

# Why realists must reject normative quietism

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**Abstract** The last two decades have seen a surge of support for normative quietism: most notably, from Dworkin (1996, 2011), Nagel (1996, 1997), Parfit (2011a, b) and Scanlon (1998, 2014). Detractors like Enoch (2011) and McPherson (2011) object that quietism is incompatible with realism about normativity. The resulting debate has stagnated somewhat. In this paper I explore and defend a more promising way of developing that objection: I’ll argue that if normative quietism is true, we can create reasons out of thin air, so normative realists must reject normative quietism.

**Keywords** Quietism · Realism · Reasons · Normativity · Morality · Etiquette

## 1 The target: normative quietism

Normative quietism is notoriously difficult to characterize. For the sake of clarity I’ll focus on the form of quietism that Scanlon defends in *Being Realistic About Reasons*.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, I am not sure how readily the objections I will raise generalize to other quietists’ views since their details are fairly elusive—I don’t know what to make of Parfit (2011b)’s claim that irreducible reasons exist “in a non-ontological sense”, and that this view “has no metaphysical implications” and so “cannot be open to metaphysical objections” (747). The three core ideas at the heart of Scanlon’s view, by contrast, are relatively clear and attractive.

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<sup>1</sup> All page references will be to Scanlon (2014), unless otherwise indicated.

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Following Scanlon, let's warm up to normative quietism by first considering mathematical quietism. "Two plus two is four" is true. What makes it true? Is it true because numbers exist as Platonic forms? If so, how do we have epistemic access to these aphysical entities? Or, do facts about numbers reduce to physical facts about quarks and bosons and the like? If so, how does the reduction go? Scanlon rejects both of these views. Claims like "Two plus two is four" are true because they are licensed by standards internal to the mathematical domain. Numbers exist because such claims quantify over numbers. So "questions about the existence of numbers ... are settled by mathematical reasoning" (19), and mathematical claims can't be metaphysically or epistemologically problematic.

Similarly, claims like "There is reason to give to charity" are true because they are licensed by standards internal to normative discourse, and reasons exist because such claims quantify over reasons. Questions about the existence of reasons are thus settled by first-order normative reasoning. So we need not invoke Platonic forms or reduce facts about reasons to facts about quarks and bosons to explain how reasons exist or how we have epistemic access to them.

This illustrates what I take to be the first core idea of Scanlon's quietism:

**Diversity:** Different statements have different subject matters, and what it takes for a statement to be true depends upon its subject matter.

To be clear, there is a single account of what it takes for any statement to be true: it must be licensed by the relevant domain-dependent standard. However, the standards for specific statements differ depending on their subject matters.

I take it that DIVERSITY is the plausible idea that Scanlon intends to model through his somewhat more abstruse appeals to "domains" and "standards" (which will be clarified and discussed further below). Scanlon seems to agree. He writes that his use of the term "domains" is "just a way of referring to the fact that statements can make claims about different subjects", which is "a common-sense idea". Scanlon then adds that "the idea that questions about a given domain (i.e. about a given subject) should be settled by the best ways of thinking about that subject is a piece of common sense, even a triviality" (23).

An attractive feature of Scanlon's quietism is that DIVERSITY is fully general: it applies to all statements about all subjects, including natural science. In this sense, it is a tad misleading for me to describe Scanlon as a *normative quietist*, rather than a *quietist*. Scanlon does not accept a metaphysically inflationary account of what it is for protons to exist and a deflationary account of what it is for reasons to exist (28). If he did, he could justly be accused of being a realist about science and an anti-realist (or quasi- or ir-realist) about normativity. That may be a tenable view; many philosophers have defended realism about domains like science and anti-realism about others, like normativity.<sup>2</sup> The crucial point is that such a view would not be tenable as form of *realism* about normativity. That is why DIVERSITY is especially attractive for so-called "quietist realists".

As Scanlon recognizes, one could accept DIVERSITY and yet deny quietism. One could insist that for "Two plus two is four" to be true it must be licensed by the

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point.

standards of mathematics *and* some other domain. That other domain could be some privileged first-order domain(s), like physical science, or some general second-order domain,<sup>3</sup> such as metaphysics. Scanlon emphatically rejects both of these possibilities. This takes us to the second core idea behind his quietism:

**Autonomy:** There are no privileged first- or second-order domains.<sup>4</sup>

As Scanlon notes, DIVERSITY “becomes philosophically controversial only when it is combined with the claim that statements about domains other than the natural world should be seen as autonomous” (23). So let’s outline the controversial commitments Scanlon accepts with respect to AUTONOMY.

Start with the first-order domains. For Scanlon, all domains are created equal, and none are more equal than others. On its face, that doesn’t seem problematic. But Scanlon acknowledges that it has striking implications:

[W]e could adopt some way of talking which specified criteria of identity for objects of a certain sort, and truth conditions for sentences containing terms referring to them which allowed for existential generalizations from such sentences. According to my view, as long as this way of talking was well defined [and] internally coherent, ... we would be committed to the existence of things quantified over in the existential statements counted as true in this way of talking (27).

For example, at various points in history we have adopted well defined and internally coherent ways of talking about supernatural phenomena like witches. So there is a supernatural domain with its own domain-specific standards, which licenses claims like “Witches caused the illness”. Since such claims quantify over witches, Scanlon is stuck with the conclusion that witches exist, and indeed are no less real than protons or reasons; at least, that is the view so far.

What about second-order domains? Scanlon accepts that there could be a domain like metaphysics whose subject matter is “existence”, or “the universe”. But he holds that the notions of “existence” and “the universe” in this second-order domain would be “entirely parasitic on the [first-order] domains that contribute to it”: there is a “merely disjunctive “universe” in which something exists if it is a physical object, or a number, or is entailed by true statements of some other domain” (22–24). Scanlon explicitly rejects any “general idea of existence” and holds that “genuine ontological questions are all domain-specific”, which he recognizes is a “radically anti-metaphysical” implication (n.10).

<sup>3</sup> While Scanlon seems to appeal to a distinction between “first-order domains” and other domains (21), he never clarifies the distinction. I take it that he considers the following to be an instance of a second-order (or at least, non-first-order) domain: “a domain concerned with the general idea of existence that applies to everything we are committed to quantifying over in a range of particular domains” (23). This is all that I have in mind by the phrase.

<sup>4</sup> This is a somewhat unfortunate choice of terminology given that plenty of related and orthogonal theses go by the same name; but I believe we should stick to it, since Scanlon repeatedly uses the term “autonomy” to describe this core aspect of his view (e.g., 21, 23).

Scanlon is right that coupling DIVERSITY with AUTONOMY is philosophically controversial in its implications about what exists, and about *what it is* to exist. Scanlon is content with the anti-metaphysical implications about what it is to exist, but wishes ameliorate concerns about the extensional implications of his view. And rightly so. Different domains could license inconsistent statements, after all, and his quietism would be a non-starter if it led to contradictions.

