

What Could Anti-Realism About Ordinary Psychology Possibly Be?*

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Descartes observed that you could not lucidly doubt that you exist nor that you are a thinking thing. It would follow that there can be no lucid doubt about the reality of those psychological states and attributes whose possession is distinctive of thinkers, par excellence their being subject to the various kinds of doxastic and conative states involved in goal-directed thought. Thus it seems a short step from the Cogito to a form of realism about ordinary psychology. Yet many leading modern philosophers—for instance, Dennett, Stich, the Churchlands and, above all, Quine—have been united, notwithstanding other differences, in a tendency to scepticism about the reality of (explanation in terms of) intentional states.

The connection with the Cogito explains why such scepticism seems like a contradiction of the obvious. It seems to flout the characteristic self-evidence of intentional states—the fact that a subject's being in such a state is, as it seems, in typical cases effortlessly, non-empirically and non-inferentially available to them. Surely each of us does have—really have—beliefs, desires, hopes, intentions, wishes, and so on. Can't we each just tell that we do? Don't we do so all the time?

* Specific acknowledgements are footnoted in the normal way but I'd like to record one general debt at the outset. My paper is in effect a sequel to Paul Boghossian's "The Status of Content", The Philosophical Review XCIX (1990), pp. 157-84. There, Boghossian gave the first sustained attention to the general issue of the possible varieties, best formulation and dialectical stability of content-irrealist views. In addition to putting forward a number of important arguments, his essay achieved a broad overview of the possible positions and a framework for thinking about them which, while qualified and extended in certain respects to my own purposes, have provided the groundwork for the line of argument below.

Besides, how, save in ways which involve self-ascribing such states, are we to make sense of most of what we do? And how else are we ever to take decisions about what best to do?

That, though, is more protest than argument. To emphasise the 'self-evidence' of ordinary psychological states to their subjects really comes to no more than an emphasis on the deep entrenchment of the phenomenon of psychological avowal: the fact that people acquire a propensity, on being educated in ordinary psychological talk, spontaneously to affirm claims concerning their own intentional states which for the most part, both to themselves and others, seem—by the standards of the practice—to make decent sense of their behaviour and projects. But how we talk is one thing and what the world is like is another. It is, so it may be contended, quite another matter what metaphysical status should be accorded to such claims: whether anything real answers to them. And if not, it's a further question again whether the linguistic practices in which such claims participate are thereby shown to be somehow essentially corrupt or whether, rather, they have a legitimate content and purpose which can be dissociated from a realist view of ordinary psychology.

Although I will review some contemporary influences in the anti-realist direction shortly, my goal in what follows is less to explore the case against psychological realism than to develop an antinomy for psychological anti-realism. In other areas, anti-realism has assumed each of a variety of—error-theoretic, expressivist, instrumentalist, fictionalist and verificationist¹—shapes. I shall

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

develop reasons to doubt whether, when it comes to ordinary psychology, there is any form of anti-realist thesis which is locally stable and rationally tenable.

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A light characterisation of 'realism' and 'anti-realism' will do to get the discussion started. Let a realist about a given region of discourse hold two things:

- (i) that its ingredient statements have a content which fits them for the representation of real states of affairs;
- (ii) that the world is furnished with states of affairs of the kind which such statements are fitted to represent.

Each of these claims is distinctively denied by some of the well-known anti-realist paradigms listed above. Expressivism and scientific instrumentalism respectively deny that a targeted discourse deals in genuinely representational—truth-apt—contents. Fictionalism and error-theory allow that the discourse is representational in content but then deny that the characteristic objects, states or properties, purportedly denoted, or attributed, within the discourse are real, insisting that the world contains no 'truth-makers' of the appropriate kind.

Anti-realists about ordinary psychology have typically directly denied the second realist component—that there are genuinely any such things as the items which ordinary intentional psychology distinctively seems to call for. But since a successful attack on the first component—the representationality of psychological discourse—would enjoin rejection of any appropriate category of corresponding states of affairs, it would seem that anti-realists of whatever stripe must converge on such a denial.²

² Though this will need qualification later—see note 21 below.

One significant challenge to psychological realism in recent philosophy derives from content anti-realism. The putative states of affairs which intentional psychological explanation trades in are individuated by the joint specification of a type of attitude—belief, desire, hope, etc.—and a content [that p], the explanatory potential of such states varying as a function of each ingredient in the pairing. It follows that if a general anti-realism about content is correct—if the world contains no real semantic properties—then a complete inventory of items in the world, and of the characteristics which they can possess, will contain no mention of the states characteristically featured in ordinary psychological explanations.

Much discussed arguments for the unreality of content include Kripke's sceptical argument, advanced in Wittgenstein's name, and Quine's arguments for the indeterminacy of translation.³ Putnam's model-theoretic arguments against realism have also been given such an interpretation⁴ (contrary to Putnam's own belief that their effectiveness is restricted to use against a metaphysical-realist antagonist.) Each of these lines of argument is, familiarly, criticisable in detail, and has indeed been roundly criticised. But an underlying worry has not gone away—the worry that we have to hand no satisfactory conception of what contents and content-properties might amount to in a world as physics conceives it, and that such a world is what we actually inhabit.

³ The principal sources are Saul Kripke, Wittgenstein on Rules and Private language, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1982; and ch. 2 of W.V.O Quine, Word and Object, Cambridge, Mass., MIT, 1960.

⁴ See ch 3 of Hilary Putnam, Reason, Truth and History, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1981. The latter is in many ways a more satisfactory argument than that of Putnam's famous "Models and Reality" , Journal of Symbolic Logic 45 (1980), pp. 464-82.

However, the consideration which has actually moved most sceptics about the reality of the intentional has been another: the well-known concern about causal over-crowding. It is, plausibly, part of our intuitive understanding of ordinary psychological explanation that it is a kind of causal explanation: more specifically, that the beliefs, desires, and other intentional states of a subject which collectively explain certain of her actions are rightly viewed as their efficient causes.⁵ But if someone's actions—like any bit of behaviour—are viewed as ultimately physical events and processes (and how else?), then this is uncomfortable. For ordinary thought has it that any physical event or process must admit of complete determination by its physical causes if it has causes at all. So now actions seem to have too many causes: any purposive action of mine is apparently caused not just by the intentional states which purportedly explain it, but by parallel neural and other bodily happenings.

