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Realism is often defined as a commitment to mind-independence. But what does such a commitment amount to? In this paper two notions of mind-independence will be distinguished. On one conception, something is independently the case iff it is *possible* for that thing to be the case without our mental lives being a certain way. On the other conception, something is independently the case iff it is not *essential* to that thing's being the case that our mental lives be a certain way. The two conceptions of independence are often run together, but it will be argued that they should be kept separate and that realism is best understood as a commitment to essential independence. It will be further suggested that defining realism in terms of essential independence may help avert the threat of subversion by Blackburn's quasi-realist.

1 Essential Independence and Modal Independence

Realism about a subject matter is often defined as the view that truths or facts or states of affairs relating to that subject matter are mind-independent – that is, that they obtain independently of their being known, knowable, conceivable, or related in some other way to our mental lives. But there is a need for more clarity as to what exactly this sort of view consists in.

One question that might be asked is whether it is really truths, or facts, or states of affairs, or something else altogether, that the realist should take to be mind-independent. But this point will not be of concern here. In order to avoid

taking a stand on such issues, let us avoid talk of truth, facts and states of affairs, and simply talk neutrally of *something's being independently the case*.

Another consideration is that there are various mundane ways in which something's being the case can depend upon our mental lives without this automatically engendering anti-realism. One can be a realist about the physical world whilst acknowledging that there being a desk in one's office is in some sense dependent upon on the mental states of the people who designed that desk, manufactured it, and put it in one's office. Similarly, it seems, one can be a moral realist while acknowledging that the wrongness of kicking innocent passers by depends in a mundane way upon the fact that it causes them pain. These mundane kinds of dependence on the mental are to be ignored when realism is characterized as mind-independence.

We should, however, acknowledge that it is not straightforward to say exactly which kinds of dependence *are* mundane. Although we have clear intuitions in many cases, subtle issues are raised by consideration of realism about the mental, and realism about social matters such as the location of legal borders. Be that as it may, here it will be assumed that mundane kinds of mind-dependence can be identified and set aside.

We should also note that, in many cases, realist debate concerns independence not just from our mental lives as they actually are, but from the mental lives of any beings with some finite extension of our cognitive powers (as, for instance, when it is claimed that something's being the case in mathematics is not a matter of that thing's being provable by some finite being). For current purposes, therefore, let us understand 'our mental lives' as including the mental lives of such beings, wherever appropriate.

Even with these points settled (or postponed), at least two significantly different readings of the mind-independence claim are available. On one reading, p's being the case is independent of our mental lives iff it is no part of *what it is* for p to be the case that our mental lives be a certain way. Let us refer to this sort of independence as *essential independence* from our mental lives. Different kinds of essential independence claim will assert p's independence from different aspects of our mental lives (independence from provability, independence from knowledge, etc.).

On another reading, independence amounts to what may be called *modal independence*.¹ Many familiar claims about possible recognition-transcendence (claims that it is possible for the way things are to outstrip our recognitional capacities) seem to be claims of modal independence. As with essential independence, various different modal independence claims are available, but on each of them, something is independently the case just in case there is a possible world where that thing is the case although our mental lives are not such that Different kinds of modal independence supply different fillings for the ellipsis. For instance, one kind of modal independence claim about mathematical discourse would be that it is possible that every even number greater than 2 is the sum of two primes although this is not provable by any finite being. Another kind of modal independence claim about humour would be that there is a possible world where there exists a funny joke (in written form, say) but where no people exist to find the joke funny.

To help clarify the distinction between essential and modal independence, note that one form of modal independence in aesthetics asserts that there is a possible world where the sunsets are beautiful even though there are no people in

that world to think them beautiful. Whereas the corresponding form of essential independence asserts that it is no part of *what it is* for sunsets to be beautiful that they should be thought beautiful.

Neither modal nor essential independence is assumed here to have any implications for whether or not one accepts bivalence for propositions about the subject matter under consideration. Those who are tempted by certain modal or essential dependence claims may tend to find bivalence *unattractive*. For instance, if one thinks that, in mathematics, something's being the case consists in, or is modally inseparable from, its being the case that that thing is provable, then one might consider it unlikely that every mathematical proposition is either true or false. For one might intuitively doubt that every mathematical proposition either provable or disprovable; and, with the relevant dependence claim in place, this doubt gives rise to a corresponding doubt as to whether every mathematical proposition is true or false. Those who reject such dependence claims will not have this sort of reason to be suspicious of bivalence. But that is not to say that they must accept bivalence, or that they will have no other reasons to reject it.

