Realism and Objectivity

Billy Dunaway
University of Oxford

'Realism' and 'objectivity' are philosophers' terms of art with no strict synonyms in ordinary English. This has not prevented philosophers from using these terms with the confidence of a native speaker—most philosophers will not hesitate to label a Subjectivist view of morality (on which an act is wrong for a subject just in case the subject herself disapproves of performing the act) as an irrealist view. And they will likely add that morality is not an objective matter according to the Subjectivist. Similarly they will agree over judgments about Instrumentalism in science, and Idealism about the material world. But broad agreement over simple cases does not by itself select a single meaning for a term of art, and in fact philosophers disagree significantly over application of these terms to anything beyond the simple cases, and offer wildly divergent general characterizations of the meaning of these terms.

It is probably a mistake to ask what *the* meaning of a term of art is. One is free to use one's words as one wishes, and in cases like the present one where an ordinary-language equivalent is not immediately obvious, it is hard to claim that a philosopher has misused or mischaracterized the term. The aim of this entry is not therefore to legislate usage of the terms 'realism' and 'objectivity'. Rather It will outline some very natural and general structural features of each notion that a plausibly presupposed by some uses of the terms. Some candidate characterizations that are proposed in the literature will can be evaluated in light of their relationship between the structural features. And we can ask how the structural features of the two notions are related to one another. I thus will not be giving an answer to the question of what *realism* and *objectivity* are, but will instead be outlining the philosophically interesting notions in the vicinity, and setting out and exploring some interesting questions that can be formulated using these notions.

One point that should be noted at the outset is that some philosophers use 'realism' and 'objectivity' as if they were interchangeable synonyms: they say that a view is realist about its domain if and only if it makes its domain out to be fully objective. In our quest to avoid linguistic stipulations involving terms of art, I will not argue against this usage here. But, as will become evident below, there are uses of the terms on which they are not synonymous, and I will only be interested in these uses here.

Part I: Realism

Motivating examples and structural features

Here are some standard distinctions the word 'realism' is used to make: a Subjectivist, who holds that ethical statements are reports about an agent's psychological state is not a realist about ethics. By way of contrast, a Non-naturalist, who holds that wrongness is an unreducible and sui generis component of reality, is a realist. An Instrumentalist philosopher of science who holds talk about quarks, spin, and other "unobservables" to be shorthand for talk about how measuring instruments would respond in various circumstances is not a realist. Meanwhile someone who takes these scientists' use of these terms at face value (much like we treat talk of chairs, people, and shapes) is a realist. Finally a Behaviorist about mental states, who takes pain and other mental states to be nothing more than complex dispositions to behave in various circumstances, is not a realist about mental states. But an Identity theorist, who identifies pain and other mental states with particular neurophysiological states in the brain, is a realist.

These are just a few examples that pattern with a fairly common use of the word 'realism'. As a first pass, it would seem to mark a metaphysical distinction: the Subjectivist has a very different view of the metaphysics of wrongness from the Non-naturalist, and similarly for the other examples. Since our goal here is to ask whether there is any philosophically interesting natural kind that underlies use of this term, I will restrict attention here to purely metaphysical properties, as adding epistemic and semantic dimensions will result in a significantly more gerrymandered candidate referent for 'realism'.

From these examples we can read off a few additional structural features of the metaphysically natural kind that is the referent of 'realism' must display. First, it must be compatible with there being substantive truths in domains which are not real. All of the examples of irrealism listed above are intuitively not realist, but they are not forced to deny that it is true that people sometimes do wrong actions, that quarks have spin, or that sharp needles can cause pain. These are irrealist views in virtue of what they say truths in the relevant domains are, but need not reject basic truths about the domains in question. Second, the realism/irrealism is domain-independent: ethics, unobservables from physical science, and mental states are distinct areas of investigation, but it is quite natural to think that 'realism' and 'irrealism' can be applied non-trivially to each domain, without equivocation. Finally, realism is compatible with some reductions but not others: an Identity theorist offers a reductive view about mental states, but comes out as a realist, unlike the Behaviorist.

