

The Conditions of Realism

Christian Miller
Wake Forest University
millerc@wfu.edu

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Issues about realism have arisen in reflecting upon just about every domain of human experience. Thus there has been a great deal of interest in the status of numbers, unobservable scientific entities, beliefs and desires, medium-sized physical objects, God, personal identity, ethical norms and values, and universals, to name just a few. Simplifying greatly, the *realists* about a particular domain have typically been those who are committed to the existence and objectivity of the disputed entities in that domain, or at least to the objective truth and falsity of statements which putatively refer to such entities. Platonists about universals, necessitarians about laws, and non-naturalists about the metaphysics of value are all paradigm realists in their respective domains.

On the other hand, many *anti-realists* simply deny outright the existence of the disputed entities or the truth of the relevant statements in a given domain. Here eliminativists about mental states and nihilists about the external world are often taken to be representatives of this form of anti-realism. Other anti-realists, however, typically reject what they see as the implausibly strong objectivity conditions mandated by certain realist positions in a given domain, and instead make the truth of the relevant statements or the existence of the disputed

entities dependent upon the mental activities of human beings. Intuitionism about mathematics and subjectivism about morality serve as helpful examples of this brand of anti-realism.¹

In this paper my concern is not with the truth of any particular realist or anti-realist view, but rather with determining what it is to be a realist or anti-realist in the first place. While much skepticism has been voiced in recent years about the viability of such a project, my goal in what follows is to articulate interesting and informative conditions whereby any view in any domain of experience can count as either a realist or an anti-realist position. Of course this is a highly ambitious (some would say foolhardy) undertaking, and so more modestly my goal is really just to help lay the groundwork for the provision of such conditions.

We shall proceed as follows. After some preliminary stage-setting in section one, I devote section two of the paper to delineating the various ways in which realism has been formulated in recent years. In the following section, I briefly suggest why non-metaphysical attempts at stating the view are problematic, and then go on to articulate my own preferred metaphysical formulation in section four and apply it to some difficult cases in section five.

1. Methodological Constraints

Many philosophers have wanted to provide an informative account of the general conditions which are both necessary and sufficient for the truth of realism in any domain of experience. It turns out, though, that determining what methodology one should adopt in order to carry out such a task is a vastly under-explored topic in the metaphilosophy of realism. Here I

¹ Unfortunately even this simplistic taxonomy is controversial. For there are some who think that countenancing the existence of the disputed entities or the truth of the relevant statements is *sufficient* for being a realist in a particular domain. Thus the second family of positions above which was initially classified as a family of anti-realist positions, would on this alternative taxonomy count instead as a family of *realist* positions.

For one such alternative taxonomy, see Sayre-McCord 1988. We shall return to this particular classificatory dispute several times in what follows.

shall not take the time to survey the different approaches and argue for any one in particular. Rather I shall merely sketch the approach that strikes me as intuitively plausible and that seems most likely to be beneficial in generating substantive taxonomic results.²

The methodology in question for formulating what might be called *general realism* bears some resemblance to reflective equilibrium in first-order normative theory. We start with those of our informed judgments for which we have a great deal of confidence as to whether realism or anti-realism is true for the respective entities in dispute in various domains of experience. Thus we might take the ontological posits made by Platonists about both mathematics and universals to be paradigm examples of entities about which realism is true. Next, we consider whether there is any common condition or set of conditions which adequately captures the constitutive features of the respective judgments in those domains. For example, one such condition might have it that what realists about both mathematics and universals have in common is a commitment to the metaphysical existence of abstract objects outside space and time.

If there is no condition or set of conditions had in common between the initially selected domains, then we have a choice – either abandon the attempt at formulating general realism, or go on to consider additional domains of experience in the hope of later revising our initial classifications in these first few cases. On the other hand, if we do arrive at some general conditions, then we can proceed to consider still other domains, revising our statement of the general conditions or our prior taxonomic commitments as we go. The end result hopefully will be an informative statement of necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of realism in any domain in which disputes about realism arise, a statement which could then be used to help bring

² For a rather different approach to formulating the general commitments of realism and anti-realism, see Railton 1995. Railton rejects the demand of articulating conditions for realism which would preserve some overlap

clarity to particular realism debates, especially in cases where it is difficult to identify the borderline between being a realist and being an anti-realist about the allegedly existent entities in that domain. For example, a formulation of general realism might be useful in imparting taxonomic order to the moral or the psychological realism debates.

Of course there is no initial guarantee that such a procedure will be successful; the various domains might be so disparate that it is impossible to formulate one single version of general realism that is capable of capturing what is centrally at issue in all of them. In the event of such an outcome, one might have nonetheless made some progress in articulating a plausible form of general realism which holds for most if not all of the relevant domains. One could then argue that putative disputes about the truth of realism with respect to domains for which the conditions provided by general realism are not applicable, are strictly speaking not *realist* disputes in the first place.³

This brief methodological discussion allows us to articulate at least four plausible constraints on any attempt at formulating general realism. It is worth stressing from the start that each of them can be treated as *defeasible* constraints which may be overridden if there were strong enough intuitive support from other domains for a particular formulation of general realism such that that support outweighed a deeply held conflicting judgment about the realist status of the objects in a particular domain. Such a qualified view of the force of these constraints thus would be more in keeping with the methodological analogy to reflective equilibrium in first-order normative theory.

concerning what is at issue in each domain of experience. Instead he employs the Ramsey-Carnap-Lewis method for defining theoretical terms in order to draw up a 'job description' for the purported entities in each particular domain.

³ Alternatively, it could turn out that we merely arrive at a number of different clusters of positions – one, for example, which articulates common conditions for the various realist positions concerning abstract objects, another which articulates common conditions for the various realist positions concerning values, and so on down the line.

With this background in mind, the first purposed constraint is the following:

- (C1) Other things being equal, any viable formulation of general realism should imply either that what had clearly seemed to be a case where realism about X is true, is in fact a case where realism about X is true and not a case where realism about X is not true, or that what had clearly seemed to be a case where anti-realism about X is true, is in fact a case where anti-realism about X is true and not a case where anti-realism about X is not true.⁴

It follows straightforwardly from (C1) that:

- (C1*) Other things being equal, any viable formulation of general realism should not imply either that what had clearly seemed to be a case where realism about X is true, turns out to be a case where anti-realism about X is true, or that what had clearly seemed to be a case where anti-realism about X is true, turns out to be a case where realism about X is true.

For example, any formulation which implies that realism is true about witches or phlogiston should, other things being equal, be justifiably dismissed.⁵

A formulation of general realism can help us to decide whether or not realism is true about X. Additionally, it can indirectly help us to decide whether certain *philosophical positions* count as realist positions or not. For example, an eliminativist about folk psychological mental states denies that there are any such things. If we let 'X' = 'folk psychological mental states,' we can arrive at the conditions that a view about these mental states must satisfy in order to be a realist view. On most if not all such formulations of general realism, eliminativism will (quite rightly) turn out to be an anti-realist position.

Then we would get one set of conditions for a position being a realist position, another for it being a realist* position, another for it being a realist** position, and so forth.

⁴ In what follows, X serves as a generic variable which stands in for any of the items (objects, properties, states of affairs, etc.) at issue in any of the manifold disputes about realism.

⁵ Less straightforwardly, but also worth noting, is the following implication of (C1):

- (C1**) Other things being equal, any viable formulation of general realism should not imply either that what had clearly seemed to be a case where realism about X is true, turns out to be a case where neither realism about X nor anti-realism about X is true, or that what had clearly seemed to be a case where anti-realism about X is true, turns out to be a case where neither anti-realism about X nor realism about X is true.

The converse of this constraint is:

- (CON) Other things being equal, any viable formulation of general realism should not imply that what had clearly seemed to be a case where neither realism about X nor anti-realism about X is true, ends up being a case where either realism about X or anti-realism about X is true.

Given this connection between formulations of general realism and the realist status of various philosophical positions, it turns out that we can also work in the other direction and use our firm judgments about which positions count as realist (or anti-realist, or neither realist nor anti-realist) views in order to help us arrive at a viable formulation of general realism. Fortunately, the resulting constraint closely mirrors (C1):

- (C2) Other things being equal, any viable formulation of general realism should imply both that a well-developed position which had clearly seemed to be an realist view, is in fact a realist view and not an anti-realist view or neither kind of view, and that a well-developed position which had clearly seemed to be an anti-realist view, is in fact an anti-realist view and not a realist view or neither kind of view.

Also noteworthy is the following closely related constraint:

- (C3) Other things being equal, any viable formulation of general realism should not count as either a realist or an anti-realist view, that which had clearly seemed to be neither a realist nor an anti-realist view.

Thus according to (C2), any formulation which implies that Paul Churchland's eliminativism⁶ or Hartry Field's fictionalism⁷ is a form of realism should, other things being equal, be justifiably dismissed. And with respect to (C3), it would be a recognizable deficiency with a formulation of general realism if it were to somehow imply that the mere adoption of a coherentist moral epistemology is sufficient for being either a moral realist or a moral anti-realist. Both sides are free to help themselves to such a view.

Finally we come to the neutrality constraint:

- (C4) Other things being equal, any viable formulation of general realism should itself attempt to remain as neutral as possible by not being implicitly committed to the truth or falsity of either a realist or an anti-realist view in any particular domain in which disputes about realism arise.

(CON) would be an important constraint to keep in mind if realism and anti-realism were not jointly exhaustive. However, in what follows I will assume that for any X, either realism is true about X or anti-realism is true about X, and hence I will not make use of (CON).

⁶ Churchland 1981.

⁷ Field 1980, 1989, and 2001.