A word is in order at this stage concerning the notion of essence which underlies essential independence. Mention of essence raises deep and difficult questions which cannot be properly addressed in this context. This paper attempts to argue that questions about essence are relevant to debates about realism, rather than to answer those questions. However, a few comments may help to avert misunderstanding.

First, it is not the essence of *objects* that is under consideration here. Rather, it is the essence of *something's being the case*. But although this may be an

unusual application of the notion of essence, it does not seem particularly problematic. It is natural to understand, say, talk of *what it is for lying to be wrong* as akin to, say, talk of *what a person is*. Saying that what it is for lying to be wrong is for us to have a certain emotive response to lying seems, at least until we have reason to think otherwise, importantly similar to saying that what a person is is a human animal.

Second, the notion of essence appealed to here is taken to explain certain corresponding modal claims, but not to be fully explicable in terms of them. For instance, suppose that what it is for a sunset to be beautiful is for somebody to find it beautiful. This might be taken to explain why it is not possible for there to be a beautiful sunset which nobody ever finds beautiful. (More about this suggestion below). But this explanatory relationship would be asymmetric: the modal claim would not be taken to explain the essence claim. This asymmetry is designed to respect our pretheoretic understanding of essence, which demands that we do not tie essence to modality in too simplistic a way. Intuitively, for instance, it is no part of *what I am* that I be such that $7+5=12$, although it is impossible for me to exist and not be such that $7+5=12$. (See Fine 1994 for some more detailed considerations of this nature.)

Thirdly, and finally, it is not immediately obvious that essence in the relevant sense need be an a priori matter. In the same sense in which one might think that being H₂O is a posteriori essential to water, so it might (for all that is said here) be that a joke's being found funny is a posteriori essential to its being funny. It could be that we need to do a lot of a posteriori empirical psychology to discover what is essential to something's being funny. At any rate, that is a possibility which this paper leaves open.

The two notions of independence, essential and modal, are often not clearly separated in the literature on realism and anti-realism. Indeed, sometimes it appears that anti-realism is being characterized as essential dependence and realism is being characterized as modal independence in the same breath. Dummett (1963), for instance, says that ‘for the anti-realist, the truth of the statement can only *consist in* the satisfaction of [evidential] criteria, whereas, for the realist, the statement *can be* true though we have no means of recognising it as true’ (p. 147; emphases added). This is not to say that Dummett conflates modal and essential independence claims (he may, for instance, be taking the realist’s modal claim as a consequence of her view as to what the truth of the statement in question consists in), but it should surprise us to see realism and anti-realism characterized in such apparently different ways at the outset and without discussion.²

In general, it is quite common to see independence defined in modal terms and matters left there, particularly by those less sympathetic to realism. Wright (1986, p. 5), for instance, says that to say truth is ‘objective’ or ‘not of our making’ is just to say that there could be truths which we could not know:

To hold that a class of statements may be fully intelligible to us although resolving their truth-values may defeat our cognitive powers (even when idealized) may naturally be described as believing in the *objectivity of truth*. For such statements, truth is not ‘of our making’ precisely because it may defy our powers of rational appraisal.

This is not meant to be a statement of Wright's particular view as to what objectivity amounts to: it is intended as (and it succeeds in being) an accurate representation of a very widespread conception of objectivity or independence.

But *should* independence be defined as modal independence, in the context of a discussion of realism? Essential independence is a view about the very nature of something's being the case: a view about *what it is* for that thing to be the case. Modal independence, on the other hand, merely concerns the possibility of that thing's being the case while something else is *not* the case. So modal independence appears to be, at the very least, philosophically less fundamental than essential independence. It will be argued here that it is also less suited to serve as definitive of realism. But first it is important to get clear as to how exactly the two notions of independence differ and how they are related to each other.

An important difference between the two conceptions of independence is that they can be used to generate different ways of spelling out the claim, often taken as characteristic (or at least a consequence) of realism, that reality (or truth) is 'potentially recognition-transcendent'. Essential independence yields the claim that certain aspects of reality *would not cease to be what they are* if they were recognition-transcendent, whereas modal independence yields the claim that *it is a genuine possibility* that these aspects of reality be recognition-transcendent.

The latter, plausibly, is the notion of potential recognition-transcendence in common use. But there is scope for confusion here, so just as it will not do simply to say that realists are committed to 'independence', it will not do simply to say that realists are committed to 'potential recognition-transcendence'. It should be

made explicit that one or other version is intended. But this point is usually not appreciated by contemporary philosophers. (To get a flavour of this, one could refer to Blanchette 1998, §1, Craig 1998, §3, Dummett 1963, p. 146 and 1982, p. 230, Resnik 1997, p. 11, or Shapiro 2000, p. 29.)