We can give these structural features labels for convenience:

TRUTH COMPATIBILITY   Irrealism about a domain D is compatible with the existence of substantive truths about D.

DOMAIN NEUTRALITY   For any domain D, 'realism' and 'irrealism' can apply

non-trivially and univocally to D.

REDUCTION COMPATIBILITY   For some domains D, some reductive views are irrealist about D while other reductive views about D are realist.

Below I will outline three prominent metaphysical characterizations of realism and explain why they do not capture the structural features outlined here.

Existence

Some philosophers, perhaps drawn by one usage of the word 'real' on which it is interchangeable with 'exists', have claimed that realism about a domain *just is* the view that the domain exists. Views of this kind assimilate all irrealist views to the kind of irrealism found in J. L. Mackie's "moral skecpticism" or "error theory", which he describes as follows:

> [W]hat I have called moral skepticism is a negative doctrine, not a positive one: it says what there isn't, not what there is. It says that there do not exist entities or relations of a certain kind, objective values or requirements, which many people have believed to exist. (Mackie 1977, 17)

This suggests a characterization of realism about a domain D as equivalent to the following claim:

EXISTENCE   Discourse about D involves terms that refer to objects and properties that exist.

Thus we can real Mackie as claiming that moral discourse uses terms like 'wrong', but that wrongness doesn't exist, and hence that the central terms of moral discourse don't refer to anything. Mackie's error theory comes out as irrealist in the sense of EXISTENCE.

But EXISTENCE as a characterization of realism won't capture the TRUTH COMPATIBILITY feature crucial to realism. Error theory is an extreme version of irrealism; more modest versions that are compatible with EXISTENCE are possible. This follows from TRUTH COMPATIBILITY. It follows because some irrealist views of a domain are compatible with substantive truths—for instance, Subjectivism is compatible with it being true that telling lies is wrong. From this it is trivial to infer that telling lies has the *property* of wrongness, and that Subjectivism entails EXISTENCE when the domain in question is ethics. Similar arguments can be made with other domains that motivate TRUTH COMPATIBILITY.

Mind-independence

Other philosophers have been impressed by the wide range of examples of irrealism which imply that the domain in question is mind-dependent. Subjectivism,

which makes wrongness dependent on an agent's attitudes of disapproval, is an irrealist view, as is Instrumentalism about unobservables, where the notion of measurement which is essential to the view is plausibly to be cashed out partly in mental terms. This moves Michael Devitt, in his chapter "What is Realism?" to include an "independence" condition on realism, which is satisfied by something "if it exists and has its nature whatever we believe, think, or can discover: it is independent of the cognitive activities of the mind." (Devitt 1991, 15) This suggests that realism about a domain D is true iff the following holds:

MIND-INDEPENDENCE   The objects and properties in D do not essentially depend on mental objects and properties.

MIND-INDEPENDENCE as a characterization of realism, however, yields a notion that is incompatible with DOMAIN NEUTRALITY. To see this we need only ask what MIND-INDEPENDENCE says about realism concerning the mental. Dependence is standardly taken to be an *asymmetric* relation: nothing depends on itself. But then any view about the mental will entail that the domain is not itself dependent on mental states, and hence that it does not satisfy MIND-INDEPENDENCE. Thus any view of the mental will come out as realist, and realism about the mental will be trivial, contrary to DOMAIN NEUTRALITY. Moreover this is borne out if we consider the examples with which we started: both behaviors and neurophysiological states are non-mental entities, hence both Behaviorism and Identity theory will have the same consequences for MIND-INDEPENDENCE.