One way to reduce the incidence of such contradictions is to insist that only the truth-values of “pure”, rather than “mixed”, claims in a domain are properly settled by standards internal to that domain. Claims like “Jones has a reason to leave the burning building now” are mixed, insofar as they “make normative claims but also make or presuppose claims about natural facts” (38). Mixed claims should be factored into pure claims: e.g., a claim about “natural facts” (e.g., “Jones is in a burning building”) and a conditional normative claim.<sup>5</sup> This helps, but Scanlon recognizes that it alone is insufficient: “Even pure statements in one domain can entail or presuppose claims in some other domain” (21).

This takes us to the third core idea in Scanlon’s view:

**Consistency:** If domains  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  contain, entail, or presuppose inconsistent statements—if  $p$  is true in  $\alpha$  and false in  $\beta$ —either  $\alpha$  or  $\beta$  must be rejected.

Scanlon illustrates CONSISTENCY with scientific and supernatural domains. The supernatural domain licenses “claims about events in the physical world and their causes” which “conflict with claims of physics and other empirical sciences, and this conflict provides decisive reason to reject the idea that there are witches” (21). We’ll return to Scanlon’s treatment of this example later. For now, it’s sufficient to note that CONSISTENCY would not, by Scanlon’s own admission, allow us to reject claims in a supernatural domain that only quantified over (say) causally inefficacious ghosts. For Scanlon, so long as a first-order domain does not conflict with any other domain, it is entirely autonomous.

At this point, you may wonder why Scanlon is willing to court such controversies in the first place. Why not privilege some first-order domains, or allow that we can ask “genuine ontological questions” that are domain-independent?

Because that would open the door for skeptical arguments about whether there really are numbers and reasons. The main attraction of quietism is that it supposedly explains why mathematical and normative claims, *inter alia*, cannot be metaphysically or epistemologically problematic. That’s why AUTONOMY is central to the view. Scanlon argues that the mathematical and normative domains do not contain, entail or presuppose any statements that are false according to any other domain, such as the domain of physical science (22). On his view, that’s enough. For Scanlon, “the truth values of statements about one domain, insofar as they do not conflict with statements of some other domain, are properly settled by the standards of the domain that they are about” (19).

<sup>5</sup> These pure claims all have the following form  $R(p, x, c, a)$ : if  $p$  is true and an agent  $x$  is in condition  $c$ ,  $p$  is a reason for  $x$  to perform act  $a$  (or have attitude  $a$ ) in  $c$  (31, 37).

## 2 The objection: creating reasons out of thin air

So far we've outlined the attractive, albeit controversial, core ideas at the heart of Scanlon's quietism. In time we'll delve further into the details of the view—especially about the nature and role of domains and standards—but for now let's introduce the objection that quietism is incompatible with realism.

I am by no means the first to make an objection in this ballpark. Enoch and McPherson also object that Scanlon's quietism is incompatible with realism. But dialectically, they have failed to find a point of purchase against the quietist.

This is for two reasons. The first is that detractors' objections often rely on metaphysical ideology that Scanlon, *qua* quietist, rejects. Enoch (2011) objects that Scanlon's quietism is "a notational variant of a fictionalist view", and so not a form of realism, because quietism does not distinguish between what it is to "exist" in the "soft, licensed-by-internal-standards" sense, and what it is to "EXIST" in "the metaphysically heavy, Platonistically friendly" sense (124). As we've already seen, Scanlon simply rejects that distinction (28). Scanlon counts himself as a realist, and denies that realists must (or should) be committed to any "metaphysically heavy", domain-independent notion of existence.

Extensional objections are more promising, as they do not rely on such ideology. One was illustrated above: if we adopted a certain way of talking about causally inefficacious ghosts, it would follow from Scanlon's quietism that these entities exist. Similarly, McPherson (2011) objects, if a community adopted a well defined, internally consistent way of speaking about "schmeasons", it would follow from quietism that schmeasons exist. Indeed, schmeasons would be no less "real" than reasons. Enoch makes a similar point *apropos* "counter-reasons". These objections seem damning. Yet they fail to find a point of purchase for a different reason: they focus on entities—ghosts, "schmeasons", "counter-reasons"—about which Scanlon has no important commitments. This is why Scanlon has been willing to respond to these objections by biting the bullet and softening its bitter aftertaste with a hefty dose of pragmatism. He concedes that we can "adopt some way of talking" and thereby add new entities to our "ontological commitments", then asks rhetorically, "Can we take seriously an idea of existence that comes so cheaply?" Scanlon answers, oracularly, that

... the question about such entities is not whether they really exist. This question is settled by the standards of the domain ... The question is only whether we have any reason to be concerned with these entities and their properties (27).

If statements about causally inefficacious ghosts or schmeasons or what have you do not conflict with statements about any other domain, Scanlon seems to think, we have no reason to be concerned with such entities. And if we have no reason to be concerned with ghosts or schmeasons, Scanlon thinks, we can be quite cavalier about our ontological commitments with respect to such entities.

Much more can be said about Scanlon's responses to these objections, and we will return to some of the issues they raise in time. For now, however, I want to

point out how the argumentative strategy I will pursue here departs from these objections in ways that have a better hope of finding a point of purchase against the quietist. Instead of considering how easily Scanlon can acquire ontological commitments with respect to ghosts or schmeasons, let's just consider the extensional implications of quietism with respect to reasons.

I will argue that it is possible for a community to adopt a new well defined, internally consistent, way of talking about reasons, statements about which do not conflict with statements in any other domain. If quietism is true, that community thereby creates new reasons to do arbitrary things out of thin air. Reasons, in other words, turn out to be a *conventional* phenomenon.<sup>6</sup>

It should be clear that Scanlon cannot respond to this objection by denying the distinction between “existence” and “EXISTENCE”, as the objection relies on no such ideology. Nor can Scanlon bite the bullet and appeal to pragmatism to soften the blow. This is partly because of the practical import of these particular entities: for Scanlon reasons *are* what matters, so we do have reason to be concerned with such entities. But it is also because of Scanlon's commitment to “Reasons Fundamentalism”, which is supposed to be a form of realism. While conventionalism about normativity may be a tenable view, it is not a form of *realism* about normativity. This is not a matter of nomenclature.<sup>7</sup> Like other quietists, Scanlon has realist commitments about the nature of reasons: reasons cannot be arbitrary, or be created when individuals or communities merely adopt some way of talking, or depend on our will or our flights of fancy.<sup>8</sup> Scanlon proclaims at some length that facts about reasons are “independent of us”, in the sense that (*inter alia*) the truth-values of pure claims about reasons “do not depend on what we, collectively, have done, chosen, or adopted, and would not be different had we done, chosen, or adopted something else” (94). The upshot of the objection here will be that Scanlon's quietism cannot vindicate his own realist commitments about reasons.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, because quietists express these commitments, they cannot make recourse to another common quietist strategy in response to the objection here: that is, they cannot declare that the objection rests on a way of talking that involves some verboten or incoherent domain-external point of view. Scanlon allows that we can pull ourselves outside of the relevant domains to see that normative facts *do not*

<sup>6</sup> To clarify, the claim here is not that if quietism is true, *any given individual* can create new reasons out of thin air. As is familiar from conventionalist approaches to other domains, it may well be the case that if quietism is true what reasons exist depends on what some *collective* does, chooses, accepts, and adopts. [Cf. Carnap (1937) on mathematics and Hume (1739) on property.] I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point.