As we will see, (C4) has been repeatedly violated by statements of general realism which implicitly involve ontological commitments to such controversial entities as facts, propositions, and states of affairs. Other things being equal, an account of general realism should not itself do any work when it comes to adjudicating important disputes about the ontological legitimacy of such entities. Nor should, for example, a theist or a non-naturalist about value be automatically saddled with an ontology which countenances propositions or states of affairs merely in virtue of being classified as a realist of that particular kind; in fact, for all we know some versions of theism or non-naturalism might happen to deny the existence of such entities, and yet that alone should not preclude them from counting as forms of realism.⁸

I do not know how to argue for these constraints other than to point to further examples and show how the constraints each preserve something that seems to be of value when we are attempting to formulate the conditions that make up a general realism position. So with (C1) through (C4) in mind, let us now turn to the various ways in which philosophers have tried to state general realism.

2. Strategies for Formulating General Realism

During the middle ages, interest in realism primarily centered around the metaphysical status of universals. In subsequent centuries, similar metaphysical disputes arose about the nature of causality, moral values, and ordinary physical objects, to name just a few. Even well into the twentieth century, the central question about realism concerned the metaphysical existence and nature of some particular class of entities.⁹

⁸ For a constraint on accounts of mind independence which is similar to (C4), see Vinuesa 2001: 54.

⁹ For similar observations, see Devitt 1991: 40, Alston 1996: 8, and Hale 1997: 272.

The contours of the traditional realism debates have largely changed in the last fifty years of Anglo-American analytic philosophy. ‘Realism’ and ‘anti-realism’ are now often defined in epistemic, semantic, or explanatory terms, and thus properly metaphysical conditions, if they are offered at all, are stated only indirectly. In order to appreciate the range of views which currently vie for attention in the contemporary literature, let us summarize the most prominent strategies for formulating the general conditions that must be met in order for realism to be true about X. In each case, only a preliminary statement of the view is given, a statement which demands but rarely receives a more detailed articulation.

Metaphysical Formulations of General Realism. We can begin where philosophers traditionally did, namely with some version of the following:

Rough Thesis:

Realism about X is true if and only if, and because, X exists and¹⁰ X has an existence and nature which are not dependent in certain ways upon human beings.

Possible Instances:

Realism about X is true iff and because . . .

. . . X exists, and is roughly as common-sense folk theory takes it to be.

. . . X exists independently of the mental.

. . . X exists objectively.

. . . X exists both independently of the mental and objectively.¹¹

Thus, for example, Michael Devitt holds that according to realism, “tokens of most current common-sense and scientific physical types objectively exist independently of the mental.”¹²

¹⁰ As we noted in footnote one, some realists take the mere existence of X to be sufficient for the truth of realism about X. Others argue that some further condition beyond mere existence is necessary, but reject the claim that this condition has anything to do with dependence relations involving human beings. So it is worth noting that even this rough statement of the thesis is not uncontroversial.

¹¹ Advocates of metaphysical formulations of general realism include Alston 1979: 620, 1996: 73-4, 2002c: 96-7, 110, Goldman 1979: 175, Rawls 1980: 519, 568, Field 1982: 553-4, Blackburn 1984: 181-9, Devitt 1987: 30-31, 1991: 13-25, Butchvarov 1988: 396, Maddy 1990: 14, Moser 1993: 4, 21-3, Fine 2001, Vinuesa 2001: 51, and Bloomfield 2001: viii-ix. They are advocates in the sense that they advance a metaphysical formulation of realism as the best way of characterizing the view. It certainly need not follow that they also endorse the view itself.

¹² Devitt 1991: 23.

Semantic Formulations of General Realism. By far the most popular way of stating general realism in recent years has been as a semantic thesis about truth and meaning:

Rough Thesis:

Realism about X is true if and only if, and because, certain claims which putatively refer to X are true (given a certain theory of truth) and/or meaningful (given a certain theory of meaning).

Possible Instances:

Realism about X is true iff and because certain claims which putatively refer to X . . .
. . . are both truth apt and correspondence true.
. . . are both truth apt and objectively or non-relatively true.
. . . have a meaning best understood using a truth-conditional theory of meaning.
. . . have a meaning best understood using a verification transcendent theory of meaning and have verification transcendent truth conditions.¹³

Thus Geoffrey Sayre-McCord writes that, “realism involves embracing just two theses: (1) the claims in question, when literally construed, are literally true or false, and (2) some are literally true. Nothing more.”¹⁴

Epistemic Formulations of General Realism. Instead of focusing on alethic and semantic issues concerning some contested domain, one might instead formulate realism in terms of our epistemic access to the disputed entities:

Rough Thesis:

Realism about X is true if and only if, and because, certain epistemic relations can obtain between human beings and X.¹⁵

¹³ Advocates of semantic formulations include Dummett 1963: 146-7, 155, 1969: 358, 1976: 56, 62-3, 1981: 434-5, 438-9, 441, 1991: 9, 325-8, Hesse 1967: 407, Putnam 1975: 69-70, Sober 1982: 369, 378, 381, Blackburn 1984: 146-171, Skorupski 1985: 13, 16, Haack 1987, Young 1987: 641-2, van Inwagen 1988: 97, 107, 1993: 60, Sayre-McCord 1988: 5, 1991: 157, Wright 1992, 2002: 218, Williams 1993: 193, Railton 1996: 50-7, and Tennant 1997: 23. Such an approach is especially popular in the philosophy of science. See for example Lauden 1981: 20-21, Leplin 1984: 1-2, Ellis 1985: 50-51, Fine 1986: 150-155, Haack 1987: 275, and the works cited in Devitt 1991: 39-40, 58 fn. 1, 339 fn. 2.

¹⁴ Sayre-McCord 1988: 5. Admittedly it is a bit hard to reconcile this claim with what Sayre-McCord writes a few pages later, namely that “for the most part, realism is a matter of metaphysics, not semantics” (7). See also his 1991: 157.

¹⁵ Advocates of epistemic formulations include Rorty 1982: 14, Young 1987: 641-2, Papineau 1987: xii, 2, 7-8, and Horwich 1998: 55-57.

This might at first seem to be a surprising thesis for a *realist* to hold. After all, hasn't realism traditionally been associated with verification *transcendence*? Here, however, I have chosen to classify verification transcendent formulations under the heading of either metaphysical or semantic approaches. After all those who claim, in the metaphysical case, that realism is committed to the epistemically invariant existence of certain entities, are starting

Hence according to Paul Horwich, the “essence” of realism concerns “how it is possible for us to know of the existence of certain facts given our ordinary conception of their nature.”¹⁶

Explanatory Formulations of General Realism. Some philosophers apparently think that the truth of realism ultimately rests on explanatory considerations:

Rough Thesis:

Realism about X is true if and only if, and because, X is ineliminable from our best explanation(s) of certain phenomena in that domain.

Possible Instance:

Realism about X is true iff and because . . .

. . . X plays an indispensable role in the best explanation(s) of something important about a given domain, i.e., the truth of certain propositions pertaining to that domain, our knowledge of such propositions, certain phenomenological experiences, and so on.¹⁷

For example according to James Griffin, “realism about a kind of thing is the view that things of that kind must appear in the best account of what happens in the world.”¹⁸

Mixed Formulations of General Realism. Naturally these four strategies need not be employed exclusively as we can combine them in rather interesting and complex ways:

Possible Instances:

with metaphysics and using an epistemic condition to help spell out what it is for the relevant entities to exist objectively or mind-independently. Similarly, those who claim that realism is committed to the possibility of verification transcendent truths, are starting at the alethic level and using an epistemic condition to help spell out what it is for the relevant truth-bearers to be objectively true. Ultimately, though, nothing should hang on these taxonomic choices.

¹⁶ Horwich 1998: 55. Similarly he writes that, “anti-realism is the view that our common-sense conception of what we know is incoherent: the supposed character of facts of a certain type cannot be reconciled with our capacity to discover them” (Ibid., 56). Later Horwich also gives the non-equivalent but still epistemic formulation of realism according to which realism is concerned with “the *justifiability* of believing in facts that exist independently of thought or experience” (Ibid., 57, emphasis mine).

¹⁷ An advocate of explanatory formulations is Griffin 1996: 60-66. Blackburn at times talks as if the central concern of his projectivism is explanation (1984: 211-2, 220). It might be thought that both Gilbert Harman and Nicholas Sturgeon also deserve to be labeled as advocates of this kind of formulation given their well-known exchange over the explanatory role of moral facts and properties (see Harman 1977, 1986 and Sturgeon 1985). But explanatory considerations could also be used as *evidence* in our best attempts at determining the truth of moral realism even when such a view is formulated metaphysically or semantically. Thus I am quite reticent to categorize either philosopher’s taxonomic views without further textual evidence.

¹⁸ Griffin 1996: 61.

Realism about X is true iff and because . . .

. . . X exists [objectively, mind-independently, etc.], and certain sentences [statements, propositions, etc.] which putatively refer to X are [correspondence, objectively, etc.] true.
. . . Certain sentences [statements, propositions, etc.] which putatively refer to X are correspondence true, and we are justified in believing that they are true.¹⁹

As a paradigm example of a mixed formulation, Hilary Putnam claims that for the realist, “the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is.’ Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things.”²⁰

Quietism. Finally we would be remiss if we did not also mention what is not so much a formulation of general realism as it is an expression of doubt that there is anything substantive at issue in debates about realism in the first place:

Rough Thesis:

The most sophisticated forms of what is often called ‘anti-realism’ about some domain can satisfy all the reasonable requirements for being a ‘realist’ about that domain. Thus at the end of the day there is nothing of substance which separates realists from anti-realists. The debate, if there even was a genuine one in the first place, has been dissolved.²¹

Gideon Rosen, for instance, at times flirts with quietism when he makes remarks such as the following: “[w]e *sense* that there is a heady metaphysical thesis at stake in these debates over realism . . . But after a point, when every attempt to say just what the issue is has come up empty, we have no real choice but to conclude that despite all the wonderful, suggestive imagery, there is ultimately nothing in the neighborhood to discuss.”²² As we will see in section four, quietism

¹⁹ Advocates of mixed formulations include Quinn 1978: 1-2, Dummett 1981: 434, 446, 449, Putnam 1981: 49, 1988: 107, 1990: 27, 30, Taylor 1987, Brink 1989: 15-6, Pettit 1991, Rosen 1994: 280, Railton and Rosen 1995: 433-7, Horwich 1996: 188, Devitt 1996: 165, 1997: 313-4, Tennant 1997: 28-38, Timmons 1999: 34-6, Oddie 1999: 252, Koons 2000: 1, Loux 2002: 250-255, and Wright 2002: 207.

