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Mind-Dependence, Irrealism and Superassertibility

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Résumé : Dans la section 1, j'explique pourquoi une conception Dummettienne du réalisme n'a de pertinence que dans certains cas particuliers. Dans la section 2, j'indique qu'il est raisonnable de penser que Crispin Wright soutient que la vérité de certains jugements dépend de notre capacité de la connaître (si et) seulement si leur vérité consiste dans le fait qu'ils sont superassertables. Dans la section 3, je souligne qu'insister, avec Dummett et Wright, sur la connaissabilité, nous empêche de voir qu'il y a d'autres formes légitimes de réalisme. Je propose une réfutation de la thèse attribuée à Wright dans la section 2, ce qui m'amène à suggérer que c'est une erreur de penser que la question du réalisme concerne essentiellement la nature de la vérité.

Abstract: In section 1, I explain why a specifically Dummettian conception of realism will be relevant only in a restricted range of cases. In section 2, I suggest that Crispin Wright could be read as holding that the truth of certain judgements depends on our capacity to know it (if and) only if their being true consists in their being superassertible. In section 3, I point out that insisting on knowability, as both Dummett and Wright do, prevents one from seeing that there are other legitimate forms of realism. I argue against the claim attributed to Wright in section 2, which leads me to suggest that it is a mistake to construe the realism debates as being essentially concerned with the nature of truth.

The purpose of this paper is to explain and criticize a conception of realism which is suggested by the general approach to the realism debates which Crispin Wright has developed, mainly in his *Truth and Objectivity* [Wright 1992]. This book largely contributed to restructuring the whole problematic of realism, along what might be called post-Dummettian lines, inasmuch as it remains in keeping with the idea that the question whether truth must be seen as epistemic in nature should be at the heart of the controversies. The main thrust of the discussion will be to cast

doubt on this idea (and by the same token, to show that a certain *prima facie* plausible way of understanding Wright's approach would turn it into an unacceptable view and is thus likely to be wrong). But first, I propose what I take to be fairly standard characterizations of the main sorts of realism/irrealism.

1 Standard vs Dummettian Realism

So, let's start with the nearly trivial observation that one may be a realist either about *things* (in the widest sense, including properties) of certain kinds, or about facts of certain kinds (or both). The realist about things of a certain kind will typically claim (i) that there are things of this kind and (ii) that all (or perhaps, some) of them exist independently of ourselves. The realist about facts of a certain kind will typically claim (i) that there are states-of-affairs of this kind, (ii) that some of them obtain and (iii) that all (or perhaps, some) of those which obtain do so independently of ourselves. Alternatively, Thing-realism could also be expressed, in the semantic mode, by saying that some terms of some corresponding kind are such that they denote or apply to existing things, all (or some) of which exist independently of ourselves. Likewise, Fact-realism could be expressed by saying that some judgements of a certain corresponding kind represent obtaining states-of-affairs, all (or some) of which obtain independently of ourselves. This, in turn, could be rephrased as the claim that some judgements of the given kind are true, and all (or some) of them are true independently of ourselves.

This suggests that any form of Thing-realism is a conjunction of two claims: an existence-claim and an independence-claim, while any form of Fact-realism is a conjunction of three claims: an existence claim, an actuality claim and an independence claim. Accordingly, there are two ways to oppose any Thing-realist claim, and three ways to oppose any fact-realist claim. That is to say, one can oppose realism about facts of kind K , not only by denying either that any state-of-affairs of kind K do obtain, or that the obtaining states-of-affairs of this kind obtain independently ourselves, but also by denying that there is any state-of-affairs of kind K at all. Likewise, one can oppose realism with-respect-to judgements of kind K^* , not only by denying either that there is any true judgement of this kind, or that the true judgements of this kind are true independently of ourselves, but also by denying that there is any judgement of kind K^* at all.

