ A suggestion about the first question is made below. For some consideration of the second, see the concluding section of Essay 7.

¹¹ 'On "The Reality of the Past"', §§ 2 and 3.

particular statements which, when made in certain circumstances, would possess truth-conditions with which a trainee could uncontroversially be presumed – or so let us suppose – to be familiar. The truth-conditions of past-tense utterances were specified as being those of certain (possible) present-tense utterances; and the truth-conditions of other-ascriptions of pain were specified as being those of certain self-ascriptions. No such connection is effected by the proposed stipulation about infinite quantification; here, there is no utterance-type in whose use the trainee can be presumed familiar and whose truth-conditions, when uttered in a particular context, coincide with those of the kind of statement being explained. To be sure, we can presume the trainee to be familiar with the use of each of, 'Fa', 'Fb',...etc., where 'a', 'b',...etc., designate objects in the range of the quantifier. But to claim that the truth-conditions of the quantified statement are that *each* of these statements should be true is simply to explain the truth-conditions of one infinitely quantified statement in terms of another; no direct link is effected with a type of state of affairs with which the trainee can be presumed to be acquainted.

Truth-value link realism about infinite quantification would thus seem to be a more fragile affair than in the case of the past or other minds. It might be preferable, indeed, so to refine our characterization of truth-value link realism as to exclude the kind of move considered in the case of infinite quantification; for it seems clear that there the acquisition-challenge can be met, if at all, only by some quite different tactic. Certainly, there is some prospect at this point that realism about, say, number-theory, and the natural sciences, might be unjustifiable while realism about other minds, and the past and the future, might not. It depends on whether McDowell is right in thinking that truth-value link manoeuvres are unsuccessful against the acquisition-challenge in the latter cases also.

III

Why does McDowell believe that those manoeuvres are unsuccessful? He writes:

According to a truth-value link realist, the state of affairs which consists in another person's being in pain is never itself accessible to consciousness. An anti-realist finds it unintelligible that a conception of such a state of affairs should be involved in linguistic competence. The realist's purported answer is, in effect, this: 'You can see how a person can have the idea of what it is for someone to be in pain – when the someone in question is himself. Well, a sentence like "He is in pain", uttered in a context which fixes a reference for the pronoun, is understood as saying of some

appropriate other person that he is in that very same state.' But this, so far from solving the problem, simply ignores it. If someone cannot see how another person's being in pain – on an interpretation of the circumstance which makes it inaccessible – can possibly enter into the meaning one attaches to some form of words, one does not allay his worry by baldly re-asserting that it does.

Similarly with the past...An anti-realist finds it unintelligible that a conception of the truth-conditions of a past-tensed utterance, thought of as something whose obtaining is, in itself, inaccessible, should be involved in linguistic competence. The realist's purported reply is on these lines: 'You can see how someone can know what it is for rain to be falling. Well, a sentence like "It was raining" is understood as saying that that very circumstance obtained at some past time.' Again, this does not meet the worry but simply restates the claim which gave rise to it. The problem was precisely an inability to see how the past obtaining of that circumstance – an instance of a kind of circumstance which the realism we are considering makes inaccessible – can possibly enter into any meaning one could succeed in attaching to a sentence.¹²

The point is: how exactly is the 'projection' via the truth-value links supposed to work? We have, for example, crudely,

'It was raining' is true iff 'It is raining' was true;

and,

'He is in pain', said by me, is true iff 'I am in pain', said by him, is true.

In both cases the quoted sentence on the right-hand side of the biconditional is, to be sure, one with whose truth-conditions, when it is uttered in a certain sort of context, an anti-realist may – or so we are supposing – assume a trainee to be familiar. But the contexts in question are precisely when 'It is raining' is – *at the present time* – true, and when 'I am in pain' is true of *the trainee*. The important projection is not that from right to left across the truth-value links; it is that involved in securing *ingress*, as it were, into the right-hand sides. The problem, after all, was to explain how it was that a trainee, familiar with what it is for it to be raining at the present time, could arrive at a conception of what it is for that very same sort of circumstance to have obtained, in a manner possibly transcending our present capacities of awareness, at a particular past time. In supposing that the biconditional in question can be of any use to him, the problem is tacitly assumed to have been solved. Likewise, by supposing

¹² McDowell, 'On "The Reality of the Past"', pp. 132–3.

that the truth-conditions of 'I am in pain', said by *him*, are familiar to *me* – the trainee, it is assumed that I have already passed beyond the conception of my own, invariably detectable, pains to an understanding of what it is for someone else to suffer, albeit possibly undetectably, in the same way. It appears, then, that, notwithstanding their difference from the truth-value link manoeuvre with the type of infinite quantification described above, these two ploys proffer against the acquisition-challenge a response not one whit stronger.

