

The Tenability of Meaning Irrealism

Finn Butler

39,993 words

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

April 2019

For Igor and Eko

ABSTRACT

The Kripke-Wittgenstein (KW) sceptical argument, presented in Chapter 2 of Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (1982), concludes that there are no meaning facts. While realism has been denied for a great many subject matters, the *meaning irrealism* motivated by KW's argument has particularly far-reaching consequences. This thesis is an investigation into some of these consequences, in an effort to determine what is at stake in accepting the argument as sound. In Chapter 2, I summarise the argument, assume that it is sound, and consider the consequences for one particular body of talk: *discourse about meaning* itself. Three models for characterising that discourse are canvassed: *error-theory*, *non-factualism*, and *mere minimalism*. The latter characterisation is made available by adopting the framework for realism debates proposed by Crispin Wright in *Truth and Objectivity* (1992), of which I give an exposition in Chapter 1. I find in Chapter 2 that the three models of meaning discourse each face serious problems, and that the upshot is a form of *meaning eliminativism*: there is no value in ascribing meaning. In Chapter 3, I generalise from that discussion and consider the consequences of KW's sceptical argument for *any discourse*. I find that we appear forced to adopt what I call *global eliminative strong non-factualism*, on which no sentence is (1) apt for even *minimal* truth, (2) correct or incorrect with respect to any norm, and thus (3) such that there would be value lost in abandoning the practice of uttering it. While I find, then, no outright *inconsistency* in the acceptance of KW's sceptical argument as sound, it is found to be *untenable* to do so. If these considerations are correct, then without a straight solution to KW's argument there is no value in talking at all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was supervised by Alex Miller, who is an exceptional supervisor. His patience and persistence were indispensable, and I am very thankful.

Many creatures—human and otherwise—have contributed to this project. Some of them directly, as sources of inspiration; others indirectly, when there is little going around. Invaluable assistance looking through final drafts was given by Tiddy, Chris, and Joe. Particular thanks are due for Joe, with whom sharing a small office is somehow never difficult. The residents of Ōwheo supported me greatly, and probably unknowingly. There are few better ways to become unstuck in thought than to watch trout and eels swim past.

Thanks and love to my parents and sister. Our Thursday night jams and Friday morning breakfasts made a great deal of difference. And thanks and love to Tamlyn, and our Eko and Igor, with whom it is hardest to deny that there is value in talking.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
WRIGHT'S METAPHYSICAL FRAMEWORK	7
1.1 Introduction	7
1.2 Deflationism	8
1.3 Minimalism	16
1.4 Realism-Relevant Cruces.....	29
1.5 The Metaphysical Landscape.....	43
MEANING IRREALISM AND MEANING DISCOURSE	51
2.1 Introduction	51
2.2 The Kripke-Wittgenstein Sceptical Argument.....	52
2.3 Casualties Of Kripke-Wittgenstein Meaning Scepticism.....	58
2.4 Meaning Discourse: Introduction	64
2.5 Meaning Discourse: Error-Theory.....	71
2.6 Meaning Discourse: Non-Factualism.....	75
2.7 Meaning Discourse: Mere Minimalism	90
2.8 Conclusion.....	113
GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS	120
3.1 Introduction	120
3.2 Globalisation	120
3.3 A Menu of Options.....	127
3.4 The Tenability of Kripke-Wittgenstein Meaning Irrealism.....	131
APPENDICES	135
Appendix A: Potential Verification Transcendence	135
Appendix B: Width of Cosmological Role	142
REFERENCE LIST	149

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Many humans—as a matter of empirical fact—produce certain sounds and shapes; we utter words. But the nature of these expressions and their utterance poses questions that need *philosophical* attention. One way to approach these matters is by deploying the notion of *meaning*. Speakers may mean something by a particular sign, and this meaning may partly constitute the nature of that sign and the utterance thereof. There are plenty of avenues for philosophical investigation into this idea. One such avenue is to consider the *metaphysics* of meaning, and to ask *whether meaning is real*. It is such considerations with which this thesis is concerned.

In particular, my investigation concerns the *denial* that meaning is real, and where that denial might take us. In *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (*WRPL*), Saul Kripke draws from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* an argument against meaning realism.¹ I will give an account of this argument—which I will call the *Kripke-Wittgenstein (KW) Sceptical Argument*—in §2.2.² KW's argument can be (and has been) investigated from several angles. The angle that I take in this thesis is to investigate *what is at stake* in the argument, and to thus determine whether it is *tenable* to accept it as sound. To that end, I will assume that it is sound, and consider what follows from that assumption. The denial of realism about *any* subject matter has consequences of certain kinds, and these will certainly emerge in the present case. But there are other consequences that arise when the subject matter in question is *meaning*. The tenability of any position turns at least in part on the severity of its consequences, and by investigating the

¹ Kripke's discussion is an interpretation of Wittgenstein, and may not be representative of the positions held by either philosopher. I will set aside any exegetical issues, and focus on the content of Kripke's book. It is Chapter 2 of that book that contains the sceptical argument that opposes meaning realism. In Chapter 3, Kripke proposes a *sceptical solution* which is meant to provide an account of discourse about meaning that is consistent with that opposition. Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition* (Harvard University Press, 1982); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

² Note that the kind of scepticism in question is *constitutive*, and not *epistemic*: KW's claim is not simply that we cannot have knowledge of meaning facts, but that there *are* no meaning facts to know.

ramifications of KW's sceptical argument I hope to determine whether accepting that argument as sound is a tenable option.

Before investigating opposition to realism about meaning, it will be helpful to characterise some of the terms and positions at work in debates about realism. I will put this initial characterisation in terms of *facts*. By “fact” I mean precisely *something that is the case* or an *existing state of affairs*. Realism debates are concerned with the nature and existence of a certain class of facts; what I will call a *subject matter*. The subject may be a *property*, in which case the relevant facts are those such that some object has that property. The subject may be a set of *objects*, in which case the relevant facts are those such that those objects exist. Say that we have entered into a realism debate about some subject. There are two basic components of realism.³ Firstly, that the relevant facts *exist*. It is necessary for realism that the objects or properties in question—or some significant proportion of them—are part of reality.⁴ And secondly, that those facts have a certain *mind-independence*, or *objectivity*. It is necessary for realism that the facts are *out there in the world*.⁵ This is not meant as a formal account, nor to comprehensively represent every form of realism. It is meant as a general characterisation of the contentions made by a realist, and will do for now. Take some subject matter *Q* comprised of *Q*-facts. The basic realist position is this:

Realism(*Q*): There are mind-independent *Q*-facts.⁶

³ Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 2nd ed. with a new afterword. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 14.

⁴ It is not necessary for realism that *every* state of affairs of a certain type exists. The realist about fish, for example, can happily suppose that some object we had thought to be a fish turns out not to be so. Devitt makes a point along these lines here: Devitt, 18.

⁵ Note that the mind-independence and objectivity at work here are of a particular sort. There is a kind of dependence such that chairs depend on minds; chairs are built by humans, and thus depend *causally* on human mental activity. There is a different kind of dependence such that the fact that more people like dogs than cats depends on minds; this fact could not obtain if there were no minds, and is thus *existentially* dependent. Neither of these are what the realist means in claiming that mind-independence is necessary for a class of facts to be real. What is meant is some *non-empirical* kind of dependence. In §1.4 I will introduce Wright's account of mind-independence, and until then I will rely on this informal account.

⁶ This characterisation is found here: Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 14.

Realism debates are sometimes characterised in terms of *truth*; as debates about whether any of a certain set of sentences are mind-independently true. Given that a certain relation obtains between true sentences and facts, such a characterisation may be equivalent to that which I have just made. Aristotle describes such a relation here:

To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true.⁷

If a sentence is true precisely when it states a fact (it “[says] of what is that it is”), and a fact exists precisely when there is a true sentence that states it, then questions about *Q*-facts may be pursued in terms of whether there are true sentences that state *Q*-facts. My preference for this initial characterisation is to talk of facts, but it will on occasion be helpful and harmless to talk instead of truth.⁸

I will use *non-realism* as a catch-all for any view that denies realism about a certain subject matter. For *Q*, then:

Non-Realism(*Q*): There are no mind-independent *Q*-facts.

One form of non-realism is *irrealism*. I will use this term to refer to forms of non-realism for which the chief departure from realism is the claim that the relevant facts *do not exist*. For *Q*, then:

Irrealism(*Q*): There are no *Q*-facts.

Error-theory and *non-factualism* are two forms of irrealism. These positions share the irrealist denial that the relevant facts exist, but differ in their account of the *discourse* about the subject matter in question. A discourse is here defined as *the*

⁷ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford, Oxfordshire: Clarendon Press, 1924), 1011b25.

⁸ The initial preference for characterisation in terms of facts stems from this thesis' concern with realism debates about meaning. Truth is a semantic notion, and there is something uncomfortable about invoking semantic notions to characterise positions in the metaphysics of meaning. But I do not yet mean to claim that this is more than a preference.

*set of all sentences about a certain subject.*⁹ There may be such a discourse for *Q*, even if the irrealist is right and there are no *Q*-facts. But if the above Aristotelian claim is correct, then it follows that none of the sentences in *Q*-discourse are true; there are no *Q*-facts for them to state. The error-theorist accounts for the absence of true sentences in our discourse about *Q* by characterising that discourse as *failed description*. Sentences that appear to state potential *Q*-facts have truth conditions and aspire to truth, but are uniformly and systematically false.¹⁰ The non-factualist accounts for the absence of true sentences in our *Q*-discourse by characterising that discourse as *non-descriptive*. When we talk of *Q*, we use sentences that have no truth conditions, and which are neither true nor false. It is no matter that there are no *Q*-facts, because in talking of *Q* we do not seek to state any facts at all.¹¹

Another form of non-realism is *anti-realism*. Where the irrealist is concerned with the existence component of realism, the anti-realist is instead concerned with the independence component. The basic anti-realist claim about *Q* is this:

Anti-Realism(*Q*): There are *Q*-facts, but they are mind-dependent.

The anti-realist agrees with the realist that there are facts about the relevant subject. And they may, then, maintain that there are true sentences that state those

⁹ Note that this definition is meant to include sets of sentences that merely *appear* to be about a certain set of facts. Discourse about *morality*, for example, may be characterised as the set of sentences that apply moral *predicates*, like “is impermissible”. If, as it might turn out, this predicate bears no relation to impermissibility *facts*, those sentences nonetheless qualify as sentences about morality, and are part of moral discourse.

¹⁰ Two prominent error-theories are Mackie’s error-theory about morality and Field’s error-theory about mathematics. Note that an error-theorist claims only that the *atomic, positive* sentences in the relevant discourse are false. They needn’t deny that it is a fact that a putative *Q*-fact *does not* obtain, nor that sentence stating that it does not obtain is true. J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth ; New York: Penguin, 1990); Hartry H. Field, *Science without Numbers*, Second edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹¹ Non-factualism is perhaps most prominent in metaethics. See, for example: A. J. Ayer (Alfred Jules), *Language, Truth, and Logic* (Penguin Books, 2001), chap. 6; Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford [Oxfordshire] : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1984); Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

facts. But the existence of those facts, and the truth of those sentences, is not sufficient for realism about the subject. The anti-realist about *Q* opposes *Q*-realism not by denying that anything is *Q*, but by denying that anything is *mind-independently Q*.

I said that this thesis is an investigation into the consequences of accepting KW's sceptical argument as sound. Chief among these consequences are those for the nature of *linguistic expressions* and their *utterance*. It is these things that we might invoke meaning to explain, and they face serious constraints if meaning is found not to be *part of reality*. We appear to engage in discourse: to utter sentences about certain things. And it often appears quite valuable to do so. The consequences of KW's sceptical argument that I will primarily consider—and those that I will use to evaluate the tenability of accepting that argument—are those for the nature of such discourse.

In Chapter 2 I will take the particular case of discourse about *meaning*, for which the denial that meaning is real has many implications. I will consider three models of non-realist meaning discourse. The first two, *meaning error-theory* and *meaning non-factualism*, are discussed in §2.5 and §2.6. My conclusion there will be that we must look elsewhere for a tenable destination of opposition to meaning realism.¹² In §2.7 I discuss an alternative that instead opposes meaning realism along anti-realist lines. This is *mere minimalism about meaning*, which is a position within the characterisation of realism debates proposed by Crispin Wright in *Truth and Objectivity*.¹³ To facilitate the application of Wright's framework to meaning, I will give an exposition of that framework in Chapter 1.

The hope, in surveying the available options for characterising meaning discourse, is that one or more of the options may be both consistent with accepting KW's sceptical argument and *tenable*. I will find, in §2.8, that there seems to be no such option. The constraints that KW's argument imposes upon meaning discourse

¹² Specifically: I will find an error-theory about meaning to be incoherent, and non-factualism about meaning to either rely on resources that are ruled out by KW's argument or to imply eliminativism.

¹³ Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

for us to adopt an untenable *eliminativism*, on which there is no value in talking about meaning. Then, in Chapter 3, I will show how many of the considerations made about meaning discourse generalise to discourse about *anything*, and that the threat of eliminativism is thus *global*.

WRIGHT'S METAPHYSICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Introduction

In the General Introduction, I characterised anti-realism about *Q* as the conjunction of two claims. There are *Q*-facts, and there are true sentences in discourse about *Q* that state those facts. But those facts, and this truth, do not have the mind-independence necessary for realism about *Q*. This thesis is, in part, an investigation into the non-realist destinations to which the Kripke-Wittgenstein (KW) sceptical argument may lead.¹⁴ The right kind of anti-realism may offer such a destination. I will set aside considerations specific to realism debate about meaning for now, and work towards establishing a model of anti-realism.¹⁵

Thus far I have characterised anti-realism in only general terms; a characterisation insufficiently specific to be of much use. There are two matters which must be settled. Firstly, we must clarify the notion of fact and truth that is at work; as we will see, there are certain notions which the anti-realist must avoid. And secondly, we need to provide an account of mind-independence. Variation between formulations of anti-realism can emerge from variation in *how* these two matters are settled. In *Truth and Objectivity*, Wright develops a framework in which realism can be opposed along anti-realist lines.¹⁶ The variety—or, strictly speaking, *varieties*—of anti-realism that emerge from Wright's framework involve idiosyncratic responses to the two matters. Wright settles the first matter by adopting a certain *minimalism about truth*, which I will discuss in §1.3. He settles the second by characterising the mind-independence of a certain subject as a function of how truth in discourse about that subject fares with respect to *four realism-relevant cruces*. I will discuss the cruces in §1.4. In §1.5, I end the chapter with a schema for applying this framework to a particular subject. The hope is that, at the culmination of this exposition, we will be in a position to apply Wright's

¹⁴ The argument in question appears here: Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, chap. 2. I introduce it in §2.2.

¹⁵ See §2.7 for application of this model to meaning.

¹⁶ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*.

framework to meaning, and to determine whether it offers a tenable home for KW opposition to meaning realism.

1.2 Deflationism

The anti-realist about *Q* concedes that there are *Q*-facts and true *Q*-sentences that state them. If such a position is to be non-realist at all, this concession must not suffice for realism about *Q*. And on some accounts of truth there does appear to be such an implication. On certain formulations of the Correspondence Theory of truth, for example, a sentence is true if and only if the fact it states *objectively* obtains; truth is correspondence with independent reality.¹⁷ Having subscribed to such a theory we could not suppose that there are true sentences in a certain discourse without thereby granting both of the characteristic realist claims: the facts stated by those sentences exist, and do so mind-independently.¹⁸ The anti-realist is forced to avoid conceptions of truth that carry such an implication.¹⁹ What we need is truth that is *metaphysically neutral*: an account of truth on which it is consistent to claim that a sentence is true while denying realism about the discourse to which that sentence belongs. And we also need metaphysically neutral facts. If facts *must* be mind-independent, then there is no theoretical space for anti-realism I have characterised it. By opposing the independence element of realism, and not the existence element, the anti-realist becomes constrained to accounts of truth and facts of this sort. (I will focus, for now, on identifying an account of truth suitable to the anti-realist. Anti-realist facts will emerge in §1.3.)

One likely candidate for an account of truth available to the anti-realist is *deflationism*.²⁰ Deflationary notions of truth, as we will see, look to be sufficiently neutral with respect to the metaphysical status of the subject matter of a true

¹⁷ Crispin Wright, "Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed," in *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 245.

¹⁸ This characterisation, introduced in the General Introduction is from Devitt: Devitt, *Realism and Truth*.

¹⁹ This is observed by Wright here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 12.

²⁰ Deflationism—or at least the precursor *redundancy theory*—was first introduced by Frank Ramsay. It has been significantly developed by Paul Horwich, among others. Paul Horwich, *Truth*, 2nd ed. (Oxford [England] : New York [N.Y.]: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1998); F. P. Ramsey and G. E. Moore, "Symposium: Facts and Propositions," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 7 (1927): 153–206.

sentence. But Wright does not incorporate deflationism into his metaphysical framework. He argues that deflationism is incoherent, and that the anti-realist must therefore look elsewhere. In its place he proposes a certain *minimalism* about truth. The aim of this chapter is the presentation of Wright's position, so I will follow him in rejecting deflationism. It is worthwhile to work through the theory nonetheless, because part of Wright's argument against it makes an important contribution to the development of minimalism.

Although there is variation among versions of deflationism, these accounts share two central contentions, and these will be enough to sustain our discussion.²¹ The first such contention is that *truth is not a property*. To ascribe truth to a sentence—with the predicate “is true”—is not to attribute a property of truth to that sentence. It will be useful to characterise this deflationary tenet in terms of the *Disquotational Schema* (DS):

The Disquotational Schema: “P” is true iff P

Whenever some sentence with propositional content P is true, P is the case. And whenever some P is the case, a sentence “P” with that content is true.²² There is an instance of this schema for any sentence that can be substituted for “P”. For example:

“Sunfish are the largest bony fish” is true iff sunfish are the largest bony fish

The DS represents an important characteristic of truth, and it is not specific to deflationism. Indeed, Wright argues that the property exhibited in the DS is *platitudinous* for truth; *any* plausible theory of truth will incorporate it.²³ But the deflationist gives the schema a distinctive role. They claim that the feature of truth represented in the DS *exhausts the content of truth ascription*. The relation

²¹ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 30.

²² The DS can be seen as a characterisation of the Aristotelian claim that I quoted in the General Introduction. Given that “P” says that P, “P” is true precisely when P picks out something that is the case, and false when it picks out something that is not the case. (Note, though, that the DS itself makes no mention of falsity.)

²³ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 23. I will return to this idea in §1.3.

between “P” being true and P being the case is not merely covariation. The statement of one is *precisely* the statement of the other; to attach the predicate “is true” to a sentence is to do nothing more than assert the sentence itself. A sentence gains nothing in being properly described as true that could not be achieved by simply asserting the sentence, and there is thus *no property* to which “is true” refers. Where other theories of truth seek to analyse and investigate a truth property, the deflationist simply shuts the book and denies that there is any property worth analysing or investigating.²⁴

Ascription of truth may be *useful*, nonetheless. Say that you wanted to assert *every* sentence in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. The truth predicate helps with this *compendious* assertion; you can utter the sentence “Every sentence in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is true” and thereby assert those sentences. Without the truth predicate “is true”, this assertion would be arduous; one would have to identify each of the sentences in the encyclopedia and assert them individually. The truth predicate also assists with *indirect* assertion. Say, for example, that you wish to assert the sentence just uttered by Aroha, but that you didn’t hear it. It may then be useful to say “Whatever Aroha just said is true”; otherwise, you would likely have to ask Aroha to repeat her assertion within earshot, or make-do with “What *she* said!”. The deflationist claims that, while such cases do show that “is true” has pragmatic value and is not *redundant*, there is nevertheless no property to which “is true” refers. To describe a sentence or set of sentences as true is still *merely* to assert those sentences, even if it is sometimes easier to use the device of truth predication than to assert each sentence individually and directly.

²⁴ Paul Horwich’s deflationism does *not* involve the denial that truth is a property. Wright argues that his discussion applies to Horwich’s account nevertheless: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 21. Note, also, that there may yet be a *minimal* sense in which truth *is* a property. As I am about to point out, the deflationist maintains that the predicate “is true” may still properly be applied to a sentence *S*, and it may thus be correct to say “*S* has the property of truth”. This may be taken to show that there is a truth property of a certain sort. The deflationist’s claim is that there is no *genuine* or *robust* property of truth, and that truth predication can be correct does *not* suffice for there to be a property of this sort. For the discussion in §1.2 I will mean a property of this non-minimal sort by “the property of truth”.

More specifically, truth predication is a device for *endorsement*. First, note that assertion of a sentence may be governed by some *norm* or *norms*. This is a matter that will receive much discussion later.²⁵ For now, it is sufficient to say that a sentence can be *warrantedly assertible* or *not warrantably assertible*, and that to assert it is to endorse it with respect to this norm of warrant.²⁶ Since, on the deflationist's account, truth predication amounts precisely to assertion of the subject sentence, "is true" can be attached to a sentence to register it as satisfying whatever norms operate over assertion of that sentence.²⁷ The second central deflationist contention, then, is this: *truth predication is purely a device for endorsement*. By applying "is true" to a sentence or set of sentences, we can deem those sentences to meet the standards of warranted assertion "without specifying [their] content"—we can effectively assert them, even when that assertion is compendious or indirect.²⁸

We can thus characterise deflationism as the conjunction of a negative claim and a positive claim:

1. Truth is not a property; "is true" does not refer to a property.
2. Truth predication is purely a device for endorsement.

Let us first consider whether truth is metaphysically neutral when construed as the deflationist suggests. For anti-realism to get off the ground it must be possible for a sentence to be true without having a real subject matter. There is a sense in which deflationism will be unsuitable for the anti-realist: we have denied that

²⁵ In §1.3 I will discuss the *discipline* that a discourse may exhibit, and this notion will be applied to meaning in §2.7.

²⁶ As an illustrative example of the kind of warrant in question, take the sentence "It is raining outside". In some states of information, and *not* in others, my utterance of this sentence is warranted. My perception that there is water hitting my office window, for example, might be an example of the former. The information that I feel hungry, on the other hand, likely does not warrant the assertion. The sentence "It is raining outside" is thus correct or incorrect with respect to a norm of warranted assertibility. And when I assert it, I deem the sentence to fare favourably (to some extent) with respect to that norm. See: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 17.

²⁷ This amounts to a characterisation of truth predication as in some sense *normative*. We needn't, here, be concerned with the detail of this normativity. Discussion from Wright can be found here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 15–19; Wright, "Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed," 251. See also: Paul Horwich, "Is Truth a Normative Concept?," *Synthese* 195, no. 3 (March 1, 2018): 1127–38, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-016-1208-8>.

²⁸ Wright, "Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed," 250.

there is a property of truth at all, and *a fortiori* that there can be true sentences with a non-real subject matter. But let us reframe the requirement, and ask instead whether the *predicate* “is true” is metaphysically neutral. Does deflationism allow the anti-realist to *claim* that a sentence is true while denying realism about the discourse to which that sentence belongs? If there is nothing to truth predication over and above assertion, then it is correct to say that a sentence is true precisely when it is correct to assert that sentence. All that is required, then, is that it can be metaphysically neutral that an assertion is warranted. And there doesn’t seem to be anything to prevent this. Nothing is conceded to moral realism, for example, by claiming that utterance of the sentence “Torture is impermissible” is *warranted*.²⁹ It is quite plausible that this moral ascription could be warranted without there being a mind-independent fact about the impermissibility of torture. So, if truth is as the deflationist conceives it, nothing is conceded to moral realism by claiming that the sentence “Torture is impermissible” is true.

Deflationism may thus offer the anti-realist an account of truth as suitably metaphysically neutral. But Wright argues that the two characteristic deflationist claims are inconsistent, and that deflationism is thus incoherent.³⁰ We can formulate Wright’s argument as the presentation of a dilemma. The second deflationist claim is that truth predication endorses the sentence as meeting some standard. Is this standard distinct from warranted assertibility? If so, then there appears to be nothing to prevent truth from being a property:

What the deflationist clearly *cannot* allow is that ‘true’, when used to endorse, has the function of commending a proposition for its satisfaction of *some distinctive norm* which contrasts with epistemic justification and which only ‘true’ and equivalents serve to mark. For if there were a distinctive such norm, it could hardly fail to be reckoned a genuine property

²⁹ There may be accounts of justification and morality on which no moral judgements are justified without the existence of independent moral facts. In that case, let this point be simply that, *on at least some accounts of justification and morality*, moral justification is consistent with the denial of moral realism. For a paradigmatic view of this kind, see: Mackie, *Ethics*, chap. 5.

³⁰ This discussion derives from the following presentations of this argument: Alexander Miller, “On Wright’s Argument Against Deflationism,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 51, no. 205 (October 2001): 527–31; Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 12–22; Wright, “Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed,” 248–61.

of a proposition that it did, or did not, comply with it. And if the norm in question were uniquely associated with 'true' and its cognates, that would be as much as to allow that there was a special property of *truth*.³¹

This is the first horn of the dilemma. The deflationist cannot claim that the standard a sentence is deemed to meet when it is attributed the predicate "is true" is distinct from warrant. If they did, it would contradict their denial that truth predication is the ascription of a property of truth. There would be *something more* to ascription of truth than what is already found in warranted assertion.

The second horn of the dilemma is that the deflationist also faces a contradiction if they contend that the standard is *not* distinct from epistemic justification. Wright argues that, in virtue of the DS, truth *inflates* under pressure, and that a distinction is forced between truth and epistemic justification. We start with the DS—which, as I have said, is lionized by the deflationist as capturing all there is to truth:

1. "P" is true \Leftrightarrow P

Then, given that for any significant sentence that says that P there can be a significant sentence that says that P is not the case, we can derive the following by substituting the negation of P for P in an instance of the DS:

2. "It is not the case that P" is true \Leftrightarrow It is not the case that P

And, given that from a biconditional we can derive another biconditional between the negation of the two original constituents, we can also derive the following from the DS:

3. It is not the case that P \Leftrightarrow It is not the case that "P" is true

³¹ Wright, "Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed," 252.

Now, from biconditionals **2** and **3**, and the transitivity of biconditionals, it follows that:

4. "It is not the case that P" is true \Leftrightarrow It is not the case that "P" is true

4 expresses the *commutativity* of truth and negation, for the sentence "P".³² It is the DS—and the admittance of significant negation—that has produced this result. The deflationist, who is explicitly committed to the DS, will struggle to deny it.³³

In this horn of the dilemma, the deflationist claims that truth predication is the predication of epistemic justification. It had better be the case, then, that whatever properties truth is found to have are properties shared by justification. It thus follows from the commitments made by deflationism that:

5. "It is not the case that P" is epistemically justified \Leftrightarrow It is not the case that "P" is epistemically justified

The problem is now clear. Clear counterexamples to **5** arise whenever there is a *neutral state of information*. In such a situation, neither "P" nor "It is not the case that P" is justified.³⁴ If such cases are possible—and they seem to be—then the right-to-left conditional in **5** is false. It is thus derivable from the deflationist's own claims that truth exhibits a property that warrant does not. This is the second horn of the dilemma: the DS is inconsistent with the claim that truth predication is endorsement of the subject sentence as epistemically justified.

The deflationist must accept either that truth predication is distinct or not distinct from predication of epistemic justification. But we have found that neither option is consistent with their basic contentions. The deflationist lionizes the DS

³² Miller, "On Wright's Argument Against Deflationism," 529.

³³ Wright points out that the inference from **1** to **3** may be denied by adopting a certain logic of negation. But he sets aside this formal option as untenable: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 32.

³⁴ Think, for example, of substituting "Tomorrow I will have cereal for breakfast" for P, and suppose that I have no information about tomorrow's breakfast. Quite plausibly, neither "Tomorrow I will have cereal for breakfast" nor "Tomorrow I will *not* have cereal for breakfast" would be justified in such a scenario.

and claims that “is true” is *only* an occasionally useful device for endorsement of a sentence; to claim that a sentence is true is just to deem it to meet the standards under which it is warranted. But from the DS alone we have found that truth predication has a feature that warranted assertibility does not: commutativity with negation.³⁵ The deflationist commits no more to truth than what is expressed in the DS, and even this is enough to generate the result that to call a sentence true is not merely to call it warranted—and thus that *there is a distinct property of truth*. Wright concludes that deflationism is incoherent; the positive claim about the nature of truth predication contradicts the negative deflationary claim.

While deflationary truth may be metaphysically neutral in the manner required, then, it faces a severe independent problem. We thus cannot rely on it in development of anti-realism. This discussion has been brief, and there may be defences available to the deflationist.³⁶ But the point of this discussion was not to comprehensively evaluate deflationism, but instead to set the stage for Wright’s alternative account of truth. Although Wright finds deflationism to be inadequate, it nevertheless makes a key contribution to the *minimalism* he implements in its stead. This minimalism follows deflationism in putting the DS centre stage, and in doing so hopes to achieve the same metaphysical neutrality. But it departs from deflationism in accepting the inflationary result and maintaining that truth *is* a property. For the minimalist, truth can be sufficiently metaphysically *lightweight* to sate the anti-realist, but is not, as the deflationist claims, metaphysically *weightless*.

³⁵ We can perhaps characterise this result as revealing that truth exhibits the *disquotational property*—evinced in the DS—but justification does not. A sentence is *true* precisely when what it says is the case is the case. But it seems not to be the case that a sentence is *justified* precisely when what it says is the case is the case. (If this *was* the case, then it would follow from any state of information in which neither “P” nor “not-P” is justified that neither P nor not-P is the case, and thus that a certain state of affairs both obtains and does not obtain.) It is in virtue of the disquotational property that truth commutes with negation, and in virtue of missing this property that warrant does not.

³⁶ See, for example: Horwich, “Is Truth a Normative Concept?”; Miller, “On Wright’s Argument Against Deflationism.”

1.3 Minimalism

I will now present Wright's minimalism about truth, and determine whether it can be appropriate for the anti-realist. The first question that the minimalist asks is this: what *must* be the case for a property to qualify as a truth property?³⁷ There are certain features of a property such that, without those features, it is a priori that that property is *not* truth. Wright calls these features *the truth platitudes*. If these features really are platitudes, of course, *any* account of truth will include them. The minimalist move is to claim that, given that a property exhibits these characteristics, it follows that it is a genuinely a truth property.³⁸ Exhibiting the platitudes is not only *necessary* for a property to be true, but is also *sufficient*. Wright sets the platitudes out as follows:³⁹

Transparency: To assert is to present as true, and any attitude to a sentence is an attitude to that sentence being true.

Opacity: The truth of a sentence may be, to some degree, beyond the recognition of a mind.⁴⁰

Embedding: Aptitude for truth is preserved under a variety of operations. Truth-apt sentences have negations, conjunctions, disjunctions and so on which are likewise truth-apt.

³⁷ In *Truth and Objectivity*, Wright talks both of which *predicates* qualify as *truth predicates* and which *properties* qualify as *truth properties*. I will take it here that the distinction is anodyne—that a predicate will exhibit platitudinous features if and only if it refers to a property with those features. I will use “property”, in preference for terms that are non-linguistic.

³⁸ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 24.

³⁹ This is (for the most part) the presentation found here: Wright, “Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed,” 271. I have set out the platitudes in terms of *sentences* rather than, as Wright does in this paper, in terms of *propositions*. Given that a sentence is true iff the proposition it expresses is true this is an anodyne discrepancy. An alternative but largely equivalent presentation of the platitudes can be found here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 34.

⁴⁰ This platitude marks a variety of possible truth characteristics. It is platitudinous that there will be *some extent* to which a sentence can be true without being recognized by a thinker to be so. Wright means for this platitude to capture, *inter alia*, the possibilities that “a thinker may be so situated that a particular truth is beyond her ken, that some truths may never be known, that some truths may be unknowable in principle” (Wright, “Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed,” 271.) Which such possibility truth *actually* exhibits emerges, in part, in the discussion in Appendix A on *Potential Verification Transcendence*.

Correspondence: For a sentence to be true is for it to correspond to reality and accurately reflect the facts.

Contrast: A sentence may be true without being justified, and vice-versa.

Timelessness: If a sentence is ever true then it always is.

Absoluteness: There is no such thing as a sentence being more or less true.

The minimalist claim, then, is that any predicate with these properties counts as a truth predicate. I cannot fully discuss each platitude here. But I will give a brief explanation of three of them that are particularly relevant.

The Disquotational Schema (DS)—“P” is true iff P—is intimately linked to the Transparency, Correspondence, Contrast, and Opacity platitudes. Minimalism is in this sense inspired by deflationism; while the minimalist does not suppose that the DS offers an *exhaustive* explanation of the nature of truth, the schema remains a central component. First, consider Transparency. Given that to assert is to present as true, the assertion of P is the assertion that P is true. It then follows that P is true iff P is the case.⁴¹ Provided, then, that a sentence is true if and only if the proposition it expresses is true, and that the sentence “P” expresses the content P, the DS follows.⁴² If Transparency is a platitude of truth, then, the property exhibited in the DS is as well.

Wright argues that the Correspondence platitude can be shown to follow from the DS.⁴³ True sentences, according to this platitude, are those that correspond to reality and accurately reflect the facts. Wright suggests that this correspondence can be paraphrased as the claim that a sentence is true if and only if *what it says is the case is the case*—a claim I earlier attributed to Aristotle. A *fact*, on the present characterisation, is simply something that is the case; and *reality*

⁴¹ This claim is the *Equivalence Schema*—it is, effectively, the analogue of the DS for contents rather than sentences. Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 24.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 25.

may be construed as the set of every fact. We can then see that, given the legitimacy of this paraphrase, Correspondence follows easily from the DS. What “P” says, if it says anything, is P. So, what “P” says is the case is the case if and only if P. Then, from the DS—“P” is true if and only if P—it follows that “P” is true if and only if what it says is the case is the case. This result, Wright claims, captures what is “genuinely platitudinous” about the correspondence that truth has to reality.⁴⁴

It is worthwhile, while we are discussing the Correspondence platitude, to pause and look again at the relation between truth and facts. Even if all we have supposed about truth is that it exhibits the DS, we have ensured that a fact accompanies every true sentence; true sentences are those that state a fact. If it is the case that “Torture is wrong” is true if and only if *torture is wrong*, for example, then if that sentence is true it follows that torture is wrong. It is surely an unproblematic step to then say that it is *the case*, and thus *a fact*, that torture is wrong. The point is that if we adopt minimalism about truth then we inherit a certain *minimalism about facts*. It is sufficient for some state of affairs to be a fact that there is a true sentence that states that it obtains, and given minimalism there need be no more required for that truth than what is given in the platitudes.⁴⁵

The Contrast platitude marks the result of the inflationary argument that formed one horn of Wright’s dilemma for deflationism.⁴⁶ Wright derives from the DS the conclusion that truth commutes with negation, and thus, given that justification does not so commute, that truth and justification are distinct—and needn’t covary. And *this*, Wright claims, suffices for a minimal satisfaction of the Opacity platitude.⁴⁷ Since a sentence is true but not justified when there is a

⁴⁴ Ibid. It might be objected that there is *more* to correspondence than what is derived here. Wright’s move is not to outright deny this intuition, but to cast it as a characteristic that truth *may* exhibit, rather than one that it *must*. It is enough for a property to qualify as truth, he claims, that it involves the kind of correspondence captured by this paraphrase. In §1.4.3 and Appendix B I will demonstrate how Wright facilitates the possibility of a more *robust* correspondence. Truth in a discourse may exert *cognitive command* or have a *wide cosmological role*, and thereby exhibit a *more than minimal* correspondence to the facts.

⁴⁵ This need not, again, be *all there is* to facts. Minimalism, *contra* deflationism, means only to lessen what is *necessary*, and not to deny that there can be robust truth and facts.

⁴⁶ Wright, “Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed,” 272.

⁴⁷ This claim is made here: Wright, 275.

neutral state of information, in such a state that truth is, to a minimal degree, beyond the epistemic access of the subject in question.

We can put the connection between these four platitudes and the DS like this. If a property Φ has the characteristic found in the DS—if, that is, a sentence is Φ if and only if what that sentence says is the case is the case—then Φ has these four platitudinous features. For Φ to qualify as a truth property, of course, it must also satisfy Embedding, Timelessness, and Absoluteness—which are not derived from the DS.⁴⁸ But Wright claims that these three platitudes are easily satisfiable; for the most part, they can be secured simply by *stipulation* about the nature of the property in question.⁴⁹ For our purposes, it is effectively sufficient for a property to exhibit each platitude that it has the property found in the DS. And it is, of course, *necessary* that it does so. I will thus take the question of whether a property has the platitudinous characteristics to be adequately answered by showing that it has the disquotational property—while acknowledging that there is, strictly speaking, more to the matter.⁵⁰

Say, then, that we have some property Φ such that “P” is Φ if and only if P, and stipulate that it satisfies Embedding, Timelessness, and Absoluteness. The minimalist claim is that it follows that Φ is a truth property. Two questions arise. Firstly, *why* take Φ to qualify as truth? Φ has many characteristic features of truth, and since it exhibits Contrast it is not mere justification. But this is not, of course, a knockdown argument. And indeed, Wright does not present one:

I have, I admit, presented no consideration which, strictly, imposes the minimalist way of looking at these matters. Rather, it seems to me that we

⁴⁸ *Part* of Embedding does follow from the DS: that the sentence may be truth-apt while appearing as the antecedent and consequent of a conditional. But this does not alone ensure that it can significantly appear in the other essential contexts.