<sup>7</sup> Though as Joyce (2015) writes, “[t]raditionally, to hold a realist position with respect to *X* is to hold that *X* exists in a mind-independent manner”. For discussion of realism and mind-independence, see Field (1989), Wright (1992), and Rosen (1994).

<sup>8</sup> Such claims are made throughout Scanlon (2014) (e.g.: 4–8, on desire-based theories, and 93–104, on constructivism). Dworkin (1996, 2011) and Parfit (2011a, b) make similar claims.

<sup>9</sup> To clarify, I will not defend these realist commitments; that would take us too far afield. So I am not arguing that we cannot create reasons out of thin air, and hence am not arguing that Scanlon's quietism is *false*. Rather, I am simply arguing that—despite frequent, prominent claims to the contrary—Scanlon's quietism cannot vindicate these realist commitments.

depend on us, and that facts about games of make believe *do* depend on us (94). So he cannot in good faith declare that we cannot pull ourselves outside of the relevant domains to see that normative facts *do* depend on us. If quietists are allowed to say that they succeed in vindicating realism, it cannot be verboten for their detractors to say that they fail to do so.<sup>10</sup>

So far, I have only offered a general outline of the objection. The devil is, as usual, in the details. Which is unfortunate, since some crucial details of Scanlon's view are fuzzy. It will prove helpful to focus on a familiar example.

Consider our discourse about morality and etiquette. It is often observed that morality and etiquette are both self-justifying. Both purport to tell us what we ought, must, can, and have reason to do. According to morality, we have reason to do what morality requires us to do. According to etiquette, we have reason to do what etiquette requires us to do. But requirements of etiquette are things we can clearly create with our shared attitudes. If quietism is true, why don't we create new reasons when we create new requirements of etiquette?

To make the comparison vivid, consider two particular requirements:

**Tithing Norm** According to morality, the wealthy must give to charity.

**Prudish Norm** According to etiquette, the unwed must be chaste.

We can make it the case that Prudish Norm is true merely by changing our attitudes; but we cannot make it the case that Tithing Norm is true merely by changing our attitudes. Quietists accept this (see, e.g., Parfit 2011a, 144–145).

What can quietists say about the corresponding claims about reasons?

**Tithing Reason** There is a reason for the wealthy to give to charity.

**Prudish Reason** There is a reason for the unwed to be chaste.

Quietists clearly accept that there is some connection between the truth of Tithing Norm and the truth of Tithing Reason. I claim that by their lights they must accept a similar connection between Prudish Norm and Prudish Reason.

This way of framing the objection avoids taking on too many commitments about how to interpret certain details of Scanlon's view. But we won't be able to develop the objection without at least discussing those details. In particular, how we develop the objection depends on whether discourse about etiquette forms a separate domain with its own domain-specific standard (*a la* the supernatural domain), or is subsumed under the one normative domain.

In Sect. 3, I'll argue that if Scanlon's quietism is true, discourse about etiquette forms a separate domain; and if quietism is true and discourse about etiquette forms a separate domain, we can create new reasons out of thin air. If realism is true, we cannot create reasons out of thin air, so realists must reject quietism.

In Sect. 4, I'll argue in the alternative that if Scanlon's quietism is true and discourse about etiquette is subsumed under the one normative domain, we can still create new reasons out of thin air. So again, realists must reject quietism.

My central aim is to defend the conclusion that realists must reject quietism. With both arguments there will be several spots where one can get off the boat. In

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 2.

particular, one can resist the arguments by reinterpreting or revising Scanlon's views about domain-individuation, the nature and role of domain-specific standards, inter-domain conflict, indeterminacy, and revisability. We will see, however, that these escape routes do not offer a way to salvage a view that is both plausible and recognizable as a form of quietism. So a subsidiary aim in this paper is to clarify and challenge these particular quietist commitments.

### 3 Separate, conflicting domains

In this section I'll argue that if Scanlon's quietism is true, discourse about etiquette forms a separate domain; and if quietism is true and discourse about etiquette forms a separate domain, we can create new reasons out of thin air.

Let's start with the premise that if Scanlon's quietism is true, discourse about etiquette forms a separate domain. That is to say, there is a set of statements like Prudish Norm and Prudish Reason that have a distinct subject matter: social propriety. The upshot of this is that such statements are true if they are licensed by a domain-specific standard, subject to the CONSISTENCY constraint.

Quietists might be tempted to reject this first premise on one of two bases. First, quietists could deny that discourse about etiquette includes statements about reasons. Parfit (2011a) suggests this when he distinguishes between two "conceptions of normativity". For Parfit, morality is normative on the "*reason-involving* conception", according to which "normativity involves reasons or apparent reasons", but etiquette is only normative on the "*rule-involving* conception", according to which "normativity involves requirements, or rules, that distinguish between what is *correct* and *incorrect*, or what is *allowed* and *disallowed*" (144–145, emphasis his). Along with etiquette, Parfit offers requirements of law, linguistic rules and codes of honour as paradigm examples of "rule-involving normativity". Discourse about all such requirements is not "reason-involving".

If that were true, it would block the argument. For quietists, there would be a connection between Tithing Norm and Tithing Reason but not between Prudish Norm and Prudish Reason, because we use "reason" in discourse about requirements of morality, but not in discourse about requirements of etiquette.

Unfortunately, this response is unavailable to quietists. *Contra* Parfit, our discourse about all of these requirements is "reason-involving". This point was implicitly made by Foot (1972), who noted that "people give as their reason for doing something the fact that it is required by etiquette" (319). Indeed, on Southwood (2011)'s view, judgments about conventional norms (like etiquette) constitutively involve some cognitive attitude towards "practice-dependent reasons". A similar point is better developed in philosophy of law, where it is an orthodoxy that according to legal discourse new legal rules give us new "legal



reasons”; this feature of legal discourse is well defined, internally coherent, and has been formally modeled by Horty (2011).<sup>11</sup>

Second, quietists could agree that discourse about etiquette includes statements about reasons, and insist that because this is the case etiquette discourse must be subsumed under the one normative domain: that is, the domain of reasons. If so, the first argument fails, but the second might succeed (see Sect. 4).

However, this response is awfully ad hoc. To see why, consider in detail what Scanlon tells us about the nature and role of domains. A domain is not “a distinct realm of objects”; rather, it is a distinct realm of discourse. A “domain is better understood in terms of the kinds of claims it involves, and hence in terms of the concepts that it deals with, such as number, set, physical object, reason, or morally right action” (19). Scanlon provides no criteria for individuating domains, and says that this is intentional: he meant to “leave the question of what domains there are entirely open”, including whether some groups of “particular domains” are “in fact single unified domains” (23, n.6).

This does not worry Scanlon. His appeal to “domains” is “just a way of referring to the fact that statements can make claims about different subjects”—it is meant to model the intuitive idea we called DIVERSITY. So “the question about domains is not whether they exist”; it is whether they are “helpful” (23).

