
MANIFESTABILITY AND SEMANTIC REALISM

BY

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Abstract: This paper provides a critical discussion of Alexander Miller's recent attack on antirealist arguments against semantic realism that are based on manifestability requirements. Miller attempts to defend semantic realism against Wright-Hale arguments from manifestability. He does so in reliance on a McDowell type assertion-truth platitude. This paper argues in both general terms and in relation to the details of Miller's argument, that attempts to defend semantic realism while accepting a Dummettian-Wittgensteinian framework on theories of meaning, are misconceived and likely to fail, as I believe is true in Miller's case. Semantic realism is best defended within a context of metaphysical realism, and naturalistic-causal theories of meaning and explanation.

Alexander Miller, in a recent paper¹ argues against versions of the so-called manifestability argument against semantic realism. Miller examines and challenges both "weak" and "strong" antirealism. Amongst his conclusions are that (i) antirealists have conceded the failure of strong anti-semantic realism; so there is no reason (based on manifestability) to believe semantic realism is false; (ii) construing understanding as a practical ability provides a reason *for* holding semantic realism, insofar as it provides no reasons for rejecting realism, but does provide reasons for rejecting antirealism. Miller is concerned with the inner dialectic of the realism debate, and related onus of proof issues. However his more substantive conclusions, that there are reasons for rejecting antirealism, depend on arguments from platitudes linking assertion and truth. I will question those arguments. But I will also comment on the nature of the realism dialectic, arguing that it is preferable for realists to avoid getting into some kinds of discussion altogether.

1. *Background to the dispute*

Antirealism is defined by Miller as the view that for any declarative sentence *S*, our understanding of *S* consists in our grasp of its truth conditions, which are in principle detectable if they obtain, [25]. Semantic realism is taken (by Miller and his interlocutors) to be the view that for some declarative sentence *S* belonging to a domain of discourse *D*, our understanding of *S* consists in grasp of its truth-conditions, which may be capable of obtaining or failing to obtain undetectably. Realist truth-conditions, then, are potentially recognition-transcendent. Commitment to realist truth-conditions is a semantic commitment; that is, it is about properties of sentences. As such it coheres with, but is separate from, metaphysical realism, the view that the world and what it contains, the world most of our sentences are about, exists objectively and independently of the mind. Dummett has argued that the only way to give non-metaphorical content to realism is to treat it as a claim about the nature of truth-conditions. Realist truth-conditions are the conditions in virtue of which, if they obtain, the sentence is true. Viewed thus, they give some concrete content to the notion of a mind-independent and external world. Since what is actually in the world is one thing, and evidence concerning the obtaining or not of specific conditions is another, realism allows sentences to possess determinate truth-conditions when speakers are not in a position to determine whether those conditions obtain. Antirealists want to close this gap. This view, that sentences have realist truth-conditions, is perceived by many as preposterous. But to see why, it is necessary to review the way such philosophers approach theory of meaning. The sketch of sentences *having* realist truth-conditions that I offered above, in itself falls short of "semantic realism" as defined by my target protagonists. That thesis is about speaker's understanding or grasp of truth-conditions. It is therefore an epistemologised thesis. The sketch of realist truth-conditions I have just given is not. That, in a nutshell, is the problem with formulating the realism debate in terms of semantic realism as defined. It assumes from the outset a certain conceptual framework wherein meaning, truth, and understanding are linked in a particular way, ignoring the prior question of whether these things should be linked in that way. I will use the framework underlying semantic realism as defined by Miller *et al.* provisionally, but largely as a basis for critique that will enable me to put more forcefully the case for preferring an alternative framework.

Dummett is mostly responsible for recent antirealism. Like Frege, Dummett believes a theory of meaning must be more than a theory only of reference and truth. It must be a theory of what *speakers understand* in being able to use language. Frege is taken to have shown that the understanding of meaning cannot consist solely in associating a certain object

with a word as its referent. Nor merely in associating with a sentence a truth-condition. There must be some means by which the association is effected, the knowledge of which constitutes grasp of meaning. Frege² proposed that words had senses, and that the sense of a sentence was a function of the senses of the words of the sentence. Senses determine reference, and are, (along with tone), what speakers grasp in understanding language. Davidson's truth-theoretic-interpretationist theory can be viewed as a theory which, via a Tarski truth definition, generates T-sentences and thus, in a trivial way, "gives" or "states" truth-conditions for all the sentences of a language.³ Dummett, in *What is a theory of meaning?*⁴ concluded that Davidson's theory was inadequate because it could not show what a speaker's understanding consists in. While Davidson's theory may be viewed as in some sense giving the meanings, by giving the truth-conditions, for every sentence of the language, Dummett held that the mere *giving* of truth-conditions in the form of direct ascriptions, would not account for speaker understanding. Such a theory could be acceptable if it allowed a simple way to characterize what speaker knowledge of meanings consists in (p. 100). But if the direct ascriptions as generated by the theory are not such as to lend themselves to a simple characterization, then by not accounting for understanding, the theory would be unacceptable as a theory of meaning. A theory must account for the way speakers recognize or judge those truth-conditions to be fulfilled, (p. 119). It must give an explicit account of speaker knowledge of meaning (p. 123). A representation of knowledge of a practical ability, to be explanatory, must do more than just specify what someone has to know to have the ability, but also explain what it is for him to have that knowledge (p. 121). Dummett holds that speakers' understanding consists in grasping the propositions that sentences express. However, such a "grasp" must be explained in terms of specific practical abilities of speakers (p. 121). Like Wittgenstein, Dummett held, eventually, that understanding (of meaning) must (at least) explain (if not be exhausted by) competent *use*, in a way that can be accounted for by externally and publicly manifestable speakers' capacities. Many followers of Dummett have construed these abilities in verificationist terms.

Dummett also argued that *realist* truth-conditions are *not* suitable for theories of meaning. It could be argued that knowledge of a realist truth-condition may be manifested simply by the capacity to decide the truth of the sentence. But, Dummett argues, in the case of an undecidable sentence, which is one not in principle verifiable, the knowledge of its truth-condition cannot be manifestable. Consider the sentence, "Cleopatra tripped over a step the day after she met Mark Antony". The sentence is true if the individual named by 'Cleopatra' did the bodily movement designated with respect to the construction designated in the time designated after the acquaintance mentioned with the second individual named.