Wright (1986, p. 3) proposes that:

[w]hat seems essential [to realism] is the conception of truth as constituted by fit between our beliefs, or statements, and an independent, determinate reality. One way of making this conception more concrete is indeed to hold that the world may be determinate in ... unascertainable ways. But it is very far from obvious that such is the only way ...

This seems right in that it suggests that being a realist may not amount to admitting that recognition-transcendence is a genuine possibility.³ But Wright still relies on the unexplicated notion of beliefs or statements fitting an 'independent' reality. Unless it is explicitly stated that *essential* independence is intended, slippage between essential and modal independence is liable to result.

To many, modal independence claims seem *prima facie* to be strictly stronger than the corresponding essential independence claims. If there are worlds where p is the case but we our mental lives are not such that q, then it seems that, *a fortiori*, it is not part of *what it is* for p to be the case that our mental lives be such that q. In other words, modal independence implies essential independence. But the converse surely does not hold: it may not be part of what it is for p to be the case that our mental lives are such that q, yet there might for some other reason be no

possible world where p is the case and our mental lives are not such that q (for instance, there might be no possible world where our mental lives are not such that q). In other words, essential independence does not imply modal independence.

If modal independence implies essential independence, then establishing modal independence is one way of establishing essential independence. Perhaps this would excuse the conflation of the two notions in discussions where the aim is to establish realism. But it would *not* excuse the conflation in discussions where the aim is to *discredit* realism. To discredit modal independence is to discredit something strictly stronger than essential independence; essential independence claims may therefore survive criticisms levelled at modal independence. This point merits serious consideration if it is at all plausible that essential independence is the distinctive commitment of realism, since it will not do to reject realism by arguing against only the stronger of two plausible interpretations of the realist's thesis.

Before proceeding, it is worth noting that some philosophers conceive of modality in a way that would falsify the claim that modal independence implies essential independence (and would therefore render the conflation of the two kinds of independence even less excusable, whichever side one is on). From this perspective, modal and essential independence seem to be two-way independent: neither implies the other.

Consider a constructivist philosopher of mathematics who is asked to imagine a possible world w with no people in it, and say whether $2+2=4$ at w . She may argue that she is at liberty to answer 'yes', provided she maintains that its being the case at w that $2+2=4$ amounts to nothing more than the fact that *she*, in

assessing w , subjects it to the mathematical structure which she has constructed. She would then appear to be consistently accepting a kind of modal independence (whereby it is possible for $2+2=4$ to be the case at a world although mathematics is not constructed by us at that world) but rejecting essential independence (by maintaining that what it is for $2+2=4$ to be the case is for us to construct mathematical structures of a certain kind). If this consistency is genuine, then modal independence claims may not imply the corresponding essential independence claims.

Whether or not it is genuine depends upon whether it is permissible for $2+2=4$ to be the case at w where this depends, not upon intrinsic facts about w , but upon whether (and how) w is assessed by an actual being. A consequence of the line of thought ascribed to our constructivist is that one must believe that $2+2=4$ is the case at w although something which is essential to its being the case that $2+2=4$ is not the case at w . The constructivist might find this too counterintuitive, and prefer to say that $2+2=4$ is *not* in fact the case at w because nobody exists at w to perform the requisite mathematical construction. Saying that it is the case at w because *we* are imposing our own mathematical constructions on w was intended to maintain the intuition that $2+2=4$ at uninhabited worlds, but perhaps our intuitions in this area can be sufficiently respected by claiming that *if* we inhabited such worlds as w , *then* $2+2=4$ would be the case at these worlds.

The issue need not be decided here, but it is worth noting that the perspective which gives rise to the claim of two-way independence also suggests an objection to the habit of defining realism as a commitment to modal independence. The objection in question is that, to assess the modal independence of p from q , we have to imagine possible worlds where p , and consider whether, at

those worlds, q . But (according to this perspective) our thinking about possible worlds is done through the lens of our actual understanding. So arguments for modal independence simply do not speak to the anti-realist's concerns. Her interest is not in what we can see *through* the lens of our own ways of understanding; what she claims is that, in the relevant respects, *the lens itself* is not created to fit the structure of the world but rather imposes a structure upon it. Hence our constructivist does not feel that her anti-realism (the view that mathematics is the study of a structure we create) is threatened by arguments for modal independence, which can be made without ever considering whether mathematics is the study of a structure we create. And if modal independence is compatible with so extreme an anti-realist view as the view that mathematics is the study of a structure we create, then modal independence is certainly not the defining commitment of realism.