⁴⁹ This point is made in footnotes here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 74; Wright, “Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed,” 275. Such stipulation may not, in some cases, be possible. But the point need only be that these latter three platitudes can, in most cases, be unproblematically granted.

⁵⁰ The most likely error this assumption could produce is that, in consideration of the candidate truth properties available to sentences in discourse about *meaning*, a candidate sustains the DS yet somehow fails to satisfy one or more of the other three platitudes. This is possible. But since most of my discussion in §2.7 concerns whether there can be a property in meaning discourse that sustains the DS, this possibility is inconsequential for the present project.

are here concerned with issues which turn on theoretical advantage. And minimalism promises considerable advantages if it can be sustained.⁵¹

The advantages to which Wright here refers are found in the framework for realism debates facilitated by minimalism, which will be the subject of later discussion. The advantages the view might have for non-realism about *meaning*, of course, are of central relevance to this thesis. So, while the option remains to simply reject minimalism outright, I will take it to be enough for present purposes that the minimalist's claim that Φ is a truth property is plausible and compelling. The aim is to establish a tenable non-realist account of meaning, and we don't need to argue *against* other theories of truth to do this.

The second question is this: can a sentence have a minimal truth property Φ without having a real subject matter? It must be possible for the matter of whether a sentence is Φ to be metaphysically neutral, if minimal truth is to be an option for the non-realist. To answer this question, we will first establish what it takes for a sentence to be *apt* for minimal truth, and then consider what it takes for a sentence to *be* minimally true. The claim will be that both truth-aptitude and truth are adequately metaphysically neutral when truth is construed as the minimalist suggests.

Wright claims that any sentence will be apt for minimal truth if it has the following two properties:⁵²

Syntax: the sentence is of the appropriate form to be situated within negations, conditionals, conjunctions, disjunctions, and propositional attitudes.

Discipline: the sentence is subject to recognised standards of warrant.

Wright further claims that the sentences of any *assertoric* discourse have these properties. The result, then, is that *all* assertoric discourses are comprised of truth-apt sentences that are true or false. Let us piece together this implication.

⁵¹ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 74.

⁵² *Ibid.*

It is necessary for a property to be truth that it exhibits the disquotational property, and is thus substitutable for Φ in the schema “P” is Φ iff P. Now, since it suffices for a sentence to be truth-apt that it is a candidate for possessing the property of truth, all we have to do to identify which sentences are truth-apt is to identify *which sentences may be substituted for “P” in the schema*.⁵³

Wherever we can introduce a concept which is a satisfier [of the platitudes] with respect to a particular class of contents, that fact on its own will justify us in regarding the contents in question as *apt for truth*.⁵⁴

A sentence is truth-apt if and only if it is equipped to sustain an instance of the DS. Wright’s claim is that meeting the requirements of Syntax and Discipline is sufficient for a sentence to be so equipped.

I will first note the role played by Syntax. It is sentences of *declarative* form that meet this requirement. If a sentence does not satisfy Syntax, then it cannot appear as the antecedent or consequent of a conditional, and is thus of improper form to sustain the schema. Take, for example, the sentence “Dinner time”. This sentence, at least as ordinarily construed, does not have the declarative syntax necessary for the following to be grammatical: “Dinner time” is true iff dinner time. The sentence is not, then, a candidate for minimal truth. Declarative sentences, on the other hand, have precisely the necessary form. It is grammatically correct to say that “Torture is impermissible” is true iff torture is impermissible.

Satisfaction of Syntax is thus a necessary condition on truth-aptitude. But it is not sufficient.⁵⁵ To see this, consider a nonsense sentence, like “Foom is foog”. Say that this sentence is declarative in form and can be embedded in conditionals.

⁵³ Note that truth-apt sentences may, of course, be *false*. For our purposes it isn’t necessary to work through the same thought *mutatis mutandis* for falsity. The assumption is that any sentence that is a candidate for truth in the sense guaranteed by the DS will likewise be a candidate for falsity: given that to every content P there corresponds a negation, we may simply say that “P” is false iff not-P. Regardless, candidacy for truth will be taken to *suffice* for truth-aptitude.

⁵⁴ Wright, “Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed,” 275.

⁵⁵ This point is well made here: Frank Jackson, Graham Oppy, and Michael Smith, “Minimalism and Truth Aptness,” *Mind* 103, no. 411 (July 1, 1994): 287–302, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/103.411.287>.

From such syntactical considerations alone it does not follow that the sentence can be substituted for “P” to produce an instance of the DS. For the substitution to go through, there must be some content P that corresponds to “P”: *there must be something that “Foom is foog” says*. We cannot simply assume that it says *that foom is foog*; it may indeed say nothing at all.

Discipline is thus added to the set of conditions necessary and sufficient for a sentence to sustain an instance of the DS.⁵⁶ The nature and role of this discipline is an important theme for this thesis, and it will return throughout the discussion. I have said that a disciplined sentence is a sentence that is subject to *recognised standards of warrant*. For such a sentence, there is a distinction between occasions on which it is *correct*, or *proper* to utter it and occasions on which it is *incorrect* or *improper*. Warrant, or justification, is one species of such correctness—and truth is another.⁵⁷ For our purposes, discipline need only be the possibility of correctness or incorrectness with respect to some unspecific *norm*.⁵⁸ I will also describe *discourses* as disciplined or not disciplined: a discourse is disciplined if and only if there is a correctness norm operating over the sentences that comprise it.

This discipline emerges, at least in part, from the *patterns* of our practice of using the sentence in question. To accord with the pattern is correct, and to fail to accord with it is incorrect. In virtue of such correctness, sentences are rendered *differentially evaluable*: utterance of one sentence in certain conditions may be *better*, in some sense, than utterance of a different sentence (or of the same sentence in different conditions). Consider, for example, sentences of the form “x is delicious”. Given—as seems plausible—that it is incorrect to utter “Sand is delicious”, and correct to utter “Pizza is delicious”, such sentences, and the

⁵⁶ See the following for discussion of the role of discipline for minimalism (and in Boghossian’s case, for deflationism): Paul A. Boghossian, “The Status of Content,” *The Philosophical Review* 99, no. 2 (1990): 163, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2185488>; Jackson, Oppy, and Smith, “Minimalism and Truth Aptness,” 293; Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 17, 74.

⁵⁷ Wright claims that it is warrant (or justification) that governs assertibility of those sentences that sustain that DS: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 17. The bulk of my discussion concerns merely correctness, and nothing will turn on matters specific to warrant.

⁵⁸ See the following for discussion of norm types: Huw Price, “Three Norms of Assertibility, or How the Moa Became Extinct,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 12 (1998): 241–54.

deliciousness discourse that they comprise, are disciplined.⁵⁹ This discourse is regulated by a norm of utterance, and one ascription of deliciousness may thus be better or worse than another. On the other hand, it is no more or less correct to utter “Foom is foog” than it is to utter “Foob is foog”. *Foogness discourse*, such as it is, operates under no disciplinary norm; there is no standard with respect to which an ascription of foogness is better or worse than any other. Such discourse is, in effect, *unregulated noise*.

I have said that a sentence will only sustain an instance of the DS if it has determinate content. The connection to be made, then, is that it is only disciplined sentences that have such content. Wright claims as much:

Consider the practice of the sincere and literal use of the sentences in the range of the [truth predicate]. In order for these sentences to be determinate in content at all, there has to be a distinction, respected for the most part by participants in the practice, between proper and improper use of them. . . . [It is plausible that,] unless participants in the practice for the most part try to respect the norms of warranted assertion which govern it, it is not clear in what the fact could consist that its ingredient sentences have the content which they do.⁶⁰

That a sentence has determinate content *depends* on our use of that sentence being evaluable for correctness. Indeed, it may be our practice of uttering sentences in certain conditions—or, at least *endorsing* that utterance in those conditions—that generates their content. It is clear that satisfying the Discipline condition is *necessary* for a sentence to have content. There can be no fact such that “Foom is foog” says that *foom is foog* if there is no distinction between occasions on which utterance of that sentence is correct and occasions on which it is incorrect. And, indeed, Discipline can plausibly *suffice* for the necessary content; given adequate

⁵⁹ Note that this correctness may be *defeasible*; the presence of a disciplinary pattern needn't exclude the possibility that in some conditions a sentence is evaluated differently. Discourse about deliciousness may be disciplined even if, for example, utterance of the sentence “Pizza is delicious” is incorrect when the pizza in question is mouldy. It is also worthwhile to note, along these same lines, that we need assume little about the strength of the *normativity* of this discipline; and in particular, about the nature of the *reasons for action* that emerge. It is enough that there is a standard that may be met or not, and that—in at least some minimal sense—it is proper to utter the former and not the latter.

⁶⁰ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 17.

regulated use of “Foom is foog”, it could be determinate that it is *foom is foog* that is to occupy the right-hand side of an instance of the DS.⁶¹

The result, then, is that satisfaction of Syntax and Discipline is necessary and sufficient for a sentence to sustain an instance of the DS. Declarativity ensures that the sentence can appear in the biconditional, and the existence of recognised standards of warrant ensure that the sentence has determinate content.⁶² And then, as established, this suffices for the sentence to qualify as apt for minimal truth.⁶³ The contribution of these conditions can be put in terms of the Aristotelian account of truth quoted in the General Introduction, to which the DS is closely related. If a sentence must *say that something is the case* to be true, then that sentence must both *say something*—it must have content—and what it says must be *that something is the case*—which is distinctive of declarative sentences.

Now consider some discourse *D*, comprised of sentences of the form “*x* is *F*”. Say that sentences in *D* meet the two conditions: they may appear in conditionals, disjunctions, and so on; and they exhibit conditions of warranted and unwarranted assertibility. *D* has the materials necessary for a property exhibiting DS to be attributed to its sentences, and those sentences are thus truth-apt. The important question for our pursuit of anti-realism is this: must *D* be a realist discourse? I think it quite clear that the answer is no. All that we have supposed about *D* is that its sentences have a certain syntactical form and that our practice of engaging in *D* is disciplined. It seems entirely consistent to conjoin these claims with the denial

⁶¹ The matter of *how* patterns of usage determine content deserves further discussion, that I cannot provide here. It is enough for now that the suggestion is at least plausible, and since the bulk of my later discussion in §2.7 turns primarily on the *necessity* of discipline, the matter is of little consequence.

⁶² Another way to characterise the necessity of discipline for minimal truth aptitude is that, since the truth that emerges is meant to *be* a standard that regulates utterance of the sentence, if there are *no* such standards then there are *a fortiori* no such standards that qualify as truth.

⁶³ The sufficiency of Syntax and Discipline for truth-aptitude has been disputed. Jackson, Oppy, and Smith argue here that certain connections between truth-conditionality and *belief* refute Wright’s account: Jackson, Oppy, and Smith, “Minimalism and Truth Aptness.” There is an interesting intersection between the discussion in that paper and this one: Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit, “A Problem for Expressivism,” *Analysis* 58, no. 4 (1998): 239–251, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8284.00128>. In the first, Jackson (et al.) argues that truth-conditionality requires a connection to belief that is not ensured by discipline and syntax alone, while in the latter Jackson (et al.) seems to argue that the discipline incorporated by the *expressivist* about morality *implies* a connection to belief. I cannot investigate this matter further here.

that *D* has a real subject matter. Indeed, we haven't had to say anything about the subject matter of *D* at all.

As noted, the metaphysical neutrality of truth *aptitude* will not be enough; it must also be the case that a sentence can be *true* without having a real subject matter.⁶⁴ Say, then, that a sentence in *D* is not merely truth-apt but qualifies as minimally true. *Must* this sentence state a mind-independent fact, and thereby belong to a realist discourse? The answer appears to again be no. All that it takes for a property to qualify as truth is that it exhibits the platitudes. And if sentences in *D* are apt for ascription of that truth, then all it takes for a sentence to be true is that it exhibits a property with the platitudinous characteristics. Like Syntax and Discipline, these platitudes make no reference to independent reality. If all we have said about some truth property is that satisfies the platitudes, then nothing mind-independent seems to be required for a sentence to meet the standard for possessing property.

One platitude that may appear to give the game away to realism is Correspondence. The worry is whether it follows from the platitude that true sentences *correspond to reality* and *reflect the facts* that the subject matter of true sentences must be real. Does Correspondence not build this implication into truth? Wright claims that it does not.⁶⁵ It was noted above that this platitude derives directly from the DS. Given that "P" is true if and only if P, it follows from any true sentence that it states a fact that obtains. We can interpret the necessary correspondence between truth and reality in a number of ways. Wright's claim is that it is a perfectly acceptable reading of Correspondence that truth produces instances of the DS; that there will be a stated fact for every truth. The DS does, in a

⁶⁴ If we considered only truth-aptitude, then it would remain possible that *only* the sentences in a realist discourse could actually achieve truth, and that the non-realist is limited to truth-apt but *false* sentences. This wouldn't qualify as an anti-realist position as I am construing it; it would be an error-theory. I will discuss the intersection of error-theories with minimalism in §1.5. There, I will find that it is formally possible that a discourse is comprised of truth-apt sentences but *none of those sentences are true*. But since Wright's approach to truth is meant to reflect the standards actually at work in a given discourse—and it would be odd for those standards to be uniformly *unmet*—that possibility is strongly constrained. For my discussion, I will simply assume that if a discourse can sustain a minimal truth norm then *some* of its sentences will be true; if that norm is what governs utterance, then it will occasionally be satisfied.

⁶⁵ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 25.

limited sense, ensure a certain relation between truth and reality. But this needn't be a connection between truth and a *mind-independent* reality. We have had to make reference to facts to capture the concept of truth. *But we have not needed to specify that those facts obtain independently of our thoughts about them*, or that they are *out there in the world*. Instead, they may be *minimal* facts that emerge when a sentence satisfies a minimal truth norm. If "Torture is impermissible" is true, then it is certainly a fact that torture is impermissible (assuming, here, that "Torture is impermissible" says that torture is impermissible); and there need be no more to the truth of that sentence than what is laid out in the platitudes. Nothing unavailable to the non-realist need be supposed to maintain that facts of a minimal sort accompany true sentences. The appearance of realism that Correspondence builds truth, then, is no more than appearance.⁶⁶

All that is necessary for minimal truth-aptness is that a sentence exhibits Syntax and Discipline. And all that is necessary for a sentence to be minimally true is that it has a property that meets the platitudinous constraints. We have found that a discourse needn't have a real subject matter to be comprised of sentences that meet these requirements. If we consider what is *undeniably* part of the concept of truth, and then lower the bar to render these platitudinous characteristics sufficient, the truth of a sentence can be quite independent of whether it belongs to a realist or non-realist discourse. And since it is quite legitimate to claim that there is a fact whenever there is a true sentence, there are thus facts with the same metaphysical neutrality. If we adopt Wright's minimalism, the realist does not have a monopoly on truth and facts.⁶⁷ This was the first task for the anti-realist: to show that the distinction between realism and non-realism is *not* the presence of truth or facts in a discourse. The second task is to add a positive claim: a claim

⁶⁶ As earlier noted, while this interpretation of the correspondence that truth exhibits is acceptable, there may yet be *other* interpretations, some of which may not be available to the non-realist. Wright incorporates this possibility into his metaphysical framework, in the cruces discussed in §1.4.3 and Appendix B: *Cognitive Command* and *Width of Cosmological Role*, respectively.

⁶⁷ It might be objected at this point that the neutrality of the platitudes alone is insufficient; the platitudes do not specify the *nature* of the standard that a sentence meets in being true, and this standard might not be consistent with the denial of realism. This is, indeed, an important part of Wright's framework that I will introduce in the next section in discussing the realism-relevant cruces. But since the platitudes describe all that is *necessary*, the metaphysical neutrality of a property with those characteristics suffices for the present claim.

about what *does* constitute the distinction. We have said that the anti-realist denies that the subject matter in question is mind-independent. What is it, then, for one subject to be more or less mind-independent than another?

The mind-independence of a subject, in Wright's framework, is constituted by *the mind-independence of truth in discourse about that subject*. Debates between realism and non-realism for some discourse are debates about the degree of objectivity exhibited by the truth norm that operates over the sentences in that discourse. Let us set aside the question of the determinants of mind-independence until the next section. There is a prior matter. This account requires a certain *pluralism* about truth. For truth to perform the role Wright assigns to it, it must be possible for there to be *variation* in the nature of different truth properties. I will briefly show how Wright's minimalism facilitates this variation.

The platitudes mark constraints on the concept of truth such that no property could plausibly be a truth property unless it satisfies them. But although the minimalist holds that meeting the platitudinous requirements settles the matter about whether a property is a truth property, this doesn't mean that we have exhausted discussion about the *nature* of that property. The platitudes mark out, as it were, a *shape* which is unmistakably that of a truth property; and having the shape suffices to be truth. But there is more that could be said about the property that takes this shape. Wright describes his approach thus:

Let us call an analysis based on the accumulation and theoretical organisation of a set of platitudes concerning a particular concept an *analytical theory* of the concept in question. Then the provision of an analytical theory of truth in particular opens up possibilities for a principled pluralism in the following specific way: that in different regions of thought and discourse *the theory may hold good, a priori of—may be satisfied by—different properties*. If this is so, then always provided the network of platitudes integrated into the theory were sufficiently comprehensive, we should not scruple to say that truth may consist in different things in different such areas: in the instantiation of one property in one area, and in that of a different property in another. . . . In brief: the *unity* in the concept of

truth will be supplied by the analytical theory; and the *pluralism* will be underwritten by the fact that the principles composing that theory admit of collective variable realisation.⁶⁸

Under Wright's minimalism, then, there may be *multiple truth properties*. Φ , a property defined earlier as exhibiting the platitudinous characteristics, is one such property. But it needn't be Φ that governs every assertoric discourse. There may be other truth properties, alike Φ in exhibiting the platitudes, but that differ with respect to *mind-independence*. In virtue of this pluralism, we may be differentially realist with respect the discourses in which those properties appear.⁶⁹ But we need an account of mind-independence, and it is to this matter which we now turn.

⁶⁸ Wright, "Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed," 273.

⁶⁹ It will be worthwhile to acknowledge an objection that has been made against this pluralism: Christine Tappolet, "Mixed Inferences: A Problem for Pluralism About Truth Predicates," *Analysis* 57, no. 3 (1997): 209–210, <https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/57.3.209>; Timothy Williamson, "Critical Notices," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2, no. 1 (March 1, 1994): 109–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559408570786>. While Wright has an effective response, presenting the point will provide a useful clarification. The objector claims that Wright's minimalism posits multiple senses of the predicate "is true" and that it is problematic to do so. We have said that the property a sentence in one discourse has in being true may differ to the property a sentence in a different discourse has in being true. There are, then, a variety of properties of truth, and of predicates that pick them out. Here is one reason to think that this might be a problem (this characterisation is given by Tappolet). Consider the following argument:

1. If x is F, then y is G.
2. x is F.
3. Therefore, y is G.

Now say that truth for the discourse in which F is the predicate ascribed is constituted differently to truth for the discourse in which G is the predicate ascribed. A weaker version of the familiar Frege-Geach problem for non-factualism appears to arise. It is expected (and desired) that the argument is valid. If *validity is due to truth being preserved from the premises to the conclusion*, then, the following charge might be made: there can be no such preservation in this argument, because the two sentences "x is F" and "y is G" have two different properties when they are true. The pluralism about truth implemented in Wright's minimalism thus fails, the objection concludes, to maintain the validity of a very plausibly valid form of argument.

The key response Wright makes to this objection is that it mistakes pluralism for ambiguity. (Crispin Wright, "Truth in Ethics," in *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 190.) The minimalist claims no ambiguity in "is true". Any two properties or predicates of truth have *enough* in common for there to be a unified sense of the predicate. Each of the sentences in the above argument share aptitude for a property that satisfies the platitudinous requirements. Truth is *multiply realizable*, but this does not suffice for the argument above to equivocate on "is true"; the argument is valid, as hoped. And indeed, Wright marks its ability to render arguments of this sort valid as a key advantage of his framework over expressivist non-factualism: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 74.

Wright makes an illustrative comparison between truth and *identity* to assuage ambiguity concerns: Wright, "Truth in Ethics," 189. The suggestion is that whenever two objects are identical, they have a property that satisfies certain platitudes: "that everything is self-identical and that all identicals share all their properties." But the property that constitutes the identity of two identical *numbers*, for example, might be different to the property that constitutes the identity of two identical *persons*. It doesn't seem likely that this difference is sufficient for there to be multiple

1.4 Realism-Relevant Cruces

1.4.1 Mind-Independence

We will now adopt Wright's minimalism about truth. On this account, *every* assertoric discourse features a norm of truth. The distinction between the realist and their opponent is not whether any of the sentences in the discourse in question are true, but instead the *nature* of this truth. Since the realist claims that certain sentences are mind-independently true, for variation between truth properties to constitute a genuine distinction between realism and non-realism it must be the *mind-independence* of truth that is in question. In this section, I will present Wright's account of mind-independence.⁷⁰

One way to characterise mind-independence is to provide a simple analysis: to complete the sentence "A subject matter is mind-independent iff...". Wright opts instead for a more complex account, on which the mind-independence of a subject matter is determined by how it fares with respect to *four realism-relevant cruces*. Each crux characterises one way that subject matters can be more or less mind-independent, and thus offers a different debate that may arise between the realist and their opponent. I will discuss two of the cruces in following sections: *Judgement-Dependence* in §1.4.2, and *Cognitive Command* in §1.4.3. I include appendices concerning the remaining two: *Potential Verification-Transcendence* in

senses of "is identical to". The claim of Wright's minimalist is that truth, in this respect, is much like identity.

An attack along these lines does not appear to be damaging to Wright's minimalism. But we have an opportunity to make a clarification. Truth, under Wright's minimalism, must occupy a position between two problematic extremes. It must be sufficiently *unified* that the above argument is valid; that there is enough preserved between the premises and the conclusion. But it must be sufficiently *plural* that there is enough room for variation between different properties for there to be a distinction between a realist and non-realist discourse. The unification and plurality come from different places; satisfaction of the platitudes unifies all truth properties, and *how* the platitudes are satisfied provides plurality. So there doesn't seem to be much reason for the minimalist to be concerned. I will set aside considerations of the tenability of truth pluralism at this point, but there may be further investigation to be done. Such investigation might pose the following questions: Can satisfaction of the platitudes provide enough unity, even when the property that constitutes truth may vary *drastically* between two discourses? And how is the truth property for which a sentence is apt determined, if that sentence has component sentences from *more than one discourse*, when those discourses feature different properties of truth?

⁷⁰ Recall, as noted in the General Introduction, firstly that I am construing *mind-independence* and *objectivity* as equivalent, and secondly that there are senses of both terms which are explicitly *not* what is meant in this discussion. It does not suffice for a chair to be mind-dependent, for example, that it has the *empirical* dependence that follows from being created by a human being with a mind. What is in question is a *non-empirical, constitutive* mind-independence and objectivity.

Appendix A, and *Width of Cosmological Role* in Appendix B.⁷¹ Each crux supplies a condition that, when satisfied by a discourse, renders it *more mind-independent* than it otherwise could be, and a corresponding condition the satisfaction of which renders that discourse *less mind-independent* than it otherwise would be.⁷²

These conditions characterise the nature of *truth in a discourse*. As we saw in §1.3, minimalism facilitates a certain pluralism about truth: all assertoric discourses feature a truth norm, but there can be variation in the nature of this truth between different discourses. Some of this variation may be *realism-relevant*—it may contribute to the realism-status of a discourse in which that truth operates. It is this variation that the cruces aim to capture. Truth in discourse *D* may differ from truth in *D** in virtue of the former property qualifying, and the latter failing to qualify, as mind-independent with respect to a certain crux. In such a case, the truth property in *D* is to that extent *more robust* than that in *D**; the fact stated by a true sentence in *D* is to that extent *more mind-independent* than an equivalent fact in *D**; and the subject matter of *D* is to that extent *more real* than that of *D**. The sentences in different assertoric discourses may have to meet a more or less objective standard to be true. Under Wright's characterisation of debates about realism it is *this* that determines the realism-status of a discourse. Whether a discourse is realist or non-realist is a function of the constitution of truth in that discourse, and thus of which of the conditions in the cruces are satisfied by that truth.

For each crux, my presentation will take the following form. First, I will establish the potential variation between truth properties and discourses that crux characterises. Each crux offers two or more positions that may be occupied by truth in a certain discourse. Since we have enshrined all that is *essential* to truth as the platitudes, one of the positions offered by each crux must be occupiable by a truth property merely on the basis of its satisfaction of those platitudes. One of the

⁷¹ The reason for distinguishing between the cruces in this way is that the latter two cruces do not seem to offer useful debates in the case of *meaning*, with which I am primarily concerned. I discuss this matter in the appendices themselves.

⁷² As we will see, the matter is not always this straightforward: Judgement-Dependence features a third option, and the conditions found in *Width of Cosmological Role* will be left to a certain extent imprecise.

positions must, in effect, be the *default* for a minimal truth property. And then, since the variation the cruces offer is meant to be *realism-relevant*, one of the positions should also constitute a genuine realist claim. That position, if occupied, to some extent strengthens the mind-independence of the subject matter of the discourse in question. This is not to say that a realist about a given discourse *must* make the realist claim for every crux. Each crux represents *one way* that truth can vary between discourses, and *one* axis along which the realism-status of a discourse can be debated.

1.4.2 Judgement Dependence

The truth properties in different discourses may differ with respect to *judgement-dependence*. Take discourse about some property F, and consider the judgements that can be made about the extension of that property; that, for example, some object *a* is F. Say that some of these judgements—those made in *cognitively ideal conditions*—are such that they *covary with the extension of F*. That is, say that the *best opinions* about F ascribe F to all and only those objects that are F. For any fact such that *x* is F, the best opinion is that *x* is F—and vice versa.

Given that this biconditional obtains for F, a distinction can be recognised between two possible *explanations* of the covariation. We can consider a certain *conceptual priority*: the covariation might arise because one of the covariants *depends* on the other. The first option is that the *facts* have priority over the *judgements*. Judgements about F at best *reflect* the independently determined extension of F, and the perfect correlation is due to the accuracy of this reflection. Judgements that satisfy the conditions of cognitive idealness—which we will call the *C-conditions*—are those that are of a sufficient quality to accurately capture independently constituted F-facts. Alternatively, it may be the *judgements* that have conceptual priority over the *facts*. The covariation is in this case explained as due to the relevant judgements *determining* the extension of F. The judgements that satisfy the C-conditions do not merely reflect independently-determined facts about F; an object that is F is so *because* the best opinion is that it is F.⁷³

⁷³ It is a *conceptual* “because” that is meant here; this matter is distinct from that of *empirical* causation.

It is clear how this would bear on the nature of truth in a certain discourse. The Disquotational Schema (DS), which is at the heart of any truth property, ensures that true sentences and facts coextend. So, while I have put this discussion in terms of facts, the point carries across to truth. We may ask the following of given discourse: which, of the extension of truth in that discourse or best judgements about that extension, is conceptually prior? The truth norm operating in a discourse may be such that whether a sentence in that discourse satisfies it is *determined* by the content of the best opinions. Such a truth property, and the discourse in which it operates, is *judgement-dependent*. On the other hand, a truth property and the discourse in which it appears may be *judgement-independent*. In this case, while cognitively ideal judgements do covary with whether the corresponding sentence is true, this is explained as due to those judgements *reflecting* that truth.

Wright dubs this distinction the *Euthyphro Contrast*, alluding to the dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro in which Socrates claims that the (perfectly accurate) opinions of the gods reflect the extension of *piety*, while Euthyphro claims in opposition that those opinions are extension-determining.⁷⁴ It is intuitive that there is a distinction between a discourse that is *judgement-independent* and one which is *judgement-dependent*. But we need to answer two questions. First, we need a formal account of the distinction that we can apply to a given discourse. And second, we need to make a case for the realism-relevance of the distinction. I will address these matters in turn.

Wright formalises the distinction as follows. Say that for the characteristic property F of a discourse we can establish a *provisional equation* (PE) of the following form:

PE(F): For all x: if the C-conditions obtain then (a suitable subject judges that x is F) \Leftrightarrow x is F).

⁷⁴ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 108.

PE(F) states that if a certain set of conditions are met, then the opinions of an appropriate subject will covary with the extension of F. This is, for the most part, equivalent to what we have already said.⁷⁵ Wright formalises the intuitive distinction between extension-determination and reflection as consisting in *whether the PE for a certain property can meet certain conditions*. We may be able to establish a PE for both judgement-independent properties and judgement-dependent properties. But only for properties with extensions that depend on best opinion will the PE satisfy the following four conditions: A Prioricity, Substantiality, Independence, and Extremal.⁷⁶

A Prioricity: It is necessary for F to be judgement-dependent that PE(F) is true *a priori*. Conceptual priority is an *a priori* matter, so if the covariation of best opinion and facts about F is at best empirically true then it cannot be due to the conceptual priority of the opinions over the facts.

The truth, if it is true, that the extension of [F] is constrained by idealised human response—best opinion—ought to be accessible purely by analytic reflection on those concepts, and hence available as knowledge *a priori*.⁷⁷

Substantiality: It is necessary for F to be judgement-dependent that the C-conditions in PE(F) can be specified in a *non-trivial* fashion. Say that we include among the C-conditions the condition that the relevant judgments are those made in *whatever conditions will render them accurate*. If such “whatever it takes” conditions are admissible, then an *a priori* PE can be established for *any* property. In such cases, it is clear that the covariation of best opinion and fact is not due to the extension-determining role of those opinions; it is merely a trivial result of the

⁷⁵ The location of the C-conditions in the PE importantly differs to what might be a more intuitive equation: a biconditional between the extension of F and the judgements about F that satisfy the conditions. Wright justifies widening the scope of the C-conditions here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 117-119. He notes that one result of this formulation is that the provision of an equation meeting the conditions is sufficient only for truth in a discourse to be *partially* determined by best opinion. We may find that truth is determined by those opinions *when the C-conditions are met*, but if the biconditional itself is consequent to those conditions then we have said nothing about the relation between truth and opinion when the C-conditions are *not* met. Nothing much will turn on this point, and I will set the matter aside.

⁷⁶ Wright discusses these conditions here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 112-124. Also see Miller’s synopsis here: Alexander Miller, “Primary Qualities, Secondary Qualities and the Truth about Intention,” *Synthese* 171, no. 3 (2009): 433-442, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-008-9316-8>.

⁷⁷ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 117.

strength of the C-conditions. It is thus necessary for judgement-dependence that those conditions are specified *substantially*; “whatever it takes” conditions will not suffice.

Independence: It is necessary for F to be judgement-dependent that *whether the C-conditions obtain* is independent of facts about F. Say that PE(F) is a priori true and features substantial C-conditions. The following might be the case for that PE: that whether or not the C-conditions obtain depends on the extension of F. F cannot be judgement-dependent in such a case. The PE specifies that the covariation of best opinion and fact is dependent on the obtaining of the C-conditions, so if satisfaction of the C-conditions depends on the facts then the judgements are *not* conceptually prior to those facts.

Extremal: It is necessary for F to be judgement-dependent that, when the previous three conditions are met, there is no better explanation of that fact than that best opinion about F determines its extension. There might be a PE established for a property F that, while a priori and including substantial and independent C-conditions, can be explained as due to something other than the judgement-dependence of F. Wright suggests *pain* as an example.⁷⁸ We may establish a PE for pain that meets the prior conditions. But this is due not to the judgement-dependence of pain but to subjects being *infallible* with respect to pain. We can be sure that a subject’s judgements about their pain covary with the facts without taking it that those facts are determined by (the best of) those judgements. The nature of pain itself can explain the accuracy of best opinion, and this nature can be (Wright suggests) specified without reference to judgements about it. To rule out such cases, the Extremal condition must be met by PE(F) for F to qualify as judgement-dependent.

Wright’s claim is that satisfaction of these four conditions is necessary and collectively sufficient for the property F featuring in PE(F) to be judgement-dependent. If we can be assured, in the manner laid out in these conditions, that, contingent on certain conditions obtaining, a subject’s opinions about F will be

⁷⁸ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 122.

perfectly accurate, then it *must* be the case that the facts about F are *determined* by the best opinions about F. The truth of sentences ascribing F, and the discourse those sentences comprise, is thus judgement-dependent. If we cannot establish a PE within the confines of the four conditions, and need to deny one or more of them to ensure the accuracy of certain opinions about F, then F may instead be *judgement-independent*. For illustration, consider the following two cases: *redness* and *squareness*.⁷⁹

PE(redness): For all x : if (S knows which object x is, and knowingly observes it in plain view in normal perceptual conditions; S is fully attentive to this observation; S is perceptually normal and is prey to no other cognitive disfunction; S is free of doubt about the satisfaction of any of these conditions) then (S judges that x is red $\Leftrightarrow x$ is red).⁸⁰

PE(squareness): For all x : if (S knows which object x is, and knowingly observes it in plain view *from a sufficient variety of positions* in normal perceptual conditions; S is fully attentive to *these observations*; S is perceptually normal and is prey to no other cognitive disfunction; S is free of doubt about the satisfaction of any of these conditions) then (S judges that x is square $\Leftrightarrow x$ is square).⁸¹

I cannot give a full discussion of these two cases here. But it is quite plausible that PE(redness) is a priori true, that the conditions are independent and substantial, and that there is no better explanation of this being the case than that redness is judgement-dependent. PE(squareness), on the other hand, does *not* look to satisfy the conditions. The italicised necessary stipulation that a subject makes more than one observation renders the independence condition unmet. *Judgements* about squareness—on this account—cannot be conceptually prior to *facts* about squareness because to be sure of an object's shape we need to perceive it from multiple angles. And the possibility of several perceptions contributing to a single judgement depends on the shape not changing between perceptions, and thus on

⁷⁹ These are the examples that Wright uses here: Crispin Wright, "Moral Values, Projection and Secondary Qualities," in *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 169.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 171.

⁸¹ Ibid., 173.

facts about the shape of the object.⁸² The failure of this *particular* PE does not, of course, imply that *no* successful PE can be found for squareness. The claim is that the difficulty seems insurmountable—that adequate C-conditions cannot be found, and that squareness cannot be judgement-dependent.⁸³

These examples are meant only to *illustrate* Wright's account of judgement-dependence; whether the results are correct is not of great concern. I have established, I hope, that there is a genuine distinction between a truth property being judgement-dependent and it being judgement-independent. The next task is to demonstrate that the distinction is relevant to the mind-independence of the property at hand, and thus that it should be included among the realism-relevant cruces. The case for this is clear. Judgements are made by minds. If truth in a discourse is judgement-dependent, then, it is to that extent mind-dependent. If, on the other hand, truth in a discourse is judgement-independent—if judgements at best track facts that are conceptually—then the truth that corresponds to those facts is to a certain extent independent of our mental activity. The Judgement-Dependence (JD) crux thus offers these two positions for realism debates about some discourse D.

JD Realism(D): Truth in D is judgement-independent. Opinions, at their best, merely reflect the independent facts that form the subject matter of D.

JD Anti-Realism(D): Truth in D is judgment-dependent. Opinions, at their best, determine the facts that form the subject matter of D.

There is an important matter to discuss before we move on. There is a *third position* available in debates about judgement-dependence. This option is not explicit in Wright's work; it is an apparent consequence of his framework, and one that he does not directly address.⁸⁴ A discourse may be such that covariation of

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ These results seem generalisable to *any* colour or shape, and thus suggest that any ascription of colour is judgement-dependent, and that any ascription of shape (or, more cautiously, *at least* ascription of two-dimensional shape) is judgement-independent.

⁸⁴ Wright acknowledges the point here: Crispin Wright, "Realism, Pure and Simple? A Reply to Williamson," in *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity*. (Cambridge,

best opinion with fact *cannot* be explained as due to the either the priority of opinion *or* fact.

JD Mere Minimalism(D): Truth in D is neither judgement-dependent nor judgement-independent. Opinions neither track nor determine the facts that form the subject matter of D.

Judgement-independence and judgment-dependence offer characterisations of the *epistemology* of a discourse. The C-conditions are those in which a judgement is *epistemically best*, and the two accounts diverge as to what *relation* obtains between judgements and facts in those conditions. But an assertoric discourse may be such that an epistemology of this sort is out of the question. There may *no* explanatory account available of how judgements access the facts, or of which of those judgements are epistemically best. The assertoricity of a discourse ensures that the comprising sentences are truth-apt, and that some of them are true. But it doesn't follow that there is anything substantial to be said about *how* our judgements about what is true relate to the extension of truth.

When truth in a discourse is of this third sort, a PE meeting the four conditions cannot be found—that would require an explanation of best judgments about truth as *determining* what is true. But from this failure it does not follow that an explanation can be given of those judgements as *tracking* what is independently true. We would need to suppose, in addition, that there is some means by which subjects who make the judgements in question *access* the facts.