It seems however to be a fairly common practice, in Dummettian circles, to understand realism with-respect-to judgements of a certain kind K^* (what is often called realism about a certain region of discourse) to

be the claim that (some or) all judgements of this kind have a determinate truth-value “independently of ourselves”, or are such that their being either true or false is “independent of ourselves” (in some relevant sense of this phrase, to be discussed later). Somewhat more perspicuously, this can be rephrased as the claim that (some or) all judgements of kind K^* are such that if they are true, then they are true independently of ourselves *and* if they are false, then they are false independently of ourselves. Even though this has just been (and is usually) put in the “semantic mode”, it should be obvious that the same sort of view could have been expressed in the material mode, by saying that (some or) all states-of-affairs of a certain kind K are such that their obtaining or failing to obtain is independent of ourselves (*i.e.*, such that if they obtain, then it is independent of ourselves that they do and if they fail to obtain, then it is independent of ourselves that they do).

From what I take to be a standard perspective, this looks like a very peculiar way of characterizing realism/irrealism. Such a claim is obviously weaker, in one respect, than what I have described as Fact-realism, since it doesn't entail the truth (or falsity) of any judgement of the relevant kind (*i.e.*, it doesn't include an actuality claim). But it is stronger in another respect, since it entails that certain judgements can be false only if they are false independently of ourselves, and in the form in which it was introduced, Fact-realism doesn't say anything about being false (or failing to obtain).

But now suppose that negation is understood in such a way that the negation of a judgement is true if and only if this judgement is false (not true). Then it would seem that if any judgement is true independently of ourselves, then its negation will have to be false independently of ourselves, and conversely. Thus, *if* the kind of judgements under consideration is closed under negation (*and* negation is construed in this standard way) then all judgements of this kind will be such that if they are true, then they are true independently of ourselves, if and only if they are such that if they are false, then they are false independently of ourselves. In other words, (on these assumptions) the claim that all judgements of kind K^* are such that if they are true, then they are true independently of ourselves *and* if they are false, then they are false independently of ourselves will boil down to the claim that all judgements of kind K^* are such that if they are true, then they are true independently of ourselves. It will then turn out to be strictly *weaker* than what I have identified as realism with-respect-to judgements of kind K^* . For the latter is the claim that there are true judgements of kind K^* and all of them are true independently of ourselves, which entails that if any judgement

of kind K^* is true, then it is true independently of ourselves. Thus, (on the assumptions mentioned above) the sort of realist thesis singled out by Dummett and Co. turns out to be nothing but a restricted form of Fact-realism, one which dispenses with the actuality claim to keep only the existence and independence claims.

However, things are less straightforward when the relevant kind of judgements is not closed under negation, or negation fails to satisfy the condition that the negation of a judgement is true if and only if this judgement is false (not true). In that case, the sort of realist thesis Dummett seems to have in mind introduces something new, namely the claim that certain judgements are such that if they are false, then they are false independently of ourselves. There will then be cases where a Dummettian style realist thesis will have to be expressed by saying that all (or some) judgements of a certain kind K^* are such that if they are true, then they are true independently of ourselves *and* if they are false, then they are false independently of ourselves.

The corresponding Independence-irrealist (as I call the irrealist who wants to oppose the realist's Independence-claim) will then hold that not all (or none of) the judgements of the given kind are such that they are true independently of ourselves if true, and false independently of ourselves if false, and there are obviously many different ways in which this could turn out to be true. For example, it could be true because not all (or no) true judgements of this kind are true independently of ourselves, or because not all (or no) false judgements of this kind are false independently of ourselves, or because some combination of these claims is true. I must confess, however, that I've never seen an irrealist trying to make his/her case by arguing that no false judgement of a certain kind is false independently of ourselves. The important thing is that it will always be *sufficient*, in order to establish a Fact-irrealist thesis as against some corresponding Fact-realist thesis (whether or not of the Dummettian variety), to show that all (or some) of the true judgements (obtaining states-of-affairs) of the relevant kind are not true (do not obtain) independently of ourselves. Indeed, it seems to be both the most natural strategy, and the most likely to be favored by the Independence-irrealist. Moreover, it must be kept in mind that it is only in a fairly restricted range of cases that the Dummettian approach would seem to have any chance of being of special relevance.

When the realist claims that something exists/obtains independently of ourselves, he/she (most often) means to be saying that it exists/obtains independently of the fact that we have some specific mental feature or power M (with respect to the thing in question). As far as I can see (and historically, at least), there are three main candidates for playing

the part of the designated mental feature M : (i) our capacity to know, (ii) our capacity to think or conceive and (iii) our capacity to perceive or experience.