There are some salient strategies of reconciliation. One is to try to stabilise the view that ordinary psychological explanations are not really causal after all. Another—rather interesting—proposal would deny the identity of the explananda in the two kinds of case: to insist on a distinction, for the purposes of explanation, between action, strictly so regarded, which is the province of intentional psychology, and tokens of behaviour whose explanation need not be psychological at all. A third, it hardly needs saying, is to work out some stable form of reductive

⁵ Of course there is a 'hermeneutic' tradition which denies this. But the great difficulty with the hermeneutic view, as Davidson and others have emphasised, is that it seems powerless to explain how cases are possible where a subject possesses beliefs and desires which would make perfectly good psychological sense of particular elements in her behaviour—a wife, for instance, would like her husband dead, and believes that she would have a good chance of killing him by toppling the ladder on which he is standing—but where the actually correct explanation does not go through these attitudes, or is even non-intentional—she leans on the ladder thoughtlessly, for instance, and so causes his death accidentally. It seems manifest that this is a causal distinction: that the accident—suppose that is what it is—contrasts with the murder by being caused differently; specifically, by not having the homicidal desire and a set of beliefs about ladders, human balancing, etc., among its causes. By the same token, to conceive of the act as murder is to conceive of it as caused by those intentional states.

physicalism—to earn the right to deny that the intentional psychological antecedents of a piece of behaviour are distinct from all its neural and physical causes. But none of these proposals has yet been presented in convincing detail. Each is open to plausible extant objections.⁶ So it is hard, in the present state of play, to dismiss a sceptical response to the problem which disputes the validity of the explanations offered by intentional psychology—and hence, since it is of the essence of intentional states to be explanatory of action, the reality of the states that such explanations purportedly depict.

These two lines of doubt—the worry about what content and content-bearing states could be in a world conceived as purely physical, and the concern about causal overcrowding—tend towards

⁶ In particular, I doubt there is any comfort to be had from the kind of vague blend of thoughts about supervenience and token-token identity which, one gets the impression, is still felt by many philosophers to offer some promise for a successful version of the third. As usually understood, the supervenience of the psychological upon the physical requires that, as a matter of necessity, any change in a subject's psychological condition must be attended by a change in her physical condition. To be sure, this principle seems to call for some kind of physicalist underpinning, for it would be utterly mysterious why it should hold if dualism were true. How could change in one ontological realm (metaphysically) necessitate change in another? Dualism has it that the mental and the physical are metaphysically distinct existences; there is therefore no room them to be linked as a matter of necessity. So it may seem that only physicalism, of however attenuated a form, can make sense of psychological-on-physical supervenience. On more careful reflection, however, it comes to seem unclear how token-token physicalism can make any sense of it either. To be sure, if my present headache actually is some token physical condition of my central nervous system, then had I not had the headache, I would have been in a different physical condition. But psychological-on-physical supervenience, in the form that is usually accepted, requires that a change in which psychological predicates may be truly applied to me requires change in a complete description of my physical state, where the latter description is precisely conceived as a compendium of the types of physical state I am in. Token-token physicalism cannot explain the validity of that principle. It requires that if I had not had the headache, I would have been in a different physical state; but it is silent on whether that different state could not still have been of a type with that I am actually in, so allows that my then physical state could have been in every way indistinguishable from my actual physical state. Psychological-on-physical supervenience, as ordinarily understood, proscribes that.

The matter needs further discussion but I suspect that only type-type physicalism can make sense of the usual understanding of psychological-on-physical supervenience.

a direct rejection of realism's second tenet (in the light characterisation above): the belief in the worldly reality of the items which intentional psychology distinctively calls for. A third important anti-realist argument challenges the first tenet: the representationality of ordinary psychological discourse. It derives from considerations of cognitive command⁷ and the indeterminacy of psychological interpretation. The idea of the realist about a given region of discourse—unless pessimistic enough to think that its truths are altogether beyond our ken—is that soberly and responsibly to practise in that region is to enter into a kind of representational mode of cognitive function, comparable in relevant respects to taking a photograph or making a wax impression of a key. The realist conceives that certain matters stand thus and so independently of us and our practice—matters comparable to the photographed scene and the contours of the key. We then engage in a certain process—we put ourselves at the mercy, so to speak, of the standards of belief-formation and 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 on our minds which, in the best case, appropriately matches the independently standing state of affairs.

Philosophers such as the early Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin tried to be very definite about this type of conception—probably too definite. But even left vague, it does have certain quite definite obligations. If we take photographs of the same scene which somehow turn out to represent it in incompatible ways, there has to have been some kind of shortcoming in the function of one of the cameras, or in the way it was used. If the wax impressions we take of a single key turn out to be of such a shape that no one key can fit them both, then again there has to have been some fault in the way one of us went about it, or in the materials used. The price you pay for taking the idea of representation in the serious way the realist wants to take it is that when subjects'

⁷ I introduced this notion in Crispin Wright, Truth and Objectivity, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard, 1992. See chapters 3 and 4 for discussion.

representations prove to conflict, then there has to have been something amiss with the way they were arrived at or with their vehicle—the wax, the camera, or the thinker.⁸

A realist about intentional psychology is accordingly obliged to hold that disagreements about a subject's intentional states, since they involve a clash between what purport to be substantial representations, have somehow to involve defects of process or materials, as it were: that at least one of the parties to the disagreement has to be guilty of a deficiency in the way she arrives at her view, or to be somehow constitutionally unfit. It follows that to lack any assurance that there has to be such a defect of "process or materials" is to be in a position where the realist—seriously representational⁹—view of intentional psychological discourse is unwarranted. But the well-known thesis of the indeterminacy of radical psychological interpretation suggests exactly that there can be no such assurance. The claim of that thesis is that, in the nature of the methodology which they follow, interpreters of a given subject's sayings and doings who proceed irreproachably can nonetheless wind up with mutually inconsistent yet unimprovable conceptions of the subject's overall psychological set. If nothing in the methodology of psychological interpretation constrains its best products to within uniqueness, then it would appear to follow that forming opinions in a manner constrained by that methodology is not, in the sense the realist contends, a substantially representational mode of cognitive function.

There is an escape route: we must either grant that conclusion or allow that the truth values of such opinions may transcend decision by the methods of radical interpretation. In that case the

⁸ Qualifications are needed here to accommodate the possibility of vagueness in the content of conflicting representations. However it would take us too far afield to go into the details. For discussion, see Truth and Objectivity, pp.