Absolute fundamentality

Another approach to realism uses a notion that is central to much recent metaphysics; roughly, this is the notion of the *fundamental*. The fundamental is, roughly, that which doesn't depend, or exist in virtue of, anything else. Kit Fine (2001) gives a seminal discussion of the notion in connection with realism, which is adapted to a characterization in the following passage by Ralph Wedgwood:

> What exactly is realism? Following Kit Fine (2001) I shall suppose that a realist about the normative is a theorist who says that there are normative facts or truths—such as the fact that certain things ought to be the case, or that it is not the case that certain things ought to be the case—and that at least some of these normative facts are part of reality itself.
>
> The notion of *reality* invoked here is a notion that has its home within a certain sort of metaphysical project—namely, the project of giving a metaphysical account or explanation of everything that is the case in terms of what is real [. . .] [I]f certain normative facts are real, then [. . .] these normative facts, properties or relations may also form part of the fundamental account or explanation of certain things that are the case. (Wedgwood 2007, 1-2)

This suggests the claim that realism about a domain D is equivalent to the following:

ABSOLUTE FUNDAMENTALITY D is absolutely fundamental.

Taking ABSOLUTE FUNDAMENTALITY to characterize realism yields a notion that entails TRUTH COMPATIBILITY and DOMAIN NEUTRALITY: there can be truths about both fundamental and non-fundamental domains, and it is coherent to adopt views on which the mental is absolutely fundamental (*e.g.,* Cartesian Dualism) and views on which it is not. However, ABSOLUTE FUNDAMENTALITY is not consistent with REDUCTION COMPATIBILITY. Identity theory is a reductivst view of the mental, yet seems to be a realist view. And some views in ethics—so-called 'naturalist' reductions such as that found in Railton (1986)—claim to be versions of realism (Railton's view is presented in a paper called "Moral Realism"). But mental states and ethical properties, respectively, will not be absolutely fundamental on these views. Since a similar argument can be repeated for any reductivist view of a domain, ABSOLUTE FUNDAMENTALITY as a conception of realism entails that REDUCTION COMPATIBILITY is false. (For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between dependence and fundamentality, see Barnes (2012).)

Relative fundamentality

There is however a view in the neighborhood of ABSOLUTE FUNDAMENTALITY that is more promising *vis-á-vis* the structural features of realism we identified earlier. This doesn't appeal to the binary distinction between what is fundamental and what is not, but rather to the notion of *relative* fundamentality, expressed by the predicate 'is more fundamental than'. Ideally one would like to have a worked-out theory of relative fundamentality, but even in the absence of such a theory we can make some plausible judgments about how the 'is more fundamental than' relation applies. The Behaviorist will need a long an complicated disjunction of behaviors to identify pain: one can be in pain either by screaming, or by clutching one's arm and grimacing, or by exhibiting another item on the long list of pain-behaviors. The neurophysiological states needed by the Identity theory, on the other hand, will not be so disjunctive: intuitively, they will constitute a psychologically natural kind. It is then plausible to say that pain is more fundamental on the Identity theorist's view than on the Behaviorist's view.

This suggests, as a first pass, that relative fundamentality might be a promising characterization of realism of a domain D in the following form:

RELATIVE FUNDAMENTALITY D is more fundamental than it is according to salient competing views of D.

The suggestion is then that Identity theory entails that mental states are more fundamental than they are according to a salient competing view of mental

states, namely Behaviorism. Analogous claims might be made concerning Non-naturalism in ethics and naive views of claims about scientific unobservables.

RELATIVE FUNDAMENTALITY also has the structural features required of any adequate metaphysical conception of realism. It entails TRUTH COMPATIBILITY, since highly non-fundamental domains may none the less exist, and be such that discourses about them contain reference to the relevant non-fundamental entities. It entails DOMAIN NEUTRALITY since there is no domain for which it is trivial that it is highly fundamental or not; it is a substantive question for any domain (including the mental) how fundamental it is. And finally it entails REDUCTION COMPATIBILITY since a domain might be reducible yet still more fundamental than other salient competing views make it out to be.

Clearly there is much more investigation to be done into whether RELATIVE FUNDAMENTALITY captures a philosophically interesting metaphysical kind to serve as the referent of 'realism'. Further investigation would proceed, ideally, by identifying additional structural features of the notion of realism, and would ask whether RELATIVE FUNDAMENTALITY or any other relatively simple metaphysical notion might have all of these features.

Part II: Objectivity

The epistemic conception of objectivity

In the previous section we canvassed readings of 'realism' on which it designates a metaphysically natural kind. Analogous issues arise for 'objective' read metaphysically, but I will not repeat them here. Many authors have also found an *epistemic* dimension to discussions of objectivity. We can then ask what the epistemically natural kind in the vicinity of this talk might be.