But this does worry me. If we have no principled basis to prefer one way of carving up domains rather than another, but can reach different conclusions depending on which one we choose, then domains are not helpful. They make our ultimate ontological commitments depend on choices that are utterly arbitrary.

Indeed, our choices about domain-individuation can be arbitrary in at least two respects. First, we can require more or less *conceptual overlap* between sets of statements in order for them to fall under the same domain. We know that if sets of statements had no conceptual overlap they would be about entirely different subjects, and hence form separate domains. But we also know that there will be some conceptual overlap between separate domains: all domains must share some basic logical concepts; and the supernatural and scientific domains could not conflict if they did not share the concept of “causation”. So what could resolve a dispute about whether  $x$  amount of overlap is enough?

Second, we could individuate concepts themselves coarsely (reasons) or finely (moral reasons; epistemic reasons) in determining how to individuate domains. Scanlon seems to want to do both: he speaks as if there is one normative domain—the domain of reasons—as well as a separate moral domain (e.g., 22).

<sup>11</sup> Quietists could respond by denying that all such discourse involves the same *concept*, “reason”. But this response faces two problems. First, it is ad hoc. While Scanlon’s position on how we attribute this concept is not clear, it seems to turn on the distinctive role that “reason” plays in deliberation and motivation (54). Claims about “legal reasons” et al. play those same roles in deliberation and motivation, at least among those who take what Hart (1994) called the “internal point of view”. Second, it makes it hard to explain disagreement. The world is full of prudes who take the internal point of view towards etiquette norms. When they take Prudish Reason to be true and I take Prudish Reason to be false, I take it that we disagree about whether there is a reason for the unwed to be chaste. How can we make sense of this disagreement if the prude and I do not use the same concept, “reason”?

In the absence of criteria, we should determine whether etiquette forms a separate domain by considering Scanlon's treatment of examples. Scanlon holds that supernatural and scientific discourses form separate domains even though both involve claims about "causation", which is as central to the scientific domain as "reason" is to the normative domain. And throughout the book Scanlon allows that there is a normative domain (involving claims about "reason") *and* a moral domain (involving claims about "reason" and "morally right action"). Surely we should say the same about etiquette, "reason", and "socially proper action". We could reach that same conclusion by appealing to fine-grained subject matters: "moral reasons", "legal reasons", and "reasons of etiquette".

So the quietist should not insist that since etiquette discourse involves claims about reasons it must be subsumed under the one normative domain. That position is ad hoc (given Scanlon's verdicts about other cases) and arbitrary (given the absence of clear criteria for domain-individuation). And we do not want our ultimate ontological commitments to depend upon arbitrary choices.

I have been defending the first premise—that etiquette discourse, including claims like Prudish Reason, forms a separate domain—by playing defense. There is also a positive argument in favor of the claim that if quietism is true, etiquette discourse forms a separate domain. Scanlon tells us that "the domain of practical reasons is not a unified subject matter" (104). This relates to his position on indeterminacy, which we will address shortly. For now, we can note that if talking about "domains" is just a way of talking about statements' subject matters, and "practical reasons" is not a unified subject matter, then the natural conclusion to draw is that *there is no normative domain*. Or if there is, it is like the domain of metaphysics: it is "entirely parasitic" on the more unified domains ("moral reasons", "legal reasons") that contribute to it.

Now let's turn to the second premise: if quietism is true and discourse about etiquette forms a separate domain, we can create new reasons out of thin air. If etiquette forms a separate domain, statements like Prudish Reason are true if and because they are licensed by the domain-specific standard of etiquette. (I'm setting aside the CONSISTENCY constraint, which we'll return to shortly.) That would allow us to make reasons exist by merely changing our attitudes.

Let's walk through this step by step. First, what are standards? Scanlon tells us that a standard consists in part "of substantive principles about the domain", which are in turn "justified by less explicitly codified reasoning about the subject matter in question," and "can be revised in the light of further reasoning of this kind." That reasoning "proceeds by appeal to our best general understanding of the nature of the concepts basic to the domain in question and to the most obvious particular truths within it" (20). To illustrate this, Scanlon claims that the standards of the empirical sciences are justified in part by "our conception of the subject matter of science" as "comprised of objects in space, causally interacting with us" (20), while the standards for set theory are justified in part by our best understanding of its central concept: "set".

Second, would the standard of the etiquette domain license Prudish Norm and Prudish Reason? Yes, it would. Prudish Norm and Prudish Reason can be among the "obvious particular truths" in some local etiquette system, and can be licensed by

the standard of that domain in the same way that Tithing Norm and Tithing Reason are licensed by the standard of the moral domain.

Third, if the standard of the etiquette domain can license Prudish Reason, can we create reasons out of thin air? Yes we can. Reasons exist if and because statements that quantify over reasons are licensed by the relevant standard. And a crucial difference between morality and etiquette is that we can *create* the relevant standard of etiquette via our practices and attitudes. So when we create the relevant standard of etiquette that licenses new statements about reasons, like Prudish Reason, we create new reasons out of thin air.

Some might dispute this third step by offering an alternative interpretation of the role of domain-specific standards. Scanlon describes their role as follows: a claim about what exists is “properly settled” by the standards of the relevant domain. This is ambiguous. On one reading, standards only play an epistemic role. The best way for us to reach justified beliefs about what exists is to reason in accordance with the standards for the relevant domain. That is, standards settle what we are justified in believing to be true. I agree that, for Scanlon, standards play this role.<sup>12</sup> And I agree that if this is all that standards do within Scanlon’s quietism, the above argument would not go through: by creating a standard of etiquette we would change what statements about reasons we’re justified in believing, but not what statements about reasons are true.

In Sect. 4 we’ll see why even this has problematic implications. But for now, I will dispute that standards *only* play this epistemic role.<sup>13</sup> On my reading, standards also play an ontological role: domain-specific standards settle what is true, and what exists. This is how Scanlon describes his view: standards settle “truth values” (not just justification), and standards provide “the conditions required in order for objects in different domains to exist”. This reading also fits with Scanlon’s minimalist conceptions of facts and properties (20–22, 45, and n. 12). Moreover, if standards only played an epistemic role, Scanlon’s view would not be recognizably quietist; it would be compatible with a range of inflationary metaphysical views. Scanlon needs standards to play an ontological role to explain and support his other metaphysical commitments (or lack thereof).<sup>14</sup>

I don’t mean to suggest that it is unproblematic for Scanlon to hold that standards play this ontological role. For instance, it immediately raises the spectre of an explanatory circle. Scanlon writes that the standards for a domain are partly set by appealing to “obvious truths” within that domain, *and* that standards settle truth-

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Scanlon’s references to standards *justifying* existential claims (25, 123).

<sup>13</sup> Maguire (2014) defends this interpretation: “The text is richly ambiguous between two interpretations of this “settling” relation, as between the constructivist view that standards for settling truth-values *ground* those truth values, and the realist view that even the best employment of the standards for settling truth-values may get things wrong. As the last sentences of the book suggest, the balance of Scanlon’s conviction lies with the realist position.” Wedgwood (2015) suggests a similar interpretation: “Given that it is plausible that different sorts of beliefs are justified in different ways, there is no reason for accepting the Quinean view that there is a single method for answering all ontological questions”. It is hard to see how to square this interpretation with the explicit textual evidence, or with Scanlon’s ambitions.