I have just pointed out that one special feature of a Dummett-style realist thesis is that it doesn't include any actuality claim and is restricted to an existence claim and a pair of independence claims. Another is that Dummett and his followers have a fairly definite idea of what it is, in such contexts, to be "independent of ourselves", according to which for something to be independent of ourselves is for it to be independent of our having the capacity to know it. More precisely, since Dummett is essentially concerned with Fact-realism, the guiding idea is that the truth or falsity of a judgement is independent of ourselves when it is independent of our having the capacity to know it¹.

One consequence of reading the independence claim as a claim that something is independent of our having a certain mental feature M (in this instance, a capacity to know), is that such a claim can be true either because we don't have any such mental feature, or because we have it and the thing in question is independent of our having it. This means that, just as the irrealist has the option of opposing the realist by rejecting his/her actuality claim, the realist has the option of opposing the Independence-irrealist by rejecting his/her commitment to our hav-

¹Putting it in this way may reveal an asymmetry between truth and falsity. The claim that the truth of the judgement that P is independent of our having the capacity to know it could be understood either as saying that it is independent of our having the capacity to know that P , or as saying that it is independent of our having the capacity to know that it is true. On the other hand, the claim that the falsity of the judgement that P is independent of our having the capacity to know it could be understood as saying that it is independent of our having the capacity to know that it is false (not true), but obviously not as saying that it is independent of our having the capacity to know *that* P . It could however, be construed as saying that it is independent of our having the capacity to know that not- P , on the assumption that a judgement is false if and only if its negation is true. This doesn't, in itself, require that the judgement that not- P itself belongs to the kind under consideration, but it would seem hard to deny that one cannot have the capacity to know that not- P without having the capacity to know that the judgement that not- P is true (assuming one possesses the concept of truth).

The upshot seems to be that only in cases where the falsity of a judgement is equated with the truth of its negation, could the Dummettian realist conceive of the capacity to know that something is false as being essentially the same as the capacity to know that something (else) is true. I will here be assuming that we are dealing with such cases, and thus that the Dummettian realist claim can be expressed by saying that (some or) all judgements of kind K^* are such that if they are true, then they are true independently of our having the capacity to know them *and* if they are false, then they are false independently of our having the capacity to know their negation.

ing the relevant mental feature. Now, this is exactly the kind of realist position that Dummett has had a tendency to present as the only possible (or interesting) form of realism. For he often writes (at least in his early papers) as if the realist was the one who holds that certain judgements have a determinate truth-value, despite the fact that we are “in principle” unable to determine which. This is the case where, to use the celebrated formula, it is held that truth “transcends our capacities of recognition”. But as Wright was one of the first to observe, and as should be clear from what we have been saying, there are many areas of discourse for which one might be inclined to grant that truth doesn’t transcend our capacities of recognition, while still wanting to interpret them in a realist way (moral and “comic” discourses are Wright’s stock examples), *i.e.*, while still wanting to hold that the truth of the relevant judgements is independent our having the capacity to know them. Much of Wright’s efforts can be seen as an attempt to make room for realist/irrealist disputes in cases where it is agreed on both sides that we do have the capacity to know the judgements under consideration (or their negation).

2 Some Central Features of Wright’s Approach

According to Wright’s approach, any predicate which satisfies, within a certain area of discourse, certain familiar platitudes such as the disquotational schema (“ p ” is T if and only if p) thereby counts as a truth-predicate for judgements of the relevant kind, or more accurately, it counts as a predicate whose extension coincide with that of the truth-predicate, for the given area of discourse. Wright holds further that there is, for each area of assertive (or truth-apt) discourse, at least one predicate which satisfies the relevant platitudes and thus works as a truth-predicate (in this area of discourse).