Crispin Wright (1992) develops the intuitive idea that non-objective facts are those for which there is a possibility of a "shortcoming-free disagreement": when dealing with objective facts, subjects who form disagreeing opinions are such that one of them must display some kind of cognitive shortcoming. The paradigm case of objectivity is perception of ordinary objects; when two subjects disagree about whether there is a chair in the room in which they are both present, it follows that one of them is epistemically non-ideal, by virtue of having impoverished visual inputs, improperly functioning perceptual apparatus, bias, etc.

By contrast, the comic is a good candidate for a non-objective domain: according to the rough theory on offer here, the non-objectivity of the comic shows up in our epistemic lives in the form of the possibility of shortcoming-free disagreement. Two cognitive agents who arrive at distinct judgments concerning whether a particular joke is funny, need not be such that one is not fully competent, or not in epistemically friendly environments, etc.

The terminology used to formulate this intuitive idea is at best suggestive. Wright recognizes this, and develops at length a proposal that improves on our use of 'epistemically ideal' and the like. He offers the notion of *cognitive command*

as a sharpening of the shortcoming-free characterization of objectivity:

> A discourse exhibits Cognitive Command if and only if it is a priori that differences of opinion arising within it can be satisfactorily explained only in terms of "divergent input", that is, the disputants' working on the basis of different information ..., or "unsuitable conditions" ..., or "malfunction". (Wright 1992, 93)

Wright goes on to give further clarification of the various shortcomings that explain disagreement of objective matters: divergent input, unsuitable conditions, or malfunction. But even without getting bogged down in these details, we can evaluate the proposal that objectivity in a domain D is equivalent to Cognitive Command:

Cognitive Command The facts in D are such that it is a priori that disagreements in discourse about D are explainable as the product of divergent input, unsuitable conditions, or malfunction amongst at least one of the disputants.

There are in general difficulties in making sense out of a very natural and substantive notion of shortcoming-free disagreements, and Wright's sharpening in terms of cognitive command is no exception. Begin with the notion of divergent input. Wright glosses this condition as one which is satisfied just in case two disputants are working on the basis of different information. But on one very natural sharpening of this idea, the "information" one has will be one's evidence, and one's evidence will be the totality of what one knows. (*cf.* Williamson (2000, Ch. 9)) Hence in any case where there is a dispute over p and only one disputant knows p, it will follow that it is a case of divergent input. (Since ex hypothesi this is a dispute over p, the non-knower does not believe p, and hence has different evidence than the knower.)

This makes the "divergent input" condition too easy to satisfy; we can illustrate this by taking the comic as an example of a putatively non-objective subject-matter. If it is possible for one person to know that a joke is funny, then any disputant by definition does not have knowledge, since it must be true that the joke is funny (since knowledge is factive) but the disputant in question doesn't even believe that the joke is funny. Hence they have different information on the simple characterization given above, and it will be a priori that discourse about the comic exhibits one of the hallmark features of objectivity.

Of course one could hope to give an alternative characterization of what evidence is, or what it is to "have" evidence, but two points should be made here. First: it is necessary to formulate adequate notions without recourse to other terms of art; our understanding of objectivity is not helped much by recourse to primitive notions of "same evidence" and related notions. Second: even granting the first pitfall can be avoided, we run the risk that the resulting notion will be too gerrymandered to be of much theoretical interest. I do not wish to rule

out that cognitive command can be reformulated within these guidelines, but will not pursue the project further here. Similar points apply as well to other terminology that appears in the formulation of COGNITIVE COMMAND: it is natural to say that "unsuitable conditions" are conditions where one is not in a position to know p, and that "malfunctioning" reasoning is reasoning that does not result in knowledge. For similar reasons as before, running with these natural notions will make virtually any domain objective according to COGNITIVE COMMAND.