⁹ "Seriously" here marks a contrast which it will be convenient to reserve until section 5 below.

price of realism becomes what Quine famously stigmatised as the Myth of the Museum.¹⁰ The basic thought behind the idea of cognitive command is that a discourse counts as seriously representational—and the formation of opinions expressible within it counts correspondingly as a representational mode of intellectual function—only if disagreements betoken cognitive shortcoming. But such a shortcoming need not pertain to the way in which opinions are formed unless the truths in question are ones which best methods invariably suffice to disclose. The so-styled "Myth of the Museum" is just the specialisation to psychology of the ordinary realist idea that some domains of fact may strictly transcend the available evidence, which may allow of radically different constructions—theories—of how the facts in question stand. If such were the correct understanding of ordinary psychological claims, then the third anti-realist argument could not get a grip—the indeterminacy of psychological interpretation would just be an instance of the under-determination of empirical theory by evidence: a consideration which, of itself, has no evident immediate bearing on the viability of a realist view of empirical theory.

The third anti-realist argument thus belongs with a broadly interpretationist understanding of ordinary psychology, whereby the correct account of a subject's motives for an action is just whatever proves to belong with the best overall interpretation of her attitudes and other psychological states. By contrast, the first two anti-realist concerns are driven by the belief in an objective, comprehensive natural (causal) order and a view of psychological explanation which sees it as, above all else, an attempt to tell truths about aspects of that order. The difficulties they point up—about what content-bearing states could be in a physical world, and about how their causal-explanatory claims can be sustained without 'overcrowding'—are then immediate. But their background metaphysics and the broad view of psychology which they presuppose are actually in tension with the interpretationism of the third argument. For there is absolutely no reason to

¹⁰ See pp. 27-8 of W.V.O. Quine, Ontological Relativity and Other Essays, New York and London, Columbia U.P., 1969.

suppose that the real truth about what causally sustains and produces what, is just whatever a (by whatever criteria) best interpretation would represent it as being.

Another way of making essentially the same point is to observe that one who sustains the third anti-realist argument actually cuts the ground from under the other two. To sustain the third argument is to conclude that ordinary psychology is not really in the business of depiction of the world, that the products of psychological interpretation are not fitted to represent or mis-represent anything real. But the complaint of the other anti-realist arguments was precisely, in effect, one of misrepresentation: that ordinary psychology calls for states and processes whose nature cannot be reconciled with the (assumed) physicality of the world, or postulates causes which unacceptably 'overcrowd' the aetiology of ordinary behaviour. One in the grip of the assumptions which spur these complaints will be regarding ordinary psychology as incredible; but if the third argument is right, credibility—that is, plausibility as serious representation—is simply not psychology's stock-in-trade in the first place.

Our leading question is what a psychological anti-realist should say—positively—about ordinary psychological discourse and the purported explanations it provides for. But now we see that this question needs to be taken with care, for there is reason to expect that the answer may vary, depending on the motivation for the anti-realism: on whether it is metaphysical, driven by the pressure put on the prima facie ontology and explanatory claims of ordinary psychology by a background physicalism; or non-cognitivist, driven by consideration of the constraint on representational content involved in the idea of cognitive command, an acceptance of the indeterminacy of radical interpretation and a repudiation of the Myth of the Museum. The complaints of the metaphysical anti-realist implicitly involve taking a stand on something—the representationality of ordinary psychological discourse—which the non-cognitivist rejects. We must be wary of assuming that all the options open to them are the same.

Let's first consider the options for metaphysical anti-realism. To accept that either of the first two challenges is successful would be to accept that ordinary psychological ascriptions concern nothing real, and that ordinary psychological explanations depict no genuine causes. That would seem to present a choice between, on the one hand, viewing ordinary psychological discourse as, like phlogiston-theory or any discredited empirical theory, hopelessly compromised—the well-known eliminativist response—or, on the other, a conservative response, broadly comparable to expressivism in ethics and fictionalism in the philosophies of science and mathematics, which will try to make a case that ordinary intentional psychological discourse is acceptable, even while conceding that it serves to represent no real matters of fact, by finding for it some other validly heuristic or valuably instrumental role. On the latter type of view, the legitimacy of moral, scientific-theoretical and pure mathematical claims, for instance, need not depend on there being real states of affairs which they depict; it is enough that they are appropriately disciplined, and serve some legitimate purpose. There are other things for useful discourses to do besides state facts.

The special obstacles that stand in the way of reconciling any proposal of this kind about ordinary psychology with a metaphysical anti-realist motivation have not been widely appreciated. What sort of purpose might intentional psychology, divorced of any claim to represent reality, really serve? One immediately thinks of the kind of instrumentalist or fictionalist "stance" idea, associated with the writings of Dennett.¹¹ Dennett's key thought was that the rationalisation of others'

¹¹ See especially ch. 1, "Intentional Systems", of Daniel C. Dennett, Brainstorms (Montgomery, Vermont: Bradford, 1978) and his The Intentional Stance (Cambridge, Mass., MIT/Bradford, 1987.) There is scope for some debate whether Dennett himself really intended his ideas to be taken in an anti-realist spirit. But whatever the view of its author, the idea of "the intentional stance" has been widely regarded as epitomising a kind of anti-realism about psychology, supposedly apt for a situation in which the real explanations of the behaviour of certain 'agents' would be too complex to be useful for practical purposes.

behaviour within the familiar ordinary psychological categories can prove an economical way of anticipating it—that it is, for instance, much easier to predict the moves of a good chess-playing computer if you just treat it as an intentional strategist rather than merely as a physical mechanism, and that the utility of such treatment is quite independent of its fidelity, presumed or otherwise, to anything that is happening with the machine. It is not sufficiently realised that a fictionalism based on this idea is not even a starter—at least, not as a fully general account of the role of intentional psychological idiom. The crucial tension emerges as soon as one puts aside the other-directed uses of ordinary psychology—by which Dennett himself was preoccupied—and focuses instead on one’s own case. It is not just that it is difficult to think of the most ingrained elements of one’s own self-conception as accepted merely as the components in a self-directed "stance"—it is not clear that it is even coherent to do so. For is not such a stance itself individuated by its content—by the attitudes one ascribes to oneself? And must we not take it as a matter of real fact that—when one is—one is taking such a stance? If not, what?—a second-order stance? What could that be? It is one thing to be advised to take a broadly instrumentalist view of a particular type of theory; quite another to be implicitly told that one must also take an instrumentalist view of the taking of the instrumentalist view. In short: self-consciously to deploy a complex of supposed fictions in the Dennettian manner is already to enter into a complex attitudinal state—in no relevant way distinguishable from regular intentional states like hope, belief and desire—which there is then no remaining room to construe as fictional or merely instrumental.¹²