On his view, if a given area of discourse includes only decidable judgements (*i.e.*, judgements whose truth-value we are in principle capable of recognizing²) then the truth-predicate for this area will be coextensive with what he calls the predicate of “superassertibility” (for this area). One could give a rough explanation of this rather controversial and ambiguous notion by saying that a judgement is superassertible if and only if

²These are, in other words, the areas of discourse satisfying the knowability principle, according to which p if and only if it is possible (for us) to know that p .

there is a state of information which would justify it, and some justification for it would survive any improvement on this state of information³. I will fortunately have no need to scrutinize this notion in any detail here; the only thing that matters for my purpose, is that this is an epistemic notion (which corresponds more or less closely to the notion of undefeasible justifiability) which, according to Wright, has the potential for playing the role of a truth-predicate, in any area of discourse for which truth doesn't transcend our capacities of recognition. It goes without saying that this also is a controversial claim, but I'm not going to discuss it either⁴. On the contrary, I will be assuming that there is at least one epistemic notion which actually has the potential for satisfying the relevant platitudes in certain areas of discourse, and pretend that this is the notion of superassertibility.

What Wright calls his "minimalism" about truth, is the claim that any predicate satisfying the relevant platitudes in a certain area of discourse is coextensive with the truth-predicate for this area of discourse, and therefore is a candidate for expressing what the truth of a judgement of the relevant kind consists in, or amounts to. The view is, in effect, that while the concept of truth is unique and applies across the board over all areas of discourse, what truth consists in, the nature of truth, may vary from one area to another, giving rise to what he calls his "pluralism" about truth. What matters here, is that since an epistemic notion of truth cannot be coextensive with a transcendent notion of truth (as Wright himself argues), if it turns out that there is even a single area of discourse for which truth transcends our capacities of recognition, then it will have been shown not only that global weak realism is true (*i.e.*, that the truth-value of at least some judgement is independent of our having the capacity to know it), but also that (contrary to what Wright sometimes suggests) the notion of superassertibility is not to be confused with that of "minimal truth" (or with what he sometimes calls the "minimal" notion of truth).

That the truth-value of judgements of a certain kind transcends our capacities of recognition thus is a sufficient condition for their being true (or false) independently of our having the capacity to know them (or their negation), and hence, to vindicate realism with-respect-to judgements of this kind. But (as I have already said) one of Wright's most important contribution was to observe that this isn't a necessary condition. This is to say that, even when it has been shown that the true

³This notion looms large in Wright's works. As far as I know, it was first introduced in [Wright 1987a]; it is further discussed in [Wright 1992, 48–61, and 66–70].

⁴See [Kvanvig 1999] for a penetrating criticism of this claim.

judgements in a certain area are exactly the superassertible ones, the question can still arise, whether these judgements' being true consists in their being superassertible, or in something else. The obvious and natural suggestion being that if it does, then their truth depends on our capacity to know it and they have to be construed in an irrealist manner, *and* that if it doesn't (if their being true consists in anything other than superassertibility), then their truth is independent of our capacity to know it (even though we do have this capacity) and they must accordingly be construed in a realist manner. Since it is precisely (the second half of) this suggestion that I will be arguing against, it seems fair to add that it is not absolutely beyond doubt that Wright is actually committed to it, though as far as I can see, the views put forward in [Wright 1992], are at least consistent with this interpretation. My reason for focusing on this suggestion (apart from the fact that I do think it is a plausible interpretation of Wright's view) is that explaining why it could not be sustained will help to dispel the impression that the realism/irrealism debates essentially have to do with the nature of truth.

Wright's official position seems to be that since (in his view) one knows *a priori* that for any area of discourse, the corresponding superassertibility predicate could be defined, it is the realist who has the burden of showing, for any given area of discourse, that being true is not (in this area) to be identified with being superassertible. To establish her doctrine, the realist may either try to show that, in the given area of discourse, truth transcends our capacities of recognition, or grant that the judgements in this area are true if and only if they are superassertible, and argue that they nonetheless satisfy further conditions which entail that being true, in this area, doesn't consist in being superassertible. On the interpretation I want to consider, this, in turn, is held to entail that the truth of these judgements doesn't depend on our having the capacity to know them.

The second half of [Wright 1992] precisely aims at identifying what these further conditions might be. Several such conditions are propounded, but they need not be mentioned here, since the only point that matters is that they are not meant to provide alternative characterizations of what realism consists in⁵. On the view I am considering, they should be seen only as necessary or sufficient conditions for it to be the case that the truth of judgements of certain kinds doesn't consist in

⁵It is quite clear from [Wright 1992, 147–148], for example, that what Wright calls "cognitive command" cannot be seen as providing an alternative characterization of realism, since it is explicitly introduced as a necessary but not sufficient condition for realism about a given area of discourse.

their being superassertible.