The motivating picture behind COGNITIVE COMMAND is still however a plausible one, and we could try to give alternative characterizations of it. One especially simple characterization revolves around the notion of a *belief-knowledge connection:* that is, it is necessary that any time a competent subject comes to believe that p, she thereby knows that p. That is, non-objectivity for a domain D requires the following:

BELIEF-KNOWLEDGE CONNECTION   Necessarily, for any claim p in D and any subject s, if s is a psychologically normal and logically competent subject, then if s comes to believe p, s thereby knows p.

By 'competent subject' here we just mean one who is logically and probabilistically coherent: she deduces the logical consequences of what she believes, updates her credences by conditionalization, and so on.

BELIEF-KNOWLEDGE CONNECTION has the virtue of being very simple: if it does indeed capture a notion of objectivity, it cannot be denied that the relevant notion is theoretically interesting. It moreover has some connection to the paradigm cases of objectivity and non-objectivity: vagueness aside, there is clearly some non-accidental connection between an object appearing red to a normal competent subject, and that subject coming to believe that it is red. No doubt BELIEF-KNOWLEDGE CONNECTION will require further refinement to successfully capture some paradigm instances of non-objectivity, but it provides a simple starting point for investigating the nature of objectivity and its connection to realism.

Is objectivity trivial?

Any discussion of the notion of objectivity will have to confront the central question in Gideon Rosen's "Objectivity and Modern Idealism: What is the Question?", which asks whether there are any substantive questions to be asked under the heading of 'objectivity' at all. The quick summary of Rosen's (tentative) answer is: no. Given a scientific, naturalistic outlook on the world, on which a plausible view about any subject-matter will have to be broadly consistent with (and ultimately dependent upon) the world studied by the natural sciences, Rosen claims that any plausible suggestion for how to flesh out the notion of objectivity will deliver the answer that any domain of facts is fully objective.

There are many interesting strands to Rosen's discussion, and I cannot cover all of them here. Instead I will only cover only the general "master argument" for

this pessimistic conclusion. Rosen uses the same argument applied to different candidate characterizations of objectivity, and claims that on each the objectivity of any domain is trivial. One instance of this is in his discussion of a "response-dependence" characterization, on which objectivity in a domain D is equivalent to Ds not being response-dependent, which is spelled out roughly as follows:

No RESPONSE-DEPENENCE The concepts used to pick out D are such that their correct application to an object x is determined by how x affects us (*cf.* Rosen (1994, 298))

A paradigm case is color-concepts: plausibly the concept of redness is a concept that is correctly applied only to objects that cause red-sensations in us (given that we are in normal environments, with normal lighting, have normal perceptual systems, etc.). This is all very rough, but it gives enough to illustrate one application of Rosen's master argument.

Rosen gives the main argument using another example of a response-dependent concept: constitutionality (laws are constitutional just in case the Supreme Count is disposed to judge them so). He argues that No RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE fails to capture objectivity as follows:

> So far we have been given no reason to think that the facts about what a certain group of people would think after a certain sort of investigation are anything but robustly objective. The facts about how the court would rule are facts of modal sociology ... but on the face of it they possess the same status as the facts about what any other collection of animals would do if prompted with certain stimuli, or set a certain problem. The facts about what the court would do with a given case ... are thus, for all we've said, features of the objective world. And if the facts [about constitutionality] just are these very facts, then [we have] no special grounds for thinking of them as less than entirely real. (Rosen 1994, 300)

Here Rosen is pointing out that the fact that constitutionality is response-dependent is itself a perfectly objective fact by any measure. It is just as objective as the fact that a mouse would run away if it saw a cat, or the fact that an electron would repel another nearby electron; all of these are dispositional facts grounded in fully objective psychological facts and other environmental factors. More generally, it is true on any plausible reading of 'objective' that following holds for any fact p (where 'O' is the operator 'it is objective that' and 'RDp' means 'p is response-dependent):

O(RDp)

Of course is is objectivity of one kind of fact—the response-dependence of p—but we might still wonder about the objectivity of another kind of fact—namely

the objectivity of p itself. Hence in order to conclude from this argument that p itself must be objective, that is

$O(p)$,

Rosen needs the following premise:

$O(\text{RD}p) \rightarrow O(p)$

(*Cf.* Rosen (1994, 301): "*Intuitively*, if the facts in the contested class can simply be read off in a mechanical way from the facts in an uncontroversially objective class, then there can be no grounds for denying the same status to facts in the contested area".)