<sup>14</sup> These include, *inter alia*, (a) Scanlon’s refusal to commit to naturalism or non-naturalist Platonism, (b) his views about indeterminacy, and (c) his responses to objections (below).

values. How can standards determine truths while the truths also determine the standards? I have no idea. But that's what Scanlon has said in print. So this is a place where one can get off the boat, though doing so won't salvage a view that's still Scanlon's, or recognizably quietist.

We've seen that if Scanlon's quietism is true, discourse about etiquette forms a separate domain, and so we can create new reasons out of thin air. But so far we've set aside the CONSISTENCY constraint, which offers the quietist a way of resisting this conclusion. You might think that just as the supernatural and scientific domains conflict, the etiquette domain will contain, entail, or presuppose claims that are false according to some other normative domain. So just as the inter-domain conflict between the supernatural and scientific domains "provides decisive reason to reject the idea that there are witches", the inter-domain conflict between etiquette and (say) morality will provide decisive reason to reject the idea that there is reason for the unwed to be chaste.<sup>15</sup>

There are two problems with this response. First, if etiquette conflicts with some other normative domain like morality, why does that "provide decisive reason" to reject Prudish Reason rather than Tithing Reason? Why privilege morality over etiquette? The problem here is fully general: that domains  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  conflict is a symmetric condition, and so cannot itself provide decisive reason to reject  $\alpha$  over  $\beta$  rather than  $\beta$  over  $\alpha$ . In his discussion of witches, Scanlon simply asserts that the conflict between the supernatural and scientific domains provides decisive reason to reject the former. But why, if quietism is true, should we reject the idea that there are witches rather than reject the idea that there are quarks? If all domains are equal—as DIVERSITY and AUTONOMY claim—why privilege science over the supernatural, or morality over etiquette?

Scanlon never gives us an asymmetric condition to serve as a tie-breaker. Indeed, it's not clear how he could. He may say that scientific discourse has "demonstrated success" in "predicting and explaining what seem to be obvious facts about this world" (20), and witch discourse has not.<sup>16</sup> But how are *quietists* entitled to make such comparisons? What domain are such comparisons internal to? If they are internal to the scientific domain, they add nothing: we already knew that scientific claims meet scientific standards but supernatural claims don't, and vice versa. So this is still a symmetric condition, and cannot serve as an explanation for why quietists are justified in privileging science.

One might suggest that comparisons between scientific and supernatural standards are internal to some third domain. But what third domain could that be? It cannot be another *first-order* domain. No first-order domain can license second-order pronouncements upon the scientific and supernatural domains.

<sup>15</sup> This was Scanlon's response to the argument in personal correspondence: "In order for us to be free to "set up" etiquette or some other domain however we like, it must be understood in a way that does not involve interdomain conflicts ...[but] in order for such a domain to entail conclusions about reasons it must be understood in a way that does involve such conflicts".

<sup>16</sup> Scanlon confirmed that this was his view in personal correspondence: "in cases of inter-domain conflict, we need some reason for giving priority to one domain. The success of science in delivering systematic, accurate predictions gives us ample reason to give it priority."

Moreover, having three conflicting first-order domains is no better than having two. We should not resolve existential questions by counting the relevant domains and going with the majority, especially in the absence of non-ad hoc criteria for domain-individuation (as we saw above). More plausibly, such comparisons could be internal to a *second-order* domain. But if so, this re-introduces the very metaphysical vantage point, with its domain-independent standards for existence, that quietists were in the business of maligning.

Plus, even if quietists can legitimately make inter-domain comparisons without re-introducing a metaphysical vantage point, how would help this help with the case at hand? Say predictive accuracy justifies privileging science over the supernatural. What similar comparison would justify privileging morality over etiquette? Neither normative domain is in the business of predicting anything.

Even if Scanlon could justify resolving inter-domain conflicts asymmetrically, the second problem would remain: there may be no conflict between etiquette and any other domain in the first place. This may sound surprising. Say Prudish Reason is true according to etiquette, and is currently not true according to any other normative domain. You might think it follows that Prudish Reason is false according to some other normative domain, like morality. But that's a mistake. Prudish Reason can be neither-true-nor-false according to other normative domains. This is plausible given Scanlon's stance on indeterminacy, which we touched on above. Scanlon takes it to be a fact, or at least a plausible conjecture, that the standards of normative domains provide determinate truth-values for some claims about reasons and indeterminate truth-values for others.

Scanlon's stance on indeterminacy is not easy to interpret.<sup>17</sup> He barely mentions familiar concerns about vague predicates.<sup>18</sup> His concern is different: "the domain of practical reasons is not a unified subject matter", in that "our thinking about reasons depends on too many disparate starting points", so "the range of non-derived elements in the domain of reasons for action is too varied to be plausibly explained by a systematic overall account" (104, 101–102).

If quietism is true, there are at least two ways that this could generate indeterminacy. First, it may be that our standards contain one fixed set of discrete starting points that yield determinate truth values for some claims and indeterminate truth values for others. As an illustrative analogy, consider a bureaucratic process that admits people who have 60 points of identification or more and rejects people who have 40 points of identification or less; those with 41–59 points of

<sup>17</sup> First, it is unclear whether Scanlon is committed to indeterminacy. He starts his discussion claiming that determinacy is a "much less plausible hope" for normative domains than for the mathematical domain (85), and ends by taking it to be a *fact* "that the domain of practical reasons is not a unified subject matter like the domain of sets, the content of which we should expect to be determined by overall principles characterizing this domain" (104). Is determinacy an implausible hope, or is indeterminacy a fact? Secondly, Scanlon discusses the determinacy of mathematics at length, but does not discuss the determinacy of other domains, including physical science. Thirdly, it is "utterly unclear" (as Wedgwood 2015 says, 5) why Scanlon takes indeterminacy about normativity to be plausible. More on this below.

<sup>18</sup> While "it seems clearly true that the fact that some action is necessary to avoid serious physical pain is, in most circumstances, a reason to do it", it can be "uncertain at the edges", in that there can be borderline cases of pain, or of pain that is not "worth bearing" (85–86).

identification have an indeterminate status, but not because any particular source of identification (e.g., “driver’s license”) involves vagueness.

Secondly, our standards may not contain *one* fixed set of discrete starting points. This seems to match Scanlon’s concerns in the text: he accepts that it is possible that while impeccably reasoning about reasons, different people “may reach different reflective equilibria”, where “the best explanation of the plausibility of [their] different answers to ... particular questions is that they flow from different overall accounts of this subject matter, and that the subject in question can equally well be understood in either of these two ways” (79–80).