This is admittedly not exactly how Wright introduces them. He refers to them as conditions for it to be the case that the truth predicate (in a certain area) has features “which go beyond the minimal constraints and in some way, without necessarily having any direct bearing on the relationship between that predicate and superassertibility, serve to clarify and substantiate realist preconceptions” [Wright 1992, 82]. Now, to show that a truth predicate has features which go beyond Wright’s minimal constraints is to show that it doesn’t stand for superassertibility; but it is not clear that every such “supplementary feature” is bound to “substantiate realist preconceptions”. Indeed, I will, in effect, be arguing that there must be such features which fail to do so, and thus that there must be room for the possibility that the truth of certain judgements depends on our having the capacity to know them, without their being true consisting in their being superassertible. If this is correct, then perhaps charity would require that Wright’s approach be interpreted as being consistent with this possibility. It would then have to be concluded that he didn’t provide us (at least in this book) with any other way of characterizing realism than as the claim that certain judgements are such that their truth is independent of our having the capacity to know them.

3 Two Problems with This View

It should be clear that with such a conception of realism (and whether or not the notion of superassertibility is to be given center stage) Wright is following in Dummett’s footsteps. On this approach, since the truth of a judgement could depend on its being knowable only if it actually is knowable, the claim that a certain judgement is knowable will be a necessary ingredient of any Independence-irrealist claim (with-respect-to this judgement). But this is a serious limitation, in that it leaves no room for any form of realism/irrealism which would take the relevant mental feature to be, *e.g.*, our capacity to *make* (*i.e.*, to think, entertain, or conceive) certain judgements, instead of our capacity to *know* them (or their negation). Both sorts of claim, it would seem, are equally plausible rendering of the intention behind classical expressions of realism in terms of something’s being “independent of ourselves”, and no reason has been given so far to give precedence to knowability over conceivability.

Quite obviously, a judgement can be true independently of one’s capacity to conceive it only if it is true independently of one’s capacity to know it (for one can know only what one can conceive, and think about), but the converse is far from evident: nothing seems, *prima facie*, to indi-

cate that a judgement could not be true independently of one's capacity to know it without being true independently of one's capacity to conceive it. This is of course why Dummett, for one, went to great lengths to establish the opposite, i.e., that one cannot have the capacity to conceive what one cannot know. Needless to say, this is a highly controversial thesis, but it is at least understandable that one who, like Dummett, endorses it should decline to pay any special attention to the possibility of framing realist theses in terms of conceivability instead of knowability.

But as far as I can see, Crispin Wright doesn't have that excuse, since he is not committed to the claim that something is conceivable only if it is knowable, as is shown by the fact that he seems happy to grant that one could coherently, or at least intelligibly, hold that certain judgements are unknowable, i.e. that they "transcend" our cognitive powers. One could obviously not accept this while holding that we can conceive only what we can (in principle) know.

Thus, unless it can be shown that we cannot conceive what we cannot know, any form of conceivability realism will be strictly stronger than (entail) the corresponding form of knowability realism; and conceivability irrealism will accordingly be strictly weaker than (be entailed by) knowability irrealism. In other words, knowability realism will be compatible with conceivability irrealism.

Now consider the proposal that a judgement is true independently of our having the capacity to know it if and only if its being true doesn't consist in its being superassertible. It should be obvious in light of what has just been said that even if this were an adequate characterization of knowability realism, it would still have nothing to do with conceivability realism. In any case, there are reasons to doubt that it provides a faithful rendering even of knowability realism, as I will now try to show.

It will help here to observe that realism about facts of a certain kind seem to entail realism about all the things involved in such facts⁶. This rests on the intuition that if a state-of-affairs obtains independently of ourselves, then all the things involved in its obtaining, and thus all its constituents, must similarly exist independently of ourselves. And if this intuition is sound, then it would also seem that a judgement can

⁶But the converse does not (or at least not obviously) hold: all the things involved in the obtaining of some fact may exist independently of ourselves, without this fact obtaining independently of ourselves. To see this, consider one trivial example: my cat exists independently of ourselves, and (let's suppose) the property of being green exists independently of ourselves, but my cat's being green could nonetheless depend on our having painted it green. This suggests that a form of Fact-irrealism does not (as such) entail the corresponding forms of Thing-irrealism.

