

Projection, Detection, and the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism

Andrew A. Johnson

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Approved by:

William G. Lycan

Thomas Hofweber

Dorit Bar-On

Ram Neta

John T. Roberts

ABSTRACT

Andrew A. Johnson

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(Under the direction of William G. Lycan)

Believing ordinary objects like tables and chairs to be real seems to be a matter of believing that they exist and are independent of our minds. However, the idea that realism about a domain is a matter of taking on certain mind-independent ontological commitments falters when we consider other domains. Realism about minds, for example, clearly does not require a commitment to mind-independence. And realism about morality does not seem to require believing in the existence of any special moral entities. The way to explain these varying intuitions, I believe, is to give up the idea that realism, at its heart, has anything to do with existence or mind-independence. I argue that believing a domain to be real is fundamentally a matter of forming one's beliefs about the domain in a certain fashion. It is a matter of deeming certain kinds of reasons more relevant to the task of belief formation than others. I call this the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism. It explains why ontology and mind-independence seem crucial to some kinds of realism, and why they seem irrelevant to others. It also explains various other intuitions that we encounter along the way.

A number of philosophers have thought that the realist about a domain has to believe the domain to be *detected* rather than *projected*. I argue that the most promising attempts to pinpoint a detection/projection distinction (including the concept of response-dependence, Crispin Wright's conception of judgment-dependence, and Kit Fine's conception of non-

factuality) all fall short of the mark, in one way or another. None of these proposals give us a distinction that is relevant to the question of realism. I then develop a new (and dialectically fruitful) way of making the projection/detection distinction. On my account, for a domain to be a projection of our epistemic practice is for our epistemic success with respect to the domain to be explained in a certain kind of way. I argue that, if a domain is a projection of our epistemic practice in this sense, it is less than fully real for us.

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Introduction

To be a realist about a domain, in the sense that concerns me in this dissertation, is to believe the domain to be fully real. A mathematical realist is someone who believes the domain of mathematics to be fully real. A moral realist is someone who believes the domain of morality to be fully real. Etc. In what follows, I will develop and defend a general account of realism, an account of what it is, exactly, to believe a domain to be fully real. With this general account of realism in hand, we will be able to say what the mathematical realist, the moral realist, and every other kind of realist have in common.

A successful general account of realism must explain all of our intuitions about what it is to believe a domain to be fully real. For example, at first appraisal, believing the domain of mathematics to be real requires believing in the existence of mathematical entities like numbers and sets. By contrast, it seems possible to believe the domain of morality to be real without believing in the existence of any special moral entities (like the Form of the Good, for example). Why does mathematical realism seem to have an ontological component in a way that moral realism does not? A successful general account of realism must explain this asymmetry.

Moving on to another set of intuitions, believing ordinary objects like tables and chairs to be real seems to require believing them to be independent of our minds in various respects. It requires believing, for example, that it is possible for them to persist even after all minds have ceased to exist. Believing psychological entities like ideas and minds to be real, on the other hand, clearly does not require believing them to be mind-independent in

this sense. Why not? Why does realism about ordinary objects involve a commitment to mind-independence in a way that realism about psychological entities does not? A successful general account of realism must explain this asymmetry as well.

Another challenge to developing a general account of realism is the intuition that realism about a domain requires the belief that we *detect* rather than *project* the domain. As we will see, pinning down a detection/projection distinction in a way that does justice to this intuition is extremely difficult.

I will proceed in developing my general account of realism in the following way. In Chapter 1, I temporarily set aside the question of detection/projection and focus on our other intuitions about realism. These intuitions will lead us to consider and reject a number of different general accounts of realism. Specifically, we will see that believing a domain to be real is not, fundamentally, a matter of believing certain entities to exist. Nor is it a matter of acknowledging the truth of our best theory about the domain. Nor is it a matter of accepting the mind-independence of the domain. Rather, believing a domain to be real is, at its core, a matter of forming one's beliefs about the domain in a certain fashion. It is a matter of deeming certain kinds of reasons more relevant to the task of belief formation than others. I will call this the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism. As we will see, it is the only account of realism that does justice to our intuitions on the matter.

After developing and defending the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism, I turn my attention to the intuition that a realist about a domain must believe that we *detect* rather than *project* the domain. If there is anything to this intuition, then there has to be a way that a domain can be dependent on us that would make it less than fully real. Gideon Rosen has put forward a compelling argument that no kind of dependence is relevant to the question of

realism in this way. Briefly, Rosen's argument is that, no matter how a domain is dependent on us, taking up an external anthropological perspective on our relationship to the domain will convince us that the domain is fully real. I present Rosen's argument fully in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3, I articulate a kind of dependence that I believe to be relevant to the question of realism. A domain is dependent on us in this sense if our epistemic success with respect to the domain is explained in a certain kind of way. I introduce this kind of dependence by showing why one might be tempted to believe that certain domains are actually dependent on us in this way. Briefly, the philosophical literature is littered with puzzles purporting to show that our ordinary beliefs cannot possibly be true. Rather than giving up our ordinary beliefs, we can often resolve these puzzles by accepting what I will call modal sociological (MS) explanations of our epistemic success with respect to the domains in question. MS explanation explains epistemic success by citing two different kinds of facts. The first concerns the relationship between the domain in question and certain modal sociological facts (facts about what judgments a certain kind of subject would make in certain conditions). The second concerns the relationship between the subjects that feature in those modal sociological facts and us. After applying MS explanation to some examples, I argue that MS explanation is relevant to the question of realism. If there is an MS explanation of a subject's epistemic success with respect to a domain, then the domain is less than fully real for that subject.

In Chapter 4, I consider several Rosen-inspired objections to my claim that MS explanation is relevant to the question of realism. In the end, I conclude that MS explanation is indeed relevant to how real different domains are for different subjects.

I believe that whether or not our epistemic success with respect to a domain receives an MS explanation is relevant to the question of realism and independent of our ordinary beliefs about the domain. As we will see in Chapter 5, Kit Fine believes that there are two questions that fit this bill. Of any domain, we can ask whether or not it is factual, and we can ask whether or not it is fundamentally real. Fine's goal is to convince us that these questions are intelligible without telling us what he means by "factual" or "fundamentally real." According to Fine, we can't seriously question the intelligibility of a question that we know how to answer. So, he devotes his paper to telling us exactly how to answer questions about factuality and fundamental reality.

I believe that, even if Fine's strategy is sound, he has failed to deliver the goods. While Fine does tell us how to resolve certain kinds of disagreements, his failure to consider other kinds of disagreements dooms his project. Once we reflect on those other kinds of disagreements, we see that Fine has not really given us a way to answer questions about factuality and fundamental reality. Thus, he has given us no reason to think that such questions are even intelligible.

Like me, Crispin Wright believes that there is a way in which a domain can depend on modal sociological facts that is relevant to the question of realism. Wright calls his dependence relation "judgment-dependence." In Chapter 6, I argue that, despite Wright's best efforts, he has failed to give us an informative characterization of what it is to be judgment-dependent. I then argue that, even if the concept of judgment-dependence were intelligible, it would be of little dialectical value.

Chapter 1: The Relevant Reasons Account of Realism

I. The Ontological Account of Realism

At first appraisal, it seems almost irresistibly compelling that questions about the reality of a domain are ontological in nature. I will call this idea the “ontological account” of realism. According to it, when presented with a list of what entities someone believes to exist, we can infer what domains she is a realist about, and what domains she is an anti-realist about. In the case of mathematics, the ontological account is particularly attractive. What is it to believe the domain of mathematics to be real other than to believe that mathematical entities exist? If your ontology contains numbers and sets, then you believe the domain of mathematics to be real. If it doesn’t, then you don’t.

While the ontological account is compelling in the case of mathematics, its luster begins to fade when we try to apply it to other domains. Consider morality, for example. Believing the domain of morality to be real does not seem to be a matter of accepting certain entities into your ontology. It is, of course, possible to believe in the existence of special moral entities like the “Form of the Good,” moral “properties,” or moral “facts.” However, being a moral realist does not seem to require believing that any of those kinds of entities exist.¹

¹ At least, being a moral realist does not seem to require believing that moral facts or moral properties exist *in more than a minimal kind of way*. A moral realist plausibly does have to believe that there are moral truths. And there are platitudes linking moral truths to minimal senses of “fact” and “property.” (If donating money to charity is good, then it is a fact that donating money to charity is good. Further, if donating money to charity is good, then there is something that has the property of being good (namely, donating money to charity).) So, the moral realist plausibly has to believe in the existence of moral “facts” and “properties” in this minimal sense. However, I am taking the ontological account to require more. According to the (more robust) way that I am using the terms “properties” and “facts” in this section, someone can believe that there

Our intuitions about what it is to be a realist seem to be constrained in the following way. While realism about a domain may commit us to the existence of certain entities, it doesn't commit us to any entities whose existence isn't implied by the truth of our best theory about the domain. In general, being a realist about a domain doesn't require you to believe anything about the nature of the domain that isn't implied by our best theory about the domain. I will call this our "Accepting Our Best Theory is Enough" intuition.

Accepting Our Best Theory is Enough: Being a realist about a domain doesn't require you to believe anything about the nature of the domain that isn't implied by our best theory about the domain.

Intuitively, our best theory about a domain represents our best attempt to characterize the domain. And, if it is possible to accept our best characterization of a domain without, for example, accepting that there are special entities called "Platonic Forms," "facts," or "properties," then it is possible to believe that the domain that is being characterized is real without taking up an ontological commitment to Platonic Forms, facts, or properties. Since it seems possible to accept the truth of a moral theory without believing in the existence of any of those entities, it seems possible to believe the domain of morality to be real without believing in the existence of any of those entities. If we are to distinguish the moral anti-realist from the moral realist who denies that there are any such ontological implications of our best moral theory, we will have to do more than compare their respective ontologies. Thus, we ought to reject the ontological account of moral realism.

are moral truths without believing in the existence of properties and facts. Later in the paper, we will consider the idea that the moral realist is someone who believes that there are moral truths (which could equivalently be formulated in terms of believing in the existence of moral "properties" and "facts" in the minimal sense that this footnote has been considering).

Clearly, these reflections are compatible with our intuition that mathematical realism does bring with it ontological commitments. Our best mathematical theories do seem obviously to imply the existence of mathematical entities (they quantify over numbers and sets, after all²). If they do, then taking our best mathematical theories to be true has implications for one's ontology. An ontological account of mathematical realism is thus compatible with our intuition that Accepting Our Best Theory is Enough.

That said, in order to bring out how powerful that intuition is, I want to briefly consider a possibility that has been explored in recent work by Thomas Hofweber³ and Jody Azzouni.⁴ Both Hofweber and Azzouni argue that, while it is obviously true that there is a prime number in between 3 and 7, the truth of this claim does not imply the existence of numbers. Such a claim, of course, flies in the face of much of what is taken for granted in the philosophy of mathematics. However, let's say that we were to become convinced that such a position is nevertheless correct. If we were to come to believe that our best mathematical theories do not imply the existence of mathematical entities, how would that affect the perceived obligations of the mathematical realist? Would we still feel that mathematical realism requires believing in the existence of mathematical entities? I don't think that we would. Our best mathematical theories represent our best characterization of the domain of mathematics. To be persuaded by Hofweber or Azzouni is to be persuaded that our best characterization of the domain of mathematics does not imply the existence of

² This idea that a theory's ontological commitments are determined by what it quantifies over can, of course, be traced back to W.V.O. Quine, "On What There Is," in *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, pp. 1-19.

³ Thomas Hofweber, "Number determiners, numbers, and arithmetic," *The Philosophical Review* 11 4(2) (2005), pp. 179-225.

⁴ Jody Azzouni, *Deflating Existential Consequence: a case for nominalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

mathematical entities. And, if we accept that our best characterization of the domain of mathematics does not imply the existence of mathematical entities, then we should also accept that the domain of mathematics can be real even if there are no distinctively mathematical entities.

These reflections show how powerful our intuition is that Accepting Our Best Theory is Enough. But further, they should lead us to conclude that whether or not a domain is real is not an ontological matter. Even in the case of mathematics, we can imagine the reality of the domain and the existence of mathematical entities coming apart.

II. The Best Theory Account of Realism

If the reality of a domain isn't reducible to the existence of certain entities, what does it amount to? In light of our most recent discussion, it is tempting to try to characterize the belief that a domain is real in terms of a commitment to the best theory we have about the domain. Even if realism about a domain clearly doesn't require that we embrace the best theory we have about it in its entirety, perhaps it does require some commitment to it or other. Perhaps realism about a domain requires that we believe at least certain parts of our best theory about it to be at least approximately true. I will call this idea the "best theory account" of realism. Michael Devitt has put forward an account along these lines.⁵

Accepting a best theory account of realism would allow us to explain our intuition that Accepting Our Best Theory is Enough. If what it is to believe a domain to be real is to

⁵ Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2nd Edition, 1991. After reflecting on a variety of possibilities, Devitt settles on this: believing the physical realm to be real requires believing that there are tokens of at least half of the types of entities mentioned by our best physical theory. It should be noted that Devitt does concede that "there is a range of doctrines that might appropriately be called 'realism' " (23). Here, however, we are concerned with whether or not Devitt's preferred doctrine is appropriately called 'realism'. In order for the label to be appropriate, there has to be a sense in which someone who rejects the doctrine believes the domain in question to be less than fully real. As we will see, there is no such sense. Thus, Devitt's preferred view isn't in the "range of doctrines that might appropriately be called 'realism'."

commit to our best theory about it to some degree, then of course someone who fully commits to our best theory about it counts as believing the domain to be real. Our intuition that Accepting Our Best Theory is Enough would thus be explained as a straightforward consequence of what it is to believe a domain to be real. Unfortunately, no account along these lines can be correct. In order to see why, let us turn to physics.

Whatever the details of our best physical theory, we can imagine a young hotshot physicist coming along and rejecting them all as false. Clearly, such a person is not necessarily an anti-realist about physics. To reject our best physical theory as false is not necessarily to deny the reality of the physical realm. According to our imagined physicist, the physical realm is fully real. It's just that our best physical theory misdescribes it. Clearly, this is a coherent characterization of a position. But, if it is, then we must reject the best theory account of realism.

Indeed, it appears that we must reject any account of realism that constrains our beliefs about the particular nature of the domain in question. For, according to our intuition that Accepting Our Best Theory is Enough, realism does not require us to believe anything about a domain that is *not* implied by our best theory about that domain. And, as the case of the hotshot physicist makes vivid, neither does realism about a domain require us to believe anything that *is* implied by our best theory about it.

III. The Minimal Account of Realism

Here is our situation. Whatever it is to believe that a domain is real, it has to be characterizable in terms of satisfying some set of criteria. However, if our above discussion is correct, then believing a domain to be real puts no constraints on our ontology. Nor does it

put any constraints on our beliefs about the particular nature of the domain. But what, then, does believing a domain to be real consist in? At this point, it is tempting to turn to a minimal answer to this question according to which being a realist about a domain is just a matter of accepting that there are *some* true claims about the domain. I will call this kind of account a “minimal account” of realism. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord has put forward an account along these lines.⁶

According to the minimal account, to believe a domain to be real is to believe that there are some claims about the particular nature of the domain that are true.⁷ Applied to the moral realm, for example, the claim is: to believe the moral realm to be real is to believe that there are true moral claims.⁸ While the minimal characterization of realism respects our intuitions about the young hotshot physicist and our intuition that Accepting Our Best Theory is Enough, it is too minimal to respect all of our intuitions. This is made apparent by what the characterization has to say about Hartry Field’s position with respect to mathematics.⁹

Hartry Field believes that mathematical claims are claims about entities that exist in a non-spatio-temporal realm. The mathematical facts, as they are described by our best mathematical theories, are facts about such entities. However, Field is convinced that no such entities exist. As a result, he rejects our best mathematical theories as false. According

⁶ Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "The Many Moral Realisms," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24 (1986), Supplement, pp. 1-22.

⁷ Requiring the true claims to be about “the particular nature” of the domain is intended to avoid letting beliefs like “The domain is unreal” from making someone a realist about the domain.

⁸ It might seem strange to characterize the reality of a domain via a semantic property like truth. One way to make the minimal account seem less alien is to see it as making the claim that the reality of the (e.g.) moral domain amounts to the existence of moral facts, where “fact” is understood minimally, as it appears in the platitude: p iff and only if it is a fact that p . Since it is also a platitude that p iff it is true that p , a characterization in terms of truth follows naturally.

⁹ Hartry Field, *Realism, Mathematics and Modality*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989.

to Field, contrary to what we were taught in grade school, there is no prime number in between 3 and 7. Pretty clearly, Hartry Field is an anti-realist about mathematics.

Unfortunately for the minimal account of realism, it cannot respect this fact.

This is because not *every* mathematical claim comes out false on Field's view. Consider universal claims concerning every set or every number of a certain kind. If numbers and sets do not exist, then all of those claims are true. This is a consequence of the fact that, in general, universal claims about non-existents are trivially true. Consider the claim that all prime numbers are odd. That claim is logically equivalent to the claim that there isn't a prime number that isn't odd. Since Field believes this latter claim to be true, Field believes that all prime numbers are odd. (For the same reason, Field also believes that all prime numbers are even.) So, Field believes that some mathematical claims are true. According to the minimal account, this means that Field is a mathematical realist. And that is an excellent reason to reject the minimal account of realism.

At this point, it might seem unclear how any *general* account of realism can respect *all* of our intuitions about what it is to believe a domain to be real. We have the intuition that Field is an anti-realist about mathematics. But, according to our discussion of the ontological account of realism, Field is not an anti-realist in virtue of the fact that numbers and sets do not appear in his ontology. Further, according to our discussion of the best theory account of realism, neither is Field an anti-realist in virtue of the fact that he holds most of contemporary mathematics to be false. But these seem like the most promising reasons for justifying our intuition that Field is an anti-realist. If we cannot point to Field's ontology or his mathematical beliefs, then how can we assert that Field is an anti-realist about mathematics?

Before we do anything rash (like give up the quest for a general account of realism), I want us to consider a case that should help us regain confidence in the results of our discussion to this point. As difficult as it seems to accept right now, our example will show us that Hartry Field is not an anti-realist about mathematics in virtue of his ontology or in virtue of his mathematical beliefs, but rather is an anti-realist in virtue of something else.

Imagine an aspiring mathematician who believes that there is a mathematical realm that he can truly describe by doing mathematical proofs. Our mathematician spends all of his time, day and night, doing proofs. And he believes a mathematical claim to be true if and only if he takes himself to have produced a mathematical proof of it. Unfortunately, our mathematician is terrible at mathematics. In his first proof, he proved that all prime numbers are odd. And then, in his second proof, he established that all prime numbers are even! He has no idea how both of these claims can be true, but he is willing to go where his mathematical proofs take him. Then, in his third proof, he established that there are no prime numbers. However, rather than taking this result as an explanation of how his first two proofs are intuitively compatible with each other, he takes it to establish the almost unbelievably mysterious nature of the mathematical facts! If we strain our imaginations, we can perhaps imagine our bumbling mathematician continuing on in this way until he has come up with what he takes to be a proof for all and only those mathematical claims that Field believes to be true. Present our bumbling mathematician and Field with any mathematical claim, and they will agree on whether or not that mathematical claim is true. Further, if we read the bumbling mathematician's ontology off of what he quantifies over in the claims he takes to be true, then he and Field have the very same ontology: neither Field nor the bumbling mathematician is committed to the existence of numbers or sets.

Once we explain to our bumbling mathematician where his proofs have gone wrong, he will quickly revise his mathematical beliefs (and his ontology). But consider our bumbling mathematician before we approach him. Is he necessarily an anti-realist about mathematics? Does he necessarily believe the domain of mathematics to be unreal? I don't think so. Our mathematician has gotten into his situation by being really bad at mathematics. And being really bad at mathematics, I want to say, does not preclude him from being a realist about mathematics, even if it has led him to accept a characterization of the mathematical realm that he cannot make sense of.

Field and our bumbling mathematician have the same ontology and have the same mathematical beliefs. Our bumbling mathematician is not an anti-realist about mathematics in virtue of this fact. This means that Field is not an anti-realist in virtue of his ontology or his mathematical beliefs – he must be an anti-realist in virtue of something else.

IV. The Relevant Reasons Account of Realism

What is the relevant difference between Field and our bumbling mathematician? What I want now to suggest is that, in order to answer this question, we need to look, not at their mathematical beliefs or at their respective ontologies, but at their *reasons* for having the mathematical beliefs and ontologies that they have. Our bumbling mathematician holds the mathematical beliefs that he does because he takes himself to have *mathematically* proven things to be that way. That is, the bumbling mathematician holds his mathematical beliefs for *mathematical reasons*, for reasons internal to mathematical practice. Field, by contrast, does not. Field holds the mathematical beliefs that he does for *philosophical* reasons. He holds those beliefs despite acknowledging that many of them contradict what our

mathematical practice tells us we ought to believe. This, I believe, is the key difference between Field and the bumbling mathematician. It explains why Field is intuitively an anti-realist about mathematics in a way that the bumbling mathematician may not be. What it is to believe the mathematical realm to be real, it would appear, is to give a certain kind of priority to mathematical reasons.

I believe that this insight is the key to explaining all of our intuitions about what it is to believe domain to real. Believing a domain to be real is not to believe certain entities to exist or to believe anything about the particular nature of the domain. Rather, believing a domain to be real is, at its core, a matter of forming one's beliefs about the domain in a certain fashion. It is a matter of deeming certain kinds of reasons more relevant to the task of belief formation than others. I will call this account the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism. As we will see, this account explains why ontology, mind-independence, and our best theory about a domain seem relevant to the question of realism in some cases and (*just as importantly*) not in others. After pinning down the details of the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism, we will examine its explanatory virtues.