The train of thought which gives rise to this sort of objection is not uncommon. We can imagine a possible world where there are no people but where the sunsets are still beautiful. Does this mean we should be realists about beauty? It is often thought that it does not: the anti-realist can argue that the possible world we imagine is only beautiful because *we*, in assessing it, see beauty in it. (Moore 1903, chapter 6, invokes this sort of point.) Likewise, we cannot easily refute Kant's transcendental idealism by arguing that, since there were mountains before there were people, it must be possible for there to be mountains but not people, so that mountains cannot be part of the phenomenal world (which is a joint product of us and our surroundings). For Kantians can reply that when we consider whether or not there were mountains before there were people, we are imposing our sensibility on the pre-historic world.⁴

If one finds this perspective appealing, then one has reason to think both that modal independence and essential independence are two-way independent and that there is a serious objection to the identification of realism with modal independence. But, whatever our verdict on this point, there are other ways of arguing that realism and anti-realism should not be defined in modal terms. These will occupy the remainder of this section.

Modal dependence claims often seem to be insufficient to determine whether or not anti-realism is true. Must we be anti-realists about arithmetic just because, for any arithmetical p , there is no possible world where p is the case but where p cannot be proved? This is not clear. For the non-existence of such a world may simply be due to the fact that, at *every* world, every arithmetical p is provable. Whether or not we agree that at every world, every arithmetical p is provable, it does not seem that realism should follow from this alone.

This point will stand to be spelled out a little more. Surely it is consistent with arithmetical realism to think that, although arithmetical reality is independent of us, it is by its nature bound to be epistemically tractable, so that there could not be an arithmetical truth which we could not possibly prove (which is not, of course, to say that it is possible for us to prove *every* mathematical truth). Let's call this combination of views 'optimistic realism'. If realism is defined as a (common type of) modal independence claim, then optimistic realism about arithmetic is not coherent. Suppose we take realism to be the view that, for any arithmetical p , there is a possible world where p is the case but p is not provable. Then the optimistic thought that arithmetic is bound to be epistemically tractable rules out realism in a decisive and straightforward way.

Assuming that optimism of this kind ought *not* to rule out realism (at least, not without substantial further argument), realists are not committed to this version of modal independence. Hence an argument for the modal dependence of arithmetic upon provability is not sufficient to refute realism. (Note that the argument here is structurally similar to that found in Tennant 1997 at §§6.3-6.4, except that Tennant's 'Gödelian Optimist' will be accounted a realist (if at all) because he accepts bivalence for mathematical statements, whereas bivalence is not here assumed to be a commitment of optimistic realism.)

Optimism about the epistemic tractability of arithmetic is perfectly compatible with a commitment to the *essential* independence of arithmetic. It makes sense to say that, for any arithmetical p , there is no possible world where p is the case but p is unprovable, while maintaining that p 's being provable is no part of *what it is* for p to be the case. In just the same way, there is no possible world where I exist and $7+5=12$ is not the case, and yet its being the case that $7+5=12$ is not, on any reasonable understanding, part of *what it is* for me to exist.

We can lend further support to the claim that essential independence is the key commitment of realism by noting that *anti*-realist views generally consist in views about the nature of reality, and not in any modal claim. For instance, Kantians argue that phenomenal reality *is* (in part) a product of our sensibility (see e.g. Yablo 2002, p. 237: 'Numbers and sets are "there" because they are inscribed on the spectacles through which we see things'). Berkelian idealists believe that truths about the physical world *consist in* truths about ideas in the mind of God. Craig (1998) characterizes anti-realism about humour as the view that 'something's being funny is very much *a matter of* whether we find it funny'

(emphasis added). The slogan *esse est percipi* asserts that facts about existence *are* facts about perception. And Wright says that truth is *essentially* a goal of enquiry (1986, pp. 24-6). These are the kinds of grounds on which anti-realists claim that truth is not ‘independent’ of us, and they all appear to be claims of essential, rather than modal, dependence.

Insofar as anti-realists are committed to modal dependence claims (or to rejecting the modal independence claims they associate with realism), such commitments tend to be presented as a *consequence* of their commitment to essential dependence. Craig (1998) summarizes a common train of anti-realist thought in the question: ‘if [something’s] whole nature is due to the way we ‘construct’ it through our style of experience and investigation, how could there be anything about it that our cognitive faculties cannot recover?’. Moreover, given a certain conception of modal truth there is no reason to suppose that anti-realists *are* committed to modal dependence in general. Recall that on this conception it is consistent for a constructivist about mathematics to believe that there is a possible world where $2+2=4$ but where the truth of this proposition is not constructed by beings like us.