This way of formulating McDowell's criticism, however, omits stress of one element in his own exposition quoted: the idea, namely, that truth-value link realism will treat the states of affairs constituting the truth of past-tense statements, or of other-ascriptions of sensation, as circumstances which not merely may be, but are *always* and *essentially* inaccessible to us. McDowell's thought here is that if circumstances which made ascription of a particular sensation to another true could ever *directly* impinge on a trainee's consciousness, there would simply be no need for an attempted projection from what it was like for him to have that sensation himself. Similarly, if it were ever possible directly to verify that a particular past-tense statement was true, there would be no need to suppose that a conception of what it was for such a statement to be true had to be acquired from the putatively unproblematic case of the present. For McDowell, then, the very idea that an appeal to the relevant truth-value links might be of help commits the realist to a conception of the past, or of other minds, as domains of in principle inaccessible truth of which we can only experience the present, or outward, symptoms.

For an anti-realist, in contrast, any respectably explained truth-condition for a statement will be such that if it obtains, it will always, at least in principle,¹³ be possible for us to recognize that it does so. That is less than saying that truth has to be *effectively* recognizable truth: ingenuity, or just good luck, can play a part in our being in a position to recognize as such a state of affairs which makes a particular statement true. What, for the anti-realist, is of dubious intelligibility is the idea that a statement can be made true by the obtaining of a state of affairs which, however lucky or ingenious, we should be unable to apprehend as having that status. For, because of the familiar points about manifestation and acquisition, there is no way in which we could have succeeded in attaching such a content to the statement.

The leading idea of McDowell's paper is to attempt to occupy what now emerges as potential middle ground. For, as McDowell believes, there is possible, at any rate in the case of other minds and the past, an intermediate kind of realism – what I shall call *M-realism* – differing from

truth-value link realism in holding that satisfaction of the truth-conditions of past-tense statements, and statements about other minds, is, at least on occasion, accessible to us; and from anti-realism in being at least bare-realistic – that is, in holding us to understand the possibility that statements of the two relevant sorts can also, on occasion, be true in virtue of states of affairs which we cannot detect. According to McDowell, whatever impulsion there may seem to be in the direction of anti-realism comes only from the manifest inadequacy of truth-value link realism; in fact, however, both the manifestation- and the acquisition-challenge can be met from an M-realist standpoint.

Clearly, this would be a very substantial result. We must investigate, therefore, the powers and possible scope of M-realism. Will it, where available, be less revisionary of ordinary linguistic practice than, under natural assumptions,¹⁴ anti-realism threatens to be? Is it genuinely available in the case of other minds and the past? Is its claim to be able to meet the anti-realist challenges really any stronger than that of truth-value link realism?

IV

Truth-value link realism suffers, as it seems to me, three injustices at McDowell's hands. To begin with, a truth-value link realist who did indeed accept, as McDowell believes he ought, that the truth-conditions of ascriptions of sensations to others were always constituted by the obtaining of inaccessible facts, would not thereby have committed himself to wanting to avoid mentioning, in his description of competence with the problematic sorts of sentence, circumstances which, when they manifest themselves to awareness, warrant assertions of the sentences.¹⁵

That is to say, there would be no clear commitment to the view that the accessible assertibility-conditions of a statement whose truth-conditions were always inaccessible would always be of merely symptomatic relevance to it, playing no part in determining its content. It wants an argument, and McDowell gives none, why the realist should not hold that our understanding of the relevant kind of statement involves *both* grasping what it is for their inaccessible conditions of truth to obtain *and* sensitivity to conditions, falling short of verification, which *criterially* justify the assertion of such statements; that is, ignorance of the relevance of which would be a matter of imperfect comprehension, rather than of factual

¹⁴ See the concluding section of Essay 1 and footnote 18 on p. 69.

¹⁵ McDowell, 'On "The Reality of the Past"', p. 135.

innocence. So far as I can see, there is no immediate reason why the idea that our conception of someone else's pain as of something essentially inaccessible to us, which we can grasp only by projection from our own case, should preclude that the relation between another's behaviour and his pain should on occasion be criterial rather than symptomatic. Indeed such would be the obvious strategy of defence for the truth-value link realist against the scepticism which, as McDowell suggests,¹⁶ his view may otherwise so easily fall prey to. It may be that such a strategy would involve a kind of incoherent over-determination of content; but the matter needs much fuller exploration.¹⁷

It is quite unfair, secondly, to lumber the truth-value link realist with the 'grotesque piece of philosophical mythology' which McDowell stigmatizes in the final section of his paper:

The truth-value link realist's view of what it is, say, for something to have occurred is unintelligible. He conceals that from himself with a confused thought of a being with knowledge-acquiring powers different from ours. Thus the realist's view of the reality of the past can be described, with only the mildest caricature, as the idea of another place, in which past events are still occurring, watched, perhaps, by God.¹⁸

But to hold that our conception of the truth-conditions of past-tense assertions is achieved in the way supposed by the truth-value link realist is surely absolutely independent of the fantasy of the accessibility of such conditions at all times to some sort of superior cognitive faculty, with the associated image of the past as another 'place'. Truth-value link realism may, somehow, tempt an adherent to such a fantasy; but it ought not to do so. For if we could indeed form a conception of facts transcendent of our cognitive powers by appealing to truth-value links, then that would precisely be a way of forming such a conception *without* appeal to the idea of the cognitive powers of a superior being. Indeed whatever advantages M-realism might prove to have over truth-value link realism, that such fantasies are any less tempting is not among them. Rather, the temptation is there as soon as, in the role of M-realists, we ask ourselves the question: what is it for the *possibility* which we admit – that the truth-conditions of a past-tense statement should obtain undetectably – to be actualized? Is it not natural, here, to invoke the idea of a being for whom whatever strands between us and detection of the actualized truth-conditions is no barrier – so that for the truth-conditions to be actualized is for Him to know what they are? As natural as ever.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132, footnote 10.

¹⁷ For a change of heart on this, see Essay 8, section 2, especially pp. 277–8.

¹⁸ On "The Reality of the Past", pp. 143–4.

The third injustice, however, is the most important. McDowell argued that there would be no point in a realist about the past, or about other minds, invoking truth-value links unless he thought that circumstances constituting the truth-conditions of past-tense assertions, or, say, ascriptions of sensation, were always strictly inaccessible to us. But *if* it is true that we really can, on occasion, non-inferentially see that so-and-so occurred, or that someone else is having such-and-such a sensation, there is surely absolutely no reason why a truth-value link realist should be embarrassed to acknowledge the fact. On the contrary; for even if such verifications are on occasion possible, the trainee, if he is to arrive at a *realist* understanding of the relevant sorts of statement, is still going to have to make a 'projection': he is going to have to advance from an understanding of what it is like to observe that such verifying conditions obtain to the formation of a conception of how the very same conditions which one then verifies to obtain can also obtain undetectably. Would not this be, for someone who believed in the efficacy of the truth-value link against the acquisition-challenge, precisely the place to invoke it? If we suppose that observation of certain sorts of behaviour, and perhaps overt physical condition – a grotesquely mutilated arm, say – is observation that another is in pain, is there not then a striking lacuna between coming to grasp that ascriptions of pain are true when such circumstances obtain and coming to grasp that stoicism is a possibility – that, indeed, in special circumstances a man's pain may go unreflected in anything he does or the overt state of his body? And is it not as plausible (or implausible) as before to say that we understand this possibility precisely because we know from our own case what it would be like to try to bottle a pain up, and, perhaps, to succeed?

It is thus incorrect, or so it seems to me, to hold that the belief that appeal to truth-value links might help meet the acquisition-challenge, either in the case of the past-tense or other-ascriptions of sensation, presupposes the view that the truth-conditions of both kinds of statement are *always* verification-transcendent. What it presupposes is only that there is no essential connection between the realization of those conditions and our ability to recognize the fact – exactly the characteristic belief of bare realism. If this is right, then the relation between realism and the truth-value links is closer than McDowell would have us suppose. And the mistake is important because, as I shall argue later, it leads him to credit M-realism with illusory advantages over truth-value link realism.

V

According to M-realism about other-ascriptions of sensation,

...what warrants the assertion that another person is in pain, on one of the relevant occasions, is the detectable obtaining of the circumstance of

that person's being in pain: an instance of a kind of circumstance – another person's being in pain – which is available to awareness, in its own right and not merely through behavioural proxies, on some occasions, including this one, although, on other occasions the obtaining of other instances can be quite beyond detection.¹⁹

And, for an M-realist about the past,

...what warrants the assertion, on one of the relevant occasions, that, say, some event of a specified kind occurred in the past is the obtaining of a circumstance which consists simply in such an event's having occurred: an instance of a kind of circumstance which is available to awareness, in its own right and not merely through traces going proxy for it, on some occasions, including this one, although, on other occasions the obtaining of other instances can be quite outside our reach.²⁰

The essential M-realist supposition is that if, and only if, a certain sort of non-effectively decidable truth condition can on occasion be realized detectably, we can form a genuinely bare-realistic conception of what it is for that condition to be satisfied. The 'only if' part is by way of concession to what the M-realist sees as the justice in the acquisition-challenge; and the 'if' part will exercise us in section VI below.