be true independently of ourselves only if each of its constituent term denotes something which exists independently of ourselves; or in other words that realism with-respect-to judgements of a certain kind should entail realism with-respect-to all the terms involved in such judgements. Let's encapsulate this thought by saying that when the realist claims that something is independent of ourselves, he/she means to be claiming that it is *completely* independent of ourselves, but when the irrealist claims that something is dependent on ourselves, he/she may mean to be claiming only that it is *partly* dependent on ourselves. This means that one can be an irrealist with-respect-to judgements of a certain kind without being an irrealist with-respect-to all the terms involved in such judgements.

It is not quite obvious exactly how this should be applied to Wright's or Dummett's knowability framework, because it is unclear how a form of Thing-realism will have to be expressed in such a framework, and neither of them have said much about Thing-realism. Consider the claim that the truth of the judgement that the sky is blue is (completely) independent of our having the capacity to know it. According to what has just been said, this should entail corresponding realist theses with-respect to the terms "the sky" and "is blue". The trouble is that nothing has been said about how the latter Thing-realist theses are to be understood, in this context. The most natural way of construing them would probably be as saying something like: each of these terms denotes something which exists independently of our having the capacity to know it (where "to know it" may mean either to know this thing or to know that this thing exists). But this particular choice may not be forced upon us.

It would seem, furthermore, that if the alleged equivalence between the truth of a judgement's being independent of our capacity to know it and its truth failing to consist in its being superassertible is to be of any use/significance, then there will have to be some concept N , standing to superassertibility just as denotation stands to truth, and allowing us to say that a certain term denotes something which exists independently of our capacity to know it if and only if its denoting this thing doesn't consist in its being N . But it is unclear what such a concept might be.

In any case, I will not need to go further into this, since I think I can make my point without resorting to the contrast between Thing-realism and Fact-realism. For just as realism with-respect-to a given judgement entails realism with-respect-to all its constituent terms and irrealism with-respect-to a given judgement doesn't entail irrealism with-respect-to all its constituent terms, it would seem that realism with-respect-to some conjunction of two judgements should entail realism with-respect-

to each of them and irrealism with-respect-to some conjunction of two judgements doesn't entail irrealism with-respect-to each of them⁷.

Now suppose that the truth of the judgement that *P and Q* depends (in part) on our having the capacity to know it. This is compatible with the possibility that the truth of the judgement that *Q* doesn't depend at all on our having the capacity to know it. On the proposal before us, this would mean that while the truth of the judgement that *Q* doesn't consist in its being superassertible, that of the judgement that *P and Q* does. In other words, it must be possible, on this view, that the conjunction of a judgement whose being true consists in its being superassertible with a judgement whose being true doesn't consist in its being superassertible should yield a judgement whose being true nonetheless consists in its being superassertible. Yet it would seem, intuitively, that a judgement whose being true consists in its being superassertible should be one whose truth is somehow "constituted" by our capacity to know it; and it is hard to see how its truth could then be even partly independent of this same capacity. The trouble is not that a judgement whose truth is partly (or even completely) independent of our capacity to know it could not *be* superassertible, but that I fail to see how such a judgement's being superassertible could "constitute" or somehow be identical to its being true.

If this objection is sound, then it must be denied that if the truth of some judgement depends (in part) on our having the capacity to know it, then its being true consists in its being superassertible; or in other words, that the truth of a judgement fails to consist in its being superassertible only if its truth is (completely) independent of our having the capacity to know it (though the converse implication can still be retained). Moreover, since this objection doesn't obviously depend on any specific way of construing the notion of superassertibility, but only on the assumption that it is an epistemic notion which satisfies the truth-involving platitudes, it would seem to warrant the conclusion that the Independence-Irrealist, as such, is not committed to truth's being epis-

⁷Does the same hold for the other propositional connectors? If not, then the statement that realism with-respect-to a given judgement entails realism with-respect-to all its constituent terms will obviously have to be restricted to "logically simple", predicative judgements. As far as I can see, the main point will remain unaffected, since it doesn't need more than the assumption that if the truth of a conjunction is independent of our capacity to know it, then so is the truth of each conjunct, which is plausible enough. However, there may also be some plausibility to the claim that if the truth of the negation of a judgement is independent of our capacity to know it, then so is the truth of this judgement itself. If so, then it will follow that any truth-functionally complex judgement is independent of our capacity to know it only if all its constituent judgements are.

temic, and that the disputes over realism need not be seen as disputes over the nature of truth.