Another very familiar anti-realist paradigm—that provided by the expressivism in ethics originally championed by such writers as A.J. Ayer and R.M. Hare¹³—also teeters into

¹² For related doubts about Dennett's proposal, see pp. 58 and following of Robert Brandom, Making It Explicit, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1994

¹³ The loci classici are of course the famous “Critique of Ethics and Theology” offered in Chapter six of Ayer's Language, Truth and Logic (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936); and R.M. Hare's The Language of Morals, (Oxford:

incoherence when applied to ordinary psychology under the aegis of metaphysical anti-realism. This might be thought obvious: after all, and as remarked above, the motivation of the metaphysical anti-realist presupposes a representational interpretation of psychological discourse. However this fast-track to the untenability of expressivism in this context overlooks the possibility that the situation be viewed as a reductio of the representational interpretation, with expressivism then proposed as a saving—perhaps revisionary—account. But the real difficulty is only a little less immediate. It is of the essence of any expressivist view to rely on a distinction between genuine assertions and other forms of speech act. But any such distinction must ultimately be explained by reference to certain characteristic intentional states of participants in the discourse in question—that is why moral expressivists, for instance, have thought they could excuse ethical pronouncements any genuinely assertoric role on the ground that they are characteristically aimed at the expression not of beliefs but of certain distinctive feelings and at shaping the corresponding feelings of others. Genuinely assertoric discourses, that is to say, will be marked off from merely expressive discourses by systematic differences in pragmatics which will simply not be stateable without recourse to the categories of intentional psychology. So the very statement of the detail of such a view will demand the possibility of genuine assertions about matters in that province.

Thus each of the classic conservative anti-realist options—conceding the large-scale literal falsity of ordinary psychology but making a case for it as useful fiction, and denying that it deals in

Oxford University Press 1952). Ayer and Hare proposed the strict expressivist view that moral discourse, properly understood, is only apparently assertoric, and that moral utterances are characteristically governed by a different kind of illocutionary force, serving to fit them for a quite different role than the statement of fact – the expression of attitude, endorsement of norms, or whatever. This strict expressivist line is softened in the more recent treatments of Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard. Chapter 6, "Evaluations, Projections and Quasi-realism", of Blackburn's Spreading the Word, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1984) remains the best introduction to his view; Alan Gibbard's ideas are developed systematically in his Wise Choices, Apt Feelings, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). It may be wondered, however, whether their proposals would not do better to travel under the banner of 'minimalism' in the sense shortly to follow.

genuine (truth-apt) assertions at all—would seem to be unplayable. So it appears that the metaphysical anti-realist is forced back on non-conservatism—on eliminativism. One who holds that either of the first two anti-realist challenges is ultimately compelling must simply regard psychology as a primitive and discreditable form of theory of the causes of human behaviour, which we should aim to supersede.

Psychological eliminativism has achieved something of a reputation for dialectical resilience. But I think this is undeserved—that it is quite quickly seen to be self-hobbling. Note that one of its ramifications is that since the reality of linguistic content depends on that of intentional states, it too has to go out of the window along with the psychological. This point would be immediate on a broadly Gricean account of meaning. According to such an account, the meaning of any expression is actually constituted in certain characteristic self-reflexive intentions possessed by those who use it. But we need take no view on that. A sufficient but less committal reflection is merely that, whatever the correct account in detail, linguistic meanings depend for their existence on conventions. And, as opposed to mere regularities, conventions—whatever the proper analysis of the notion—have somehow to be constituted in the beliefs and intentions of those who are party to them. So strip the world of intentional states and properties and you strip it of semantic ones too.

I am naturally aware that this observation—that linguistic meanings are hostage along with content-bearing attitudes—would be unlikely to produce much of a frissant in actual eliminativists. In particular, it would presumably not dismay a thoroughgoing Quinean. But note that what eliminativism puts in jeopardy is not (merely) the legitimacy of treating meanings as objects—the point on which Quine's own critique of the intensional was largely focused—but the whole idea of expressions' having meaning at all; that is, their being semantically differentiated in specific ways. There is considerable doubt about the coherence of the resulting position. The eliminativist view is that ordinary psychology is massively false. That fact has to consist in the falsity of the overwhelming majority of its characteristic type of claims, and those claims are identified precisely by their characteristic type of content. If there is no such thing as linguistic content, how is the

eliminativist to explain what exactly are the limits of her proposal—which precisely are the kinds of spurious explanatory claim which it is proposed we should try to supersede and which we may retain?

There is a related, more general point. It becomes wholly unclear, once linguistic meanings are jettisoned along with intentional states, how we are to conceive of the determinants of truth-value. It is—or so one would suppose (with Aristotle)—the merest platitude that the truth of a statement depends on whether what it says is so, is so. So its truth depends on what a statement says. If there is no such thing as what a statement says, how can there be any such thing as its truth or falsity (let alone the massive falsity of an entire discourse)?

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

'P' is true if and only if P

as putatively capturing the determinants of truth independently of any play with semantic notions. But if so, they are deluded. The Disquotational Scheme is merely another way of articulating the Aristotelian platitude, made possible by the unstated assumption that 'P' says that P.¹⁴

In sum: eliminativism about the intentional requires semantic eliminativism, and the latter has two unwelcome consequences for a proponent of the former: first it throws away the materials for a proper circumscription of the discourse to be supplanted; second it undermines the truth-

¹⁴ There are, no doubt, ways of concealing the semantic character of that necessary assumption—for instance, one may express it as the assumption that "the metalanguage contains the object language." But for languages to overlap in the relevant way is just for lexically equivalent expressions within them to be semantically equivalent.

predicate—thus again, in another way, leaving eliminativism without the conceptual resources to identify its own central contention: the massive falsity of ordinary psychology.¹⁵

It might be rejoined, as far as the second point is concerned, that all we really have any right to conclude is that any psychological, ergo semantical eliminativist owes an account of what determines truth-value which implicates no semantic parameters—in effect, that she needs to be able to provide room for truth-values without appeal to truth-conditions, semantically conceived. Well, alright. But we have been given not the slightest inkling of any such account nor any reason whatever to think that a satisfactory account could ever be given.—so the idea that there is any such identifiable contention as the massive falsity of ordinary psychology remains a mere article of eliminativist faith. This is not the familiar grumble that eliminativists are characteristically content to make it an article of faith that some non-intentional explanatory theory will somehow one day supplant psychology as an account of the sources of human action. My point is rather that their 'faith' has to extend further: it has to extend to the very existence of the trademark claim, viz. that ordinary psychology is massively false. And in that case, to hold that there is good reason to accept psychological eliminativism emerges as a commitment to a package which involves holding that there is, as things stand, no good reason to accept that any such thesis as that psychological discourse is massively false, and should be abandoned, so much as exists. To have to take it on faith that science can develop to repair the gaps left by a philosophical thesis is one thing; but to have to take it on faith that one so much as has a thesis in the first place is quite another. It is no predicament for a serious philosopher to put herself in.