²⁰ Putnam 1981: 49.

²¹ Blackburn flirts with quietism (1980, 1987: 55-59, 1993: 4, 7, 1998: 319), as does Gideon Rosen in his 1994. For other flirtations, see McDowell 1981, Putnam 1987: 19, Dworkin 1996, and Gibbard 2002: 153.

²² Rosen 1994: 279, emphasis his.

can be avoided if I am right to think that there still remains an informative way of construing the divide between realists and anti-realists.

It is of course true that there are other strategies for formulating general realism on offer in the contemporary literature, but the ones described above represent the most popular and influential approaches. So let us critically examine each of them.

3. Against Non-Metaphysical Formulations of General Realism

Extant semantic, epistemic, explanatory, and mixed formulations of general realism are all inadequate because they typically violate one or more of the constraints (C1) through (C4) that were sketched in section one. In order to properly argue for this conclusion, we would need to undertake a detailed examination of the major non-metaphysical statements of general realism in the literature. While such a task certainly would be worthwhile to carry out, it would also require several additional papers. So instead I will briefly mention a few concerns about each of these strategies.

Against Semantic Formulations of General Realism. It should be clear that many realism debates have very little to do with truth, or at least do not appear to upon initial inspection. Thus a realist about universals or about mental states is primarily concerned with the metaphysical status of these entities, and not with the truth-values of the relevant statements which refer to them.²³ Questions about truth might arise in these domains, but it is hard to see how they alone could advance the debate between realists and anti-realists unless each side had already taken a prior stand on the metaphysical status of the relevant truth-makers.

²³ Even Michael Dummett, the most prominent advocate of a semantic formulation of general realism, admits as much. See his 1963: 147.

In order to make the inadequacy of semantic approaches to formulating general realism more pronounced, it is worth briefly mentioning four important challenges for such a strategy – the possibility of evidence transcendent entities, the lack of entailment relations between realism and truth, the choice of truth-bearer, and the success of quasi-realist mimicry. Let us take each of these in order.

First Challenge. Suppose that for a given domain of experience, there exist certain mind-independent entities which are such that human beings do not have epistemic access to them and are thereby wholly ignorant of their existence. There could be a variety of reasons for our ignorance – perhaps (i) evolution did not naturally endow us with the relevant detection faculties, or (ii) we do have such faculties but they are always malfunctioning, or (iii) we have not yet developed the requisite technology needed in order to detect them, or (iv) the entities are simply unknowable to beings like us. Regardless of the particular explanation, it seems apparent that nonetheless such entities exist *realistically*. Clearly their existence need not depend in any way on our conceptual schemes or intentional attitudes. Nor need such entities be straightforwardly reducible to other entities with which we are already well-acquainted.

Given even a rough formulation of the central thesis at work in metaphysical formulations of general realism, it should be apparent that unknown entities of the kind at issue here rightly get classified as entities about which realism is true. On the other hand, such a result is not immediately obvious given the rough thesis at the heart of semantic formulations since by hypothesis there currently are no human beings who are such that they bear the appropriate semantic relations to the entities in question. Were it to not imply that such entities are objects

about which realism is true, a semantic formulational strategy would thereby violate constraint (C1).²⁴

Thus the challenge to the advocate of a semantic formulation of general realism is to be able to properly account for the truth of realism about entities of this kind. Note that the very fact that the entities are unknown implies that a wide variety of candidate truth-bearers which might be employed in a semantic formulation will not in fact be in the offing. After all, there will not be any sentence tokens, beliefs, statements, or assertions in use which pertain to such entities. Propositions, on the other hand, would do the job but as we will see in a moment, building propositions into a formulation of general realism involves an unacceptable violation of the neutrality constraint.

Unknown entities also prove troublesome for those who state general realism in terms of a commitment to a correspondence theory of truth. Correspondence theories depend on there being referential relations between truth-bearers and truth-makers in order to guarantee that the former properly mirror the latter.²⁵ But realism could be true about some X even though it does not enter into the appropriate referential relations with any truth-bearers. In such a case, the truth-values of the relevant truth-bearers (if there were any) would be either false or indeterminate. This especially would be a problem if one holds that referential relations should be modeled along the lines of recent causal theories of reference. For X might exist realistically even though no human being has ever or even physically could ever enter into causal contact with X.²⁶

²⁴ Bob Hale (1997: 287) uses a similar approach to object to Dummett's semantic characterization of realism.

²⁵ See Devitt 1987: 32, 1991: 28-9 and Maddy 1990: 16.

²⁶ Possible candidates for X might include, for instance, particular astronomical objects which exist outside of our light-cone.

Second Challenge. Being a realist about many domains of experience seems to straightforwardly underdetermine one's commitment to a theory of truth, and the same in the other direction. For consider the following:

(A1) General Realism \Rightarrow Some Particular Theory of Truth.²⁷

But it turns out that domain specific realist positions often do not entail any particular theory of truth. Thus a theist or a numerical Platonist also could be, say, a deflationist about truth. Even if being a Platonist might incline one towards a correspondence theory, it is hard to see how a certain view of the metaphysics of numbers would *necessarily* force one in that direction. And given that a formulation of general realism is derived from reflective equilibrium on judgments about the conditions which make realism true in at least some of the various local realism disputes, it is hard to see how a general commitment to a particular theory of truth will emerge from realism debates which often do not involve any commitments to such a theory.²⁸

The converse entailment is the following:

(A2) Some Particular Theory of Truth \Rightarrow General Realism.

But (A2) is hardly plausible given any of the dominant theories of truth in the literature. One could be a deflationist,²⁹ minimalist,³⁰ alethic realist,³¹ pragmatist, or coherentist about the truth of statements in, say, science or ethics, while also denying the claim that unobservable microscopic entities or objective moral values exist.

²⁷ ' \Rightarrow ' symbolizes entailment.

²⁸ For further doubts about (A1), see Field 1982: 554, Horwich 1982: 186, Devitt 1987: 31, 1991: 41, Sayre-McCord 1988: 6-7, Maddy 1990: 17-8, Dummett 1991: 331, and Alston 1996: 78-9.

²⁹ For example, the success of the quasi-realist project of mimicking truth talk depends on denying that deflationism entails realism. See Blackburn 1998: chapter three. For general discussion of deflationism and realism, see Field 1994.

³⁰ Paul Horwich explicitly denies that his version of minimalism (and more generally, any particular theory of truth) entails realism (1998: chapter four). Crispin Wright as well considers his minimalism about truth to be neutral between realism and anti-realism (1992: chapter three).

About the best one might hope for is the following:

(A2*) Correspondence Theory of Truth \Rightarrow General Realism.

But one could, for example, accept the correspondence theory and at the same time also hold an error theory about the mental whereby mental states do not exist and putative reference to mental states reflects a deep and systematic error which renders the relevant truth-bearers false. Similarly, one could reject realism about ordinary physical objects in favor of a certain kind of phenomenalism according to which there are correspondence relations that obtain between truth-bearers and sense data. So even the theory of truth which is often thought to be most congenial to realism is by itself simply insufficient to capture what is primarily at issue in many realism debates.³²

Third Challenge. There are also specific problems which arise depending on one's choice of truth-bearer. In recent years it has become quite popular in the realism literature to construe *sentences* as truth-bearers, where this can amount to a claim either about sentence tokens or about sentence types. Consider the former. Here it is well-known that there are grave difficulties with attributing truth-values to sentence tokens.³³ But even if these worries can be addressed, there is an important problem when it comes to using sentence tokens to formulate a version of general realism, namely that sentence tokens make what is ontologically legitimate from a realist perspective turn out to be unacceptably hostage to our linguistic capacities. Suppose that human

³¹ William Alston holds that his alethic realism is neutral between metaphysical realism and anti-realism (1996: 79-84).

³² For further concerns about both (A2) and (A2*), see Horwich 1982: 189, 1996: 193, 1998: 57-60, Devitt 1987: 31-32, 1991: 41-2, 1996: 170, 1997: 319, Maddy 1990: 16, and Alston 2002b: 4.

³³ For one it is hard to understand what it would mean to say that some lead on a piece of paper or some pattern of sounds could be the bearer of truth or falsity. Furthermore, it is quite natural to view the statement or propositional content being expressed by a speaker at a time to be both conceptually and metaphysically prior to the sentence token in question.

beings had never evolved the means of producing sentence tokens.³⁴ It would be absurd to conclude that since there are no true sentence tokens, Platonism about universals or non-naturalism about the metaphysics of values is thereby precluded from counting as a form of domain specific realism in that possible world. Such a result would leave us with a seemingly gross violation of constraint (C2).

Would sentence *types* fair any better? Not obviously. Again there are recognized problems with using sentence types as truth bearers, problems which are independent of whether or not they can also be employed in an account of general realism.³⁵ Furthermore, there is a special problem when it comes to general realism. For at least on many views, sentence types are abstract objects,³⁶ and thus in the very process of articulating the conditions for realism we would have implicitly taken a controversial stand against nominalism in an important realism debate. This is clearly unacceptable – a formulation of general realism should itself remain neutral on substantive issues about the truth of realism (C4).