We can see that judgement-dependence and judgement-independence cannot exhaust the possibilities for truth in a discourse by noting that meeting the minimal requirements for being a truth property does not suffice for either relation to judgement. From merely the platitudinous characteristics of any truth

Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 80. That judgement-dependence and judgement-independence do not exhaust the options is suggested here, in relation to discourse about *morality*: Wright, "Moral Values, Projection and Secondary Qualities," 181. This matter is also well discussed here: Alexander Miller, "Differences with Wright," *Philosophical Quarterly* 54, no. 217 (2004): 595–603, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0031-8094.2004.00376.x>.

property, we are not guaranteed any explanatory relation between judgement and what is true. We could put the point like this: if judgement-dependence and independence were the only two options, then *one of them* would be enshrined amongst the platitudes or derivable from them; and neither is. Or, at least, neither seems to be—the platitudes include no reference to judgement.⁸⁵ A discourse may be what we will call *merely minimal* with respect to the Judgement-Dependence crux.⁸⁶

Debate about the realism-status of a certain discourse can thus be debate about which of *three* Judgement-Dependence positions is occupied by that discourse. If a PE meeting the four conditions can be established for the characteristic property of the discourse, then when a sentence in that discourse is true, it is so *because* it is judged to be so in conditions of idealisation. If there cannot be such a PE, then either an extension-tracking epistemology justifies the claim that the covariation of certain judgements and truth is due to the independence of truth from those judgements, or the absence of a sufficient epistemology prevents movement beyond the platitudes for truth in that discourse.

1.4.3 Cognitive Command

Cognitive Command concerns the nature of the correspondence afforded by the Correspondence platitude:

⁸⁵ To avoid supposing that there is a third option, one may attempt to derive one of the first two options from the platitudes. It is worth noting a difficult constraint on this plan. The following seems to be a trilemma: (1) that judgement-independent truth is a genuine realist position, (2) that the minimal platitudes are neutral on the question of realism and non-realism, (3) that it follows from the platitudes that truth is judgement-independent. To maintain (1) and (2) one must deny (3). If we are to cohere with Wright's framework as we have set it up, then, either judgement-dependence or some third option is platitudinous. And then, noting the hoops through which one must jump to establish a sufficient provisional equation for judgement-dependence—conditions that are surely not satisfiable merely on the basis of the platitudes alone—it follows that it must be the third option that is platitudinous.

⁸⁶ One result of this possibility is that, unlike for the other cruxes, what I have called the anti-realist option for Judgement-Dependence—that certain judgements determine what is true—is *not* a default feature of truth. Instead, the basic position is JD mere minimalism, and both the realist *and* the anti-realist must add to the platitudes to achieve their distinctive positions.

Correspondence: for a proposition to be true is for it to correspond to reality and accurately reflect how matters stand.

Any truth property will exhibit Correspondence. But, as I have noted, there can be variation in the *robustness* of the correspondence between the truth of a sentence and the fact it states. Minimalism about truth entails a certain minimalism about facts; the Disquotational Schema (DS) is enough for there to be *some kind* of correspondence between a true sentence and a fact it states. But, for truth in some discourses, there may be *more* to correspondence than what is produced by the DS alone.⁸⁷

A discourse may be such that it exerts cognitive command:

Cognitive Command: A discourse exerts cognitive command iff it is a priori that differences of opinion formulated within the discourse, unless excusable as a result of vagueness, will involve something which may properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming.⁸⁸

Or a discourse may instead be such that it does *not* exert cognitive command. Consider the sentence “*x* is *F*” in some discourse *D*. Say that person *A* believes this sentence to be true and person *B* believes it to be false; *A* and *B* *disagree*. There are three possibilities given such a disagreement. Firstly, the disagreement may be due to the presence of *vagueness*. I will set this possibility aside; take it that when I refer to a disagreement in this discussion it is implicit that that disagreement is *not* attributable to vagueness.⁸⁹ It is the second two options which are of relevance to

⁸⁷ Another crux, *Width of Cosmological Role* (WCR) also concerns this correspondence. Cognitive Command offers one way that the *relation* between true sentences and facts can be robust, while WCR offers one way that the *facts themselves* may be robust. I discuss WCR in Appendix 2. See: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 84.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁸⁹ Wright identifies (*ibid.*) several places in a disagreement that may involve some vagueness may occur in such scenarios. It might be the case, for example, that whether or not *x* is *F* is a vague matter, or that the standards under which *A* and *B* evaluate the sentences are such that it is a vague matter whether the standards are met. If the disagreement is due to such vagueness, then the question of cognitive command does not apply. Vagueness among the facts, standards, or whatever else does not imply anything about the metaphysical nature of the subject matter in question—at least, it does not appear to. And disagreements that are *due* to this vagueness will not, then, be realism-relevant either. Note, also, that I am primarily concerned with the application of this

debates about realism. The disagreement may occur because one of A or B exhibits a *cognitive shortcoming*. The divergence of their opinions, in this case, is attributable to one or both of them committing some error in arriving at the belief in question. It might be the case, for example, that B believes that x is not F because they are *poorly informed*. Or, it could be that their belief-forming processes *malfunctioned* and produced a belief that does not follow from the available evidence.⁹⁰ The third possibility in the face of a difference of opinion is that there *no shortcoming*. In this case, A and B arrive at their conflicting beliefs without any error.

A discourse exerts cognitive command when it is *a priori* that any disagreement is of the second variety; that some cognitive fault must have occurred.⁹¹ The standard of truth that operates over such a discourse is sufficiently strict that two subjects *cannot* form conflicting opinions without one or both of them having made some kind of error. Discourses that exert cognitive command are those for which it is inconceivable that two subjects can faultlessly disagree about what is true.

The positions of the realist and the anti-realist in debates about Cognitive Command (CC) are as follows:

CC Realism(D): D exerts cognitive command. It is *a priori* that differences of opinion formulated within the discourse, unless excusable as a result of vagueness, will involve something which may properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming.

framework to meaning (in the case of this crux, in §2.7.3). Since there seems to be no particular reason to suspect that vagueness will happily explain away disagreements about the truth of meaning ascriptions, we will simply set matters of vagueness aside.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 93.

⁹¹ The condition of a priority on discourse that exert cognitive command is included because we are concerned with a characteristic of a discourse that is *built-in* to our practice of it; it would not be enough if it was simply a matter of empirical fact that every disagreement was due to error. See: *ibid.*, 94.

CC Anti-Realism(D): D does not exert cognitive command. It is *not* a priori that differences of opinion formulated within the discourse, unless excusable as a result of vagueness, will involve something which may properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming.

To see that these positions mark a *realism-relevant* distinction, consider the nature of the relation between truth and fact. In virtue of the DS, a minimal sense of representation arises even for merely minimal truth properties; a sentence can be true only if it states a fact, and thus in a sense only if it *accurately reflects reality*.⁹² But if the sentences in a discourse *cannot* be faultlessly incompatible, then there is a *more robust* representation at work in that discourse.

The thought of a realist ... is that responsibly to practise in that region is to enter into a kind of representational mode of cognitive function, comparable in relevant respects to, say, taking a photograph or making a wax impression of a key. Certain matters stand thus and so independently of use—compare the photographed scene and the contours of the key. We engage in a certain process, to wit, we put ourselves at the mercy, so to speak, of the standards of appraisal appropriate to the discourse in question—compare taking the snapshot or impressing the key on the wax—and the result is to leave an imprint in our minds which, in the best case, appropriately matches the independently standing state of affairs.⁹³

There is a notion of representation, Wright claims, such that a discourse that involves that representation deals with mind-independent matters. A discourse can be such that the comprising sentences are attempts to capture the nature of an independent reality, as a photograph captures a landscape. The connection to be made, then, is between cognitive command and this robust representation. The claim must be that the impossibility of faultless disagreement is sufficient for representationality of this robust sort. And it is quite plausibly so. What else, other than that the sentences in question are *meant* to capture independent facts, could a priori ensure that disagreement in a discourse implies that one or both of the conflicting beliefs is faulty? It must be that those sentences are robustly

⁹² This point was made in §1.3, and derives from here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 25.

⁹³ Wright, "Truth in Ethics," 197.

representational—that there is a strict correspondence relation that rules out the possibility of two subjects faultlessly arriving at conflicting beliefs. We can put the point like this: given that *only one* of P or not-P obtains, and that the function of the sentences “P” and “not-P” is to accurately represent what is the case with respect to P, it cannot be that both sentences successful perform their function. The exertion of cognitive command, then, suffices for a discourse to be robustly representational. And it is clear that this representationality is realism-relevant. If a sentence must accurately represent a mind-independent fact to be true, then that truth is to that extent mind-independent.

That a discourse exerts cognitive command does not follow merely from the aptitude of the sentences in that discourse for minimal truth.⁹⁴ If, for a certain truth property, we commit only to the satisfaction of the platitudes and nothing more, the third possibility in the face of a disagreement is available:

It is consistent with the minimal truth aptitude of a discourse that the relevant standards are highly tolerant, or underdetermine a substantial class of potential disagreements, or otherwise allow a degree of idiosyncrasy in their application, and so permit divergences of opinion in which, judged purely by those standards, no shortcoming need be involved.⁹⁵

A discourse can be *disciplined* without there being error in holding conflicting opinions about whether a sentence meets the disciplinary standard. And as earlier established, this discipline (and an appropriate syntax) is all that is necessary to establish a minimal truth norm in a discourse. If truth in a discourse does not extend beyond the platitudes, then correspondence to fact need be no more than the casting of an *ontic shadow*: when a sentence meets the standard for truth the fact it states obtains. For it to be a priori that disagreement implies error, a more robust correspondence is necessary. We must go beyond what is granted by the platitudes and hold that true sentences are those that *map* the facts, and not merely those that the DS ensures are everywhere *accompanied by* the facts. It is

⁹⁴ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 94.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

this quality that a discourse exhibits when it exerts cognitive command. Cognitive Command thus offers a genuine realism debate. The default position, ensured on the basis of the assertoricity of a discourse alone, is that truth does *not* exert cognitive command. The realist may seek to establish that truth *does* exert cognitive command, and that the discourse in question thus involves a robustly representational correspondence to reality.

1.5 The Metaphysical Landscape

This exposition of *Truth and Objectivity* is far from comprehensive. But we are now in a position to specify the basics of Wright's framework for debates about realism. We set out, at the start of this chapter, to formulate an anti-realist approach to non-realism. The first task was to find an account of truth and facts on which they are metaphysically neutral: on which they are not available only to the realist. Wright's *minimalism* provides such an account. The second task was to provide an account of what *does* suffice for realism. This is provided by the variable constitution of truth characterised in the four cruces. The realist argues that the truth property at work in the discourse in question is mind-independent in one or more of these respects. We have thus produced a workable model of opposition to realism along anti-realist lines: an assertoric discourse may operate under a truth norm that involves little or no mind-independence. I conclude this chapter with a brief general suggestion of how to apply Wright's model of realism debate to a given discourse. In §2.7 I will apply the framework to discourse about meaning. For now, I will use a made-up example, to render the discussion as neutral as possible.

Say that a group of people engage in discourse comprised of sentences of the form "x is foog". Assume, for now, nothing whatsoever about the nature of foogness. All we know is that people appear to talk about which things are foog. In seeking to evaluate the realism-status of foogness within Wright's framework, the first step is to determine whether discourse about foogness is *assertoric*. Minimalism about truth is such that all that is necessary for sentences to be truth-apt is that they exhibit a certain syntax and discipline. The metaphysician first considers whether sentences like "If this is foog, then it's edible," and "Roxanne

believes that this is foog” are grammatically correct—let us say that they are.⁹⁶ The metaphysician then considers whether discourse about foogness is disciplined. There must be a norm or norms of *correct assertion* operating over sentences that ascribe foogness, such that there is a distinction between ascriptions that are *correct* and those that are *incorrect*. Let’s say that there is such a norm, and that the patterns of regulated use are sufficient for foogness ascriptions to have determinate content. From these syntactical and disciplinary considerations, it follows that the sentences “x is foog” are apt for ascription of a property Φ that be substituted for truth in the Disquotational Schema (DS): “P” is true iff P. Given that Φ also satisfies the three platitudes that do not follow directly from the DS, it is a truth property.⁹⁷ We have thus found that foogness discourse features a norm of truth under which each comprising sentence is evaluated as either true or false. And any foogness ascription which meets the standard will be true.

So, having assumed nothing of any metaphysical import about foogness, we have found that there can be true foogness ascriptions. Recalling the Correspondence platitude, then, it follows that there are foogness *facts*. We next consider how truth in foogness discourse fares with respect to the cruces. It is the cruces that may imbue a truth property with mind-independence, and it is this mind-independence that determines the realism-status of the discourse in which that truth appears. So, we next ask the following questions:

1. *Is truth in this discourse judgement-dependent, judgement-independent, or neither?* Debates in this area concern, first, whether an a priori true provisional equation with substantial, independent C-conditions, for which we have no better explanation than judgement-dependence, can be established. If such an equation can be established for foogness, then the anti-realist wins the debate. If it cannot, then either the discourse features

⁹⁶ To see the point of this test, imagine that foog-talk was instead comprised of sentences like “Foog!” and “No foog!”. Such a discourse wouldn’t qualify as assertoric or as apt for minimal truth. It may be norm-governed; there may be quite specific conditions in which it is proper to utter these sentences. But that norm cannot be *truth*, because it is essential to our concept of truth that sentences that are true or false can be embedded into certain contexts.

⁹⁷ Recalling, as noted in §1.3, that satisfying these three platitudes seems to be an unproblematic requirement.

an epistemology in which judgements track the facts—a win for the realist—or, with no such epistemology, the discourse is merely minimal with respect to this crux.

2. *Does this discourse exert cognitive command?* When there is disagreement about what is foog that is not due to vagueness, is it a priori that one or more of the disagreeing parties exhibit some cognitive shortcoming? If it is, then the robust representationality that follows constitutes a win for the realist. If it is not, then there is no robust representationality, which is a win for the non-realist.

Two other cruces, *Potential Verification Transcendence* and *Width of Cosmological Role* are described in Appendices A and B. They offer the following questions, which I will include here without further discussion:

3. *Is truth in this discourse potentially verification transcendent?* We may commit to every foogness ascription being true or false even when that ascription is beyond the bounds of our standards of justification, and grant the realist this victory. Or, for any foogness ascription for which we have no guarantee that it (or its negation) is knowable, we may withhold commitment to it having a truth-value. This latter option constitutes a victory for the non-realist.
4. *What is the width of the cosmological role of the facts in this discourse?* Can facts about foogness explain anything other than, or other than via, propositional attitudes about those facts? If so, then truth in the discourse corresponds to facts that are independent of our minds, which is a victory for the realist. If not, then truth in the discourse may correspond only to facts as ontic shadows, and the victory goes to the non-realist.

Effectively, there are *four* debates about the realism-status of any discourse. A consequence of this structure is that there is a diversity of positions available. Realism debates as construed by Wright are not simply debates about which of

two positions—realism or non-realism—is occupied by a certain subject. The four distinct cruces, and the possibility that they might be differentially satisfied by a certain subject, multiply the available positions. There are three options for Judgement-Dependence, two options for Cognitive Command, two options for Potential Verification Transcendence, and at least two options for Width of Cosmological Role. An additional, non-multiplying option is to deny that the discourse is assertoric. We have, then, 25 or more debatable positions on the realism-status of any subject.⁹⁸ I have not considered whether certain combinations of positions across multiple cruces might be incoherent, so it is possible that this number is lower. Regardless, it is clear that this framework establishes a more complex landscape than that which arises for realism debates for which there is a singular question. We will not always, for example, be able to straightforwardly compare the realism-status of two discourses.⁹⁹ This may pose a difficulty, but I don't think it a very serious one. What reason is there to think that something like mind-independence must boil down to a single question?

This diversity of positions also produces terminological difficulties. Given Wright's framework, labelling a certain metaphysical view of a certain subject "realist", "anti-realist" or "non-realist" will leave the metaphysical status of that subject largely unspecified.¹⁰⁰ These terms are for the most part clear in the context of an individual debate. More generally, I think it clearest to use "full realism" for a discourse that falls on the realist side of every debate, and "anti-realism" for a discourse that falls on the non-realist side once or more—as long as it is remembered that a discourse may be anti-realist yet still operate under a truth norm that is mind-independent in one or more respects. "Mere minimalism" will be used for any discourse in which truth satisfies the platitudes but fails to be objective with respect to *any* of the cruces. Nothing turns on the specifics of this

⁹⁸ That is, the combinations offered in the four cruces produce at least 24 options ($3 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$), and the denial of assertoricity is one additional option.

⁹⁹ If some truth, for example, is PVT, judgement-independent, does not exert CC, and corresponds to facts with narrow cosmological role, then it is unclear how to determine whether the discourse in which that truth operates is more or less realist than another discourse the truth of which is not PVT, is judgment-dependent, does exert CC, and corresponds to fact with a wide cosmological role.

¹⁰⁰ Wright says that "the epithets "realism" and "anti-realism" come to seem less and less happy from a pluralistic perspective." Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 142.

terminology, but it is of course advantageous to make metaphysics clearer whenever possible.¹⁰¹

It is important to recognise that, in a certain sense, anti-realism becomes the default position under Wright's framework.¹⁰² We start by establishing that the targeted discourse meets the minimal constraints for truth. All assertoric discourses feature a truth norm that is *at least* minimal. The cruces mark four ways that truth in a discourse can go beyond this minimal level; four ways that the standard a sentence must meet to be true can gain some *objective* requirement, over and above the kind of evaluation internal to the discourse. It is sufficient for a kind of *anti-realism* about a certain subject that it is comprised of syntactically appropriate sentences, the use of which is disciplined.¹⁰³ *Realism*, on the other hand, is a more demanding position, one that must be earned by demonstration that truth in the discourse imposes mind-independent requirements on the sentences.

It is realism which must try to make good its case, by showing that minimalism about the relevant discourse is wrong—showing that the minimal platitudes leave out features of the local truth predicate which substantially justify the rhetoric of independence, autonomy and full-fledged cognitive interaction by which realism pretheoretically defines itself.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Another terminological point concerns "truth". Wright's framework involves a certain pluralism about truth, in which all truth properties share fundamental properties yet may vary widely in others. There may be certain advantages to restricting the term "truth" to only some of these properties. In one discussion, for example, Wright imposes a distinction between "correctness" and "truth", where both are strictly speaking truth properties but the former is merely minimal. (Ibid., 215.) Such variation in terminology is an option, and may be quite useful, but it remains essential to Wright's framework that all assertoric discourses feature a norm with the platitudinous characteristics, and that differences in realism-status between those discourses is constituted not by whether there is such a norm, or whether that norm is ever achieved, but by the nature of that norm beyond its platitudinous shape.

¹⁰² Ibid., 174.

¹⁰³ As noted in §1.4.2, Judgement-Dependence is an exception. To arrive what I have called the anti-realist option—that best opinions determine the facts—it is necessary to add an appropriate epistemology to what is granted by the minimal truth platitudes; an epistemology that has the resources to establish that, in certain conditions, best opinion covaries with the facts (and that the four conditions on this provisional equation can be satisfied). See, again: Miller, "Differences with Wright."

¹⁰⁴ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 174.

The anti-realist must, of course, defend against arguments made by the realist. But all positions in realism debate for an assertoric discourse will accept that that discourse traffics in truth and fact, and the onus is on the realist to argue that this truth and fact is more than the product of the form and discipline of the discourse itself.

Finally, let us look again at *non-factualism* and *error-theory*. These *irrealist* accounts of non-realist discourse oppose realism by denying that there are any facts about the relevant subject, and thus by denying that there are any true sentences that state those facts. If we have adopted Wright's framework, these positions remain formal options but become constrained. Once we adopt minimalism about truth (in place of an account on which truth is characterised as more robust), the space occupied by the non-factualist shrinks, and may for many subject matters disappear. The moral non-factualist, for example, claims that sentences like "Torture is impermissible" are not truth-apt. But Wright sets the bar for truth-aptitude very low. "Torture is impermissible" can qualify as truth-apt simply by sustaining an instance of the DS, for which all that is necessary is declarative syntax and the presence of some acknowledged standard of warrant. The moral non-factualist must deny either that moral ascriptions have the necessary syntax or the necessary discipline—both of which seem unappealing—or reject Wright's account.¹⁰⁵

The *error-theoretic* route fares moderately better, but is constrained by Wright's minimalism nonetheless.¹⁰⁶ The issue arises when we consider how error-theorists typically defend against *eliminativism*. Having accepted that the sentences in a discourse are systematically false, the error-theorist might contend

¹⁰⁵ The sufficiency of declarative syntax and discipline for truth aptitude—and, in particular, the intersection of this possibility with non-factualism—has received much discussion. See, for example: John Divers and Alexander Miller, "Why Expressivists about Value Should Not Love Minimalism about Truth," *Analysis* 54, no. 1 (1994): 12–19, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3328097>; John Divers and Alexander Miller, "Platitudes and Attitudes: A Minimalist Conception of Belief," *Analysis* 55 (1995): 37; Jackson, Oppy, and Smith, "Minimalism and Truth Aptness"; Michael Smith, "Why Expressivists about Value Should Love Minimalism about Truth," *Analysis* 54, no. 1 (1994): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3328096>. This matter is important for the discussion in §2.7.

¹⁰⁶ Wright discusses the intersection of minimalism and error-theory here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 35, 86.

that practicing that discourse is still worthwhile because it is governed by a *subsidiary norm*. The comprising sentences are correct or incorrect with respect to a norm, despite being universally incorrect (false) with respect to the *truth* norm. But given Wright's minimalism, truth can take different forms. If the subsidiary norm satisfies the minimal platitudes—which, as we have established, is quite consistent with non-realism about the discourse in question—it may be *that* norm which constitutes truth in the discourse. There is a choice, in such a case, between characterising truth as a standard that no sentences in the discourse achieve, or characterising truth as a different standard—one that is actually satisfiable, and that we may actually use to evaluate some sentences as correct and others as incorrect.¹⁰⁷ When a non-eliminative error-theorist charges the discourse in question as committing a grand error, they may in fact simply be *misconstruing* the nature of truth in that discourse. The difficulty posed for the error-theorist by minimalism, then, is this. Say that minimalism is right, and that we have accepted a non-realist argument to the effect that the sentences of a certain discourse are systematically false with respect to some *robust* standard of truth. Say also that we have taken the non-eliminativist route and maintained that some other pragmatically valuable standard or standards are present. It will often, in such a situation, be more appealing to investigate the standards at work in that discourse and identify a *less robust* and *satisfiable* norm of truth than to stick to the robust account and characterise practice of the discourse as pragmatically useful error. An error-theorist might respond by providing reason for thinking that we *should* characterise truth as robust in the relevant discourse.¹⁰⁸ Or, they might respond by claiming that, in the relevant discourse, the only norms that could qualify as truth are systematically unmet. I will not investigate these thoughts here.¹⁰⁹ The point is

¹⁰⁷ The error-theorist need only claim that the *atomic* and *positive* sentences in a discourse are false.

¹⁰⁸ Wright suggests this here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ One thing to note, regarding the second response, is that arguments that the sentences in a discourse fail to achieve some robust truth standard may not apply with respect to less robust standards. It seems, for example, that Mackie's ontological claim (Mackie, *Ethics*) that there are no objective moral facts would have no effect on whether moral ascriptions can satisfy a truth standard that doesn't exert cognitive command or on which true sentences correspond to facts with narrow cosmological role. Truth, given minimalism, does not rely on the statement of any objective fact. Denying that there are objective moral facts is insufficient to motivate a moral error-theory, if truth in moral discourse takes this less robust form.

that an error-theoretic approach to non-realism is less appealing having adopted Wright's account of realism debates. But, in virtue of such possibilities as the two I have noted, an error-theory within Wright's framework remains a formal option.

As for non-factualism, then, once we have adopted minimalism the error-theoretic approach to non-realism is significantly constrained. If truth is as diverse and promiscuous across assertoric discourses as the minimalist claims, then opposing realism about an assertoric discourse *D* by denying that there are true sentences (or facts) in *D*—either by claiming that they are false or not truth-apt at all—seems to be the wrong approach.

We have thus developed a workable model of the metaphysical framework Wright presents in *Truth and Objectivity*. We enter into debates about whether to be realists or non-realists about a certain discourse by investigating the characteristics of the standards for utterance at work in that discourse. In some discourses, correctness is merely a product of the shape of our talk, and simply reflects our practice of following norms in engaging with a certain subject. In other discourses, correctness is *largely* constituted by the structure of our thought about that subject, but there are certain respects in which assertion is regulated by mind-independent matters. In *other* discourses, sentences must meet a *highly* mind-independent standard to qualify as true. To engage in such a discourse is to seek to accord with a norm that is strongly beholden to objective reality. In all of these discourses, this correctness properly qualifies as truth; every comprising sentence is truth-apt, and many of them may be true. It is the *nature* of this truth—the objectivity of the regulatory standard—that determines whether a certain body of talk is realist or not.

MEANING IRREALISM AND MEANING DISCOURSE

2.1 Introduction

It is worthwhile to distinguish between *motivations* and *destinations* for opposition to realism. The strongest motivations for meaning non-realism are arguments in its favour, and such arguments may be compelling. But the tenability of the destinations to which such argument leads are, to a certain extent, independent of the strength of the motivation. In this chapter, I will develop one prominent motivation for meaning non-realism, and investigate the destinations to which it might lead. This is the sceptical argument drawn by Saul Kripke from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, which Kripke presents in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*.¹¹⁰

Kripke's Wittgenstein (KW) argues against the existence of meaning facts, and thus against meaning realism. While realism has been denied for many things, opposition to realism about meaning has particularly severe consequences—so severe, in fact, that it may fail to be coherent. My plan is to investigate some of these consequences, in the hope of shedding some light on the tenability of meaning non-realism. The strategy of this chapter is to consider what we might make of *discourse* about meaning once we have denied that there are meaning facts to which it answers. The thought, in doing so, is that the tenability of meaning non-realism depends on provision of an acceptable account of meaning discourse. I will first, in §2.2, give a synopsis of KW's argument. Since I am primarily concerned with the consequences of opposition to meaning realism, I will simply assume that this argument is sound. In §2.3, I will note some important consequences of KW meaning non-realism, to indicate the scope of the argument.

¹¹⁰ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*; Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. It is not of great concern whether Kripke's book is representative of Wittgenstein's philosophy. I will attribute the arguments made to Kripke's Wittgenstein; Kripke's work is an interpretation of Wittgenstein and may be representative of the thoughts of neither Kripke nor Wittgenstein. For argument that Kripke gets Wittgenstein wrong, see: Crispin Wright, "Kripke's Account of the Argument against Private Language" (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 114.

§2.4 – §2.7 are investigations into three types of account that we might make of meaning discourse having opposed meaning realism: *meaning error-theory*, *meaning non-factualism*, and *meaning mere minimalism*. In §2.8, I will attempt to generalise from the results of the previous sections, and determine the severity of the situation for meaning non-realism as motivated by KW.

2.2 The Kripke-Wittgenstein Sceptical Argument

In Chapter 2 of *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language (WRPL)*, KW makes a sceptical challenge against meaning. If the challenge is successful, then there are no meaning facts; no facts in virtue of which sentences that ascribe meaning—such as “Hemi means *addition* by ‘+’”—are true. I will follow Kripke in beginning this exposition with an illustration of the role required of meaning facts: a dialogue between a sceptic and their interlocutor Hemi, concerning what Hemi means by ‘+’.¹¹¹

Say that Hemi has used the expression ‘+’ many times in the past. They have, for example, said that “ $42 + 22 = 64$ ”, and that “ $11 + 17 = 28$ ”, and many more such sentences. This use is consistent with it being the case that Hemi means *addition* by ‘+’, and Hemi may testify that this is indeed what they mean. Now reflect that Hemi’s usage of ‘+’ must be limited in the following way: there will always be some possible use of ‘+’ which is *novel*. Let’s say, for example, that Hemi has only used ‘+’ with numbers less than 57. (Since there are infinitely many numbers, even if Hemi is prolific in their use of ‘+’ there will always be some such limitation.) The sceptic asks Hemi a question: “What is $68 + 57$?”. Hemi computes the sum of the two numbers, answers “125”, and claims that this answer is correct and justified because what they mean by ‘+’ is the function *addition*. But the sceptic objects, and suggests instead that Hemi should answer “5” because what they mean by ‘+’ is in fact *quaddition*, a function defined as follows:

¹¹¹ It is worth noting from the outset that the sceptic character in KW’s discussion is independent of KW’s own position. The dialogue is a device KW uses to illustrate the problem, and the argument against meaning realism itself is a distinct matter. But KW does, to a certain extent, end up accepting the sceptic’s claims. I will return to this point in §2.4.

$$\begin{aligned}
 x \text{ quus } y &= x \text{ plus } y, \text{ if } x, y < 57 \\
 &= 5, \text{ otherwise}
 \end{aligned}$$

The sceptic does not deny the *mathematical* fact that the *number* 125 is the sum of the *numbers* 68 and 57. Their claim is against the *semantic* fact that what Hemi means by '+' is addition, and thus against the fact that "125" is the correct answer to the question. The sceptic doesn't think that Hemi might actually mean quaddition. Their point is that, while there is clearly a distinction between addition and quaddition, if there is to be a distinction between Hemi *meaning* addition and *meaning* quaddition by '+' then there must be a fact in virtue of which this is the case. Hemi's past usage of '+' is consistent with both addition and quaddition being what they mean by the expression, so if there is to be a fact of the matter about what they mean by '+', that fact cannot be constituted by their past usage alone.

Hemi is unlikely to be convinced, at this point, that they do not mean anything by '+'. They will likely feel that they do mean addition by '+', and that even though their practice with the sign is finite, there is nevertheless a fact in virtue of which it is semantically correct to answer questions like "What is 68 + 57?" with the sum of the two numbers. The challenge made by the sceptic is to provide an account of such facts. KW imposes two conditions on a satisfactory response. Firstly, that the fact supplied must make it the case that it is correct to use '+' in sentences of the form " $x + y = z$ " when, and only when, z is the sum of x and y (and incorrect otherwise). That is, the fact must have something to say about every possible use of '+'. And secondly, that the fact supplied must make it the case that Hemi *ought* to use, or is *justified* in using, '+' correctly.¹¹² I will call these conditions the *constitution* and *normativity* requirements.

¹¹² There is much debate about whether KW's account of the normativity of meaning is accurate. See, for example: Anandi Hattiangadi, *Oughts and Thoughts Rule-Following and the Normativity of Content* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007). It is quite plausible that KW overstates the strength of the normativity which must be imposed by meaning. But nothing for my discussion will turn on this, so I will set the matter aside.

The case of Hemi and '+' is quite generalisable; *quus*-like possibilities threaten for any sign and any putative meaning.¹¹³ The sceptic denies that there are *any* facts, for *any* sign, which satisfy the constitution and normativity requirements. To justify this claim, the search for candidates must be comprehensive. To that end, the sceptic allows *idealised epistemic access* to any of the areas in which the facts might be found; to Hemi's *behaviour, mental history*, and to the behaviour and mental history of some *linguistic community* to which Hemi belongs.¹¹⁴ If there are no facts found in these areas that satisfy the requirements even when our fact-finding abilities are perfect, the sceptic suggests, then there are no facts to be found. The remainder of the second chapter of *WRPL* is a survey of several candidates that KW motivates and rejects in turn (I indicate in parentheses the numbers of the pages in which KW deals with each). That Hemi means addition by '+' could be constituted by: Hemi's *past usage* of '+' (7-15); a *general thought*, e.g. that the correct z in " $x + y = z$ " is found by counting x and y together (15-17); a *disposition*, such that Hemi is disposed to use '+' in a manner in accordance with *addition* and not with *quaddition* (22-38); the *simplicity* of candidate meanings, such that meaning addition is simpler than meaning quaddition (38-40); *qualitative, introspectible mental states*, either akin to mental images or of a unique sort of their own, such that Hemi has such a state that is associated with addition and not quaddition (41-51); *sui generis, irreducible, non-qualitative mental states*, such that Hemi has some mental state of *meaning addition by '+'* (51-53); a *Fregean objective sense*, such that Hemi relates to an objective sense of addition, and not of quaddition (53-54).¹¹⁵

¹¹³ One quick way to establish a *quus*-like variation on any finite set is to claim that the rule should be followed *this* way, and not *this other* way, in any situation that occurs from the present moment onwards. The sceptic demands a fact, for example, in virtue of which 'sunfish' means *sunfish* and not *quunfish*—where *quunfish* has precisely the same extension as *sunfish* on every occasion before January 1, 2019, but diverges from that day onwards. On the sceptic's claim, then, on January 2, 2019 it would be semantically incorrect for their interlocutor to refer to a sunfish with the word "sunfish". This model for generating *quus*-like interpretations is used by Wright: Wright, "Kripke's Account of the Argument against Private Language," 97.

¹¹⁴ KW addresses facts about communities here: Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 111. For discussion of communitarian responses to KW's argument, see: Alexander Miller, "What Is the Sceptical Solution?," forthcoming.

¹¹⁵ This summary is drawn from the synopsis of KW's argument here: Alexander Miller and Ali Saboohi, "Rule-Following and Consciousness: Old Problem or New?," *Acta Analytica* 30, no. 2 (2015): 171–178, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12136-014-0237-5>.

KW considers each candidate, and finds in every case that the sceptic's challenge is unmet; that the candidate cannot satisfy the two conditions the sceptic imposes, and thus cannot constitute meaning. I will not discuss the fate of each candidate in detail.¹¹⁶ As noted, my focus is on the effects of the sceptical argument *if it is sound*, so I will make do with a brief description of one central thread of KW's argument.

Say that a candidate fact has something to say about only *some* of the possible uses of '+'. This incompleteness allows the sceptic to ascribe a *quus*-like meaning to Hemi and '+'; one that diverges from *addition* over the cases about which the fact says nothing. Such a candidate fails to make it *addition* that Hemi means by '+', because there are numbers z that are the sum of x and y , yet there are sentences " $x + y = z$ " that have not been made semantically correct. The sceptic's constitution requirement is unsatisfied. This criterion seems, then, to exclude candidates that offer only a *finite* amount of content; the set of correct applications of '+' that must be generated is indefinitely large.

We are thus led to consider candidates that have *general* content: those that are not limited in their coverage to some subclass of the possible applications of an expression.¹¹⁷ Say, for example, that we attempt to go beyond the finitude of Hemi's past usage of '+' by supposing that the meaning of the expression is constituted by their association of the sign with a certain process: when faced with a question of the form " $x + y = ?$ ", the correct answer is what is found in taking x pebbles and y pebbles and counting them together.¹¹⁸ When x is 68 and y is 57, Hemi arrives at 125 and not 5, so it is *addition* and not *quaddition* that they mean by '+'. But the sceptic will be unconvinced. In order to generate this general content, it is necessary for this process to be *interpreted*. The rule must be applied *in a certain way* to a given novel case. The sceptic can thus make an alternative interpretation of the (putative) rule that Hemi has just appeared to follow: that

¹¹⁶ I gave the argument a more thorough discussion here: Finn Butler, "Kripke-Wittgenstein Meaning Scepticism and the Sceptical Solution," *University of Otago Honours Dissertation*, 2017. Honours Dissertation, 2017.

¹¹⁷ Crispin Wright, "Kripke on the Argument against Private Language" (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 98.

¹¹⁸ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 15.

what is actually correct for Hemi to do is to count the piles of pebbles together *unless one of the piles is equal to or larger than 57*. And they will demand a fact in virtue of which *this* is not the correct interpretation of the general thought with which Hemi intends to accord. Wherever interpretation is required, another quaddition-like possibility will arise. In such cases, there must be some fact in virtue of which *this* interpretation of the fact is correct, and not *that* interpretation. We are revealed to have made no progress: the search for a fact that constitutes the correctness of an interpretation is simply the search for a fact that constitutes meaning, and will fall prey to precisely the same sceptical attack to which we are attempting to respond. The problem, in essence, is that a rule for following a rule is itself a rule.

In the face of the fruitlessness of any response to the sceptic that involves interpretation, the suggestion might be made that we can satisfy the sceptic by identifying a candidate that has unlimited content yet requires *no interpretation* between this fact and a particular correct usage. There is no interpretative distance between the fact that Hemi means addition by '+' and the fact that Hemi should answer "240553" to the question " $234987 + 5566 = ?$ " that the sceptic could exploit. KW rejects this suggestion on the following grounds:

It seems desperate . . . such a state would have to be a finite object, contained in our finite minds. It does not consist in my explicitly thinking of each case of the addition table, nor even of my encoding each separate case in the brain: we lack the capacity for that. Yet "in a *queer way*" each such case already is "in some sense present" [Here Kripke is quoting Wittgenstein] . . . What can this sense be? Can we conceive of a finite state which *could* not be interpreted in a quus-like way? How could that be?¹¹⁹

For there to be a fact about Hemi that constitutes the correctness of *every* putatively correct use of '+', then, KW finds that we either invoke interpretation and thus make no progress, or simply leave the matter quite unexplained.¹²⁰ Neither option is satisfactory. This line of reasoning does not represent KW's

¹¹⁹ Kripke, 51.