¹⁵ The observation that error-theoretic views in general are committed to the reality of content—specifically, truth-conditions—and that this leads error-theory about semantics in particular into aporia is nicely made in "The Status of Content"; see pp. 167 and 174.

If all this is right, then one inclined to sustain either of the metaphysical challenges to intentional psychological realism faces an acute bind. For there appears to be no clearly viable form—since if not eliminativism, nor some form of fictionalism, nor some expressivist account, then what?—for a coherent, metaphysically motivated anti-realism about ordinary psychology to assume. But how do matters play if the emphasis is on the third anti-realist argument outlined earlier—the alleged failure of ordinary psychological discourse to satisfy the constraint of cognitive command, and hence to qualify as seriously representational? We have already observed that a side-effect of this—non-cognitivist—version of anti-realism is to undermine the two metaphysical challenges, since the ontology, or explanations, of ordinary psychology can be regarded as incredible—as the metaphysical challenges suggest—only if the discourse is indeed rightly regarded as making a claim to represent what things there really are and what causally explains what. So the non-cognitivist does not need to worry about how those challenges might be accommodated if sustained. But what exactly should be her positive view? And can it escape binds of its own?

Well, let's take stock. Eliminativism and fictionalism agree about the literal falsity of the massive majority of ordinary psychological statements; and an expressivist account would deny that such 'statements' are so much as truth-apt—are genuine statements at all. We have seen that each of these proposals is threatened with dialectical instability. So a better form of psychological anti-realism will have to dispute neither the truth-aptitude of psychological claims, nor the truth of very many of them. The non-cognitivist proposal should thus be a conservative account, but one differing from fictionalism and expressivism by allowing that we are perfectly entitled to regard those claims which are warranted by the standards of ordinary intentional psychology as both genuine statements and literally true.

Recent work offers a prima facie hospitable framework for such a proposal. According to the conceptions of truth and truth-aptness defended by writers such as Paul Horwich and myself¹⁶ any sentence is a candidate for truth which is possessed of assertoric content, and possession of assertoric content is essentially merely a matter of meeting certain surface syntactic and disciplinary constraints—in essence, assertoric contents are ones which are capable of significant embedding within constructions such as negation, the conditional, and in contexts of propositional attitude, and whose acceptability is subject to acknowledged standards of warrant. When such standards are satisfied, that will then suffice, other things being equal, (defeasibly) to justify the claim that the content in question is true.¹⁷ If this kind of approach is accepted, almost all the areas which have traditionally provoked realist/anti-realist debate—ethics, aesthetics, intentional psychology, mathematics, theoretical science, and so on—will turn out to traffic in truth-evaluable contents, which moreover, when the disciplinary standards proper to the discourse are satisfied, we are going to be entitled to claim to be true.

None of this helps the non-cognitivist, though, unless an acceptance that intentional psychological claims which are warranted by ordinary standards may be regarded as literally true is somehow less than a commitment to psychological realism. But what, in that case, is realism? According to the type of account I favour,¹⁸ the question most fruitfully taken to be at issue

¹⁶ Paul Horwich, Truth (Oxford, Clarendon Press 2nd. edition 1998) and Crispin Wright, Truth and Objectivity. There are however important differences between the views of truth proposed. Horwich outlines some of his disagreements in his "Realism Minus Truth", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research LVI vol. 4 (1996), pp. 877-83.

¹⁷ These claims would also be accepted by more traditional deflationary conceptions of truth, according to which the word, 'true', expresses no real attribute of the items in its range of predication. Horwich and I are not deflationists in that sense.

¹⁸ —and develop in Truth and Objectivity—

between realist and anti-realist views about a discourse is not whether it deals in truth-apt claims, nor whether those of its claims which are justified in the light of its own disciplinary standards may defensibly (if defeasibly) be regarded as true, but rather what kind of truth its statements are—as all sides can agree—fitted for. The suggestion, in other words, is that the justification of realist, or anti-realist views about a particular area is to be sought by attending to the local characteristics of truth. There are a number of such relevant characteristics: evidence-transcendence, response-dependence, width of explanatory potential ("cosmological role"), for instance—a number of realism-relevant ways in which what is implicated in a statement's being true may differ depending on the region of discourse to which it belongs. The claim of the psychological non-cognitivist can thus be that what the claims of ordinary psychology are not fitted for is the kind of substantial correspondence property aspired to by the realist: that it will emerge, when proper controls are placed on such claims, that the discourse of intentional psychology does not deal in contents which are apt for the representation of aspects of objective reality.

As I just said, there are a number of plausible such controls. But the one directly relevant in the present context is, of course, the constraint of cognitive command, for it was this that the third anti-realist argument directly concerned. Let's look at this idea a little further.

It is a platitude concerning convergence and representation that

Representationally functioning systems, targeted on the same subject matter, can produce divergent output only if working on divergent input or if they function less than perfectly.¹⁹

Now, in any discourse over which truth operates at all, there can be no good objection to its paraphrase in terms of "fitting the facts", "telling it like it is", and so on—but if the discourse exerts cognitive command, then an important analogy is established between the idea of correspondence

¹⁹ Cf. Truth and Objectivity p. 146.

between statement and world implicitly featured in such talk and the, as I should like to say, more full-blooded use of the notion of representation as it features in the representation platitude. If a discourse exerts cognitive command, that has the effect of "beefing up" the idea of truth as correspondence in just the kind of realism-relevant way needed. The idea of correspondence to fact takes on a characteristic which minimal truth-aptitude does not impose, but one it had better have if there is to be real substance in the idea that, in using the discourse in ways which respect the standards of assertoric warrant by which it is informed, we function as representational systems, responsive to states of affairs which, when we are successful, our beliefs and statements serve to portray.²⁰

There is no doubt much about this proposal, and the general strategy it follows, which will stand further explanation. But the relevant point for our immediate purpose is that if the misgivings bruited above about fictionalism, expressivism and eliminativism are well-founded, then this general direction would seem to represent the only hope for a coherent psychological anti-realism. Let us appropriate the term minimalism about an assertoric discourse for the view that it carries, when correctly conceived, no realist aspiration—that its ingredient claims are merely minimally truth-apt and have no further characteristic which should encourage the idea that they are full-fledged representations, or misrepresentations, of aspects of an objective world.²¹ Then the proper outlet

²⁰ Truth and Objectivity p. 147.