This is a specification of the truth-condition. The realist determines the truth-condition, following Frege, by a consideration of the referential properties of the sentence components and the structure of the sentence. This specification of truth-condition amounts to a specification of the sentence's meaning or a core element of its meaning. Let us suppose that in the Cleopatra sentence's case there is absolutely no evidence bearing on the obtaining or not of its truth-condition, and we know that there is not, (since Cleopatra forbade any record whatsoever of her embarrassing moments, and we cannot travel back in time to witness the event, or speak to possible witnesses). Back there, on the day in question, the condition either obtained or did not. We have no way of ever knowing. Nevertheless, a realist will still happily say that a specification of the sentence's (realist) truth-conditions is a specification of the sentence's core meaning. We can determine the truth-conditional meaning of the sentence without knowing, or ever being in a position to know, whether or not the sentence is true. Dummett rejects this possibility. He rejects it because of his insistence that a theory of meaning must at the same time be a theory of understanding, and what he thinks that entails. Dummett proposes that either truth-conditional theories of meaning be abandoned, and replaced by some notion like warranted assertibility, or, that truth-conditional theories be retained, on the revision of "truth" into some epistemically-constrained notion, (which seems to amount to the former option under another name). Crispin Wright⁵ observes that on realist truth-conditions, with the cooperation of the world, the truth or falsity of a sentence could be satisfied beyond anyone's knowing. So we are forced to choose between conditions which make a sentence acceptable, and conditions making it true. But surely, the antirealist supposes, it is conditions and evidential standards relevant to the *acceptability* of sentences, which explain their use, hence the "meaning" relevant to understanding?

Grounds on which Dummett rejects realist truth-conditions include manifestability concerns. If a sentence's meaning is equated with its truth-conditions, and if meanings are supposed to be grasped by competent speakers, then understanding a sentence consists in grasp of its truth-conditions. Any thesis about the truth-conditions of a set of sentences is *inter alia*, for Dummett, a thesis about what our understanding of those sentences consists in.⁶ Realist truth-conditions seem to entail that understanding the sentences involved consists in grasp of potentially verification-transcendent conditions. But what could such understanding consist in, and how could it be manifested *in the required manner*? One needs to see that a lot of baggage accompanies antirealist expectations of how understanding must be manifested, and what a theory of understanding must do. Dummett and Wright etc., following Wittgenstein, hold that speakers must be able to manifest their language understanding in observable behavioural capacities. (One aspect of this requirement is to explain

how language use is related to language *learning* and to *communication*, but also to our capacity to evaluate the appropriateness or otherwise of others' utterances). Wright's "neighbourhood abilities", which he holds to manifest competent use, include grasp of a sentence's applicability conditions, inferential roles, and conditions under which we would use it to ascribe propositional attitudes to others in explaining their behaviour. These are all aspects of (potentially) publicly conveyable uses of language, involving manifestations of understanding of communicable and learnable meanings. Very often capacities antirealists look to tend to be verificationist. For pure verificationists, knowledge of meaning is knowledge of what counts as a direct or indirect verification of the sentence, i.e., establishing it as true. Realists distinguish truth and verification. So if realists commit themselves to the idea that speakers grasp truth-conditions, then they purportedly have the problem that the truth-condition of an undecidable sentence, while determining what would count to verify that sentence, also remains out of reach of potential verification. Such realists who also accept the manifestability requirement, seem obliged to hold that knowledge of the truth-condition contains an ingredient beyond what is involved in knowing what would count as a verification. The realist then must show what empirical import that extra ingredient has. Otherwise there would be no real difference in the explanatory positions of realists and antirealists with respect to use. Antirealists doubt that realists can find any distinctive role for this additional knowledge that could enter into an effective account of language use. It is against this sort of assumed background⁷ that Miller mounts his critique of manifestation anti-semantic realism arguments.

2. *Antirealists have conceded the failure of strong anti-semantic realism*

The question accepted in the current dialectic then is, if understanding is constituted by grasp of realist truth-conditions, how could use manifest such understanding? Understanding is sought in practical abilities amounting to publicly available, evidence-sensitive procedures for justifying the applicability of a sentence in a context of use. Where procedures exist for settling truth value, we say that the sentences are "effectively decidable". The challenge then is to show in these terms how understanding realist truth-conditions could be manifested. This challenge is most powerfully brought to bear in terms of sentences, like the foregoing Cleopatra sentence, which are commonly agreed *not* to be effectively decidable. Strong anti-semantic realism claims that for sentences like these, the manifestation requirement cannot be fulfilled, so semantic realism is false. If understanding cannot consist in grasp of realist truth-conditions in the case of

undecidable sentences, then in those cases it must consist in grasp of some other features, since we clearly are capable of understanding and using such sentences. Once we see what understanding consists of for these classes of sentences, there is no basis for going beyond positing grasp of these alternative features, holds the antirealist, in order to explain the understanding and use of any class of declarative sentence.

Gideon Rosen summarizes the (Dummettian) anti-semantic realism manifestability argument. Meaning is use, and use is the deployment of linguistic objects in public circumstances, so whatever it is to understand a sentence as possessing certain truth-conditions, this state must be exhaustively manifestable. This means it must be able to show up in behaviour, or else language would be unlearnable and meanings non-communicable. However, I can manifest my grasp of S's meaning by asserting it when it is true and rejecting it when it isn't. But when S's truth conditions are undetectable, I cannot manifest my knowledge of them in this way. And since there is no other way for the fact that I assign one set of truth conditions to S rather than another to show up, it follows that there is no way for a speaker to manifest his grasp of a sentence as having any determinate verification-transcendent truth condition.⁸

Strong antirealism concludes the falsity of semantic realism. Miller presents strong anti-semantic realism in terms of an allegedly inconsistent triad. Semantic realism (strong antirealists allege) implies the following inconsistent triad of beliefs.

- (1) understanding a sentence is grasping its truth-conditions;
- (2) truth can be recognition-transcendent;
- (3) understanding a sentence is a complex of practical abilities to use that sentence (the Manifestability Principle).

The tension is held to emerge because grasp of recognition-transcendent truth-conditions would have to involve understanding that the relevant conditions are not what is appreciable in any context of use of the sentence. But (say antirealists) understanding a sentence must be explanatorily tied to discriminations appreciable to sentence users in contexts of use. All the abilities cited by antirealists above: verification procedures and neighbourhood capacities, are purportedly based on what is appreciable to speakers who understand a sentence and manifest that understanding in their use. Capacities grounding epistemically-constrained conditions of applicability, cannot somehow do double duty as capacities manifesting understanding of recognition-transcendent truth-conditions, the antirealist argues. Miller cites Wright: "How can knowing what it is for an unappreciable situation to obtain be constituted by capacities of discrimination exercised in response to appreciable ones?"⁹ In effect, the strong

anti-semantic realist argues: If (1) and (2) then not (3); (3) therefore not (1) and (2).