¹²⁰ KW's treatment of the non-interpretative suggestion is relevant to the response that Crispin Wright makes to the problem, which I note and discuss in §2.7.2.

treatment of *every* candidate meaning fact, but it is at least the central thread in the sceptic's attack.¹²¹

At the culmination of the survey, KW finds that no candidate meets the sceptic's requirements. Given, then, that the survey is comprehensive, *there is no fact such that Hemi means addition by '+'*. The claim to comprehensiveness may strictly be unwarranted—could there not be some as yet unconsidered candidate?—but this is not a concern. The claim can simply be that it is not a fact that Hemi means addition by '+', barring the revelation of some heretofore unconsidered fact. The result, of course, is quite generalisable. We have not relied upon anything specific to Hemi, addition, or '+'.¹²² The claim is that, for *any* subject *S*, *any* putative meaning *M*, and *any* expression *E*, there is no fact such that *S* means *M* by *E*. We have thus arrived at the sceptical conclusion: there are no meaning facts. Meaning appears to have “vanished into thin air”.¹²³

This surely amounts to some form of *non-realism* about meaning. The meaning realist must contend that there are facts about meaning: existing states of affairs such that subjects mean something by an expression. To argue that there are no such facts, then, is to oppose meaning realism. To follow the terminology that I adopted in the previous chapter, the claim that there are no meaning facts suffices for *meaning irrealism*: a form of non-realism that denies the component of realism that claims that some set of facts *exist*.

Meaning Irrealism: There are no facts such that anyone means anything by an expression.¹²⁴

¹²¹ In particular, this account does not quite represent the *dispositionalist* response to the sceptic, which turns primarily on the *normative* characteristics of meaning facts.

¹²² I did incorporate the infinite size of the addition series into the discussion in order to make clear the possibility of *quus*-like interpretations. But I do not mean for this infinity to be taken as necessary for such interpretation. See fn.113 for an example of how the sceptic's attack can arise for seemingly any expression.

¹²³ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 22. Note that this claim is best considered the position of *KW's sceptic*, not *KW himself*. *KW's sceptical solution*, which I will introduce in §2.6, is an attempt to deny that meaning so vanishes, while denying that there are meaning *facts*.

¹²⁴ It is worth noting that there may be certain kinds of fact that are *not* within the scope of the meaning irrealist claim. On some accounts of facts—such as those which accompany *deflationism* and *minimalism* about truth, which I discussed in the previous chapter—all it takes for there to be a fact that P is for it to be in some way correct to say that it is a fact that P. Meaning irrealism, as I am

KW argues that there are no meaning facts, and thus argues for meaning irrealism. I will not spend time evaluating the strength of this argument. I will instead simply assume that its conclusion has been proven, and focus on where it may take us. I do claim, however, that the issues raised in the second chapter of KW's book are at least *not obviously implausible*. We have found good reason to investigate opposition to meaning realism, even if that opposition turns out, at the end, to be undue.¹²⁵ For the remainder of this discussion, I will use the term "KW's sceptical argument" to refer to the argument made in this section that there are no meaning facts: the argument for meaning irrealism. And I will now assume that this argument is sound, so that we can investigate the destinations to which it leads.¹²⁶

2.3 Casualties of Kripke-Wittgenstein Meaning Scepticism

This thesis is primarily concerned with the metaphysics of *linguistic meaning*. It is necessary to impose this priority so that the discussion is not spread too thin. But it is important to acknowledge that limiting the discussion in this way undersells the scope of the sceptical attack. There are additional considerations both *downstream* and *upstream* of meaning irrealism, in the wake of KW's sceptical argument. Downstream, there are matters which likely *depend* on the reality of meaning, and thus that are *consequently* threatened by the KW sceptical argument. Upstream, there are matters which are *antecedently* threatened by the general "rule-following considerations" of which the attack on meaning is one part.¹²⁷ These are things that, while they may not be threatened by the meaning irrealist thesis taken in isolation, are certainly threatened by that thesis given that we

presently characterising it, is not yet concerned with the possibility of meaning facts of this type. This point will return in §2.7. But until then, for ease of presentation I will simply reject the deflationary and minimalist accounts of facts: the propriety of *calling* some state of affairs a fact will not be taken to be sufficient for that state of affairs to be a fact.

¹²⁵ Indeed, I think it possible that there would be such reason even without a plausible attack on realism. If it is found for some subject that we *cannot* tenably deny that it is real, even without any compelling argument to motivate that denial, does this not have interesting implications for that subject? But the question is beside the point in our present case, because KW's argument does provide such an argument—at least, I will assume as much.

¹²⁶ I will also, on occasion, use "KW meaning irrealism" to stress that it is KW's argument which motivates the irrealist position.

¹²⁷ For explanation of the origin of this term, see: Crispin Wright, *Rails to Infinity: Essays on Themes from Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5.

arrived at it by *accepting the strategy of the KW sceptic*. In this section, I will briefly note considerations of both types, prioritising those that will have a bearing on discussion elsewhere in this thesis.

We will first attend to downstream matters. KW's sceptical argument, as it has been presented here, initially targets facts such that *a subject means something by an expression*. One quite plausible consequence is that there cannot then be facts such that *an expression has a meaning*. The connecting thought is this: for there to be such a thing as correct or incorrect use of an expression there must be such a thing as a subject correctly or incorrectly using an expression. Or alternatively, that for there to be such thing as *meaning* it is necessary for there to be such thing as *grasping meaning*. Wright puts it thus:

[KW concludes that] there are no facts about what anyone *presently* means. . . . But the, as it were, impersonal meaning of an expression must supervene upon what individuals mean by it: so it follows, finally, that there are no facts about what any expression means or meant.¹²⁸

I think that investigation into this distinction and the ramifications it might have on the metaphysics of meaning is potentially fruitful. But I won't pursue the thread here, and will instead assume that the irrealist position we have adopted is that there are no facts such that a subject means anything by an expression *or* any facts such that an expression has a meaning.

The exposition given in §2.2 concerned the expression '+'. We have noted that the conclusion is meant to be general to *any* expression, but it is worthwhile to make special mention of *sentences*. It will be an implication that looms large in this thesis that, if no sentences have a meaning, then no sentences have a *truth condition* or *propositional content*. This is not to say that the truth condition of a sentence *is* its meaning.¹²⁹ But surely having a truth condition would *suffice* for

¹²⁸ Crispin Wright, "On Making Up One's Mind: Wittgenstein on Intention," in *Rails to Infinity: Essays on Themes from Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 117.

¹²⁹ Heather Dyke argues that it is a mistake to conflate truth conditions with meaning: Heather Dyke, *Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*, Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy ; 13 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2007), 73.

being meaningful—in which case it follows from meaning irrealism that no sentences have truth conditions. The sceptic demands a fact in virtue of which “Sunfish are the largest bony fish” says *that sunfish are the largest bony fish* (or anything at all), and we have assumed that their demands are unmet. I will note two further consequences of this result. Firstly, that it is hard to see how language can perform a *descriptive* function given meaning irrealism. For a sentence to describe a certain state of affairs *S* it is surely necessary that it has the propositional content: *S obtains*. And secondly that if no sentence has a truth condition then, quite plausibly, it follows that no sentence has a *truth-value*. If the sceptic succeeds in showing that expressions have no meaning then no sentence has a truth condition that is either satisfied or unsatisfied, and thus no sentence is true or false.

Those are the downstream matters of central concern. As I said, there are also consequences that, while they may not *follow* from meaning irrealism, they will likely emerge whenever the KW sceptical argument is accepted as sound. There is no reason, of course, to think that meaning non-realism *must* take precisely the form motivated by KW’s argument. It might be motivated by other arguments—for example, by Quine’s *indeterminacy of translation*¹³⁰—and thus involve different upstream commitments. My discussion cannot, unfortunately, be so comprehensive that all such possibilities are examined. I will focus on meaning non-realism as it is motivated by KW, and note where the ramifications might be specific to this motivation.

There is a connection between meaning and *mental content*. Just as a sentence might *say* that sunfish are the largest bony fish, a subject might *believe* that sunfish are the largest bony fish. There are various ways that the relation between linguistic and mental content can be construed. It might be that one depends on the other, or that the two are interdependent.¹³¹ The important point

¹³⁰ W. V. Quine, *Word and Object*, Studies in Communication (Cambridge: Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960); W. V. Quine, “On the Reasons for Indeterminacy of Translation,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 67, no. 6 (1970): 178–183, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2023887>.

¹³¹ For argument that meaning depends on mental content, see: H. P. Grice, “Meaning,” *The Philosophical Review* 66 (1957): 377. For argument that mental content depends on meaning, see:

for present purposes is that if we have accepted KW's argument then *we must deny that there are contentful mental states*—or at least, it is hard to see how we could avoid doing so. This implication is immediate if mental content depends on meaning. If the belief that sunfish are the largest bony fish has its content (at least partly) in virtue of the meaning of “sunfish are the largest bony fish”, for example, then the denial that there are meaning facts will of course imply that there is no such belief.¹³² This covers both the case on which mental content has the relevant dependence on meaning, and on which they are in some way interdependent. But even on an account on which mental states have priority over meaning, our meaning irrealism will enjoy some non-realism about mental content. Paul Boghossian puts it thus:

The real difficulty with the suggestion that one may sustain differential attitudes towards mental and linguistic content stems from the fact that the *best* arguments for the claim that nothing mental possesses content would count as *equally* good arguments for the claim that nothing linguistic does. For these arguments have nothing much to do with the items being *mental* and everything to do with their being *contentful*: they are considerations, of a wholly general character, against the existence of items individuated by content.¹³³

If we have conceded to KW's sceptic in the case of what Hemi means by some sign, then we must likely also concede to a sceptical attack against what Hemi *thinks by some thought*. Where is the fact of the matter, the sceptic asks, in virtue of which Hemi's belief is that *this* is the case, rather than *this*? I won't rehearse the KW argument in these terms, but it is quite plausible that we will arrive at the same irrealist conclusion as in the meaning case—and that we will do so regardless of how the relation between meaning and mental content is construed. My

Wilfrid Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” in *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963). For argument that meaning and mental content are interdependent, see: Donald Davidson, “Thought and Talk,” in *Mind and Language*, ed. Samuel D. Guttenplan (Clarendon Press, 1975), 1975–7; Donald Davidson, “Rational Animals,” *Dialectica* 36, no. 4 (1982): 317–28.

¹³² Paul A. Boghossian, “The Rule-Following Considerations,” *Mind* 98, no. 392 (1989): 510, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/XCVIII.392.507>.

¹³³ In this passage, Boghossian claims specifically that irrealism about *mental* content implies irrealism about *linguistic* content, whereas I am concerned with the reverse implication. But it is clear that the point applies just as well in our case; attacks against content will threaten both. Boghossian, “The Status of Content,” 171.

investigation will remain specific to meaning, but it is important to note that it is unlikely that the meaning irrealist can avoid adopting a non-realist account of contentful mental states.

The second upstream matter that I will note is that KW's sceptical argument can be construed as one part of the Wittgensteinian *rule-following considerations*. The treatment of meaning in Wittgenstein's later philosophy is—in some important respects—*at least* analogous to the treatment of rules. I will characterise the point in the following way. It is in virtue of the meaning that a subject attributes to a sign, the sceptic and their opponent agree, that it is *correct* or *incorrect* for that subject to use that sign a certain way. The sceptic then exploits this characteristic of meaning to deny that there is such a thing as meaning. There are no facts that offer the necessary correctness and incorrectness to render correct, for example, all and only the occasions where Hemi uses '+' in accordance with addition. We can see the connection between meaning and rule-following by noting that *according* or *failing to accord* with what one means by a sign is analogous to *following* or *failing to follow* a rule. In both cases, the actions available to a subject are (putatively) evaluated as correct or incorrect with respect to some commitment they have made. It is this rule-like characteristic of meaning that enables the sceptic's attack. But linguistic meaning is not the only notion with such a feature. If we have accepted that the sceptic's attack on the possibility of rule-following in the case of *what one means by a sign* is successful, then we are likely thereby forced to accept it for *any other facts with this rule-like form*.

Let's illustrate the point with a non-linguistic example. Say that Hemi has, in the past, smiled precisely when they are in the presence of a waterfall. And say that Hemi is under the impression that this behaviour is correct with respect to some norm with which they intend to accord—a norm, say, of waterfall appreciation. Putatively, Hemi intends to smile when and only when they are in the presence of a waterfall. Hemi visits *Haruru Falls*, in the North Island of New Zealand, and smiles. The shape of the sceptical attack is this. There must be a fact in virtue of which smiling—and not frowning—is correct with respect to the norm of waterfall appreciation. That fact must render correct every instance of smiling

by a waterfall, and incorrect every other instance of smiling, and every other instance of being by a waterfall. These are indefinitely large sets, and Hemi's mind is finite. The fact, then, must be *interpreted*; there must be a process by which the correctness of a *particular* action is *derived* from something that can be contained in Hemi's mind.¹³⁴ Some such interpretation may be compelling to Hemi. But the sceptic, of course, will not be swayed: they will demand a fact in virtue of which *this* interpretation rather than *that* interpretation is correct. Hemi may claim, for example, that smiling at Haruru Falls is correct because they have previously thought "I should smile when and only when I am by a waterfall". But this move will not work unless there are facts that rule out *alternative interpretations* of that thought. The sceptic might suggest that 'waterfall' means *quaterfall*, or that "I should smile when and only when I am by a waterfall" means *I should smile when and only when I am by a waterfall unless that waterfall is Haruru Falls*. There must be facts in virtue of which a certain interpretation of these expressions is correct. And it is precisely facts of this sort that we have ruled out in accepting KW's sceptical argument. We can put the point like this: if there *was* such a fact about the correct interpretation of Hemi's waterfall appreciation rule, then it is hard to see how there could fail to be an analogous fact available in the case of what Hemi means by '+'. To adopt KW meaning irrealism, then, is to deny that there is such a thing as an action being correct or incorrect with respect to the waterfall appreciation norm. And then, given for there to *be* such a norm is for there to be actions that are correct or incorrect with respect to it—just as for there to be such thing as meaning is for there to be uses of an expression that accord or fail to accord with that meaning—we have found that there can be no norm of waterfall appreciation at all. And this example is meant, of course, to be generalisable. The sceptic's attack appears to arise *wherever* we might suppose that our actions are evaluable for correctness with respect to some norm. To accept the soundness of that attack is to deny that there are *any* such norms.

¹³⁴ As noted in §2.2, there is also the option of *non-interpreted* general facts. KW rejects such facts as mysterious and unhelpful, and given that we have accepted his argument we thus do the same in this case.

This is a matter that deserves more discussion. But for now, my point is simply that it is unlikely that the KW meaning irrealist can rely on the possibility of correctness-governed action at all. This will be an important constraint on the meaning irrealist, and it will re-emerge in later sections.

Having accepted that KW's sceptical argument is sound and that there are no meaning facts, we have thus (1) denied that any sentences are descriptive and have truth conditions, (2) denied that there are mental states with content, and (3) denied that there can be norm-governed actions. The tenability of meaning irrealism may be threatened by these matters. But I don't think it obvious that the bullets cannot simply be bitten. To investigate the severity of the consequences of meaning irrealism more rigorously, I now turn to a consideration that is often made in discussion of the realism-status of a subject: the status of *discourse* about meaning. Sometimes, the question of the metaphysical status of a subject and the question of the nature of discourse about that subject are addressed as one. I have decided to impose a degree of separation—although it may be a merely superficial one—because meaning is a somewhat peculiar case.¹³⁵ I have represented meaning irrealism as a metaphysical claim: a claim about *what facts there are*. The discussion in the next three sections is specifically concerned with *our talk* about meaning; with what we might say about such talk given KW meaning irrealism.¹³⁶

2.4 Meaning Discourse: Introduction

There are no meaning facts; no existing states of affairs such that anyone means anything by any expression. Consider *discourse about meaning*, comprised of every sentence which ascribes meaning to subjects and signs.¹³⁷ We do engage in such

¹³⁵ The peculiarities will emerge throughout the remainder of the chapter, but in brief the point is this: seeking an account of the nature of the *meaning* of sentences that appear to be about a certain type of fact is difficult when the facts in question are *meaning facts*.

¹³⁶ Note that it is distinctive of non-realism about meaning that it has implications not only for discourse about meaning but for *discourse about anything*. There is a sense in which meaning irrealism *globalises*. This is an important consequence, but I will set it aside until the next chapter.

¹³⁷ By "sentences that ascribe meaning" or "meaning ascriptions" I mean sentences that apply the predicate 'means' to some subject and sign—not sentences that actually state that some meaning state of affairs attains. Meaning ascriptions *appear* to be attributions of meaning to signs and subjects, but it is important that we are at this moment neutral on whether this is more than appearance. The same point applies to "discourse about meaning": I mean this to pick out our discourse that *purports* to be about meaning, which may or may not *actually* be about meaning.

discourse. We utter sentences like “Hemi means *addition* by ‘+’”, and seem to do so with sincerity and purpose. But Hemi does not mean addition—or anything at all—by ‘+’. It is an immediate consequence of meaning irrealism that no meaning ascriptions are *statements of fact*; there are no meaning facts to state. And if no meaning ascriptions are statements of fact then no meaning ascriptions are *true*. We can establish the connection to truth by considering the *Disquotational Schema* (DS):

The Disquotational Schema: “P” is true iff P

In §1.3 I noted Wright’s claim that it is part of the concept of truth that it exhibits this property. If this is so, then on *any* plausible account of truth, it follows from the truth of a sentence “P” that its propositional content P is the case. When a sentence is true, *the fact it states obtains*. If there are no *meaning* facts, then, it follows that *there cannot be any true meaning ascriptions*.¹³⁸ The question that we will seek to answer in the next three sections is this: how are we to characterise the nature of sentences that ascribe meaning when we have found that there are no meaning facts and no true meaning ascriptions?

Before canvassing answers to this question, it will be worthwhile to point out an important distinction. In fact, there are two distinctions to be made—though I will claim that they can be mapped onto one another. Firstly, we must make a distinction between the position for which *KW’s sceptic* argues and that for which *KW* argues. And secondly, we must make a distinction between *eliminative* and *non-eliminative* non-realism for some discourse. Let us start with the first distinction. After making the sceptical argument in Chapter 2 of his book, Kripke has this to say in Chapter 3:

¹³⁸ Note here that this characterisation ignores the possibility that meaning ascriptions could be true in virtue of stating a *non-meaning fact*. I have said that sentences must state a fact to be true. But for it to follow from meaning irrealism (in the way I have noted) that no meaning ascriptions are true, we must assume that meaning ascriptions state *meaning facts* if they state facts at all. See the following for exploration of this possibility (but note that it is not applied to discourse about meaning in particular): Dyke, *Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*. I will set this consideration aside, primarily because it is not an option in our case. As we will see, the meaning irrealist cannot suppose that meaning ascriptions are statements of *any* fact, meaning or otherwise.

I have said that Wittgenstein's solution to his problem is a sceptical one. He does not give a 'straight' solution, pointing out to the silly sceptic a hidden fact he overlooked, a condition in the world which constitutes my meaning addition by 'plus'. In fact, he agrees with his own hypothetical sceptic that there is no such fact, no such condition in either the 'internal' or the 'external' world. Admittedly, I am expressing Wittgenstein's view more straightforwardly than he would ordinarily allow himself to do. For in denying that there is any such fact, might we not be expressing a philosophical thesis that doubts or denies something everyone admits? We do not wish to doubt or deny that when people speak of themselves and others as meaning something by their words, as following rules, they do so with perfect right. We do not even wish to deny the propriety of an ordinary use of the phrase 'the fact that Jones meant addition by such-and-such a symbol', and indeed such expressions do have perfectly ordinary uses. We merely wish to deny the existence of the 'superlative fact' that philosophers misleadingly attach to such ordinary forms of words, not the propriety of the words themselves.¹³⁹

The point is this. In Chapter 2, KW engages with his sceptical character, and conducts an unsuccessful search for meaning facts. But we must distinguish what is claimed by KW and what is claimed by his sceptic.¹⁴⁰ At the culmination of the survey of candidate meaning facts, KW and his sceptic *agree* that there are no successful candidates, and thus that there are no meaning facts. The conclusion of the KW sceptical argument, as I have construed it, is meaning irrationalism, and both KW and the sceptic accept this argument as sound. The distinction between the two emerges in Chapter 3. KW proposes a *sceptical solution*: a response to the sceptical argument such that, while there are no "superlative facts" about meaning, *it may yet be worthwhile to continue practicing meaning discourse*.¹⁴¹ KW presents an account of our meaning talk that is meant to be consistent with meaning

¹³⁹ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 69.

¹⁴⁰ This point is well made here: George M. Wilson, "Kripke on Wittgenstein and Normativity," *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (1994): 366–90, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4975.1994.tb00295.x>.

¹⁴¹ A sceptical solution is here distinguished from a *straight solution*, which is a response to the sceptical argument that denies that it is sound, and thus avoids meaning irrationalism. I am, for purposes of this investigation, simply assuming that there are no straight solutions to the KW sceptical argument. KW derives the distinction between straight and sceptical solutions from Hume: Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 66.

irrealism.¹⁴² In doing so, he diverges from the position occupied by the sceptic, who *offers no consolatory account*. When KW notes—in the quote given above—his opposition to the denial that it can be *right* to ascribe meaning to subjects and signs, it is the sceptic’s position he is opposing. Elsewhere, he rejects the sceptic’s position as “insane and intolerable” and “incredible and self-defeating”.¹⁴³ KW and KW’s sceptic are both meaning irrealists, but KW seeks to soften the sceptical blow with a sceptical solution, and the sceptic does not.

One distinction that emerges in many realism debates is that between *eliminativism* and *non-eliminativism*. It is useful to characterise KW’s position as a kind of non-eliminativism about meaning discourse and the sceptic’s position as a kind of eliminativism.¹⁴⁴ Let’s briefly describe the eliminativist distinction in general terms.

Take the discourse *D*, comprised of *D*-sentences. We engage in *D*, and frequently utter *D*-sentences. Say that we had assumed that, when we utter *D*-sentences, we occasionally state *D*-facts; that *D* is concerned with states of affairs, and some of these states of affairs exist. Part of the *reason* to utter *D*-sentences, we had thought, was that those sentences bear this relation to reality. But a philosopher now presents an argument for irrealism about *D*: that there are no *D*-facts. If we are convinced by such an argument, then there are two broad categories of available responses. We might think that, having accepted that there are, after all, no *D*-facts to state—and thus that our *D*-sentences are never true—*it is no longer worthwhile to say those sentences*. The point of engaging with *D*, if there is a point at all, is to engage with *D*-facts, and having found that there are no such facts it follows that there is nothing lost by simply abandoning *D* altogether.¹⁴⁵ It is

¹⁴² I will discuss the form of the sceptical solution offered by KW in §2.6.

¹⁴³ The quotes appear here: Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 60, 71.

¹⁴⁴ These characterisations are, to a certain extent, suggested by Alex Miller here: Alexander Miller, “Rule Following, Error Theory and Eliminativism,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 23, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 323–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2015.1042004>. Miller is here concerned specifically with *error-theoretic* accounts of meaning discourse, whereas I mean to characterise the sceptic’s position as simply eliminativism, which may or may not be accompanied by an error-theory.

¹⁴⁵ It is worthwhile to clarify the nature of this loss. A discourse may have *theoretical value*: it may offer *true* sentences, and thus contribute to our description of reality. A discourse may also have *pragmatic value*: it may offer sentences that, while non-true, contribute to some worthwhile

this approach for which the eliminativist advocates. I mean for this characterisation to be somewhat unspecific, and there are eliminativist theories that may not consent to it.¹⁴⁶ The eliminativist is opposed by the non-eliminativist, who does not take irrealism about *D* to be sufficient for its abandonment. The non-eliminativist provides a picture of the discourse in question that is consistent with the denial that there are any facts stated by the comprising sentences. We have reason to continue using *D*-sentences even though those sentences are *never* true: it has a function that does not rely on the possibility of truth. There are, again, many ways that this approach can be fleshed out. Generally, the non-eliminativist project will include argument that *D*-sentences can still be *correct* or *incorrect* despite the absence of *D*-facts; that some sentences in *D* are better than others with respect to performance of the function of *D*.¹⁴⁷ I characterise these categories as follows.

Eliminativism (*D*): The utterance of *D*-sentences lacks a function, and there is no value to be lost in abandoning the practice.

Non-Eliminativism (*D*): The utterance of *D*-sentences has a function, and there is value that would be lost in abandoning the practice.

activity other than description of reality—it be may *useful* to talk of moral impermissibility, for example, even if none of that talk is true. The eliminativist claim, as I am characterising it, denies that the discourse in question has value of *either* sort, and thus—given that there are no other kinds of value—that in abandoning that discourse nothing of value is lost.

¹⁴⁶ Miller notes (Ibid., 326), for example, that the model of eliminativist error-theory proposed by Paul Churchland for ordinary mental states advocates abandoning discourse about those states only *in principle*. *Once other discourses have become sufficiently advanced* we will have no reason to continue engaging with the discourse in question—but before that point we may still have some reason. I mean for eliminativism to be a broader category than views of this sort alone.

¹⁴⁷ Mackie's moral error-theory and Field's arithmetic error-theory offer prominent examples of non-eliminativism. Both theories deny that the discourse in question contains any true sentences. But they deny that the discourse can be abandoned without loss, because it suffices for there to be *pragmatic value* that the sentences in those discourse play a useful non-descriptive role. Mackie claims that moral ascriptions can have desirable effects on agents, and Field claims that arithmetical statements can secure inferential advantages—despite all of the sentences in both cases being false. Miller contrasts these positions with what Churchland claims of ordinary psychology—that, eventually, the relevant sentences will be superseded even in such non-descriptive capacities by the sentences of some future science. Mackie, *Ethics*; Field, *Science without Numbers*; Miller, "Rule Following, Error Theory and Eliminativism."

(Note that my characterisation of these positions does not incorporate irrealism about *D*. I assumed *D*-irrealism to introduce the distinction, but I do not mean to suggest that the debate between the eliminativist and the non-eliminativist can arise *only* given a metaphysical non-realist claim.¹⁴⁸)

The idea, then, is that KW is a non-eliminative meaning irrealist, while KW's sceptic is an eliminative meaning irrealist.¹⁴⁹ Both deny that there are any meaning facts. But the sceptic goes further and denies that there is any point in continuing to ascribe meaning, while KW instead offers a consolatory picture of meaning discourse that justifies (some of) those ascriptions.

Eliminative Meaning Irrealism: There are no meaning facts. We *may* abandon meaning discourse without loss.

Non-Eliminative Meaning Irrealism: There are no meaning facts. We *cannot* abandon meaning discourse without loss.

There will be more discussion of these two approaches later.¹⁵⁰ But it will be worthwhile to make one general remark.¹⁵¹ I noted earlier that KW describes the sceptic's position as "insane and intolerable". If we take this position to be a form of eliminativism then it is clear how this judgement could be apt. For discourses that are pervasive in human activity—which is certainly the case for meaning

¹⁴⁸ This point will be important in Chapter 3, where the distinction will emerge for sentences about which we have no sceptical concerns about the existence of the facts they appear to state.

¹⁴⁹ I find this characterisation compelling, but there are some textual reasons to doubt that KW and his sceptic differ only on the eliminativist question. On page 71 of *WRPL* for example, KW says this: "What *can* be said on behalf of our ordinary attributions of meaningful language to ourselves and to others? Has not the incredible and self-defeating conclusion, that all language is meaningless, already been drawn?" The first of these questions aligns with my characterisation, but in decrying the claim that all language is meaningless KW seems to me to be departing from the claim that there are no meaning facts. But I have little concern for these exegetical matters: the distinction between non-eliminativism and eliminativism is an important one for the meaning irrealist, independently of whether that distinction neatly aligns with that between KW and the sceptic. (And it may, anyway, be an appropriate reading of "all language is meaningless" that no meaning ascriptions are even *justified*; in which case KW would not consent to the claim.)

¹⁵⁰ In particular, this distinction will arise for each of the models of non-realist meaning discourse presented in §2.5, §2.6, and §2.7, and then again in general in the next chapter.

¹⁵¹ A remark drawn primarily from here: Miller, "Rule Following, Error Theory and Eliminativism," 329; Wright, "Kripke's Account of the Argument against Private Language," 101.

discourse—eliminativism is an uncomfortable position. We *seem* to be doing something worthwhile in saying what we or others mean by certain signs. To take the eliminativist approach to meaning discourse, as I have characterised it here, is to deny that we have been doing anything of value at all. This is not by itself, of course, a convincing argument against eliminativism. But it is, I think, sufficient to motivate pursuit of a non-eliminative account of meaning—an account that seeks to explain and justify our practice of ascribing meaning, rather than to advocate its abandonment.¹⁵² And it is sufficient to show that it would be a *problem* for meaning irrealism if it *implies* eliminativism, and is thus forced into this corner.¹⁵³ Much of my discussion about meaning discourse amounts to the search for a non-eliminativism that can successfully stave off the eliminativist. It would be a boon to the tenability of meaning irrealism if an account of meaning discourse could be found that retains the propriety of meaning talk despite the absence of meaning facts.

KW's argument is incorporated into this chapter in the following way. Chapter 2 of *WRPL* features the KW sceptical argument, the conclusion of which is meaning irrealism: there are no meaning facts. KW, his sceptic—and I, for the sake of this investigation—all accept this argument as sound, and thus accept the irrealist conclusion. The discussion in the remainder of this chapter concerns the nature of meaning *talk*. KW's sceptic takes the conclusion of the sceptical argument to amount to a rejection of all such talk. This represents the eliminativist option. KW seeks, with his sceptical solution, to establish a form of non-eliminativism: an account on which meaning discourse can still be worthwhile despite meaning irrealism. KW's sceptical solution will appear in §2.6. In §2.5 and §2.7, I will introduce and evaluate models of meaning discourse not considered explicitly by KW. These models may offer *alternative* sceptical solutions, and may thereby offer defence against eliminativism.

¹⁵² Another way to characterise the unpalatability of eliminativism is that, having found no satisfactory philosophical account of what we are achieving in a widespread activity, it may be more desirable to *reject the philosophy* than to *abandon the activity*. If we adopt eliminativism, we may be overestimating the degree to which philosophical matters should impinge on ordinary human behaviour. This is again, of course, not a knockdown argument.

¹⁵³ Miller makes an argument along these lines, localized to an *error-theory* about meaning, here: Miller, "Rule Following, Error Theory and Eliminativism."

2.5 Meaning Discourse: Error-Theory

There are no meaning facts. Given, then, that for a sentence to be true there must be a fact that it states, there are no true meaning ascriptions. Meaning discourse is a body of sentences devoid of truth. There are two ways to account for this absence of truth. We could characterise meaning ascriptions as *systematically false*, or we could characterise them as *neither true nor false*.¹⁵⁴ In this section, I will consider the first option: *meaning error-theory*. The second option—*meaning non-factualism*—will be discussed in the next section.

An error-theory about meaning characterises the atomic and positive sentences of meaning discourse as *attempted* statements of fact that systematically fail.¹⁵⁵ “Hemi means addition by ‘+’” says that Hemi means addition by ‘+’, but it is not the case that Hemi means addition by ‘+’. Our ascriptions of meaning pick out states of affairs that uniformly fail to obtain. In talking about meaning we *try* to describe reality, but we never get it right.

It will be worthwhile to immediately recall the distinction between eliminativism and non-eliminativism. There may be some advantages to continuing to practice ascription of meaning even when, as the error-theorist claims, those ascriptions are attempted statements of fact that always fail. Even given the absence of meaning facts, there may be some *subsidiary norm* under which meaning ascriptions are evaluable. Certain meaning ascriptions may still be *correct* with respect to this alternative norm, even though they fail to accord with the norm of *truth*. If there is such a norm, and if engaging in the discourse in a manner governed by that norm is worthwhile, then we have a *non-eliminative* error-theory for that discourse. The *eliminativist* alternative is that there is no such

¹⁵⁴ I suppose it is a formal possibility that, for some discourse in which none of the sentences are true, *some* of them are false and *some* are neither true nor false. But this would provide a less plausible picture than each ascription falling into the same camp, and since we will find that falsity is not an option for the meaning irrealist anyway, I will set this possibility aside.

¹⁵⁵ It is sentences that can *only* be true if some meaning fact obtains that are characterised as false by the error-theory. The sentences “Either Hemi means addition by ‘+’ or it is a lovely day” and “Hemi *does not* mean addition by ‘+’”, for example, may still be true. This is why the error-theorist’s claim is limited to *atomic and positive* meaning ascriptions.

subsidiary norm, and that the practice of meaning ascription could be abandoned without pragmatic loss. If *all* we are doing when we talk of meaning is falsely describing, it is hard to imagine what point there would be in continuing to engage with that talk. The following two positions, then, are potential irrealist characterisations of meaning discourse:

Meaning Eliminative Error-Theory: There are no meaning facts. (Atomic and positive) meaning ascriptions are false. Meaning discourse can be abandoned without loss.

Meaning Non-Eliminative Error-Theory: There are no meaning facts. (Atomic and positive) meaning ascriptions are false. Meaning discourse features a non-truth norm and cannot be abandoned without loss.

The task, then, is to evaluate the tenability of these positions. I will raise three objections that show—conclusively, I think—that an error-theory is not a live option for the meaning irrealist.

The eliminative error-theorist will face the general worry noted above for any eliminativist approach. It is uncomfortable to advocate the abandonment of a seemingly worthwhile practice that is pervasive among humans. Let's be more specific, now that we have added the error-theory to the picture. If *every* (atomic and positive) meaning ascription is false, and as the eliminativist claims there is no other norm under which those ascriptions are evaluated, then *no meaning ascription is more or less justified than another*. Meaning ascriptions are systematically equivalent with respect to how well they describe the facts, but they are also systematically equivalent with respect to *whether they should be uttered*. In adopting this account, we construe any appearance of differential correctness between such sentences as "Hemi means addition by '+'" and "Hemi means quaddition by '+'" as *mere* appearance. We decry a widespread human activity as worthless. As earlier noted, such considerations do not provide a convincing argument against the eliminativist account. But they do motivate looking elsewhere.

Perhaps, then, we should pursue a non-eliminativist error-theory about meaning. There is still something worthwhile about ascribing meaning, even though all such ascriptions are also failed description. Such a position would be akin to what J.L. Mackie suggests for morality.¹⁵⁶ “Torture is morally impermissible”, and *not* “Charity is morally impermissible”, might satisfy some subsidiary norm—perhaps of possessing a certain utility—even when there is no such thing as moral impermissibility and both sentences are false. Likewise, there might be some norm satisfied by “Hemi means *addition* by ‘+’” that isn’t satisfied by “Hemi means *quaddition* by ‘+’”, even though there is no such thing as meaning and both sentences are false. The thought, in essence, is that while all meaning ascriptions are false, some of them might yet be *correct* with respect to something other than truth.

It is clear that such an account—if it is stable—would oppose eliminativism. Meaning ascriptions are correct or incorrect with respect to this norm, and it is quite possible that the practice of meaning discourse conducted in these terms could be worthwhile.¹⁵⁷ We would seek to *characterise* the function of our meaning talk, rather than to deny that there is any such function. But a serious problem arises when we consider what is required for there to be a non-truth norm operating in meaning discourse. The problematic consideration arose at the end of §2.3: *KW’s meaning irrealism implies that there are no norms governing human action*. Miller argues against taking a non-eliminative error-theory to be the upshot of meaning irrealism on this basis.¹⁵⁸ The key idea is that to accept the sceptic’s strategy in the case of meaning is to accept that strategy wherever it is supposed that there is such a thing as rule-following. And for there to be a subsidiary norm governing meaning discourse *there must be a fact about whether we accord with that norm* in making a particular ascription of meaning. There must be some fact in virtue of which meaning ascriptions in any number of novel situations are evaluated as correct or incorrect. And if our practice is to be

¹⁵⁶ Mackie, *Ethics*.

¹⁵⁷ Further discussion of the potential *role* and *utility* of meaning ascription given meaning irrealism will be given in the next section, when I describe KW’s sceptical solution.

¹⁵⁸ Miller, “Rule Following, Error Theory and Eliminativism.”

governed by such a norm, this fact must be graspable by our finite minds. It needn't matter whether the norm is truth or something else. The KW meaning irrealist must deny that there are any facts in virtue of which an ascription is correct or incorrect with respect to any norm. The non-eliminative error-theorist about meaning, then, appears to rely on resources that are unavailable once we have accepted meaning irrealism. Subsidiary norms may be available to the moral error-theorist. But meaning irrealists face special constraints.

The final nail in the coffin of an error-theory about meaning—whether eliminative or non-eliminative—is the following problem, raised by Paul Boghossian.¹⁵⁹ The issue is straightforward, and has likely been clear given my comment in §2.3 that meaning irrealism implies that no sentences have truth conditions. The error-theorist marks their opposition to realism as a systematic failure on the part of the subject discourse to achieve the description for which it aims. Every sentence in an error-theoretic discourse is truth-apt and has a truth condition; each of those sentences, therefore, *has a meaning*. This general error-theoretic position immediately fails in the present case, because the possibility of sentences being meaningful is within the scope of the irrealist claim. An error-theory about meaning is an error-theory, and thus implies that *some sentences are false*. But it follows from meaning irrealism that *no sentences are false*. If we are to find a way to account for the nature of meaning ascription after denying that there are meaning facts, relying on certain sentences having truth conditions will not be a coherent (let alone *tenable*) option.