Well, perhaps we should forget about sentences and turn instead to statements and beliefs as the truth-bearers in a semantic formulation of general realism.³⁷ But if we do so, then again we would be making what is for a realist otherwise perfectly legitimate turn out to be dependent upon our linguistic and psychological capacities. There was nothing about evolution which guaranteed that we would evolve into beings with the capacity to make statements and form beliefs. Similarly, there may be some entities which enjoy an intuitively realistic existence but

³⁴ Or if that is too fanciful, simply trace our own evolution back to some point in time before which we lacked the relevant capacities.

³⁵ Most notably, sentence types face familiar problems with ambiguous word meaning, as well as with indexicals and demonstratives. See Alston 1996: 9-11 and Horwich 1998: 16.

³⁶ See Haack 1978: 77, Alston 1996: 13, and Katz 1998: 3. Alternatively, if sentence types are simply sets or collections of identical or meaning equivalent sentence tokens (Sellars 1963 and Kirkham 1997: 56-7), then difficulties similar to those raised for sentence tokens would also apply to sentence types.

³⁷ What follows applies to judgments and assertions as well.

which are such that it is physically impossible for us to form beliefs about them because, for example, they exist outside our light-cone. Finally, once we have left behind sentences in favor of either statements or beliefs, then it seems that there will be little resistance to going all the way down the road to *propositions*. For on the one hand there is the psychological state of believing or the speech act of stating so-and-so, and on the other hand there is that which is believed or stated. And in the case of beliefs, it is natural to think that the truth of my belief that $2+2=4$ is simply derivative from the truth of the content of that belief.

So finally we come to propositions. And here the defender of semantic formulations of general realism is again in serious trouble. Regardless of one's view about the nature of propositions, positing their existence involves adopting a controversial stance in the relevant local realism debate. After all, being a moral realist or a theist should not also *thereby* commit one to the existence of propositions; it should be possible to hold a number of realist positions while also being an anti-realist about propositions.^{38 39}

Fourth Challenge. Before concluding it is worth noting that if Simon Blackburn is right about the implications of his quasi-realism, then the view would allow us to capture most if not

³⁸ Additionally, depending on your theory of propositions, you might find yourself taking controversial views on the existence of states of affairs (Chisholm 1976) or possible worlds (Stalnaker 1984), again violating (C4). Of course, the same point applies in the other direction. If one has a deflationary view of the ontology of propositions (Schiffer 1990: 603-4), building such a view into a characterization of realism would unfairly preclude ontological 'inflationists' about propositions from being able to defend realist views.

³⁹ The considerations advanced above about truth-bearers should raise doubts about trying to render realism debates semantic by semantically ascending via the equivalence schema. The doubts would be due to the fact that in order to state one's preferred version of the schema, a choice has to be made about what should play the role of the truth-bearer. Thus, for example, Paul Horwich uses propositions in his formulation:

It is true that p if and only if p (Horwich 1998).

But then the realist is already committed to an ontology of propositions even before we have arrived at a precise statement of what general realism is supposed to amount to in the first place. Problems similar to those raised above would also apply to the other natural choices of truth-bearers.

For further reservations see also Devitt 1991: 41-2, 2002: 2.

all instances of a semantic formulation of general realism while at the same time being at bottom a form of anti-realism. For it turns out that according to Blackburn statements like:

(QR) X is good in virtue of the relevant objective ethical facts about goodness.

are not only truth-apt, but may also be true since according to the quasi-realist, (QR) means nothing more than:

(QR*) X is good.⁴⁰

And the hope is that the same will hold for statements about, say, modality and causality as well.⁴¹ Thus realists and quasi-realists will not differ at the semantic level; what differences there are will have to be determined at the level of metaphysics.⁴²

This should come as no surprise. In general the most sophisticated forms of anti-realism about some putatively factual domain of experience will do all they can to preserve the appearances while rejecting the realist's interpretation of the underlying reality. In other words, they will seek to preserve the semantic properties of discourse in the domain, its ability to function in sound arguments, its declarative form, its objective and impersonal character, and so on, while at the same time giving an anti-realist account of its status which thereby eschews any appeal to a purportedly gratuitous realist metaphysics. With this in mind, then, the place to look in order to characterize the dispute between realists and anti-realists will have to be somewhere other than their accounts of language and truth.⁴³

⁴⁰ Blackburn 1998: 78-9, 305-6.

⁴¹ Blackburn 1984: 210-17.

⁴² As Blackburn notes, ". . . now there need be no attempt to deny the distinctive nature of the commitments, and the unique meaning of the various vocabularies, and this still leaves open a projective theory of what is true of us when we use them. This implies that the pure philosophy of language has less to offer to such problems than most recent discussions assume" (1984: 210).

⁴³ For similar sentiments, see Sayre-McCord 1988: 2, Railton 1995: 259-263, Devitt 1996: 161-2, 1997: 311, and Fine 2001: 12. Note that instead of Blackburn, we could have arrived at the same conclusion using the minimalist proposals of Crispin Wright (1988, 1992, 2002) and Paul Horwich (1993, 1994).

So in general it would be surprising if semantic formulations of general realism were successful in capturing our intuitions about the various local realism debates, for that would mean that to be a realist is to think that our referential capacities somehow mirror the structure of the real. But such an approach seems to get things backwards – a realist should be interested in the nature of reality first, and care only derivatively about how we are able to successfully refer to it. For a realist, reference and truth typically depend upon what there is, and not the other way around.

Against Epistemic Formulations of General Realism. Many of the concerns raised above about semantic formulations of general realism can also be straightforwardly adapted to epistemic statements of the view as well. Of the four mentioned above, perhaps the most pressing challenge would again concern the existence of unknown entities. If there are such objects, then intuitively they deserve to be classified as entities about which realism is true – they exist, their existence and nature do not depend on our conceptual schemes or projective activities, they would continue to exist even in worlds without human beings, and so on. But then any formulation of general realism in terms of epistemic success will give the wrong results.

Rather than merely repeating the concerns that were raised about semantic formulations, let us briefly consider some specific proposals in the recent literature. According to Peter Railton and Gideon Rosen, a necessary condition for being a realist about some area is:

- (*) The epistemic thesis that we have good reason to believe our theories in the area not to be gravely in error.⁴⁴

But while some local realists may be inclined towards accepting something like (*) given the peculiarities of the domain with which they happen to be working, it is hard to see how this

⁴⁴ Railton and Rosen 1995: 435.

epistemic thesis is partially *constitutive* of what it is to be a realist in the first place. After all, I could be a realist about science and yet think that certain areas of scientific inquiry are still in their infancy and likely will undergo major changes with the progression of technological development. More straightforwardly still, in certain cases (*) would preclude unknown entities from counting as objects about which realism is true.

The same considerations tell against Paul Horwich's claim that:

(**) The essence of realism concerns how it is possible for us to know of the existence of certain facts given our ordinary conception of their nature.⁴⁵

(**) violates the neutrality constraint (C4) by building a controversial commitment to an ontology of facts right into the very formulation of realism.⁴⁶ Even worse, Horwich's account seems to badly mislocate the source of a wide variety of local realism debates ranging from Platonism to theism. And finally, (**) is unable to handle unknown entities about which it is not physically possible for us to know of their existence and for which we have no ordinary conception of their nature.

Similar considerations tell against the handful of other epistemic proposals. Epistemic success formulations of general realism look to be rather unpromising from the start.

Against Explanatory Formulations of General Realism. Explanatory formulations suffer from some of the same problems that were raised above for semantic and epistemic accounts, but they also engender new worries of their own. One familiar difficulty concerns unknown entities –

⁴⁵ Horwich 1998: 55. See also the additional quotations from Horwich in footnote 16. Compare as well Papineau: "The realist . . . takes the view that we need somehow to ensure that our beliefs correspond to the world" (1987: 8).

⁴⁶ On the other hand, if Horwich only intends to be appealing to a deflationary view of facts according to which it is a fact that p iff p , then any moderately sophisticated anti-realist position which countenances p will have no trouble meeting this condition.

they will not have a role to play in our best explanation of any phenomenon, but if they exist they deserve to be classified as realistically existing objects.

The distinctive concern that comes with explanatory formulations is that they typically tell us nothing about what the nature of X is supposed to be. After all, it could be the case that X plays an inelimitable role in our best explanations of certain phenomena even though we have projected X onto the world or our conceptual schemes are somehow intimately involved in supplying existence and persistence conditions for X. Similarly, explanatory considerations are insufficient to rule out a broadly Kantian view according to which we impose forms of intuition such as space and time onto the world; spatio-temporal objects would still be ‘empirically real’ and serve an important role in causal explanations. As such, then, explanatory formulations run the risk of violating constraint (C2) by counting as realist views what are widely taken to be paradigms of anti-realism.

Both sets of concerns arise with respect to the explanatory formulation of general realism offered by James Griffin:

- ([^]) Realism about a kind of thing is the view that things of that kind must appear in the best account of what happens in the world.⁴⁷

Presumably the best account will be one supplied by human beings, and thus will be such as to leave out reference to unknown entities which nonetheless deserve to be counted as realistically existing objects. Similarly it is compatible with Griffin’s account that ‘the world’ is not mind-independent but rather constituted by our conceptual and projective activities.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Griffin 1996: 61.

⁴⁸ Related considerations count against Crispin Wright’s appeal to the importance of wide cosmological role (Wright 1992). For compelling reasons in favor of rejecting Wright’s proposal as well as explanatory accounts in general, see Rosen 1994: 310-313.