²¹ We now need to make the qualification advertised in note 2 above. Earlier it was suggested that anything worth regarding as a form of psychological anti-realism would involve the denial of the worldly reality of psychological states of affairs. But we have just observed that the identification of truth with 'correspondence to fact' is at one level a platitude, so that to grant that we are justified in taking certain psychological claims to be true is already a commitment to recognising the existence, in some sense, of psychological states of affairs. The necessary qualification, then, has to be that it is only in a platitudinous, metaphysically non-committal sense that an anti-realist may countenance such states of affairs.

for the psychological non-cognitivist would seem to be minimalism. Such a theorist should allow that psychological discourse is genuinely assertoric, highly disciplined and thereby sustains the introduction over its characteristic claims of a predicate with all the essential features of a truth-predicate. But she should insist that nothing is true of psychological discourse which should motivate the interpretation of this predicate in terms of the imagery of correspondence to external, objective matters, in the fashion characteristic of realism, rather than as a projection out of its own internal discipline.

6

However there is an immediate challenge to this minimalist proposal too. Discourses for which minimalism is the correct view ought peacefully to co-exist alongside others which are more realism-apt. Indeed, that is the whole point: ordinary psychology is supposed to be able, on this proposal, to be credited with literally true claims without any risk of competition with the truths of physical science, conceived as by realism. The problem is that while such a view might be all very well when psychology is interpreted as in the hermeneutic tradition—the construction of heuristic patterns from the shards, as it were, of agents' behaviour—it is unclear how competition can be avoided when it is viewed as making causal claims. For then—the charge is—it enters the space occupied by physiology and, ultimately, physics. Just this was the cardinal point behind the second metaphysical anti-realist argument. And it was reinforced by the reflection that the causality of the

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

explanations offered by ordinary psychology is not just an assumption of its critics but is apparently implicit in the very notion of acting on a specific set of motives, which seems to be an essential ingredient in ordinary psychological explanation.

The challenge is thus that the causality of ordinary psychological explanations requires their hypotheses to carry a content which already puts them out of the running for minimalist treatment: that once a discourse is regarded as making causal claims, it must be entered into the competition for correct depiction of the real-world causal order and sink or swim accordingly. Psychology, so viewed, can no more be excused all substantial representational purport than astrology. Minimalism is not an option for theories of the causes of things. Of course this is to presuppose—an assumption noted earlier—a realist (and indeed monist) view of the causal order. But psychological minimalism will be the more competitive if it is not vulnerable to the truth of that presupposition.

I do not know if this challenge can be satisfactorily met. Certainly it will be bad news for minimalism generally if any discourse in which prima facie causal claims are to be found is immediately ruled to be outside its compass. Even so intuitively promising a candidate for minimalism as discourse about comedy has its share of prima facie causal claims. Consider, for instance:

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

and

...very little of what passes for comedy achieves timelessness. But some does. Both Python and Fawlty Towers each offer occasional cameos of such irresistible humour that they transcend the unspoken assumptions and attitudes of the milieu of their origins and attain an eternal appeal.

Similarly causal-seeming claims are commonplace for the boring, obscene, delightful and for various kinds of value. If minimalism is ever to be an option, these kinds of claim must be shown to allow of interpretation as non-competitive with those of natural science—and this for reasons

other than the presumed reducibility (by whatever standards) of the distinctive predicates involved to predicates of (physical) nature.

If this cannot be done, we can get off the bus right here: each of minimalism, eliminativism, expressivism and fictionalism will have been shown to be *prima facie* unsustainable as anti-realist accounts of the status of ordinary psychology. No other type of account seems foreseeable. So we should conclude that, whatever force may seem to attach to the motivating arguments for anti-realism, and whether or not they can be satisfactorily independently addressed, there simply is no coherent anti-realism about psychology—that we have no alternative but to acquiesce in ordinary psychological discourse under a face-value construal as providing the resources for true, potentially irreducible accounts of our natures and the (causal) springs of our actions.

What though if the challenge can be met? What if a careful examination of the *prima facie* causal-explanatory claims made in discourses, like those about the comic, obscene and delightful, where minimalism is at its most attractive, turns up considerations and distinctions which somehow draw its sting, so that one who makes a claim like either of the two examples above says nothing which either competes with a physical explanation of the explanandum concerned (physically construed) or is hostage to physicalistic construal? And what if ordinary psychological explanations turn out to belong on the right side of those considerations and distinctions, whatever they are? In that case, for all we have so far said, psychological minimalism would seem to present itself as far and away the most promising vehicle for psychological anti-realism, providing simultaneously both a way of finessing the first two, metaphysical anti-realist arguments and an accommodation with the third. Or are there other drawbacks to consider?

7

When minimalism is accepted as a coherent theoretical alternative, a realist view of a region of discourse may be characterised as any which holds that, in addition to the syntactic and disciplinary features acknowledged by minimalism, it is proper to think of truth in the discourse in question in

robustly representational terms. So—according to the understanding of what that comes to with which we are presently working—a realist will maintain that cognitive command holds for that discourse.²² The argument to be developed now proceeds through two observations. The first is this:

Thesis 1:

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

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

It is a priori that differences of opinion formulated within the discourse, unless excusable as a result of vagueness in a disputed statement, or in the standards of acceptability, or variation in personal evidence thresholds, so to speak, will involve something which may properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming.²³

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

S says that P

²² Note that it is not being claimed that its exhibition of cognitive command suffices for a discourse to be robustly representational: the claim is that cognitive command is a commitment of realism, not that it is constitutive.

²³ Truth and Objectivity p. 144.

and assume that such claims exert cognitive command: that it is a priori that, unless vagueness is implicated in one of the ways allowed for, any disagreement about such a statement will involve some form of cognitive shortcoming - some element of ignorance, error or prejudice. Well, it is obvious enough—again, without presupposing the correctness of any broadly Gricean necessary-and-sufficient conditions analysis of what it is for an expression to have any particular specific content—that one way in which such a statement may fall into dispute—between a pair of radical interpreters, for instance—is if the disputants have arrived at quite different views about the attitudinal states that tend to provide the stage-setting for uses of S. In that case, it may happen that all hands can agree that the disputants are right to hold their conflicting interpretations of S in the light of their conflicting views about the background psychology. So possession of an a priori guarantee that cognitive shortcoming is involved in the semantic dispute will require a similar guarantee concerning the interpreters' respective parent views about speakers' relevant attitudinal states.²⁴ On the assumption of minimalism about intentional psychology, however, there is no such a priori guarantee that cognitive shortcoming is involved in the conflicting parent views.