I think this problem to be an immediate and fundamental blow to any error-theory about meaning, and I therefore reject an error-theoretic account of meaning discourse given meaning irrealism. *Failed description* is a characterisation of meaning discourse that relies on something we have explicitly denied: that sentences can have the meaning necessary to pick out a state of affairs. And even given a solution to this problem, an error-theory about meaning faces a challenging dilemma between eliminativism and non-eliminativism. The error-

¹⁵⁹ Boghossian makes this argument here: Boghossian, "The Rule-Following Considerations," 523; Boghossian, "The Status of Content," 174.

theorist about meaning must either endorse the abandonment of a seemingly worthwhile discourse or rely on resources unavailable to the meaning irrealist by claiming that there is a non-truth norm operating over meaning discourse.

2.6 Meaning Discourse: Non-Factualism

KW, whether for the reasons I have described or otherwise, does not consider an error-theoretic response to the sceptical problem. Instead, in Chapter 3 of *WRPL*, he presents a form of *non-factualism* about meaning.¹⁶⁰ There are no meaning facts, and therefore no true meaning sentences that state them. But meaning discourse does not involve a grand error. It is no problem that there are no facts for meaning ascriptions to state, because those ascriptions *are not attempts at fact-stating*.¹⁶¹ The basic non-factualist claim is this:

Meaning Non-Factualism: Meaning ascriptions are not truth-conditional and are neither true nor false.¹⁶²

We may accommodate the impossibility of true meaning ascription by denying that they are in the market for truth at all. This is, in a sense, a more severe response to irrealism than an error-theory. Both the error-theorist and the non-factualist deny that any meaning ascriptions state *existing* states of affairs, but the non-factualist goes further and denies that those ascriptions state even *non-existing* states of affairs. But in the light of the fundamental problem for a meaning error-theory described at the end of the previous section, it is clear that the

¹⁶⁰ The interpretation of KW's characterisation as a form of non-factualism has been disputed. See, for example: Wilson, "Kripke on Wittgenstein and Normativity"; Alexander Miller, *Philosophy of Language* (Florence, UNITED STATES: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 191, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/otago/detail.action?docID=324938>. I will construe KW's account as non-factualist, but as I have said for other exegetical considerations, this will have little bearing on the discussion; it is worthwhile to consider meaning non-factualism either way.

¹⁶¹ To reiterate an earlier note: by "meaning ascriptions" I mean sentences of a certain form, that *appear* to attribute meaning to signs and subjects. The term is consistent with the contention that those ascriptions do not really serve to state states of affairs at all—the claim made by the non-factualist.

¹⁶² *Non-cognitivism* is a related position, on which the relevant sentences are not used to express beliefs. I mean for non-factualism to be distinct from non-cognitivism, and won't discuss whether meaning ascriptions are used to express beliefs. But I do not mean this to imply that the meaning non-factualist could avoid meaning non-cognitivism. See the following for a brief note comparing the two positions: Boghossian, "The Status of Content," 160.

meaning irrealist *must* adopt a position of this severity. We cannot characterise meaning ascriptions as having truth conditions while denying that there are any facts in virtue of which those ascriptions could have truth conditions at all.

The basic non-factualist claim, as I have characterised it, is purely negative. The question of providing a positive account of the targeted discourse is an important one for the non-factualist. I distinguish two kinds of responses to this question:

Eliminative Meaning Non-Factualism: Meaning ascriptions are not truth-conditional, and meaning ascription has no function. Meaning discourse can be abandoned without loss.

Non-Eliminative Meaning Non-Factualism: Meaning ascriptions are not truth-conditional, and meaning ascription has a function that is not description. Meaning discourse cannot be abandoned without loss.

For a sentence to serve as a *description* of some state of affairs, it must state that that state of affairs obtains. Since meaning ascriptions are not statements, the function of meaning discourse cannot be description. But after making this negative claim we may either vindicate our continued practice of meaning ascription by positing some *alternative function*, or we may instead simply deny that there is any function at all. It is hard to imagine what reason there would be to continue ascribing meaning if doing so is without function, so the latter option amounts to advocating for elimination.

Let us start with a consideration of eliminative non-factualism. On such a view, there are no meaning facts, and meaning discourse does not involve the attempted statement of such facts. What's more, that discourse involves nothing worthwhile at all—there is no other function fulfilled by talking of meaning. Eliminative non-factualism does seem to be an improvement on eliminative error-theory: it avoids the implied contradiction that there are no meaning facts yet false sentences. But it will inherit all the eliminativist difficulties acknowledged in §2.4.

There *seems* to be something worthwhile in meaning talk, and to advocate for the abandonment of a widespread practice on the basis that we cannot satisfactorily account for it in philosophy is not a promising plan. And indeed, things seem in this respect *worse* for the eliminativist non-factualist than for the eliminativist error-theorist. The error-theorist can, at least, offer an account of one thing we are doing when we talk of meaning: we are trying but failing to state meaning facts. But the eliminative non-factualist explicitly rejects that account, and does not replace it. The position amounts to the denial that there is *anything* going on when we talk about meaning. These considerations, again, do not seem to decisively rule out the eliminativist option. But they do show that it is undesirable, and that we should pursue non-eliminativism.

We will, then, consider the shape that a non-eliminative non-factualism about meaning may take. A lead can again be taken from metaethics: *moral expressivists* occupy a position of this kind. In the paradigmatic case of A.J. Ayer's *emotivism*, for example, the sentence "Torture is wrong" does not state that torture is wrong, but is instead used to express a certain emotional attitude towards torture.¹⁶³ The meaning non-factualist may make a similar move. The function of "Hemi means addition by '+'" is not to state that Hemi means addition by '+'. Instead, meaning ascription serves some *non-descriptive* role; a role that renders it worthwhile to continue ascribing meaning, and thus prevents eliminativism.

KW's sceptical solution—as I will interpret it—is a form of non-eliminative non-factualism. I will give a brief description of the sceptical solution as an illustration of this approach to meaning discourse, but I won't go into much depth; the issues with which I am concerned are not specific to KW's account.¹⁶⁴ The basic structure of KW's sceptical solution is as follows.¹⁶⁵ Meaning ascriptions have no truth conditions. But they may nonetheless have *assertibility conditions*. That there are certain conditions in which the assertion of a sentence is *considered to be*

¹⁶³ A. J. Ayer (Alfred Jules), *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 110.

¹⁶⁴ I went into more depth about KW's sceptical solution here: Butler, "Kripke-Wittgenstein Meaning Scepticism and the Sceptical Solution." For comprehensive discussion, see: Miller, "What Is the Sceptical Solution?"

¹⁶⁵ The sceptical solution is found in Chapter 3 of KW's book: Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 55–113.

justified—and conditions when it is not—does not imply that the sentence is a statement of fact. Take “Hemi means addition by ‘+’”. There are many characterisations we could make of the conditions in which utterance of this sentence is considered to be justified. For example: if Hemi’s use of ‘+’ *corresponds* to how some *linguistic community* uses ‘+’, uttering that sentence may serve to *accept* Hemi into that community. Whatever the specifics of the account, it seems plausible that meaning ascription could have a role independent of the statement of meaning facts:

All that is needed to legitimize assertions that someone means something is that there be roughly specifiable circumstances under which they are legitimately assertable, and that the game of asserting them under such conditions has a role in our lives. No supposition that ‘facts correspond’ to those assertions is needed.¹⁶⁶

It is easy to see how this could amount to non-eliminativism. On the above account, uttering “Hemi means addition by ‘+’” in certain conditions is useful: it indicates to others that Hemi is to be trusted in their use of ‘+’. There is *pragmatic value* in ascribing meaning. On a non-eliminative non-factualist account—of the kind suggested by KW or otherwise—there would be value lost in abandoning meaning discourse.

We now turn to objections and worries for meaning non-factualism. First, I will set aside any such concerns that arise quite in general for *any* non-factualist position. The *Frege-Geach* problem is a prominent example.¹⁶⁷ I won’t spend time

¹⁶⁶ Kripke, 77.

¹⁶⁷ This problem, in our present case, would be as follows. We may identify some function performed by asserting “Hemi means *addition* by ‘+’” that is consistent with meaning irrealism. But it will prove difficult to accommodate the apparent embeddability of that sentence as the antecedent of the conditional “If Hemi means *addition* by ‘+’, then they know what they’re talking about”, and to do so in a way that renders the sentence “They know what they’re talking about” a valid inference from the previous two sentences. It may be difficult for the meaning non-factualist to respond to this problem. But, for two reasons, I won’t investigate this problem here. Firstly, because it arises in general for any non-factualist, and I am concerned with difficulties particular to non-realism about meaning. And secondly, that preserving the apparent validity of the meaning modus ponens argument will likely seem comparatively less pressing once we have seen the extent of the difficulties for the meaning irrealist. Meaning irrealism threatens our ordinary conception of language quite generally, and concerns about the argument described here are, I think, just a drop in the bucket. For Geach’s presentation of the problem see: P. T. Geach, “Ascriptivism,” *The Philosophical Review* 69, no. 2 (1960): 221–25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2183506>; P. T. Geach,

on such concerns here. It is more important to consider the worries that are specific to non-factualism about *meaning*. The task, in a sense, is to determine whether meaning non-factualism is *at least* as tenable as non-factualism for other subject matters. I have already noted the undesirability of an eliminative non-factualism. The two objections that I will raise both primarily concern non-eliminativism. The first—an argument that derives contradictory results about the nature of truth from meaning non-factualism—comes from Paul Boghossian. My contention will be that this argument is unsuccessful. The second objection I will consider is an analogue of that raised for non-eliminative error-theory: that the consolatory account meant as a defence against eliminativism relies on resources unavailable to the KW meaning irrealist. This argument I will find to be successful. In the end, then, the meaning non-factualist appears forced to adopt an unpalatable eliminativism.¹⁶⁸

Boghossian’s argument appears in “The Status of Content” and “The Rule-Following Considerations”.¹⁶⁹ He contends that meaning non-factualism implies a contradiction and is thus incoherent. The attack is analogous to Boghossian’s objection to meaning error-theory that I noted in §2.5: the traditional non-factualist mechanisms fail in the case of meaning. To generate the purported contradiction, let us start by adopting the two key non-factualist claims: there are no meaning facts, and meaning ascriptions have no truth conditions.

Boghossian’s first claim is that *no* non-factualism is consistent with a *deflationary* account of truth.¹⁷⁰ The argument for this claim touches on similar points to those I raised in §1.5, for the intersection of non-factualism and minimalism about truth. I won’t repeat the description of deflationism that I gave in §1.2. The two key deflationist contentions will suffice: there is no property of

“Assertion,” *The Philosophical Review* 74, no. 4 (1965): 449–465, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2183123>.

¹⁶⁸ It is worthwhile to note here that one prominent point of discussion for meaning non-factualism—that it *globalises*—will not appear in this chapter. I have set aside any globalisation considerations for the next chapter: see §3.2.

¹⁶⁹ Boghossian, “The Rule-Following Considerations,” 525; Boghossian, “The Status of Content,” 164, 173.

¹⁷⁰ Boghossian, “The Status of Content,” 165.

truth, but truth predication can serve as a device for the endorsement of sentences. In §1.3 I showed how, for the minimalist, it is sufficient for a sentence to be apt for minimal truth that it exhibits *declarative syntax* and that its use is *disciplined*. Boghossian makes an analogous point for deflationism:

Any proposed requirement on candidacy for truth must be grounded in the preferred account of the nature of truth. On a deflationary account of truth, there is no substantive property—truth—that sentences or thoughts may enjoy ... Any meaningful, declarative sentence would be (at a minimum) a *candidate* for assertion; it would be, thereby, a candidate for the compliment we pay sentences we are prepared to assert, or, as the alternative would have it, a candidate for semantic ascent. Any such sentence would count, therefore, as truth-conditional in a deflationary sense.¹⁷¹

Deflationists claim that to ascribe truth to a sentence is just to assert that sentence. Truth predication—and thus truth-aptness—will therefore inherit whatever conditions there are on a sentence being a *candidate for assertion*. A sentence may be asserted when it is *declarative* and *disciplined* by utterance norms. Given deflationism, then, it is sufficient for a sentence to be apt for truth that it has declarative syntax and is governed by norms of correct utterance.

The difficulty posed by this contention for the non-factualist is that the sentences they target appear to meet these requirements. It will be most practical to use meaning ascriptions as an illustrative example, although the point is meant to be general. The syntactical matter for meaning ascriptions is straightforward. “Hemi means addition by ‘+’” has declarative syntax: the sentences “If Hemi means addition by ‘+’ then they are a good mathematician” and “Either Hemi means addition by ‘+’ or Hemi means quaddition by ‘+’”, for example, are grammatically correct. The matter of the discipline that may be exhibited by meaning ascriptions is a somewhat more complicated matter. For now, it will be enough to note that any *non-eliminative* non-factualist will surely accept that there are standards at work in meaning discourse such that certain ascriptions are correct and others are

¹⁷¹ Boghossian, 165.

not.¹⁷² Indeed, accounting for this discipline is a central part of KW's sceptical solution. If meaning discourse features assertibility conditions such that we consider it *correct* to utter "Hemi means *addition* by '+'" only when the speaker intends to accept Hemi into their linguistic community with respect to their use of '+', then that discourse is disciplined.¹⁷³

If truth is construed as the deflationist suggests, then, a non-eliminative non-factualist about meaning appears forced to concede that meaning ascriptions are apt for truth: they can be asserted, and the truth predicate is just a device for endorsed assertion. Boghossian's point is that, if there is to be space for non-factualism about such sentences, *deflationism must be rejected*. It cannot be as easy as deflationism suggests to qualify as truth-apt; the requirements must be sufficiently demanding that significant and declarative sentences can fail to meet them. This is the result of the first half of Boghossian's argument:

A non-factualism about any subject matter presupposes a conception of truth richer than the deflationary: it is committed to holding that the predicate "true" stands for some sort of real, language-independent property, eligibility for which will not be certified solely by the fact that a sentence is declarative and significant.¹⁷⁴

This claim targets any non-eliminative non-factualism. But it may not in itself be a problem for any such theory.¹⁷⁵ It is when we direct the non-factualist approach towards meaning that the apparent inconsistency with deflationism becomes problematic.

¹⁷² It is an interesting question whether any eliminative non-factualist would agree that meaning ascriptions are disciplined. Boghossian does claim that *any* non-factualism will imply that truth is more than deflationary, but it is unclear whether he would include eliminative non-factualism, as I have included it, within the scope of this claim. Regardless, I mean to include versions of non-factualism that deny that the target sentences exhibit the discipline necessary for even deflationary truth, so I deny that *all* non-factualist accounts are inconsistent with deflationary truth. We will proceed with Boghossian's argument as targeting specifically non-eliminative non-factualism, with the acknowledgement that it may also apply to certain eliminative non-factualist accounts; those that admit that the sentences in question exhibit the necessary discipline.

¹⁷³ The detail of the account of assertibility conditions needn't matter for this point to be sustained. I will return to the matter of whether meaning discourse meets the disciplinary requirement in §2.7.1 and §2.7.4.

¹⁷⁴ "The Status of Content", 165.

¹⁷⁵ Boghossian points out that this result may be a problem for Ayer, who explicitly advocates for both deflationary truth and non-eliminative non-factualism about morality. Boghossian, "The Status of Content," 165.

Deflationists deny that truth is a genuine property, and thus that the predicate “is true” refers to such a property. Boghossian takes the result of the first half of his argument to imply that the meaning non-factualist must claim that truth is *robust*, by which we need only mean *non-deflationary*: truth *is* a genuine property, and the predicate “is true” may thus refer to that property. Boghossian next argues that meaning non-factualism also implies that *truth is not robust*. There are two steps to this contradictory result. Firstly, Boghossian argues that if truth is robust, then it must be a *factual matter*. And secondly, he argues that meaning non-factualism implies that truth is *not* a factual matter. Since I am going to argue that this half of Boghossian’s argument fails, I will quote the relevant passages in full.

So we have it that any non-factualist thesis presupposes that truth is, as I shall henceforth put it, *robust*. But, now, notice that judgements about whether an object possesses a robust property could hardly fail to be factual. If *P* is some genuinely robust property, then it is hard to see how there could fail to be a fact of the matter about whether an object has *P* . . . If *truth* is a robust property, then judgements about a sentence’s truth must themselves be factual. But . . . a non-factualist thesis about meaning implies that judgements about a sentence’s truth cannot be factual: whether a certain sentence is true cannot be a factual matter if its meaning is not.¹⁷⁶

Notice, however, that [the claim that the predicate “has truth condition P” does not refer to a property] entails [that “true” does not refer to a property]. For the truth value of a sentence is fully determined by its truth condition and the relevant worldly facts. There is no way, then, that a sentence’s possessing a truth value could be a thoroughly factual matter (“true” does express a property) if there is non-factuality in one of its determinants (“has truth condition p” does not express a property). A non-factualism about content amounts, therefore, to [the claims that “S has truth condition p” is not truth-conditional and that “true” does not refer to a property]. But now here too a contradiction seems apparent. . . . The idea of a significant declarative sentence failing to possess truth conditions is an

¹⁷⁶ Boghossian, “The Rule-Following Considerations,” 526.

idea that *presupposes* that “true” does refer to a property: it presupposes a robust, as opposed to a deflationary, conception of truth.¹⁷⁷

The first part of the argument is clearest seen in the first quote. Having denied deflationism, we have denied that truth predication is merely a device for endorsement, and we have posited that there *is* a property of truth. There is a property that a sentence possesses when it is true and does not possess when it is not true, and there are thus *facts* about whether or not a sentence has that property. Boghossian puts the point in terms of the nature of *talk* about truth: from robust truth it follows that *judgements* about whether a sentence is true or false are truth-apt, and that the *predicate* “is true” refers to the property of truth. The denial of deflationism appears to imply that truth is in this sense *factual*.

The second part of the argument is clearest seen in the second quote. I have acknowledged the connection between meaning and truth elsewhere in this chapter. Boghossian exploits this connection to argue that, in a sense, non-factualism *poisons the well*. Whether a sentence is true is determined, in part, by its meaning: as I earlier put it, a sentence is true when *what it says is the case is the case*, and a sentence says what it says in virtue of its meaning. To hold that the truth-value of a sentence is a factual matter, then, is to hold that factual matters can be determined by non-factual matters. And this, the argument maintains, is not possible. Boghossian, again, puts the point in terms of truth-talk: if no sentences of the form “*S* means that *P*” are statements of fact, and meaning partly determines truth, then how could any sentences of the form “*S* is true” be statements of fact? Wright puts it like this:

One immediate difficulty [for the meaning non-factualist] is presented by the meaning-truth platitude. If the truth value of *S* is determined by its meaning and the state of the world in relevant respects, then non-factuality in one of the determinants can be expected to induce non-factuality in the outcome. (A rough parallel: If among the determinants of whether it is worthwhile going to see a certain exhibition is how well presented the leading exhibits are, then, if questions of good presentation are not

¹⁷⁷ Boghossian, “The Status of Content,” 175.

considered to be entirely factual, neither is the matter of whether it is worthwhile going to see the exhibition.) A [non-factualist] view of meaning is thus, it appears, going to enjoin a [non-factualist] view of what is for a statement to be true.¹⁷⁸

Non-factualism about meaning, then, implies non-factualism about whether sentences are true. But in the first half of Boghossian's argument, we found that there *must* be facts of the matter about whether a sentence is true—otherwise, truth could not be sufficiently substantial to leave space for the denial that some declarative and disciplined sentence is truth-apt. Meaning non-factualism appears to imply a contradiction: truth is both non-factual and factual.

I will argue that this argument fails.¹⁷⁹ Let us accept—at least to a certain extent—the half of Boghossian's argument that is concerned with non-factualism for *any* subject. We reject deflationism and accept that there is a property of truth. And I will accept, further, that there are thus facts about whether or not a sentence is true. But I will deny that this commitment is at all a problem for the meaning non-factualist. To do this, I will present two characterisations of the supposed conflict, and find in both cases that a consistent option is available to the meaning non-factualist.

One way to represent the purported factuality and non-factuality of truth is in terms of ascriptions of truth; we can examine the nature of judgements of the form “*S* is true”, or of the truth predicate “is true”. I will focus on judgements, but I think that the discussion applies *mutatis mutandis* to predicates. Truth is factual, on this interpretation, if sentences of the form “*S* is true” are truth-conditional—and non-factual if they are not. Boghossian argues that the denial of deflationism implies that truth is in this sense factual. There is a property of truth, and facts about whether or not a sentence is true. Judgements about those facts, then, cannot fail to have truth conditions: there are facts they are attempting to state. But truth is non-factual, on this interpretation, because we have denied that

¹⁷⁸ Wright, “Kripke's Account of the Argument against Private Language,” 104. I have replaced Wright's usage of the term “projectivist” with “non-factualist”, to cohere with my present terminology.

¹⁷⁹ My argument is similar to that given by Wright here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 231–36.

judgements about what a sentence means are truth-conditional. “*S* means that *P*” has no truth conditions, and is thus never true. But for a sentence of the form “*S* is true” to be true or false it is surely necessary that a sentence of the form “*S* means that *P*” is true: a sentence must say that something is the case to be a candidate for a truth-value. Meaning non-factualism, then, appears to imply that “*S* is true” both is and is not truth-conditional; that truth is both factual and non-factual.

On this characterisation of the problem, I do not think that there is any difficulty for the meaning non-factualist. The question of whether the sentence “*S* is true” is truth-conditional is settled quickly by the observation, which I have made several times, that *no* sentence can be truth-conditional given meaning irrealism. No sentence has the meaning necessary to state that something is the case. On the present interpretation of Boghossian’s problem, it was the denial of deflationism that implied that judgements about truth are factual: “If *truth* is a robust property, then judgements about a sentence’s truth must themselves be factual.” I think that the meaning irrealist must deny this claim, and that they are quite justified in doing so. The absence of a sentence that *states* a fact does not, it seems to me, imply the absence of *the fact itself*.¹⁸⁰ If this implication did obtain, then in denying that any sentence has content, the meaning irrealist would be forced to maintain that *nothing is the case*. It is a central upshot of meaning irrealism, I think, that we must deny that sentences map neatly onto the world; and, indeed, perhaps that they can map onto anything at all. To return to the present point, then, the idea is this: the denial of deflationism may imply that truth is a property, and that there are facts about whether sentences have that property. But the meaning irrealist will deny that this implies that there are truth-conditional statements that a sentence is true. (Or, to put it in terms of the truth predicate, they will deny that “is true” refers to the property of truth, even though there is such a property.) On this interpretation of the conflict, then, I think it clear that the meaning non-factualist can consistently claim that truth is non-factual: truth ascriptions are not truth-conditional.

¹⁸⁰ Note that I have assumed here that “judgements about a sentence’s truth” refers to sentences that *appear* to be about a sentence’s truth. If the term instead refers to sentences that *actually* have that content, then the meaning non-factualist’s denial is simply that there *are no such sentences*.

Let us now consider a second interpretation of the factuality conflict. It may be unfair to reject Boghossian's argument on the previous grounds alone: it might succeed if limited to a characterisation of factuality in terms purely of *facts*. That is, perhaps non-factualism implies both that truth is factual in that there are *facts of the matter* about whether a sentence is true, and that truth is non-factual in that there are no such facts. Such a characterisation would, I think, preserve the spirit of the Boghossian attack—and it would do so without relying on assumptions about the possibility of truth-conditional sentences that the meaning non-factualist will deny. The contradiction, then, would be this. Truth is factual in that, since truth is a property, the matter of whether a sentence is true is a matter determined by facts. For any sentence there is a fact such that that sentence does or does not have the property of truth. But meaning non-factualists deny that there are any facts such that a sentence has a meaning. And since whether a sentence has the truth property is determined, in part, by what it means, there are thus no facts such that a sentence is true. Meaning non-factualism, then, implies that there are both facts of the matter and *no* facts of the matter about truth.

We can express the result like this: meaning non-factualism implies (1) that the matter of whether a sentence is true is a matter of facts, and (2) that there are no facts such that a sentence is true. Once it is put this way, the meaning non-factualist's escape is clear. (1) and (2) are, I think, quite consistent. Truth is, as the denial of deflationism implies, a matter of facts. *But none of those facts need be that a sentence is true.* When a sentence is true, it has a certain property. But since it is a necessary condition on being true that a sentence is equipped with truth conditions, and since meaning non-factualism implies that no sentences are so equipped, no sentence is true. The denial of deflationism implies only that there are facts such that a sentence is *or is not* true. There would only be a problem for meaning non-factualism if the implication was instead simply that there are facts such that *a sentence is true.*

On the second characterisation of the factuality of truth that follows from its robustness, the meaning non-factualist can happily suppose that truth is factual.

All that needs to be supposed is that all of the facts about truth are, in a sense, *negative*: no sentences are true. We found above, on the prior characterisation of factuality, that meaning non-factualism also implies that truth is *non-factual*: ascriptions of truth are not truth-conditional. But two characterisations of factuality seem quite distinct. My response to Boghossian's argument, then, is that even granting the claim that no non-factualism is consistent with truth deflationism, the meaning non-factualist needn't be concerned. It seems to me quite consistent to claim that truth is robust and is a matter of facts, while denying that sentences of the form "S is true" are truth-conditional, and denying that there are any facts such that a sentence is true. These matters are problematic for the meaning non-factualist only if it is assumed that to every fact there corresponds a sentence stating that fact, or that if truth is a property then there are facts such that a sentence has that property. Boghossian's argument is successful only given a certain equivocation on "non-factual", and once we explicate the notion, there is a quite consistent position for the meaning non-factualist to occupy.¹⁸¹

Much of this discussion has concerned characterisation of Boghossian's argument, and it may be prudent to put the result modestly: on *this* interpretation of the argument, it fails to derive a contradiction from meaning non-factualism. It is possible that I have misinterpreted it, and that on a better characterisation the argument would be sound. But I will take it henceforth that Boghossian's argument against the coherence of meaning non-factualism fails.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ The position may be consistent. But consistency does not suffice for the position to be *attractive*. The meaning non-factualist, on this account, claims that truth is a property, but that (1) no sentence has that property, and (2) that there can be no statement of the fact that a sentence does not have that property. This is a difficult position to maintain. Indeed, on one reading of (1) and (2), they seem to contradict: is (1) not precisely the kind of statement ruled out by (2)? While I cannot here investigate these considerations in-depth, the central thought is this: meaning non-factualism seems to rely on a certain separation between facts and truth. There must be things that are the case despite there being no statements that they are the case. On such an account, the sentence "no sentence is true" is not true, despite it being the case that no sentence is true. Such considerations have metaphysical consequences along broadly Kantian lines: much of reality may be simply *beyond* our semantic capabilities. I will return to such thoughts in Chapter 3 (see fn. 223), and for now will simply set them aside as posing a difficulty that, while serious, is not obviously insurmountable.

¹⁸² Other objections to Boghossian's argument can be found here: Divers and Miller, "Why Expressivists about Value Should Not Love Minimalism about Truth"; Jackson, Oppy, and Smith, "Minimalism and Truth Aptness"; Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 231. One prominent objection is that Boghossian relies on there being no distance between what is necessary for *truth* under deflationism (or minimalism) and what is necessary for *truth-aptitude*.

We now turn to the second objection. We have seen that, given meaning irrealism, the sentences that comprise meaning discourse cannot be in the business of describing meaning facts, and they are not apt for any kind of truth that involves such description. But the threat from the rule-following considerations runs deeper. As I have acknowledged in §2.3 and §2.5, KW meaning irrealism appears to rule out the possibility of correct or incorrect utterance.¹⁸³

To see the concern for non-eliminative non-factualism, let us pick a rough example of such a theory. The function of sentences that ascribe meaning to signs and subjects—we will say—is to *express the acceptance of that subject into the speaker's linguistic community with respect to that sign*. So, when Aroha says “Hemi means addition by ‘+’”, she is expressing acceptance of Hemi to her community for the use of ‘+’. If there is this function, then there must be occasions on which a certain meaning ascription *fulfils* or *fails to fulfil* it. And then, if this function is to characterise what we are doing when we ascribe meaning, it must be *correct* to utter when doing so fulfils the function, and *incorrect* when it does not. Say that Aroha intends to accept Hemi into her ‘+’ linguistic community. If the function of meaning ascription is as presently construed, then it will be correct for her to say “Hemi means *addition* by ‘+’”. If she *did not* have that intention, then the utterance does not fulfil this function, and it would be *incorrect*. Correctness emerges from the function—Aroha ascribes correctly when doing so performs the role of that ascription.

The opportunity for the sceptic is clear. There must be some fact in virtue of which the function is fulfilled or not—and the utterance correct or not—in a particular case. That fact must rule out *quus*-like alternative interpretations. The sceptic may claim, for example, that what is correct for Aroha to say in the above case is instead “Hemi does *not* mean *addition* by ‘+’”. The facts necessary for this non-eliminative non-factualist account to work are precisely of the kind ruled out

¹⁸³ This argument for the dependence of non-eliminative non-factualism on rule-following can be found here: Alexander Miller, “Rule-Following Skepticism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, Routledge Philosophy Companions (London ; New York: Routledge, 2011); Miller, “What Is the Sceptical Solution?”

by KW's sceptical argument: those such that a subject's utterance of an expression accords or fail to accord with the standards for using that expression. Such facts are necessary even when the function of an expression is not to describe reality—they will follow wherever it is supposed that the utterances of a subject may be correct or incorrect. Given, then, that this sample non-eliminative non-factualist account of meaning is representative of any such account, we have found that non-eliminative non-factualism is not an option for the KW meaning irrealist. It relies on materials that are explicitly ruled-out.

This, then, is our ultimate evaluation of meaning non-factualism. The basic negative contention—that meaning ascriptions are not truth-conditional—was not found to be problematic. And indeed, the denial of truth-conditionality seems to follow directly from meaning irrealism, which is why a meaning error-theory is incoherent. Furthermore, I rejected Boghossian's argument that this negative meaning non-factualist claim implies a contradiction about the factuality of truth. But having found that non-eliminativist accounts rely on meaning ascriptions being correct or incorrect with respect to some standard, we end up in an analogous situation to that found for meaning error-theory. The non-eliminativist's attempt to retain the legitimacy of meaning ascription appears inconsistent with KW meaning irrealism. If meaning discourse is characterised as non-factualism it must advocate for eliminativism. And this, as I have noted, is a quite unpalatable result. We have denied that there is value in a pervasive human activity in response to philosophical difficulties.

If KW is a non-eliminative non-factualist, and KW's sceptic is an eliminativist, it looks as though we must side with the sceptic. In contrast with the meaning error-theory, consideration of meaning non-factualism has produced an apparently consistent option. But mere consistency is unlikely to be enough for tenability. We are quite clearly motivated to seek an alternative non-realist account of meaning discourse, and it is such an alternative to which I now turn.

2.7 Meaning Discourse: Mere Minimalism

2.7.1 Meaning Discourse and Minimal Truth

It is distinctive of the prior two non-realist models of discourse that opposition to realism about meaning manifests as *the absence of true meaning ascription*; *systematic falsity* in the case of error-theory, or *non-truth conditional semantics* in the case of non-factualism. Crispin Wright's metaphysical framework, presented in *Truth and Objectivity* and described in Chapter 1 of this thesis, offers an alternative approach. The realism-status of a discourse on Wright's account—at least for *assertoric* discourses—turns on the *nature* of truth available in that discourse, rather than the possibility of truth at all. It is helpful to think of this distinction in terms of the two generic components of realism: *existence* and *independence*.¹⁸⁴ The approach made in the previous sections was to deny the existence of meaning facts, and thus of true meaning ascriptions—what I have called an *irrealist* approach. In this section, I will instead make what I have called an *anti-realist* approach, and deny the realist's claim that meaning is a mind-independent matter.¹⁸⁵ In §2.7.1 – §2.7.3 I will apply the strategy outlined in §1.5 to meaning, and investigate which positions in Wright's metaphysical landscape might be motivated by Kripke's Wittgenstein (KW). I will first find that KW's position—at least, given the non-eliminative opposition to the sceptic—may be characterised as *mere minimalism about meaning*: the claim that, while there is truth in meaning discourse, that truth is nothing more than the product of the assertoric form of that discourse. Then, in §2.7.4, I will raise against this position analogous concerns to those raised against the error-theoretic and non-factualist approaches to meaning discourse, and find that we seem to be no better-off.

¹⁸⁴ See the General Introduction and Devitt, *Realism and Truth*.

¹⁸⁵ I have characterised KW's sceptical argument as concluding in meaning *irrealism*, and it may thus seem odd to suggest an *anti-realist* destination for that argument. But this is simply a quirk of the terminology that results from adopting Wright's minimalism. The position which we will initially find KW's sceptical argument to motivate is, effectively, the *irrealist* position that Wright's framework offers. But since it does posit meaning facts, it is also, in the terms I adopted in the General Introduction, a form of *anti-realism*. This terminological dispute will, I hope, be cleared up once we have fully applied KW's sceptical argument to meaning from within Wright's framework.

A metaphysical inquiry of the form suggested by Wright has two stages. First, we must determine whether meaning discourse is assertoric, and thus whether meaning ascriptions are apt for a truth property that exhibits at least the *essential* characteristics: those I listed as the *platitudes* in §1.3. Second, we must consider the further, *non-essential*, features that property may have—we must determine how truth in meaning discourse fares with respect to the four realism-relevant cruces. I will address these matters in turn. And since the present concern is to find an account of meaning discourse that is consistent with KW meaning irrealism, the inquiry will assume that KW’s sceptical argument is sound. The question is this: what follows from this assumption for the nature of truth in meaning discourse?

All that it takes for the sentences of a discourse to be apt for minimal truth is that they meet a minimum standard of *assertoricity*.¹⁸⁶ They must have a certain *syntactical form*, characteristic of declarative sentences. And they must exhibit a certain *discipline* in being governed by a recognised standard of *warranted assertibility*. Satisfaction of these two conditions is necessary and sufficient for sentences to appear as “P” in instances of the Disquotational Schema (DS): “P” is true iff P. Such sentences are thus truth-apt; and some of them, it is likely, will meet the standard and qualify as true.¹⁸⁷ The question, then, is whether meaning discourse features the necessary syntax and discipline.¹⁸⁸ Consider the following sentences:

Conditional: “If Hemi means addition by ‘+’, then he is no friend of the sceptic.”

Negation: “It is not the case that Hemi means addition by ‘+’.”

¹⁸⁶ This section relies on the discussion of Wright’s minimalism given in §1.3.

¹⁸⁷ The implication from there being a truth norm operating over a discourse to some of the sentences in that discourse being true relies on the rejection of an *error-theoretic* option: that the truth norm is systematically unmet. I discussed the intersection of minimalism and error-theory at the end of §1.5—and see Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 86. The point there is that taking the discourse in question to uniformly *fail* to meet a certain standard is undesirable in contrast with using minimalism to select a different standard that the sentences do meet (a standard which must be present if eliminativism is to be prevented). For present purposes, I will simply set aside the possibility of an error-theory, and take it that the presence of a minimal truth norm implies that the norm is at least occasionally met.

¹⁸⁸ I have already touched on this matter in §2.6, in discussion of Boghossian’s argument against meaning non-factualism—and I will return to it in §2.7.4.

Propositional Attitude: “Aroha believes that Hemi means addition by ‘+’.”

These are grammatically acceptable sentences. Taking this sample to be representative, we conclude that meaning ascriptions have the right syntactical form for ascription of a truth property. The discipline question is a more complicated matter, and will prove problematic. For “Hemi means *addition* by ‘+’” to be substitutable for “P” in an instance of the DS, there must be conditions in which that ascription is correct and incorrect. *Are* there such standards at work in meaning discourse? This question has been important in discussion of the tenability of forms of non-eliminativism. For now, let the claim simply be that *at least on KW’s own account* meaning discourse has sufficient discipline. KW’s *assertibility conditions*, which I briefly described in §2.6, characterise the occasions on which it is considered justified to ascribe meaning—roughly, doing so is justified when the speaker intends to accept another speaker into their community with respect to their use of a certain expression, and when that use has corresponded with communal use in the relevant respects. Our talk of meaning is disciplined when it is characterised as such, because that talk is not mere noise. There is function to that talk that may or may not be fulfilled by any particular utterance. Without committing to the letter of KW’s sceptical solution, then, we will assume that KW characterises meaning discourse as disciplined.

On KW’s account, then, meaning ascriptions meet the conditions of syntax and discipline. And then, given Wright’s minimalism, all meaning ascriptions are truth-apt and those that meet the standard are true. Recalling Wright’s discussion of the Correspondence platitude, it also follows that for every true meaning ascription *there is a meaning fact*.¹⁸⁹ That fact emerges from the copermissibility of “‘Hemi means addition by ‘+’” is true” and “It is a fact that Hemi means addition by ‘+’”; if an ascription meets the standard of truth then there seems to be nothing that prevents us from saying that that ascription states a fact. Even given linguistic acrobatics like “Is it *really* a fact that Hemi means addition by ‘+’?”, the truth of the ascriptive sentence still seems sufficient for an affirmative answer.

¹⁸⁹ See §1.3, and Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 25.

This result may seem immediately problematic for the KW meaning irrealist: I have characterised meaning irrealism as precisely the denial that there are meaning facts. But there is no conflict here—at least, not immediately. Having adopted Wright’s account of truth and facts we must look again at the characterisation of the meaning irrealism that follows from KW’s sceptical argument. It is unlikely that KW would have any qualms about admitting minimal meaning facts, and it seems that his meaning irrealist claim need only be that there are no *non-minimal* meaning facts.