This sets up a master argument against the possibility of any non-objective facts. For given a broadly naturalistic framework, analogous premises will hold for *any* proposed characterization of objectivity Φ. Rosen can then substitute the proposed characterization in the following argument to show that any candidate for non-objectivity p is in fact fully objective:

The Master Argument

$O(\Phi p)$

$O(\Phi p) \rightarrow O(p)$

Therefore, $O(p)$

Let us call the second premise in the Master Argument the *collapse premise*:

Collapse $O(\Phi p) \rightarrow O(p)$

We can now ask whether Collapse is indeed a structural feature of objectivity. The next subsection asks whether in particular this is true on epistemic conceptions of objectivity, in particular Belief-knowledge Connection.

The Collapse premise

Given the (no doubt overly simple) Belief-knowledge Connection as a conception of objectivity, Collapse is demonstrably false.

To show this, let us make some simplifying assumptions. Suppose first that we are in a world where everyone is psychologically normal, and is logically and probabilistically competent. And moreover, let's assume that everyone in this worlds believes all of the paradigm non-objective propositions, and that they don't know any other proposition. On these simplifying assumptions, the claim that Ψ is non-objective is equivalent to the claim that it is known. That is:

$\neg O\Psi \leftrightarrow K\Psi$

Collapse is then on our current assumptions the claim that is obtained by replacing 'Φ' with 'Kp':

$$OKp \rightarrow Op$$

But since our simplifying assumptions make '$\neg O\Psi \leftrightarrow K\Psi$' true, the occurrences of 'O' in the collapse principle can be replaced with '$\neg K$'. Rosen's collapse principle is equivalent to the following:

$$\neg KKp \rightarrow \neg Kp$$

This however is just the KK principle (typically written as the equivalent '$Kp \rightarrow \neg KKp$') which has compelling counterexamples, even when we assume full logical competence and psychological normality. (See Williamson (2000, Ch. 4)). I won't go through these in detail here, but one general feature of the counterexample cases involve subjects who are in a certain state but are such that their evidence makes it unlikely that they are in this state. And intuitively, there is no reason to think that, given a subject who is in a privileged epistemic state with respect to a non-objective proposition p, they necessarily also be in a privileged epistemic state with respect to the claim that they are in a privileged epistemic state with respect to p. Thus more generally, epistemic conceptions of objectivity will find Collapse not to be a structural feature of objectivity.

Part III: Some connections

We have so far considered some various candidates for the natural kinds that might underly talk of realism and objectivity. It should be clear that on the best candidates covered here there is no strict entailment between realism and objectivity: domains can be not-very-fundamental and also difficult to know. But there still might be some interesting connections between the notions, and below I will give a brief discussion of some of the possibilities.

Magnetism

Suppose we accept a view of a domain on which it is highly fundamental: say we hold, unlike the Subjectivist, that normative properties are fairly natural, non-gerrymandered properties studied by social science. Many writers, starting with David Lewis (1983), have held that highly fundamental properties are easier to refer to than their less fundamental counterparts. Roughly, this means (in the non-normative case) that a community of speakers that uses 'gold' with some idiosyncracies—say they are reliably tricked into sincerely saying that iron pyrite ("fools gold") counts as 'gold'—might nonetheless come to refer to the highly fundamental element Au rather than the disjunction of Au and iron pyrite. The superior "fit" of their use of 'gold' with the disjunction is overridden by the superior fundamentality of Au. A similar thesis applies to obligation if realism

about the normative is true and obligation is therefore highly fundamental. In particular, communities might use 'ought' in all sorts of ways that do not precisely "fit" obligation; one especially stark example of this is found in different social groups and cultures that have fundamentally different moral sensibilities. But if obligation is highly fundamental, as a realist view would hold, then many of these communities will end up referring to obligation with their word 'ought', even though there are other properties besides obligation that fit their use better.