M-realism is a possibility, then, whenever we are concerned with a class of non-effectively decidable statements for which, however, conclusive verification cannot be ruled out. Mathematical proof, one would ordinarily suppose, is conclusive enough verification by any standards. So, unlike truth-value link realism, M-realism may be an option with respect to a large class of mathematical statements. Even granting the soundness of M-realism, however, that thought should be of only dubious comfort to the classical mathematician – unless McDowell is wrong in the belief that bare realism involves no commitment to classical realism. Otherwise, there is no very clear reason why M-realist number-theory, for example, should interestingly differ from, say, intuitionist number-theory. More generally, indeed, in any language containing the means of expression of no modal notions but otherwise as rich as you like, it is unclear whether M-realism as such would commit one to the legitimacy of any moves about which a generalized intuitionistic anti-realism would have cause to complain. And where no defensible notion of conclusive verification is available, as for example, presumably, with the general hypotheses of scientific theory, the M-realist's desire to respect that he sees as just in the acquisition-challenge will lead him to anti-realism; that is, he will reject as unintelligible the

idea that truth-conditions for such statements can be realized in a manner transcending our capacities of awareness.

Obviously it becomes crucial at this point to determine just how wide the class of statements is whose truth can, under favourable circumstances, be wholly embraced by the human mind – whose conclusive verification is not ruled out. McDowell gives the matter little explicit attention. He talks, as we have seen of circumstances 'being available to awareness in their own right' and not merely through 'proxies'. Elsewhere his M-realist recommends the view that

...on those occasions which are paradigmatically suitable for training in the assertoric use of the relevant part of the language, one can literally perceive, in another person's facial expression or his behaviour, that he is in pain, and not just infer that he is in pain from what one perceives.

The analogue, in the case of the past, would be insistence that knowledge of the past occurrence of an event of a specified kind (say) is something non-inferential.²¹

Well, that no inference, via 'proxies' or whatever, should be involved is quite consistent with what is actually perceived being not that someone is in pain, *tout court*, but that criteria – in what I take to be the *Philosophical Investigations* sense – that he is in pain are satisfied. Criteria are not proxies, and they do not form the bases of inferences, correctly so described. But, in contrast with truth-conditions, a claim made on the basis of satisfaction of its criteria can subsequently be jettisoned consistently with retention of the belief that criteria were indeed satisfied.²² So the M-realist about a particular kind of statement has to hold not just that inference via proxies is not invariably involved when the assertoric use of those statements is justified, but more: that the occasions which are 'paradigmatically suitable' for training in their assertoric use involve not just satisfaction of criteria – otherwise experience of them will be experience of a situation whose obtaining is consistent with the falsity of the relevant statements – but realization of truth-conditions, properly so regarded.²³ That might make it look as though the proper course for the M-realist would be to argue that circumstances can so arrange themselves as to endow a witness with an *undefeasible* warrant to make a particular claim about the past, or about someone else's mental state. But care is needed in formulation here. For it is doubtful whether undefeasible certainty can ever be legitimate about any contingent statement; one can always turn

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² This aspect of the notion of a criterion, or at least its importance here, may have escaped McDowell. See *ibid.*, footnote 17.

²³ I believe that the 'thin' notion of criterion surviving at the end of the discussion in Essay 8 will subserve the point of this paragraph.

¹⁹ McDowell, 'On "The Reality of the Past"', pp. 135–6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

out to be the victim of a misjudgement or misperception (or at least of a misunderstanding), even in the case of reports about one's immediate physical environment (or one's own mental states). Without arguing the matter in detail, it seems to me likely that we must either jettison altogether the notion that truth-conditions can obtain detectably or give an account of what it is for them to do so which does not require that to have experienced the obtaining of such a condition is to be entitled to have an indefeasible certainty about the truth of the corresponding statement.

How might such an account go? Well, some statements, including all (effectively) decidable mathematical statements, have the characteristic that they are associated with a possible course of action which it is within the power of finite beings to implement and which is such that, if an agent carries it through correctly and with full attention, then, provided he makes no perceptual error and correctly understands the statement in question, the opinion which he forms concerning the truth-value of that statement is bound to be correct. '23 is a prime' has this property; and so, in appropriate contexts, do 'The cat is on the mat in the sitting-room' and 'The curtains are blue'. It seems to me that this is a reasonable generalization of the notion of decidability in mathematics; that, for a statement to be decidable true or false is for there actually to be a procedure meeting the conditions described, (and for us to have recognized that we are in a position *effectively* to decide a particular statement is for us to have recognized, in advance of knowing what its truth-value is, that we actually possess such a procedure in its case). In the case of the latter two examples cited, for instance, and indeed the whole class of statements concerning present goings-on in bounded, smallish, nearby regions of space which they represent, the appropriate procedure is: position yourself suitably and observe. The certainty which we can, in general, secure about decidable statements falls short of indefeasibility not because we cannot fully embrace in consciousness the appropriate truth- or falsity-conferring circumstances – for carrying out the appropriate procedure in a way which meets the described conditions is doing just that – but because we cannot, in general, secure an indefeasible certainty that the procedure in question has been so implemented: that we have been sufficiently attentive, have made no perceptual or procedural error, and correctly understand the statement at issue.²⁴