Admittedly, explanatory considerations will often have a large role to play in adjudicating many local realism disputes. As such, then, they might serve as a test for the truth of realism in a particular domain of experience, and thereby supply us with reasons for or against adopting a realist stance towards the entities in that domain. But what is harder to see is how explanatory considerations are *constitutive* of what it is to be a realist in the first place. Rather, the metaphysical existence and nature of the relevant Xs seems to come first in debates about realism, and whatever explanatory role is played by such Xs is merely derivative from these prior concerns.

Against Mixed Formulations of General Realism. Finally, if a mixed formulation does not rely on any metaphysical conditions whatsoever, then it seems that it will prove to be problematic for many of the same reasons given above. But to the extent that it incorporates such conditions, it is not clear why anything more is needed, as we shall see in the following section.

Putnam's well-known statement of what he calls 'metaphysical realism' serves as a helpful illustration of the problem with mixed formulations. Recall that for Putnam, the realist is committed to the following three theses:

- (i) The world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects.
- (ii) There is exactly one true and complete description of 'the way the world is.'
- (iii) Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things.⁴⁹

But (ii) and (iii) hardly seem necessary. Stated as an epistemic demand to arrive at one true theory of the world, (ii) violates constraint (C2) by precluding views which posit verification

⁴⁹ Putnam 1981: 49.

transcendent mind-independent entities from counting as forms of realism.⁵⁰ And condition (iii) commits the realist to a controversial position in the theory of truth since, as we saw above, realism is also compatible with a wide variety of other views such as deflationism. On the other hand, provided that we can give an informative account of ‘mind-independence,’ the metaphysical thesis in (i) may be both necessary and sufficient for general realism. It is to the task of giving such an account that we now turn.

4. Metaphysical Formulations of General Realism

Of course, merely deciding in favor of a metaphysical approach to formulating general realism hardly settles the matter since there are a number of different and often incompatible versions one could adopt. To begin, consider the simplest statement of all – realism about X is true iff and because:

(M1) X exists.

The problem with (M1) is that it is far too permissive – it lets far too many anti-realist views count as forms of realism, thereby violating constraint (C2). Thus common forms of subjectivism, relativism, and constructivism about a wide variety of domains would all count as realist views according to this account. Similarly, Putnam’s internal realist countenances the scheme-relative existence of ordinary physical objects, a phenomenalist claims that tables and chairs exist, and both a quasi-realist and a minimalist can readily accept the existence of modal facts and causal relations. And yet all such views – subjectivism, relativism, constructivism, internal realism, phenomenism, quasi-realism, and minimalism – are widely taken to be

⁵⁰ For further problems with (ii), see Field 1982: 553-4 and Alston 2002c.

alternatives to realism. So (M1) seems to badly mislocate the source of contention in the various realism debates.⁵¹

But there is no guarantee that we can do any better. For attempts to strength (M1) typically either (i) invoke uninformative metaphorical imagery, or (ii) end up *excluding* straightforwardly realist positions, thereby violating constraint (C2). These are the two horns of a dilemma that has continually plagued attempts at giving a substantive metaphysical characterization of general realism.

As instances of formulations which succumb to the first horn, take the following well-known examples:

(M2) X exists, and it makes up a part of the fabric of the world.

(M3) X exists from a God's eye perspective.⁵²

(M4) X exists, and its existence was not projected onto the world by human beings.

Clearly these conditions are mere gestures in the direction of strengthening (M1) into a more plausible account.

Instances of the other horn of the dilemma are also prevalent. As straightforward examples, consider:

(M5) X exists, and it is roughly as current common-sense folk theory takes X to be.

(M6) X exists, and it is roughly as current scientific theory takes X to be.⁵³

Problems similar to those that arose above for epistemic formulations of general realism also infect these two accounts as well. For by privileging current folk or scientific theory, they

⁵¹ Admittedly (M1) does exclude those who deny the existence of X, and so, for example, rightly precludes atheists, moral nihilists, and nominalists from counting as realists. Unfortunately, while perhaps stating a necessary condition for general realism, (M1) by itself seems far from sufficient. For one among many similar claims, see Rosen 1994: 280-282.

⁵² See Putnam 1988: 109.

exclude the existence of Xs whose detection would require radical advances in either area, as well as those Xs which are epistemically inaccessible to human beings given the noetic faculties with which evolution has endowed us.

Perhaps what is missing from (M1) is the role that human beings might play in *causing* X to exist. In other words, perhaps general realism is true iff:

(M7) X exists, and it was not brought about or caused to exist by human beings.

But clearly this account is inadequate. Parents can think that realism is true about their children even though they brought them about, carpenters can think that realism is true about artifacts like tables and chairs even though they caused them to exist, and meta-ethicists can think that realism is true about character traits even though they were brought about through deliberative human activities.

Another familiar move is to supplement (M1) with an additional necessary condition about the role that *minds* play. Thus arguably the most common metaphysical formulation of general realism is the following:

(M8) X exists, and its existence is independent of the mental.⁵⁴

But (M8) as stated is hardly informative unless we are told something more about what the relevant notion of independence is supposed to amount to.

There are a variety of strategies available to the realist in order to flesh out mind-independence, but almost immediately counterexamples arise. Take, for example, the following:

(M9) X exists, and its existence is independent of any human being's awareness that X exists.

⁵³ See Plantinga 1982: 48, Devitt 1987: 31, 1991: 23-4, Maddy 1990: 14, Horwich 1996: 188-9, and the discussion in Bigelow 1994.

⁵⁴ See Heil 1989: 66, among many others.

(M9) has trouble with realism about the mental. Some philosophers have thought that there are mental states which are necessarily objects of awareness, and while such a position is surely controversial in contemporary philosophy of mind, we cannot allow the definition of general realism alone to preclude the possibility of being a realist about such states without violating the neutrality constraint (C4).

Similar problems arise for a straightforwardly causal account of mind-independence:

(M10) X exists, and its existence is not causally dependent on the mental.

Artifacts and character traits will again prove troublesome for such an account. And regardless of how we understand causal dependence, (M10) cannot accommodate realism about mental states that are either (i) caused by other mental states, or (ii) caused by a non-physical mental substance, or (iii) both (i) and (ii).

Mental states also serve as counterexamples to constitution accounts of mind-independence such as the following:

(M11) X exists, and its existence is not constituted by the mental.⁵⁵

The inadequacy of such a view should be evident. For (M11) seems to prevent one from being a realist about human mental states if, for example, one holds that they are constituted by a non-physical mental substance.

Having considered causal and constitution accounts of mind-independence, it is only fitting that we also consider a counterfactual view as well:

(M12) X exists, and it would have existed even if it were the case that there are no human minds.

While something like (M12) will ultimately emerge as the most promising formulation of general realism, initially at least it is hard to see how it can permit realism to be true about our

mental states since they would not exist in the worlds most similar to ours in which there are no human minds. Similar problems also arise with character traits and artifacts.

By now things are looking rather bleak. (M2) through (M12) are the standard ways of providing a metaphysical formulation of general realism, and yet they all turn out to be either uninformative or overly restrictive. Naturally it does not follow that more sophisticated versions of these views could not be devised which avoid the problems mentioned above without at the same time proving to be *ad hoc* or unmotivated. But for now it looks as if (M1) – X exists – is our only hope. And far from being too restrictive, (M1) seems to error in the opposite direction of being far too permissive.

Yet perhaps we need not give up hope just yet. Suppose we start from the other direction and consider that to be an *anti-realist* about some disputed X in a given domain is, intuitively, to think either that X does not exist or that if it does, its existence is closely bound up with the attitudes that we happen to take towards its existence. Thus while atheists and nominalists typically have denied the existence of the Xs in their respective domains, an anti-realist like Putnam thinks that the Xs which make up, say, the external world do exist but only relative to our conceptual schemes and object-directed attitudes. Given that conceptual schemes supply existence and persistence conditions for Xs, what Xs there are in a given domain of experience can depend on our prior choice of which scheme to adopt. Had we evolved otherwise or adopted a rather different conceptual scheme or set of relevant attitudes with respect to Xs, then the number and kinds of Xs in the world would very likely have changed accordingly.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See Alston 1996: 74-5 and especially Schmitt 1995: 12. Oddie 1999: 252 gives a constitution account of mind-independence as part of a mixed formulation of general realism.

⁵⁶ See Putnam 1983: 42-43, 1987: 18-20, 1988: 110-114, 1989: 173-176, 1990: 26-7, 40-1, 1992: 116-120, Sosa 1993: 614-623, and Brueckner 1998. We shall take up Putnam's view in more detail in a moment.

Leaving aside conceptual schemes for the moment and focusing just on our various attitudes towards objects in the world, what the above suggests is that we need to supplement (M1) with a condition which requires that the relevant Xs enjoy an attitude-invariant existence. In other words, what we need is something like the following:

- (M*) Realism about X is true if and only if, and because:
- (i) X exists.
 - (ii) The existence and nature of X are independent of the intentional attitudes had by human beings which pertain to X.

Provided that we can give an informative account of the sense of ‘independence’ at work in condition (ii), let us take (M*) as at least a promising starting point from which to develop an account of the conditions required for the truth of general realism. Thus setting aside the previous proposals that we have been considering in this section, we can start afresh and try to carefully unpack both conditions (i) and (ii) in (M*).⁵⁷

At first glance, there might not seem to be much to say about condition (i) other than that it is intended to be a thesis stated in an object language and concerned with the metaphysical existence of X, rather than being a semantic thesis stated in a metalanguage and concerned with statements about X. Theists, for example, think that when ‘X’ is ‘an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent being,’ then X exists in the actual world. Atheists, on the other hand, naturally deny that X exists.