Let us say that, where Y is some domain, Y-reasons are the reasons internal to Y's epistemic practice.¹⁰ They are the reasons that the Y-expert qua Y-expert ought to be sensitive to. Saying exactly what kinds of reasons are internal to which epistemic practices would be a daunting task to try to take on. Luckily, we do not have to take on that task in

¹⁰ I don't (yet) have a substantial account of what it is for something to be a *mathematical* reason rather than (e.g.) a *moral* reason or an *aesthetic* reason. Perhaps there is no substantial account to give. Perhaps epistemic practices are (partly) constituted by their reasons in the way that some games are constituted by their rules. Whatever the correct account of mathematical reasonhood is, our not having that account in hand does not preclude us from being able to recognize mathematical reasons when we see them. Intuitively, certain kinds of formal proofs matter in mathematics in a way that they don't matter in aesthetics. Similarly, consequences seem to matter in morality in a way that they don't in mathematics. And geometrical symmetry seems to matter in aesthetics in a way that it doesn't matter in morality.

order to distinguish realists from anti-realists. This is because what the Y-reasons actually are is irrelevant to whether or not you are a realist about domain Y.

As we saw above in our discussion of the bumbling mathematician, being a bad inquirer does not make you an anti-realist about a domain. Thus, believing domain Y to be real cannot require that you form your Y-beliefs via *what are in fact* the kind of reasons that a Y-expert qua Y-expert ought to be sensitive to. Misidentifying what kind of reasons the Y-expert qua Y-expert ought to be sensitive to does not make you an anti-realist about Y. It is enough that you form your Y-beliefs in accordance with *what you take to be* Y-reasons.¹¹

To believe domain Y to be real is to give a certain priority to reasons you believe to be Y-reasons. To be a realist about the psychological realm, for example, is to give priority to reasons you believe the psychological expert qua psychological expert ought to be sensitive to. Being a realist about the psychological realm does not, however, require you to have beliefs about the psychological realm that you formed on the basis of such reasons.

Imagine an experimental psychologist in the very first days of experimental psychology. Our psychologist is convinced that there is a domain for him to investigate. However, he is extremely cautious, and he doesn't want to prejudge any of the psychological facts of the matter. So, he doesn't believe, of any particular psychological claim, that it is

¹¹ At this point, an objection might be raised. It seems possible to (e.g.) believe mathematical facts to be real without being able to make sense of talk of "mathematical reasons." Not being able to make sense of reasons internal to an epistemic practice or reasons that a mathematician qua mathematician ought to be sensitive to shouldn't preclude you from being a mathematical realist. What this objection shows is that we better not require the mathematical realist to believe that his reasons are mathematical reasons *in those terms*. But how can we tell if someone believes his reasons to be *mathematical* reasons if his belief isn't in those terms? With the following (admittedly defeasible) test: Take someone who has mathematical beliefs. Now present this subject with a series of people who disagree with him on mathematical matters because they refuse to be moved by the kinds of considerations that move our subject. In each encounter, we get our subject to argue with the person across from him about what the mathematical facts are. Then we interrupt the argument to tell our subject what the person across from him does for a living. What we want to observe is: how upset does our subject get when he finds out this information? If he gets *extra* upset upon hearing that the person across from him is a mathematician, then we have reason to attribute to our subject the belief that his reasons are *mathematical* reasons, in the relevant sense.

true. This caution, however, does not preclude him from being a realist about the psychological realm. What this shows is that it is possible to believe a domain to be real without having any beliefs about the particular nature of the domain. As a result, in order to determine whether or not you believe that domain Y is real, it is not enough to look at your reasons for holding your actual Y-beliefs.

To be a realist about domain Y, it would appear, is to have a standing policy of giving priority to Y-reasons in the determination of your Y-beliefs. As the case of the experimental psychologist demonstrates, how often (or even whether) this policy has been exercised is beside the point. The realist's policy, it should be noted, does not preclude him from forming beliefs about the nature of Y for non-Y reasons. The mathematical realist, for example, can believe mathematical facts to be beautiful for *aesthetic* reasons, even though he has no *mathematical* reason to think this to be the case. Similarly, he can, for philosophical reasons, believe mathematical entities to exist in a Platonic realm, even if he has no mathematical reason to believe this to be true. The mathematical realist is someone who is willing to go where he believes his mathematical reasons will take him. But he is free to let non-mathematical reasons guide his beliefs about the mathematical realm, to the extent that they don't contradict what he takes his mathematical reasons to be telling him.

Our description of the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism is almost complete. However, there is one final emendation that must be made. Recall Pascal's Wager. As the story goes, rather than letting theological reflections determine his theological beliefs, Pascal let his theological beliefs be determined by a cost-benefit analysis.¹² Pascal did this because he wanted theological beliefs that maximized potential reward rather than ones that had the best chance of being true. Pretty clearly, despite eschewing the policy of giving priority to

¹² Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, edited by Philippe Sellier, Paris: Bords, 1991.

theological reasons, Pascal isn't necessarily an anti-realist about the theological realm. That said, if Pascal believed in the reality of the theological realm, we should expect him to have been willing to make the following concession. If Pascal's goal had been to acquire beliefs that have the best chance of being true (rather than having the best chance of maximizing reward), then he would have formed theological beliefs in accordance with what he believed to be theological reasons. We are now in a position to state our account of realism.

The Relevant Reasons Account of Realism: To believe domain Y to be real is to have the policy of forming your Y-beliefs in accordance with what you take to be Y-reasons, when your goal is to acquire true Y-beliefs.^{13,14}

Initially, the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism might seem counterintuitive. How can believing the scientific realm to be real be a matter of having a certain attitude towards scientific reasoning, for example? Let me try to make the view more intuitive. We got to this point, recall, by following our intuitions about cases. Our intuition that Accepting Our Best Theory is Enough led us to reject the ontological account of realism. Our intuition that the hotshot physicist is not necessarily an anti-realist led us to reject the best theory account of realism. And our intuition that Hartry Field is an anti-realist about mathematics led us to reject the minimal account of realism. The way to save our intuitions about these

¹³ As we saw in footnote 10, the realist does not have to be able to explicitly state this policy that she is (at least implicitly) committed to. It just has to be appropriate to attribute the (perhaps merely implicit) commitment to her.

¹⁴ It is worth pointing out that the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism has the resources to make sense of the claim that Person A is "more of a realist" than Person B, who is "more of a realist" than Person C. Imagine that A, B, and C agree about what our scientific and philosophical reasons tell us to believe. According to A, B, and C, there are several instances in which what our scientific reasons tell us to believe contradicts what our philosophical reasons tell us to believe. Imagine that, in the face of these conflicts, A always goes with his scientific reasons, C always goes with his philosophical reasons, and B sometimes goes with his scientific reasons and sometimes goes with his philosophical reasons. While the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism implies that only A is a full-blown scientific realist, it can make sense of the claim that B is more of a realist about the scientific realm than C is.

cases is to accept the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism. This was made vivid by our comparison of Field and the bumbling mathematician. We have the intuition that Field is an anti-realist about mathematics in a way that the bumbling mathematician may not be. But the only available difference between Field and the bumbling mathematician lies in their reasons for having the mathematical beliefs and ontologies that they each have.

What our intuitions about these cases show us, I believe, is that we individuate domains in an epistemic kind of way. There are, of course, lots of ways that we can individuate kinds of entities and kinds of facts. However, when it comes to the domain of mathematics, the domain of physics, the domain of ethics, or any other domain that we pre-philosophically take ourselves to know, we are inclined to individuate it via the way that we pre-philosophically take ourselves to know it. If we are to believe our intuitions, then the mathematical realm is the realm that can be known through mathematical practice, to the extent that it can be known at all. The physical realm is the realm that can be known through physics, to the extent that it can be known at all. The moral realm is the realm that can be known through moral reasoning, to the extent that it can be known at all. It is because we individuate domains epistemically that we need to look at people's attitudes towards different kinds of reasons in order to see what domains they believe to be real.

V. On the Relevance of Mind-Independence to the Question of Realism

With our account of realism in hand, let us turn to issue of mind-independence. We have the intuition that the realist about ordinary objects and scientific entities has to believe her domains to be independent of our minds in a way that the psychological realist does not. Why?

According to the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism, believing ordinary objects to be real is to give a certain priority to the way we pre-philosophically take ourselves to know them. Central to our epistemic practice with respect to ordinary objects, of course, is perception. Our commonsensical conception of things like tables and chairs, I take it, is the result of our taking our apparent perceptions of them at face value and then trying to explain those perceptions in a systematic kind of way.

If there is anything that perception seems to tell us, it is that ordinary objects are causally active spatio-temporal entities. Whether or not the spatio-temporal nature of ordinary objects is part of the content of our perceptions of them, perception spontaneously and irresistibly leads us to believe that ordinary objects are spatio-temporal entities that are causally related to us in various ways. Our willingness to accept these spontaneously formed beliefs is central to our commonsensical epistemic practice concerning ordinary objects. What this means is that, if the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism is correct, believing ordinary objects to be real plausibly requires believing that they are spatio-temporal entities that stand in certain causal relations to us. Of course, if ordinary objects do indeed have those properties, they exist *outside* of our minds. Which means that believing ordinary objects to be real plausibly requires believing them to be mind-independent in this sense.

Further, once we accept that ordinary objects are spatio-temporally and causally related to us in the way that they appear to be, it is a small step to accept that ordinary objects are independent of our minds in other ways. Believing that ordinary objects don't go out of existence when we close our eyes, that they don't change when our beliefs about them change, etc. helps us systematically explain our apparent perceptions of them. Ordinary commonsense wholeheartedly endorses these claims for their explanatory value. If we are

willing to defer to ordinary commonsense when it comes to these matters, it is difficult to see how we can avoid the belief that ordinary objects are independent of our minds in these various respects. Which means that, if the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism is correct, believing ordinary objects to be real plausibly requires believing them to be independent of our minds in all of these ways. In this way, the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism explains our intuition that the realist about ordinary objects has to believe ordinary objects to be mind-independent.

Unsurprisingly, this same kind of account can be given of most scientific entities. (Well, all scientific entities except those belonging to the science of psychology.) Just as ordinary commonsense endorses a picture of our relationship to ordinary objects that implies their mind-independence, so too does science endorse a picture of our relationship to scientific entities that implies their mind-independence. Since believing scientific entities to be real requires giving priority to scientific reasoning and scientific reasoning compels us to accept a picture that implies the mind-independence of scientific entities, believing scientific entities to be real plausibly requires believing that they are mind-independent. This enables us to explain our intuition that the scientific realist has to accept the mind-independence of scientific entities. We take scientific realism to involve a commitment to the mind-independence of scientific entities because we take scientific reasoning to endorse that mind-independence.

Of course, this is not to say that scientific entities are independent of our minds in all respects. Nor is it to say that the scientific realist has to believe scientific entities to be independent of our minds in all respects. The Relevant Reasons Account of Realism predicts that someone's belief in the mind-dependence of the physical realm will seem anti-realist to

us only if it contradicts what that person believes science to say about the matter. This prediction is borne out by our intuitions. Consider someone who believes that quantum mechanics and the Heisenberg uncertainty principle imply the physical realm to be dependent on our minds in certain respects. Pretty clearly, such a person is not necessarily an anti-realist about the physical realm. Believing the physical realm to be mind-dependent *for those reasons* is compatible with believing the physical realm to be fully real. This is exactly as the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism would have it.

While we have commonsensical reason to believe ordinary objects to be mind-independent and scientific reason to believe scientific entities to be mind-independent, we do not have psychology-appropriate reason to attribute this same kind of mind-independence to psychological phenomena. Believing that toothaches exist even when we are not experiencing them does not serve the same explanatory function that similar beliefs about tables, chairs, and atoms do. According to the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism, this perceived explanatory asymmetry explains the asymmetry in our intuitions about the relevance of mind-independence to the question of realism. It explains why we have the intuition that the realist about ordinary objects and scientific entities has to believe her domains to be independent of our minds in a way that the psychological realist does not.

VI. Brief Summary and Application

Believing some domains to be real seems to require believing that particular entities exist. Mathematical realism seems to require a commitment to mathematical entities, scientific realism seems to require a commitment to scientific entities, etc. In light of this, it is tempting to say that believing particular things to exist is (at least a big part of) *what it is* to

believe a domain to be real. However, an ontological account of realism falters when we consider a domain like morality. While ontology seems crucial to some kinds of realism, it seems irrelevant to others. A general account of realism ought to explain this asymmetry. As we saw, the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism does explain it.

Believing some domains to be real seems to require believing them to be independent of our minds. Realism about ordinary objects, for example, seems to require believing them to exist even when we aren't conscious of them, believing in the possibility of their persisting after we have all gone extinct, etc. This makes it tempting to think that believing a domain to be mind-independent is (at least a big part of) *what it is* to believe a domain to be real. However, this conception of realism falters when we consider the domain of psychology. While mind-independence seems crucial to some kinds of realism, it seems irrelevant to others. A general account of realism ought to explain this asymmetry. As we saw, the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism does explain it.

With the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism in hand, I want to briefly explore the realism debate about color. The landscape of that debate is sometimes presented in the following way. On the one hand, there are those who, like Boghossian and Velleman, deny that the external world is colored.¹⁵ They are the anti-realists about color. Then there are the realists about color, those who believe that the external world is colored. The realists about color can mostly be separated into two groups. There are the physicalists, who identify colors properties with physical properties. And there are the response-dependent theorists, who identity color properties with dispositions to produce certain responses in creatures like us.

¹⁵ Paul Boghossian and David Velleman, "Colour as a Secondary Quality," *Mind* 98 (1989), pp. 81-103.

If we hadn't just had our lengthy discussion, this picture of the realism debate about color would likely have struck us as being completely unobjectionable. However, in light of our discussion, we should resist the quick inference from "physicalists and response-dependence theorists have things that they call 'colors' in their ontologies" to "physicalists and response-dependence theorists are realists about color."

In order to determine whether or not physicalists and response-dependent theorists are realists about color, we need to get a handle on what kind of reasons they take to be internal to our color practice. The most obvious candidates, of course, are reasons derived from color perception. What are the colors other than the properties that we seem to be acquainted with in color perception? If this is how we conceive of the colors, then being a realist about color is to give color perception a certain kind of priority in the determination of our beliefs about color.

If we are to believe color perception, we live in a colored world. In denying that anything is colored, Boghossian and Velleman are refusing to defer to color perception on this matter. They, of course, concede this point:

The most plausible hypothesis about what someone means when he calls something red, in an everyday context, is that he is reporting what his eyes tell him. And according to our account, what his eyes tell him is that the thing has a particular visual quality, a quality that does not actually inhere in external objects but is a quality of his visual field. We therefore conclude that when someone calls something red, in an everyday context, he is asserting a falsehood.¹⁶

According to the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism, Boghossian and Velleman are anti-realists about color in virtue of refusing to believe what their eyes are telling them.

Why do Boghossian and Velleman refuse to believe what their eyes tell them? Because they take their eyes to tell them a set of things that can't possibly all be true. Indeed,

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 100.

almost everyone in the color literature professes to be in this same predicament. In addition to telling us that the external world is colored, believing our eyes leads us to have particular beliefs about what it is to be colored.

First, if we are to believe my eyes, then colors are intrinsic (i.e., non-dispositional) properties of things in the external world. As Mark Johnston puts it:

A basic phenomenological fact is that we see most of the colors of external things as “steady” features of those things, in the sense of features which do not alter as the light alters and as the observer changes position.¹⁷

As Boghossian and Velleman put it:

When one enters a dark room and switches on a light, the colours of surrounding objects look as if they have been revealed, not as if they have been activated. That is, the dispelling of darkness looks like the drawing of a curtain from the colours of objects no less than from the objects themselves.¹⁸

Second, color perception seems to acquaint us with the colors’ very natures. I see that the canary in the front of the room to be canary yellow. And I see what it is to be canary yellow. To be canary yellow is to have a certain hue, a hue that is related to other hues in all kinds of interesting ways. It is, for example, to have a hue that is more similar to other shades of yellow than it is to cherry red.

To sum up, if we are to believe color perception, then the colors (i) are properties of things in the external world, (ii) are intrinsic (i.e., non-dispositional) properties, and (iii) are essentially similar to and different from each other in the way that they appear to be. Since believing the color facts to be real plausibly requires believing what color perception tells us, realism about color requires believing (i) – (iii). As we have seen, Boghossian and Velleman are anti-realists about color in virtue of denying (i). Response-dependent theorists, we can

¹⁷ Mark Johnston, “How to Speak of the Colors,” *Philosophical Studies* 68(3) (1992), p. 226.

¹⁸ Boghossian and Velleman, “Colour as a Secondary Quality,” p. 85.

now see, also refuse to believe their eyes. They are anti-realists about color in virtue of rejecting (ii). What about physicalists? Well, if we are to believe C.L. Hardin, then none of the microphysical properties that are causally responsible for our color perceptions are essentially similar and different from each other in the way that the colors appear to be.¹⁹ Physicalists, then, are anti-realists about color in virtue of rejecting (iii).

What the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism has put us in a position to see is that we ought to reject the picture of realism about color that we encountered above. Physicalists and response-dependent theorists are anti-realists about the colors. And they are anti-realists for the same reason that Boghossian and Velleman are anti-realists about color. They all refuse to give priority to the reasons internal to our color practice. They all refuse to believe their eyes.

In order to believe the colored world to be real, you either need to accept (i) – (iii), or deny that (i) – (iii) are all affirmed by color perception. John McDowell, for example, has argued that the colors do not appear in color perception as non-dispositional properties.²⁰ As a result, McDowell believes the colored world to be real, despite being a response-dependent theorist about color. John Campbell, on the other hand, argues that color perception affirms, *and ought to be believed* with respect to, each of (i) – (iii).²¹ According to the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism, then, when it comes realism about the colors, Boghossian, Velleman, the physicalist, and the traditional response-dependent theorist are all to be contrasted with McDowell and Campbell. In a later chapter, we will have more to say about

¹⁹ C.L. Hardin, *Color for Philosophers*, Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1993.

²⁰ John McDowell, “Values and Secondary Qualities,” in *Morality and Objectivity; a Tribute to J.L. Mackie*, ed. Ted Honerich, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985, pp. 110-29.

²¹ John Campbell, “A Simple View of Colour,” in *Reality, Representation and Projection*, edited by Crispin Wright and John Haldane, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 257-268.

why color realism of the kind endorsed by Campbell is ordinarily not taken to be a live option.

Chapter 2: Rosen's Challenge

We have the intuition that realism about a domain requires the belief that we *detect* rather than *project* the domain. If there is anything to this intuition, then there has to be a way that a domain can be dependent on us that would make it less than fully real. Gideon Rosen has put forward a compelling argument that no kind of dependence is relevant to the question of realism in this way.²² In this Chapter, I will present Rosen's argument. To transition to Rosen's preferred idiom, let us say that a domain that is dependent on us in a way that makes it less than fully real is less than fully objective.

What is it, exactly, for a domain to be "fully objective?" Well, if a domain X is fully objective, then:

Our discourse about X concerns a domain of fact that is *out there*. These facts obtain *anyway*, regardless of what we may think. When all goes well, inquiry in the disputed areas *discovers* what is *already* there, rather than *constituting* or *constructing* its object. Successful thought amounts to the *detection* of something real, as opposed to a *projection* onto the real of our own peculiar or subjective perspective.²³

These metaphors are nice. And, after reciting them out loud, it is difficult to resist the belief that the question of metaphysical objectivity is a legitimate and important one. However, recently, a number of philosophers have doubted whether there is actually any debate that we contemporary philosophers can have in which that imagery is really at stake. Gideon Rosen

²² Gideon Rosen, "Objectivity and Modern Idealism: What is the Question?," in M. Michael and J. O'Leary-Hawthorne (eds), *Philosophy in Mind: The Place of Philosophy in the Study of Mind*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994, pp. 277-319.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

is one such philosopher. In “Modern Idealism: What is the Question?,” Rosen makes the case for his so-called quietism.

If it makes sense to talk about a domain being less than fully objective, then that must be in virtue of it standing in some relation to some mind(s). Most of us contemporary philosophers are happy to talk about minds. However, the minds that we are happy to talk about are embodied minds, and they are parts of the empirical world.²⁴ While there are all sorts of ways that facts can be related to minds, it is unclear how any of those relations can generate less than full objectivity.

Lots of facts are, for example, causally related to minds. This is a consequence of the fact that embodied minds causally interact with the empirical world in all kinds of ways. There is a sense in which the fact that there is a big building outside of my window is mind-dependent. If there weren’t ever any minds, then there wouldn’t have been the minds that brought that building into existence. So, there being a big building outside of my window depended on the existence of certain minds. Clearly, this kind of mind-dependence is not the kind of mind-dependence that we are after. A fact’s being mind-dependent in this sense doesn’t make it less than fully objective.

A different kind of way that facts can be related to minds is by being about minds. Consider the fact that, in the United States, basketball is more popular than water polo. If there were no minds, then basketball wouldn’t be more popular. Indeed, if there were no minds, then nothing would have any popularity whatsoever. So, there is a sense in which facts about popularity are mind-dependent. However, this kind of mind-dependence is not the kind of mind-dependence that we are after either. Facts about popularity are mind-

²⁴ This, Rosen argues, is an important difference between us and someone like Kant. Rosen suspects that, if Kant was able to make sense of facts being less than fully objective, it is because he was thinking about the minds responsible for the less than full objectivity as being in some sense outside of the empirical world.

dependent because they are facts about minds. And facts about minds do not necessarily fall short of meriting the metaphors we encountered above.

Let us now turn to a brand of mind-dependence that has appeared in the philosophical literature, in a number of attempts to capture the essence of a “secondary” quality. It has been suggested that the property of being red, for example, is the property of being disposed to psychologically affect normal human beings in standard conditions in a certain kind of way (different proposals fill in the details differently). Call a property “response-dependent” if it is a dispositional property along these lines, if it is a disposition to psychologically affect certain subjects in certain conditions in a certain kind of way. Clearly, there is a sense in which response-dependent properties are mind-dependent. Further, it is sometimes suggested in the literature that this kind of mind-dependence is relevant to the question of realism, that believing that a certain kind of property is response-dependent amounts to believing that it is less than fully objective in exactly the kind of way that concerns us here. What are we to make of this claim?

Let’s say that the property of being red is the property of being judged to be red by normal human beings in standard conditions. And let’s say that I am a normal human being, in standard conditions, considering whether or not an object in front of me is red. It is tempting to say that whether or not the object is red is, for me, a less than fully objective matter. After all, whether or not the object is red is just a matter of whether or not I’ll judge it to be red. The redness of the object doesn’t seem to be independent of my judgment in the way that fully objective matters are independent of our judgments. The redness of the object doesn’t seem to obtain *anyway*, regardless of what I may think. Does this mean that we have

found what we are looking for? Is a debate about whether or not a property is response-dependent a debate about whether or not the above metaphors are appropriate?