Call this thesis about highly fundamental properties *reference magnetism*. Such a view will imply that Belief-Knowledge Connection is false for the domain in question. It is no part of psychological normality or logical competence that one know which properties are highly fundamental. So one can be logically competent and yet still use 'ought' in a way that does not fit best with obligation, but rather some other obligation-like property. Let's call this other property *obligation**. And let *a* be an action that instantiates obligation* but not obligation. One might come to know that one uses 'ought' by applying it to *a*, and might come to accept on this basis '*a* ought to be done'. This is a very natural way to form the belief that *a* ought to be done. But it is false that *a* ought to be done since, by hypothesis *a* does not instantiate obligation. In short: if realism brings reference magnetism along with it, then objectivity in some forms will follow.

Constructivism

Denials of realism and denials of objectivity both have some philosophical appeal. If one denies that a view is realist in the sense of Relative Fundamentality, then one has thereby avoided the commitment of adding the relevant domain to the list of privileged fundamental domains. Parsimony at the level of the fundamental is a theoretical virtue. And if one denies objectivity for a domain, then one has an easy account of how we can come to know about the domain: if non-objective domains by definition remove the possibility of belief under certain conditions without knowledge, then knowledge about the domain requires only belief in the right conditions.

But the benefits to denials of realism do not automatically include the benefits of a denial of objectivity. We can illustrate this with the "constructivist" view of normativity articulated and defended recently by Sharon Street (2008). Street formulates the view roughly as follows (I have made minor changes to keep the ideology in line with that of the rest of this entry):

Constructivism   The fact that *A* ought to ϕ is constituted by the fact that the judgment that *A* ought to ϕ withstands scrutiny from the standpoint of *A*'s other judgments about what *A* ought to do. (Street 2008, 223)

In other words, what makes it true that *A* ought to ϕ is the fact that, were *A* to reflect on her judgment that she ought to ϕ, she would not retract it in light of her other normative commitments.

CONSTRUCTIVISM is not a realist view according to RELATIVE FUNDAMENTALITY. If A's obligation to ϕ is constituted by counterfactual facts about what A would judge, and B's obligation not to ϕ is constituted by counterfactual facts about what B would judge, and so on, then the property *being obligated to ϕ* is intuitively highly non-fundamental. There are other views of the normative that make it out to be much more fundamental, some of which we canvassed in Part I.

Does it buy easy knowledge of the normative by denying that the normative is objective in the sense of BELIEF-KNOWLEDGE CONNECTION? It does not, for the fairly trivial reason that competent subjects might fail to know about what they would judge they ought to do under counterfactual circumstances, and hence might fail to know that they ought to do according to CONSTRUCTIVISM. So there is one sense in which the metaphysical modesty of the view does not guarantee that knowledge of the normative will be easy.

This does, however, suggest some related notions of objectivity that CON-STRUCTIVISM entails are false. If these related notions have the same general structure as before—that is, if the relevant notions are substantive claims about the absence of a connection between belief in certain circumstances and knowledge—then it would seem that the Constructivist is back on track to claiming a distinct advantage in epistemology for her view.

Here is one proposal in more detail. Knowledge of one's mental behavior in nearby counterfactual circumstances is unmysterious psychological knowledge. It might then seem that Constructivist could plausibly claim that given knowledge of this kind (and other minimal conditions) there is then no possibility of not knowing. That is, she would claim the presence of a kind of non-objectivity as captured by CBKC:

> CONSTRUCTIVIST BELIEF-KNOWLEDGE CONNECTION (CBKC): Necessarily, for any subject s, if s is psychologically normal, logically competent, and who knows all of the psychological facts about what s would judge in counterfactual circumstances about whether s ought to ϕ, then if s believes that s ought to ϕ, then s thereby knows that s ought to ϕ.

If CONSTRUCTIVISM entailed CBKC, then the view would have a decided advantage in epistemology. That is does have such a feature appears to be the primary line of argument in Street's "Darwinian Dilemma" against realism, which is summarized in Street (2008, §7) and discussed at length elsewhere. Thus it is an interesting question whether CONSTRUCTIVISM really does entail CBKC.