To see this, first note that Wright intends a truth property about which we have accepted *only* the platitudinous characteristics to be *metaphysically neutral* ground between the realist and their opponent. There is nothing in the platitudes inconsistent with the denial that a sentence with a property satisfying those platitudes has a real subject matter. Aptitude for truth in Wright’s minimalism emerges solely from the *shape* of our talk about the relevant subject, and it needn’t be the case that the facts comprising that subject matter exist independently of that talk. It is not necessary, in opposing realism about meaning, to deny that there are such truths and facts. We could put it like this: it is unlikely that the sceptic would be satisfied by the provision of a meaning fact that is *merely* an artefact of the acceptability, with respect to some *minimal* truth norm, of the claim that that fact obtains.

KW *needn’t* deny the possibility of minimal meaning facts to oppose meaning realism. And there is good evidence, too, to suggest that he *doesn’t* deny this possibility. KW admits that it may be correct to ascribe truth to meaning ascriptions, if truth is construed a certain way:

Wittgenstein’s sceptical solution concedes to the sceptic that no ‘truth conditions’ or ‘corresponding facts’ in the world exist that make a statement like “Jones, like many of us, means addition by ‘+’” true . . . Do we not call assertions like the one just quoted ‘true’ or ‘false’? Can we not with propriety precede such assertions with ‘It is a fact that’ or ‘It is not a fact that’? Wittgenstein’s way with such objections is short. Like many others,

Wittgenstein accepts the 'redundancy' theory of truth: to affirm that a statement is true (or presumably, to precede it with 'It is a fact that...') is simply to affirm the statement itself, and to say it is not truth is to deny it: ('p' is true = p).¹⁹⁰

Wright's minimal truth shares much with this deflationary approach to truth, as I noted in §1.2 and §1.3. In this passage it is clear that KW concedes to the *propriety* of calling meaning ascriptions true, and calling meaning states of affairs facts. While minimalism, *contra* deflationism, posits a *property* of truth, there need be little more required for a sentence to have that property than to meet the standards for assertion at work in the discourse to which that sentence belongs.

Given minimalism, then, KW's discussion implies that there are true meaning ascriptions, as well as meaning facts that they state. But this is not a problem. The divergence between this result and the characterisation of the sceptical argument in §2.2 emerges not from a disagreement about the status of meaning facts, but from a disagreement about what is necessary for truth and facthood. To accommodate the adoption of minimalism we must reformulate meaning irrealism as follows:

Meaning Irrealism*: There are no *more than minimal* facts such that anyone means anything by an expression.

The prior characterisation of Meaning Irrealism (MI) was that there are *no* meaning facts. If we limit facts to those available *only* to the meaning realist, and ignore the possibility of the *minimal* facts that, on Wright's account, emerge merely from the assertoricity of the discourse in question, Meaning Irrealism* (MI*) is equivalent to MI. That is, MI follows from MI*, and vice versa, if we suppose that (necessarily) *all* facts are more than minimal. In subscribing to Wright's framework we consent to the possibility of merely minimal facts, and so we must

¹⁹⁰ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 86. Note that KW here refers to the redundancy theory of truth rather than deflationism. This theory differs from deflationism in denying the pragmatic value of truth predication that I described in §1.2, but shares what is important for the present point: that since ascribing truth is simply asserting, it is correct to ascribe truth whenever it is correct to assert. The difference, then, is inconsequential.

reject a literal reading of MI if we take meaning discourse to qualify for minimal truth and thus minimal facts. What I claim is that MI* expresses the sentiment of the conclusion of KW's sceptical argument from our adopted perspective of Wright's metaphysical framework.

We now turn to the second stage of the inquiry, in which we investigate the non-essential properties that truth in meaning discourse might have. So far, we have established only that meaning discourse features a truth with the essential characteristics: those laid out in the list of platitudes given in §1.3. There is little to be said about the nature of this truth from its satisfaction of the platitudes alone. And indeed, Wright's four cruces—to which we now turn—do not offer a complete picture either. Many questions will be left unanswered: questions, for example, about *which* meaning ascriptions qualify as true, and about *why* it is these that qualify. Truth in meaning discourse may, indeed, come to bear some resemblance to the *assertibility* norm invoked by KW in the sceptical solution. But Wright's cruces do offer characterisations of the features of this truth that are *realism-relevant*—those features about which the realist and the non-realist disagree. More specifically, they characterise the ways in which truth may be *mind-independent*. The realism-status of meaning is determined by the mind-independence of the truth for which meaning ascriptions are apt, and thus by how truth in meaning discourse fares in the four debates.

Note that to accept MI* is to *presume* an outcome of the four debates in favour of the non-realist: if the realist is at all victorious then truth is not *merely* minimal. In a sense, then, the point of applying the cruces to meaning is to *test* the claim that MI* follows from KW's argument. It may yet work out to be consistent with the soundness of that argument that truth in meaning discourse is mind-independent in some respect, and it is important to investigate this possibility. Wright thinks that it will not:

The irrealism established by Kripke's sceptical paradox, if it is sustained, comes to the contention that discourse about rules, meanings and what

complies with them is at most minimally truth-apt—that nothing about such discourse merits movement away from minimalist anti-realism about it.¹⁹¹

Wright suggests that, if the KW sceptical argument is sound, then truth in meaning discourse falls on the non-realist side of every crux. If Wright is right, then nothing motivates a move beyond minimal truth in meaning discourse unless KW's sceptical argument is denied. In this case, while KW may admit that there are *merely minimal* meaning facts, his argument would rule out the possibility of *more than minimal* meaning facts. Let us turn to the cruces, to confirm this hypothesis.¹⁹²

2.7.2 Meaning Discourse and Judgement Dependence

This crux offers three options for truth in meaning: *judgement-independence*, *judgement-dependence*, and *neither*. Our talk of meaning involves many judgements; judgements which share the form of “Hemi means addition by ‘+’”. Say that some such judgements—those made in *cognitively ideal conditions*—are *epistemically best*. And say, of these judgements, that they *covary with true meaning ascriptions*. A meaning ascription is true—and the fact it states obtains—when and only when it agrees with best opinion. We have a choice, when faced with this biconditional, between granting a certain *explanatory priority* to either the judgements or the facts. It may be that the perfect covariation between these judgements and the facts arises because those judgements *track* the facts; that the best judgements are those that are of a sufficient epistemic quality to capture the truth. This is the realist's option. The second option is that best opinion covaries with truth because those opinions *determine* which sentences are true. The true sentences in a discourse are those that agree with the best opinions. This is the anti-realist's option. Wright formalises this distinction as the question of whether a *provisional equation* satisfying four conditions—*a priority*, *substantiality*, *independence*, and *extremal*—can be established for the relevant discourse. In the case of meaning, such an equation would take this form:

¹⁹¹ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 212.

¹⁹² As in §1.4, my discussion in the next two sections will concern just two of Wright's cruces: those for which there is a legitimate realist option for meaning. For the application of *Potential Verification Transcendence* and *Width of Cosmological Role* to meaning, and justification for setting them aside in this discussion, see Appendices A and B.

PE(Meaning): For any S , M , and E : if the C-conditions obtain then (a suitable subject judges that S means M by $E \Leftrightarrow S$ means M by E).

(Where the “C-conditions” are the conditions of cognitive idealisation that suffice for a judgement to be best.) And, as noted, for this crux there is a *third* option. Truth in meaning discourse may be *neither judgement-dependent nor independent*. Let’s consider these three options in turn.

On Wright’s account, meaning is judgement-independent if, firstly, no satisfactory provisional equation can be found, and secondly, an account of the epistemology of meaning is given that can explain the best judgements of meaning as *tracking* independently-constituted truth. KW’s sceptical argument, if sound, seems to quickly rule out satisfaction of the latter of these conditions. Judgement-independence implies that there are specifiable C-conditions in which judgements are perfectly accurate. But the interlocutor of the sceptic’s attack in Chapter 2 of *WRPL* is granted idealised epistemic access to all relevant facts and—we have assumed—finds none that can constitute meaning. Since that access surely includes satisfaction of the C-conditions, there can be no tracking of independent meaning facts if the sceptic is right. We have seen that KW would likely concede that there are minimal meaning facts, but it is clear that he would *not* concede the additional tracking epistemology necessary for judgement-independence.

Secondly, consider whether there may be judgement-*dependent* truth in meaning discourse: whether the relation between meaning facts and judgements about those facts is that the best of those judgements determine the facts. This would be the case, on Wright’s account, if a provisional equation can be produced for meaning that satisfies the four conditions. As for judgement-independence, this position relies on an account of what makes for a better or worse judgement about meaning—it relies, that is, on there being a certain story about *how* our judgements might capture the facts. But unlike judgement-independence, the epistemological account necessary for judgement-dependence does not seem to be directly ruled out by the sceptical argument. The relevant parts of the sceptic’s attack concern the possibility of *correct interpretation*—the possibility, in a sense,

of accurate *mediated* contact with meaning facts across some *distance*. Judgement-independence relies on such contact, and is thus ruled out. But under the judgement-dependence account, the best judgements of meaning are *not* those that best traverse the gap to the facts with which they covary. There is no gap at all—the facts simply *are* whatever is claimed by those judgements.

Judgement-dependence about meaning may, then, be consistent with the KW sceptical attack. And indeed, Wright's own account of the KW sceptical considerations characterises meaning and related notions as judgement-dependent.¹⁹³ But, for two reasons, I will not spend much time on this idea. Firstly,

¹⁹³ Since we are at present concerned with the application of Wright's framework to meaning, it is important to acknowledge the position that Wright himself takes to be the upshot of this application. Wright argues in the following articles that KW's argument can be construed as motivating a judgement-dependent account of meaning: Wright, "Kripke's Account of the Argument against Private Language"; Wright, "On Making Up One's Mind: Wittgenstein on Intention"; Crispin Wright, "Excerpts from a Critical Study of Colin McGinn's Wittgenstein on Meaning," in *Rails to Infinity: Essays on Themes from Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 143–69; Crispin Wright, "Wittgenstein's Rule-Following Considerations and the Central Project of Theoretical Linguistics," in *Rails to Infinity: Essays on Themes from Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 170–213.

First, recall KW's argument. Wright argues (with McGinn: Colin McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning: An Interpretation and Evaluation*, Aristotelian Society Series ; v. 1 (Oxford ; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1984)) that this argument relies on an assumed *reductionism*, such that no candidate meaning fact will satisfactorily meet the sceptic's requirements unless that fact can be characterised independently of meaning itself. I noted in §2.2 that KW rejects a *non-reductionist* response to the sceptic as "desperate" and "mysterious". Wright and McGinn claim that KW's rejection is too hasty. A non-reductive account, on which we may access what we mean *without inferring* that meaning from non-semantic facts, is not *desperate*: the ordinary notion of *intention* has precisely these characteristics, and meaning may share them. We need simply suppose that Hemi can access what he means by '+' without *interpreting* anything, with just the authority that they have in accessing their intention to eat cereal for breakfast.

But Wright maintains this account of meaning facts remains *mysterious*, and that a serious puzzle persists. The apparent epistemic authority seems at odds with the requirement that what one *presently* means by an expression renders correct or incorrect *any number* of unconsidered possible uses of that sign (meaning has a "disposition-like theoreticity"). We seem to be very sure how we intend to use an expression—how is this possible when that intention must answer to an infinity of cases? It is here that *judgement-dependence* enters the fray. Wright argues that this puzzle may be solved for intention—and, if the analogy works, for meaning—by supposing that certain judgements about what one means are *extension-determining*, in the sense characterised in the Judgement-Dependence crux. Wright proposes C-conditions for a provisional equation for intention that seem to meet the requirements. The conflict between disposition-like theoreticity and epistemic authority dissolves: what one intends to do in some distant scenario may be easily grasped, because that intention is *determined* by what one would judge about it in the C-conditions.

Such an account, for meaning, would offer a drastically different picture of meaning discourse than that towards which we are working. There may be no *mind-independent* standard under which ascriptions of meaning are regulated. But there is a serious standard, nonetheless. It is correct to ascribe meaning only in accordance with the content of the best opinions about meaning. But there are compelling reasons to doubt that a judgement-dependent account of meaning will work. Recall, from the introduction of Judgement-Dependence in §1.4.2, the *Independence* condition

because my goal at present is to identify the characterisations of meaning discourse to which KW's argument may lead, and KW's argument alone offers little motivation for judgement-dependence. And secondly, because—as I noted in fn. 193—there are compelling independent reasons to doubt that an account of meaning as judgment-dependence can be sustained.

Truth in meaning discourse, then, is neither judgement-independent nor dependent, and we are led by elimination to the third option. Such a position seems well motivated. If we lack a sufficiently robust account of the epistemology of meaning, then we cannot explain any covariation between judgements about meaning and meaning facts. KW's argument militates against the possibility of such an account—or, at the very least, offers nothing that *motivates* one. KW's sceptic, after all, grants their interlocutor *idealised epistemic access* to any relevant facts. Even given such access, the interlocutor (we have assumed) finds nothing that justifies one meaning ascription over another. KW may admit that there are the kinds of meaning facts that emerge from merely minimal truth. But there is nothing in the platitudes which ensures that the relation between judgements and facts can be explained. I conclude, then, that if KW is right then truth in meaning discourse is *merely minimal* with respect to Judgement-Dependence. Truth in meaning discourse is not judgement-independent as the *realist* would claim, and it is not judgement-dependent as the *anti-realist* would claim.

necessary for judgement-dependence. For meaning to be judgement-dependent, judgements about meaning must be conceptually prior to meaning facts. Boghossian (Boghossian, "The Rule-Following Considerations," 547) points out that this cannot be the case. For there to *be* judgements about what one means there must be facts about the *content* of those judgements: there must be a fact about what that judgement means. Judgement-dependence does not seem to be an option for meaning.

This matter is certainly worthy of further discussion, and there may be interesting intersections of Wright's account of KW with considerations raised elsewhere in this thesis. But for now I will set this possibility aside, and characterise truth in meaning as neither judgement-independent nor dependent. For clear discussion of Wright's judgement-dependent account on which I have relied here, see: Miller, *Philosophy of Language*, 226–34. For a more flat-footed objection regarding the independence condition, see: Alexander Miller, "An Objection to Wright's Treatment of Intention," *Analysis* 49, no. 4 (1989): 169–173, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3328551>. For a more sophisticated line of objection, see Mark Johnston's discussion here: John Haldane and Crispin Wright, *Reality, Representation, and Projection*, Mind Association Occasional Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 121–30.

2.7.3 Meaning Discourse and Cognitive Command

When a discourse exerts cognitive command it is a priori that any disagreement about which of the sentences in that discourse are true must be due to some *cognitive shortcoming* on the part of one or more of the disagreeing parties—unless it is excusable as due to vagueness in either the facts or formation of the beliefs. For a sentence comprising such a discourse to achieve truth is for that sentence to *robustly represent* some independently existing state of affairs. When a discourse is representational in this way, Wright suggests, we cannot accept that two incompatible judgements have both been faultlessly produced. It is the exertion of cognitive command for which the realist argues in this debate; the anti-realist argues that the relevant discourse does not exert cognitive command.

Let's see how this would work in the case of meaning. Say that two subjects disagree over whether the sentence "Hemi means addition by '+'" is true. We can first set aside the explanation of this disagreement as due to vagueness. Whether Hemi accords with what they mean when they answer "125" and not "5" to the question " $57 + 68 = ?$ " does not seem to be a vague matter. There are thus at least *some* meaning ascriptions for which the question of cognitive shortcoming will arise. Is it a priori, then, that when Hemi believes that they mean *addition* by '+', and Aroha believes that Hemi *does not* mean addition, that one of them must be guilty of some cognitive fault?

It is quickly seen that if KW's sceptical argument is sound then there need be no such fault. And indeed, this point has much in common with the conclusion of KW's illustrative dialogue. Hemi is granted total access to any available fact that could rule out the sceptic's suggestion that they mean *quaddition* by '+'. No such facts are found, and the ascription that they mean *quaddition* is on just the same footing as the ascription that they mean *addition*. Put conversely: *if* it was a priori that either Hemi or the sceptic made an error in arriving at their judgement about what Hemi means by '+', then surely pointing out that error would constitute a response to the sceptic. As we have accepted that there is no such response, we have denied that it is a priori that there is such an error.

This debate, then, is one about which KW's sceptical argument has much to say. If the sceptical argument is sound, truth in meaning discourse cannot involve the robust representationality for which the exertion of Cognitive Command is necessary and sufficient. There is no relation between true meaning ascriptions and meaning facts strong enough to ensure that there can only be conflicting ascriptions if one of those ascriptions was made in error. There may be a norm of truth in meaning, but it is not so strict that two opinions cannot faultlessly disagree. This much follows from the acceptance of KW's sceptical argument, and truth in meaning discourse falls again on the non-realist side.¹⁹⁴

2.7.4 *Mere Minimalism about Meaning*

The application of Wright's framework to meaning is as follows. If meaning discourse is assertoric, and is thus apt for minimal truth, there are three available moves that take us towards meaning realism. Firstly, we may produce a provisional equation meeting the four conditions on judgement-dependence, and contend that certain judgements about meaning *determine* the meaning facts. This is a step away from mere minimalism, but it will not suffice for realism—I have characterised such a position as *anti-realist*. Regardless, as I noted in §2.7.2, it is doubtful that a provisional equation meeting the conditions on judgement-dependence can be found for meaning. The second option is to argue that the best meaning judgements may *track* meaning facts that are independent of those judgements. And thirdly, the realist may argue that meaning discourse exerts cognitive command: that the correspondence between true meaning ascriptions and meaning facts is such that there cannot be faultless disagreement about meaning.¹⁹⁵ True meaning ascriptions *represent* the facts, and there is no way for there to be a divergence in the output of two properly functioning representational mechanisms unless there is divergence in the input. If these are the three

¹⁹⁴ KW often claims that, on his account, meaning ascriptions do not *correspond* to meaning facts. See, for example: Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 79. Once the move has been made that KW's claim is limited to the *robust* correspondence that implies realism—which seems plausible, given that the discipline KW invokes *suffices* for a minimal correspondence on Wright's account—that claim seems to amount precisely to the denial that meaning discourse exerts cognitive command.

¹⁹⁵ Or, more precisely: that it is a priori that any disagreement about what someone means by an expression is either attributable to cognitive shortcoming or excusable as due to vagueness.

battlegrounds on which debate about the metaphysical status of meaning is performed, then KW's sceptical argument may be construed as the argument that meaning facts are neither judgement-independent nor judgement-dependent, and that there may be faultless disagreement about what someone means by an expression.

What we have found, then, is that it follows from KW's sceptical argument that there can be no truth in meaning discourse that has any of the mind-independence represented in the cruces. There can be no truth in meaning discourse that is *judgement-dependent or independent* or that *exerts cognitive command*. And in appendices I argue that truth in meaning discourse also fails to be *potentially verification transcendent* and to correspond to facts with *wide cosmological role*.¹⁹⁶ We have confirmed the earlier hypothesis that to accept KW's sceptical argument is to deny that there are any *more than minimal* meaning facts. It is the existence of such facts that would give ground to the realist, and it is thus clear that KW's argument opposes meaning realism when realism debates are conducted within Wright's metaphysical framework.

But there may yet, of course, be *minimal* meaning facts, and *minimally true* meaning ascriptions; the features of truth thus far found to be ruled out by KW's argument are not *essential*. And, as noted in §2.7.1, by KW's own account it seems as though meaning discourse has the resources for what *is* essential: meaning ascriptions appear to have the right syntax, and the *assertibility conditions* that KW proposes are sufficient for those ascriptions to exhibit the necessary discipline. The upshot is that, if we accept both the sceptical argument and something like KW's sceptical solution, the following position emerges:

Mere Minimalism about Meaning (MMM): Sentences that ascribe meaning are truth-apt. Some of them are true, and there are meaning facts to which those sentences correspond. But this truth, and these facts, are merely minimal: they fail to be mind-independent with respect to any of the four realism-relevant cruces.

¹⁹⁶ See appendix A for the former and appendix B for the latter.

It will be important to contextualise this position within the two overlapping dichotomies described in §2.4: *non-eliminativism* and *eliminativism*, and *KW* and *KW's sceptic*. I have said that MMM can be construed as part of *KW's* sceptical solution—as playing an equivalent role to what I earlier defined as *non-eliminative non-factualism*, or *non-eliminative error-theory*. Like those other positions, MMM characterises meaning ascriptions as correct or incorrect with respect to some standard; and indeed, for MMM this standard is *truth*. But the *strength* of the defence against eliminativism offered by this position is not entirely clear. In particular, there may be concerns about the degree to which it is *worthwhile* to continue engaging in talk about meaning. After all, that talk is regulated by a standard that does not exert cognitive command. Why ascribe meaning if two parties may disagree about that ascription without fault?¹⁹⁷

Let us set such considerations aside. It is clear, regardless, that MMM is an appropriate characterisation of *KW's* position, and a compelling defence against the eliminativist threat may be given once that characterisation has been supplemented with *KW's* account of the *role* and *utility* of meaning talk. But what is this eliminativist threat? We need a characterisation, analogous to eliminative non-factualism or an eliminative error-theory, of the account that *KW's* sceptic would make of meaning discourse from within Wright's framework. The task is to identify where in Wright's landscape we are led if we accept the sceptical argument but oppose a consolatory account of meaning discourse that retains its propriety. In §2.7.1, I noted that it is such a consolatory account which motivates the claim that meaning discourse qualifies as sufficiently disciplined to sustain

¹⁹⁷ One thought along these lines can be found here: Crispin Wright, "What Could Anti-Realism about Ordinary Psychology Possibly Be?," in *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 438. Wright claims that "to regard a statement as failing to exert cognitive command is to be committed to regarding it as one for which one has no cogent a priori grounds.". This result derives from the consideration that, if there *were* such grounds, then failing to be convinced by them would constitute a cognitive shortcoming; there can be no faultless disagreement for a matter for which there are a priori grounds. This suggests that if a discourse does not exert cognitive command then there is a significant constraint on the nature of *reasoning* in that discourse; what point could there be to reasoning a priori if *any* of the reasons produced can be rejected without fault?

minimal truth. If KW's sceptic offers no consolatory account, *and denies this claim to discipline*, it leads to the following position:

Sub-Minimalism about Meaning: Meaning discourse is not assertoric. Meaning ascriptions are not apt for even minimal truth, and there are no meaning facts, minimal or otherwise.

It is quite clear that this position would amount to eliminativism, as I have characterised it. If meaning discourse does not exhibit discipline, and there are no conditions of correct utterance governing meaning ascription, then it is hard to imagine *what function* could be fulfilled by that discourse. This position faces the same concerns as the eliminativist accounts considered earlier. It supposes that there is *no* difference in correctness between "Hemi means addition by '+'" and "Hemi means quaddition by '+'", and that we achieve nothing of value by talking of meaning. This is an undesirable result. In the face of philosophical difficulties accounting for the nature of a pervasive human practice, I think it generally preferable not to settle for an account of that practice as without value.

The question, then, is whether MMM can succeed where non-eliminative error-theory and non-eliminative non-factualism have failed. Can we consistently accept the KW sceptical argument while claiming that meaning discourse is governed by a minimal truth norm that staves off the eliminativist? I will argue that the answer to this question is no, and that we have no choice but to concede sub-minimalism about meaning. There are at least two respects in which mere minimalism appears to rely on resources that are ruled out by the KW sceptical argument. For any other subject, a sceptical argument of the kind given by KW may allow minimal truth. But as we have seen elsewhere, the consequences of such an argument for meaning run deeper.

Let's reiterate what is necessary, in Wright's framework, for minimal truth-aptitude. There are two necessary and sufficient conditions for a sentence to qualify as apt for minimal truth:

Syntax: the sentence is of the appropriate form to be situated within negations, conditionals, conjunctions, disjunctions, and propositional attitudes.

Discipline: the sentence is subject to recognised standards of warrant.

If a sentence meets these conditions, then there is nothing to prevent it from appearing as “P” in instances of the Disquotational Schema (DS):

The Disquotational Schema: “P” is true iff P

The sentence “P” is a candidate for truth. Exhibiting a suitable syntax and discipline to sustain an instance of the DS is necessary and (largely) sufficient for a sentence to be truth-apt.¹⁹⁸

Since MMM characterises meaning ascriptions as apt for minimal truth, those sentences must satisfy the conditions of syntax and discipline and sustain instances of the DS. I will argue that the condition of discipline cannot be met.¹⁹⁹ I will present two problems that seem to rule out the necessary discipline—problems that are closely related but sufficiently distinct to warrant separate treatment. The first is analogous to that faced by non-eliminative error-theory and non-factualism: KW’s sceptical argument militates against the possibility of norms of correctness in linguistic activity. The second is broadly analogous to Boghossian’s problem for meaning error-theories: for a sentence to sustain an instance of the DS it must have *content*, and we cannot consistently suppose that meaning ascriptions are contentful while accepting KW’s sceptical argument.

¹⁹⁸ Recalling that any property Φ will qualify as truth if it (1) can appear in the schema “P” is Φ iff P, and (2) satisfies the three additional platitudes that do not follow from the prior claim.

¹⁹⁹ Similar concerns to those that I will raise may apply to the syntactical requirement. Roughly, the idea here would be, firstly, that for it to be the case that a sentence has declarative form there must be facts about in which contexts it is *grammatically correct* to embed that sentence. And secondly, that KW’s sceptical argument rules out the possibility of such facts: no mind can grasp an indefinitely large set of correctness-evaluations for the embedding of a sentence into various contexts. I will set this matter aside and focus on discipline.

The difficulty for MMM posed by the generalisation of KW's sceptical strategy to *any* norm-governed utterance may have been obvious since the beginning of §2.7. MMM contends that there is a norm of truth governing meaning discourse. Our talk of meaning is comprised of assertions that are correct in certain conditions, and this is sufficient—Wright claims—for there to be truth governing that talk. Wright's framework, in a sense, *builds* truth out of the standards at work in a body of talk. But, as we have seen, to accept the KW sceptical strategy in the case of meaning is to accept an analogous attack against *correctness with respect to a standard*. Minimal truth need not involve relation to any mind-independent facts; it is no problem for MMM that there are no such meaning facts to *state*. But the *recognised standards of warrant* out of which MMM means to build truth in meaning discourse surely face the broader sceptical attack against norm-governed utterance. For "Hemi means addition by '+'" to be regulated by a disciplinary norm at all, it must be correct for Aroha to utter that sentence in certain conditions. And if it is correct for Aroha to utter that sentence in those conditions, there must be some fact about Aroha or her community that rules out any *quus*-like interpretation of that correctness; an interpretation, for example, that simply diverges from what we might expect from the present day onwards. It is the very possibility of such facts that we have denied by accepting the KW sceptical strategy. If the sceptic is right that there are no facts such that someone accords or fails to accord with what they mean when they use an expression, then there are no facts such that someone accords or fails to accord with a norm when they utter a sentence.

It certainly *seems* as though there are patterns of disciplined utterance in meaning discourse; it is quite intuitive that "Hemi means *addition* by '+'" is a better ascription than "Hemi means *quaddition* by '+'". KW's assertibility conditions—on which correctness is determined by what the speaker intends to express with regards to Hemi's use of '+', and whether that use agrees with that of the relevant linguistic community—are meant to characterise this discipline. But on KW's sceptical argument the appearance of this discipline seems no more than illusion: there are no rules of utterance to follow at all. An irrealist about an unrelated subject may be able to rely on such warranted assertion. But it seems that the KW

meaning irrealist cannot. And since the presence of a norm of warranted assertibility is necessary for a discourse to qualify as apt for minimal truth, the irrealist must likewise deny this aptitude.²⁰⁰

The second problem I will raise is closely related. Wright says, of any sentence that appears in the DS, that it will be *determinate in content*.²⁰¹ The point is made particularly clearly in the following passage:

The Disquotational Schema is merely another way of articulating the [platitude that the truth of a statement depends on whether what it says is so, is so], made possible by the unstated schematic assumption that ‘P’ says that P.²⁰²

Take some sentence *S*. What does it take to establish an instance of the DS for *S*, and to thus ensure that *S* is minimally truth-apt? Among other things, there must be some content *C* such that *S* is true iff *C*. The DS represents the property of truth in virtue of which a sentence is true if and only if *what it says is the case is the case*. If *S* is to qualify as truth-apt, *C* cannot be just *anything*. There must be a specific relation between *S* and *C*—a relation that I will represent as the *Content Schema* (CS):

The Content Schema: *S* says that *C*

²⁰⁰ Wright’s commitment to there being standards of correctness governing any sentence which sustains the DS is clearly expressed in the following passage, which I quoted when introducing minimalism in §1.3 (Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 17.):

Consider the practice of the sincere and literal use of the sentences in the range of the [truth predicate]. In order for these sentences to be determinate in content at all, there has to be a distinction, respected for the most part by participants in the practice, between proper and improper use of them. ... [It is plausible that,] unless participants in the practice for the most part try to respect the norms of warranted assertion which govern it, it is not clear in what the fact could consist that its ingredient sentences have the content which they do.

²⁰¹ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 17.

²⁰² Wright, “What Could Anti-Realism about Ordinary Psychology Possibly Be?,” 420. The point appears in many other places, for example: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 34.

Only with the assumption that the sentence *says* what would appear on the right-hand-side of an instance of the DS can we conclude that that sentence can appear in such an instance at all. The claim, then, is this:

If (*S* is true iff *C*) then *S* says that *C*

The point, in effect, is that one way of characterising the discipline condition is that there must be an instance of the CS for the sentence in question.²⁰³ Since MMM characterises meaning ascriptions as truth-apt, it follows from MMM that those ascriptions sustain instances of the CS. If “Hemi means *sunfish* by ‘sunfish’” is apt for minimal truth, then there is something that it says. Ordinarily, we would suppose that that content is *that Hemi means sunfish by ‘sunfish’*.²⁰⁴

For mere minimalism about other discourses, motivated independently of KW’s argument, such an implication might be happily accepted. But facts about what sentences say are within the scope of the sceptical argument. The sceptic may suggest that the content of “Hemi means *sunfish* by ‘sunfish’” is *that Hemi means quunfish by ‘sunfish’*, and we have conceded that we are unable to identify facts to refute this suggestion. That MMM implies that there *are* facts about what sentences say is thus an immediate concern.

Let’s get clear about the nature of this problem, and attempt to make a response on behalf of MMM.²⁰⁵ For MMM to work there must be instances of the CS

²⁰³ As I noted in §1.3, the discipline condition is in part meant to ensure that the sentence has sufficiently determinate content to sustain the DS.

²⁰⁴ Horwich argues against the claim that truth problematically relies on meaning in a footnote here: Horwich, “Is Truth a Normative Concept?,” 1134. This likely deserves some discussion, but I cannot provide it here; I will suggest, at least, that the conception of the DS that Horwich suggests is not the same as Wright’s.

²⁰⁵ I will briefly note a second response that might be available for MMM. Wright’s account of truth is *minimal*, and is meant to rely on the barest materials. We needn’t, for example, suppose that there is a *robustly representational* relation between a sentence and the fact it picks out. Such representationality is a possible but *non-essential* feature of truth, with which the Cognitive Command crux is concerned. To take up the minimalist mantle, then, can we not simply arrive at the content of the sentence “Hemi means *sunfish* by ‘sunfish’” by *removing the quotes*? That truth predication serves to disquote is, of course, a feature lionized by the deflationist, and the mere minimalist may inherit this characterisation (without also inheriting the denial that truth is a property). There appears to be much in common between “Hemi means *sunfish* by ‘sunfish’” and *Hemi means sunfish by ‘sunfish’*. The *physical form* of these two objects is surely similar—either in

for meaning ascriptions; meaning ascriptions must say that something is the case. This result would constitute an immediate *reductio* if MMM also implied that there are *no* meaning facts. But this is not how the position was characterised. We modified the meaning irrealist claim to Meaning Irrealism*: there are no *non-minimal* meaning facts. In reply to the present objection, then, the mere minimalist about meaning may claim that there *are* instances of the CS for meaning ascriptions, but that the facts picked out by those instances are *merely minimal*. And indeed, an analogous reply seems available for the first problem I presented—that MMM relies on rule-following in supposing that meaning discourse is norm-governed. It could be suggested that there may yet be *merely minimal* facts about correctness with respect to a norm, and that these facts would be enough to sustain MMM.

I have identified two necessary conditions on a sentence being minimally truth-apt—two characterisations of Wright's *discipline* condition. It is clear that the satisfaction of these conditions is *threatened* by the KW sceptical considerations. But if the threat is against the *mind-independent reality* of meaning and rule-following, and the conditions may be satisfied on merely *mind-dependent* terms, then MMM may yet be tenable. And indeed, this might be thought to be one advantage of this approach over those made in previous sections. Wright's framework offers a spectrum of mind-dependence, and there may be a comfortable position for meaning that is consistent with the conclusion of KW's sceptical argument *and* characterises meaning as disciplined.

The suggestion is that the advocate of MMM could respond to the objections raised above by claiming that it may be *merely minimal* that truth in meaning is

sharing many of the same letters, or, in their verbal utterance, sharing many of the same sounds. Could this physical similarity be sufficient to determine what is to appear on the right-hand side of an instance of the DS?

I think it clear that such a manoeuvre will be unsuccessful. There must be some semantic relation between *S* and *C*, and no similarity in physical form will suffice: even if the two objects differ only in their location on the page, or in time of utterance, there must still be some fact such that *S* says that *C*—a fact under siege from KW's sceptical argument. It will be left open for the sceptic to insist that correctly removing the quotes from "Hemi means sunfish by 'sunfish'" results in Hemi means quunfish by 'sunfish'. Wright considers a similar point in the footnote here: Wright, "What Could Anti-Realism about Ordinary Psychology Possibly Be?," 420.

merely minimal, and that we had only ruled out the possibility of it being *more than minimal* that truth in meaning is merely minimal. Given that we have ruled out that possibility, *MMM implies that MMM is at best minimally true*. This is not a particularly surprising result. It is intuitive that the degree of minimalism exhibited by a sentence is due—at least in part—to what it means. If what a sentence means is itself a merely minimal matter, then it quite naturally follows that the degree of minimalism enjoyed by a sentence is merely minimal matter.²⁰⁶

But I do not think that this response will work. Take the following two sentences:

1. “Hemi means *sunfish* by ‘sunfish’” says that Hemi means *sunfish* by ‘sunfish’.
2. “Hemi means *sunfish* by ‘sunfish’” is correct iff *F*.²⁰⁷

The claim made is that meaning ascriptions may yet sustain instances of the DS because it may be *minimally* true that those ascriptions have content, and *minimally* true that those sentences have certain disciplinary conditions. But now a certain *recursion* emerges. If the sentence in 1, for example, is minimally true, then it sustains an instance of the DS, and thus an instance of the CS. If merely minimal resources are to be up to the job, then, this must be the case:

3. ““Hemi means *sunfish* by ‘sunfish’” says that Hemi means *sunfish* by ‘sunfish’” says that “Hemi means *sunfish* by ‘sunfish’” says that Hemi means *sunfish* by ‘sunfish’”.

²⁰⁶ Wright makes this point here: *Ibid.*, 435. There is an interesting intersection between Wright’s discussion in section IX of this paper and my present discussion. While I will not, unfortunately, be able to investigate the matter comprehensively, I will suggest some similarities and differences. Wright argues that mere minimalism about meaning implies mere minimalism about whether or not some subject is merely minimal, and thus minimalism about itself. He suggests that while the position is not inconsistent, it is rendered *rationaly untenable* (a move I mentioned in fn. 197). There are two noteworthy differences between this discussion and mine. First, that Wright is not, here, *motivated by Kripke’s Wittgenstein*; he arrives at MMM instead from considerations about anti-realism about ordinary psychology. And secondly (and likely relatedly), Wright’s discussion concerns whether truth in meaning is *minimal* or *robust*, whereas I am concerned with whether there can be *even minimal* truth. Wright does not, in this article, consider whether the dependence of the DS on matters of discipline threatens the consistency of MMM with the soundness of KW’s sceptical argument. Much more could be said relating these two discussions, but for now I can simply acknowledge the broad contact between them and move on.

²⁰⁷ Where *F* is some state of affairs that obtains when the sentence satisfies some disciplinary norm.

A process which will, of course, continue indefinitely—as it will, *mutatis mutandis*, for sentence 2. It is merely minimal all the way down: sentences say what they say only in virtue of there being a sentence that says that those sentences say what they say.

There are two problems with this picture. The first is that, on this account, MMM is simply spinning its wheels.²⁰⁸ It is not, of course, a *contradiction* to rely on the materials that sustain minimal truth in claiming that certain sentences have the materials to sustain minimal truth. But it seems to be a quite useless suggestion. To claim, when faced with the objection that meaning ascriptions lack the necessary discipline for minimal truth-aptitude, that *some* meaning ascriptions (like sentence 1) have the necessary discipline, is to beg the question.