More of the baggage, brought to expectations placed by antirealists on a theory of understanding, now begins to emerge. In my view Miller fails to take sufficient note of this baggage, and therein lies the basis of the ultimate failure of his critique. For one thing, there seems to be an assumption that the understanding accompanying truth-conditional theories of meaning requires manifestation abilities that operate primarily at the sentential level. A declarative sentence is a complex entity which strings constituent parts together. The truth-condition correlate of the complex entity is the complex situation or state of affairs which is specified by its complex content. But why should understanding of a sentence entail that the correlate condition of the complex content is itself appreciable in any given use of a sentence? Yet this is what antirealist requirements on a theory of understanding seem to presuppose. In explaining how truth conditions are determined we consider the component parts and the structure of the sentence. In explaining how sentences are understood, however, it seems antirealists require that practical capacities are tied to appreciable properties of sentential correlates in actual contexts of use. Then, as in the case of undecidable sentences, when sentential correlates are not themselves available, it is concluded that understanding of those sentences cannot be manifested in the appropriate way. The sentential correlate of the Cleopatra sentence is in no way, either mediately or immediately, appreciable by us. Thus it is concluded that we cannot manifest our understanding of that sentence. However, if we were to focus on the composition and structure of the sentence, and consider our individual abilities in relation to these components, it is not so clear that we cannot show our understanding. We have independent dispositional abilities with individual words which we can use in different ways in different contexts: 'day after', 'tripped', 'step'; we have independent abilities with the three-place spatio-temporal relationship specified; we even have independent abilities with 'Cleopatra' and 'Mark Antony' which are tied to historically mediated, canonical procedures of application. Moreover, if we were to substitute 'Laura' and 'George W' for 'Cleopatra' and 'Mark Antony' in the sentence, we would have no trouble satisfying the manifestation requirement. Why cannot the semantic realist argue that these distinct and dispositional compositional and structural abilities, and our analogous abilities with respect to a Laura/Bush substitute, suffice to manifest our abilities with the Cleopatra sentence? Though I raise this question, I shall not pursue it here. I suspect the antirealist response will reveal further the kind of Wittgensteinian, positivistic-empiricist, even behaviourist, assumptions and presuppositions which so heavily shape their notions of what an explanation of understanding should be. Furthermore, I think that even on a compositional account, the antirealist

will maintain that realist understanding, as opposed to antirealist understanding, has not been demonstrated, because the former is *redundant* with respect to the latter. I consider this redundancy issue shortly.

Miller finds another formulation of strong anti-semantic realism in an argument by Wright.¹⁰ Wright's argument seems to proceed as follows: (i) on a realist truth-conditional theory, grasp of truth-conditions must constitute some "core ability" over and above, and unifying and explaining, neighbourhood abilities which manifest competent use; (ii) speakers have to be able to manifest the core ability in some way other than having the neighbourhood abilities; (iii) for direct observation sentences this core ability could be manifested in reporting immediate sensations which confirm or disconfirm a sentence, (e.g., taste of bitterness to confirm "this is bitter"); (iv) for undecidable sentences there is no analogue of direct sensation reports; (v) thus, for undecidable sentences there is no specific way to manifest grasp of realist truth-conditions as a core ability. For undecidable sentences, the speaker (also) has to be able to understand what it would be for truth-conditions to be satisfied unrecognisably, in a way that accommodates the manifestability principle.

Wright's requirement brings to light a second aspect of the baggage that goes with antirealist conceptions of theories of understanding. He seems to incorporate the idea that each element of what is understood, in order to be explanatorily active, must be distinctly accounted for in terms of its own abilities and what grounds them. What is desired of one's theory of understanding is an explanation of how speakers are able to know and show that their symbols latch onto the world. For effectively decidable sentences, the explanation of what it is for speaker's to have this knowledge is manifested in uses causally underwritten by recognitional skills, activated in response to discernible features of contexts of use, and relevant to the applicability of sentences. We have recognitional skills in relation to the deduction of sentences from other sentences, and in relation to the inductive warrant of sentences from experience, or in the form of confirmation judgements grounded in simple sensations. So abilities with 'red' or 'bitter' require knowledge of discriminations relevant to applications of 'red' or 'bitter'. What the realist must supply, according to Wright, in order to provide a basis for the knowledge underlying practical abilities in relation to realist truth-conditions, is something "which stands to understanding an evidence-transcendent truth condition as recognitional skills stand to decidable truth conditions".¹¹ Wright seems to put the onus on the realist to show how the distinctive aspect of an evidence-transcending truth-condition, the very fact of transcendence, is distinctly tied back to a ground of knowledge in the speaker.¹² This seems to suppose that every ingredient of the meaning engaged in a speaker's knowledge can be shown up by his use, because if there were some ingredient that could not be shown by the use of the expression, that

ingredient would have no importance for communication,¹³ and would not reflect what goes on in language learning. But what faculties within us are responsive to transcendence the way recognitional skills are responsive to immanence?

Miller cites McGinn¹⁴ and Strawson¹⁵ as realists who have tried to meet the manifestability challenge for undecidable sentences. McGinn proposed that it amounts to our skill in linguistically interpreting the behaviour of others, sometimes attributing realist beliefs. Strawson held that our abilities in relation to undecidable sentences all come down to recognitional capacities with respect to appreciable properties. Our grasp of meaning is displayed in response to recognizable conditions, even where those conditions involve the absence of evidence either way for the sentence holding or not. Antirealists reject these proposals because of redundancy. Basically, the antirealist says that there is no reason to construe the beliefs attributed as a result of linguistically mediated interpretationist skills as having *realist* truth-conditions. The antirealist, now expressed by Hale,¹⁶ can accommodate the same interpretationist skills while construing the same beliefs attributed in terms of assertibility conditions. Likewise, Strawson's capacities are compatible with antirealist warranted-assertibility conditions. So there is no need to view these capacities as grounding knowledge of realist truth-conditions over and above antirealist conditions. The transcendence element in itself is redundant in relation to the ability predicated over realist truth-conditions, whereas Wright was requiring demonstration of a specific ability, specifically discernible in relation to the transcendence element.