Rosen is skeptical. Yes, where we are the subjects, it is tempting to think that a fact's being response-dependent makes it less than fully objective for us. However, Rosen argues, it is a temptation that we should resist. Consider a case of response-dependence where we are not the subjects in question. Being annoying to a fox terrier is, plausibly, a response-dependent property. To be annoying to a fox terrier is to have the disposition to bring about a certain psychological state in certain fox terriers in certain conditions. However, despite being response-dependent, facts about what is annoying to fox terriers are not necessarily less than fully objective. It is not necessarily inappropriate to use the above metaphors to describe them. Facts about what is annoying to fox terriers are just as objective as facts about the fox terrier's psychology. And facts about the fox terrier's psychology are not necessarily less than fully objective. This seems obvious. Further, if facts about what is annoying to a fox terrier are fully objective, then they are fully objective *for fox terriers*. This, too, seems obviously true. We are not at all tempted to think that perspective makes a difference here. If facts about the fox terrier's psychology are fully objective, then they are fully objective *for everyone*.

The reason that these points seem obviously true to us, Rosen suggests, is that we are able to take up an external perspective with respect to fox terriers. Taking up this external perspective enables us to see facts about how fox terriers would react in certain conditions as just another kind of fact in the world, not necessarily any less objective than any other kind of fact. Even for fox terriers.

In order to accurately evaluate whether or not response-dependent facts in which we are the subjects are less than fully objective for us, Rosen argues, we need to try to take up this external perspective with respect to ourselves. He suggests that we do this by imagining an alien anthropologist coming to our planet and observing our species. For him, facts about what we would judge to be “red” in certain conditions are just another kind of fact in the world, not necessarily any less objective than any other kind of fact. As Rosen says:

He would be talking about the dispositions of one part of the objective world to affect another part of that world in certain apparently objective respects.²⁵

If the above response-dependence analysis of redness is correct, then being red isn’t any less objective than certain psychological facts about us. So, the alien anthropologist can acknowledge the response-dependence of redness without having any reason to think that facts about redness are less than fully objective.

Further, from the alien anthropologist’s point of view, the objectivity of facts about redness should not vary with perspective. That is, if the alien anthropologist has reason to think that facts about redness are fully objective, then he equally has reason to think that they are fully objective *for us* as well. Yes, where we are the subjects, there is a sense in which response-dependent facts are not independent of us. However, this is the same kind of relationship that we have with many of our psychological characteristics. And our psychological characteristics are not less than fully objective in virtue of being dependent on us in this sense. Considering things from the point of view of the alien anthropologist helps us appreciate this point.

A more subtle way in which facts can be related to minds has been explored by Crispin Wright. Rosen presents a simplified version of Wright’s view according to which a

²⁵ Ibid., p. 297.

fact is “judgment-dependent” iff it stands in an a priori relationship to the judgments of certain subjects in certain conditions. Specifically, to say the fact that F is judgment-dependent is to say, of certain substantially specified subjects S and conditions C, that it is a priori that: F iff S would judge that F in C. And the suggestion is that being judgment-dependent is a way of being less than fully objective. Clearly, given this characterization of judgment-dependence, this suggestion is obviously false, for a number of reasons.^{26,27}

However, the suggestion only appears obviously mistaken because Rosen has significantly simplified Wright’s conception of what it is to be judgment-dependent.²⁸ Thankfully, Rosen does not make any of the obvious objections. Rather, Rosen’s objection would seem to apply to any form of dependence that implies an a priori relationship to the judgments of certain subjects in certain conditions. And Wright’s form of dependence certainly does imply such an a priori relationship (it just implies a whole lot more as well). Let us turn to Rosen’s objection.

Rosen asks us to consider facts about constitutionality. Let’s say that it is a priori that a U.S. law is constitutional (at t) iff the majority of the US Supreme Court, after informed and unbiased deliberation, would judge it to be constitutional (at t). According to (Rosen’s presentation of) Wright’s proposal, facts about constitutionality would be less than fully objective. What are we to make of this claim? Well, facts about how the majority of the court would rule after informed and unbiased deliberation are certainly not necessarily less than fully objective:

²⁶ For one, some properties would count as judgment-dependent in virtue of their being response-dependent. But, as we have seen, being dependent in that sense does not make something less than fully objective.

²⁷ For another, the fact that S would judge that F in C would count as judgment-dependent. But clearly, the fact that S would judge that F in C is not necessarily less than fully objective.

²⁸ In Chapter 6, we will encounter Wright’s conception of judgment-dependence, in all of its details.

The facts about how the court would rule are facts of modal sociology. These may be very hard to discover, and the idiom that describes them maybe vague (which means that there may be truth value gaps in our discourse about constitutionality); but on the face of it they possess the same status as the facts about what any other collection of animals would do if prompted with certain stimuli, or set of a certain problem.²⁹

So, if the facts about constitutionality are *identified* with the facts about modal sociology, then the facts about constitutionality are not necessarily less than fully objective, even though they would (according to Rosen's presentation of Wright's view) be judgment-dependent. However, it is an important feature of Wright's conception of judgment-dependence that the facts in question are *not* identified with the facts about modal sociology that they stand in an a priori relationship to. So, if facts about constitutionality are judgment-dependent, then, even if the facts about how the court would rule are fully objective, there is still space for the suggestion that facts about constitutionality nevertheless fall short of that mark. Rosen replies to this suggestion as follows:

In the absence of a real theory about facts and their individuation it is hard to know quite how to respond. My own view, for what it's worth, is that *intuitively*, if the facts in the contested class can simply be read off in a mechanical way from the facts in an uncontroversially objective class, then there can be no grounds for denying the same status to facts in the contested area.³⁰

In order to make the case for his view, Rosen once again asks us to take up the external anthropological perspective:

Think of it this way: an anthropologist studying the court might determine which laws are constitutional by theorizing about which laws the court would ratify. He thinks of the latter study as a matter of charting some modal facts that are *already* in place. His own way of thinking in no way *constitutes* these facts. But more importantly, the only sense in which anyone's thinking constitutes them is the sense in which they just are facts about the thinking of the members of the court; and we have already seen that this is not

²⁹ Ibid., p. 300.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 301.

incompatible with complete objectivity. Now once these objective facts are known, he can deduce facts about the distribution of *constitutionality* by employing an entirely analytic principle – a conceptual truth. And the trouble is that even if we agree to call these facts ‘distinct’, it’s still hard to see why they deserve to be called mind-dependent in any special sense. For the anthropologist they are every bit as ‘out there’ as the facts that allegedly constitute them: the facts about what certain people would think.³¹

So, even if we are the subjects in question, we have no reason to think that judgment-dependent facts are less than fully objective. In order to convince ourselves of this, we just need to take up the external anthropological perspective. The alien anthropologist has no reason to think that the modal sociological facts that the judgment-dependent facts stand in an a priori relationship to are less than fully objective. Further, since the alien anthropologist can just read the judgment-dependent facts off of the modal sociological facts in the way that Rosen describes, he has no reason to think that the judgment-dependent facts are any less objective than the modal sociological facts. If things appear that way to the alien anthropologist, then we should accept that they are that way. A fact’s being judgment-dependent does not make it less than fully objective in the sense that we are after.

Rosen’s arguments can be seen as posing a challenge: show me a debate about metaphysical objectivity that we contemporary philosophers can have, or withdraw the claim that the question of realism concerns any such thing. Rosen suspects that any attempt to meet this challenge will fall prey to the external anthropological perspective. Despite Rosen’s pessimism, I believe that the challenge can be met. In Chapter 3, I will outline a way in which domains can be dependent on us, and then make the case that, prima facie, domains that are dependent on us in that way are less than fully objective for us. Then, in Chapter 4, I will argue that no Rosen-inspired considerations can undermine that prima facie case. If successful, I will have given substance to the intuition that the realist has to believe

³¹ Ibid., p. 301.

that we *detect* rather than *project* the domain in question. (And so the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism will have to be modified accordingly.)

Chapter 3: Modal Sociological Explanation

This chapter will be devoted to providing the details of the kind of dependence I take to be relevant to the question of realism. Before I present those details, however, I want to first try to convey the dialectical role that I take this kind of dependence to play.

Pre-philosophically, we are realists about all kinds of domains, in the sense articulated in Chapter 1. When it comes to my mathematical beliefs, I am willing to go where my mathematical reasons take me. When it comes to my beliefs about color, I am willing to go where color perception takes me. When it comes to my moral beliefs, I am willing to go where moral reasoning takes me. Etc. As a result, I find myself with all kinds of beliefs. I believe that there is a prime number in between 3 and 7. I believe that my computer has the color properties that it appears to have. I believe that it is morally wrong to torture innocents. Etc.

The philosophical literature is littered with reasons for giving up our pre-philosophical beliefs. In one way or another, the integrity of our different kinds of reasons has been called into question. To consider the classic case, it is often taken for granted that, if numbers exist, they exist in a non-spatio-temporal acausal realm. As Benacerraf famously pointed out, it is puzzling, to put it mildly, how spatio-temporal creatures like ourselves could ever have epistemic access to such a realm.³² As Hartry Field puts the puzzle, it seems impossible that doing proofs could reliably result in our forming true mathematical beliefs.³³

³² Paul Benacerraf, "Mathematical Truth," *Journal of Philosophy* 70(8) (1973), pp. 661-679.

³³ Hartry Field, *Realism, Mathematics and Modality*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989.

The puzzle arises because we are unable to see any connection between mathematical practice and mathematical facts that would allow the former to non-accidentally track the latter. On the one hand, we have certain mathematical entities standing in certain relations to each other in a non-spatio-temporal acausal realm. On the other hand, we have certain spatio-temporal entities (mathematicians) causally engaging with the physical world (trying to come up with proofs, and the like). How on earth can what the mathematicians are doing non-accidentally result in an accurate description of the mathematical realm?

In the face of this puzzle, what ought we to do? Giving up our claim to mathematical knowledge is an unpleasant option, to say the least. But without an answer to the puzzle, how can we continue to let mathematical reasons determine our mathematical beliefs?

When confronted with a puzzle like this, we might just assert that we have Moorean reasons to believe that it can be solved somehow, even if we have no idea how the solution might go. That is, we might just dig in our heels and assert that yes, we *really* do know, and any considerations that seem to suggest otherwise just *have* to be mistaken. However, this kind of response is not very satisfying. But what other option do we have, if we are unwilling (or even unable) to give up our ordinary beliefs about different domains?

I am interested in coming up with a better response to this dialectical predicament. Specifically, I am interested in different ways of resolving the puzzles that threaten our ordinary beliefs about different domains. It is worth noting that, in order to save our various claims to knowledge, it is not enough to solve the puzzles that are threatening them. For, if those puzzles are solved by ascribing certain characteristics to the domains in question, it is important that ascribing those characteristics to the domains does not contradict any of the beliefs that we (arguably) have Moorean reasons to defend. So, with respect to mathematics,

for example, what we want is for there to be certain characteristics that we can believe mathematical facts to have that (i) will allow us to explain how creatures like us can come to have mathematical knowledge and (ii) will not contradict any of our mathematical beliefs.

I believe that, if we accept that our epistemic success with respect to a domain is explained in a certain kind of way, our intuitive knowledge can be saved from epistemic worries. Briefly, this kind of explanation explains epistemic success by citing two different kinds of facts. The first kind of fact cited concerns the relationship between the domain in question and certain modal sociological facts. The second kind of fact cited concerns the relationship between the subjects that feature in the modal sociological facts and us. Until I can settle on a name for this kind of explanation, I will just call it modal sociological explanation, or MS explanation for short.³⁴

I. On the first kind of fact cited by an MS explanation

If there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to a fact *p*, then it has to be true that: *p* if and only if some possible kind of subject would judge that *p* in some possible conditions.³⁵ Thus, to accept an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to a domain requires accepting that there is a biconditional along these lines for each of the domain's facts that we take ourselves to enjoy non-accidental epistemic success with respect to. It requires accepting that those facts supervene on certain modal sociological facts. Further, it requires accepting that that supervenience is explained in one of at least two ways.

³⁴ MS explanation is similar, in certain respects, to Wright's conception of judgment-dependence and Kit Fine's conception of nonfactuality. See chapters 5 and 6 for my presentation and criticism of their views.

³⁵ As we will see, not just any kind of subject and any kind of conditions will do the trick. The constraints on subjects and conditions will be imposed by the second kind of fact cited by an MS explanation.

First, the supervenience relations can hold because the facts that compose the domain are identical to the modal sociological facts that they supervene on. To accept this option is to accept that the domain is response-dependent. As a general rule, we should avoid MS explanations that cite the response-dependent nature of a domain. This is because, as we saw above, the main motivation for accepting an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to domain Y is to be able to believe what our Y-reasons are telling us about Y. And there seem to be lots of domains Y such that what our Y-reasons tell us about Y is incompatible with Y's being response-dependent.³⁶ Thus, to accept an MS explanation that identifies such a domain with certain modal sociological facts would be counterproductive.

Consider the colors. As we saw at the end of Chapter 1, colors are presented in color perception as being non-dispositional properties. And, if colors are non-dispositional properties, then they are not response-dependent properties. If we are to believe what color perception tells us about the colors, we cannot identify the color facts with modal sociological facts.

Luckily, accepting an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to a domain does not require us to believe that the domain is response-dependent. It is enough if we believe that the domain is metaphysically grounded in the modal sociological facts that it supervenes on. The idea that one kind of fact can “metaphysically ground” another kind of fact has been touted by both Kit Fine³⁷ and Jonathan Schaffer.³⁸

³⁶ In his pioneering essay on response-dependence, Mark Johnston concedes that accepting a domain to be response-dependence usually requires that we revise our other beliefs about it. Mark Johnston, “Objectivity Refigured: Pragmatism Without Verificationism,” in *Reality, Representation and Projection*, edited by Crispin Wright and John Haldane, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 85-130.

³⁷ Kit Fine, “The Question of Realism,” *Philosopher's Imprint* 1(1) (2001), pp.1-30.

³⁸ Jonathan Schaffer, “On What Grounds What,” in *Metametaphysics*, edited by Chalmers, Manley, and Wasserman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 347-83.

Schaffer sees the acceptance of a conception of metaphysical ground as providing an alternative to the Quinean way of doing metaphysics. According to the Quinean, the central question of metaphysics concerns what exists. According Schaffer, the central question of metaphysics ought to concern what grounds what. Schaffer traces this conception of metaphysics back to Aristotle:

Return to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. There are virtually no existence questions posed. The whole discussion is about *substances* (fundamental units of being). At one point Aristotle does pause to ask if numbers exist, and his answer is a brief and dismissive *yes*: "it is true also to say, without qualification, that the objects of mathematics exist, and with the character ascribed to them by mathematicians" (1984: 1704; *Meta*.1077b32-33³⁹). For Aristotle, the serious question about numbers is whether they are transcendent substances, or grounded in concreta. The question is not *whether* numbers exist, but *how*.⁴⁰

[T]he neo-Aristotelian will begin from a *hierarchical view of reality* ordered by *priority in nature*. The primary entities form the sparse structure of being, while the grounding relations generate an abundant superstructure of posterior entities. The primary is (as it were) all God would need to create. The posterior is grounded in, dependent on, and derivative from it. The task of metaphysics is to limn this structure.⁴¹

Schaffer argues that this Aristotelian way of doing metaphysics is preferable to (and indeed presupposed by) the Quinean way of doing metaphysics. I will not enter into the details of Schaffer's arguments here. Rather, let us take a quick peak at the concept of ground as it appears in the work of Kit Fine.

Fine conceives of the concept of a metaphysical ground as explanatory. If the fact that x is the ground of the fact that y, then the fact that x explains why it is a fact that y. And it explains it in a fundamental kind of way. If y is metaphysically grounded in x, then it is

³⁹ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.

⁴⁰ Schaffer, "On What Grounds What," p. 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

tempting to say that its being the case that y consists in nothing more than its being the case that x.

In order to introduce us to his initial example of a plausible statement of ground, Fine has us consider the claim that the couple Jack and Jill is married. What ultimately explains the truth of this claim? Plausibly: the fact that Jack is married to Jill. That is, the fact that the couple Jack and Jill is married plausibly consists in nothing more than Jack being married to Jill. To the extent that we find this compelling, we will say that the fact that the couple Jack and Jill is married is grounded in the fact that Jack is married to Jill.

To consider another kind of example, let us turn to the current war in Iraq. Just as we can inquire into the cause of the war, so too can we inquire into its ground. Arguably, its being the case that there is a war in Iraq consists in nothing more than its being the case that various warring activities have been performed by various individuals. If that is right, then the war in Iraq is *grounded in* those activities.

From our point of view, the nice thing about the concept of a metaphysical ground is that one fact can ground another fact without being identical to it. Indeed, one kind of fact can be grounded in a fact of a completely different kind. Facts about the ocean's wave patterns can be grounded in certain facts about water molecules. Facts about the physical world can be grounded in facts about the mind of God. Facts concerning non-dispositional properties can be grounded in modal sociological facts. In general, a kind of fact being grounded in modal sociological facts does not constrain the other properties that that kind of fact has. Thus, believing that a domain Y is grounded in modal sociological facts does not preclude us from believing whatever our Y-reasons tell us about Y.^{42,43} For this reason, the

⁴² Of course, in order to accept that a domain Y is metaphysically grounded in the kind of modal sociological facts that we are considering, our Y-reasons will have to allow for the possibility that Y supervenes on those

first kind of fact cited by my preferred kind of MS explanation is a fact about ground. It is the fact that the domain in question is grounded in certain modal sociological facts.

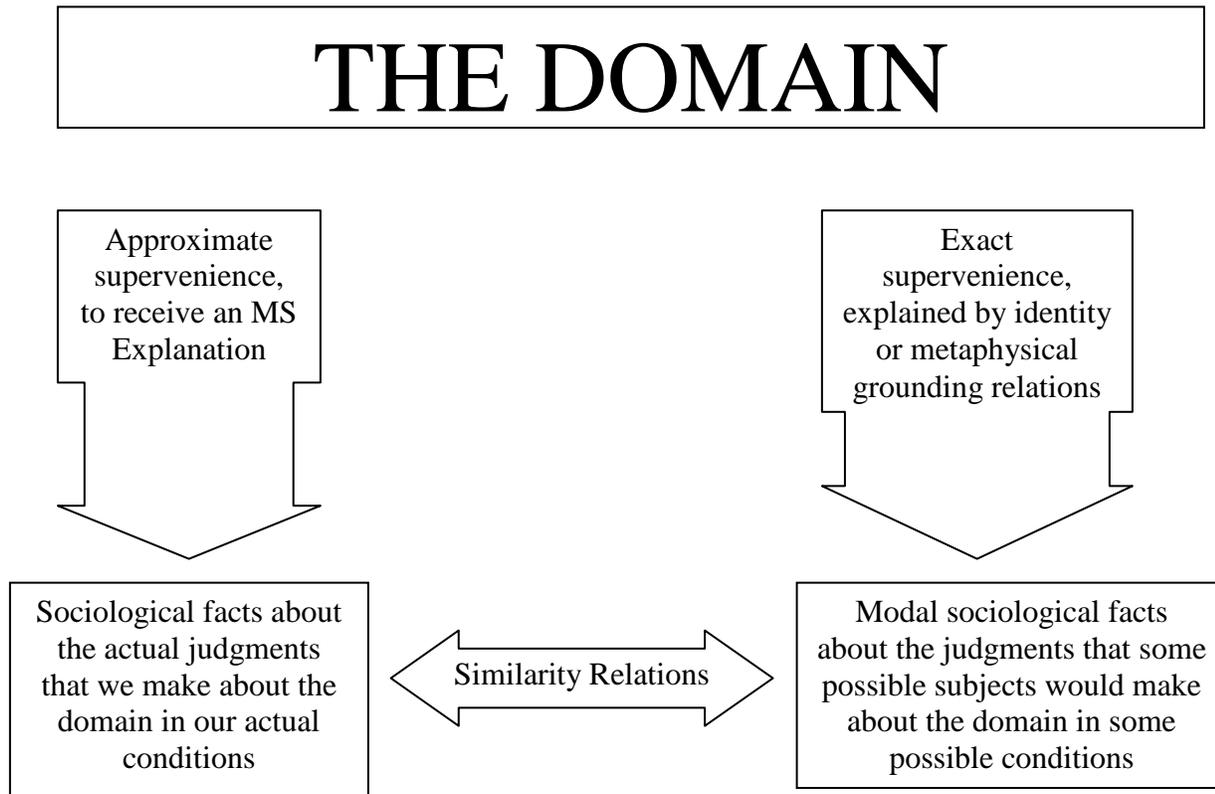
II. On the second kind of fact cited by an MS explanation

Before I try to convey the details of the second kind of fact cited by an MS explanation, it will help perhaps be helpful to consider the following picture:

modal sociological facts. However, the supervenience claim follows from the concession that the facts in question are knowable by some possible subject in some possible conditions. And the facts that we are considering, recall, are all facts that we believe ourselves to enjoy epistemic success with respect to. Thus, we should confidently expect our Y-reasons to allow for the possibility that Y supervenes on modal sociological facts of the desired kind.

⁴³ There does, however, seem to be a way in which our Y-reasons could tell against MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to Y. It is conceivable that we could become convinced that it is immoral to accept an MS explanation with respect to morality. Similarly, we could become convinced that an MS explanation with respect to aesthetics is ugly, that it would be crazy to accept an MS explanation with respect to psychology, etc. In each of these cases, we would have Y-reasons not to accept an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to Y. What should we say about these possibilities? While they seem silly, it really would be best if we could assert that MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to Y is independent of what our Y-reasons have to say *without prejudging what our Y-reasons have to say*. Luckily, even if we were to become convinced that accepting an MS explanation is immoral, ugly, and crazy, we could still accept the truth of an MS explanation without *contradicting* any of our moral, aesthetic, or psychological beliefs. To take the aesthetics case, we can only infer the falsity of an MS explanation from its ugliness if we assume that everything that is the case is beautiful. Since we can confidently reject that assumption as false, we have every reason to believe that our aesthetic reasons will be silent on whether or not an MS explanation with respect to aesthetics is true, even if we believe it to be ugly. Similarly, while it is possible that accepting an MS explanation is incompatible with living a maximally moral life or a life of maximal psychological well-being, it simply does not follow that MS explanations with respect to morality and psychology are false. In this way, if we believe domain Y to be grounded in certain modal sociological facts, an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to Y is independent of Y's particular nature.