We can say, then, that for the truth-conditions of a statement to obtain detectably is for that statement to be associated with a procedure meeting the described conditions, and for it to be the case that the bound-to-be-correct opinion which an agent will form when all the constraints are met will be that the statement in question is true. A clear example of a class of

²⁴ Essay 4, section 3, attempts to improve and enlarge on this proposal.

statements with, by this test, no detectable truth-conditions would be – as one would hope – the class of unrestrictedly generally quantified contingent statements. For no matter what investigative procedure we carry out into the truth or falsity of such a statement, it is consistent with our doing so correctly, and with full attention, and with our making no perceptual error and perfectly understanding the statement at issue, that we form an incorrect opinion about its truth-value – that, say, a falsifying instance is just around the corner, outside the purview of that particular procedure.

It seems to me, however, that statements about other minds and about the past also lie on this side of the distinction, the wrong side from the point of view of McDowell's M-realism. Consider the case of any particular ascription of pain to another. If the M-realist is right, then the truth-conditions of the claim that another is in pain can obtain detectably, can reside in aspects of his behaviour and overt physical condition. But surely it is part of our concept of another person's pain that, for any particular finite period of time at least, he can, say, behave as if he was in pain in a *completely convincing way* – he may even seem to have suffered extensive physical damage – without actually feeling any pain. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, for the case of suppression of a pain which is felt. And if this is right, then it follows that so long as our 'procedure' is confined to observation of someone's behaviour and the apparent surface of his body, then, no matter how attentive we are, and even allowing that we make no perceptual error and grasp perfectly what is at issue, we can still form an incorrect opinion about whether or not the subject is in pain. (Just this is the substance in 'grammar', if you like, of the dualist's idea that another's sensations are inaccessible to us.)

The same, I suggest, holds good of statements about the past; though, again, I have no argument for the point save to appeal to our intuitive preconceptions. The question is: can any plausible account be produced of the *province* – corresponding to behaviour and overt physical condition in the M-realist's account of others' pains – on which one who wished, supposing such a thing were ever possible, directly to verify a statement about the past would have to concentrate? Clearly it will not do merely to invite him to 'observe the past'. What is the species of presently accessible states of affairs such that an agent who in a sufficiently attentive, comprehending, and perceptual-error free way observes enough such states of affairs cannot arrive at a mistaken view about a putative state of affairs which antedated them all? McDowell does not tell us; the play with traces in the nervous system made in section 6 of his paper²⁵ serves only to make a plausible case for supposing that our propensity to assert past-tense statements cannot everywhere be seen as a propensity to make certain

²⁵ McDowell, 'On "The Reality of the Past"', pp. 136–8.

sorts of inference. But that does not meet the issue; it merely serves to satisfy one necessary condition for meeting it. Examples in some detail are what is wanted here; we need to be told how, subject to all the relevant conditions, we can actually directly observe that it rained yesterday, for instance; failing such detail, that an M-realist view of the past might be feasible looks to be merely one more philosophical thesis whose falsity it might be illuminating fully to comprehend.

VI

Let us turn finally to consideration of the M-realist's response to the twin challenges of the anti-realist.

McDowell sees no difficulty with the manifestation-challenge:

Certainly it seems reasonable to insist that a practical capacity, such as competence with a language, should be observable in its operations. But our realist

– the M-realist –

can claim that linguistic competence, as he describes it, is indeed observable in linguistic behaviour. Competence with sentences of one of the problematic sorts involves a conception of the sort of circumstance that constitutes their truth-conditions: possession of the conception sometimes manifests itself in linguistic behaviour which – on our realist's view – can be observed as a response to the detectable obtaining of a truth-condition.