It could be replied that instead of assuming that the truth of a judgement consists in its being superassertible if and only if it is *partly* dependent on our capacity to know it, we should assume that it consists in its being superassertible if and only if it is *completely* dependent on our capacity to know it, or in other words, that the truth of a judgement fails to consist in its being superassertible if and only if it is *at least partly* independent of our capacity to know it. The trouble with this suggestion is that the resulting position runs a serious risk of trivializing the realist's claims. For consider, *e.g.*, the claim that the truth of the judgement that the sky is beautiful is not completely dependent on our having the capacity to know it. On the hypothesis we are contemplating, this amounts to the realist claim that the truth of this judgement doesn't consist in its being superassertible. For this claim to be true, it suffices that the sky exists independently of our having the capacity to know it; yet it is unlikely that the irrealist who held that the judgement that the sky is beautiful is not true independently of our having the capacity to know it would thereby want to deny that the sky exists independently of our capacity to know it.

Two options present themselves, at this point. Either one takes the hard line and maintains that irrealism with-respect-to judgements of a certain kind is equivalent to the claim that the truth of judgements of this kind consists in their being superassertible. One is then forced to accept that the truth of a judgment consists in its being superassertible if and only if its truth *completely* depends on our capacity to know it; thus subscribing to a very demanding intuitive conception of what irrealism amounts to, and a correspondingly lenient conception of realism. Or one opts for the soft line and insists that irrealism with-respect-to judgements of a certain kind must be equivalent to the claim that the truth of judgements of this kind *at least partly* depends on our capacity to know it; thus subscribing to a relatively lenient conception of what irrealism amounts to, and a correspondingly demanding conception of realism. One is then forced to reject (the left-to-right half of) the claim that the truth of a judgement depends on our having the capacity to know it if and only if it consists in its being superassertible.

Now why should anyone prefer the soft line? In a sense, it doesn't matter which line we choose, as long as we all agree exactly what is going on. But the foregoing discussion at least suggests that opting for the hard line would make it too easy to be a realist, and correspondingly too hard to be an irrealist. Either way, it can be seen that to substitute the

question whether being true, in some area of discourse, consists in being superassertible, to the question whether the judgements in this area can be true independently of ourselves, merely masks the real structure of the debates and is liable to be misleading.

But, again, why prefer the soft line? Well, nothing exists unless all its parts or aspects exist, *i.e.*, unless it “wholly” exists; and similarly nothing obtains or is true unless it “wholly” obtains or is “wholly” true. To say that the existence/obtaining/truth of something X depends on its being the case that P (*e.g.*, on our having the capacity to know/conceive it) is at least to imply that X wouldn’t exist/obtain/be true if it were not the case that P . For this to be true, it suffices that some part of X is such that it would not exist/obtain/be true if it were not the case that P . Thus, my preference for the soft line rests on what I take to be a natural reading of the claim that the existence/obtaining/truth of X depends on its being the case that P . Taking the hard line requires that this same claim be read as implying that no part of X would exist/obtain/be true if it were not the case that P , and I find this unnatural.

Observe further that something which is not completely *independent* from our capacity to know/conceive it would seem to be at least less than fully *real*. By the same token, it could be said, something which is not completely *dependent* on our capacity to know/conceive it would seem to be less than fully *unreal*. There is admittedly an unavoidable part of arbitrariness in the way one chooses to describe the status of something (the existence/obtaining/truth of) which is both partly dependent on and partly independent from our capacity to know/conceive it. There is a lot of space between the “fully real” and the “fully unreal”, which suggests that the simple contrast between realism and irrealism should eventually be replaced by some *graded* notion of reality/irreality, allowing one to acknowledge that some things/facts are more (or less) real than others. This is not the place to explore this idea in any detail, but since truth is *not* a graded notion, this may be a further indication that any attempt to reduce the Fact-or-Judgement realism debates to disputes concerning the nature of truth is fundamentally misguided.

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