As an illustrative analogy, consider athletes. While impeccably reasoning about who or what is and is not an athlete different people may reach different reflective equilibria, where the best explanation of why they do so is that their incompatible answers to particular questions flow from different but equally good overall accounts or understandings of the subject matter. For instance, some take Secretariat, a racehorse, to be obviously one of the best athletes of all time; others take it to be equally obvious that racehorses are not athletes.<sup>19</sup> Since all overall accounts of athletes still converge on some claims, those claims have determinate truth values: “Usain Bolt is an athlete” is true; “Rocks are athletes” is false. But since overall accounts sometimes diverge, claims like “Secretariat is an athlete” have indeterminate truth values. This indeterminacy does not result from a vague predicate, but from a subject matter that is not sufficiently unified to be best explained by one unique systematic overall account.

If this is how we should understand Scanlon’s view about indeterminacy, Prudish Reason is a particularly suitable candidate for a claim that has an indeterminate truth value according to normative domains. Many people accept as “a discrete starting point” a kind of moral puritanism about sex; they take there to be underived *moral* reasons for the unwed to be chaste. “Liberals” tend to reject this claim. But for many “conservatives”, it is foundational to their moral thought.<sup>20</sup> Given this, it is plausible that while reasoning impeccably about morality, different people may reach different (“liberal” or “conservative”) reflective equilibria. The best explanation of the plausibility of their different answers (e.g., to whether according to morality the unwed have reason to be chaste) may be that they flow from different overall accounts of morality.

However, little hangs on this example, or on this understanding of Scanlon’s stance on indeterminacy. Whatever claims about reasons have indeterminate truth-values according to the standards of other normative domains, there could be a local standard of etiquette according to which only those claims are true. After all, we can create such standards, so we can gerrymander their contents. So if there is indeterminacy in normative domains, we can create an etiquette domain (via mere changes in our attitudes) that licenses new claims about reasons without entailing

<sup>19</sup> See Ludlow (2008) and Plunkett and Sundell (2013) for discussion of this example.

<sup>20</sup> See Haidt (2012) for evidence for and discussion of these empirical claims.

claims that are false according to other normative domain. So we can create new reasons without creating inter-domain conflicts.

There are several ways that one could get off the boat here. One could deny the indeterminacy of normativity. It is unclear if the view that would emerge is recognizably quietist. But if it is, the view would be vulnerable on other fronts. Scanlon appeals to the indeterminacy of normativity in fending off various non-quietist views which are inspired by Hume and Kant: in claiming that practical reasons “depend on too many disparate starting points” to be a unified subject matter, Scanlon is denying that we can explain practical reasons in terms of a single starting point like actual or ideal desires, or rational agency. So parting ways with Scanlon on the indeterminacy of normativity is far from cost-free.

Alternatively, one could revise CONSISTENCY. Recall that CONSISTENCY holds that domains  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  conflict when  $p$  is true in  $\alpha$  and false in  $\beta$ . We could go for something weaker: domains  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  conflict when  $p$  is true in  $\alpha$  and not true in  $\beta$ . Now etiquette conflicts with other normative domains. But this makes inter-domain conflicts ubiquitous. Just take any claim about reasons that is true according to normative domains but neither-true-nor-false according to science. (The standards of science are silent about reasons. So statements about reasons are not true according to science, and they had better not be false either.) This is a very unwelcome result for Scanlon, who claims that there is in fact no tension between scientific and normative discourse.

Could we revise Scanlon’s view in order to generate a conflict between etiquette and morality without generating a conflict between morality and science? Perhaps one could restrict the scope of this revised CONSISTENCY principle such that it only applied to normative domains. This may not be ad hoc: perhaps the conditions for conflict between indeterminate domains should be weaker. On this view, a statement about reasons is true only if it is true according to the standard of every normative domain. Licensing claims about reasons is a bit like launching missiles from a submarine: everyone needs to turn their key. This is sufficient to generate a conflict between etiquette and other normative domains. And it reduces unwanted inter-domain conflicts. But it does not eliminate them entirely. Plausibly, epistemology is silent about moral reasons, and morality is silent about epistemic reasons. So even a revised and restricted CONSISTENCY constraint cannot generate the needed conflict between etiquette and morality without generating unwelcome conflicts between epistemology and morality.

A final possibility is more promising. The quietist could concede that the claims that etiquette contains and entails are not false according to other domains, but argue that etiquette still *presupposes* claims that are false according to other normative domains. This would generate an inter-domain conflict.

Scanlon offered this response in personal correspondence. He suggested that morality and etiquette have similar normative presuppositions, and that those presuppositions are true in the former case and false in the latter. So to understand the response, let’s consider the normative presuppositions of morality:

The claims that we make about moral right and wrong generally presuppose *that there are moral standards that everyone has good reason to take seriously*

*as guides to conduct and as standards for objecting to what others do.* But the ordinary ways of understanding morality, and ordinary ways of arguing for moral conclusions do not make clear what these reasons are, or establish that we have such reasons. There is therefore a question, external to morality, *whether the usual ways of establishing that a form of conduct is wrong also guarantee that there are good reasons not to engage in it.* This question is not scientific or metaphysical but normative—a question about what we have reason to do (22, emphasis mine).

I take the basic idea behind this response to be that all normative domains—morality, etiquette, epistemology, etc.—have such normative presuppositions. Does this provide a basis for generating the needed conflict between etiquette and some other domain without generating unwelcome inter-domain conflicts?

No. These normative presuppositions are either overly demanding, or trivial.

Scanlon offers two quite different formulations of the relevant normative presuppositions (which I have emphasized above). Roughly, they correspond to the following: *that everyone has good reason to take Tithing Norm seriously as a guide to conduct*; and *that the usual ways of establishing that Tithing Norm is true guarantee that there are reasons to tithe.* Let's consider them in turn.

The first formulation is overly demanding. It may be false that everyone has good reason to take norms of etiquette seriously as guides to conduct. However, if morality is esoteric, it is also false that everyone *has* good reason to take moral norms seriously as guides to conduct. And if morality is self-effacing, there may not *be* good reason for everyone to be guided by what morality requires. So it is too demanding to require that all normative domains—morality, etiquette, etc.—are such that everyone has good reason to be guided by their dictates. If Scanlon takes this route, his quietism threatens to herald moral nihilism.

What about the second formulation? On a natural interpretation, it is trivial. Do the usual ways of establishing that Tithing Norm is true guarantee that there is reason to tithe? Sure. Our ways of establishing that Tithing Norm is true (the standards of the moral domain) guarantee that Tithing Reason is true too. But by parity of reasoning, our ways of establishing that Prudish Norm is true (the standards of the etiquette domain) also guarantee that Prudish Reason is true, and hence that there is reason to do what etiquette requires.

Perhaps this natural interpretation is mistaken. After all, Scanlon says that morality's presuppositions are "external", so perhaps they must be made true in a domain other than morality (and *mutatis mutandis* for etiquette et al.). This makes the presupposition non-trivial. But it also has the surprising consequence that moral nihilism is true, and all moral claims like Tithing Norm are false, unless it is guaranteed that there are non-moral reasons to be moral. This is a very controversial, even counter-orthodox, position. Since Prichard (1912), many have thought that it is a mistake to demand that there must be some non-moral source of reasons to act in accordance with the requirements of morality.