A theory of meaning in the style of our realist ascribes to a competent speaker (among other things) dispositions to respond to the obtaining of truth-conditions – circumstances of sorts which need not be detectable – when they *are* detectable. Of course nothing could be observed to be a response to the undetectable obtaining of a truth-condition; but that was not the kind of response which a realistic theory credited the speaker with the ability to make.²⁶

On the face of it, this line of thought simply misses the point of the manifestation-challenge. What, an anti-realist who is inclined to press that challenge will want to know, in the responses of speakers to the detectable obtaining of conditions warrants the attribution to them of a conception that the *very same* conditions can obtain undetectably? What could distinguish the performance of someone who had grasped that possibility from that of someone who had not but who was prepared to count the statements in question as verified in the appropriate detectable circumstances? There is no need for the anti-realist to dispute that if the

circumstances of a particular class of statements were met for a species of M-realism, then it would be proper to attribute to speakers of the language grasp of truth-conditions for them. The question is: what would warrant the step of attributing to speakers such a conception of those truth-conditions as to allow that they could obtain undetectably?

But McDowell does not believe that he is missing the point:

It is crucial to this realist rejection of the anti-realist argument that the conception which the realist claims the right to ascribe is a conception of a *kind* of circumstance. He claims the right to ascribe it on the basis of behaviour construable as a response to *some* instances of the kind, in spite of the admitted fact that *other* instances, on his view, are incapable of eliciting any response from the possessor of the conception.²⁷

There is a sound point here. Whatever style of theory of meaning is favoured, it will not be reasonable to demand that *every* aspect of the competence with which it will credit a speaker of its object-language should be capable of being manifested in his behaviour. Sometimes it will be reasonable to credit a speaker with understanding of a particular sentence not because he has yet directly manifested competence with that sentence but because in other sentential constructions he has manifested competence with the semantic atoms which feature in it, and with the general mode of construction which it exemplifies. In such a case, as it happens, the actual conditions by reference to which we could test his putative competence directly – from a realist point of view, the truth-conditions of the sentence; from an anti-realist point of view, conditions, perhaps, of some other kind – may simply not be realized. And in that case, the demand that he manifest his understanding is unreasonable; at least, it is either unreasonable or it has been met by what he has done already with other sentences.²⁸

This is obviously correct as far as it goes, but the manifestation-challenge is still being evaded rather than answered. Suppose that McDowell were right about the occasional direct observability that another is in pain; and consider a trainee, X, well-versed in the attribution of pain to other people in the relevant kind of circumstance. Now suppose that Y, who is known to X, is never actually going to suffer any pain in X's presence. Then X is never going to have the opportunity directly to manifest his understanding of the statement that Y is in pain. In spite of that, everyone can agree, to be sure, that it can be reasonable to attribute to him an understanding of that statement; in general, a man may possess a grasp of the truth-conditions of a particular statement although circumstances

²⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

²⁸ Or so I take to be the point of 'On "The Reality of the Past"', section 7.

contrive to prevent his being able to display that grasp in the most direct way – by sensitivity to the truth-conditions' realization. Now, that sounds close enough to what McDowell has in his mind to make it intelligible, perhaps, why he should have thought that the manifestation-challenge could be met along these lines; the idea is that to grasp possibly verification-transcendent truth-conditions is in essential respects comparable to any recognitional skill which there may be no chance to exercise. But this is surely a muddle. The understanding of what it is for Y to be in pain which, in the circumstances described, we have reason to attribute to X need be no more than a disposition to respond appropriately to Y's observably being in pain if such a situation were ever to arise – which, by hypothesis, it won't – within X's view. That type of attribution of, as it happens, non-directly manifestable understanding – an unexercised and, as it happens, never-to-be exercised propensity – is justified because the ability with which the speaker is credited is of a type which he has manifested elsewhere. But knowing what it is for a truth-condition to obtain *undetectably* is *not* knowledge which can straightforwardly be viewed as of a type with certain clear-cut recognitional skills. The M-realist wants to make two quite different attributions to X: he wants to credit him with recognitional abilities which, as it happens, he may not get the chance to display; and he wants to credit him with an understanding of what it is for certain truth-conditions to obtain undetectably. McDowell's answer to the manifestation-challenge is to claim, in effect, that these two attributions are exactly on a par. But the fact is that they are not. Grasping M-realist truth-conditions for a particular statement involves *both* possession of a recognitional skill, whose exercise may be pre-empted either by falsity or by undetectable truth, *and* an understanding of what it is for the statement to be undetectably true. No reason is so far apparent why the behaviour which McDowell's theorist discerns among object-language speakers entitles him to do any more than attribute the first; whereas the manifestation-challenge asks for an account of what would justify attribution of the second.