Figure 1. MS Explanation



Represented in this picture is everything that is going on in an MS explanation. First, there is our epistemic success with respect to the domain. This is represented by the domain “approximately supervening” on our actual judgments about the domain. While it is not a fact that p if and only if we judge that p , we take ourselves to approximate this ideal, to some degree. It is this “approximate supervenience” that we can use an MS explanation to explain. Second, there is the first kind of fact cited by an MS explanation. That, as we have seen, is the fact that the domain is identical to, or metaphysically grounded in, certain modal sociological facts. Which brings us to the second kind of fact cited by an MS explanation.

The second kind of fact cited by an MS explanation is the relationship between what we are doing when we enjoy our limited epistemic success and what the subjects in the

modal sociological facts (hereafter, MS subjects) are doing when they enjoy their unlimited epistemic success with respect to the domain. If there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success, then what we are doing is similar to what the MS subjects are doing in certain respects. More specifically, what we are doing approximates what they are doing. It is in virtue of approximating what they are doing that our judgments approximate their judgments. And it is in virtue of our judgments approximating their judgments that we enjoy the epistemic success that we do.

Perhaps we can say a little more about the similarity relations posited by an MS explanation. It is useful to think of, for example, moral reasoning as a process that takes us from certain inputs to certain outputs. In an attempt to answer moral questions about a certain situation, we latch onto what we take to be the morally relevant characteristics of that situation. These are the inputs. Then we do something with those inputs. We process that information in a certain kind of way. At the end of that process, out pop our moral judgments, the outputs of the process. An MS explanation of our ability to successfully morally appraise a situation to some degree would cite the similarity between the way that we appraised the situation and the way that MS subjects would have appraised the situation in the conditions cited by the modal sociological facts. Specifically, an MS explanation would assert that what we took the morally relevant characteristics of the situation to be approximated what they would have taken the morally relevant characteristics of the situation to be. Further, the way that we converted that information into moral judgments approximated the way that they would have converted that information into moral judgments. According to an MS explanation, it is in virtue of approximating the MS subjects in these two respects that our moral judgments approximate the judgments that they would have made.

And it is in virtue of approximating their judgments that we enjoy some degree of epistemic success.

Let us return to the epistemic puzzle that arises for mathematics. If mathematical facts are facts about non-spatiotemporal acausal entities, then it is puzzling how mathematical practice could successfully describe those entities in a non-accidental kind of way. Accepting an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to mathematics is one way to resolve this epistemic puzzle. If we are unwilling to give up our belief that mathematical facts are facts about non-spatio-temporal acausal entities, then we cannot accept that the mathematical facts are response-dependent. In this case, an MS explanation would cite the fact that the mathematical facts (conceived of as facts about non-spatio-temporal acausal entities) are metaphysically grounded in certain modal sociological facts. If mathematical facts are grounded in modal sociological facts, then, in order to explain how we are able to track the mathematical facts to some degree, we just have to explain how our judgments approximate the judgments of the subjects in the modal sociological facts. An MS explanation does this by positing similarity relations between what we are doing when we form our mathematical judgments and what they would do were they to form mathematical judgments. It is because what we are doing approximates what they would do that our judgments approximate the judgments that they would make. And, again, it is in virtue of approximating the judgments that they would make that we are able to track the mathematical facts, to some degree. Epistemic puzzle resolved.

It is worth noting that we can accept an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to a domain without knowing the exact nature of the modal sociological facts that the domain is grounded in. It is enough that we believe the domain to be grounded in some

modal sociological facts or other, and that our way of generating judgments about the domain approximates the MS subjects' way of generating judgment about the domain in the way we have indicated.⁴⁴

Just to be clear, if there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to morality, the claim is *not* that the way we track the facts is by *consciously thinking* about what an ideal observer would judge to be the case. No, we achieve our epistemic success by engaging in moral reasoning. MS explanation is an explanation of how engaging in moral reasoning allows us to track the moral facts to some degree. And, again, the explanation goes as follows. Moral facts are grounded in the judgments of some kind of subject in some kind of conditions. And, when we engage in moral reasoning, we approximate what they are doing. Further, we approximate what they are doing in a way that results in judgments that approximate their judgments. This is the MS explanation of how we do as well as we do with respect to the moral facts.

III. Back to the colors

I want to return to our discussion of color, which we discontinued at the end of Chapter 1. There we saw that, if we are to believe color perception, the colors (i) are properties of things in the external world, (ii) are intrinsic (i.e., non-dispositional) properties, and (iii) are essentially similar to and different from each other in the way that they appear to be. If we are to believe most of the philosophical literature on color, on the other hand, then

⁴⁴ Notice that, in order for there to be an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to a domain, not just any approximation relations will do. After all, we could no doubt manufacture countless examples in which (i) a certain kind of subject enjoys complete epistemic success in certain conditions, but (ii) another kind of subject enjoys zero epistemic success in certain other conditions, despite the fact that (iii) the latter kind of subject's way of generating judgments is an approximation of the former's. What an MS explanation requires is that there be approximation relations *of a kind that will result in our judgments approximating their judgments*.

we ought not believe color perception. The philosophical literature on color mostly takes it for granted that at least one of (i) – (iii) has got to be false. Most of the debate centers around which of (i) – (iii) we ought to reject. Should we accept that we live in a colorless world (and reject (i)), accept that the colors are response-dependent properties (and reject (ii)), or accept that the colors are physical properties (and reject (iii))?

What is preventing us from just believing our eyes? Why can't we just accept that the world is colored in exactly the way that it appears to be? The colors as they appear in color perception no doubt supervene on certain microphysical properties. However, as we have seen, they are not identical to them. Why can't we allow ourselves to believe that colors exist as intrinsic properties of things, and are unified by the essential similarity- and difference-relations that we see them to have?

According to David Armstrong, the problem with colors as they appear in color perception is explanatory:

The trouble is that these properties do not *explain* anything physical... The secondary qualities do not even help to explain how they themselves are perceived. Contrary to earlier speculations, it is not the sensible species of colors, but rather patterns of light waves, that cause us to see the colors of the surfaces of objects.⁴⁵

This sentiment seems to be common in the color literature. According to it, science has shown us that colors as they appear to be in color perception are not causally responsible for color perception. But how, exactly, has science shown us this? Yes, science has given us a causal explanation for color perception in physical terms. And no, that explanation doesn't mention colors as they appear in color perception. However, it hardly *follows* that colors as they appear to be in color perception have no causal explanatory role to play. Physics no

⁴⁵ David Armstrong, "Smart and the Secondary Qualities," in *Readings on Color: The Philosophy of Color*, edited by Alex Byrne and David R. Hilbert, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001, pp. 35-6.

doubt could give us a causal explanation of how the current state of the United States came to be. However, this fact doesn't preclude us from seeking an economical explanation of our current state. Physical explanations aren't the only possible kind of causal explanations. Why, then, can't we say that colors as we perceive them to be in color perception supervene on the microphysical properties cited in the physical explanation, and cause us to have the color perceptions that we have?

In "A Simple View of Colour," John Campbell tries to defend a view along these lines. According to Campbell, we know through color perception that the colors are intrinsic properties of external objects that are unified by the essential similarity- and difference-relations that we perceive them to have. However, Campbell's defense of this view encounters an obstacle, an epistemic puzzle that it gives rise to:

Suppose someone asks whether objects really have the shapes we ordinarily take them to have, on the strength of their appearances. For example, suppose he asks whether bicycle wheels, though they look circular, might not in fact be triangular. The question can be dealt with by attempting to ride the bicycle ... In contrast, consider the case in which someone asks whether this bicycle, though it looks white, really is white. Here there is no such auxiliary test we can use. Colour has no effect on the motion of the bicycle... do things have the colours they ordinarily seem to? ... For example, it might be proposed that we live in an environment in which blueness is the ordinary cause of our perceptions of redness, greenness the ordinary cause of our perceptions of yellowness, and so on. To complete the construction of the alternative explanation, we should have to include stipulations about how the relations between the colours affect the relations between experiences of them. For instance, it might be said that one object's being bluer than another is the usual reason why an experience of it is an experience as of a redder object than is the experience of the second thing. And so forth.⁴⁶

Notice that this epistemic puzzle does not arise for physicalist or response-dependent conceptions of the colors. The physicalist identifies the colors via their causal relationships to our color experiences. Cherry redness, for example, is identified as the physical property

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 185-6.

that is normally causally responsible for our cherry red color perceptions. So, for the physicalist, there is no worry that a color other than cherry redness might be the normal cause of our cherry red color perceptions.

According to the usual response-dependence conception of colors, cherry redness is the disposition to produce cherry red color experiences in normal human subjects in standard conditions. So here, too, since cherry redness is what it is in virtue of its relationship to our cherry red color experiences, there is no worry that our cherry red color experiences might be normally caused by a color other than cherry red. It is only if we take the colors to be as they appear to be in color perception that the epistemic puzzle arises.

Mark Johnston has latched onto a similar epistemic problem that arises for colors (and other perceptible properties), if we take them to be as they appear to be in our experiences of them. He dubs this epistemic problem ‘the other problem of the external world’:

The other problem of the external world is the problem of acquaintance, the problem of how, given the nature of transmission, we could be acquainted with the nature of any of the properties of external things represented by our experience. The nature of any signal received is partly a product of the thing sending the signal and partly a product of the signal receiver. It seems that we cannot separate out the contribution to our experience of our own sensibility from the contribution to our experience of the objects sensed. The case of the brain in the vat shows that our experience does not discriminate between many different kinds of external features so long as their effects on our sensibility are isomorphic in certain ways. Therefore, despite the seductive offer that perception makes, we cannot take our perceptual experiences to reveal the natures of external things... relative to the problem of acquaintance, even if we are not brains in vats, things are as bad as they would be if we were brains in vats.⁴⁷

So, Johnston concludes, while our experience of the world purports to acquaint us with the intrinsic properties of its inhabitants, we cannot take our experience at face value. We can at

⁴⁷ Mark Johnston, “Is the External World Invisible?,” *Philosophical Issues* 7 (1996), pp. 187-8.

best know the intrinsic properties of the world by description, as “those properties that stand in a certain causal relationship to our experiences.” Thus:

[T]here is a causal process connecting the state of my dog’s coat and my internal states. Barring a pre-established harmony no such causal process will preserve and transmit information so as to secure a nature-revealing match between how some feature of the cause, say the greyness of my dog’s coat, is and the way I am caused to represent that feature as being.⁴⁸

Johnston’s epistemic puzzle is similar, in certain respects, to the epistemic puzzle that arises for mathematics. In the case of mathematics, we have, on the one hand, certain mathematical entities standing in certain relations to each other in a non-spatio-temporal acausal realm. On the other hand, we have certain spatio-temporal entities (mathematicians) causally engaging with the physical world (trying to come up with proofs, and the like). In the grip of this puzzle, it is tempting to say that, barring a pre-established harmony between the mathematical facts and the beliefs that the mathematicians were causally determined to acquire, our mathematical practice has no chance to track the mathematical facts.

Of course, there are differences between Johnston’s puzzle and the one that arises for mathematics. It is, for example, important to the epistemic puzzle about mathematics that mathematical entities play no role in the causal determination of the mathematicians’ beliefs. The external world’s intrinsic properties, by contrast, do play a causal role in our perceptions of them. However, according to Johnston, this is not a difference that makes a difference. According to Johnston, if color perception accurately represents the intrinsic properties of external things, it is by accident. In order to have any faith in mathematical practice or color perception, what we need is a non-accidental connection that links the relevant facts to the relevant investigators. Johnston thinks that what would be required is a bizarre sort of “pre-established harmony.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 191.

We, however, know that there is another possibility. It could be that there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the colors. To accept an MS explanation here would be to accept that the color facts (that concern properties with characteristics (i)-(iii)) are grounded in certain modal sociological facts. And it would be to accept that our way of knowing about the colors is an approximation of the MS subjects' way of knowing about the colors. And it would be to accept that these approximation relations ensure that our judgments about the colors approximate the MS subjects' judgments about the colors. By accepting an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the colors, we can resolve the epistemic puzzles raised by Campbell and Johnston. So, if it is those puzzles that are standing in the way of our believing our own eyes, we should feel free to take color perception at face value.

IV. Why MS explanation appears to be relevant to the question of realism

I believe that, if there is an MS explanation of a subject's epistemic success with respect to a domain, then the domain is less than fully objective for that subject. Here, I will demonstrate that this claim is supported by Rosen's metaphors concerning what it is to be fully objective.

Before applying Rosen's metaphors to MS explanation, I want to briefly note that MS explanation does *not* make a domain less than fully objective in virtue of implying that it is response-dependent or metaphysically grounded in modal sociological facts. We already encountered Rosen's argument that response-dependence is irrelevant to the question of realism in Chapter 2, so I will just concern myself with the question of ground. Two examples should be enough to establish that being grounded in modal sociological facts is

similarly irrelevant to the question of realism. First, I could believe that moral facts are grounded in Gods commands by virtue of being a sophisticated divine command theorist. Second, I could believe that all conjunctive modal sociological facts are grounded in the non-conjunctive modal sociological facts that appear in them because I have something against conjunctive facts in general. In neither of these cases would I be believing that the domain in question is less than fully objective.

Let us now return to the collection of metaphors that Rosen offers as a characterization of what it is for a domain X to be fully objective:

Our discourse about X concerns a domain of fact that is *out there*. These facts obtain *anyway*, regardless of what we may think. When all goes well, inquiry in the disputed areas *discovers* what is *already* there, rather than *constituting* or *constructing* its object. Successful thought amounts to the *detection* of something real, as opposed to a *projection* onto the real of our own peculiar or subjective perspective.⁴⁹

If these metaphors are to be our guide, then for a domain to be fully objective for us is for it to be independent of our way of knowing it. Conversely, then, for a domain to be less than fully objective for us is for it to be dependent on our way of knowing it. Of course, there are lots of ways in which a domain can depend on our epistemic practice.⁵⁰ And certainly, not all of them are relevant to the question of realism. Do the metaphors give us any insight into what distinguishes relevant kinds of dependence from irrelevant kinds of dependence?

Yes, they do. Dependence that is relevant to the question of realism is dependence that enables a certain kind of explanation of our epistemic success, a kind of explanation that is, in a sense, less robust than other kinds of explanation. It explains our epistemic success in

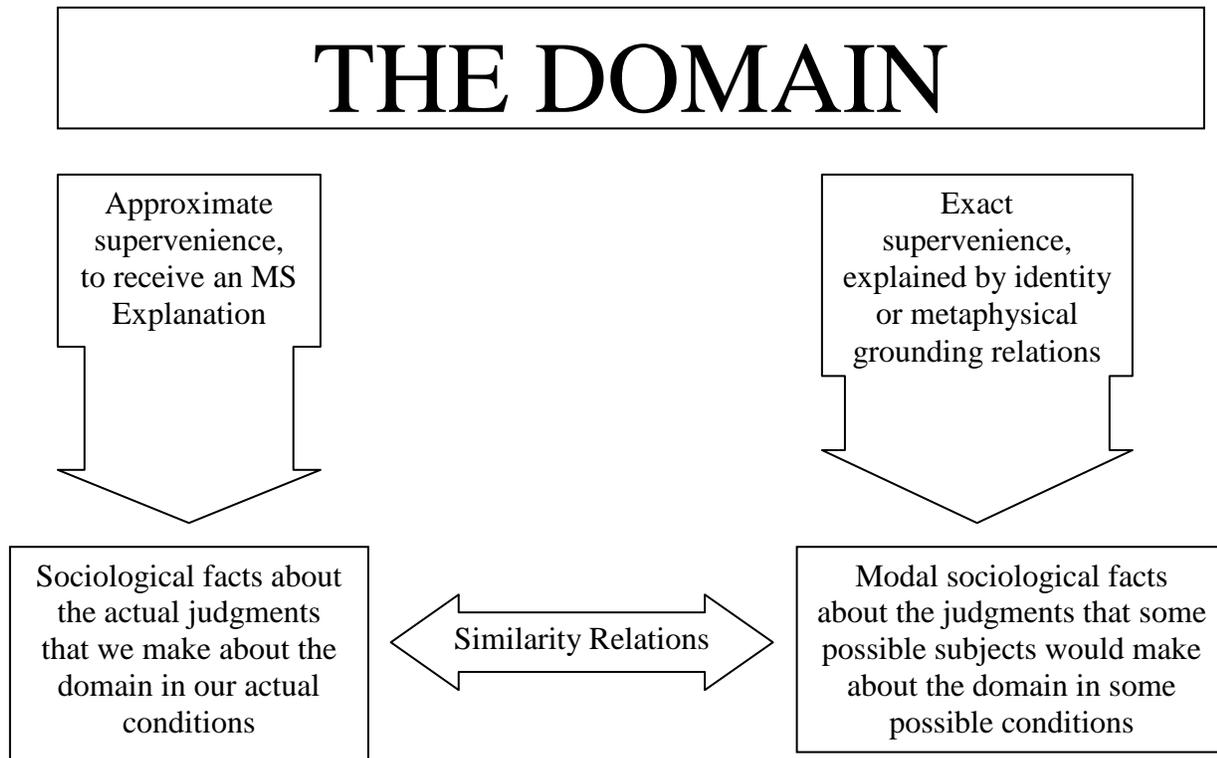
⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 278.

⁵⁰ And, it is worth noting, there are lots of ways in which a domain can be independent of our epistemic practice even if there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to it. It can be causally independent of our epistemic practice, for example.

terms of *construction* rather than in terms *discovery*, in terms of *projection* rather than in terms of *detection*. Does MS explanation fit this bill?

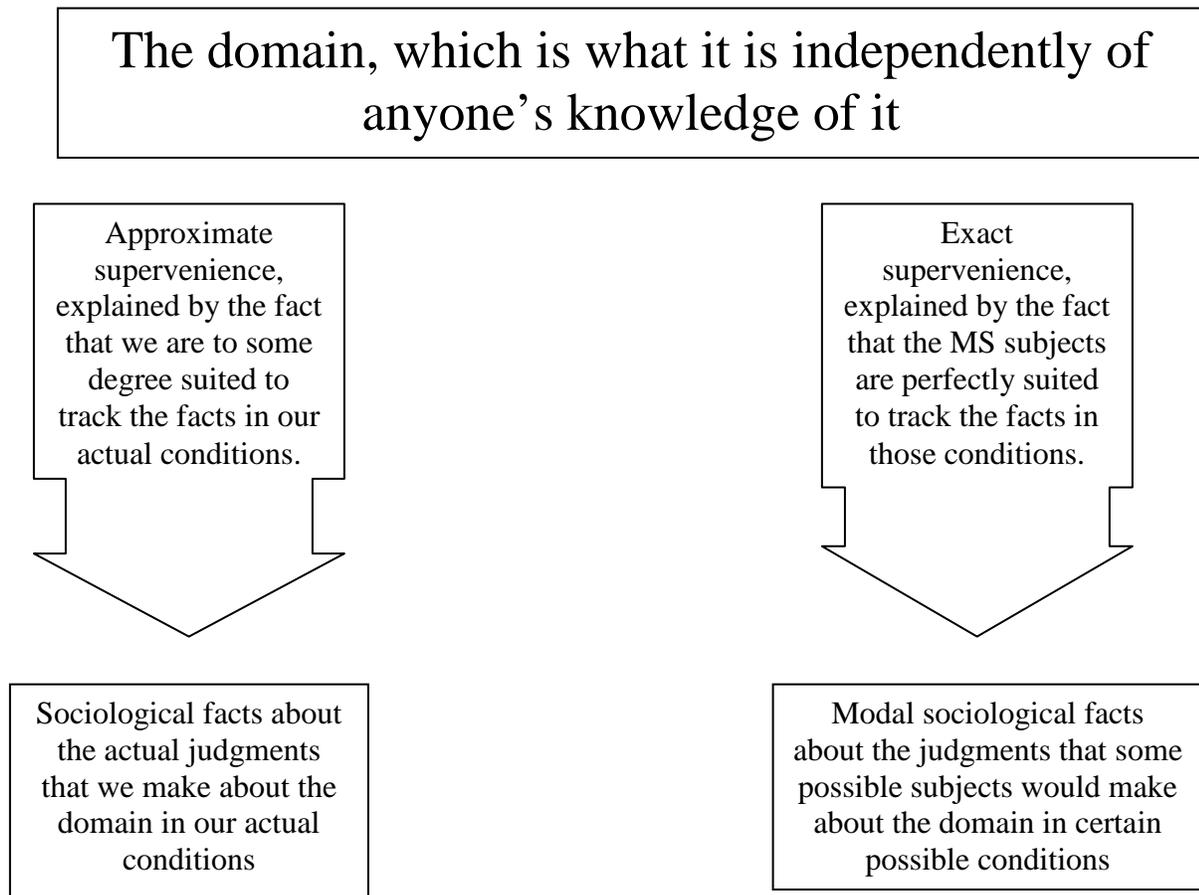
It will perhaps be helpful for us to recall our picture of MS explanation:

Figure 2. MS Explanation Revisited



And now, let us contrast MS explanation with a non-MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to a domain.

Figure 3. Non-MS Explanation



In this picture of a non-MS explanation, we have, on the left, our epistemic success with respect to the domain. This is represented, as in our picture of MS explanation, by the domain approximately supervening on our judgments about the domain. On the right, we have the epistemic success of some possible kind of subject in some possible set of conditions. The existence of these subjects that would perfectly track the domain in certain conditions follows from our belief that the domain is knowable.