Moreover, the relevant presupposition is now far too demanding, even for Scanlon. Scanlon (1998) argued that if his contractualism is true, it is guaranteed that there are non-moral reasons to do what "we owe to each other". But he also



indicated that “what we owe to each other” may not exhaust morality; it may not include our moral requirements regarding animals and the natural environment (179). So it is an open question whether, for Scanlon, our usual ways of establishing that conduct that mistreats animals or the environment is wrong guarantee that there are “good (non-moral) reasons not to engage in it.”

Another way to see why this presupposition is too demanding is to consider other normative domains, like prudence and epistemology. To undermine my prospects is imprudent even if the usual ways of establishing this do not guarantee that I have non-prudential reasons to act prudently. To believe contrary to my evidence is unjustified even if the usual ways of establishing this do not guarantee that I have non-epistemic reasons to form justified beliefs.

The upshot of all of this is that if quietists are to insist that it is an external presupposition of any normative domain that we are guaranteed to have good reason to act in accordance with the dictates of that domain, then quietism opens the door for nihilism about morality, prudence and epistemology. And if quietists do not insist that morality et al. have such external presuppositions, then by parity of reasoning they must say the same about etiquette et al. too.

Where does this leave us? We first saw that if Scanlon’s quietism is true, discourse about etiquette forms a separate domain, so we can create new reasons out of thin air. To resist this the quietist must respond that etiquette conflicts with other normative domains—it contains, entails, or presupposes claims that are false according to other normative domains—and this conflict provides decisive reason to reject the etiquette domain. However, neither step in this response succeeds. The only ways to generate a conflict between etiquette and other normative domains massively over-generate inter-domain conflicts. And the quietist has no resources to explain why symmetric inter-domain conflicts should be resolved asymmetrically by rejecting etiquette. So we’re left with the conclusion that if quietism is true we can create new reasons out of thin air.

#### 4 One domain, one standard

The first argument rests on a way of individuating domains that is especially plausible given Scanlon’s stance on indeterminacy and his commitment to the separateness of the particular domains he discusses (such as the scientific and supernatural domains, and the normative and moral domains). But let’s assume, *arguendo*, that one can supplement Scanlon’s view with clear criteria for domain-individuation that justify the stance that etiquette discourse does not form a separate domain, but instead falls under one and only normative domain. The upshot of this would be that claims like Prudish Reason must be licensed by the standards of the one normative domain in order to be true.<sup>21</sup>

Does it follow from this that Prudish Reason is not true? Or, more pertinently, does it follow that we cannot make Prudish Reason true via mere changes in our

<sup>21</sup> This mirrors Scanlon’s response (29) to Enoch (2011)’s “counter-reasons” example (124).

attitudes? I don't think so. In this section I'll argue that if Scanlon's quietism is true and discourse about etiquette is subsumed under the one normative domain, we can still create new reasons out of thin air.

This argument rests on what is perhaps the most elusive detail of Scanlon's view: the revisability of standards. Let's warm up to the basic idea by considering scientific and supernatural discourse once more. Recall that they can contain inconsistent claims about causation, such as "Bacteria caused the illness" and "Witches caused the illness", where either cause would exclude the other. If these discourses form separate domains, they conflict. But what if they are subsumed under a single domain, such as the domain of causation? We cannot appeal to CONSISTENCY. So we must determine whether it's true that "Witches caused the illness" by appealing to the standards of the causation domain. And this is where things get interesting. It would be a mistake to assume that the standards of the broader causation domain would be identical to the standards of the narrower scientific domain. After all, a domain is just a set of statements with a single subject matter, and the standards for a domain are determined in part by the "obvious particular truths" within that set of statements. So the broader set will contain obvious particular truths that are absent from the narrower set, and hence the broader domain may well have a different standard than the narrower domain. I am not sure if that would occur here. There are significant tensions between the candidate "obvious particular truths" within the broader set of statements, which would need to be resolved.

Still, this example illustrates how the content of the standard for a domain may change depending on what statements are subsumed under that domain. The example above illustrates this point synchronically: we considered how we could carve out a broader or narrower domain at a single point in time. But we could make the same point diachronically by considering what happens when we add to the relevant set of statements over time. By adding to the "obvious particular truths" we could revise the relevant standard, and thereby change what statements are true in the domain. If we could make "Witches caused the illness" true in such a manner, we could create witches out of thin air.

Now let's return to the normative domain. Say that discourse about morality, prudence, and epistemology all falls under the normative domain. Then discourse about etiquette—statements like Prudish Norm and Prudish Reason—emerges and is subsumed under that domain too. This adds new "obvious particular truths" to the domain. And unlike in the example of supernatural discourse, it does not introduce any tension between the obvious particular truths in the domain: these "obvious particular truths" were previously neither-true-nor-false, not false. So it seems probable that by adding a set of statements like Prudish Reason to the normative domain we will revise the standards of the latter so that they license the former. In other words, by subsuming etiquette discourse under the one normative domain we can still create new reasons out of thin air. If this is right, realists must still reject normative quietism.

Quietist could try to resist this argument by rejecting either of its two crucial steps: that we can change what statements are true by revising the standards of a

domain; and that adding statements like Prudish Reason to the normative domain would prompt such a revision. Let's consider each in turn.

According to Scanlon's quietism, can we change what statements are true by revising the relevant domain-specific standards? I believe so. We saw that, for Scanlon, domain-specific standards determine the truth-values of statements. From when he first discusses standards Scanlon notes that they can be "revised" (20). He even states that "nothing beyond the (*evolving*) standards of a domain can be relevant to the *truth* of statements within it" (21, emphasis mine).

It is surprising that Scanlon does not discuss the controversial implications that seem to follow from this view. The following, for instance, is at least possible on Scanlon's view: scientific standards "evolved" between the ancient, medieval, and modern eras, such that quantum field theory was false (or indeterminate) but is now true, while Humorism was true but is now false.<sup>22</sup> This commits Scanlon to a form of relativism about truth. Worse yet, it commits Scanlon to a form of relativism about existence. Something exists iff it is quantified over by a true statement. So entities like phlogiston and quantum particles can pop in and out of existence with "evolutions" in our scientific standards.

These implications seem to be absurd and paradigmatically anti-realist; and there is no evidence that they were explicitly accepted by Scanlon. So perhaps we should charitably reinterpret or revise Scanlon's stance on the revisability of standards. Recall that Scanlon accepts that standards play epistemic and ontological roles. We could distinguish between two types of standards—truth-value-determining ontological standards and justification-determining epistemic standards—one of which is immutable, and the other revisable.<sup>23</sup> So revised, Scanlon's view could yield the more intuitive verdict that phlogiston never existed: claims like "Phlogiston caused the fire" were always false (according to the relevant fixed ontological standards), but at times we were justified in believing these falsehoods (according to the relevant fluctuating epistemic standards).