For these reasons I don't believe Miller is entitled to draw the conclusions he does from Hale's response to semantic realists' attempts to meet the transcendence-manifestability requirement. Initially Miller notes merely that Hale's response supports a softer conclusion than strong anti-semantic realism. The outcome of Hale's response is not that semantic realism is false because incompatible with the manifestability principle, just that the abilities it cites in its defence are also compatible with antirealism. Miller describes this as antirealists having switched from strong anti-semantic realism to weak anti-semantic realism. Later he makes the more forceful assertion that antirealists have 'conceded' the failure of strong anti-semantic realism as a manifestation argument. If abilities are compatible with either realism or antirealism, this does not establish that realism is false or untenable. The modest conclusion is that "we cannot justify semantic realism solely on the basis of considering the practical abilities which constitute linguistic understanding" [11]. Miller goes on to contend that, given the initial plausibility of realism, the soft conclusion serves to shift the onus of proof from realists to antirealists to show theirs is the more plausible position. He then argues that antirealists cannot fulfil it. In my view Miller does not establish that antirealists have conceded

the failure of strong anti-semantic realism in drawing their soft conclusion, though it may in fact be the case that they have somewhere explicitly conceded that. From the present discussion one could reach a different judgement. If antirealists view manifestability as *mandating* a grounding of explanatorily potent knowledge of transcendence that is distinct from, and over and above, groundings based on recognition-driven skills, then McGinn and Strawson do not appear, at least from Miller's description, to do this. The manifestability principle is a principle not just about speakers' practical abilities, but also the *explanatory role of those abilities*. So if one does not challenge antirealists' right to make such a demand (as I think one should), but rather attempts to meet it, then in failing to demonstrably meet it, as McGinn and Strawson do, antirealists could advance a strong anti-semantic realist conclusion.¹⁷ Moreover, on the onus of proof issue, I suspect equivocation is at work. It is true that realism is the initially plausible position. But that is realism understood as metaphysical realism. I would very much question the idea that "semantic realism", defined as a thesis that *understanding* consists in grasp of recognition-transcendent truth conditions, is describable as an obviously plausible position. This reinforces my own view that this entire discussion has got off on the wrong track by accepting the underlying framework of theories of meaning viewed as theories of understanding, combined with Wittgensteinianism about understanding and use. If you accept such a framework, and allow it to dictate the dialectic of realism, then the "semantic realism" which results is going to turn out to be an apparently paradoxical and difficult to defend view. Miller does not believe so, however, as we shall see below.

3. *Weak anti-semantic realism is either unmotivated or it fails*

Having decided that strong anti-semantic realism has surrendered, Miller proceeds to show that weak anti-semantic realism, is in the first place unmotivated, and in the second place, fails. I have some sympathy with Miller's argument [13–14] that weak anti-semantic realism is unmotivated. However his criticism of antirealism does not cause him to go far enough. If it did, he would abandon the assumed framework of theories of meaning as use/Wittgensteinian understanding, altogether. Moreover the sort of equivocation I detected earlier in Miller's comment that realism has more "initial plausibility" than antirealism, emerges again in another form in his argument about motivation.

Weak anti-semantic realism, as Miller puts it, is the view that realism must, but is unable to, justify grasp of specifically realist truth-conditions, where such grasp can be manifested in distinctly realist

practical linguistic capacities, because whatever abilities they cite are compatible with an antirealist (epistemically constrained) construal. In challenging the motivation of weak anti-semantic realism, Miller questions the supposition that justification of grasp of realist truth-conditions must be done solely on the basis of speakers' linguistic performance capacities. He tries to bring out the absurdity of the restriction by considering an absurd outcome generated by a possible general principle which could ground the restriction. With regard to any feature *F*, sentence *S*, and speaker *L*, let the possible principle be:

for any *F*, whether or not the content of 'S' as understood by *L* has *F* must be constituted by facts about *L*'s linguistic abilities.

Miller then asks us to consider the outcome if we were to apply this principle under the instance of *truth* for *F*. This would entail that whether or not a sentence as understood by a speaker were true, would depend on that speaker's linguistic performance abilities. If the sentence is, "every even number is the sum of two primes", the sentence as understood by Jones means that every even number is the sum of two primes. The postulated principle would have it, then, that whether or not "every even number is the sum of two primes" is true, is constituted by facts about Jones' linguistic abilities. Which Miller takes to be absurd. In arguing this way Miller claims to be taking the "content" of the sentence for granted. For any 'S', its "content" is *S*. Likewise, Miller wants to say, it is absurd if you substitute for *F* the notion of realist truth-conditions.

Now I do not find the reasoning here very satisfactory. Miller begins by asking why the justification of realist truth-conditions should be done solely on the basis of speaker's linguistic performance abilities. But the semantic realism that is defined for the discussion is a position which has already accepted a good deal of the theoretical background which leads to the outcome Miller is criticizing. This is a position which accepts that a theory of meaning is to be a theory of understanding, where an explanation of understanding must incorporate a Wittgensteinian theory of use. It is when you link meaning, truth, understanding and use, in a Dummettian-Wittgensteinian way, that you get the restrictions. Knowledge of meanings is attributed in such a way that the knowledge itself, as well as what is known, is both accounted for and explanatorily active. And the knowledge itself must be accounted for in terms of properties that are manifested and detectable in practical contexts of *linguistic uses*. Arguments concerning semantic realism have been mounted either on grounds of manifestability, or language acquisition, or the possibility of intercommunicable meanings, or justification and normativity. However it seems to me the manifestability arguments discussed here by Miller involve a conceptual nexus whereby it is not possible to isolate capacities

relevant to manifestability, while ignoring the connection of manifestability to language acquisition and to communication. The *same* understanding manifested in capacities for competent use must be that involved in explaining acquisition and communication, where sensitivity to the linguistic actions of others in given evidential circumstances was the crucial theoretical factor. It is surely this which forces one to home in on speakers' linguistic capacities.¹⁸

As to the claim of absurdity, that too is not as clear cut as Miller would like. Miller thinks it is absurd to think that "every prime number is the sum of two primes" could be constituted as true by speakers' abilities. Likewise he thinks it is absurd that the fact that a sentence having realist truth-conditions could be constituted by speaker abilities. But what does he mean by this? Is it not only obviously absurd if you view truth or truth-conditions along realist correspondence lines?¹⁹ Because it is indeed absurd that *the actual instantiation of those conditions (the content correlate)* could be constituted by speaker abilities. When Miller shifts in his argument from talking about 'S' to talking about S, he claims merely to be taking the "content" of 'S' for granted. However, in order for the absurdity intuition to emerge with any convincing force, there has to be more going on. In fact I suggest that rather than just taking the content for granted, Miller slips into a metaphysically realist perspective on content and truth. It would be clearly absurd to think of the latter being constituted by, or essentially dependent on, speakers' abilities. However, if, along antirealist lines, the "content of S as understood by L" were given a fundamentally epistemologically-constrained construal, such as "the grasped meaning of S", and 'truth' were warranted assertibility, then it would not be so clearly absurd to conclude that the features of content important to understanding and use were essentially linked to, hence explained by, speakers' abilities.