The second problem is this. On Wright's minimalism, truth-aptitude emerges from our *disciplined practice* of uttering certain sentences. It is an interesting question whether this practice must be *actual* practice. I think it must be at least *close* to actual. As Jackson, Oppy, and Smith characterise the necessary discipline, it is sufficient *usage* that suffices for a sentence to have determinate content:

No amount of purely syntactical information in the sense at issue is in itself sufficient to determine that there is *a rich enough pattern of usage to determine truth conditions*.²⁰⁹

The worry for the present MMM response is that it relies on there being patterns of usage for ridiculous sentences. If sentence 3 is to be merely minimally true—and it certainly cannot be more robustly true than that—then another sentence, of

²⁰⁸ This point is similar to a worry Miller raises for a *quasi-realist* approach to non-realism about meaning (a position which is largely similar to what I have called *non-eliminative non-factualism*): “The quasi-realist about meaning is not attempting to construct one notion of correctness out of another, but rather attempting to construct a notion of correctness out of materials which are to be described with no invocation of any notion of correctness whatsoever . . . [they] appear to be attempting to conjure something out of nothing.” Miller, “What Is the Sceptical Solution?” My claim is that the current MMM response is an attempt to build something (minimal truth) from itself—if this is impossible, then it is akin to attempting to build something from nothing.

²⁰⁹ Jackson, Oppy, and Smith, “Minimalism and Truth Aptness.” (emphasis mine.)

double the length, must receive the same treatment. The process will repeat, and it will surely at some point cease to be plausible that there are—or even *could be*—rich patterns of use.²¹⁰ It is hard to see how there could be disciplined use of a sentence which is too long for a human to utter in their lifetime. The entire venture has no foundation: the absence of instances of the CS will ripple upwards, ultimately resulting in the absence of an even *minimal* fact that Hemi means addition by ‘+’.

If these considerations are correct, then MMM—at least as the upshot of the KW sceptical argument—is not an option.²¹¹ There *cannot* be truth in meaning discourse once we have accepted the sceptical argument, even if truth is construed as Wright’s minimalist suggests.²¹² This account of truth places demands on sentences that cannot be met if KW’s sceptical argument is sound: no sentences are equipped for correctness, or for sustaining the CS. The result, then, is that meaning ascriptions are not apt for minimal truth. And then, since there are no sentences that cast ontic shadows, there are no minimal meaning facts. We end up with the following, stronger, version of meaning irrationalism:

²¹⁰ The point persists even if the relevant usage is construed as somehow dispositional: there will, I think, be some point at which the sentence is simply too long for there to be a disposition to use it in any way.

²¹¹ Consider how these considerations would play out if meaning was *not* supposed to be merely minimal. Since any truth property incorporates the DS, and any instance of the DS relies on an instance of the CS, a similar recursive dependence may still arise *even for the meaning realist*. If there is a true statement of every fact, then the truth of some meaning ascription relies on the truth of another (via the DS and CS), which thus relies on the truth of another, and so on. The difference is that, on the MMM account, there is *no more* to the meaning facts that are required for instances of the CS than there being a minimally true sentence that states them. If meaning facts are *merely* products across the DS of true meaning ascriptions, and for those ascriptions to be true there must be a meaning fact, we simply flip back and forth across the DS without finding any ground. If, as the meaning realist claims, meaning facts are not mere ontic shadows, and they have some substance independent of any instance of the DS, then we do find ground, and any regress is unlikely to be vicious. (One interesting consideration is whether the realist would face the worry that the necessary truths would surpass the limits of possible disciplined usage. But if meaning is real then there are likely to be tools available to deal with such sentences—for example, considerations of *compositionality*.)

²¹² I think it clear that these considerations would also rule out the possibility of *deflationary truth* given KW meaning irrationalism. The deflationist will not claim that there is a norm of truth in meaning discourse, but they must still claim that meaning ascriptions can be correct or incorrect, and likely that what is on the LHS of the DS (the truth ascription) *means the same thing* as what is on the RHS; which would rely on something like the CS. Deflationism and minimalism were both introduced as accounts of truth as *metaphysically neutral*, such that it is not exclusively available to the realist. What we have found, in a sense, is that these notions are not metaphysically neutral at all, when it is the metaphysics of meaning that is in question. If a sentence is apt for either such truth, the game has to a certain extent already been conceded.

Strong Meaning Irrealism: There are no facts, *minimal or otherwise*, such that anyone means anything by an expression.

I earlier claimed that KW's sceptical argument motivates the denial that there are *more than minimal* meaning facts. From KW's discussion—in particular his account of *assertibility conditions*—we might expect that there could yet be *merely minimal* meaning facts. But the sceptical argument has even these facts within its scope. To accept KW's argument from within Wright's framework is to deny that there are minimal facts of *any* sort: to accept Strong Meaning Irrealism.

We end up what I earlier called *sub-minimalism about meaning*: meaning discourse is without the assertoricity necessary for minimal truth-aptitude. This amounts to eliminativism. There are no correctness conditions for meaning ascriptions—no meaning ascription is better or worse than any other, and there cannot, then, be a valuable function performed by uttering those sentences. The hope, in introducing Wright's framework, was that departing from the traditional error-theoretic and non-factualist models, and gaining some nuance with respect to the variety among truth properties, would produce a safe home for the KW meaning irrealist. But we are still without a defence against eliminativism. To accept KW's sceptical argument and adopt Wright's framework forces us into an unpalatable corner, in which no meaning ascription is better or worse than any other. We may as well simply stop talking about meaning altogether.

2.8 Conclusion

We set out to account for a body of talk for which we have denied that there are any facts for that talk to describe. For many subjects, such a task may not be particularly troublesome—we can imagine some pervasive human practice working out to have a markedly different nature than its appearance suggests. But the characterisation of a discourse—at least on traditional terms, and at least in part—is the characterisation of the *meaning* of the sentences in that discourse. When the subject of the sceptical threat is meaning itself, such characterisation becomes particularly difficult. To investigate this problem, I assumed KW meaning

irrealism: that KW validly arrives at the conclusion that there are no meaning facts.²¹³ I considered three categories of characterisation of meaning discourse—*error-theory*, *non-factualism*, and *mere minimalism*. These characterisations aim to be consistent with the denial of the reality of meaning facts. They also offer forms of *non-eliminativism*, with the hope of providing an account of meaning discourse that vindicates its continued practice. What we have found is that the latter move is difficult, and that there seems to be no such vindication available. I will briefly summarise the investigation which led to this result.

The quickest reading of “Hemi means *addition* by ‘+’”—at least for those unfamiliar with the metaphysics of meaning—is that it picks out some fact in the world: the fact *that Hemi means addition by ‘+’*. Having denied that there are such facts, an *error-theory* is the first stop, and I considered an error-theory about meaning in §2.5. If there are no meaning facts, then perhaps we seek to describe them but fail, and our atomic and positive meaning ascriptions are thus false. A distinction between non-eliminative and eliminative error-theory turns on whether there is some non-truth norm—a norm that sentences may differentially satisfy despite uniformly failing to satisfy the standard for truth. But, on consideration of the shared rule-like characteristics of meaning and accordance with a norm, a non-eliminative error-theory cannot be consistent with KW meaning irrealism. What’s more, since a sentence must be meaningful to be false, even an *eliminative* error-theory is not an option for the KW meaning irrealist.

Non-factualism offers a more severe option. On such an account, meaning ascriptions are not descriptions of states of affairs at all, and are neither true nor false. Non-factualism dodges the fundamental problem of the error-theorist: if they are not truth-conditional, meaning ascriptions needn’t have the meaning necessary to be truth-conditional. And I defended meaning non-factualism against Boghossian’s charge that the view implies a contradiction about the factuality of truth. But upon consideration of the distinction between non-eliminativism and

²¹³ This discussion is general and not specific to Wright’s framework, so I will use “Meaning Irrealism” to refer to the original formulation: there are no meaning facts. This formulation does not *explicitly* deny that there are minimal meaning facts, but as we found in §2.7.4, it may *imply* it.

eliminativism, an analogous problem arises to that for the error-theorist. For meaning ascriptions to have a valuable function there must be conditions of correctness governing their utterance—correctness that faces the same sceptical attack as meaning itself. But, unlike the error-theory, a position is available: *eliminative non-factualism*. While such a theory appears *consistent* with the soundness of KW's argument, eliminativism remains strongly unpalatable.

The plan, then, was to seek greener pastures. The metaphysical framework presented by Wright in *Truth and Objectivity* offers a more elaborate denial of realism, in which realism debates are characterised as debates about the degree of mind-independence associated with the standard of truth at work in an assertoric discourse. *Mere minimalism about meaning* characterises meaning discourse as governed by a truth norm that is maximally mind-dependent. Meaning ascriptions are true or false, but that truth involves no adherence to a mind-independent standard. But this position, too, was found to be unavailable if KW's sceptical argument is sound. Meaning discourse may *appear* to have the assertoricity necessary for the operation of a minimal truth norm. But for meaning ascriptions to have the necessary discipline they must sustain instances of what I called the Content Schema (CS)—*S* says that *C*—and they must be governed by norms of warranted utterance. Both of these things are within the scope of the sceptical attack. I considered whether this discipline can *itself* emerge from merely minimal materials, but the move seemed to be a failure. In the end, from within Wright's framework we are forced to adopt *sub-minimalism about meaning*: the view that there is no truth in meaning discourse, of even a merely platitudinous variety. Sub-minimalism is in the same boat as eliminative non-factualism: it seems not to be inconsistent, but it leads to an undesirable eliminativism on which there seems no point in ascribing meaning.

It will be worthwhile to generalise from the worries we have identified. The three models of non-realist discourse that I have considered do not, of course, exhaust the possibilities. But I think that the investigation is sufficiently broad that we identify two *general* difficulties that will threaten any attempt to characterise meaning discourse while denying that meaning is real.

The first is that no characterisation can depend on meaning ascriptions having the kind of content represented by satisfaction of the CS. The sceptical attack rules out the possibility of meaning ascriptions *saying* anything. The most prominent casualty of this result is, of course, *truth*. Meaning ascriptions cannot be true or false: given that it is a platitude that a sentence is true when and only when what it says is the case is the case (and false when what it says is the case is *not* the case), possessing a truth-value requires that a sentence *says that something is the case*. This result rules out a meaning error-theory, but I have argued that it also rules out mere minimalism. There seems to be no way that we can characterise meaning discourse as governed by truth—or any other norm that invokes the CS—while accepting KW’s sceptical argument.

The second general difficulty arises from the broader rule-following considerations. I sought to establish in §2.3 that accepting KW’s argument for meaning must go hand-in-hand with accepting an analogous argument for *accordance with a norm*. This imposes a serious constraint upon any attempt to characterise meaning talk. Any characterisation that posits correctness conditions for meaning ascriptions relies on the kind of rule-following facts that are within the scope of KW’s sceptical attack. Just as we have ruled out the possibility of a subject grasping an indefinitely large set of correctness conditions for accordance with what they mean—and thus the possibility of meaning—we have ruled out the possibility of a subject grasping an indefinitely large set of correctness conditions for accordance with any norm at all—and thus the possibility of norm-governed utterance.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ It is worthwhile to pause and consider whether what we have found for meaning irrealism as *motivated by KW* applies to *any* meaning irrealism. I think it clear that *any* meaning irrealism will face the first difficulty: for a sentence to sustain the CS there must surely be a fact about what it means. But in §2.3 I characterised the norm-following point as an *upstream* matter—something that doesn’t follow directly from the denial that there are meaning facts. This observation prompts consideration of a non-KW meaning irrealism that avoids *general* sceptical worries about the possibility of correctness conditions, and that may thus face only the first of the two general worries. Such a theory may, indeed, be consistent with a *non-eliminative non-factualism*, on which meaning ascriptions are correct or incorrect despite not being true or false. This may be a formal possibility. But I think it an unlikely one. It is hard to imagine what might motivate the denial that there can be the conditions of correct use that constitute meaning without *also* motivating the analogous denial for conditions of correct action in general.

If these two difficulties cannot be overcome, then KW meaning irrealism imposes serious constraints on the characterisation of meaning discourse. The most striking constraint, I think, can be put in terms of the distinction between non-eliminativism and eliminativism. I have construed the pursuit of a tenable characterisation of meaning discourse as the attempt to stave off eliminativism; to retain some function for meaning ascription despite the denial of realism. What my investigation seems to suggest is that we have no choice but to concede to the eliminativist. The three forms of non-eliminativism that I considered—supplementing either an error-theoretic, non-factualist, or mere minimalist account of the discourse—were found to be unsuccessful. There may be some unconsidered tenable non-eliminativism. But I think that we can hypothesise against such a prospect, in consideration of the second problem. It is doubtful that there *can* be a non-eliminative account of meaning discourse that doesn't rely on correctness. The non-eliminativist claims that there is value in talking of meaning. For this position to be at all available, there must be such value despite there being *no* evaluation of correctness or incorrectness across that talk. I will return to such thoughts in the next chapter. For now, the point is merely that the odds appear stacked, quite generally, in favour of eliminativism.²¹⁵

The upshot of the discussion of this chapter is that the KW meaning irrealist seems forced to adopt the following position:

Eliminative Ultra-Non-Factualism about Meaning: Meaning ascriptions are not apt for *even minimal* truth. Meaning ascriptions are not correct or incorrect with

²¹⁵ I will make one suggestion. In §2.7 I found no way to prevent eliminativism within Wright's framework while accepting KW's sceptical argument. Part of that discussion included the claim that KW's argument may not rule out *mind-dependent* meaning facts; those that do not imply realism, and that would not offer a successful response against the sceptic in Chapter 2 of *WRPL*. The model of such facts offered from within Wright's framework—that they may be generated across the DS when sentences in meaning discourse satisfy a certain standard—was found to be unsuccessful. For the most part, the failure was due to the dependence of the DS upon matters under attack from KW's sceptical argument itself. *But we may model mind-dependent meaning facts in a different way.* If we can identify meaning facts that (1) are not within the scope of KW's argument, and (2) that do not rely on sentences sustaining instances of the DS, then we may yet produce a non-eliminative account of meaning discourse that is consistent with KW meaning irrealism. For now, of course, I must make do with acknowledging and setting aside this consideration. I will briefly return to this point in §3.3.2.

respect to any norm of utterance, and there would be nothing of value lost in abandoning the practice of uttering them.

This is, in effect, a stronger version of the theory at which we arrived in §2.6. There, truth was limited to a *robust* conception, on which only sentences in realist discourse can be true. Having now considered whether meaning ascriptions are apt for the *minimal* truth proposed by Wright, we have found that KW meaning irrealism implies that no meaning ascriptions are truth-apt, even when the requirements for truth-aptitude are considerably lower.

Let us return to the initial motivation for considering meaning discourse. I am seeking to evaluate the tenability of KW meaning irrealism. I characterised the question of the existence of meaning facts as distinct from the question of what we are doing when we appear to talk of those facts. But these two matters are closely related. The thought behind the strategy of this chapter is that the tenability of meaning irrealism turns, at least in part, on the tenability of the characterisation provided of meaning discourse. And now, given that my generalised reasoning goes through, we have found *only* eliminativist characterisations to be available. The tenability of meaning irrealism, then, turns in part on the tenability of eliminativism; a position that KW describes as “insane and intolerable”.²¹⁶ The point can be put like this. If there are no *straight solutions* to KW’s argument—no hidden satisfactory meaning facts, or errors in the reasoning—then it is sound. What is at stake, if such a solution cannot be found? It is not merely that we must deny that in talking of meaning we successfully describe reality, as the error-theorist claims. It is not merely that we must deny that our talk of meaning even *attempts* to describe reality, as the non-factualist and the mere minimalist claim. What is at stake for meaning discourse is that we seem forced to deny that any meaning ascription is more correct than any other, and thus that our meaning talk is more than *unregulated noise*. And since, as seems plausible, if ascribing meaning has a function then it is correct to make such an ascription when doing so will fulfil that function, there is thus no such function at all.

²¹⁶ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 60.

No considerations have been raised, as far I can tell, that justify the *outright* denial that this is a formal possibility. But we are far from happy to concede to eliminativism. It is one thing to claim, for a body of talk ubiquitous among humans, that it does not describe reality. But it is quite another to claim that it is mere illusion that there is *any* difference in correctness among that talk, and that it serves *any* function. This is an unpalatable claim. It may, indeed, be so unpalatable that we would rather reject the philosophical reasoning which led to it than to accept it. Perhaps it is the case that there is no point in meaning talk. But tenability is more demanding than consistency. If we accept KW's sceptical argument then we appear *forced* to advocate the abandonment of meaning discourse. Insofar as a theory should be judged on the palatability of its consequences, we have found that KW meaning irrealism is untenable. If we wish to retain the legitimacy of talking of meaning, we had better find a straight solution to the Kripke-Wittgenstein problem.

GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Introduction

The argument against meaning realism made by Kripke's Wittgenstein (KW) in Chapter 2 of *Wittgenstein on Rule and Private Language (WRPL)*, if it is sound, has dire consequences.²¹⁷ That argument concludes with *meaning irrationalism*: there are no meaning facts.²¹⁸ Some of those consequences were presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis—in particular, we found no way to avoid an *eliminativist* account of discourse about meaning, on which there is no value talking about meaning at all. In this final chapter, I will take a step back from considerations about meaning discourse in particular, and discuss the consequences of KW's sceptical argument on discourse in general. First, I will show in §3.2 how opposition to meaning realism appears to *globalise* to non-realism elsewhere. In §3.3, I will summarise the findings of this thesis as a set of four available responses, of varying tenability. Finally, in §3.4, I will return to the first question: when the dust settles, how *tenable* is it to accept KW's argument and deny meaning realism?

3.2 Globalisation

In Chapter 3 of *WRPL*, KW characterises meaning ascriptions as lacking truth conditions but possessing assertibility conditions: there are no meaning *facts* to state, but we may be nonetheless *justified* to ascribe meaning in certain conditions. To support this account, Kripke characterises one divergence between the account of language found in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and that found in the later *Philosophical Investigations*:²¹⁹

Wittgenstein replaces the question, “What must be the case for this sentence to be true?” by two others: first, “Under what conditions may this form of words be appropriately asserted (or denied)?” second, given an answer to

²¹⁷ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*.

²¹⁸ I use “KW meaning irrationalism” to stress that it is KW's sceptical argument which motivates the irrationalist claim.

²¹⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Dover ed. (Mineola, N Y.: Dover Publications, 1999); Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

the first question, “What is the role, and the utility, in our lives of our practice of asserting (or denying) the form of words under these conditions?”²²⁰

The suggestion is that the characterisation of meaning discourse to which KW’s sceptical argument leads may be just part of a *broader* project, and that the considerations made for that discourse may be generalisable.

Since I am concerned with *consequences*, purely background matters may not be of central interest. But this is not a purely background matter. As Wright and Boghossian have pointed out, we can *derive* such generalisations from KW meaning irrealism itself.²²¹ *All* sentences are within the scope of the denial that linguistic expressions have conditions of correct use. The threat, then, is that the non-realist position at which we arrived for meaning discourse may indeed be *global*: that we must deny that uttering sentences of *any* kind serves a function.

Let’s get clear about how this globalisation works. For the most part, all we need to do is to reflect that *most of the considerations made in Chapter 2 did not rely on the sentences in question belonging to meaning discourse*. I focussed on those sentences because characterisation of meaning discourse may be thought to be partly constitutive of a non-realist account of meaning. But now we can see that there was little in that discussion that was specific to meaning ascriptions. Take the following four sentences as test cases:²²²

- A:** “Sunfish are the largest bony fish.”
- B:** “Sunfish are not the largest bony fish.”
- C:** “Beethoven’s *Eroica* is beautiful.”
- D:** “Foob is foog.”

²²⁰ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 73.

²²¹ See, for example: Boghossian, “The Rule-Following Considerations,” 524; Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 209; Wright, “Kripke’s Account of the Argument against Private Language,” 104. Wilson suggests that Boghossian and Wright get the globalisation “back to front”; that the implications for language in general are part of KW’s argument itself, rather than a secondary consequence: Wilson, “Kripke on Wittgenstein and Normativity,” 376. This makes little difference to my present discussion, since KW meaning irrealism has the same global implications either way.

²²² It is easier to put this discussion in terms of *sentences*. But the point, of course, is meant to apply to *any* linguistic expression. (Although to generalise from sentences would require modification of the discussion of truth.)

On an ordinary reading of these sentences, there are many important differences between them. They are distinct in physical form: they are simply composed of different shapes. They appear to differ in *truth-value*: **A** and **C** seem *true*, **B** *false*, and **D** *neither true nor false*. **A** and **C** plausibly differ with respect to *mind-independence*: the size of fish, it seems likely, is an objective matter; the beauty of a musical work less so. And finally, they appear to differ in terms of what we have called *discipline*: for the first three sentences, there seem to be conditions under which their utterance is correct, while the utterance of **D** (we may safely assume) is never evaluated as correct or incorrect.

This much is intuitively—and perhaps hopefully—the case. But to accept KW's sceptical argument is to deny most of this account. Firstly, consider *robust truth*: the kind of truth such that a sentence must bear some strong *representational* relationship to *mind-independent* facts to meet the standard, and which thus implies that the subject matter of that sentence is real. It is such a property that **A** may be thought to enjoy, in contrast with the other sentences. But KW's argument quickly rules out this possibility. For **A** to be true in this sense there must be some fact about what it *states*, that picks out a particular part of the world. Such a fact is within the scope of KW meaning irrealism. With respect to robust truth, each of the four sentences fare the same: *no sentences are robustly true*.

From the denial that there are any robustly true sentences alone, it may yet be an option to suppose that sentences can be *robustly false*. This might be contended for **B**, and denied of the remainder. But we can quickly see, from the discussion given in §2.5 of the *error-theoretic* option for meaning discourse, that this too will not be an option. The argument from Boghossian that I presented in that section was that false sentences must have truth conditions. That which prevents **A** from achieving robust truth also prevents **B** from achieving robust falsity: both properties rely on sustaining a relation to a particular mind-independent fact. This representationality is inconsistent with KW meaning irrealism, even when it is supposed that the representation is *inaccurate*—when it

is supposed that the sentence is robustly false. These considerations of robust truth and falsity are thus attributable to the impossibility of a sentence possessing *robust truth conditions*.²²³

At this point, then, we have arrived at the global claim as KW characterises it: whatever we are doing when we utter sentences, it is not the utterance of robust truths or falsehoods.²²⁴ If this is far as the problems go, then we may hope yet to identify a difference in quality between the four sentences listed above. But KW meaning irrealism imposes further constraints. Consider *non-robust truth*:

²²³ **A** fails to be robustly true, *not* because it is not a mind-independent fact that *sunfish are the largest bony fish*, but because of the limitations of meaning. This point has interesting implications for the intersection of *realism* with meaning. I don't have space for a full investigation, but I will indicate the thread that such investigation may follow. First, compare **A** with "Hemi means *sunfish* by 'sunfish'". What we have found is that *neither* sentence has robust truth conditions. Such a denial is often taken to constitute *non-factualism* about the sentence in question. But there is something odd about treating these two sentences as similarly non-factual. The oddness is that, while in the case of the meaning ascription we have denied that it has robust truth conditions *and* that Hemi means addition by '+', in the case of **A** we seem to do only the former. We did not deny that it was the case that sunfish are the largest bony fish. That is an empirical matter that is surely out of reach of our a priori argumentation. What we denied is that there is any *statement* of that fact. The question is whether this result should constitute *non-realism about fish sizes*. If it is necessary for realism about *any* subject matter that there are true sentences that describe that matter, then one implication of KW's sceptical argument is *global non-realism*.

This seems to me an unhappy result. I think it desirable to be a realist about fish size, and I don't think that considerations about the semantic limits of our sentences should rule that out. It may be considered a problem for KW meaning irrealism that it forces us into this position. But I think that it may, instead, motivate more careful characterisation of realism. The suggestion is that there may be a distinction between the non-factualism which we have attributed to meaning ascriptions and that which we have attributed to **A**. Our characterisation of **A** is *non-factualism by the backdoor*: that the sentence is not a statement of fact is due *not* to the absence of any facts about fish or size, but to the impossibility of *statement*.

Can there be a workable distinction between this account and what we claim of meaning ascriptions? If there is, then it may yet be possible to be a realist about some matters while denying realism about meaning. It would be a problem if the only available distinction was simply that there *are* facts about fish size but no facts about meaning. It is likely necessary, to *specify* whether facts of *a certain type* exist, for there to be meaningful description of those facts. One thought is that we may be able to distinguish between **A** and meaning ascriptions on the basis of the *explanation* or *motivation* for denying that they state no fact. We arrived at the denial that meaning ascriptions have truth conditions at least partly via considerations about the absence of meaning facts, whereas the analogous denial for **A** involved *no metaphysical considerations about the nature of fish size*.

In sum, while it appears difficult for the KW meaning irrealist to be a realist about *anything*, there may be a characterisation of metaphysics that avoids the denial that it is the case that sunfish are the largest bony fish. The matter needs further investigation. Help may be found from philosophers who to some extent oppose the *linguistic turn* in metaphysics: the idea that metaphysical matters are at root matters of the meaning of sentences. See, for example: Devitt, *Realism and Truth*; Dyke, *Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*.

²²⁴ Recalling, as I claimed in §2.7.1, that KW denies of meaning ascriptions the kind of truth available only to the realist about meaning; he concedes that there may be true meaning ascriptions if truth is construed as the *deflationist*—and likely the *minimalist*—suggests.

truth that is consistent with the denial that a true sentence has a real subject matter. Wright's minimalism, introduced in §1.3, provides a compelling model of such truth. The thought is that, while the four sentences fail to possess the necessary *robust truth condition* to state a mind-independent fact, they might yet qualify for a truth property that does not rely on such a truth condition. **A** and **C** may be thought to be non-robustly true. But we found in §2.7.4 that this supposition is inconsistent with the acceptance of KW's sceptical argument. It is platitudinous that *any* truth property will require a sentence to sustain an instance of the Disquotational Schema (DS): "P" is true iff P. And for sentences to be so equipped there must be facts about their content—facts that are within the scope of KW meaning irrealism. The result is the same for non-robust *falsity*: sentences must still sustain instances of the DS—or at least, an equivalent schema for falsity, featuring the *negation* of "P"—to qualify as non-robustly false.

To generalise from the results thus far, what we have found is that no sentences are *apt* for even *minimal* truth. A sentence is true only when *what it says is the case is the case*, and false only when *what it says is the case is not the case*.²²⁵ The denial that any sentences have the meaning necessary to *say that something is the case* amounts to the denial that any sentences are true or false—a result that, as we have seen, seems to persist even given a minimal construal of truth. The result, to use the terminology from Chapter 2, is *global ultra-non-factualism*: no sentence, from any discourse, is even minimally true or false.

There may be some function to talking that is independent of truth. The most obvious candidate for such a function is **C**. Such aesthetic judgements can plausibly be given an *expressivist* characterisation, such that the utterance of **C** is not the expression of a truth-conditional belief, but the expression of some pro-attitude towards the *Eroica*. **A** and **B**, too may be candidates for a function that is consistent with a lack of truth-aptitude.²²⁶ These sentences would hopefully contrast, in this case, with the nonsense sentence **D**. But as I noted throughout

²²⁵ This is the Aristotelian claim about truth that I introduced in the General Introduction.

²²⁶ In which case it may work out that **A** fulfils the function and **B** does not; that **A** is better in this sense than **B**.

Chapter 2, the consequences of the sceptical strategy run deeper than truth. The possibility of *any* correctness conditions for our utterances seems to be ruled out by a more general analogue of KW's sceptical argument. What is problematic about the possibility of an utterance according or failing to accord with the speaker's meaning is also problematic for the possibility of an utterance according or failing to accord with *any other standard*. It is quite clear that such considerations would globalise. There are no facts for *any* sentence that could render utterance correct or incorrect in any conditions. It is often the case that we *do* or *do not* utter sentences. But it seems never to be the case that we *should* or *should not* utter sentences: there is *no disciplinary standard* governing our production of sentences whatsoever.

There are physical differences in form between **A**, **B**, **C**, and **D**. But if the argument in Chapter 2 of *WRPL* is sound, then there are no differences between them in their *truth-value* or their *correctness*. KW's argument, in effect, *flattens the landscape*: in terms of accordance with norms of utterance (including truth norms), *all sentences are precisely equal*.²²⁷

One way to characterise this result—I am sure there are others—is in terms of the distinction I have discussed between *eliminativism* and *non-eliminativism*.

²²⁷ There is another potential globalisation that, while worth acknowledging, cannot be fully investigated here. This is the implication from how *meaning discourse* fares with respect to Wright's realism-relevant cruces to how *any discourse* so fares. Since I have argued that no discourse qualifies for even minimal truth, the *constraints* on that truth found in the cruces are not of central importance—but the question may be of consequence elsewhere. Wright discusses this matter here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 221. The question, for each crux, is whether the realist condition it supplies can *anywhere* be satisfied if it is unsatisfied in the case of meaning. Wright's discussion most central concerns *Cognitive Command* (CC), which I introduced in §1.4.3. The globalisation seems to go through for this crux: since the content of a belief is given by its meaning, if there can be faultless disagreement about meaning then there can be faultless disagreement about *anything*. The disagreeing parties may simply disagree about the meaning of the purportedly conflicting beliefs, and they can do so without fault. This much coheres with the connection between CC and representationality: KW's argument militates against there being sentences that can correspond to mind-independent matters. We can place, alongside the above general constraints on sentences, the impossibility of the exertion of CC: no sentences are governed by a correctness norm sufficiently strict that disagreement must have resulted from error. This is an important consequence of KW meaning irrealism, and it deserves a more comprehensive discussion—as do many other matters Wright introduces in Chapter 6 of *Truth and Objectivity*. But I cannot make such investigation here.

The distinction concerns whether there is *value* in engaging in a certain practice.²²⁸ In Chapter 2, I found that in accepting KW's sceptical argument we are forced to accede to eliminativism about meaning discourse: none of the attempts to grant meaning talk a *function* were consistent with KW meaning irrealism. Now that we are thinking globally, we can see that this threat is quite general. Without a convincing account of *what we are doing* when we utter a sentence—an account that renders such a practice valuable—why not simply abandon the practice altogether? If there are *no* disciplinary standards at work in any discourse, then there is nothing that distinguishes our utterances from mere noise. And if we produce no more than noise when we utter words then it is hard to see what point there could be to continuing the practice. We have thus arrived at the following position:

Global Eliminative Ultra-Non-Factualism: No sentences are apt for truth, even when truth is construed minimally. No utterance is correct or incorrect, or fulfils a function. There would be no value lost in abandoning the practice of uttering sentences.²²⁹

I think it helpful to represent the argument that leads to this claim as follows—although I am sure this summary is not without the loss of important detail. It is necessary for there to be *value* in talking that doing so has some *function*. If there is some such function, then a sentence either fulfils the function or fails to fulfil it. It then follows that there will be some *correctness* at work in the practice of talking: it is correct to utter a sentence only when doing so fulfils the function of that sentence.²³⁰ If KW's sceptical strategy is sound then there can be no such correctness: any supposition that an utterance accords with a norm respected by the speaker will produce opportunity for the sceptic's attack. It

²²⁸ Value, to recall §2.4, that may be *theoretic* or *pragmatic*; sentences may be pragmatically valuable, even if they offer no theoretical utility for describing reality.

²²⁹ To reiterate an earlier note: I have put this in terms of sentences for ease of presentation, but the position applies quite generally to any linguistic expression.

²³⁰ If the function is *description*, for example, then it is correct to utter a sentence that *successfully describes* (and incorrect when the sentence fails to describe). Or if the function, as the non-eliminative non-factualist may suppose, is instead to *express an attitude*, then it is correct to utter a sentence that *successfully expresses that attitude*; when one actually has that attitude.

follows, then, that KW meaning irrealism implies that there is no value in uttering any sentence. There would be nothing lost in simply stopping talking.

3.3 A Menu of Options

This is obviously an unhappy result. But before we move on to making an evaluative claim about KW meaning irrealism in the next section, let's take a step back and consider what *outs* there may be. I will present four options, ordered by increasing severity. If my considerations are correct, then *precisely one* of these options must be selected. We must either refute KW's sceptical argument, accept eliminativism about all talk, or reject one of the steps that take us from KW's argument to eliminativism. The latter options—§3.3.2 and §3.3.3 below—serve as *speculative suggestions*: they exploit places where, as it seems to me, there may be gaps in the argument to eliminativism.

3.3.1 Find A Straight Solution

Firstly, we may reject KW's sceptical argument with a *straight solution*.²³¹ There may be some response we can make to the sceptic that prevents the non-realist conclusion. On such an account, there *are* meaning facts, and such facts may be mind-independent. We would not, then, be forced to deny that sentences can be robustly representational, truth-apt, correct or incorrect, and valuable. This is not to say, of course, that there are no *other* considerations which militate against sentences being equipped for these properties. But the unpalatable consequences would not arise in the manner I have described in this thesis.²³²

3.3.2 Find an Innocuous Correctness

We may attempt to find some characterisation of correctness that is unchallenged by the KW sceptical argument, and thus prevent the implication from the

²³¹ A straight solution, as I have noted, is one that denies that the argument is sound. KW himself opts for a *sceptical* solution, which accepts the argument but seeks to weaken the sceptical blow. KW introduces the distinction here: Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 66.

²³² For discussion of straight solutions, see: Boghossian, "The Rule-Following Considerations"; Jerry A. Fodor, *Psychosemantics: The Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind*, Explorations in Cognitive Science; 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987); Alexander Miller and Crispin Wright, *Rule-Following and Meaning* (Chesham [England]: Acumen, 2002); Wright, "Kripke's Account of the Argument against Private Language.", and the discussion of Wright's judgement-dependent account of meaning described in fn. 193.

soundness of that argument to the absence of correctness conditions among sentences. If some *innocuous correctness* is found then we may yet suppose that there are norms at work in discourses—even if, as seems likely, the comprising sentences are insufficiently *contentful* for truth to be one of those norms. While I think the prospect doubtful, I have included this option to acknowledge two steps in the argument that may *conceivably* be denied. Firstly, that KW's sceptical argument generalises to *any* standard of correctness. And secondly, that the fate of mind-dependent meaning *as characterised in Wright's framework* generalises for *any* account of mind-dependent meaning. To deny the first would require some account of correctness of a very different sort than those considered here. And to deny the second would require some resources for generating mind-dependent facts such that those facts (1) do not rely on the nature of our *talk* about them; a feature found to be problematic for *merely minimal* meaning facts in §2.7.4, and (2) do not imply realism about meaning. It is unclear how either of these possibilities could be pursued, and I will set them aside.

3.3.3 Find Alternative Functions

Next, we may reject the implication from the absence of correctness to the absence of function. At the very beginning of this thesis, I introduced the notion of meaning as offering *one way* to investigate what we are doing when we talk the way we do. That we produce certain sounds and shapes is simply empirical. What KW shows to be problematic, I suggest, is certain features of the *explanation* that we ordinarily give of that practice; explanation in terms of meaning, and related notions like *understanding*. On this third option, we may attempt to find some function that offers enough value to prevent eliminativism, but that is sufficiently divorced from the problematic notions that it is consistent with KW's sceptical argument.

There is much that could be said along these lines, and I will settle for just one suggestion. If there is a function to uttering a sentence, then there surely must be facts about whether or not that function is fulfilled. But perhaps this is not a problem unless we suppose that fulfilling that function is a broadly *intentional* activity. Utterances may be better or worse without there being any sense in which

we try to utter the better ones. The sceptic would have an opportunity for attack if such intention was necessary: they could demand an account of that fact in virtue of which that intention is or is not fulfilled in any particular case. But if there may be function without intention, then there may be no such opportunity. Whether the function is fulfilled by a particular utterance may, that is, be a matter that is independent of the thoughts of the utterer. If we avoid the implication that a subject must have *knowledge* of the *reasons* for uttering, then perhaps there needn't be any sense in which that subject grasps an indefinitely large set of correctness conditions.²³³

The claim, in effect, is that uttering sentences may be akin to other biological activities. *Running*, for example, likely has some function—and there can surely be instances of that activity that are better or worse with respect to fulfilling that function. This value could perhaps be attributed to *evolutionary adaptivity*. With respect to such adaptivity, it is better to run *away from a bear* than it is to run *off a cliff*. We might seek to explain our practice of utterance (and the appearance of patterns in that practice) in similar terms. We could tell an evolutionary story about why many humans say “I am thirsty” when they are dehydrated, and that story might suffice for there to be value in continuing to utter such a sentence in those conditions. The KW sceptical considerations would take hold the moment we supposed that, for the utterance of “I am thirsty” to have this function, the utterer must be attempting to *follow the rule* that they should utter it only when they are dehydrated. We would then have to account for the indefinitely large set of correctness conditions that must be contained in the mind of the

²³³ Such an account would, of course, be a drastic departure from the conception of utterances as meaningful. I cited, in §2.3, Wright's claim that “the, as it were, impersonal meaning of an expression must supervene upon what individuals mean by it.” (Wright, Crispin, “On Making Up One's Mind: Wittgenstein on Intention,” 117.) There is little sense in there being *ungraspable meaning*—so argument that there can be no grasped meaning implies that there is no such thing as meaning. But this need not, perhaps, be the case for the alternative functions that utterance might have. That there can be no *intentional pursuit* of better sentences does not imply that there *are no* better sentences unless that quality must be, in a sense, graspable. One interesting point of contact here is with KW's discussion of *Fregean objective sense* (Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 53.) Here, KW accepts that there *can* be objective facts about the extension of the addition function: a set of ordered triples. The problem only arises when we suppose that a subject *understands* an expression as picking out that set. My claim, in effect, is that while such understanding is necessary for *meaning*, utterance may have a non-semantic purpose for which that is not necessary; for which it will suffice that there are facts akin to the extension of addition.

utterer. The present suggestion is that there could be functional utterance without any of these problematic notions. If the patterns in our practice of running are attributable to our evolutionary history, then perhaps the patterns in our speech are too.