Nonetheless there is an important issue to address with respect to (i), namely whether general realism so understood is compatible with the truth of either reductionism or idealism. Starting with the former, since our primary interest is in the metaphysical existence and nature of

⁵⁷ Note that there is no restriction on how widely or narrowly domains of experience must be individuated in order for realism to be true of them. Thus realism might be true of mountains but not tables, or of tables but not quarks, or of observable objects but not unobservable ones, and so on. Furthermore, (M*) is formulated in such a way as to respect the neutrality constraint (C4) - X can be a fact, proposition, state of affairs, possible world, event, property,

particular Xs, we can set aside what use to be popular conceptual, semantic, and linguistic forms of reductionism.⁵⁸ Thus while a common version of behaviorism concerned whether our *concepts* of certain mental states are analytically equivalent to our concepts of dispositions to behave in certain ways, for us the question is whether an ontological form of behaviorism – according to which, roughly, mental states just *are* certain complex behavioral dispositions – would still count as a form of realism about such states. Similarly, while popular forms of phenomenalism attempted to translate physical object statements into statements about various patterns of sense data, we need only focus on whether the ontological version of phenomenalism – according to which, roughly, physical objects are constituted out of complexes of actual and/or possible sense data – is still entitled to count as a form of realism about ordinary objects.

What then should we say about condition (i)? Can we leave it as stated, or do we need to explicitly insist that a given X must exist *nonreductively*? It seems that there are strong intuitions pulling in both directions. Phenomenalists about the ontology of physical objects as well as behaviorists about human mental states do come across as anti-realists, and have traditionally been characterized as such.⁵⁹ On the other hand, reductive forms of materialism in the philosophy of mind have not been regarded as threats to the realistic status of mental states simply because they identify them with neuropsychological states.⁶⁰ Similarly, scientific

number, or whatever. Finally, we must not forget to say something about the role that conceptual schemes might have to play in formulating condition (ii). More on that in a moment.

⁵⁸ For a similar view, see Fine 2001: 8-10. Unfortunately, this eschewal of non-metaphysical forms of reduction may be too quick. According to one popular interpretation at least, logicians were said to view a semantic reduction of classical mathematics as sufficient to engender an ontological reduction as well.

⁵⁹ See Goldman 1979: 175, Taylor 1987: 47-9, 52, Maddy 1990: 6-7, Dummett 1963: 150, 156-7, 1981: 448, 1991: 4-5, 329, Fine 1986: 156, Devitt 1991: 15-16, Railton and Rosen 1995: 435, Railton 1996: 55-6, and Hale 1997: 286.

⁶⁰ See Dummett 1981: 448, 1991: 324, 328, Taylor 1987: 53, Alston 1996: 70, and Tennant 1997: 24.

identifications of water as H₂O or salt as NaCl have not inspired widespread pronouncements of victory by prominent anti-realists.⁶¹

My view is that we can leave condition (i) as stated but at the same time insist that careful attention be paid to what the specification should be of 'X' when inquiring into its purported realistic status. Thus a behaviorist understanding of mental states will meet the first condition of (M*) if we let 'X' be 'a particular belief,' and similarly for a phenomenalist who lets 'X' be 'this wooden table.' On the other hand, if we fill the characterizations out such that 'X' is, for example, 'a particular belief understood to have non-behavioral causal powers' or 'this wooden table understood to be an ordinary material object,' then both behaviorism and phenomenism about X will typically be precluded from counting as forms of realism about X. And the same move is available in the case of reductive materialism in the philosophy of mind and chemical identifications in science; it is because we can specify 'X' as 'a particular belief' or 'salt' that we feel some pull towards counting both views as instances of realism in their respective domains.⁶² But there is another sense in which a further specification of the relevant Xs as *distinct* entities also precludes those views from counting as forms of realism.

Similar remarks apply in the case of idealism. Like reductionism, it traditionally has been thought that idealism is one of the major rivals to realism.⁶³ But an idealist can agree with a realist that my cat or Mt. Everest exists. Nor will condition (ii) suffice to rule out certain historically prominent forms of idealism since it is stated in terms of *human* attitudes whereas Hegel invoked the Absolute Spirit and Berkeley appealed to the god of theism. So does it turn

⁶¹ See Railton and Rosen 1995: 436 and Railton 1996: 56.

⁶² Provided, that is, that condition (ii) is also met when it comes to the reducing class.

⁶³ See Goldman 1979: 175, Brink 1989: 15, Maddy 1990: 6, Dummett 1991: 4, Devitt 1991: 15-16, van Inwagen 1993: 59, Alston 1996: 73, and Vinuesa 2001: 61.

out that idealism about the external world ends up being a form of realism, and if so, does (M*) thereby violate constraint (C2)?

Again it depends on the descriptions being used for 'X.' If we just let 'X' be 'this particular stone,' then certain idealists will be realists about stones provided they also accept condition (ii). But if instead we are concerned with 'this particular stone understood to be an ordinary material object,' then for the idealist X does not exist and the view fails to satisfy a necessary condition for being a form of realism.⁶⁴

Condition (ii) is naturally the heart of the matter. To begin with, it is important to note that the sense of 'attitude' in question is meant to be taken quite broadly to include not only cognitive attitudes like beliefs but also the full range of conative and affective attitudes as well.⁶⁵ Given this understanding of the term, we can make a preliminary attempt at unpacking (ii) by taking up a suggestion that was made earlier, namely that to be a realist about X is to think that X's existence and nature would remain invariant under a wide range of different attitudes that I or any other human being might take towards X. This characterization in turn suggests that one

⁶⁴ For related discussion, see Bigelow 1994: 14-16. It might be thought that this kind of strategy for handling reductionism and idealism creates a problem for condition (ii). For why can't we just take condition (i) to be both necessary and sufficient for the truth of realism, and leave it up to particular realists to decide whether they are interested in describing X along the lines stated in the second condition?

The relevant difference is that condition (ii) is *constitutive* of realism in a way in which the choice of descriptions used when evaluating reductionist or idealist views is not. As we noted at the beginning of this section, without a mind-independence condition, far too many views which are commonly taken to be forms of anti-realism would thereby get to count as realist views, thereby violating constraint (C2).

⁶⁵ Aren't I violating neutrality by assuming that such attitudes exist and thereby implicitly taking a stand on an important debate about the ontology of the mental? Not quite. Those who deny the existence of mental attitudes will trivially satisfy any of the formulations of condition (ii) proposed in this section while also failing the existence condition and thereby rightly counting as anti-realists about mental attitudes. The problem comes when an anti-realist about mental attitudes also tries to exclude, say, a relativist about ethics from counting as a moral realist; the short answer is that she can not do so given that condition (ii) will always be trivially satisfied. However, I take this result not as indicative of a problem with (M*) but rather as a natural consequence of having adopted this form of psychological anti-realism in the first place. For further discussion of the deep implausibility and perhaps even incoherence of such a view, see Boghossian 1990 and Wright 2002.

promising way of understanding the use of ‘independence’ in (ii) is along the lines of the following:

- (ii*) The existence and nature of X do not exhibit counterfactual dependence on the intentional attitudes had by human beings in the actual world which pertain to X.

where ‘counterfactual dependence’ is taken in the usual way to mean that for two things A and B, A’s existence counterfactually depends on B’s existence iff if B did not exist, then A would not exist.⁶⁶

As a representative instance, take a domain in which the attraction of an anti-realist view is felt rather strongly, namely the domain of fictional objects. Here we might be inclined to think that Polonius exists but only in such a way that is limited to the mental life of Shakespeare and his readership. Condition (ii*) thereby attempts to capture at least one aspect of Polonius’ mind-dependent existence – if Shakespeare had not even contemplated including a character like Polonius in his play, then Polonius would not have existed. Similarly with respect to Polonius’ nature - if Shakespeare had assigned different essential properties to this character in the course of writing the play, then in such worlds Shakespeare’s literary activity would have been sufficient by itself to bestow upon his character these new properties rather than the ones Shakespeare assigned to him in the actual world. Nonetheless, and importantly, condition (ii*)

⁶⁶ Counterfactual dependence is taken to be central to some analyses of causation, and if those views are correct, then it is perhaps not so clear how (M*) with (ii*) as the second condition ends up differing from the causal account of mind-dependence in (M10). In particular, it may not be clear why (M*) is meant to be an *improvement* over (M10). However, two things are worth noting. First, straightforward counterfactual dependence is insufficient for analyzing causal relations, as the well-known cases of preemption and trumping show. Even the defenders of counterfactual approaches to causation admit as much (see for example Lewis 2000). Second and more importantly, I am far less interested in the relationship between (M10) and (M*) as I am in whether the latter can accommodate the objections that undermined the former. I think it can.

Similarly, it may also not be clear whether (M*) with (ii*) as the second condition is an improvement over the counterfactual account of mind independence in (M12). This is what I take to be the decisive issue for determining the fate of a proposal like (M*), but we will have to wait until the following section in order to see whether the new account can preserve the contours of the debate between realists and anti-realists over the status of mental states in a way in which (M12) could not.

does leave plenty of room to stake out an alternative realist position about fictional objects according to which, for example, they are Platonic entities.

Thus far we have only been discussing the role that intentional attitudes might play in precluding one from being a realist about X. But what happened to the contribution of conceptual schemes? Perhaps we should first say a bit more about conceptual schemes themselves. Conceptual schemes are systems of concepts. Crucially for our purposes, one feature of conceptual schemes is that they provide existence and persistence conditions for sortal membership. Thus, for example, something counts as an object for me if and only if it satisfies the conditions for sortal membership in the kind 'object' that are supplied by my conceptual scheme.