It turns out that CBKC does not follow from Constructivism. Suppose A is an agent who satisfies the antecedent of CBKC: she knows all of the relevant psychological facts about herself, and so knows that were she to reflect, she would judge that she ought to ϕ. That is:

$KJ(A$ ought to $\phi)$

(Here K and J are relativized to the agent A, and J is read as 'A would judge in the relevant counterfactual circumstances that ...'.) We can then ask whether it follows that she knows she ought to ϕ, that is

$K(A$ ought to $\phi)$.

But quite clearly, this latter claim only follows given the additional premise that she knows that if A judges that she ought to ϕ, then she ought to ϕ:

$K(J(A$ ought to $\phi) \rightarrow (A$ ought to $\phi))$.

If she did know this, then her knowledge that she ought to ϕ would follow via a plausible closure principle: knowledge is closed under known entailments.

But nothing in the Constructivist view guarantees that the entailment expressed by '$(J(A$ ought to $\phi) \rightarrow (A$ ought to $\phi))$' is known. (The Constructivist view entails that the conditional is *true*, but truth is different from knowledge.) Suppose A actually does believe this. Nonetheless, it is consistent with her she *dis*believe the conditional in nearby worlds, even if she retains knowledge of the relevant psychological facts and remaining logically competent in these worlds. Even if facts about obligation are constituted by what we would judge in appropriate circumstances, we might easily have believed that they were not. There are then, for all the Constructivist view says, nearby worlds where the following holds:

$\neg B(J(A$ ought to $\phi) \rightarrow (A$ ought to $\phi))$.

And given plausible constraints on knowledge, it would follow that A doesn't actually *know* the conditional, that is:

$\neg K(J(A$ ought to $\phi) \rightarrow (A$ ought to $\phi))$.

The point here is not to argue that entailments of the kind that the Constructivist accepts are, even if true, unknowable. That would lead to an untenable skepticism over philosophical claims. Rather, the point is that the Constructivist needs to do more than simply point out that, one her view, normative facts are constituted by easily knowable psychological facts: we granted throughout that '$K(J(A$ ought to $\phi))$' is true. She still needs to explain a *further* piece of knowledge in order to have a view on which normative knowledge is easy; in particular, she still needs to give say why '$K(J(A$ ought to $\phi) \rightarrow (A$ ought to $\phi))$' is true; this does not follow from CONSTRUCTIVISM alone.

It is worth noting here that the Constructivist's realist opponents are in the same position. A realist will, if we spot her knowledge of a conditional with the same form, be able to explain normative knowledge in exactly the same way. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that realism is true that that we ought to do the actions which maximize total happiness. Now there is no barrier to the realist claiming that we can know which actions have this property; that is, the following (we can assume) holds:

$K(MH\phi).$

But a realist could just as easily as the Constructivist secure the conclusion that there is normative knowledge if she could know the relevant entailment. That is, if it were the case that

$K(MH\phi \rightarrow A \text{ ought to } \phi),$

then it would follow via closure that

$K(A \text{ ought to } \phi).$

It is clear that in such a short space we will not be able to give attention to the details of why the realist might think that '$K(MH\phi \rightarrow A \text{ ought to } \phi)$' is true. But it is noteworthy that this is the same kind of claim as the '$K(J(A \text{ ought to } \phi) \rightarrow (A \text{ ought to } \phi))$' claim that the Constructivist needs for her view to help with the epistemology of the normative but is not a straghtforward consequence of her view. If Constructivists want to secure the epistemic benefits of a denial of objectivity from their rejection of realism, they need to do substantial work beyond simply holding that normative facts are ultimately grounded in easy-to-know facts about counterfactual judgment.

The same points hold more generally for other irrealist views. If these views are to have the advantages in epistemology that are often advertized for them, we need to find a suitable epistemic notion of objectivity which do not hold for these views. But we have seen that formulating plausible notions of objectivity which fail according to irrealist views is in fact quite difficult. A substantive notion of objectivity may be, as Rosen suggests, a chimera after all.

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