Let me quickly highlight the differences between these two pictures. First, the domain in an MS explanation depends on someone's knowledge of it in a way that the domain in a non-MS explanation does not. Second, the non-MS explanations of the MS

subjects' and of our epistemic success proceed independently of each other. The non-MS explanation of the MS subjects' success cites their relationship to the domain, and the non-MS explanation of our success cites our relationship to the domain. This, of course, is to be contrasted with an MS explanation of our success, which cites the epistemic success of the MS subjects. Third, non-MS explanations cite characteristics in virtue of which a subject is well suited to track a domain in certain conditions. MS explanations, by contrast, cite facts about metaphysical ground, identity, and similarity relations between epistemic agents.

With these two pictures in front of us, let us now ask: according to Rosen's metaphors, is the domain less objective for the epistemic agents in the picture of MS explanation than it is for the epistemic agents in the picture of non-MS explanation? Let us begin by considering an MS subject who is making judgments about the domain in the ideal conditions that appear in the modal sociological facts that the domain supervenes on. If the MS subject is related to the domain in the way that he is in our picture of non-MS explanation, then the domain is what it is independently of his judgments. The reason he is nevertheless able to perfectly track the facts is that he has characteristics that make him perfectly suited to track facts of that kind in these ideal conditions. Here, the metaphors of tracking and discovery are obviously appropriate. Contrast our intuitions about this case when we move from the picture of non-MS explanation to the picture of MS explanation. If the MS subject is related to the domain in the way that he is in our picture of MS explanation, then the domain is what it is in virtue of the subject making the judgments that he makes in those ideal conditions. Further, it is in virtue of this dependence that the MS subject is able to perfectly "track" the facts in those conditions. The domain in this case is pretty compellingly described as being *constructed* out of the MS subject's judgments. Prima facie, in our picture of MS

explanation, the domain is less than fully objective for the MS subject when he is making judgments about it in ideal conditions.

Now consider an MS subject who is making judgments about the domain outside of the ideal conditions that appear in the modal sociological facts that the domain supervenes on. The domain does not exactly supervene on the judgments that the MS subject makes in these conditions. However, the MS subject will likely be able to track the facts to some extent. Does the objectivity of the domain for our MS subject in non-ideal conditions change depending on which picture of explanation we place him in? I think that it does. Obviously, if we place our MS subject in non-ideal conditions within our picture of non-MS explanation, the domain is fully objective for him. What happens when we place him within our picture of MS explanation? Well, while the domain is what it is independently of the MS subject's judgments in these non-ideal conditions, so long as there is an MS explanation of his epistemic success, the claim that he is *tracking* and *discovering* the domain seems misplaced. If there is an MS explanation of his success, then the MS subject's way of generating judgments in non-ideal conditions is able to track the facts by virtue of approximating the way that he generates judgments in ideal conditions. These approximation relations result in his non-ideal judgments approximating his ideal judgments. And, since the domain is what it is in virtue of his ideal judgments being what they are, his ability to approximate those ideal judgments allows him to "track" the facts to some degree in non-ideal conditions. Intuitively, the MS subject in non-ideal conditions is only able to "track" the facts because the domain is a *projection* of his epistemic practice. If that is right, then, if there is an MS explanation of the MS subject's ability to track the domain in non-ideal conditions, then the domain is less than fully objective for him in those conditions.

Finally, let us consider *our* relationship to the domain in our picture of MS explanation. It is true that the domain is what it is independently of our judgments about it. However, like the MS subject judging in non-ideal conditions, it doesn't seem right to describe our epistemic success in terms of robust tracking and discovery. It just feels like there is an important difference between our relationship to the domain in our picture of MS explanation and our relationship to the domain in our picture of non-MS explanation. Like the MS subject judging in non-ideal conditions, an MS explanation of our epistemic success points to the fact that our way of generating judgments approximates the MS subject's way of generating judgments in ideal conditions. It is tempting to say that an MS explanation of our epistemic success points to two facts: (i) the domain is a *projection* of the MS subject's epistemic practice; (ii) our epistemic practice is of the same kind as the MS subject's epistemic practice. If that is right, then, if there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success, we "track" the facts by virtue of the domain being a projection of *our* epistemic practice. Intuitively, where there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success, the domain is less than fully objective for us. In the next chapter, we will see if Rosen-inspired considerations can undermine this claim. First, however, I want to make one more point about our picture of non-MS explanation.

The claim, in our picture of non-MS explanation, that the domain "is what it is independently of anyone's knowledge of it" is compatible with the domain's being response-dependent. So, too, is it compatible with the domain being grounded in certain modal sociological facts. Let us start with the last claim first.

Above, I mentioned two ways in which I could believe a domain to be grounded in modal sociological facts without believing that it is less than fully objective for me. First, I

could be a sophisticated divine command theorist. If I am, then I believe that the moral facts are grounded in certain facts about what God would command in certain conditions. Clearly, the moral facts can depend on God's commands in this way without being dependent on our or God's knowledge of the moral facts. Second, I could believe that all conjunctive modal sociological facts are grounded in the non-conjunctive modal sociological facts that appear in them. Maybe I believe this because I have something against conjunctive facts in general. Clearly, my believing this does not commit me to believing that conjunctive modal sociological facts depend on anyone's knowledge of them.

There are different reasons we might have for believing that domain X is response-dependent. Yes, we might take X to be response-dependent because we are compelled to accept an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to X. However, we might alternatively take X to be response-dependent because we take our X-reasons to support that claim. And it is possible for a domain to be response-dependent independently of anyone's knowledge that the domain is response-dependent. Thus, our picture of non-MS explanation is compatible with the domain being response-dependent and/or being grounded in certain modal sociological facts.

Chapter 4: Meeting Rosen's Challenge

In Chapter 3, I introduced the concept of an MS explanation. Briefly, an MS explanation explains a subject's epistemic success with respect to a domain by pointing to the similarity between the subject and certain other subjects that feature in modal sociological facts that the domain is metaphysically grounded in.⁵¹ I then made the case that, *prima facie*, if there is an MS explanation of a subject's epistemic success with respect to a domain, the domain is less than fully objective for that subject. How would Rosen attempt to undermine my *prima facie* case? Well, he would no doubt begin by pointing out, of the subjects and conditions implicated by the modal sociological facts in question, that what the subjects would judge to be true in those conditions may be a fully objective matter. We should concede this, since there being an MS explanation of a subject's epistemic success with respect to a domain does not imply that there is an MS explanation of anyone's epistemic success with respect to the modal sociological facts that the domain is grounded in. Let's say that those modal sociological facts are indeed fully objective. We can imagine Rosen asking: If the modal sociological facts are fully objective, how can the allegedly distinct facts that are "grounded" in those facts be less than fully objective?

This rhetorical question will no doubt be followed up by a visit from the alien anthropologist. Let's say that there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with

⁵¹ As we saw, being grounded in modal sociological facts is one of two ways that a domain can be related to modal sociological facts in an MS explanation. The other way is for it to be identical to those facts. In my discussion of Rosen's challenge, I will focus on MS explanations that involve the domain being grounded in certain modal sociological facts. At the end of the discussion, I will briefly explain how my argument can be modified if the MS explanation in question identifies the domain with the modal sociological facts.

respect to the moral facts. If there is, then the moral facts are grounded in certain modal sociological facts. Now imagine the alien anthropologist setting out to investigate the modal sociological facts that, as a matter of fact, the moral facts are grounded in. I am happy to concede that the alien anthropologist would be investigating fully objective facts. But, Rosen would say, the moral facts can be “read off” of those facts. So how on earth can I maintain that the moral facts are less-than fully objective? For the alien anthropologist, the moral facts will be just as objective as the modal sociological facts. And if there is no relevant difference between the two kinds of facts for the alien anthropologist, then there is no relevant difference between them for us. In order to drive this point home, Rosen might point out that, while we ordinarily investigate moral facts by engaging in moral reasoning, our investigation need not proceed in this way. Instead, *we* could follow the lead of the alien anthropologist and give up moral reasoning in favor of a more indirect method of investigation. We could investigate the modal sociological facts that the moral facts are grounded in, and then read the moral facts off of our results. If we were to do this, the moral facts would be just as objective for us as the modal sociological facts are. So, our Rosen-inspired argument concludes, we have no reason to think that moral facts are less than fully objective, even if there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to them. In summary:

Rosen-inspired argument #1: If it is possible to position ourselves in such a way that, in that position, the moral facts would be obviously fully objective for us, we should accept that the moral facts are fully objective for us now. If there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts, then we can position ourselves towards the moral facts in this kind of way. We can do this by investigating the modal sociological facts that the moral facts are grounded in, and then reading the moral facts off of our results.

I think that the key to responding to this Rosen-inspired argument is to reflect on the sense in which, if there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the

moral facts, the moral facts can be “read off” of the modal sociological facts that they are grounded in. Certainly, if there is such an MS explanation, then the moral facts are grounded in, and so supervene on, certain modal sociological facts. And so it follows that, if we knew exactly which modal sociological facts the moral facts are grounded in, we would be able to indirectly investigate the moral facts by directly investigating the modal sociological facts and then reading the moral facts off of our results.

If, on the other hand, we do not know what modal sociological facts the moral facts are grounded in, we will not be able to pursue an indirect investigation of the moral facts. We could, of course, still investigate the modal sociological facts that the moral facts are, as a matter of fact, metaphysically grounded in. However, without knowing that those modal sociological facts are the ones that the moral facts are grounded in, we will not be in a position to read the moral facts off of our results.

As we saw in Chapter 3, it is possible to accept an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to a domain without knowing exactly which modal sociological facts the domain is grounded in. However, Rosen’s argument might not require that we actually have those details in hand. For, Rosen seems happy to move from the metaphysical possibility of a fact’s being fully objective for us to its actually being fully objective for us. If that is a legitimate move, then the fact that we *could* be in a position to have knowledge of the facts about ground would seem to be enough. So, in order to explore the argument, let us just grant that we know exactly which modal sociological facts the moral facts are grounded in. Does it follow that we can put ourselves in a position to make the moral facts fully objective for us? Let us consider two scenarios. What distinguishes these scenarios is the description under which we know the modal sociological facts. First, we will consider the case where

we know the modal sociological facts under an at least partly moral description. Then, we will consider the case where we know the modal sociological facts under a completely non-moral description.

Assuming that all of the moral facts are grounded in the same kind of modal sociological fact,⁵² to know which modal sociological facts the moral facts are grounded in is to have two descriptions in hand. It is to have a description of a kind of subject and to have a description of some set of conditions. The moral facts, on this assumption, are grounded in facts about what moral judgments a subject of that kind would make in those conditions. Let's say that, while we have a completely non-moral description of the conditions, our description of the kind of subject consists of a bunch of non-moral characteristics and the requirement that the subject be just. With these descriptions in hand, we are now in a position to embark on the kind of indirect investigation of the moral facts that Rosen describes. By figuring out which moral judgments a subject of that kind would make in those conditions, we can figure out what the moral facts are. We can indirectly track the moral facts by doing some modal sociology. Would our ability to indirectly track the moral facts in this way make them fully objective for us?

I don't think that it would. Remember, our claim to being able to indirectly track the moral facts depends on our having correctly identified the modal sociological facts that the moral facts are grounded in. Specifically, it depends on our being able to correctly identify the relevant kind of subject. However, since our description of the subject is partly moral, our being able to identify the right kind of subject requires that we have true moral beliefs. It

⁵² It is worth noting that, while this assumption makes exposition easier, it needn't be the case. That is, it is possible for one subset of a domain's facts to be grounded in modal sociological facts that feature one kind of subject and conditions, and another subset to be grounded in modal sociological facts that feature another kind of subject and and/or conditions.

requires that we be able to distinguish a just subject from an unjust subject. Since we are assuming that, before we embark on our indirect investigation, there is an MS explanation of our ability to track the moral facts, there is an MS explanation of our ability to distinguish just subjects from unjust subjects. So, since the success of our indirect investigation depends on our being able to successfully distinguish just subjects from unjust subjects, the success of our indirect investigation will be partially explained by an MS explanation. And, so long as our ability to track the moral facts depends on an MS explanation, we cannot claim that the moral facts are obviously fully objective for us. We have not counterfactually maneuvered ourselves into the kind of position that our Rosen-inspired argument demands.

The thought behind our first Rosen-inspired argument is that, by tracking a set of facts indirectly by reading them off of the modal sociological facts that they are grounded in, our relationship to those facts becomes the same, in all of the relevant respects, as our relationship to the modal sociological facts. What we have seen is that, in the above scenario at least, this is not the case. Indirectly tracking the moral facts does not erase the differences between the moral facts and the modal sociological facts they are grounded in that are *prima facie* relevant to the question of realism. While there may very well be a non-MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the modal sociological facts, our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts is still explained via an MS explanation.

But what if we had a completely non-moral characterization of the subjects and conditions implicated by the key modal sociological facts? Would that make a difference? Well, I take it that that depends on our reasons for thinking that we have the right characterization in hand. What led us to believe that that characterization is the right one? I think that the answer to this question has to be, at least in part: moral considerations. What I

am balking at is the idea that we could arrive at our beliefs about ground independently of our moral beliefs. After all, if we had different moral beliefs (different beliefs about what it is to be just, for example), that would surely affect which modal sociological facts we take the moral facts to be grounded in, *regardless of how we decide to describe them*.

If I am right about this, if we need to rely on our moral beliefs in order to arrive at which modal sociological facts the moral facts are metaphysically grounded in, then our being able to identify a set of modal sociological facts as being *the ones which the moral facts are grounded in* will depend on an MS explanation. This is because our epistemic success with respect to which modal sociological facts the moral facts are grounded in will be explained (at least in part) by our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts. And, as we have stipulated, there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts.

Thus, I conclude that, if there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts, then there is no way that we can position ourselves towards those facts that will rid us of MS explanation. Reading the moral facts off of the modal sociological facts that they are metaphysically grounded in will not do the trick, no matter what kind of description of the modal sociological facts we have in hand. My argument that MS explanation is relevant to the question of realism remains intact.

Have we vanquished our Rosen-inspired considerations? Not quite. What we have done is shown that, if our epistemic success with respect to a domain depends on an MS explanation, then there is no external anthropological perspective for us to take up that will change this fact. However, what if there is such an external anthropological perspective for the alien anthropologist to take up? What if an alien anthropologist, after studying us, could

position himself in such a way that the moral facts would be obviously fully objective for him? Perhaps Rosen would argue that, if it is possible for the alien anthropologist to do that, then we should accept that the moral facts are fully objective for us now, despite the fact that there is an MS explanation for our epistemic success with respect to them. In summary:

Rosen-inspired argument #2: Given that we are epistemically in touch with the moral facts, an alien anthropologist could read the moral facts off of our behavior. Since the moral facts would be fully objective for the alien anthropologist in this scenario, we should conclude that they are fully objective for us now.

Let's continue to assume that there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts. Now imagine an alien anthropologist setting up camp in our community. He pays attention to our use of moral terms, and gets good at predicting what we are going to say when. What are we to say about such an alien anthropologist? Is it possible for him to enjoy epistemic success with respect to the moral facts in a way that isn't explained by an MS explanation?

Well, we can concede that the alien anthropologist has a very good handle on what our moral beliefs are. And those facts about what we believe are, for him, fully objective. Further, since there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts, our moral beliefs track the moral facts to some extent. The moral facts (at least approximately) supervene on our moral beliefs. So, it might seem, all the alien anthropologist has to do is read the moral facts off of our moral beliefs. If he does that, then he will enjoy epistemic success with respect to the moral facts in a way that will not be explained by an MS explanation. When presented with any number of actions, the alien anthropologist is able to say (e.g.) which of them we would judge to be just. And our beliefs are at least approximately true. So, isn't the alien anthropologist in a position to have reliably true moral beliefs?

Only if he is justified in moving from the fact that we believe a moral claim to be true to the fact that it is true. The question we need to pursue is what exactly could justify such an inference. Specifically, we are interested in whether or not it is possible for the alien anthropologist to put himself in a position to make that inference without thereby making his epistemic success with respect to the moral facts subject to an MS explanation. If this Rosen-inspired argument is to defeat my claim that MS-explanation is relevant to the question of realism, then there has to be a story to be told in which the alien anthropologist can do just that.

The alien anthropologist sees clearly which actions we would call just. How can he put himself in a position to infer that those actions are indeed just? Well, he could reflect on moral matters and come to see that we (to some degree) get things right. That is, the alien anthropologist could put himself in a position to infer the truth of our beliefs by engaging in moral reasoning himself and determining that we are right. However, this would be for the alien anthropologist to take up *our* perspective of the moral facts. And we have stipulated that there is an MS explanation of our way of tracking the moral facts. Thus, any epistemic success that the alien anthropologist achieved via moral reasoning will receive an MS explanation.⁵³

If it is possible for an alien anthropologist to read the moral facts off of our behavior in a way that avoids an MS-explanation of his success, it looks like (i) he needs to be justified in moving from the fact that we believe *p* to the truth of *p*, and (ii) that justification cannot depend on his own moral reasoning. Is that possible?

⁵³ It is worth noting that, in general, if there is an MS explanation of *anyone's* epistemic success with respect to a domain via reasoning of a certain kind (conceived of as a kind of process that takes the reasoner from certain kinds of inputs to certain outputs), then there is an MS explanation of *everyone's* non-accidental epistemic success with respect to a domain via reasoning of that kind.

What non-moral reason could the alien anthropologist have for accepting that the moral facts approximately supervene on our moral beliefs? Well, if the alien anthropologist could somehow motivate the claim that there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts, he would have reason to accept this approximate supervenience. For, if there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts, then we (to some extent) track the moral facts. So, if the alien anthropologist could learn that there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success, he could then infer the (at least approximate) truth of our beliefs, and thereby inherit the ability to (at least approximately) read the moral facts off of our moral beliefs. Further, it seems possible that he could, in this way, have a reason to believe what we believe about the moral facts that doesn't rely on his own moral reasoning. So, the key question becomes: what reason could the alien anthropologist have for believing that there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts?

Well, what reason do *we* have for believing that there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts? According to me, our reason to accept an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to a domain comes from the ability of such an explanation to resolve certain apparently irresolvable epistemic puzzles about the domain. Well, the alien anthropologist presumably has access to those same puzzles. If he were to think about those puzzles, would the alien anthropologist emerge with reason to believe that there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to morality?

Not quite. Rather, he would emerge with the belief that, *if we are epistemically successful* with respect to the moral facts, then there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success. Of course, in order to turn this into reason for believing the consequent, the alien

anthropologist needs reason to believe the antecedent. Without reason to believe that we do in fact track the moral facts, the alien anthropologist will be unable to decide between MS explanation and error-theory. So, unfortunately (for Rosen), the alien anthropologist still needs reason to think that our moral beliefs are (to some extent) true.

What is *our* reason for believing that we are epistemically successful with respect to the moral facts? Why do *we* accept that there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success rather than accepting an error-theory about moral facts? I have suggested that, for us, it might have something to do with Moorean considerations. Some things just seem obviously true to us. And, as a result, we are unwilling to give them up. How exactly this obviousness and unwillingness (if not inability) to give up certain of our beliefs might *justify* our beliefs is a good question. But let's say that they are so justified. Can the alien anthropologist justify his belief in our beliefs in the same way?

It would seem that he cannot. Moorean reason to believe something about a domain derives (at least in part) from *beliefs about that domain*. Which means that, in order to have Moorean reason to believe that our moral beliefs are (at least approximately) true, the alien anthropologist himself will have to have moral beliefs. When justifying our moral beliefs to ourselves, we cite moral reasons. But without moral beliefs, the alien anthropologist is not in a position to do this. Without moral beliefs of his own, all that the alien anthropologist could cite is the fact that our moral beliefs seem obvious to us. Surely that can't be enough.

If, on the other hand, the alien anthropologist has moral beliefs from which Moorean reason might be derived, why does he have the moral beliefs that he has? We have yet to come up with a way for the alien anthropologist to have any reason to have moral beliefs that doesn't thereby explain any epistemic success he enjoys via an MS explanation. Reflecting

on different puzzles are not enough, by themselves, to justify any moral beliefs. And, while moral reasoning can justify moral beliefs, it does so at the price of MS explanation. It looks like there is no way for the alien anthropologist to reason his way into believing that our moral beliefs are (at least approximately) true that doesn't result in an MS explanation of his being able to track the moral facts.

But what if the alien anthropologist relied on someone *else's* judgment that our moral beliefs are (at least approximately) true? Could he, for example, rely on *our* judgment? Well, what reason could he have to believe us? We could try to convince him that our moral beliefs are true. But, in order to do that, we would cite moral considerations. We would give moral reasons. And we haven't figured out a way to make the alien anthropologist responsive to moral reasons that doesn't give the game away.

What else could we tell him? Well, I suppose that we philosophers could tell him that we figured out that there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to morality. As we rehearsed above, if he could be convinced of that, he would have reason to think that our moral beliefs are (to some degree) true. But what reason would he have for believing that we got it right? After all, our reasoning to MS explanation presupposes that our moral beliefs are (to some extent) true. And, as we have seen, neither we nor he are in a position to make that case to him in a non-moral kind of way.

So, he can't convince himself of our epistemic success in a non-moral kind of way. Neither can we. Can anyone else? I don't think so. Without taking a stand on at least some moral issues, the alien anthropologist does not have a framework from within which to judge how good someone is at assessing moral claims. So, he cannot assess how good we are at

tracking the moral facts. Nor can he assess how good someone else is at assessing how good we are at tracking the moral facts. Etc.

So, it looks like the alien anthropologist cannot put in himself in a position to track the moral facts without making his success subject to an MS explanation. And if that's right, then my claim that MS explanation is relevant to the question of realism has escaped the clutches of our second Rosen-inspired argument.

But wait. What if the alien anthropologist just took a leap of faith and accepted, for no reason whatsoever, that we are good at assessing moral claims. Wouldn't that put him in a position to track moral facts? Indeed, wouldn't that put him in a position to track moral facts just as well as we do? Certainly, he would get things right just as often as we do. Further, his epistemic success wouldn't be explained by an MS explanation. Have we found the triumphant Rosen-inspired argument? Should this possibility convince us that the moral facts are fully objective for us?

I don't think that it should. For the alien anthropologist to blindly decide to believe whatever we believe is like him deciding to draw his moral beliefs out of a hat. In both cases, he would be committing to a way of generating moral beliefs that he has no reason whatsoever to believe to be reliable. And the fact that a subject could in this way luck into tracking the moral facts without making them less than fully objective for him doesn't preclude our being non-accidentally related to the moral facts in a way that makes them less than fully objective for us.