Such a picture of utterance comes with serious costs, of course. It will likely be very difficult to explain *mental activity*, and that our sentences appear to provide some degree of *communication*. But a move of this sort may nonetheless prevent *eliminativism*. There might be value to running, even if that value cannot be intentionally pursued. If utterance can sustain a similar account, then we may yet stave off the eliminativist.²³⁴

3.3.4 Accept Global Eliminativism

Finally, we may simply bite the bullet. It is mere illusion, on this account, that we are doing anything worthwhile when we utter sentences. For there to be such value there must be some function, and KW's sceptical argument has ruled out the possibility of the norms of correctness that seem necessary for there to be such a function.²³⁵ As I have said elsewhere, eliminativism does not seem *inconsistent*. I do not think it impossible that talking is without value. But it is, clearly, a dreadfully *unpalatable* position. And this unpalatability is drastically amplified now that it is clear that it is not only the practice of talking about *meaning* that is under siege. The sentences used in physics, in ordering food at a restaurant, in greeting someone on the street: each of these, on this account, are without value, and nothing would be lost by abandoning them. This is far from an acceptable result. It seems to overstate the weight of philosophical troubles upon non-theoretical behaviour: the burden of dealing with a conflict between theory and practice of this kind should likely be on the philosophy, and not on ordinary

²³⁴ It is important to note that such an account needn't characterise every utterance as performing the *same* function. There might be—as seems plausible—quite different functions to saying “Hold the door!” than saying “Sunfish are the largest bony fish”. In effect, this discussion imposes a *constraint* on the functions available to sentences: that they cannot engender the kind of correctness ruled out by KW's sceptical argument. There may be many different functions that satisfy this constraint.

²³⁵ I'm assuming here, of course, that the option in the previous section is rejected.

human activity. And it is hard not to think it simply *intuitive* that there is a point to talking, and that we would suffer great losses in abandoning the practice.

3.4 The Tenability of Kripke-Wittgenstein Meaning Irrealism

Such are the apparent consequences of accepting the KW sceptical argument. We now return briefly to the original motivation for the investigating these consequences: evaluation of the tenability of accepting the argument. Several considerations have been made that impinge on this tenability. I will reiterate the two that have received the most discussion.²³⁶

Firstly, we must adopt eliminativism about meaning discourse. Elsewhere, the denial that there are facts of a certain type might be accompanied by an explanation of our talk about those facts, under which that talk remains valuable. KW's sceptical argument prevents such non-eliminativism, and leads us to a complete rejection of the practice. It is one thing to consider whether it is tenable to suggest that a pervasive human practice is without value. But it is another to be *forced* to adopt such a position, as we appear to be in the present case. KW's attack on meaning runs so deep that it threatens not only the *metaphysics* of meaning, but the value of meaning as a subject of linguistic activity.

Secondly, we must adopt eliminativism for *all* discourse. We might, with enough effort, be comfortable rejecting talk about meaning. It may already be intuitive that that talk is to some extent fraught. But it is *surely* unpalatable to suppose that there is *nothing of value* in our talk in general. It is difficult to make sense of the suggestion that there are no patterns of utterance in, for example, asking for water at a restaurant; that there is no difference in correctness between that request and "Foom is foog". Whatever the strength of the philosophical

²³⁶ Two others, that I will mention only briefly, are as follows. Firstly, that non-realism about meaning likely goes hand in hand with non-realism about *mental content*: I mentioned this in §2.3. I don't have space to investigate this implication here, but it will effectively serve to multiply the concerns developed for the possibility of valuable utterance: it may not be consistent with KW meaning irrealism to suppose that it is valuable to *think*. This would, of course, be a seriously problematic consequence. Secondly, the point I raised in fn. 223 that it will be difficult to be a *realist about anything* while accepting KW's sceptical argument. We will likely be forced into unhappy metaphysical corners, in which it will be a struggle to suppose that such ordinary things as tables and chairs (and the size of fish) are real.

difficulties faced by the attempt to vindicate the appearance of function in our practice of utterance, those difficulties seem likely to be outweighed by the plausibility of that appearance. In response to compelling argument that there are *no* recognisable patterns that suffice for correctness in our talk, it seems better to think that there is some hidden philosophical error than to accept the argument as sound.

Global eliminativist ultra-non-factualism paints a dramatically unpalatable picture of our practice of utterance, on which there are no teeth to the cogs: our expressions spin freely and engage with nothing, and thus perform no function.²³⁷ Of course, reality need not be palatable. No considerations I have made—as far as I can tell—have ruled out the possibility of a world in which there is no such thing as meaning, or that we inhabit such a world. But consistency does not suffice for tenability, and the cost of accepting KW's sceptical argument as sound is steep. On the basis of the severity of constraints it imposes on the nature of linguistic expression and our utterance thereof, I conclude that KW meaning irrealism is untenable.

This result provides *strong* motivation not to accept KW's argument as sound, and to find a straight solution. There may be such a solution, and we may thus avoid denying realism about meaning. In that case, this investigation serves merely to illustrate the important role played by meaning and correctness: that the value of talking appears to depend on them. But the strength of the motivation

²³⁷ It is important to note that among the sentences that are found without function by KW's argument are *the very sentences of that argument itself*. The KW meaning irrealist *claim* that there are no meaning facts—and every premise and consequence—fails not only to be *true* but to be *correct in any way*. And this includes, of course, everything I have written. There is no standard under which any of these sentences are evaluated as better or worse than other others: they are equivalent in all but physical form to "Foom is foog". This does not imply, of course, that these claims are *false*, or *incorrect*; they are no *worse* than other sentences. In particular, "KW's argument is sound" is no worse than "KW's argument is not sound". While this is a troubling situation, it is unclear *how* troubling it is. One related matter that I have raised elsewhere (see fn. 223) is that a failure of a *sentence* to be true need not be the failure of the *fact* it appears to state to obtain. To say that "KW's argument is sound" is not true likely says little about whether KW's argument is sound, if that lack of truth is attributable purely to meaning irrealism.

It might be suggested that the argument implies that there is no *reason* to believe its conclusion: such reason would rely on some kind of correctness. But then, of course, *that* line of reasoning likewise fails to produce reasons to believe. This matter is likely due more investigation, but for now I will favour the more obviously troubling global eliminativist consequences.

does not imply that the attempt will be successful. If the Kripke-Wittgenstein sceptical argument proves resilient, then we face a serious threat: that, for all our seemingly careful writing and speech, nothing of value is said.

“Blessed is the man who having nothing to say,
abstains from giving us wordy evidence of the fact.”—
George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Potential Verification Transcendence

This discussion concerns Wright's metaphysical framework, discussed in Chapter 1. All assertoric discourses are governed by a truth norm. Every sentence in those discourses either satisfies the norm and is true, or fails to satisfy it and is false. One way that the truth properties at work in different discourses may differ is whether the sentences in that discourse are *potentially verification transcendent* (PVT):

PVT: Truth is potentially verification transcendent iff whether a sentence is true or false is independent of whether we possess a method that will in principle produce evidence that it has that truth-value.

In this appendix, I will establish the distinction characterised in this crux, show how it may be realism-relevant, and then suggest that it seems inapplicable to realism debates about meaning.

It might the case, for a given discourse, that whether a sentence in that discourse meets or fails to meet the standard for truth can transcend any verification that it does so. Truth is PVT in such a discourse. Given that some verification is necessary for *knowledge*, this amounts to the claim that truth in a discourse of this sort can *outrun* knowledge; a sentence "P" can be true even if it is not possible to know that P. Every assertoric sentence is disciplined by a warranted assertibility norm and a truth norm. When truth in a discourse is PVT, sentences in that discourse can satisfy the truth norm *without* satisfying the warranted assertibility norm (and can *fail* to satisfy the truth norm without their *negations* ever satisfying the warranted assertibility norm).

The alternative is that truth *cannot* transcend verification. A discourse may be such that the truth-value of the comprising sentences is epistemically constrained. Whether a sentence satisfies or fails to satisfy the standard for truth is *never* a matter beyond our epistemic capabilities. For any sentence about which

we are not certain that there is evidence for or against it, then, we cannot be certain that it is true or false at all. Truth in discourses of this sort is not PVT.

In Michael Dummett's characterisation of realism debate, this distinction is *the* distinction between realism and anti-realism.²³⁸ Wright instead *incorporates* potential verification transcendence into his account of realism debate as just one of four realism-relevant cruces.²³⁹ Let us confirm that the distinction is indeed realism-relevant and marks a potential point of divergence between the realist and their opponent. It is quite plausible that truth that is PVT is *more mind-independent* than truth that is not. Say that some sentence is true but that there are no potential grounds on which it would be justified to claim that it is so. The standard that such a sentence meets in being true cannot be *wholly* dependent on the mind. Otherwise, what could prevent it from being recognisable in principle that the sentence has met the standard?

[When the truth of a sentence is potentially verification transcendent,] we are forced to recognise a distinction between the kind of state of affairs which makes such a statement acceptable, in the light of whatever standards inform our practice of the discourse to which it belongs, and what makes it actually true. The truth of such a statement is bestowed on it independently of any standard we do or can apply; acceptability by our standards is, for such statements, at best merely congruent with truth.²⁴⁰

If truth can outrun knowledge then there must be something *more* to that truth than satisfaction of our standards for endorsing sentences. There must be some *mind-independent* matter that (at least in part) determines whether a sentence meets the standard for truth.

²³⁸ For the relevant Dummettian sources, see Wright's footnote here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 3. For further discussion, see the introduction here: Crispin Wright, *Realism, Meaning, and Truth* (Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1987).

²³⁹ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 12. Part of the reason for this is that PVT marks a plausible distinction between the realist and the anti-realist in only *some* cases. This issue is severely diluted when PVT is just one of four respects in which realists and anti-realists can disagree. There are certain subjects—Wright's examples include comedy and morality—for which even the *realist* about those subjects wouldn't wish to contend that truth outruns potential verification. And indeed, this is what we will find for *meaning*.

²⁴⁰ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 4.

Truth that is PVT, then, is to some extent more mind-independent than truth that is not. Since the mind-independence of truth contributes to the realism-status of any discourse in which that truth operates, one realism debate for some discourse *D* is debate between the following two positions:

PVT Realism(*D*): Truth in *D* is PVT. The sentences in *D* are true or false independently of whether we know a method that would in principle allow us to identify that truth-value.

PVT Anti-Realism(*D*): Truth in *D* is not PVT. It is not the case that the sentences in *D* are true or false independently of whether we know a method that would in principle allow us to identify that truth-value.²⁴¹

Given that the epistemic standards from which truth is claimed by the realist to be independent include *knowability*, we can also represent these positions in the following way:

PVT Realism(*D*): Sentences “P” in *D* can be true without it being knowable in principle that P, or false without it being knowable in principle that not-P.

PVT Anti-Realism(*D*): Sentences “P” in *D cannot* be true without it being knowable in principle that P, or false without it being knowable in principle that not-P.

²⁴¹ In light of the minimalism that we have adopted, the following charge could be made against this position. Since the truth-aptitude of a sentence is settled purely by the syntactical form and discipline exhibited by that sentence, the anti-realist must accept that *any* assertoric sentence is true or false, even if we have no evidence either way. One available response is that, if we have no evidence either way, then that sentence is *not* governed by a warranted assertibility norm, and thus is not even apt for minimal truth. If this response is made, it may put strain on Wright’s framework; truth may not be as promiscuous among sentences as we had thought. Another response available to the anti-realist is that there is some *distance* between a sentence being *truth-apt* and being *true or false*; they might claim that the sentence in question is of the right sort to be governed by truth, but refrain from committing to that sentence actually having a determinate truth-value. This discussion is interesting, but I will set it aside here; it will make no difference to the discussion about meaning.

To illustrate the positions available in this debate, consider the following oft-used example:

Goldbach's Conjecture: Every even integer is the sum of two primes.

This claim has not been proven, and we have no method by which to acquire a proof. And the same is the case for the negation of the claim: we have no *counterexample* to Goldbach's Conjecture, and no method to produce one. There is no guarantee that Goldbach's Conjecture will ever be within our epistemic limits. The PVT realist about mathematics commits to the conjecture being true or false nevertheless. Mathematical matters are settled, they claim, independently of whether we can access them. The PVT anti-realist about mathematics makes no such commitment; given that we have no assurance that the conjecture (or its negation) is knowable, and that knowability is necessary for truth, we cannot justifiably consider it to be true (or false).²⁴²

We can also discuss whether truth in a discourse is epistemically constrained in terms of *superassertibility*. Superassertibility is a construction out of assertibility that Wright presents as an improvement on accounts of truth as something *epistemic*, such as that proposed by Hilary Putnam.²⁴³ It is defined as follows:

Superassertibility: A sentence is superassertible if some actually accessible state of information—a state of information which this world, constituted as it is, would generate in a suitably receptive, investigating subject—justifies its assertion, and will continue to do so no matter how enlarged upon or improved.²⁴⁴

²⁴² To clarify: the anti-realist needn't be committed to the claim that Goldbach's Conjecture actually *is* unknowable. It is quite consistent with the anti-realist's position that a proof of Goldbach's Conjecture is stumbled upon at some point in the future, and that it is found to have been knowable and true after all (or *mutatis mutandis* for the negation of the conjecture). But we have no such proof at the moment, and no good reason to think that there is one to be found, and thus cannot claim that the conjecture has a determinate truth-value if we have denied that truth in mathematics is PVT.

²⁴³ Wright argues against Putnam's *internal realism* here: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 38–44.

²⁴⁴ This is the definition Wright provides here: Crispin Wright, "Précis of Truth and Objectivity," in *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6.

Superassertible sentences are those that *are* warranted, and that will *continue to be* warranted after any improvement to the warranting state of information. I don't have the space to thoroughly investigate this notion, but the central idea is this. In Wright's argument against deflationism, described in §1.2, it was found that it follows from the Disquotational Schema (DS)—“P” is true iff P—that truth cannot *be* warranted assertibility; at least, not wherever there may be neutral states of information. In the terms I adopted in discussion of minimalism, we can characterise this result as the claim that warranted assertibility is not a truth property. Warrant does not have the platitudinous characteristics: it is not the case that a sentence is warranted if and only if what it states is the case. But this needn't generalise to the failure of *every* epistemic property to qualify as a species of truth. *Superassertibility* may qualify. The second condition imposed—that superassertible sentences remain warranted after any increase in the quality of the available information—renders superassertibility a minimal truth property in certain contexts. It would (largely) be sufficient for superassertibility to be a minimal truth property for sentences “P” that the following schema obtains:²⁴⁵

DS_{SA}: “P” is superassertible iff P

Say that we accept PVT realism for some discourse: there can be sentences in that discourse that are determinately true or false yet for which we know no method to verify that truth-value. Say that “S” is such a sentence, and that it is true. Since it is epistemically inaccessible that “S” is true, then by the DS for truth, and the assumption that epistemic access transmits across a biconditional, it is likewise epistemically inaccessible that S. Given DS_{SA}, then, it is epistemically inaccessible that “S” is superassertible. But this cannot be the case. When a sentence is superassertible some *accessible state of information* justifies its assertion. Sentences like “S”, then, are counterexamples to DS_{SA}; S is the case, but “S” cannot be superassertible. If S is a matter settled independently of our epistemic standards, then it can maintain no biconditional with the superassertibility of “S”.

²⁴⁵ As acknowledged in §1.3, it does not directly follow from the DS that *every* platitude will be satisfied by the property in question—but the remainder may be satisfied without much difficulty.

Wherever we accept PVT realism, the right-to-left half of DS_{SA} fails, and superassertibility thus fails to qualify as a minimal truth property.

But consider a discourse in which truth is not PVT; a discourse in which any sentence “P” is true if and only if it is in principle knowable that P. Wright argues that, for such a discourse, DS_{SA} may be derived.²⁴⁶ We arrive at the right-to-left half of the DS_{SA} ,

$P \Rightarrow$ “P” is superassertible,

by reflecting that denying PVT implies that knowability follows from truth, and that superassertibility follows from knowability.²⁴⁷ And Wright derives the left-to-right half,

“P” is superassertible $\Rightarrow P$,

by showing that, given the denial of PVT, if P is not the case then “P” is not superassertible.²⁴⁸ We have thus found that superassertibility has the disquotational property whenever the subject sentence is part of a discourse that does not feature PVT truth. For any such discourse, then, superassertibility will have the platitudinous characteristics and will qualify as a minimal truth predicate.

The introduction of superassertibility thus provides an alternative characterisation of the positions available in realism debates about PVT:

PVT Realism(*D*): Superassertibility is not a truth property in *D*.

PVT Anti-Realism(*D*): Superassertibility is a truth property in *D*.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 58.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁴⁹ Wright argues that, given that superassertibility is a truth property in *D*, a further distinction can arise. We have accepted that “P” is superassertible iff it is true. But we might yet distinguish between a discourse in which sentences are superassertible because they are true and one in which

Having established an account of potential verification transcendence, I will now apply the debate to meaning discourse.²⁵⁰ The realist about meaning in the PVT debate commits, for some meaning ascription about which we have no method to identify its truth value, to that ascription nonetheless having a determinate truth value. The truth of a true meaning ascription, the realist contends, is something which is settled even when that ascription may be beyond our epistemic bounds. The non-realist, when faced with a meaning ascription that may lie outside these bound, will withhold commitment to it being determinately true or false. Truth and falsity are constrained by evidence, so if we have no justification at present for believing a certain meaning ascription or its negation, we cannot at present be sure that it is true or false at all.

I noted earlier that, for certain discourses, the question of whether truth in that discourse is PVT is misplaced, and does not seem to mark a distinction between the realist and their opponent. In such discourses, *even the realist* will not claim that truth is PVT. Wright suggests as much for comic discourse:

It might seem implausible to claim that the sense of humour is a faculty which enables us to track independently constituted comic qualities; but it would ascend to a quite difference order of implausibility to add that the obtaining of such qualities may altogether transcend, even in principle, our abilities of recognition.²⁵¹

Whether something is funny—the thought runs—is a matter that *must* be within our epistemic means. There is a sense in which this is a victory for the comic non-realist. But there is another—and, I think, stronger—sense in which it is simply a reflection of the nature of comic facts, with which the realist will have no quarrel.

sentences are true because they are superassertible. This point foreshadows the introduction of the *Euthyphro Contrast*, discussed in §1.4.2, and represents one intersection between the Judgement-Dependence and Potential Verification Transcendence cruces. I cannot discuss the point here, but see: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 79.

²⁵⁰ This application depends on the introduction of the Kripke-Wittgenstein argument, given in §2.2.

²⁵¹ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 8.

Even the comic realist will admit that it is essential to comedy that the comic facts are in principle accessible; if something is funny, then it must be able to be *appreciated* as such.

It is quite plausible that meaning is a subject of this sort. Can it be the case that a subject means something by an expression without there being some justification available in principle that that fact obtains? It seems to me that it cannot—and that we needn't accept the Kripke-Wittgenstein (KW) sceptical argument to be confident in this claim. What a subject means by an expression is a matter for which some appreciation *must* be at least in principle available, and thus that will never be beyond epistemic means. Indeed, that truth in meaning discourse is not PVT seems *implicit* in the strategy of KW's argument: if there could be true meaning ascriptions for which there is no justification, then the failure to justify to the sceptic any such ascription given *idealised epistemic access* (i.e., given *every possible justification*) could not suffice for the constitutive scepticism at which KW aims. The upshot, then, is that while meaning falls on the non-realist side of the PVT crux, it is in a sense a hollow victory. With respect to this crux, truth in meaning discourse fails to achieve additional mind-independence. But this is due to the nature of meaning, rather than the success of KW's sceptical efforts.

While PVT may in many cases offer a compelling debate between the realist and their opponent, then, it does not in the case of meaning. To suppose that there can be meaning facts beyond our access seems too steep a demand, even for the meaning realist. We must look elsewhere for matters in Wright's framework about which KW's sceptical argument has important consequences: see the discussion of *minimal truth* in §2.7.1 and §2.7.4, and *Judgement-Dependence* and *Cognitive Command* in §2.7.2 and §2.7.3 respectively.

Appendix B: Width of Cosmological Role

It is a platitude that all truth properties exhibit a certain correspondence to facts. Cognitive Command (introduced in §1.4.3) is one respect in which this correspondence can have a substance over and above that which is ensured by this platitude: the *relation* between the truth of true sentences and the facts they state

can be more or less robust. This final crux offers a second respect. Truth in some discourse D_1 and truth in some discourse D_2 can differ in that *the facts themselves* in D_1 are more robust than the facts in D_2 . Wright posits *Width of Cosmological Role* (WCR) as a measure of the robustness of the facts to which a certain truth property corresponds. The plan for this appendix, as for the previous one, is to first establish a genuine distinction between facts of one type and facts of another, show how this distinction may be realism-relevant, and then suggest that the crux does not offer a useful realism debate for meaning.

Wright argues that the Disquotational Schema (DS)—“P” is true iff P—ensures that from every true sentence an at least minimal fact will emerge.²⁵² The anti-realist can happily contend that there are facts to which the true sentences in the discourse in question correspond; facts are not isolated to real subjects. But anti-realism is constrained to facts of a certain sort:

The states of affairs purportedly depicted by merely minimally true sentences do not seem to *do* anything except answer to the demands of our minimally true thoughts.²⁵³

In any assertoric discourse there are certain sentences that satisfy the standard for truth.²⁵⁴ For any such sentence there is a fact that it states. But if this truth is merely minimal, then there is *nothing more* to these facts than this correspondence they have with true sentences. If there are things that facts can do—*explanatory roles* they might have—that are unavailable to the kind of facts to which the anti-realist is constrained, then the explanatory role of the facts in a discourse might mark a distinction between realism and anti-realism.

Classes of facts do intuitively vary with respect to the explanations they offer, but we need a formal characterisation. One such characterisation might be

²⁵² Wright, 25.

²⁵³ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 181.

²⁵⁴ This is assuming that the possibility of an error-theory is excluded. I discuss this possibility in §1.5; for now, it is harmless to assume that some of the sentences in an assertoric discourse are at least minimally true.

found in the *Best Explanation* accounts discussed by Harman and Wiggins.²⁵⁵ But Wright rejects such accounts.²⁵⁶ For Wright, the question is not whether the facts are necessary inclusions in best explanations, but instead which *kinds* of explanation the facts in question can offer.²⁵⁷ There are some explanations to which even merely minimal facts can contribute. And there are some available only to facts that have additional substance. The task, then, is to specify this distinction.

Wright characterises four types of explanation.²⁵⁸ Take, as an example, the fact that *the rocks are wet*. This fact can explain facts of the following four types:

- (1) *Cognitive effects*. For example: my perceiving, and hence believing, that the rocks are wet.
- (2) *Precognitive-sensuous effects*. For example: a small (prelinguistic) child's interests in his hands after he has touched the rocks.
- (3) *Physical effects on agents*. For example: my slipping and falling on the rocks.
- (4) *Physical effects on non-agents*. For example: the abundance of lichen growing on the rocks.

A first attempt at analysing the robustness of a fact, then, is to claim that this robustness is determined by which of (1) through (4) that fact can explain. But we will need a different approach. Wright shows that even the most minimal of facts can offer explanations of these four types, and thus that this simple criterion for robustness will not provide an adequate distinction. The central idea is this.²⁵⁹ A truth norm governs any assertoric discourse. To any true sentence in that discourse there corresponds a fact that it states. The satisfaction of the truth norm by a sentence "x is F" can explain a subject's *belief* that x is F; someone may have a

²⁵⁵ Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

²⁵⁶ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 182, 189.

²⁵⁷ Wright, "Truth in Ethics," 199.

²⁵⁸ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 197.

²⁵⁹ For further detail see: *Ibid.*, 194.

belief *because* they recognise the content of that belief as satisfying a certain norm. (We needn't be limited to *belief* here, but this will be enough to make the point.) Now that even minimal facts are shown to be capable of explanatory links to propositional attitudes, the floodgates open. There are many cases that quite plausibly exhibit explanatory relations between beliefs and facts of any of the four specified types. Say, for example, that we admit nothing more than the minimum to truth in moral discourse. And say that the sentence "This institution is unjust" has this minimal truth property. We may cite the truth of this sentence as explanation of the fact that a certain subject believes that this institution is unjust. All that this requires is that the subject in question is sensitive to truth in morality; that they have reason to believe a moral ascription if it is true. In virtue of the DS, and the quite plausible assumption that explanations can be transmitted over a biconditional, we can then say that the subject believes that the institution is unjust *because the institution is unjust*. The subject with this belief proceeds to burn down the building housing the institution in question. We thus have an explanatory connection between the injustice of the institution and the burning of a building: a fact of type (4) in the above taxonomy. It is easy to see how similar results could be found for the other classes of fact. Merely minimal truth, then, can figure into explanations of a wide range of phenomena.

To impose a distinction between minimal and robust facts, Wright simply excludes the kinds of cases where cognitive access to the relevant facts is an intermediate step in the explanation. The above demonstration of how a minimal moral fact may explain the burning of a building includes the *beliefs* of a subject as part of the explanatory chain. For a fact to be robust, Wright claims, it must have a role that does not depend on any thought about it. The fact that the institution is unjust, then, would not qualify as robust on the basis of the above explanatory story. Wright defines width of cosmological role thus:

WCR: The width of cosmological role of a fact is the extent to which citing that fact is potentially contributive to the explanation of things *other than*, or *other than via*, our being in attitudinal states which take that fact as object.²⁶⁰

The distinction between those facts that are robust and those that are not is that the former contribute to a wide variety of phenomena independently of our thoughts about them, while the latter do not. Robust facts are those that are *more* than simply a reflection across the DS from true sentences. To see that this distinction is realism-relevant, consider the nature of a truth property that involves correspondence to facts with wide cosmological role. For a sentence to meet the standard set by such a property, it must adhere with facts that have *mind-independent explanatory roles*. Correspondence is more demanding when the corresponding facts are robust, and a discourse in which truth involves this relation is regulated by matters that are independent of our minds. WCR thus constitutes a genuine distinction between realism and non-realism. We can formalise the positions available as follows:

WCR Realism(D): Truth in *D* corresponds to facts that have *wide cosmological role*; facts that can contribute to explanations of *many* things other than, or other than via, our being in attitudinal states for which those facts are the object.

WCR Anti-Realism(D): Truth in *D* corresponds to facts that—a priori—have *narrow cosmological role*; facts that can contribute to explanations of *few* things other than, or other than via, our being in attitudinal states for which those facts are the object.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁶¹ Wright includes a condition of a priority on the anti-realist's claim that a given set of facts have narrow cosmological role. It would not be sufficient if the facts in question were—as Wright puts it—“accidentally lazy”; it must be part of the nature of those facts that they fail to figure into cognitively unmediated explanations (to whatever extent). We don't need to impose the same condition on the claim of the WCR realist, because the possibility of providing any cognitively unmediated explanation—a priori or otherwise—suffices for a fact to have the relevant robustness. See: Wright, “Truth in Ethics,” 200.

There is, clearly, some lack of precision in the number of types of explanation sufficient for having a wide or narrow explanatory role. But the nature of debates in this area, and the positions for which a realist or anti-realist will wish to argue, are nevertheless clear. When the facts stated in a discourse have a wider cosmological role than those in another discourse, the former features a more objective truth property than the latter, *ceteris paribus*. The realist, in this debate, argues to widen the role of the facts in question, and the anti-realist fights to narrow it.

Now consider the width of the explanatory roles exhibited by *meaning facts*. In virtue merely of satisfying the platitudes, truth in meaning discourse may explain our beliefs about what a subject means by an expression. If “Hemi means addition by ‘+’” satisfies the truth norm that operates over meaning discourse, then it is an (at least) minimal fact that Hemi means addition by ‘+’. We can then explain Aroha’s belief that Hemi means addition by ‘+’ as due to her sensitivity to this truth norm. And *then*, once we have connected the fact to our talk about it, a large variety of facts may be explanatorily connected to the fact that Hemi means addition by ‘+’—perhaps that Aroha trusts Hemi’s arithmetic skills and thus visits their bakery, and then that the door to Hemi’s bakery opens, and so on. These kinds of explanations are available to any minimal fact. For the realist to emerge victorious from debates about WCR, meaning facts must be able to contribute to a variety of explanations *independently of our thought about them*.

The question, then, is whether meaning facts may have these mind-independent roles—and whether KW’s sceptical argument motivates one of the positions offered by this crux. But as for Potential Verification Transcendence (discussed in Appendix A), there is a strong sense in which Width of Cosmological Role is not properly realism-relevant in the case of meaning. The matter of what a subject means by a certain sign is a matter that is *always* intimately related to a certain subject—the one for whom what they mean is in question. It seems to misconstrue the nature of meaning to suppose that there are things that meaning *does* independently of the cognitive activity of *any* mind. What Hemi means by ‘+’ may explain a wide range of phenomena; whether they pass their mathematics

exam, for example, or whether they get hired as an accountant. But it is quite doubtful that any such explanations could be offered that do not involve, as an intermediary step, Hemi's mental contact with the meaning of '+'. If this is right, then the realist position offered in the Width of Cosmological crux is out of the question.²⁶²

There is, as for PVT, a sense in which this is a *victory* for the non-realist. But I think it better to take these considerations to reveal that WCR is not properly realism-relevant for meaning in the first place. A realist about wetness may identify mind-independent explanations available to the wetness of rocks. But it is too steep a requirement for the meaning realist to identify roles available to meaning facts that are independent of mental activity. Meaning facts have narrow cosmological role. But we needn't take any heed of KW's sceptical argument to arrive at this result. To reiterate the concluding point of Appendix A: if we want to identify the consequences of KW's sceptical argument on the state of meaning discourse in terms of Wright's framework then we should look elsewhere. I discuss such consequences in §2.7: for *minimal truth* in §2.7.1 and §2.7.4, and *Judgement-Dependence* and *Cognitive Command* in §2.7.2 and §2.7.3 respectively.

²⁶² Wright suggests that *morality* is an example of a discourse for which the possibility of wide cosmological role is doubtful: Wright, "Truth in Ethics," 200. He writes here that "It is hard to think of anything which is true of sentient but non-conceptual creatures, or of mobile organisms, or of inanimate matter, which is true because . . . a moral fact obtains and in whose explanation it is unnecessary to advert to anyone's appreciation of that moral fact."

REFERENCE LIST

- A. J. Ayer (Alfred Jules). *Language, Truth, and Logic*. Penguin Books, 2001.
- Aristotle. *Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Oxford, Oxfordshire: Clarendon Press, 1924.
- Blackburn, Simon. *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language*. Oxford [Oxfordshire] : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Boghossian, Paul A. "The Rule-Following Considerations." *Mind* 98, no. 392 (1989): 507–549. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/XCVIII.392.507>.
- . "The Status of Content." *The Philosophical Review* 99, no. 2 (1990): 157–184. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2185488>.
- Butler, Finn. "Kripke-Wittgenstein Meaning Scepticism and the Sceptical Solution." *University of Otago Honours Dissertation*, 2017.
- Davidson, Donald. "Rational Animals." *Dialectica* 36, no. 4 (1982): 317–28.
- . "Thought and Talk." In *Mind and Language*, edited by Samuel D. Guttenplan, 1975–7. Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Devitt, Michael. *Realism and Truth*. 2nd ed. with a new afterword. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Divers, John, and Alexander Miller. "Platitudes and Attitudes: A Minimalist Conception of Belief." *Analysis* 55 (1995): 37.
- . "Why Expressivists about Value Should Not Love Minimalism about Truth." *Analysis* 54, no. 1 (1994): 12–19. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3328097>.
- Dyke, Heather. *Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*. Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy ; 13. London ; New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Field, Hartry H. *Science without Numbers*. Second edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Geach, P. T. "Ascriptivism." *The Philosophical Review* 69, no. 2 (1960): 221–25. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2183506>.

- . “Assertion.” *The Philosophical Review* 74, no. 4 (1965): 449–465.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2183123>.
- Gibbard, Allan. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Grice, H. P. “Meaning.” *The Philosophical Review* 66 (1957): 377.
- Haldane, John, and Crispin Wright. *Reality, Representation, and Projection*. Mind Association Occasional Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Hare, R. M. *The Language of Morals*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
- Harman, Gilbert. *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Hattiangadi, Anandi. *Oughts and Thoughts Rule-Following and the Normativity of Content*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2007.
- Horwich, Paul. “Is Truth a Normative Concept?” *Synthese* 195, no. 3 (March 1, 2018): 1127–38. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-016-1208-8>.
- . *Truth*. 2nd ed. Oxford [England] : New York [N.Y.]: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Jackson, Frank, Graham Oppy, and Michael Smith. “Minimalism and Truth Aptness.” *Mind* 103, no. 411 (July 1, 1994): 287–302.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/103.411.287>.
- Jackson, Frank, and Philip Pettit. “A Problem for Expressivism.” *Analysis* 58, no. 4 (1998): 239–251. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8284.00128>.
- Jerry A. Fodor. *Psychosemantics: The Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind*. Explorations in Cognitive Science; 2. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987.
- Kripke, Saul A. *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*. Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Mackie, J. L. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. Harmondsworth ; New York: Penguin, 1990.

- McGinn, Colin. *Wittgenstein on Meaning: An Interpretation and Evaluation*. Aristotelian Society Series ; v. 1. Oxford ; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1984.
- Miller, Alexander. "An Objection to Wright's Treatment of Intention." *Analysis* 49, no. 4 (1989): 169–173. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3328551>.
- . "Differences with Wright." *Philosophical Quarterly* 54, no. 217 (2004): 595–603. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0031-8094.2004.00376.x>.
- . "On Wright's Argument Against Deflationism." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 51, no. 205 (October 2001): 527–31.
- . *Philosophy of Language*. Florence, UNITED STATES: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/otago/detail.action?docID=324938>.
- . "Primary Qualities, Secondary Qualities and the Truth about Intention." *Synthese* 171, no. 3 (2009): 433–442. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-008-9316-8>.
- . "Rule Following, Error Theory and Eliminativism." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 23, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 323–36.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2015.1042004>.
- . "Rule-Following Skepticism." In *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, 454–63. Routledge Philosophy Companions. London ; New York: Routledge, 2011.
- . "What Is the Sceptical Solution?," forthcoming.
- Miller, Alexander, and Ali Saboohi. "Rule-Following and Consciousness: Old Problem or New?" *Acta Analytica* 30, no. 2 (2015): 171–178.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12136-014-0237-5>.
- Miller, Alexander, and Crispin Wright. *Rule-Following and Meaning*. Chesham [England]: Acumen, 2002.
- Price, Huw. "Three Norms of Assertibility, or How the Moa Became Extinct." *Philosophical Perspectives* 12 (1998): 241–54.
- Quine, W. V. "On the Reasons for Indeterminacy of Translation." *The Journal of Philosophy* 67, no. 6 (1970): 178–183. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2023887>.

- . *Word and Object*. Studies in Communication. Cambridge: Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960.
- Ramsey, F. P., and G. E. Moore. "Symposium: Facts and Propositions." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 7 (1927): 153–206.
- Smith, Michael. "Why Expressivists about Value Should Love Minimalism about Truth." *Analysis* 54, no. 1 (1994): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3328096>.
- Tappolet, Christine. "Mixed Inferences: A Problem for Pluralism About Truth Predicates." *Analysis* 57, no. 3 (1997): 209–210. <https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/57.3.209>.
- Wiggins, David. *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Wilfrid Sellars. "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind." In *Science, Perception and Reality*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.
- Williamson, Timothy. "Critical Notices." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2, no. 1 (March 1, 1994): 109–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559408570786>.
- Wilson, George M. "Kripke on Wittgenstein and Normativity." *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (1994): 366–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4975.1994.tb00295.x>.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. John Wiley & Sons, 2009.
- . *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Dover ed. Mineola, N Y.: Dover Publications, 1999.
- Wright, Crispin. "Excerpts from a Critical Study of Colin McGinn's Wittgenstein on Meaning." In *Rails to Infinity: Essays on Themes from Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*, 143–69. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- . "Kripke's Account of the Argument against Private Language," 91–115. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- . "Moral Values, Projection and Secondary Qualities." In *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity.*, 155–82. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.

- . “On Making Up One’s Mind: Wittgenstein on Intention.” In *Rails to Infinity: Essays on Themes from Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations*, 116–42. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- . “Précis of Truth and Objectivity.” In *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity.*, 3–10. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- . *Rails to Infinity: Essays on Themes from Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- . *Realism, Meaning, and Truth*. Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1987.
- . “Realism, Pure and Simple? A Reply to Williamson.” In *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity.*, 61–81. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- . “Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed.” In *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity.*, 241–87. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- . *Truth and Objectivity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- . “Truth in Ethics.” In *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity.*, 183–204. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- . “What Could Anti-Realism about Ordinary Psychology Possibly Be?” In *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity.*, 407–42. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- . “Wittgenstein’s Rule-Following Considerations and the Central Project of Theoretical Linguistics.” In *Rails to Infinity: Essays on Themes from Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations*, 170–213. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.