Having tried to show that weak anti-semantic realism is unmotivated, Miller moves on to claim further that it fails. He does so by exploiting a dispute between McDowell and Wright. McDowell has held that there is a trivial link between the content of an assertion and the notion of truth-conditions: "To specify what would be asserted, in the assertoric utterance of a sentence apt for such a use, is to specify the condition under which the sentence (as thus uttered) would be true".²⁰ In asserting undecidable sentences, speakers must know they are not asserting conditions whose obtaining they can be sure of putting themselves in a position to recognise. Thus the mere assertion of such sentences seems to involve an element of realism.²¹ Wright replies²² that you cannot get to substantive semantic realism from a platitudinous link between assertion and truth. Wright's argument, as summarized by Miller [16–18] can be paraphrased as follows. [Note: I introduce here, for convenience only, in italics, some of my own terminology, and add my own comments in curly parentheses].

Wright's weak anti-(SR):

1. Granted there is a trivial connection between the content of an assertion and specifying the assertoric truth conditions of the sentence.
2. Granted this allows a trivial construal of "grasp of truth conditions": It is a platitude that: minimally competent speakers know trivially that 'P' says that P; or that a state of affairs necessary and sufficient for 'P's truth obtains. {Call this *understanding disquotational truth-conditions, or, disquotational understanding*}.
3. The trivial connection holds independent of speakers' neighbourhood abilities with 'P'.
4. However, one could hold a truth-conditional theory of meaning by accepting *disquotational truth-conditions*, while still making 'truth' itself epistemically constrained when it comes to substantive understanding of 'P'. (Neighbourhood abilities will all be tied to recognisable conditions of appropriate assertion).
5. Thus, the possibility of *disquotational truth-conditions* does nothing to support semantic realism, because it does not show how grasp of *disquotational truth-conditions*, allied with epistemically-constrained neighbourhood abilities, can amount to speakers' manifested understanding of how a state of affairs specified by an undecidable 'P' can obtain undetectably. (Wright, 1993, p. 19).
6. Allowing speakers' grasp of *disquotational truth-conditions*, therefore, does nothing to justify commitment to realist (objective) truth or semantic realism.

I take this to be the argument that Miller believes he can show to fail. He does so by trying to make a case against step 5 of the argument. Wright's argument is an example of weak anti-semantic realism because the conclusion is merely that practical abilities by themselves do not *warrant* semantic realism over antirealism. Miller argues in effect that the notion of disquotational truth-conditions does justify commitment to semantic realism. To be precise, he holds that the thesis that understanding consists in practical abilities provides a reason for semantic realism, insofar as this thesis provides no reasons for rejecting realism, (the intuitively plausible prior position), but does provide reasons for rejecting antirealism. My response to Miller is this: it is true that the stand-off reached above does nothing to decide between realism and antirealism, but it is not true that the understanding thesis, in light of the assertion-truth link, gives a reason for semantic realism, nor is it true that it gives a reason against antirealism, nor is semantic realism, as opposed to metaphysical realism, an intuitively plausible prior position. In a word, I conclude that Miller's efforts do not substantially advance the semantic realist cause. Miller mounts an argument in favour of semantic realism. I will present the

argument in terms of the sentence, "Caesar had ten moles", which is similar to, but shorter than, the one Miller uses. I will also use the terminology I introduced above. The argument (SR) proceeds: (i) we understand the assertoric content of "Caesar had ten moles" to be that conditions obtain necessary and sufficient for its truth; and our understanding consists in our grasp of these disquotational truth-conditions; (from the platitude trivially linking assertion and truth). (ii) "Caesar had ten moles" is not effectively decidable; (agreed by all). (iii) our understanding of "Caesar had ten moles" consists in our grasping truth-conditions for which we have no procedure for determining their obtaining or not; (from (i) and (ii)). (iv) our understanding of "Caesar had ten moles" consists in grasping truth-conditions which, if obtaining, we may be incapable, even in principle, of detecting; (from (iii)). Therefore, semantic realism, because (iv) amounts to a statement of semantic realism.

Wright is sceptical that you can get to a substantive position of realism on the basis of platitudes and trivial connections. I am too. Wright maintains, against the McDowell-Miller line, that one could (a) consistently accept that a sentence was undecidable, and also (b) have disquotational understanding regarding it (i.e. understand its assertoric content to be that conditions obtain necessary and sufficient for its truth), while at the same time (c) *not* understand what it would be for these truth-conditions to obtain undetectably. Wright accuses McDowell of begging the question by conflating *undecidability with capacity to be undetectably true*. And I, in effect, think I agree with Wright. Miller cannot see what bearing Wright's (a)-(c) consistency claim has on his own semantic realist argument (SR). Miller goes on to try to establish that Wright's response reveals Wright to be actually shifting to a different conception of semantic realism than that which has been defined for this discussion. Miller then identifies two possible semantic realist arguments, (SRI) and (SR2). He further argues [21 ff] that, if semantic realism is (SRI), then weak anti-semantic realism is reasonable, but can easily be met by semantic realists; whereas, if semantic realism is (SR2), then weak anti-semantic realism is not reasonable, and thus poses no threat to semantic realists. Before trying to follow Miller into the intricacies of these arguments, I want to bring out what I think is correct about Wright's response to an argument along the lines of Miller's (SR) above.