Realists about objects will typically think that their existence and persistence conditions are independent of the conceptual schemes that we happen to employ. A certain brand of anti-realism made famous by Putnam, on the other hand, can only countenance the existence of objects relative to individual conceptual schemes. As Sosa nicely describes the view, “[s]uppose there is a time t when our conceptual scheme C first recognizes the appropriate criteria of existence and perdurance. According to our conceptual relativism, prior to that time t there were, relative to C , no objects of sort O , and in particular object o did not exist.”⁶⁷

Conceptual schemes determine the mode of presentation of intentional content; very roughly, a change in scheme can result in a change in the presentation of some content which in turn often engenders a change in the attitudes a person has towards that content.⁶⁸ To take an example, suppose that what seem to be before me are three individuals in a box, and that I

⁶⁷ Sosa 1993: 622.

thereby come to believe that I am seeing three objects. Yet suppose that my conceptual scheme changes such that now two or more objects necessarily compose another object (i.e., I become a mereological universalist). Then given the above mentioned relationship between schemes and intentional contents, my *attitudes* towards the individuals in front of me should normally change as well – for one thing, I would no longer believe that I am looking at only three individuals in a box.

For a realist, the change that I have undergone in this bizarre scenario is really of little importance to questions about the existence and nature of the objects involved – either there are or there are not exactly three objects in the box in virtue of objective facts about their existence and persistence conditions.⁶⁹ For the Putnamian anti-realist, on the other hand, what goes on with respect to the makeup of my conceptual scheme determines the nature of objects; thus in our example, after the change took place in my conceptual scheme *four more objects came into existence*.⁷⁰

Despite the dependence of intentional attitudes on conceptual schemes, it turns out that condition (ii*) does not adequately preclude the Putnamian conceptual relativist from counting as a realist. For conceptual schemes still might function in the way that Putnam alleges they do even in worlds in which, for whatever reason, human beings have different particular intentional attitudes from the ones that they have adopted in the actual world. So we need to revise (ii*) as follows:

⁶⁸ Alternatively we might say that concepts are the constituents of thoughts, where thoughts express intentional attitude objects. Exactly how we put all this does not matter much for our purposes. For more see Alston 2002c: 110 and Lynch 2002.

⁶⁹ For similar claims made in defense of realism about what should follow from the relationship between conceptual schemes and intentional content, see Field 1982, Heller 1988: 118, Sosa 1993: 608, and Moser 1993: 37.

⁷⁰ That is to say, four more objects came into existence given the concept of ‘object’ now operative in my conceptual scheme. On Putnam’s view, someone with a different concept of ‘object’ can deny that there are seven objects in the

(ii**) The existence and nature of X do not exhibit counterfactual dependence on the intentional attitudes or conceptual schemes had by human beings in the actual world which pertain to X.

Are conditions (i) and (ii**) now sufficient for realism about X to be true at a given time?

Unfortunately this is not quite the end of the story. For there is a certain technical problem with this way of construing condition (ii) that will allow many anti-realists who accept the existence of X to still count as realists. The problem stems from the way in which we engage in the assessment of non-actual worlds. One way to do so is to use our *actual* conceptual schemes in order to determine what is going on in counterfactual worlds, i.e., in order to determine how many individuals are in a box in a world in which there are no human beings. But if we adopt this approach, then the Putnamian anti-realist can *agree* with the common sense realist about how many individuals are in the box in such a world. For the Putnamian can simply use his own conceptual scheme in the actual world to evaluate the number of individuals in the box, even though there are no human thinkers in the relevant counterfactual world. Thus the Putnamian can *agree* with the realist that objects which exist in this world continue to exist in nearby counterfactual worlds in which human beings have different conceptual schemes and intentional attitudes pertaining to their existence. Sosa, speaking on behalf of the conceptual relativist, makes this point nicely as follows:

While existing in the actual world x we now have a conceptual scheme Cx relative to which we assert existence, when we assert it at all. Now, we suppose a possible world w in which we are not to be found, in which indeed no life of any sort is to be found. Still we may, in x : (a) consider alternative world w and recognize that our absence there would have no effect on the existence or course of a single planet or star, that Mercury, Venus, and the rest, would all still make their appointed rounds just as they do in x ; while yet (b) this recognition, which after all takes place in x , is still relativized to Cx , so that the existence in w of whatever exists in w relative to Cx need not be affected at all by the absence from w of Cx , and indeed of every conceptual scheme and of every being who could have a conceptual scheme. For when we suppose existence in w or allow the possibility of existence in w , we do so *in x*, and we do so there still relative to Cx , to our present conceptual scheme, and what it recognizes directly or indirectly, or ideally.⁷¹

box without being mistaken. For Putnam's treatment of this example and for related discussion, see the references in footnote 56.

⁷¹ Sosa 1993: 624, emphasis his.

In effect, then, what the Putnamian anti-realist can do is rigidify her conceptual scheme and then evaluate other possible worlds in light of that scheme.⁷²

Nonetheless, there still seems to be a way of carving out a difference between the realist and the Putnamian. For the realist, what matters concerning objects in nearby possible worlds is their existence and nature as divorced from any conceptual schemes whatsoever, whether actual or counterfactual. Furthermore, a realist about some object thinks that its existence and nature remain invariant in nearby worlds in which we have undergone variations in our conceptual schemes and intentional attitudes. These points suggest a better, albeit more cumbersome, way of stating the conditions for general realism:

(M+) Realism about X at time t is true iff and because:

- (i) X exists at t.
- (ii) The existence and nature of X do not at t exhibit counterfactual dependence on any intentional attitudes or conceptual schemes had by human beings at t in the actual world which pertain to X so that, *in* the nearby worlds in which human beings at t have different intentional attitudes and conceptual schemes from those in the actual world which at t pertain to X, it is the case that:
 - (a) The existence and persistence conditions of X at t do not result to any extent from any conceptual schemes which pertain to X in the actual world at t.
 - (b) The existence and nature of X remain unchanged at t from how they are in the actual world at t.⁷³

Note that condition (b) is not sufficient by itself to block the rigidifying move outlined above by Sosa. An anti-realist who follows Putnam could agree that the existence and nature of X do not change in these counterfactual worlds provided that such an assessment of X in those worlds

⁷² A similar move is familiar from discussions of rigid natural kind terms and definite descriptions in the philosophy of language, as well as from debates about response-dependence as a way of understanding the metaphysics of color and value. For general discussion, see Davies and Humberstone 1980.

⁷³ Two notes about (ii) – first, we should take ‘different intentional attitudes’ to include not having *any* such attitudes towards X whatsoever, and second, by the ‘nature’ of X I simply mean all of X’s essential properties. Thus X has some essential property F *realistically* iff (i) X and F exist, (ii) F is an essential property of X, and (iii) X’s having F as an essential property does not exhibit the form of counterfactual dependence at issue in (M+).

For broadly similar proposals to (M+), see Goldman 1979: 175, Moser 1993: 21-2, Alston 1996: 74-5, and Railton 1996: 57. Alvin Plantinga’s taxonomy of anti-realist positions nicely compliments (M+). According to him, one can be an ‘existential anti-realist’ and thereby deny the existence of the Xs in question, or be a ‘creative anti-

stems from the conceptual scheme that the anti-realist is using in the actual world. Thus we need to combine (b) with condition (a), so that realism will be true of X provided only that X is unchanged in these particular counterfactual worlds and yet at the same time X in those worlds does not have existence and persistence conditions which result from our actual conceptual schemes. In such a case, we can say that X enjoys an existence in the actual world which is *mind-independent*.

Clearly much more needs to be said about conceptual schemes, intentional attitudes, and counterfactual dependence before we can accept (M+) with confidence. While such a discussion will have to wait for another occasion, it appears to me that further work along these lines will turn out to be quite promising. And if something like (M+) ultimately can be defended, then such a thesis would seem to have at least the following advantages:

- (i) It does not build suspicious notions like ‘facts’ and ‘truths’ in from the start.
- (ii) It is perfectly general, applying to any domain of experience and to any X or Xs.
- (iii) It is consistent with traditional approaches to discussing realism in that it focuses the debate on the metaphysical existence and nature of the relevant Xs, and not on secondary concerns about semantics, epistemic access, or explanation.
- (iv) It satisfies constraints (C1) through (C4).

Claims (i) through (iii) should be clear enough. So let us conclude the paper by considering the purported advantage in (iv).

5. Applying (M+)

(M+) seems to give us much of what we intuitively want from a formulation of general realism. Theism as well as Platonism about universals both turn out to be forms of realism. Various forms of nominalism, atheism, and nihilism are all anti-realist positions because their existence claims are incompatible with condition (i). Subjectivism about aesthetics, Putnamian

realist’ and claim that “their existence and fundamental structure have been conferred upon them by the conceptual

internal realism about ordinary objects, and instrumentalism about unobservable scientific entities all seem to be committed to claims which are incompatible with condition (ii), and thereby also count as forms of anti-realism. Four difficult cases, however, are worthy of special attention.

Mental States. The first concern is whether (M+) can avoid the problems about mental states that plagued many of the mind-independent formulations of general realism mentioned above. Part of the reason for their failure was that they were each stated in terms of independence from ‘the mental’ or ‘mental states.’ Nor was this done simply to set up strawmen as rivals to (M+); many philosophers who discuss realism and mind-independence typically invoke such language. But as we saw above, it thereby becomes difficult to be a realist about mental states themselves.

Condition (ii) of (M+) avoids this problem. In particular, (ii) is stated in terms of counterfactual dependence not on ‘the mental,’ but only on those intentional attitudes which are had *towards* X. And this poses no obstacle to being a realist about, say, my particular mental states at a time. For then the view would be that these mental states exist at that time, and furthermore that they would have existed even if I had had different *second-order* mental attitudes towards their existence. In other words, they would have existed at that time even if I had believed that they did not exist, or hoped that they did not exist, or imagined that they did not exist, and so on.⁷⁴

Mathematical Objects. How does (M+) fare when it comes to realism debates in the philosophy of mathematics? Here the Platonist will have no trouble counting as a mathematical realist since

activities of persons” (48). For more, see Plantinga 1982: 48-9.

for her mathematical entities exist in a way that is clearly compatible with condition (ii).⁷⁵ So then the real question is whether (M+) adequately excludes the traditional anti-realist positions.⁷⁶

Nominalists seem to be no problem – they hold that there are no mathematical entities, and so violate condition (i).⁷⁷ And the same goes for Field’s fictionalism and Chihara’s constructivism.⁷⁸ Intuitionists, on the other hand, violate condition (ii). For them, at least roughly, mathematical objects are mental constructions whose existence depends on the availability of a relevant proof.⁷⁹ As such, then, such objects exhibit counterfactual dependence on our intentional attitudes.