Rosen's way of reasoning is only compelling if it makes us think of *our own relationship to the facts* in a new kind of way. It works by making us take up a perspective on our own relationship to the facts that makes us concede that, from that perspective, the

facts are fully objective. While the alien anthropologist who blindly decides to believe what we believe has a way of generating moral beliefs that is causally related to our own, the causal relationship is, in this context, a superficial relationship. The alien anthropologist's relationship to the moral facts is independent of our relationship to the moral facts *in the sense that matters*. As a result, whether or not the moral facts are less than fully objective for him seems irrelevant to the question of whether or not the moral facts are less than fully objective for us. We should feel confident asserting, in the face of these Rosen-inspired considerations, that MS explanation is indeed relevant to the question of realism. If there is an MS explanation of a subject's epistemic success with respect to a domain, then the domain is less than fully real for that subject.

Before we leave this chapter, I want to add two more bits to our discussion. First, I want to establish that there is no as of yet unconsidered Rosen-inspired argument that can undermine the relevance of MS explanation to the question of realism. Second, I want to briefly discuss whether the above defense of the relevance of MS explanation can be applied to MS explanations that identify the domain in question with the modal sociological facts.

Against the existence of a different successful Rosen-inspired argument

If there is an MS explanation of someone's epistemic success with respect to the moral facts, there seem to be only three ways that you could reliably track the moral facts. First, you could be an MS subject. If you are, then the moral facts are grounded in the moral judgments that you would make in certain ideal conditions. Your ability to track the moral facts in ideal conditions, then, will receive a straightforward MS explanation: your way of generating moral beliefs in ideal conditions is exactly similar to the MS subjects' way of

generating beliefs in ideal conditions. (This, again, is because you are an MS subject.) Your ability to track the moral facts (to some extent) in non-ideal conditions will receive a slightly more sophisticated MS explanation: your way of generating beliefs in non-ideal conditions approximates the MS subject's way of generating beliefs in ideal conditions. By virtue of this approximation relation, you track the moral facts to some extent.

Second, you could be a kind of subject other than an MS subject, but still track the moral facts via an MS explanation. Your epistemic success would be explained by the fact that your way of generating moral beliefs approximates the MS subjects' way of generating moral beliefs in ideal conditions.

Third, you could stand in a certain causal relationship to someone who tracks the moral facts via an MS explanation. For example, you could be the alien anthropologist who decides to believe whatever we believe about the moral facts. Or we could have kidnapped you and implanted a microchip into your brain that forces you to form whatever moral beliefs we would have formed in whatever situation you are confronted with. Or ... (use your imagination.)

If you accept that there is an MS explanation of at least one person's epistemic success with respect to the moral facts, and you take yourself to reliably track the moral facts, then you can only explain your epistemic success by placing yourself into one of these three categories. Of course, to place yourself in either of the first two categories is to accept that there is an MS explanation of your epistemic success. But further, what our discussion of Rosen has shown us is that, to place yourself in the third category also requires accepting that there is an MS explanation of your epistemic success, in one way or another. In order to have reason to believe that your causal connection to us results in your having true moral

beliefs, you have to have reason to accept that our way of generating moral beliefs is successful. And, as we saw in our above discussion, in order for you to have reason to believe that our moral beliefs are true, you have to position yourself with respect to the moral facts in a way that results in an MS explanation of your ability to track the moral facts.

From this we can conclude that there is no Rosen-inspired argument against the relevance of MS explanation to the question of realism. If there is an MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to a domain, then there is no external anthropological perspective for us to take up that will convince us that the facts in question are fully objective.

On MS explanations that cite identity

To this point, I have only considered MS explanations that point to the fact that the domain in question is grounded in certain modal sociological facts. What about MS explanations that identify domain X with certain modal sociological facts? Is this kind of MS explanation relevant to the question of realism?

We can imagine Rosen arguing against the relevance of this kind of MS explanation to the question of realism. After all, the facts about modal sociology are, we can happily stipulate, fully objective. And, to stick with our example, the facts about morality just *are* the facts about modal sociology. Doesn't it follow that the facts about morality are fully objective? The inference does seem pretty irresistible. However, I am nevertheless inclined to resist it. While the moral facts *qua modal sociological facts* may be fully objective, the moral facts *qua moral facts* are not.

According to the view I have in mind, being fully objective is not only relative to a subject. It is also relative to the description under which the set of facts is described. If there

is an MS explanation of a subject's epistemic success with respect to a set of facts under a certain description, then those facts, under that description, are less than fully objective for the subject.

If this is right, then a set of facts under one description can be fully objective to a subject and, under a different description, be less than fully objective to that very same subject. Further, we can respond to any Rosen-inspired challenge to this claim in the same way that we did above.

For example, an adaptation of our first Rosen-inspired argument would claim that, since the moral facts are identical to modal sociological facts, we have a way to investigate the moral facts in which they would be obviously fully objective for us. All we have to do is read the moral facts off of the modal sociological facts that they are identical to. Since the moral facts would be obviously fully objective for us in this counterfactual situation, we should conclude that they are fully objective for us in our actual situation.

The correct response to this argument mirrors the response that we already made above. Briefly: In order to be able to read the moral facts off of the modal sociological facts, we need to know which modal sociological facts they are identical to. However, it is impossible to arrive at an identification independently of our moral beliefs. So, the success of the indirect way of tracking the moral facts depends on the success of our actual way of tracking the moral facts. But, we are stipulating that there is an MS explanation of the success of our actual way of the moral facts. Therefore, the success of Rosen's indirect way of tracking the moral facts is (at least partially) explained by an MS explanation.

While we can happily stipulate that our epistemic success with respect to the modal sociological facts qua modal sociological facts is independent of MS explanation, we cannot

use this fact to similarly liberate our epistemic success with respect to the moral facts qua moral facts, even if the two sets of facts are one and the same. Since there is no way for Rosen-inspired considerations to overcome this asymmetry, they cannot undermine the fact that MS explanations that identify the domain in question with certain modal sociological facts are relevant to the question of realism.

If this is right, then to accept either kind of MS explanation is to accept that the domain in question is less than fully real. This puts us in a position to state our complete general account of realism. To believe a domain Y to be fully real is to (i) be willing to go where you take your Y-reasons to take you in the way specified by the Relevant Reasons Account of Realism and to (ii) accept that there is a non-MS explanation of our epistemic success with respect to Y.

Chapter 5: On Fine

Like me, Kit Fine is after a dimension of the realism debate that makes the question of realism independent of our ordinary pre-philosophical beliefs about domains.⁵⁴ My interest in such a dimension has been documented above. Fine, on the other hand, just wants there to be a question of realism that it is appropriate for us philosophers to try to answer. According to Fine, philosophers have no business telling us what we ought to believe about non-philosophical matters. Our mathematical reasons for believing that there is a prime number in between 4 and 6 trump any puzzle that Hartry Field can up with. Similarly, our moral reasons for believing that it is wrong to torture innocents trump any philosophical concerns that might have bothered someone like Mackie. In general, Fine argues, philosophy lacks the epistemic authority to tell us what to believe about any non-philosophical fact of the matter. As Fine puts it,

in this age of post-Moorean modesty, many of us are inclined to doubt that philosophy is in possession of arguments that might genuinely serve to undermine what we ordinarily believe. It may perhaps be conceded that the arguments of the skeptic appear to be utterly compelling; but the Mooreans among us will hold that the very plausibility of our ordinary beliefs is reason enough for supposing that there *must* be something wrong in the skeptic's arguments, even if we are unable to say what it is. In so far, then, as the pretensions of philosophy to provide a world-view rest upon its claim to be in possession of the epistemological high ground, those pretensions had better be given up.⁵⁵

So, if there is a question of realism that it is appropriate for philosophers to try to answer, it had better be independent of our ordinary pre-philosophical beliefs.

⁵⁴ Kit Fine, "The Question of Realism," *Philosopher's Imprint* 1(1) (2001), pp. 1-30.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

When it comes to the question of what it is to be fully real, Fine is sympathetic to two answers. According to the first, to be real is to be factual. According to the second, to be real is to be irreducible. Unfortunately, as Fine compellingly argues in his paper, attempts to substantially characterize factuality and irreducibility have resulted in concepts that are either not relevant to the question of realism or concepts that are not independent of our ordinary pre-philosophical beliefs. This does not, however, dissuade Fine from conceiving of the realism debate as a debate about factuality and irreducibility. Fine argues that, even if it is impossible to substantially characterize factuality and irreducibility in a way that makes them relevant to the question of realism and independent of our ordinary pre-philosophical beliefs, it does not follow that there aren't concepts of factuality and irreducibility that have exactly those characteristics. The concepts could, after all, be primitive. By accepting that there are primitive concepts of factuality and irreducibility that are both relevant to the question of realism and independent of our ordinary pre-philosophical beliefs, we philosophers get our question of realism.⁵⁶ Of any domain, we can ask whether or not it is factual, and we can ask whether or not it is irreducible, in the senses of factuality and irreducibility that are relevant to the question of realism and independent of ordinary pre-philosophical beliefs.

If that was all that Fine had to say about the matter, then Fine's way of acquiring the realism debate would be clearly objectionable, for at least two reasons. First, while Fine may be convinced that there are special senses of factuality and irreducibility that can be used to frame the realism debate in the way that he wants, he has not yet given us any reason to believe him. Second, even if we were to grant Fine the intelligibility of his concepts, we don't yet have any idea how to go about answering questions concerning these special senses

⁵⁶ Fine stops short of asserting that these concepts are definitely primitives. Rather, he says that our inability to substantially characterize them makes it plausible that they are primitives, and that he is happy to proceed on the assumption that they are primitives.

of factuality and irreducibility. Unless Fine can convince us that disagreements over factuality and irreducibility are tractable, he hasn't really given us philosophers a question of realism that it is appropriate for us to try to answer.

The main aim of Fine's paper is to convince us that disputes over factuality and irreducibility are both meaningful and tractable. In order to achieve this end, Fine devotes many pages to telling us exactly how to resolve such disputes. Clearly, if Fine can tell us how to answer questions about factuality and irreducibility, he can avoid the charge of intractability. But further, Fine argues, the presentation of a tractable methodology should also allow him to take on the charge of unintelligibility:

[I]f the methodological problem could be solved, the conceptual problem would then lose much of its bite. For how can we seriously doubt the intelligibility of a given discourse, when its employment in resolving disputes is not otherwise in doubt?⁵⁷

If Fine can give us a tractable methodology for resolving disputes over factuality and irreducibility, it would seem that, at a minimum, our *prima facie* presumption has to be in favor of the meaningfulness of the disputes.

While I am sympathetic to Fine's project, I believe that he falls short of establishing that questions of factuality and irreducibility are either tractable or intelligible. After outlining Fine's methodology, I will make my case.

Central to Fine's methodology is the concept of a metaphysical ground. The concept of a metaphysical ground is explanatory. If the fact that x is the ground of the fact that y, then the fact that x explains why it is a fact that y in a fundamental kind of way. If y is metaphysically grounded in x, then it is tempting to say that its being the case that y consists in nothing more than its being the case that x.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

In order to introduce us to his initial example of a plausible statement of ground, Fine has us consider the claim that the couple Jack and Jill is married. What ultimately explains the truth of this claim? Plausibly: the fact that Jack is married to Jill. That is, the fact that the couple Jack and Jill is married plausibly consists in nothing more than Jack being married to Jill. To the extent that we find this compelling, we will say that the fact that the couple Jack and Jill is married is grounded in the fact that Jack is married to Jill.

To consider another kind of example, let us turn to the current war in Iraq. Just as we can inquire into the cause of the war, so too can we inquire into its ground. Arguably, its being the case that there is a war in Iraq consists in nothing more than its being the case that various warring activities have been performed by various individuals. If that is right, then the war in Iraq is *grounded in* those activities. Fine emphasizes that facts about ground do not directly answer any questions about realism. To say that the war in Iraq is grounded in various warring activities is neither to imply that the war is in any sense unreal nor that the warring activities are in any sense more real than the war.

According to Fine, metaphysical grounds play a key role in making disputes over factuality and irreducibility tractable. Specifically, Fine argues that disagreements over factuality and irreducibility are bound to imply disagreements over ground. Since disagreements over ground are tractable, so are disagreements over factuality and irreducibility. It is now time for us to turn to the details of Fine's proposed methodology. I will follow Fine in starting with the question of factuality. Afterwards, we will turn to irreducibility.

Imagine two people who disagree about the factual status of some domain and have opinions about what kind of facts the domain is ultimately grounded in. Fine argues that, as

long as the disputants are reasonable, they are bound to have at least one tractable disagreement over a matter of ground such that, were it to be resolved, it would resolve their disagreement over factuality. I will present Fine's argument in two main parts. In the first part, Fine establishes that our disputants will disagree about a matter of ground, the resolution of which will resolve their disagreement over factuality. In the second part, Fine explains how to resolve disagreements over ground. It should be noted that, in the interest of brevity, my presentation of Fine's argument diverges in several respects from Fine's. However, as far as I can tell, none of these divergences make a difference, at least for our purposes.

Part 1: Establishing the key disagreement over ground.

Let us call the domain in dispute 'X', and recall that our disputants have opinions about what kind of facts X is ultimately grounded in. In order to isolate the key disagreement over ground, Fine assumes that the disputants will agree on what ultimately grounds X. As long as disagreements over ground are tractable (a matter we will turn to in Part 2), this assumption is harmless. For, even if the disputants initially disagree over what grounds X, they will have a tractable way of resolving that disagreement. Once they do, they will be in the same position as disputants who initially agree on what grounds X.

Starting from an initial agreement over what ultimately grounds X, Fine establishes our disputants' key disagreement over ground in three stages. In the first stage, Fine shows that our disputants will disagree about the factual status of some basic domain Z, a disagreement that, if resolved, will resolve their disagreement over the factuality of X. In the second stage, Fine explains why our disputants ought to agree that at least some aspects of Z's practice are factual. In the third and final stage, Fine shows that our disputants will

disagree over what grounds those aspects of Z's practice, a disagreement that, if resolved, will resolve their disagreement over Z's factuality. If all of these stages are successful, then Fine will have established our disputants' key disagreement over ground.

Stage 1: Showing that our disputants will disagree about the factual status of some basic domain Z, a disagreement that, if resolved, will resolve their disagreement over the factuality of X.

Recall that we are assuming at this point that our disputants agree on what ultimately grounds X. If our disputants agree on what ultimately grounds X, this is either because they agree that there are certain other kinds of facts that X is ultimately grounded in, or because they agree that X is 'basic' and so not grounded in any other kinds of facts.⁵⁸ If our disputants agree that X is basic, then we may proceed to Stage 2, since, in that case, $Z = X$.

If our disputants agree that X is ultimately grounded in certain other kinds of facts, then, Fine argues, they will disagree about the factual status of at least a subset of the facts that ultimately ground X. In support of this claim, Fine appeals to a fact about metaphysical ground: A domain that is grounded in other kinds of facts is factual if and only if all of the kinds of facts that it is grounded in are factual. If our disputants accept this fact, then the anti-factualist about X will be an anti-factualist about at least one of the kinds of fact that ground X. Whatever that kind of fact is, call it 'Y'. The anti-factualist about X, then, will be an anti-factualist about Y. The factualist about X, on the other hand, will be a factualist about Y, since he will be a factualist about all of the facts that ground X. We can now proceed to Stage 2 since, in this case, $Z=Y$.

⁵⁸ Fine is here assuming that our disputants will agree that, if X is not basic, it is ultimately grounded in some facts or other. That is, he is assuming that our disputants will reject the possibility of an infinite regress on grounds. Fine thinks that this is an assumption that he can ultimately do without. For ease of exposition, I am happy to grant the assumption to him here.

Stage 2: Explaining why our disputants ought to agree that at least some aspects of Z's practice are factual.

Imagine that our disputants' initial disagreement was over the factual status of ordinary moral facts, a domain that they agree to be basic. In this case, Z = the ordinary moral facts of the matter. While our disputants agree that it is a fact that we ought not torture innocents, they disagree over whether or not that fact is factual in Fine's special sense of factuality that is relevant to the question of realism and independent of our ordinary moral beliefs. Despite their disagreement, Fine argues, they ought to agree that certain aspects of moral practice are factual in his specialized sense. Specifically, it is plausible that our disputants will agree that at least one of the following statements concerns a factual matter:

- (I) Frank said that lying is morally wrong.
- (II) "morally wrong" refers to moral wrongness.
- (III) Frank is less biased in moral matters than Jan is.
- (IV) Jan's belief that Frank did something morally wrong is unjustified.

Fine's thought is that, even if ordinary moral facts are not part of the "real world," moral practice is. Even if we are radical anti-factualists about meaning, and so reject the factuality (I) and (II), we will at least agree that the epistemic aspects of moral practice are factual:

Our epistemic activity must somehow engage with the real world; there must be something that we aim for – in aiming to be well-placed epistemic agents – whose realization is a factual matter.⁵⁹

The factualist about ordinary moral facts will of course think that the epistemic standards in play in our moral practice are factual, for she will identify those epistemic standards with the ordinary moral facts of the matter that she takes to be factual. Since the anti-factualist about

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

morality thinks that ordinary moral facts are nonfactual, he will either similarly regard the epistemic standards in play in our moral practice as nonfactual, or he will locate those standards somewhere other than in the moral facts of the matter. Fine argues that he ought to opt for the latter option. The anti-factualist should acknowledge that there is a factual epistemic standard “in the shadow of” the nonfactual moral standard. If the anti-factualist takes this advice, then both the factualist and anti-factualist will agree that at least certain aspects of our moral practice are factual.

Stage 3: Showing that our disputants will disagree over what grounds those factual aspects of Z’s practice.

Consider again the facts expressed by (I) – (IV). Plausibly, those facts are not basic. That is, if (I) – (IV) are indeed facts of the matter, then they are grounded in other facts, facts that explain why (I) – (IV) obtain. Consider (III) and (IV) in particular. If (III) and (IV) are facts of the matter, then part of the explanation of why they are facts of the matter will point to what is, in fact, the epistemic standard of moral practice. (III) and (IV), then, will be partially grounded in facts about the epistemic standard of moral practice.

In Stage 2, we established that our disputants will agree that there are aspects of Z’s practice (of the kind expressed by (I) – (IV)) that are factual. As we saw above, Fine believes that every fact that is factual and grounded in other facts is wholly grounded in other facts that are factual. Assuming that our disputants accept this, what this means is that both our factualist and our anti-factualist will be committed to grounding the factual aspects of Z’s practice in facts that they take to be factual.

The fact that the factualist is committed to grounding the factual aspects of Z’s practice in facts that are themselves factual puts constraints on which facts the factualist can

believe those aspects of Z's practice to be grounded in. Specifically, Fine argues, the factalist is compelled to believe that the factual aspects of Z's practice are at least partially grounded in the facts that compose Z. This is because the factalist believes that the facts that compose Z are both factual and basic. To turn back to our example, if you believe that the ordinary moral facts are basic and factual, then, if you believe any of (I) – (IV) to be factual, you are committed to at least partially grounding them in the moral facts of the matter. Fine argues that it is just another fact about metaphysical ground that, if a domain is factual and basic, it will at least partially ground all of the factual aspects of its practice. Now let us turn to our anti-factalist.

The fact that our anti-factalist is committed to grounding the factual aspects of Z's practice in facts that are themselves factual puts constraints on which facts he can believe those aspects of Z's practice to be grounded in. Specifically, since our anti-factalist takes Z to be non-factual, he is committed to grounding the factual aspects of Z's practice in something other than the facts that compose Z.

We have arrived at our key disagreement over ground. To recap, in Stages 2 and 3, we established that our disputants' disagreement about the factual status of Z leads them to disagree about what grounds the factual aspects of Z's practice. The factalist is compelled to at least partially ground the factual aspects of Z's practice in the facts that compose Z. The anti-factalist, on the other hand, is compelled to disagree. Since this disagreement over ground flows from our disputants' disagreement over the factual status of Z, a resolution of the former disagreement should lead to a resolution of the latter. Further, as we saw in Stage 1, our disputants' disagreement over the factual status of Z flows from their disagreement over the factual status of X. Thus, if our disputants can resolve their disagreement over what

grounds the factual aspects of Z's practice, this should resolve their disagreement over the factual status of X. That is, we have found our disputants' key disagreement over ground. All that remains is to show how disagreements over ground can be resolved.

Part 2: How to resolve disagreements over ground.

As we have seen, our factualist is compelled to ground the factual aspects of Z's practice at least partially in the facts that compose Z. Our anti-factualist, on the other hand, is compelled to disagree; he is forced to wholly ground the factual aspects of Z's practice in facts other than the facts that compose Z. What allows us to decide between these two accounts, Fine argues, are the challenges inherent to each. Whichever account best meets the challenges that it faces is the account that we ought to go with. Fine gives us a hint as to what these challenges will involve in the cases of mathematics, morality, and meaning:

Can the moral factualist account for the motivational role of moral belief or the moral antifactualist account for its inferential role? Can the mathematical factualist account for the referential capacity of mathematical language, or the constructivist for its application to science? Can the factualist about meaning provide an adequate account of the grounds for the meaning statements that we make, or the antifactualist an adequate account for the factual standards of correctness by which they appear to be governed? It is on their answer to these and many other such questions that the correctness of a factualist or antifactualist position will ultimately be settled.⁶⁰

Whether or not we ought to believe that a basic domain is factual depends on whether or not there is a compelling account that grounds its practice in the facts that compose the domain. If ordinary moral facts are basic, then we should believe them to be factual just in case there is a compelling account that grounds moral practice in ordinary moral facts. Developing an account of ground and getting clear on exactly which challenges it has to meet requires doing a lot of philosophy. Indeed, Fine argues that being in a position to adjudicate

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

between the two competing accounts of ground requires that we resolve most of the major philosophical problems in the area in question. For example, it is often claimed that our moral beliefs are motivational in a special kind of way. If that is right, then we have one criterion by which to judge an account of what grounds the factual aspects of moral practice: does it respect and explain the relationship between moral beliefs and motivation? Of course, what exactly that relationship is is a good philosophical question, a question that we will have to answer before we will be able to use it to help us adjudicate between competing accounts.