Miller's version of (SR) starts with a premise about disquotational understanding. By virtue of the platitude which trivially links assertion and truth it is held that a speaker understands the asserted content of any 'S', including some undecidable 'S', to be that conditions necessary and sufficient for its truth obtain. It entails nothing more than that a speaker's understanding of assertoric content of 'S' consists in understanding that it is being supposed that conditions necessary and sufficient for 'S', viz., S, or S-conditions, obtain. If I assert 'S' I understand myself to

commit to the holding of S-conditions (i.e. conditions necessary and sufficient for truth of 'S'). If you understand me to have made an assertion, you understand, trivially, me to have made that commitment. Such understanding is disquotational understanding. Anyone who is a language user, and understands that a sentence is an assertoric sentence of a language, knows this trivial fact concerning the sentence. One need only have minimal linguistic competence in general: to understand what goes on in using language to assert something. Disquotational understanding, insofar as it could be described as grasp of disquotational truth-conditions, is thus itself a trivial notion. I could know of a sentence 'FS' in a foreign language which I did not understand, if I knew from the context that 'FS' was an assertion, that understanding its content consisted in understanding that conditions necessary and sufficient for 'FS's truth, *viz.*, FS-conditions, were held to be obtaining. I need not have any substantive competence with, or understanding of, the sentence. But it is substantive understanding which is required to explain competent use with the sentence. *Disquotational understanding is not substantive* and is thus *not integral to explaining use*. One might want to argue that one cannot really assert a content at all unless one understands the content in a substantive and independently explainable manner. An independent account of such understanding of content or meaning could take one into either the Cartesian-Fregean world of grasp of propositions or senses, or into the Dummettian-Wittgensteinian world of practical verification or neighbourhood abilities. However the McDowell insight does not depend on drawing a substantive theoretical connection between assertion and understanding of content, it depends merely on the trivial notion of disquotation. In (SR), from grasp of disquotational truth-conditions Miller attempts to draw a conclusion about substantive understanding, or the understanding needed to explain use. He does this via a second premise which simply affirms the status of the 'S' in question as not effectively decidable. That means there is no way for the asserter of 'S' to determine whether the conditions necessary and sufficient for the truth of 'S', obtain or not. When Miller concludes in (iii) that the speaker's understanding of 'S' consists in grasping truth-conditions which are undecidable, and equates this in (iv) with grasping recognition-transcendent truth-conditions, in order to conclude (v) that this amounts to a statement of semantic realism, he must be taking the understanding involved to be substantive understanding, because substantive understanding, which explains use, has been the theoretical postulate at issue all along. The manifestability principle requires that what *grounds* the practical capacities manifested in use also *explains* that use. However there is no justification at all for slipping from trivial understanding which does not explain use, to a conclusion about substantive understanding, which is what seems to occur in the argument (SR) as presented. Alternatively, if it is only disquotational

understanding intended throughout (SR), then (SR) will not satisfy the antirealist that a substantive alternative realist position has been established, within the framework of theories of meaning both sides are purportedly accepting.

On the one hand the minimally competent speaker has trivial understanding of a trivial claim about truth-conditions, which emerges from the sheer act of engaging in making an assertion, on the other hand the speaker is devoid of abilities to discern the obtaining or not of those conditions. Presumably, since the speaker understands the sentence enough to assert it, there must be some substantive basis of understanding. An antirealist like Wright will construe this substantive understanding in terms of warranted assertibility and neighbourhood abilities. What the antirealist will emphasize in relation to the 'S' in question (say, "Caesar had ten moles") is that there can be no non-inert core ability manifested with respect to that sentence. That is, there is no ability over and above neighbourhood abilities and explicative of neighbourhood abilities with the sentence, which is responsive purely to the transcendence element of the sentence's substantive truth-conditions, and which is effective in explaining use. Miller tries to infer substantive semantic realism from his two premises: that understanding the assertoric content of 'S' is grasping its disquotational truth-conditions; and that the sentence at issue is, in fact, not decidable. He holds it to follow from these premises that speakers' (substantive) understanding of the sentence concerned consists in grasping its truth-conditions which are not effectively decidable. But since the only understanding involved in the premises was trivial disquotational understanding, the understanding in step three can only be trivial too. It amounts to understanding such that: the speaker knows that a state of affairs necessary and sufficient for the sentence's truth (i.e., a content correlate) is being presupposed as obtaining, and, objectively, the speaker has no way of recognizing if it obtains or not. Insofar as the speaker knows they are asserting an undecidable sentence, (and they may not), the speaker's understanding consists in knowing that, in asserting what they take to be an undecidable sentence, their intentional act, as it were, overshoots accessible recognisable conditions for the sentence's applicability. I think it is right that this is an interesting point, and that it does reveal something about the realist beliefs underlying our general capacity as language users, but Miller attempts to go further than that. Miller concludes that the speaker's understanding consists in *grasping* those very same inaccessible truth-conditions, that the speaker understands himself to be shooting towards but not reaching. Perhaps one could maintain that it is just this same awareness of the overshooting aspect of the linguistic act itself, manifested in our capacity to go ahead and use such sentences anyway, in otherwise appropriate contexts of use, that constitutes speaker knowledge/ability that is distinctly and specifically relevant

to the element of transcendence Wright has been demanding. But Miller does not attempt to do this in his argument, and in any case, it is hard to see how such a capacity could be anything but explanatorily inert with respect to use. If one plays the antirealist game in accepting that grasp of truth-conditions instantiates understanding that can explain use, where there are direct and manifestable links between what is grasped, how it is grasped, and how it explains use, then Miller's argument will fail. It is clear that we *can* understand and use sentences which we assert while undecidable, thus while understanding that their truth conditions are beyond us, but that fact for the antirealist just shows that it must be something *else* that we grasp that explains our substantive understanding and use, since in understanding that the truth-conditions are beyond us we are understanding that they cannot be, themselves, grasped.²¹

Now it is not my intention to support antirealism; far from it! My overall conclusion is that the failure, in my view of Miller's dismissal of Wright's scepticism, and of Miller's argument for semantic realism, show how unproductive it is to try to establish semantic realism on the antirealists' own turf. Introducing the McDowell intuition while operating in a largely Wittgensteinian-Dummettian framework of theory of meaning and understanding, will not be sufficient to establish realism. The intuition that realism is something to do with speakers using sentences meaningfully, while committing to their truth-conditions obtaining, while never being in a position to know whether they obtain or not, is probably correct. But admitting that realism involves something like this, is quite a different matter from maintaining that speaker's understanding consists in *grasping* those very same truth-conditions. Miller however believes he has made progress against antirealism.