That suffices to validate Thesis 1. Minimalism about intentional psychology—whatever its motivation²⁵—must embrace minimalism about semantics as well.²⁶

²⁴ This claim assumes, of course, that their semantic dispute not merely commits the interpreters to the psychological one but wholly turns on—is fully rationalised by— their conflicting beliefs about speakers' attitudes.

²⁵ This is important. Lemma 1 might seem unsurprising, even obvious, to someone for whom the only envisaged motivation for psychological non-factualism specifically concerned psychological content, for it is indeed obscure what sort of argument could select for that while leaving linguistic content alone (cf. note 26.) However the considerations just sketched are not so specific but would be good—if good at all—if it were e.g. scepticism about the attitudes themselves—hope, belief, desire and their kin—rather than their content, that drove a psychological minimalist; or whatever the motive happened to be.

²⁶ For complementary considerations in this direction, see pages 170-3 of Boghossian, "The Status of Content". Boghossian's observation is, more generally, that the characteristic arguments for anti-realism (of

One consequence of Thesis 1 is that any demonstration of the incoherence of minimalism about linguistic content would convert to a refutation of psychological minimalism. Paul Boghossian's "The Status of Content" contains precisely such a purported demonstration: specifically, an argument to show that minimalism about linguistic content must wind up committed to incompatible claims about the interpretation of the truth predicate.²⁷ If that argument succeeded, it would once again, in conjunction with the earlier part of the present paper, erect a ring-fence of aporia, as it were, within which psychological anti-realism would be confined. However subsequent commentary has suggested that Boghossian's argument will not perform quite as advertised.²⁸ I will not recapitulate those discussions now.²⁹ What is germane is rather a corollary of them, which I shall here elicit in a more direct manner.

whatever stripe) about psychological content—or at least the best of them—all extend undiminished to linguistic content.

²⁷ "The Status of Content" at pp. 175-6. To be specific: the official target of Boghossian's argument is what he terms a "non-factualism" about meaning and content generally. There may be significant philosophical differences between non-factualism as Boghossian conceives it and the kind of position I have introduced as minimalism. However Boghossian's non-factualist grants both that discourse about linguistic content can quite properly assume an assertoric surface, and that a notion of correct assertibility will operate over it. Such is the detail of his argument, that is enough to ensure there is no relevant difference between semantic non-factualism, as Boghossian conceives it, and semantic minimalism—no difference which might enable his argument to succeed against the former but not the latter.

²⁸ See for instance Robert Kraut "Robust Deflationism", The Philosophical Review CII (1993), pp. 247-63, and Crispin Wright, Appendix to ch. 6 of Truth and Objectivity and "Eliminative Materialism: Going Concern or Passing Fancy?" in Mind and Language (special number on Eliminativism), 8 (1993), pp. 316-26. For further discussion, including formal regimentation of Boghossian's argument, see ch 3 of Neil Tennant's The Taming of the True, Oxford; the Clarendon Press 1997.

²⁹ For an indication, see note 30.

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

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

S has the truth-condition that P,

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

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

– ascriptions of realist truth-conditions are not apt for realist truth and falsity.

But this has a striking consequence: that for the minimalist about semantics, the distinction between truth-apt and merely correctness-apt assertoric discourses emerges as one the details of

whose extension are not themselves stateable by truths, but only permit of correct statement. For reflect that, with 'true' and its cognates now importing realism, a statement of the form, 'S has the truth-condition that P', is, as it were, Janus-faced, serving simultaneously both to make a semantic claim about the content of S and to classify its subject—the statement S—as robust. So to attempt to hold simultaneously that ascriptions of robustness are themselves robust while ascriptions of content are not, would be—when possession of truth-conditions is taken as a hallmark of robustness—a direct commitment to contradictory claims.³⁰

Really, this is rather obvious. For however exactly the distinction is drawn, which side of the minimal/robust divide a given discourse falls is going to be, in general terms, a function of the type of content which its sentences possess. So the minimality of claims which place a discourse to one side or the other of the minimal/robust divide must follow from a general minimalism about matters to do with content. Imagine that a Genie fixes all genuine—robust—facts, as it were, but nothing else. If such a determination would leave content undetermined, then it must likewise fail to

³⁰ It is this point, in effect, which provides the loophole in Boghossian's argument noted in the discussions referred to in note 28. Boghossian observes that his semantic non-factualist is committed both to the selectivity of the truth predicate—since, on his characterisation, all non-factualists hold that some target class of significant declarative sentences do not have truth-conditions—and to holding that ascriptions of truth denote no real facts (since ascriptions of truth-conditions do not, and how could factual matters functionally depend on non-factual ones?) He takes the first point to imply that truth must be a real property —(it cannot allow of deflationary construal since not all indicative discourses are apt for it)—and the second to imply that it is not a real property (since ascriptions of it are not factual). But the contradiction is arguably an illusion and disappears under disambiguation of "real property". In one—we can call it the 'anti-deflationary'—sense "true" expresses a real property if it is not promiscuous across indicative discourses. In another—the 'non-factualist'—sense "true" expresses a real property if ascriptions of it generate factual claims. Boghossian shows that, for the content non-factualist, "true" expresses a real property in the first sense and it fails to express a real property in the second sense. This is however—at least prima facie—a perfectly consistent combination. Truth and truth-aptitude can be both selective and non-factual. It is that combination that is shown by the argument in the text to be not just a saving option for content non-factualism (minimalism) but actually integral to the view.

determine anything which functionally depends on matters to do with content—including the details of the distinction between minimal and robust discourses. So there could be no truths about that distinction.

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

The point is fair, as far as it goes. But it is very difficult to see how semantic descent could make any important difference in this context. Consider any singular judgement of the form: the F is G. If such a judgement is to exert cognitive command, then so must any particular judgement about which object is the F—for manifestly, it cannot be a priori that disagreements about whether the F is G involve cognitive shortcoming unless the same goes for disagreements—which may be the whole source of the former—about which is the object they concern. Accordingly, if while "S is truth-conditional" is granted to be non-robust for the reason given, we try to conceive of "The proposition that P is truth-conditional" as a robust claim, then which entity is the proposition that P had better itself be a robust issue: an issue opinions about which exert cognitive command. But propositions, most philosophers would agree, are not entities which allow of linguistically unmediated acquaintance: an opinion about which proposition is the proposition that P can be

nothing other than an opinion about what the particular form of words used to raise the issue—the that-clause, "that P"—should be taken to mean. And the latter, by Thesis 1, is a non-robust matter.