What makes the taxonomic issues here tricky is that while traditionally disputes in the philosophy of mathematics were framed at the level of ontology, more recently and largely through the work of Kreisel, Dummett, and others attention has gradually shifted to the level of semantics and the status of truth ascriptions for mathematical statements.⁸⁰ As a result, a divide has opened between semantics and ontology in the philosophy of mathematics such that one could, for example, be a realist about mathematical objects and deny that statements about them

⁷⁴ What about the truth of realism for these *second-order* mental states? Well, just apply (M+) again – realism will be true for these states at a time only if the states exist at that time and would still exist under counterfactual variation of the relevant *third-order* states had towards the second-order states.

⁷⁵ See Maddy 1988: 275, 1990: 21, Shapiro 1997: 8, 23, 37, and Katz 1998: 1-2, 6.

⁷⁶ If Stewart Shapiro is right, then this will be no problem at all: “Antirealist programs, on the other hand, try to account for mathematics without assuming the independent existence of mathematical objects, or that mathematical statements have objective truth-values” (1997: 5).

⁷⁷ See Maddy 1990: 28 and Tennant 1997: 64.

⁷⁸ See Field 1980: 1-6, 1998a: 323, 1998b: 332, and Chihara 1990 as well as the taxonomies in Shapiro 1997: 37, Hale 1997: 289, and Katz 1998: 10-12.

⁷⁹ For similar claims, see Haack 1987: 281, Maddy 1990: 23, Dummett 1963: 153-4, 163-164, 1969: 361, 1973: 227-229, 231, 239, 1976: 70, 1991: 5, 14, 324, Tennant 1995: 247, and Shapiro 1997: 22.

⁸⁰ See Dummett 1963: 153-4, 164, 1969: 361, 1973: 227-229, 231, 1981: 434, 441, 447-8, 1991: 5, 14. For similar observations, see Shapiro 1997: 37 and Katz 1998: xi-xxxii.

have objective truth-values,⁸¹ or be an anti-realist about such objects while still countenancing objective truth.⁸²

However, given the considerations that support a formulation of *general* realism as a claim about the existence and objective nature of metaphysically existing Xs, we should construe debates about mathematical *realism* as primarily having to do with the ontology of mathematics. Fortunately, this need not have deeply revisionary consequences in this area since a number of prominent philosophers of mathematics still understand the debates along these lines.⁸³

Artifacts. Does (M+) leave room for the philosopher who wants to be a realist about artifacts like tables, cars, and money? It most certainly does. Two points are worth stressing.

In the first place, (M+) is neutral on the metaphysical existence and objective status of artifactual properties like *being a table* or *being a painting*. Thus it is compatible with our formulation of general realism that such properties exist as mind-independent abstract objects.

While the existence conditions of such properties might be independent in the way described by clause (ii) of (M+), most views about the metaphysics of artifacts allege that these properties have *instantiation conditions* which depend in part at least on the attitudinal contributions made by human beings. Of course one could, however implausibly, think that *both* the existence and the instantiation conditions for artifactual properties are thoroughly mind-independent. But one need not take that route in order to be a realist about such properties, since the mind-dependence of the instantiation conditions for properties does not entail the mind-dependence of their existence conditions.

⁸¹ See Tennant 1987.

⁸² See Chihara 1990.

⁸³ For an opposing view see Field 1998a and 1998b, and especially the references to Dummett in footnote 80.

Secondly, if artifacts are identical to their underlying physical constituents, and if realism is true of those constituents, then the artifacts themselves can exist in a way that satisfies (M+). For even in nearby worlds in which human beings lack the concept of a *car*, the very same physical objects which we presently countenance as cars could exist realistically.

The tricky case here will be the realist about artifactual properties who is also a coincident objects theorist about artifacts. For while in this world there might be, say, a particular stone and paperweight which are spatially co-located at a given time, in nearby worlds in which human beings do not assign the relevant function to stones, the paperweight does not exist.⁸⁴ Since, then, the paperweight satisfies condition (i) but fails condition (ii) of (M+), realism is false in this instance. And, more generally, (M+) entails that a coincident objects theorist for artifacts who also thinks that the instantiation conditions for an object's being an artifact are (partially) mind-dependent, cannot be a realist about those artifacts.

While others might disagree, I myself think that such a result is actually a virtue of (M+). For artifacts (as distinct from their physical realizers) exist in virtue of the purposes and functions intentionally ascribed to them by human beings; as Searle aptly remarks, from the divine perspective "God could not see screwdrivers, cars, bathtubs, etc., because intrinsically speaking there are no such things. Rather, God would see *us treating* certain objects as screwdrivers, cars, bathtubs, etc."⁸⁵ This is a large part of why anti-realism has seemed to most writers on the subject to be true of artifacts, and (M+) can capture this result nicely.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ The above claim relies on the assumption that the instantiation conditions for being a paperweight are at least partially mind-dependent. It also assumes that the nearby worlds are not being assessed using our conceptual schemes in the actual world which include the concept of *paperweight*, and thereby follows clause (a) in condition (ii) of (M+).

⁸⁵ Searle 1995: 12, emphasis his.

⁸⁶ For similar sentiments, see Plantinga 1982: 49, Vinuesa 2001: 53, 55, 57, and especially Searle 1995: 8-13, 190-194.

Scientific Laws. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord thinks that a metaphysical approach to formulating general realism proves to be inadequate when it comes to characterizing realism debates about scientific laws.⁸⁷ His reasons for thinking this are not altogether clear, but it is certainly worthwhile to briefly examine the implications of (M+) for this domain as well.

If we take the central issue about scientific laws to be the giving of an account of what distinguishes an accidentally true generalization or regularity from a law of nature, then (M+) will be well suited to providing an informative taxonomy of the relevant positions. For while most philosophers of science agree that facts about what distinguishes laws *exist*,⁸⁸ there is deep division over whether those facts are partially constituted by the attitudinal contributions that *we* make. To the extent that an account of scientific laws does appeal to such contributions, then according to (M+) it deserves to be understood as a form of anti-realism.⁸⁹

Such a result is in line with standard practices in the literature on laws of nature; in fact, (M+) for the most part preserves the existing distinction between so-called Humean and non-Humean analyses of lawhood.⁹⁰ On the Humean side, Braithwaite's subjectivist account, Goodman's inductive view, Rescher's mind-dependence proposal, and Lewis's systems approach all count as forms of anti-realism.⁹¹ On the other hand, according to necessitarians or nomic platonists, laws of nature are expressions of relations between universals, and thus such

⁸⁷ Sayre-McCord 1988: 6, 1991: 159.

⁸⁸ For some exceptions, see Mackie 1974, Cartwright 1980, and van Fraassen 1989. All three thus deserve to be counted as anti-realists about laws given that their accounts fail to satisfy condition (i). For helpful discussion, see Carroll 1994: chapter four.

⁸⁹ Thus I find myself in agreement with the taxonomies in Armstrong 1983: 7-8, Woodward 1992: 182-3, and Loewer 1995: 266.

⁹⁰ At least, given the accounts of the distinction in Woodward 1992: 182, Carroll 1994: 29, and Loewer 1995: 266.

⁹¹ See Braithwaite 1927, 1928, Goodman 1955, Rescher 1969, Lewis 1973, 1983. In Lewis's case, his account fails condition (ii) because of its reliance on our actual subjective evaluations of simplicity and strength (as Lewis himself acknowledges). For relevant discussion, see Woodward 1992: 182 fn. 4, Carroll 1994: 49-54 and Loewer 1995: 267.

philosophers are rather straightforwardly non-Humean realists provided they also think that the universals in question satisfy condition (ii).⁹²

Thus (M+) turns out to do quite well in accounting for the central realism debate in this domain too.⁹³

6. Conclusion

This is, though, hardly the end of the story. For example I have elsewhere applied (M+) to the moral realism debate and argued that it can nicely distinguish between the realist and anti-realist status of a wide assortment of views on offer there, including Blackburn's quasi-realism and recent minimalist proposals.⁹⁴ For now, however, I only hope to have accomplished two main goals. The first has been to suggest the plausibility of a broadly metaphysical approach to formulating general realism as compared to rival semantic, epistemic, and explanatory approaches. And the second has been to outline what I take to be a promising positive account of the conditions of realism.⁹⁵

⁹² See Dretske 1977, Armstrong 1983, and Tooley 1987. For doubts about Tooley's realism, see Woodward 1992.

⁹³ One seemingly unfortunate result, however, is that a naive regularity account, often categorized as a form of Humeanism, turns out to be a realist view according to (M+). Thus on John Carroll's construal of the view:

P is a law iff P is true, contingent, universally quantified, and unrestricted.

where,

P is unrestricted iff P includes only nonlocal, empirical concepts apart from logical connectives and quantifiers.

(Carroll 1994: 30. See also Armstrong 1983: 12). But such a formulation satisfies condition (ii).

This is a consequence of my account of general realism with which I am willing to live. As David Armstrong notes, "[r]egularities are the Realistic component of anti-Realist theories of laws" (1983: 8).

⁹⁴ See my "The Conditions of Moral Realism."

⁹⁵ For helpful comments and discussion I am grateful to Fritz Warfield, Philip Quinn, Michael DePaul, and an anonymous referee.

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