What of the acquisition-challenge? Someone who holds, as McDowell believes the truth-value realist ought to hold, that another's pain is always essentially inaccessible to us obviously runs up against this wing of the anti-realist's attack as soon as he tries to explain how training in the behavioural conditions under which other-ascriptions of pain are warranted can induce an understanding of the real content of those ascriptions. All that can thereby be imparted, it seems, is something less than what needs to be grasped – the language learner has somehow to extract more from the training which he receives than is actually there explicitly in it. It is as if he was told: 'All these states are indeed evidence for the truth of what you say when you assert that another is in pain;

but *what* you are saying when you say that is something which you have to divine for yourself.' Now, if as McDowell convincingly argues, supplementation of that sort of training with an understanding of self-ascriptions of pain, when the self in question is oneself, and drill in the truth-value links, is still no help, how exactly is M-realism supposed to be any better off? Well, because now, McDowell writes,

...formation of the required conception needs no leap beyond the bounds of awareness: it can be drawn from actual confrontation with instances of the sort of circumstances involved.²⁹

But, the anti-realist will, as we know, complain, there is still a blatant leap! It is precisely from grasp of certain verification-conditions for the statement in question to the conception that the very same sort of circumstance which a verification discerns, when it is open to view, can obtain undetectably. The anti-realist will want to take the M-realist to task here in exactly the way in which McDowell took the truth-value link realist to task in the passage which I quoted at the start of section 3. He will say, for example,

The M-realist is saying, in effect, 'You can see how a person can have the idea of what it is for someone else to be in pain – when the pain is conclusively manifested in his behaviour. Well, a sentence like "He is in pain", uttered in a context which fixes a reference for the pronoun, is just to be understood always as saying of the appropriate person that he is in that very same state, whether or not there is any behavioural manifestation of it.' But so far from solving the problem, this simply ignores it. If someone cannot see how another person's being in pain – on an interpretation of that circumstance which allows it to hide from our view – can possibly enter into the meaning which we attach to the appropriate statement, if he cannot see, that is to say, how the putative M-realist truth-conditions can intelligently be received by a trainee as anything other than a certain sort of verification-conditions, one does not allay his worry by baldly insisting that they can.

Remember, there is to be no attempt, however confused it might be to try, to protect the required conception from one's own case. The M-realist is holding that we can form a realist conception of what it is for it to be true that someone else is in pain simply on the basis of confrontation with the alleged class of cases in which that subjects are in pain is observationally verifiable. But surely it is mysterious how the trick is to be pulled. Put yourself in the position of the trainee: you confront a series of cases in which there is a distinctive common pattern of behaviour, – facial expressions, grunts, groans, shrieks and so on; and in each of these cases

²⁹ McDowell, 'On "The Reality of the Past"', p. 140.

it is true, or so you are told, that the subject is ϕ . But now you are told of people whose behaviour is totally different than, the difference notwithstanding, they too may be ϕ . Wouldn't there be a temptation to think that you had misunderstood the original examples, that the distinctive behaviour had nothing to do with being ϕ ? And if you were reassured about that, would you not then be constrained to think that the concept of being ϕ had a breadth to it which the original examples had simply not made clear and about which you needed some further clarification? McDowell recognizes that there may be an inclination to press the acquisition-challenge in this way. But:

There is no real difficulty here. Acquisition of one of the problematic conceptions is acquisition of competence with the relevant part of language. Exercising the conception, then, is nothing but exercising the relevant linguistic competence, in speech of one's own or in understanding the speech of others. Puzzlement over how the relevant sort of circumstances can figure in a person's thoughts, if not by way of imagery, is misplaced. The possibility of its figuring in his thoughts is secured, without any need for speculation about a vehicle, by the possibility of its figuring in his speech. A competent speaker has words to express, if need be, what state of affairs it is about whose perhaps undetectable obtaining he is capable of, for instance, self-consciously speculating or understanding a fellow-speaker of his language to be speculating.³⁰

What this manoeuvre comes to is a tacit appeal to the priority of the manifestation-challenge. McDowell is saying, in effect, 'Never mind how such an allegedly problematic conception is acquired. The fact is that it is presumably acquired somehow because it is manifest in exercise of the relevant aspects of linguistic competence.' But by which aspects, exactly – in, say, the case of pain? Not, at any rate, by simply recognizing the correctness, or incorrectness, of particular ascriptions of pain. But do we not, for example, perfectly well understand the *speculation* that somebody who is smiling and joking at a party is actually concealing a splitting headache? 'Jones, for all that he gives no sign of it, may be in great pain.' Clearly, something has gone wrong here: for if this response to the manifestation-challenge were feasible, a classical realist about mathematics, for example, could meet that challenge simply by calling attention to the currency of classical logic. He could claim that we manifest our understanding of the possession of possibly proof-transcendent truth-conditions by Fermat's Last Theorem simply in regarding the law of Excluded Middle as validly applicable to it.