(SRI) is given as the view that: for some declarative sentence 'S', our understanding of 'S' consists in grasp of its truth-conditions which may be capable of obtaining undetectably. (SR2) is the view that for some declarative sentence 'S', we can understand what it would be for the truth conditions of 'S' to obtain undetectably. Miller takes it that weak anti-semantic realism directed at (SRI) simply challenges realists to show some ability of the speaker which is justifiably described as "grasp of potentially recognition-transcendent truth conditions". As we have seen, Miller thinks (SRI) can satisfy the truth-conditional aspect of this demand in terms of the assertion-truth platitude, and the transcendence component by noting that sentences can be effectively undecidable. I have tried to show why I am not convinced that (SRI) can meet the challenge. The antirealist requires not just that speakers have some ability describable as grasp of recognition-transcendent truth-conditions. They also require that realists show speakers' ability to be responsive to the transcendence element of the truth-condition the way neighbourhood abilities are responsive to recognizable features of contexts of use, so that the realist ability

is manifested in some non-redundant way in use, in order to provide a distinct and specific determinant in explaining use. Miller tries to wed nonsubstantive understanding of disquotational truth-conditions with the objective fact of undecidability, which fact implies the lack or absence of certain core abilities for a speaker, in order to produce speakers' grasp of realist truth-conditions. But this concoction will not meet the challenge when it is taken on in full. There must be some positive explanation of substantive grasp of meaning which is sufficient to explain use, and satisfy the distinct transcendence requirement, *at the same time*. The objectively noted *absence* of capacities with effective procedures cannot count as something substantively grasped, so cannot be a positive capacity capable of playing the required explanatory role.

Miller [22–25] also charges Wright with shifting from (SRI) to (SR2). (SR2) holds that for some declarative sentence 'S', we can understand what it would be for the truth-conditions of 'S' to obtain undetectably. (SR2) is judged "unreasonable" by Miller, hence ignorable. (SR2) purportedly requires that: if speaker understands 'S', there must be some ability of speaker in regard to 'S' which is justifiably described as grasp of potentially recognition-transcendent truth-conditions, *and, in addition, this same ability, or another its presence guarantees, merits description as an understanding of how it could be that the truth conditions of 'S' could obtain undetectably*. Miller rejects this demand, containing what he sees as unjustified additional elements. He claims the additions are not licensed merely by the view that understanding sentences consists in practical abilities, and are unreasonable because they require in effect that speakers' competence includes manifesting an understanding of realism *per se*. Miller thinks that it is obviously implausible to think that speakers' competence should require manifesting understanding of realism, because realism is a theory, (and as such perhaps known only to philosophers).

Now it is a bit puzzling to know what to say. I in fact think that (SRI) is more implausible than (SR2), though I would not embrace either of them. (SRI) is unacceptable because, *pace* Miller, it cannot rely on a substantive theory of realist understanding sufficient to explain use. Presumably though, in preferring (SRI), Miller does not see the need for the substantive understanding component and the transcendence component to do their explanatory work in an integrated way. But this is what puzzles me, since just such an expectation seems to thread through antirealist arguments. That (SR2) demands that the two elements work in an explanatorily integrated way comes as no surprise to me. Moreover, it might be that (SR2) is not so far removed from what Miller wants to establish in any case. In (SR2), understanding is supposed to be both of undetectable truth-conditions, and simultaneously of the way these truth-conditions could obtain undetectably. Miller thinks this requires speakers to know the theory of (metaphysical) realism. But does it? I

earlier remarked that when speakers knowingly assert undecidable sentences, which they know to be undecidable, they are aware of an intentional linguistic act which is overshooting what is available to them in contexts of use in determining the applicability of the sentence. It could be argued that there are many respects in which basically realist presuppositions could be part of the explanation of what speakers take themselves to be doing in carrying out their linguistic acts. For example, in using natural kind terms we intend to refer to not just whatever fits some qualitative description, but whatever has a nature which we may not yet even have discovered, hence whose existence transcends our evidence. Obviously this is not a line of argument I can follow up here, but in my view it is not unreasonable to attribute to language-users basic realist beliefs and assumptions. In fact this may be part of what it *is to be* a language user. Thus the requirement that understanding incorporate an explicit dimension of realism in some way or other does not seem to me totally unreasonable. So this aspect of (SR2) does not bother me as it does Miller. Where I disagree with (SR2) is exactly where I disagree with (SR1) – in the assumption that to be a semantic realist one needs to engage in the first place in theory of meaning that is simultaneously theory of understanding manifestable in use.

4. *Realists and semantic realism*

Antirealist objections to the semantic realism discussed here hinge on the notion that mastery of language, which involves understanding meaning, must be explained by a theory that links evidence and meaning, for speakers in a linguistic community, in a certain kind of way. Frege took understanding inward and propositionalized it; Wittgenstein took it outward in publically displayable behaviours. The supposition, in a Dummettian-Wittgensteinian framework, is that we have to explain meaning in terms of what it is that speakers can discern in their interactions with other speakers in the context of linguistic usages. This is one way to attempt a quasi-scientific explanation of language. Antirealism takes the best explanation to be one which adverts to dispositions to respond verbally to stimuli and to exercises of the dispositions in response to stimuli. Antirealists consider such quasi-scientific explanation to be superior to merely “descriptive” explanation “which sees language-acquisition as the inculcation of dispositions to fit utterances with the (independently existing) real world”.²⁴ Miller has attempted to defend semantic realism while remaining within this overall explanatory framework. In my view his project is both unsuccessful and misconceived.

Alternative construals of semantic realism are available within the context of alternative approaches to theories of meaning. One could imagine

a triangle with *thought*, *world*, and *language*, at each point.²⁵ As philosophies come and go in fashion, philosophers may enter the triangle at different points at different times. They will naturally assume one entry point as relatively more solidly established, less problematical, than the others. Thus they will enter there and attempt to explain the relations to the other points from the more secure base. The antirealist, seeking explanatory foundations in the data of experience and knowledge constructed thereby, finds confidence in epistemology, hence for them the thought locus is primary, and, for those of a Wittgensteinian bent, attempts to theorise from a position giving priority to metaphysics are treated with positive suspicion. At the same time, the thought locus has been affected by behaviourist doctrines. So understanding and other capacities are, by philosophers so affected, construed in terms of outwardly manifestable behavioural capacities. So antirealists generally try to bring philosophy of language within the thought-(i.e., behaviour)-language relationship. In tying meaning to what we, as individual speakers, can know and verify in publically manifestable ways, they are in danger of losing the capacity of language to reach out to a mind-independent world. The metaphysical realist takes the world locus to be more secure, thus the favoured entry point. The commonsense view (in spite of inroads of postmodernism) is simply that the world exists and has the composition and properties that it does, independent of both our thought and language, while causally interacting with our thought and language. Cognitive science meanwhile has legitimated an alternative to behaviourism. So options exist for explaining competence or understanding in terms of mental states and dispositions. The explanation of linguistic meaning can proceed in terms of reference of sentence components to a mind-independent world, in such a way that sentential truth-conditions can be part of the explanation of sentence meaning without assuming it integral to the explanation that speakers know or grasp those sentential truth conditions. *Semantic realism* on this view would simply be the view that sentences can *have* recognition-transcendent truth-conditions, and their *having* these truth-conditions *is part of the explanation of their having the meaning they do*. Semantic realism would not be essentially a theory of understanding or of what speakers grasp. I am supporting the view, promulgated by Kripke, Donnellan, Devitt, Lycan, Fodor, and many others, that decompositional semantics and causal theories of reference lie at the heart of successful theories of meaning. That to a large extent people use language to refer to a real and objective world and say meaningful things about it, while often in ignorance or error about referents or truth values of the sentences they use. Causal theories of meaning allow words to have reference without attributing knowledge of their objects to speakers sufficient to determine that reference. Objective causal links between linguistic tokens and objects in the world take up the brunt of explanation