Fine argues that the same goes for other potential criteria. Consider mathematics. The account of what grounds mathematical practice ought to harmonize with mathematical epistemology. If mathematical truths can be known a priori, for example, then the story about what grounds the factual aspects of mathematical practice ought to allow for and perhaps explain that possibility. Of course, whether or not mathematical truths can be known a priori is a good philosophical question. It is a question that we will have to answer before we can be in a position to adjudicate between competing accounts of ground.

In general, Fine thinks that the criteria by which we will judge the competing accounts of ground will center around issues concerning the relevant domain's epistemology, language, and psychology. In order to generate such criteria, we will need to settle a plethora of hard questions in epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophy of psychology.

That, in sketch, is Fine's methodology for resolving disagreements about factuality. It represents Fine's attempt to show that there are intelligible and tractable questions about factuality that are relevant to the question of realism and independent of our ordinary pre-philosophical beliefs. Of course, Fine has not given us an easy way to resolve disagreements

over factuality in his specialized sense. However, the methodological difficulties implied by Fine's picture are not necessarily a drawback. Indeed, Fine argues that they are a virtue of his position: Grasping the difficulties involved in resolving matters of ground helps us better understand why progress on the realism debate has been so slow-going. As it turns out, answers to the realism debate's key questions represent the near terminus of philosophical inquiry.

Now let us turn to evaluating Fine's methodology for answering questions about factuality. I take it that Fine has established that every reasonable disagreement over factuality will imply one or more disagreements over ground that, if resolved, will allow us to resolve the disagreement over factuality. He has also made a plausible case that, where there is initial agreement over what ultimately grounds the domain in question, the key disagreement over ground is tractable. However, this is not enough. Or so I will argue. In order to bring out my dissatisfaction with Fine's methodology, I will focus on a kind of dispute that Fine does not attend to in detail, a disagreement over factuality in which the disputants do not initially agree about what ultimately grounds the domain in question. I will argue that Fine has not given us the resources to resolve such a disagreement. Further, I will argue that Fine's inability to handle this kind of case shows that he has given us no reason to think that questions about factuality are answerable or even intelligible.

Above, at the beginning of our discussion of Part I of Fine's argument, I suggested one possible explanation for why Fine does not go into detail about the sort of disagreement I am about to consider. Fine may be thinking that, in order to turn my kind of disagreement into the sort of disagreement that he focuses on, we just have to resolve the initial disagreement over what ultimately grounds the domain in question. And surely that is right.

But the question is: How can that initial disagreement over ground be resolved? Fine has given us a plausible way of resolving the kind of disagreement over ground that arises between a factualist and anti-factualist who initially agree on what ultimately grounds the domain in question. Fine might be thinking that, in doing that, he has given us a *general* methodology for resolving disagreements over ground. If Fine were right to think this, then the sort of case I am about to consider poses no problem for him. However, as I will bring out, if Fine thinks he has given us a general methodology for resolving disagreements over ground, he is mistaken. Specifically, I will argue that the methodological details that Fine does give us are not enough to resolve the initial disagreement over ground I am about to consider. But enough foretaste. It is time to dive into the details.

Consider a disagreement over the factual status of a domain in which the anti-factualist believes the domain to be basic, and the factualist believes the domain to be grounded in certain other kinds of facts. For example, let's consider a disagreement over the factual status of color facts. Our disputants agree that the canary in the front of the room is canary yellow. However, they disagree about the factual status of that color fact, in Fine's specialized sense of factuality. Our anti-factualist believes that color facts are basic. Our factualist, on the other hand believes that color facts are grounded in facts about color appearances, facts about what color things would appear to be in certain conditions. According to our factualist, then, the fact that the canary is canary yellow is grounded in the fact that it would appear to be canary yellow in certain conditions.

As conceded above, if we can establish the tractability of our disputants' initial disagreement over ground, the tractability of their disagreement over factuality will follow. This is because resolving their initial disagreement about ground would turn their

disagreement into Fine's paradigm case of disagreement, which we have conceded to be tractable. So, the key question is: Is our disputants' initial disagreement over ground tractable? If Fine has given us the tools to resolve this disagreement, we should expect our disputants' initial disagreement over ground to lead them to give competing accounts of what grounds a certain practice. The tractability of their initial disagreement over ground will then follow from our ability to decide between their competing accounts. Let us see where this strategy takes us.

Which practice will the factualist and anti-factualist be compelled to give competing accounts of? In our example, it seems that there are two possibilities. On the one hand, there is our color practice, the practice that is centered on color facts. On the other hand, there is what we might call our color appearance practice, the practice that is centered on what color things would appear to be in different conditions. Unfortunately for Fine, our disputants are not forced to give competing accounts of either of these practices.

Consider our color appearance practice. True, our anti-factualist's belief that color facts are non-factual precludes him from grounding the factual aspects of our color appearance practice in facts about color. However, our factualist will equally deny that our color appearance practice is grounded in facts about color. If she believed otherwise, then she wouldn't believe that color facts are grounded in facts about color appearance. Given that our factualist is not going to ground our color appearance practice in color facts, it looks like, no matter what account our factualist gives about what grounds our color appearance practice, our anti-factualist can give the exact same account. There is no forced disagreement in their accounts of what grounds our color appearance practice.

Let us now consider our color practice. Our factualist, remember, believes that color

facts are ultimately grounded in facts about color appearance. As a result, our factualist's account of what grounds color practice is plausibly constrained. Since our factualist believes that color facts are, in a sense, nothing over and above color appearance facts, her account of what grounds our color practice will presumably have to be contained in her account of what grounds our color appearance practice. And the fact that our factualist believes that facts about color appearance are basic constrains the story that she can tell about our color appearance practice. As we saw in our discussion of Fine's paradigm case of disagreement, Fine argues that, if you believe a domain to be basic and factual, you are committed to at least partially grounding its practice in the facts that compose the domain. Which means that our factualist is plausibly forced to at least partially ground our color practice in facts about color appearance.

What about our anti-factualist? According to Fine, he will feel compelled to hold that there are aspects of our color practice that are grounded in the real world. Since he denies that color facts are part of the real world, he cannot believe that our color practice is grounded in color facts. However, there is nothing preventing our anti-factualist from believing that facts about color appearance are factual. And there is nothing preventing our anti-factualist from grounding our color practice in facts about color appearance. Our anti-factualist could, for example, locate the factual epistemic standard in play in color practice in facts about color appearance. Indeed, there is nothing preventing our anti-factualist from giving the exact same account of what grounds our color practice that our factualist gives. Our disputants are not compelled to give competing accounts of what grounds our color practice.

Since it is open to our disputants to give the exact same accounts regarding what

grounds both our color practice and our color appearance practice, it is not clear how their initial disagreement over ground can be resolved. Certainly, Fine has not given us the resources to resolve their disagreement. And, without a way to resolve their initial disagreement over ground, we have no way of resolving their disagreement over factuality.

Consider the different possible combinations of factuality and ground. A domain X is either:

- (1) Basic and factual.
- (2) Non-basic and factual.
- (3) Basic and non-factual.
- (4) Non-basic and non-factual.

With Fine's methodology in hand, what are we in a position to figure out about X? Well, if there is a compelling case to be made for (1), then there is compelling account to be given in which X's practice is grounded in X-facts. Further, the account in which X's practice is grounded in X-facts is, for reasons we have already rehearsed, not available to the would-be defender of (2), (3), or (4). So, Fine's methodology gives us a tractable way of deciding between (1) and any of (2), (3), and (4). We just have to decide whether or not the best account about X's practice is one that grounds it in X-facts. Unfortunately, if we decide that X's practice is not grounded in X-facts, Fine has given us no insight into how to choose between (2), (3), and (4). Which means that, in such a case, Fine has given us no way to figure out whether or not X is factual.

How damaging is this limitation in Fine's methodology? It might appear to be insignificant. After all, even if Fine's methodology is limited, doesn't it still give us the resources for resolving some debates about factuality, and isn't that enough to establish the

intelligibility of questions concerning Fine's special sense of factuality? I am not so sure. In what follows, I will argue that the way in which Fine's methodology is limited shows that he has not really given us a way to answer questions *about factuality*. As a result, he has not given us any reason to think that questions about factuality are even intelligible.

Fine's methodology is not able to resolve the disagreement between a factualist who takes X to be grounded in Y and an anti-factualist who takes X to be basic (and grounds X's practice in Y). In order to grasp the significance of this limitation, we need to grasp the significance of the dispute. What is the difference between these two positions, and what would it take to resolve them? Plausibly, what our factualist and anti-factualist are disagreeing about is precisely *the factuality of X*, and that's it. That is, the only difference between our disputants is that one is an anti-factualist and the other is a factualist. So, in our disagreement, what we have managed to do is to isolate a disagreement about factuality. Which means that, in order to resolve our disagreement, what we need is a methodology for resolving disagreements *about factuality*. While Fine claims to have given us precisely that methodology, what he has given us is in fact incapable of resolving our disagreement. Which means that Fine's methodology is not what he proclaims it to be.

Fine's ability to resolve the disagreement that he considers, then, is not explained by its being a disagreement over factuality. Indeed, Fine is only able to resolve his disagreement because it is *not* a (mere) disagreement over factuality. If the disagreement that Fine considers isn't a (mere) disagreement over the factuality of X, what is it? It is a disagreement about whether or not X is factual *and basic*. This realization puts us in a position to see Fine's methodology for what it is. It is a methodology for figuring out whether or not a certain domain is *factual and basic*.

Where does this leave Fine's claim that he has shown questions of factuality to be intelligible and answerable? Well, in giving us a tractable methodology for resolving disagreements over whether or not a certain domain is factual and basic, Fine has plausibly given us a compelling argument that such disagreements are both intelligible and tractable. It does not follow, however, that Fine has established that questions of (mere) factuality are answerable or even intelligible. It is worth noting that Fine is in a position to establish the intelligibility of his special sense of factuality, if he could just explain the relationship between the concepts "factual" and "basic factual." However, accomplishing *that* feat would require Fine to either give a substantial characterization of the concept of factuality (a task that he believes to be impossible), or at least a methodology for resolving disagreements *about factuality*. That is, it would require Fine to do exactly what he set out to do in the first place.

Let us now turn to Fine's question of irreducibility. Fine notes that, in order for a domain to be fully real, it is not enough for it to be irreducible in his specialized sense. It needs to be irreducible *and factual*. Fine calls a domain that is irreducible and factual "fundamentally real." He then attempts to outline a methodology for answering questions about fundamentally reality. Fine's hope is that this methodology will establish the intelligibility of such questions.

According to Fine's picture, in order to figure out what is fundamentally real, we need to first figure out what is factual. Surprisingly, this does not obviously doom Fine's discussion of fundamental reality. This is because Fine takes facts that are both basic and factual to be paradigm examples of facts that are fundamentally real. And, as we saw above, Fine has successfully given us a methodology for establishing which facts are both basic and

factual. Unfortunately, the methodology that we outlined above is not quite a methodology for figuring out which facts are fundamentally real. Facts that are basic and factual may be paradigm examples of facts that are fundamentally real. They do not, however, exhaust all of the fundamentally real facts that there might be:

Just as we cannot read off what is real from what is basic, so we cannot read off what is unreal from what is nonbasic. Indeed, it is possible to imagine metaphysical scenarios in which the nonbasic, or grounded, is plausibly taken to be real. Suppose, to take one kind of case, that Aristotle is right about the nature of water and that it is both indefinitely divisible and water through-and-through. Then it is plausible that any proposition about the location of a given body of water is grounded in some propositions about the location of smaller bodies of water (and in nothing else). The proposition that this body of water is here, in front of me, for example, will be grounded in the proposition that the one half is here, to the left, and the other half there, to the right. But which of all these various propositions describing the location of water is real? We cannot say some are real and some not, since there is no basis upon which such a distinction might be made. Thus we must say either that they are all real or that none are. But given that the location of water is a factual matter, we should take all of them to be real, notwithstanding the fact that each is grounded in propositions of the very same sort.⁶¹

So, Fine wants to say, a fact's being non-basic does not preclude it from being fundamentally real. If water is like Aristotle thought it was, then facts about water location are a case in point. Unfortunately, Fine has no way of establishing whether or not facts like these Aristotelian facts about water location are a part of fundamental reality. As a result, he cannot claim tractability or even intelligibility for his questions concerning fundamental reality. Let me explain

Fine's reasoning about Aristotelian water location assumes that we have established that facts about water location are non-basic and factual. On that assumption, Fine proceeds to argue that we are compelled to admit that facts about Aristotelian water location are fundamentally real. I will take Fine's reasoning to be compelling. The problem is that, in

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 27.

order to ever be in a position to employ Fine's reasoning about a kind of fact, we will need to have established that that kind of fact is non-basic and factual. And, given our critical discussion of Fine's special sense of factuality, it is doubtful that Fine has given us the resources to be able to do that.

Above, I argued that Fine has not adequately distinguished between a fact being factual and non-basic, on the one hand, and it being basic and non-factual, on the other. Applied to the example of Aristotelian water, where A, B, and C are all facts about Aristotelian water location, Fine is unable to distinguish between these two possibilities:

(1) A is factual and grounded in B and C.

(2) A is basic and non-factual and A's practice is (partially) grounded in B and C.

But is it really true that Fine can't distinguish between (1) and (2)? Granted, if our above discussion is correct, then Fine has no *general* method for distinguishing between something's being non-basic and factual, on the one hand, and basic and non-factual, on the other. However, it might appear possible, for all that we have established, that Fine can distinguish between these alternatives in some particular cases. The key question, then, is whether or not there is something particular to the decision between (1) and (2) that enables Fine to distinguish and choose between them in this particular case.

And indeed, it might seem like there is. Consider. In order to hold (2), we will have to hold that water facts B and C are factual. Our admitting that there are factual aspects of A's practice will compel us to do so. As a result, in order to hold (2), we would have to hold that, while some facts about water location are factual, others are not. But this asymmetry seems untenable. Facts about water location either all have to be non-factual, or else they all have to be factual, *no matter what it is to be factual*. If that is right, then it looks like Fine

has a way to choose between (1) and (2), since he has a reason to dismiss (2) as untenable. And, with (1)'s victory would seem to come Fine's being able to legitimately claim to have given us a methodology for resolving disputes about fundamental reality.

So, as long as Fine's special sense of factuality has some content or other, Fine has a methodology for answering questions about fundamental reality. The problem, however, is that, as we saw above, Fine has given us no reason to think that his special sense of factuality has any content whatsoever. Unfortunately for Fine, this means that, while he may have established the intelligibility of "basic factual", and therefore the intelligibility of "a paradigm example of being fundamentally real," he has neither established the tractability nor the intelligibility of debates about whether or not some kind of fact is "fundamentally real."

Without a case for the intelligibility of his special sense of factuality, Fine has no way to establish a methodology for answering questions about fundamental reality. But establishing such a methodology was Fine's only way of establishing the intelligibility of such questions. So, Fine has given us no reason to think that questions about factuality and fundamental reality are answerable or even intelligible. As noted, Fine has given us reason to believe that it is intelligible to ask whether or not a fact is "a paradigm example of being fundamentally real," but that's it. And that's not much.

Chapter 6: Where Wright Goes Wrong

Like me, Crispin Wright believes that there is a way in which a domain can depend on modal sociological facts that is relevant to the question of realism. Wright calls his dependence relation “judgment-dependence.” In a lengthy appendix to *Truth and Objectivity*, Wright attempts to give us a substantial characterization of what it is to be judgment-dependent.⁶² In chapter 2, we encountered Gideon Rosen’s compelling argument against the relevance of judgment-dependence to the question of realism. In this chapter, I will set its relevance to the question of realism to the side. Instead, I will focus my attention on two other shortcomings of Wright’s dependence relation. First, I will put forward an argument that, despite Wright’s best efforts, he has failed to give us an informative characterization of what it is to be judgment-dependent. If I am right, then Wright has failed to give us any reason to think that the concept of judgment-dependence is even intelligible. Afterwards, I will argue that, even if the concept of judgment-dependence were intelligible, it would be of little dialectical value.

In Plato’s *Euthyphro*,⁶³ Socrates and Euthyphro agree that:

(A) An act is pious if and only if it is loved by the gods.

Despite their agreement, Socrates and Euthyphro purport to disagree about the nature of piety. Their disagreement is reflected in their respective reasons for believing the biconditional (A) to be true. Socrates believes (A) to be true because he believes the

⁶² Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 108-139.

⁶³ Plato, *Euthyphro*, Trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, pp. 1-16.

gods to be impeccable epistemic agents that let their beliefs about which acts are pious determine which acts they love. Euthyphro, by contrast, believes (A) to be true because he believes that whether or not the gods love an act *determines* whether or not the act is pious.

Unfortunately, Plato never tells us how exactly Euthyphro believes pious acts to be related to the gods' love. Is it that the property of being a pious act is *identical* to the property of being an act that is loved by the gods? Or is the relationship between the two properties supposed to be more sophisticated? Does there even exist a relationship other than identity that could underpin Euthyphro's position? Crispin Wright argues that this last question can be answered in the affirmative.

Wright argues that identity is not the only relation that can allow a subject's attitude towards an object to determine the nature of the object. Where the attitude in question is that of judgment, Wright calls the relation he has in mind "judgment-dependence." Wright believes that we can use the concept of judgment-dependence to have interesting debates about domains, debates that are relevant to the question of realism. Consider the following biconditional:

- (B) An object is red if and only if a normal observer would judge it to be red in standard lighting conditions.

Here, too, we can imagine two different kinds of reasons we might have for believing the biconditional to be true. On the one hand, our reasons might be Socratic. That is, we might believe that a normal observer in standard lighting conditions would be ideally situated to *track* facts about color. On the other hand, we might believe (B) to be true for Euthyphronic reasons. That is, we might believe that what color an object is is *determined* by what color a normal observer in standard lighting conditions would judge

the object to be. According to Wright, we can believe facts about colors to be determined by facts about counterfactual judgments without believing the two kinds of facts to be identical. To believe this would be to believe that colors are judgment-dependent.

While it is possible for a Socratic and a judgment-dependent Euthyphronist about color to agree on the truth of (B), Wright argues that they cannot agree on the truth of every kind of biconditional relating colors and counterfactual judgments. Specifically, Wright believes that there is a kind of *a priori* biconditional that the judgment-dependent Euthyphronist must endorse and the Socratic must deny. Wright devotes many pages to saying exactly what kind of a priori biconditional will do the trick. Wright's thought is that, if he can isolate that biconditional, he will have identified the essence of a Euthyphronic position that is not underpinned by identity. He will be in a position to say exactly what it is for a domain to be judgment-dependent.

Wright begins by telling us the form that the a priori biconditional will take.

Where 'p' is some fact:

- (1) The a priori biconditional is of the form: p if and only if <insert description of a kind of subject here> in <insert description of a set of conditions here> would judge it to be a fact that p.

According to Wright, believing that p is judgment-dependent requires believing, of a biconditional that has the above form, that it is a priori true. However, merely specifying the form of the biconditional does not yet allow us to distinguish the Euthyphronist from the Socratic. This is because there are some biconditionals of the above form that the Socratic is free to endorse.

Consider, for example, any biconditional that describes the relevant subject as "the kind of subject that is bound to get things right in any conditions." Clearly, the

Socratic is free to believe all such conditionals to be a priori true. The same goes for biconditionals that describe the relevant conditions as “the kind of conditions that will ensure that any subject will get things right.” So, if we are going to come up with a kind of biconditional that the Socratic cannot endorse, we will have to put some restrictions on the kind of descriptions that it can contain. For starters:

- (2) The biconditional’s descriptions of the subject and conditions must not contain any “whatever it takes” shortcuts.

What other constraints must we put on the descriptions of subjects and conditions?

Wright explores whether there ought to be a restriction on what concepts can be employed in the descriptions. If we are trying to characterize the judgment-dependence of domain X, is it legitimate to use X-concepts to describe the subjects and conditions? Well, one might ask, why not? What vice is it that we have to make sure that our descriptions avoid? We don’t have to worry about the charge of circularity, for, as we have seen, the X-facts are not to be *identified* with the facts about judgment. What, then, do we have to worry about?

Wright’s worry is that certain uses of X-concepts in the descriptions might make demands on the extensions of those concepts that are incompatible with X being judgment-dependent. Let’s say we are trying to construct a biconditional in order to characterize judgment-dependence about color. Since it may take a subject some time to form his judgment about the color of an object (he may want to view the object from more than one angle, for example), it seems important that the object in question *remain the same color* throughout that period of time. So, in describing the conditions for making color judgments, it is tempting to insert a clause requiring such color stability. However, Wright argues, it is not obvious that it is legitimate to do so.

If facts about colors are judgment-dependent, then so are facts about color stability. However, if facts about color stability are in some sense *determined* by facts about certain color judgments, then it is not clear how we can use facts about color stability to specify the nature of those very color judgments. Using facts about color stability to specify the nature of certain color judgments would seem to presuppose that facts about color stability are independent of those color-judgments. If that is right, then we cannot use facts about color stability in our characterization of judgment-dependence about color.

Wright's hunch is that there are some ways of using X-concepts in descriptions that are compatible with judgment-dependence about X, and there are other ways that are not. Let's say that he's right. What follows? Well, for one thing, we need to add another constraint on the descriptions that are allowed to appear in our biconditional, something along the lines of:

(3A) All of the uses of concepts in the descriptions of the subject and conditions must be compatible with the truth of judgment-dependence about p.

Of course, because it uses the concept of judgment-dependence, this formulation of the constraint is no good to us. Remember, we are using the constraint in order to pin down a kind of biconditional that will allow us to say what "judgment-dependence" amounts to. What we need is a formulation of the constraint that is equivalent to (3A), but does not make use of the concept of judgment-dependence.