The most immediate reason why this response will not do is because

Excluded Middle, and the sort of example which the statement about Jones illustrates, are statements the correctness of our assent to which the anti-realist will want to review. Of course, there are ways of expressing realist convictions – or if not, that is a decisive objection to realism. But if we are realists and sincerely offer such expressions of our conviction, we can scarcely expect the mere fact that we can do so, intelligibly and correctly as it seems to us, to carry the day. For the fact is that it is possible to hold a mistaken philosophical theory about the character of our understanding of a particular class of statements, and for that theory to insinuate itself into our linguistic practices, motivating speculations and claims which we might otherwise not be prepared to make.

Against this, the realist can be expected to protest that he is scarcely likely to be able to meet the manifestation-challenge if, every time he calls attention to promising-looking aspects of our talk, the anti-realist reserves the right to place the legitimacy/intelligibility of those aspects under suspicion! But the point is that the failure of the realist to meet the acquisition-challenge squarely *does* place such aspects under prima facie justified suspicion. Perhaps to move straight to the standpoint of revisionism, like the mathematical intuitionists, is precipitate; but the anti-realist is at least entitled to know what makes the realist sure that (bare) realist conceptions receive expression in those controversial aspects of our linguistic practice. Why, for example, does the remark about Jones have to be interpreted as expressive of a bare realist conception of Jones' pain, rather than as merely one ordinary way of giving expression to the essential defeasibility of statements about others' mental states advanced on the basis of behavioural criteria? So interpreted, the truth expressed by that sentence would be – to repeat – an encapsulation of an aspect of the 'grammar' of our language of mind. Awareness-transcendence would have nothing to do with it.

It is similar with Excluded Middle. One explanation of the classical mathematician's acceptance of that principle might be that he grasped proof-transcendent truth-conditions for the statements in his field. But it might be, too, that Excluded Middle was a mere convention, motivated by certain arrogated analogies between the finite and infinite; or that disjunction possessed a complexity unsuspected in either classical or intuitionistic semantics; or even that Excluded Middle was accepted wholly unthinkingly. All of these would be possibilities which a Martian visitor, attempting radically to interpret our linguistic practice, would have to consider. And the manifestation-challenge will be met only when one of the two things is achieved: *either* we must call attention to features of our practice which would provide the Martian with a sound motive for preferring to attribute to us at least a bare realist understanding of statements of the relevant sorts, rather than advance any of the alternative accounts; *or* we must divine, a priori, pure philosophical considerations

30 'On "The Reality of the Past"', p. 141.

which constrain the former interpretation of behaviour which, of itself, fits the alternative accounts. My hunch is that victory for realism, if and when it comes, will be achieved by the second route. But we are presently a long way from the necessary insights.

This paper has been largely critical. Let me say in conclusion that anyone who, like myself, believes that there is no more fundamental philosophical task confronting us at the present time than to see our way clear to disposing of, or sustaining, the anti-realist challenge in different areas of discourse, ought to be grateful to McDowell for something that is still unusual: a sensitive and resourceful attempt by a philosopher of broad realist conviction to meet the anti-realist's arguments *en face*.

Strict Finitism

I

This paper is primarily concerned with the Modus Tollens inference adverted to by Dummett in 'Wang's Paradox', namely: arguments essentially analogous to those which the mathematical intuitionists, at least when their case is presented in the way which Dummett has recommended,¹ use to support their revisions of classical logic and mathematics lead to a yet more radical *strict finitist*² outlook; this outlook, however, is incapable of issuing in a coherent philosophy of mathematics; therefore there must be something amiss with the arguments which lead to it, and, by analogy, with the original intuitionistic arguments also.³

As is familiar, Dummett's presentation of the case for intuitionism is based on very general considerations to do with meaning and understanding applying not just in mathematics but to statements of all kinds. I shall assume that the reader is *au courant* with this way of presenting the intuitionistic case, and I shall not here attempt to expound

1 See especially *Truth and Other Enigmas*, Essays 1, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 21; *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, *passim* (see the Brief Subject Index, under 'Verification versus realism as theories of meaning'); also 'What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)', and Concluding Philosophical Remarks, in *Elements of Intuitionism*.

2 The term was introduced by Kreisel in 'Wittgenstein's Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics' to denote what he took to be an aspect of Wittgenstein's later philosophy of mathematics; and taken over by Kielkopf (*Strict Finitism*) – misunderstanding, as it seems to me, both Kreisel and Wittgenstein – as a label for Wittgenstein's later philosophy of mathematics in its entirety. It is not a happy label for the ideas I am concerned with, since it is only from non-strict finitist points of view that the strict finitist can be straightforwardly seen as stressing the finitude of human capacities, countenancing only finite sets, etc. (See subsections 5 and 6 below). But we need a label; and Dummett in 'Wang's Paradox' has already followed Kreisel's lead. Anyway, a rose by any other name...

3 Dummett, 'Wang's Paradox', in *Truth and Other Enigmas*, p. 302.