This proposal might seem promising, but it fits neither the letter nor the spirit of Scanlon's view. If ontological standards are immutable and epistemic standards are revisable, the two can come apart. This raises many of the troublesome epistemological problems that quietists like Scanlon want to dissolve rather than solve. How we could know that what we're justified in believing to be true according to our current, changeable epistemic standards—for math, normativity, science, or any domain—conforms to what's actually true according to the immutable ontological standards? The quietist fails at her own game if she opens the door for skepticism about our epistemic access to the truth.

Moreover, the proposal that ontological standards are immutable but epistemic standards about normativity are revisable is still problematic for realists about normativity. It follows from this proposal that by adding statements like Prudish Norm and Prudish Reason to the normative domain we cannot make Prudish Reason

<sup>22</sup> Humorism is the historically influential view that physical and mental qualities are caused by the proportions of the four cardinal humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile.

<sup>23</sup> I thank Tristram McPherson for this suggestion. It is, to be clear, not Scanlon's view.

true, but we can make everyone justified in believing that Prudish Reason is true. This is a smaller bullet to bite, but it still leaves a bitter aftertaste. Even the “liberals” in a society with “conservative” social mores would become justified in falsely believing that there are reasons for the unwed to be chaste. So this is a view on which we cannot create *practical reasons* by changing our attitudes, but we can create epistemic justification (i.e., *epistemic reasons*) to believe that there are practical reasons when there aren’t, merely by changing our discourse and our attitudes. This still leaves our central conclusion intact: if quietism is true, we can create reasons out of thin air.

Since it does not seem to be very promising, let’s set aside the first response and consider the second. For Scanlon, we can change what statements are true by revising standards. But would subsuming etiquette discourse under the normative domain prompt such a revision and make Prudish Reason true?

I don’t know if we can reach a decisive conclusion about this issue either way, given how little Scanlon says about the nature of standards, or their revisability. But based on the little we know from the text, I think it’s more plausible that subsuming etiquette discourse would prompt such a revision. We know that standards are not revised due to changes in our linguistic practices alone (19 n.3). More helpfully, we know that domain-specific standards are set by reasoning that appeals to “our best general understanding of the subject matter in question” and “the most obvious particular truths” within the domain (20). We know that according to Scanlon our best general understanding of reasons (the subject matter in question) is one on which there are many “disparate starting points” for reasoning impeccably about reasons. And we know that in a sufficiently conservative community claims like “According to etiquette there is reason for the unwed to be chaste” can be at least as obvious as truths like “According to morality there is reason for the wealthy to give to charity”.

If we subsume etiquette discourse under the one normative domain, we should treat etiquette as another disparate starting point for reasoning impeccably about reasons (along with morality, prudence, and so on). And from that starting point we can reach claims like Prudish Reason, which will be at least as obvious as truths reached from other starting points, like Tithing Reason. This is a strong *prima facie* case for thinking that adding such starting points could prompt a revision, and it need not appeal to our linguistic practices at all.

This case is strengthened by considering an analogy to other points in history where we added new statements to our broader normative discourse. Discourse about distributive justice—including, perhaps, statements like Tithing Reason—is relatively recent. Presumably, distributive justice became another disparate starting point for reasoning impeccably about reasons, which could revise the standards for the normative domain to license different claims about reasons. However it is that this worked for distributive justice and Tithing Reason, it should work the same way for social propriety and Prudish Reason.

We’ve now seen two arguments for the conclusion that if quietism is true, we can create new reasons out of thin air, which is incompatible with realism. The arguments depend on different ways of individuating domains. So to block the objection, the quietist needs to show that *either* both arguments fail, *or* one

argument fails and the other rests on an unacceptable way of individuating domains. If one succeeds and both ways of individuating domains are acceptable, quietism makes our ontological commitments depend on arbitrary choices.

Several challenges to Scanlon's quietist commitments about the nature and role of domain-specific standards, inter-domain conflict, indeterminacy, and revisability have also been considered. Even if both arguments fail, I believe these challenges still provide ample grounds for realists to reject normative quietism.

## 5 Conclusion

The debate over whether realism is compatible with quietism has stagnated because of the realist's difficulties in finding a point of purchase against quietists: Scanlon gladly rejects the metaphysical distinction between what "exists" and what "EXISTS", and cavalierly accepts the implication we can make entities like ghosts and schmeasons exist. But Scanlon cannot maintain such nonchalance about quietism's implications about reasons. So if Scanlon's quietism entails that we can create new reasons out of thin air, Scanlon's own realist commitments about reasons militate against quietism.

Two final questions are worth considering. What is the source of the problem for Scanlon's quietism? And is it a problem for quietism, or just a problem for Scanlon's version thereof? The two problems are obviously related. Diagnosing the source of the problem will reveal whether its roots are deep or superficial.

The problem flows from the initially plausible ideas that lie at the core of Scanlon's view. He concedes that if DIVERSITY and AUTONOMY are true we can create new unfamiliar entities like ghosts by adopting a new way of talking about them. I've shown that the same holds for one familiar entity: reasons.

The same may also hold for other familiar entities like numbers and quarks. This depends on whether the indeterminacy of the normative domain is central to our diagnosis of the source of the problem. I suspect that the problem remains even if we are committed to determinacy, due to the independent problems with the CONSISTENCY constraint: quietists need a principled basis for resolving inter-domain conflicts asymmetrically, but none is available. Even if I'm wrong about this, it is cold comfort to quietists. That their view yields such unwanted results about reasons should make realists reject the general enterprise.

If this is right, the roots of the problem run deep, and affect quietism writ large. To avoid the objection, quietists will have to get off the boat early. They may consider abandoning CONSISTENCY.<sup>24</sup> This move may be well-motivated, given the seemingly benign character of various inconsistencies between (and sometimes within) scientific theories;<sup>25</sup> there certainly seem to be some cases where different domains license inconsistent statements, yet we are in no position to reject either domain, and may continue to accept both. But even if this move is well-motivated, it

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<sup>24</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>25</sup> See Saatsi (2014) for recent discussion.

will not help quietists here. CONSISTENCY is introduced as a *constraint*: without CONSISTENCY, the extensional implications of Scanlon's quietism—that is, of DIVERSITY and AUTONOMY—run amok, and proliferate contradictions. And more directly, without CONSISTENCY, there is simply one less obstacle to showing that if quietism is true we can create reasons out of thin air. So if quietists wish to get off the boat they will have to do so even earlier, by abandoning DIVERSITY and AUTONOMY. If that is the preferred response I confess that I'm not sure what lies at the core of quietism, and why it is even initially attractive. Perhaps quietists will restrict their view to a handful of privileged domains—like normativity, mathematics, and physical science. But that will be awfully ad hoc. As we've seen, it is hard to justify privileging some first-order domains over others without appealing to comparisons in some general second-order domain (like metaphysics) that quietists are in the business of maligning. Or, perhaps quietists will abandon any aspiration to provide a general view. Perhaps they will accept a general, metaphysically inflationary account of why quarks exist, and a metaphysically deflationary account of why reasons exist. But if reasons are held to be less real than quarks, it is hard to see how normative quietism amounts to more than anti-realism by another name. If there is an alternative form of quietism that is clear, attractive, and compatible with realism, the onus is on quietists to develop and defend it.

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