Wright proposes that we take "a somewhat conservative response to this difficult matter."⁶⁴ Rather than attempting to spell out exactly what uses of concepts would be compatible with judgment-dependence about p, Wright notes that there are some ways of

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 122.

describing subjects and conditions that clearly avoid the worry that prompted the need for a clause like (3A). Where we are concerned with domain X, the easiest way to ensure that our conceptual choices are not making demands on the extensions of X-concepts that are incompatible with the judgment-dependence of X is to make conceptual choices that make *no* demands on the extensions of X-concepts. The most obvious way to do that would be to simply *avoid X-concepts altogether* in our descriptions of subjects and conditions. Another option would be to only use X-concepts within intensional contexts. Indeed, it is already built into our biconditional that our subject would judge that p. This use of “p”, however, is obviously compatible with p’s judgment-dependence, since it makes no requirements whatsoever on the extensions of the concepts in “p.” The same goes for intensional contexts generally. Wright’s “conservative response” is to only use X-concepts on the right-hand-side of the biconditional within intensional contexts:

(3B) If any X-concepts occur within the descriptions of the subject or conditions, they must only occur within intensional contexts.

(3B) is an improvement over (3A) insofar as it doesn’t use the concept of judgment-dependence in order to state the constraint. Further, if we respect (3B), we will avoid the worry that prompted it. The problem with taking this “conservative response” is that, as Wright himself acknowledges, it is probably not necessary that we do so. (That is why Wright dubs it “conservative.”) That is, on the assumption that there are some uses of X-concepts outside of intensional contexts that are compatible with X being judgment-dependent, it is not necessary that a judgment-dependent Euthyphronist about X respect (3B). Someone can be a judgment-dependent Euthyphronist without believing a biconditional of *that* kind to be *priori* true. And since it is a characterization of judgment-dependence that we are after, this is problematic. For, any set of conditions

that contains (3B) will not pick out a biconditional that can be used to characterize judgment-dependence. Wright, nevertheless, leaves (3B) in his characterization.

Does Wright's acceptance of (3B) damn his project? Yes it does, so long as we conceive of his project as an attempt to characterize the essence of a Euthyphronic position that is not underpinned by identity. However, perhaps Wright's project can be reconceived. If we conceive of the "judgment-dependence" of a domain as being just one way in which a domain's nature can be determined by facts about judgment without being identical to them, then we are free to use (3B) in a characterization of judgment-dependence. And successfully characterizing even this modest conception of "judgment-dependence" would still be an accomplishment. It would establish the intelligibility of a kind of Euthyphronic position that is not underpinned by identity. So, let us proceed in order to see whether or not Wright's project, so reconceived, can be completed.

So far, we have a judgment-dependent Euthyphronist about domain X as someone who believes a certain set of biconditionals to be a priori true, where the biconditionals in question (i) link X-facts to certain judgments about-X facts, (ii) describe the subjects making the judgments and the conditions in which the judgments are made without using any whatever-it-takes shortcuts, and (iii) if those descriptions contain any X-concepts, they only occur within intensional contexts. Are we done? Have we successfully articulated a kind of Euthyphronism that is not underpinned by identity? Not quite. For, as Wright notes, it is still possible for a Socratic to believe the very same set of biconditionals to be a priori true.

Considers facts about pain. Wright thinks that it is plausible that pain facts sustain a set of a priori true biconditionals that meet conditions (i), (ii), and (iii).

However, even if that is right, it does not follow that pain facts are Euthyphronic. For, it is open to the Socratic to claim that, while pain facts are judgment-independent, a priori reflection on the nature of pain facts leads us to appreciate that we can infallibly track them in certain conditions. Indeed, Wright argues that such a position is plausible. So, it looks like our characterization of judgment-dependence is not yet complete. We have to add another condition to our set.

If a Socratic and a Euthyphronist both agree on the a priori truth of a biconditional that meets conditions (i)-(iii), what distinguishes their respective positions? It is tempting to describe their disagreement in terms of explanation. While they both believe the biconditional to be a priori true, they disagree over what explains its a priori truth. This suggests a condition along the following lines:

(5A) The explanation of the a priori truth of the biconditional is the truth of judgment-dependence about X.

Of course, we can't accept (5A) into our set of conditions, for the same reasons that we were compelled to reject (3A). What are the prospects for coming up with an informative alternative to (5A)? Wright's proposal goes as follows:

[T]he distinction should be captured along the following lines. Where it is possible, without mention of human judgment or the conditions under which, in the case in question, such judgment would be best, either fully to analyze, or at least to draw attention to very general characteristics of the truth-conferring states of affairs in such a way that it is a *consequence* that there is an a priori guarantee that best opinion will be on track, then it is appropriate to think in terms of infallibility. Where it is not, where no further characterization of the type of states of affairs is possible in terms of which we can explain why it is possible to construct [biconditionals] meeting the other conditions, then the notion of [judgment-dependence] has its proper place.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 124.

I, for one, am not clear on exactly what Wright is suggesting in this passage.

Unfortunately, it is all that Wright gives us on the subject. Let's say that it is agreed that there is an a priori true biconditional meeting conditions (i)-(iii). How do we determine whether the explanation of the a priori truth of this biconditional is Euthyphronic or Socratic? Wright's suggestion seems to be that, in order to answer this question, we should engage in some a priori reflection on the domain in question. The question appears to be: when we a priori reflect on the nature of the domain, can we come to appreciate that there is a correlation between the facts that compose the domain and best opinion about that domain? That is, the question is: does a priori reflection on the domain lead us to accept an a priori biconditional meeting conditions (i)-(iii)? If so, then we should endorse a Socratic explanation of the a priori truth of the biconditional. If not, then we ought to go Euthyphronic. That, at least, is my best interpretation of Wright's comments. Unfortunately, as far as I can see, it is not an interpretation that can generate a plausible and informative condition that we can insert in place of (5A).

First, it is not at all clear to me why Euthyphronic domains cannot pass the test that only Socratic domains are supposed to be able to pass. Wright says that if a priori reflection on the domain leads us to accept an a priori biconditional meeting conditions (i)-(iii), then Euthyphronism cannot be true. But the judgment-dependent Euthyphronist, recall, embraces the truth of this kind of a priori biconditional. How exactly did the Euthyphronist come to accept it if it wasn't by a priori reflecting on the domain in question? Obviously, unless there is a compelling answer to this question, there is no hope for turning Wright's comments into the kind of condition that we are looking for.

Second, I would like to know why every single domain doesn't come out as Socratic on Wright's view, for reasons that have nothing to do with whether or not it is in fact Socratic. For every domain, some subjects are going to be ruled out as candidates for getting things right all of the time under any conditions (subjects that lack certain concepts or a certain linguistic competency, for example). Similarly, for every domain, some conditions are going to be ruled out as candidates for enabling any subject to get things right all of the time (conditions in which the subject is paying no attention whatsoever, for example, or conditions in which the subject is asleep). So, the most that a priori reflection on a domain is going to yield is that some subjects get things right all of the time in some conditions. So, it is tempting to understand Wright's test as requiring that a priori reflection come up with a single subject that would get things right all of the time in certain conditions. But then every domain passes the test. For, it is a priori that God would get things right all of the time for all domains. Similarly, most subjects would get things right all of the time in conditions where God was telling them what's what.

Now, it might be objected that God gets things right all of the time via a whatever-it-takes property: omniscience. If that is right, then it looks like Wright avoids this worry by requiring that the biconditional in question meet conditions (i)-(iii). However, it is far from clear that this requirement actually avoids the problem. For, it is possible that God's omniscience is a priori deducible from certain other of his properties. If it is, then a priori reflection on any domain will still yield a subject that will get things right all of the time in certain conditions, where neither the subject nor the conditions are characterized in a whatever-it-takes kind of way. This is because a priori reflection on

any domain will lead us to accept the a priori truth of biconditionals linking its facts to what God (described via the characteristics from which His omniscience is a priori deducible) would judge to be the case in pretty much any situation, just as it will lead us to accept a priori biconditionals linking its facts to what pretty much any subject would judge to be the case if he had God (described in the same way) whispering in his ear. Unless Wright is willing to take on substantial theological commitments concerning how various descriptions of God are a priori related to each other, I am not sure how he can avoid this problem.

So, whether or not Wright has made progress towards an informative characterization of a kind of Euthyphronism that is not underpinned by identity depends on whether or not there is an informative alternative to (5A). As far as I can tell, Wright has not given us the means to create that condition. Which means that, unless there is an informative alternative to (5A) lurking in the murky passage I quoted above, Wright has failed to give us any reason to believe that his concept of judgment-dependence is even intelligible.

Now I want to criticize Wright's conception of judgment-dependence in a different kind of way. By giving us a characterization of judgment-dependence, Wright takes himself to have captured one way of drawing the Euthyphro contrast. That is, Wright takes himself to have found one way to distinguish Socratic domains from Euthyphronic domains. Intuitively, Socratic domains are domains that have to be robustly *detected* and *discovered*. Euthyphronic domains, on the other hand, are *projected*; they are *constructed* out of the epistemic practice that purports to "track" them. Above, we have called Wright's claim to have successfully done this into question. Here,

however, I want to set those criticisms to the side. I am happy to concede, for the sake of our discussion to follow, that Wright can overcome all of the objections I have raised to this point. What I want to explore now is the dialectical value of Wright's Euthyphro distinction.

One way to conceive of the concept of MS explanation is as an attempt to capture what it is for a domain to be Euthyphronic for a subject. That is, it is an attempt to say when the anti-realist's metaphors of "projection" and "construction" are appropriate. When there is an MS explanation of a subject's epistemic success, the domain is a projection of the subject's epistemic practice; the domain is Euthyphronic for the subject. When there is a non-MS explanation of the subject's epistemic success, by contrast, the subject can be said to robustly track the domain; the domain is Socratic for the subject.

As we saw in Chapter 3, the possibility of accepting an MS explanation plays an important dialectical role. Take any domain that we have ordinary pre-philosophical beliefs about. Perhaps for Moorean reasons, we are committed to our being to some extent epistemically in touch with that domain. The key question is: why do we do as well as we do? To the degree that we are epistemically successful, what explains our epistemic success? Perhaps there is an epistemic story to tell linking our epistemic practices to the domain that is as it is completely independently of our epistemic practices. But what if there is not? Should that compel us to give up our claim to epistemic success? No way. As I said, perhaps for Moorean reasons, we are not giving that up. But what other possibility is there? How can we hang on to our claim to epistemic success without being committed to a robust epistemology? By accepting an MS explanation of our

epistemic success. It is as a possible explanation of our epistemic success that MS explanation has its dialectical value.

A maximally dialectically interesting conception of Euthyphronism ought to be able to play the dialectical role that I take MS explanation to play. If the concept of judgment-dependence cannot play this role, then this a reason to try to draw the Euthyphro contrast in a different way. This is especially true if Rosen is right that the question of judgment-dependence is irrelevant to the question of realism. If Wright's conception of Euthyphronism cannot play the above dialectical role and is not relevant to the question of realism, then, while we can still ask whether or not a domain is "Euthyphronic" in Wright's sense, it is tempting to answer: Who cares?

In order to see why Wright's conception of Euthyphronism may not be able to play the above dialectical role, we must first appreciate that it is a consequence of Wright's characterization that there are a bunch of facts that we cannot be Euthyphronists about. Here's why:

- (6) According to Wright, Euthyphronism about X requires that it is a priori that, for every X-fact that actually obtains, a certain kind of subject would judge that it obtains in ideal conditions.
- (7) It is possible for facts to obtain in non-ideal conditions.
- (8) Moving from non-ideal conditions to ideal conditions requires a change in physical facts. (That is: The ideality of conditions supervenes on the physical facts.)
- (9) For any domain X that supervenes on the physical facts and is capable of changing, it is not a priori knowable that the kind of change involved in (8) will not change any X-facts.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ So, if mathematical facts, for example, are incapable of changing because they necessarily obtain, then this clause does not apply to them even though they (trivially) supervene on the physical facts.

It follows from (6)-(9) that, for every domain that supervenes on the physical facts and is capable of changing, some of its facts are not Euthyphronic. Let me attempt to spell this out a bit more. Perhaps an example will help. There are a bunch of color facts in the world right now. According to Wright, if color facts are Euthyphronic, then it is a priori that they would line up with the judgments a certain kind of subject would make about them in ideal conditions. Now, as a matter of fact, not all of the world's current color facts are obtaining in ideal conditions. (Consider facts concerning the color properties of an assortment of lizards at the Minnesota Zoo right now, in a cage, in a pitch-black room, resting up from today's performances). If we wanted to make the non-ideal conditions ideal, we would have to bring about some physical changes (for one thing, we would probably want to turn on the lights). So, if we want to be Euthyphronists about those color facts that are obtaining in non-ideal conditions, it looks like we have to believe that it is a priori that the changes brought about by making non-ideal conditions ideal will not change any of the color facts. However, this is simply not something that we can come to know a priori. Color facts supervene on physical facts, and the physical changes brought about by making non-ideal conditions ideal may very well bring about a change in the physical facts that color facts supervene on. Whether or not this would happen is (at least partially) a causal matter, and we cannot evaluate such causal matters a priori. Indeed, in the case of color, it isn't just that we can't a priori rule out potential color changes brought about by making non-ideal conditions ideal. In the case of color, it is plausible that such color changes actually happen. (If viewing the assortment of lizards in ideal conditions requires that we turn on the lights, and the assortment contains a chameleon, then making conditions ideal will likely change some of the color facts.) Generally, for

any domain X that supervenes on physical facts and is capable of changing, we cannot know a priori that the physical changes brought about by the transition from non-ideal conditions to ideal conditions will not induce a chameleon-like change in the X-facts. Which means that, given Wright's conception of Euthyphronism, we cannot be Euthyphronists about any X-facts that obtain in non-ideal conditions. X-facts that obtain in non-ideal conditions are Socratic.

Wright sees this implication of his view, and concedes that there is no way around it. We simply cannot be Euthyphronists about *all of* the facts of any domain that supervenes on physical facts and is capable of change. Wright takes consolation in the fact that we *can* be Euthyphronists about *some* of the facts of every domain. Specifically, we can be Euthyphronists about facts that obtain *in ideal conditions*. Returning to our color example, we can't be Euthyphronists about color facts obtaining in non-ideal conditions because of the chameleon worry. However, the chameleon worry does not apply to color facts obtaining in ideal conditions. Since color facts obtaining in ideal conditions are already in the conditions specified by the right hand side of the biconditional, the chameleon worry does not arise. And, importantly, for facts that obtain in ideal conditions, we can rule out the chameleon worry a priori. In this way, the chameleon worry does not preclude us from being Euthyphronists about color facts obtaining in ideal conditions. The same goes for every other domain.

That, at least, is Wright's thought. However, things are even worse than Wright realizes. For, Wright's characterization of Euthyphronism does not even allow us to be Euthyphronists about all of the facts obtaining in ideal conditions. Recall that:

- (6) According to Wright, Euthyphronism about X requires that it is a priori that, for every X-fact that actually obtains, a certain kind subject would judge that it obtains in ideal conditions.

And now consider:

- (10) It is possible for facts to obtain while not being evaluated by an ideal subject. (It is even possible for facts to obtain *in ideal conditions* while not being evaluated by an ideal subject.)
- (11) Moving from not being evaluated by an ideal subject to being evaluated by an ideal subject requires a change in physical facts. (That is: Whether or not a fact is being evaluated by an ideal subject supervenes on physical facts.)
- (12) For any domain X that supervenes on the physical facts and is capable of changing, it is not a priori knowable that the kind of change involved in (11) will not change any X-facts.

It appears that, given Wright's characterization of Euthyphronism, we can at most be Euthyphronists about facts that both obtain in ideal conditions and are being evaluated by an ideal subject. All other facts are Socratic.

Let us now address the question of whether or not Wright's conception of Euthyphronism can play the dialectical role I outlined above. In the envisioned dialectic, Euthyphronism about a domain functions as a possible explanation of our epistemic success with respect to that domain. It is a position that we can occupy if we neither want to commit ourselves to a Socratic epistemology nor want to give up our claim to epistemic success. The question is: Can Wright's conception of Euthyphronism act as an explanation of our epistemic success that is a legitimate dialectical alternative to a Socratic explanation of our epistemic success? The worry is: For domains that supervene on physical facts and are capable of changing, it cannot, since Wright's conception of Euthyphronism can only be true of facts that are both obtaining in ideal conditions and being evaluated by ideal subjects. Let us work through the matter.

Whether or not judgment-dependence can serve as a possible explanation of our epistemic success depends, unsurprisingly, on how epistemically successful we take ourselves to be. Specifically, it depends on (i) how many of us qualify as “ideal subjects,” (ii) how often facts obtain in “ideal conditions,” (iii) what kind of epistemic success non-ideal subjects enjoy, and (iv) what kind of epistemic success anyone can enjoy with respect to facts obtaining in non-ideal conditions. Our opinions on these various issues no doubt vary from domain to domain. Rather than attempt to say what exactly those opinions are (or ought to be) with respect to various domains, let us instead just consider some possibilities.

Consider some domain X that supervenes on physical facts and is capable of changing. Are any of us ideal subjects with respect to X? What this question amounts to here is: Is it a priori true of some conditions (substantially specified in the way we went over above) that subjects having the characteristics that some of us actually have will always correctly evaluate X-facts obtaining in those conditions? If none of us are actually ideal subjects in this sense, then Wright’s conception of Euthyphronism cannot explain our epistemic success. For, if none of us is ideal, then none of the facts with respect to which we enjoy epistemic success are Euthyphronic. (Recall: For reasons we went over above, it is a consequence of Wright’s characterization of Euthyphronism that facts not being evaluated by ideal subjects are all Socratic.)

Similarly, if X-facts never actually obtain in ideal conditions (in conditions in which it is a priori of some substantially specified subject that in those conditions he/she would always get things right), then Wright’s conception of Euthyphronism cannot explain our epistemic success. For, if X-facts never actually obtain in ideal conditions,

then none of the X-facts are Euthyphronic. (Recall: For reasons we went over above, it is a consequence of Wright's characterization of Euthyphronism that facts obtaining in non-ideal conditions are all Socratic.)

That just leaves those domains X for which some of us are ideal subjects and some X-facts obtain in ideal conditions. Here, Wright's conception of Euthyphronism has the potential to do some explanatory work. Specifically, it offers us an explanation of why those of us who are ideal get things right when evaluating those facts that obtain in ideal conditions. However, it strikes me as implausible that ideal subjects making judgments in ideal conditions will exhaust our epistemic success in any domain. Here's why. Plausibly, for every domain, some of us sometimes make mistakes. (As mentioned above, it seems plausible to me that we can even get pain facts wrong due to, e.g., extreme inattention.) Which means that there is no domain in which all of us are always ideal subjects and in which the facts only obtain in ideal conditions. Let a "non-ideal judgment" be a judgment that is either made by a non-ideal subject or else made in non-ideal conditions. It strikes me as plausible that, for all domains, some non-ideal judgments get things right (or at least approximately right) despite being non-ideal. Further, while some of the epistemic success enjoyed by non-ideal judgment can no doubt be chalked up to complete and utter luck, not all of it can. Sometimes non-ideal judgment gets things (at least approximately) right because, while non-ideal, the judgment in question is still pretty darn good. Plausibly, such cases arise for every domain. If they do, then that is unfortunate for Wright, since his conception of Euthyphronism cannot be used to explain this kind of epistemic success. Why not?

Because it is a consequence of Wright's characterization of Euthyphronism that the facts being appraised in non-ideal judgment are all Socratic.

Let us take stock. Wright's conception of Euthyphronism can plausibly explain some of our epistemic success for some domains: it can explain how those of us who are ideal subjects get things right when we are evaluating facts that obtain in ideal conditions. However, when we combine Wright's characterization of Euthyphronism with some extremely plausible claims about our epistemic success, we get the result that Euthyphronism cannot explain *all* of our epistemic success with respect to *any* domain that supervenes on physical facts and is capable of changing. With respect to such domains, Wright's Euthyphronist must concede that some of the facts are Socratic. And this concession precludes Wright's conception of Euthyphronism from playing the dialectical role I outlined above. Given Wright's characterization of Euthyphronism, Euthyphronism can never have a dialectical advantage over a whole-hearted Socratic position. Let me explain.

For all domains that supervene on physical facts and are capable of changing, Wright's Euthyphronist needs to explain our epistemic success with respect to some Socratic facts. Specifically, Wright's Euthyphronist owes us an explanation of how non-ideal judgment is able to robustly *track* facts in question, to the extent that it does. The Euthyphronist and the Socratic share this explanatory burden. Which is to say that the Euthyphronist must grant to the Socratic that there is a perfectly legitimate Socratic explanation in such cases. The problem for Wright's Euthyphronist is that, if he has to grant that there is a perfectly legitimate Socratic explanation of the epistemic success of non-ideal judgment, it is unclear how he could deny that there is a perfectly legitimate

Socratic explanation for the epistemic success of ideal judgment. If there is a Socratic story explaining how subjects who are engaging in non-ideal judgment can robustly track the facts to some degree, it should be easy to extend that story to explain how ideal subjects in ideal conditions can be perfectly track the facts. If that's right, then, while Wright's conception of Euthyphronism does offer an explanation of the epistemic success of ideal judgment that is not available to the Socratic, it is not an explanation that gives the Euthyphronist any dialectical advantage over the Socratic. Where Wright's Euthyphronist has a non-Socratic explanation of our epistemic success, he is compelled to admit that there is a perfectly legitimate Socratic alternative.

I suppose we could imagine a dialectical situation in which the Euthyphronist would seem to have an advantage over the Socratic. Consider a situation in which the Socratic leaves it as mysterious how any of us enjoy epistemic success in any situation. The Euthyphronist agrees that the success of non-ideal judgment is mysterious, but is able to explain our success when we are ideal and in ideal circumstances. In such a dialectical situation, doesn't the Euthyphronist emerge with the upper hand? I don't think so. The problem with the Euthyphronist's position in the imagined dialectic is that it is not a tenable *final* position. That is, while there may be things in the world that are simply brutally mysterious, and hence literally unexplainable, the epistemic success of non-ideal judgment is surely not one of them. If non-ideal judgment enjoys epistemic success, there really *has* to be an explanation for that fact. And, again, according to Wright's way of drawing the Euthyphro contrast, if there is an explanation of the epistemic success of non-ideal judgment, it is Socratic.

Thus, our argument concludes, Wright's conception of Euthyphronism cannot play the valuable dialectical role that we outlined above. This result, when combined with Rosen's criticism and the criticisms of the first half of this chapter, should motivate us to draw the Euthyphro contrast in some other kind of way. May I humbly suggest that we look in the direction of MS explanation.

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