of the meaning of sentences composed from words. The meaning of a sentence is explained by accounting for how its truth-conditions are compositionally and referentially determined, where the account need not impute knowledge or grasp of those truth-conditions to speakers who competently use the sentence. Speaker understanding and linguistic competence are explained separately. On such an approach, a theory of meaning is one thing, and a theory of understanding quite another. Moreover theories of understanding can take many forms and need not be conformed to Wittgensteinian doctrine. Cognitive science provides alternatives. Theories abound which postulate structural parallels between the composition of thought, and the structure of language. The role of language in thought, and the role of thought in explaining behaviour, including linguistic behaviour, will all be part of an explanation of understanding, but not necessarily of meaning. Obviously, understanding and meaning are related in some way and much more would need to be said about the options open to a realist in theoretically relating meaning, truth, understanding and use. That is something I cannot do here. Here we need simply note that many such programs are being actively pursued in philosophy of language, by realists. For such realist philosophers, the arguments between Hale and Wright and McDowell and Miller, over "semantic realism", are largely beside the point. My foregoing critique of the shortcomings of Miller's defense of "semantic realism" suggest that this is a good thing.

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NOTES

¹ Miller, Alexander (2002). "What is the manifestation argument?", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 83, 352–383. Page numbers in square brackets refer to computer circulated draft copy November/December 2001.

² Frege, G. (1952). "Sense and reference," in *Philosophical writings*; trans. Geach, P. & M. Black. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960).

³ Davidson, Donald (1967). "Truth and meaning". *Synthese*, VII, 304–23. The truth definition works by giving necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of every sentence, and to give the truth conditions is a way of giving the meaning of a sentence.

⁴ Dummett, Michael (1975). "What is a theory of meaning?" in S. Guttenplan (ed.) *Mind and Language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 67–137.

⁵ Wright, Crispin (1992). *Truth and objectivity*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, p. 4.

* A point made often enough by Michael Devitt.

⁷ See Platts, Mark (1979). *Ways of meaning*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 227; Prawitz, Dag (1994). "Meaning theory and anti-realism," in B. McGuinness & G. Oliveri (eds.) *The Philosophy of Michael Dummett*. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

pp. 84–85; Rosen, Gideon (1995). "The shoals of language". (Critical Notice: Dummett, M. *The Seas of language*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1993)), *Mind*, 104, 599–609. Page 601.

⁹ Rosen: *op cit.*, p. 601.

¹⁰ Wright, C. (1989). "Misconstruals made manifest." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XIV*, pp. 54–55.

¹¹ Wright (1989) p. 57.

¹² Wright (1989) p. 57.

¹³ Prawitz identifies as a key idea of the manifestability requirement the notion that since the point of a theory of meaning is to give an account of language use, the meaning theory is not to contain ingredients without empirical import. i.e., "ingredients that play no part in deriving practical abilities from knowledge of meaning", p. 85.

¹⁴ Prawitz: *op cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁵ McGinn, Colin (1980). "Truth and use," in M. Platts (ed.) *Reference, Truth, and Reality*. London: Routledge. 1980, pp. 19–40.

¹⁶ Strawson, Peter (1977). "Scruton and Wright on anti-realism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, LXXVII, pp. 15–22.

¹⁷ Hale, Bob (1997). "Realism and its oppositions," in B. Hale & C. Wright (eds.) *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 280.

¹⁸ Note however that Prawitz distinguishes a strong and a weak manifestability requirement and concludes that Dummett's argument depends on only a weak manifestability argument. The strong reading requires both that knowledge of each ingredient of meaning can be shown by some use of the expression, i.e., that there be a certain adequate behaviour in certain situations, and, that there is a certain behaviour that implies the person knows the meaning. Weak manifestability requires only the former. But even so, it still requires some distinct behavioral manifestation implied by the ingredient of knowledge, because otherwise the ascription of the knowledge would be empty (p. 84).

¹⁹ Platts, *op cit.*, pp. 239–40.

²⁰ If one were a coherentist about truth, and so made truth a matter of a speakers' beliefs cohering with one another in a certain sort of way, it need not be absurd for an antirealist to view this state of affairs as constituted, (in a Dennettian sort of way) by linguistic performance of speakers in attributing beliefs. Though I myself find the view that interpretation could constitute beliefs untenable.

²¹ McDowell, John (1987). "In defence of modesty," in *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. p. 88.

²² McDowell, J. (1987). "Anti-realism and the epistemology of understanding," in *Meaning, Knowledge and reality, op cit.*, p. 322.

²³ Wright, C. (1993). *Realism, Meaning, and Truth*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edition.

²⁴ In recent email communication Alexander Miller has told me that in (SR)(i) he did not intend to be attributing only disquotational understanding but rather, he assumes substantive (neighbourhood abilities) understanding of the sentence and then holds that the assertion-truth platitude to license identifying *this state* as grasp of a truth-condition. Unfortunately I cannot respond in detail to this late reply now, but on the face of it, either Miller's position attempts to make a substantive claim about grasp of realist truth-conditions, in which case question-begging circularity remain a problem, or it is an explanatorily vacuous account of grasp of realist truth-conditions, hence will not answer the antirealist.

²⁵ This provides another way to formulate the antirealist objection to semantic realism. If speaker mastery boils down to speakers having sets of dispositions to fit utterances with observed evidential circumstances, including perception of the contexts in which others make approved utterances, then it seems that attribution of realist truth-conditions has trouble finding some explanatory foothold. In the case of assertion of undecidable

sentences, speakers assert sentences whose truth is in principle undetermined by all the available evidence. So if speakers are credited with a conception of realist truth-conditions, in making such assertions, they are credited with *something which could not have been acquired in the way in which the speakers' language was in fact required*. (Platts, *op cit.* 1979 pp. 20-23, 29-30.)

¹² As, for example, has been suggested by Simon Blackburn in *Spreading the Word*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