There is more to say about this.³¹ But enough has been done to identify a powerful case for Thesis 2:

Minimalism about semantics enforces minimalism about the minimal/robust distinction itself.

9

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

Is that necessarily an uncomfortable dialectical situation? One reason for supposing so is that it seems utterly unclear what possible rationale realist/anti-realist debate can have unless we think of it as answerable to objective distinctions. Doesn't one have to be a meta-realist—i.e., to believe that the protagonists in realist/anti-realist debates are disputing a 'real issue': something where there is a 'fact of the matter'—before any interest can attach to the question on which half of the distinction ordinary psychology falls? The brisk reply would be that it need no more be a precondition of the interest of debate about realism that one take a realist view of that very debate than it is a precondition of the interest of ethics, or mathematics, or indeed ordinary psychology that one takes a realist view of them. But that reply seems a little too brisk in the present instance: there is something disorientating about the thought that while there is an intelligible distinction to be drawn between minimal and robust discourses, there are no robust facts about the proper

³¹ For further discussion, see Wright, Truth and Objectivity, ch. 6.

classification of discourses under that distinction.³² Why would it not just be a charade to traffic in any kind of distinction between the objective and the non-objective if nothing is objectively objective? Besides, a fully satisfying development of the minimalist line about ethics, or mathematics, etc., will involve explaining a legitimate role and purpose for such discourses to have, dissociated from the project of representing the world. But what role and purpose might metaphysics have if not the attainment of insight and understanding into how things really are?—how could those benefits be the product of an enquiry of which one should take an anti-realist view?

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

Manifestly, that is not a scenario with which any rational psychological minimalist can rest content, since it is tantamount to something akin to Moore's Paradox. A philosophical claim about the robustness or otherwise of a discourse is, like any philosophical claim, warranted a priori, by

³² For forceful expression of a different view, see Robert Kraut's "Robust Deflationism".

philosophical reflection, or by nothing at all. So a psychological minimalist would appear constrained to concede both that her position admits of no philosophically sufficient support and that it is a view which, if it deserved to be accepted at all, could be so only by the adduction of philosophically sufficient considerations.

It may be objected that this reasoning depends on a quite mythical view of the kind of persuasiveness exerted by typical philosophical argument. Argument for a philosophical view—say, for anti-realism about ordinary psychology!—is no doubt a priori in some good sense of that term. But in contrast with a mathematical proof, for instance, philosophical argument need not be such that, if it can be rationally sufficient for a certain view at all, it must be acknowledged as persuasive by any thinker on pain of cognitive shortcoming. The difference is that, unlike a mathematical proof, a good philosophical argument can be defeasible—can be rationally persuasive in one informational setting but cease to be so when further considerations are marshalled. Most philosophical arguments make assumptions which, for one reason or another, are found attractive; but their attractiveness may wane when certain of their consequences are elicited. Indeed the dialectic of this paper—if sound—may provide an example: the metaphysical arguments against psychological realism, for instance, might justifiably be found quite forceful just so long as one has not yet bothered to enquire exactly what account of psychological discourse they should motivate.

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

sufficient a priori case for minimalism about psychology is to be entitled to regard that thesis as exerting cognitive command.

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

10

I said at the beginning that my concern was primarily to develop an antinomy for psychological anti-realism. We have now, in all essentials, completed that development. The question is what positive account the anti-realist should offer of the status and character of ordinary psychological discourse. Boghossian divided the options into essentially two: error-theory and non-factualism. I have found it useful to distinguish four: expressivism, eliminativism and fictionalism—each of which might belong with a metaphysical anti-realist motivation—and in addition, minimalism., which goes naturally with a non-cognitivist motivation (though that might encourage expressivist proposals as well.) But each of the four has given rise to antinomy. Expressivism about any discourse needs illocutionary distinctions which, it would seem, must depend on stateable differences in speakers' characteristic attitudes (the ones they are characteristically 'expressing' in that discourse.) Fictionalism about any discourse needs the reality of the attitudinal state of

working with a (disbelieved) fiction. Eliminativism about psychology in particular gets into trouble over accounting for the determinants of falsity and with the circumscription of the discourse to be eliminated—hence with its own very formulation. And minimalism, finally, has emerged as no better off for it follows from its truth that it admits of no cogent philosophical support and hence is strictly rationally untenable.

So—failing some further, quite novel anti-realist paradigm—we do finally seem to have psychological anti-realism penned within a complete "ring-fence of aporia". A resourceful friend of psychological anti-realism will no doubt identify places at which pressure may be put on the fence but enough has been done to call the coherence of the outlook into serious question.

But we must end on a cautionary note. Our considerations do not, properly understood, make a case for realism as the metaphysical truth about ordinary psychology. What the arguments collectively tend to show is rather that there can be no rationally compelling argument for psychological anti-realism, in any of its foreseeable guises. That need not be the same thing. For one thing, there may be unforeseen guises. But even if not, the considerations marshalled tend to establish—if correct—not the reality of ordinary psychological categories but that an acquiescence in ordinary intentional psychology is a commitment of fictionalist, expressivist and eliminativist positions about any region of thought; and that the belief that support for a minimalist position can be rationally cogent anywhere is a commitment to regarding psychological discourse as robust. The effect of our arguments is thus that ordinary psychology has a kind of diplomatic immunity in realist vs. anti-realist debate. They drive a conclusion about the investment in ordinary psychological discourse to which the various anti-realist paradigms are committed. The soundness of that investment, and more generally the significance of the dialectical situation that has emerged, is a further matter, for further argument.³³

³³ The argument of this paper has been leisurely in arriving at its present form. A first version of it was presented at a Birkbeck College reading party held at Cumberland Lodge in May 1993. It developed through

presentations at the SOFIA conference in Lisbon in 1994, at the Cincinnati conference on Significance in Semantics in the same year, and at subsequent colloquia at Durham, Birmingham, the Irish Philosophical Society, Kings College London, MIT, Ohio State and, most recently, at the Summer School at Parma in July 2000. My thanks to the discussants on all those occasions and especially to Paul Boghossian, Bob Brandom, John Campbell, Jim Edwards, Bob Hale, Paul Horwich, Christopher Peacocke, and Barry C. Smith.