It is, perhaps, surprising that realism should be often defined in modal terms, when many anti-realists clearly consider essential dependence to be the core of their position. We could, of course, resolve the discrepancy either by characterizing both realism and anti-realism in terms of essence, or by characterizing both in modal terms. But we should consider that the question of essential independence is, as mentioned earlier, more philosophically fundamental than the question of modal independence. For that reason, if we understand the realism/anti-realism debate as a deep debate about the nature of reality, we should

characterize it as a debate concerning essential independence. While modal independence claims may turn out to be interestingly related to realism, they do not constitute the core of the realist position, and the relationship is not straightforward enough for anything to be assumed about it without careful discussion.

2 Essential independence and the Quasi-Realist

Blackburn has argued that any attempt to characterize realism in terms of a commitment to ‘objectivity’ or ‘independence’ can tend to undermine our grasp on what realism is. It is important to note, therefore, that being clear about the difference between essential and modal independence may help us to address this claim in a novel way.

Blackburn’s ‘quasi-realist’ is a character designed to illustrate the difficulties of giving a proper account of the debate between the realist and the anti-realist. The quasi-realist begins life as an anti-realist, but ends up ‘progressively able to mimic the intellectual practices supposedly definitive of realism’ (1980, p. 15). He is eventually able to assert various mind-independence (and other) claims which have been taken as distinctively realist. We thus seem to be left without a handle on what is at issue between the quasi-realist and the realist.

Blackburn claims that, for any realist-sounding assertion, the quasi-realist can understand that assertion in a way which makes it acceptable to him. So for instance, when the realist says something like *It’s really a fact that p*, the quasi-realist applies a minimalist interpretation and hears only something like *p to you with brass knobs on*. And, taking the brass knobs to be merely decorative, he

consequently assents to the realist's claim, all the while maintaining (for example) that assertions like *p* are nothing but expressions of attitudes (see e.g. Blackburn 2002).

Similarly, when the realist says that lying would have been wrong however things had been with us and our attitudes, the quasi-realist can hear this as the claim that our standards for moral disapprobation of lying do not involve reference to us or our attitudes, so that those standards could perfectly well have been met in a situation where we and our attitudes were different. Rejecting the claim that lying would have been morally acceptable had we but approved of it amounts to rejecting the claim that our moral standards tie approbation of lying to our attitudes about lying. (See e.g. Blackburn 1984, p. 219.) For all this, the quasi-realist can maintain that the standards in question are standards *for the adoption of an attitude* (or standards for an emotive rather than a cognitive response, or whatever). It's just that those standards make us *responsive*, not to our attitudes, but to other salient features of lying (its capacity to harm people, for instance).

The quasi-realist's strategy, when dealing with realist-sounding mind-independence claims, is to try to make them 'internal' to the subject-matter under consideration. An 'internal' claim about (e.g.) ethics is one which is internal to ethical discourse, i.e. one which itself an ethical claim. One way of explicating Blackburn's underlying thought would seem to be as follows. The quasi-realist can understand the claim that lying would have been wrong however things had been with us as the claim that all close possible worlds where things go differently with us are worlds where lying is wrong. Accepting this does not undermine his anti-realism, he can argue, since in accepting it he is simply adopting an attitude towards the possible worlds in question; he can hear assertions like 'Lying is

wrong at world w' as internal to ethical discourse by hearing them as expressions of ethical attitudes towards acts of lying at w. The quasi-realist thus understands 'Lying would have been wrong however things were with us and our attitudes' in such a way that asserting it makes clear that our standards for disapprobation of lying do not simply track the attitudes we happen to have towards lying in various situations. But he does this while leaving room for the (external, meta-ethical) claim that our standards for disapprobation of lying are standards for the adoption of a negative attitude towards lying.⁵

The realist who believes in essential independence is free to acknowledge Blackburn's insights here. She can allow that *It's really a fact that p* has a minimalist reading whereby it is merely a stylistic variant of p. And she can allow that counterfactual independence claims do not adequately characterize realism. (This should not be surprising, given the modal nature of counterfactuals: it has already been acknowledged that *prima facie* realist-sounding statements of modal independence are susceptible to interpretation in such a way as to make them acceptable to the anti-realist). The crucial question is: what can the quasi-realist say about the essential independence claim: *It is no part of what it is for lying to be wrong that we have a negative attitude to lying?* Now that we have taken care to define realism in terms of essential independence, can he continue with his customary mimicry?

Blackburn shows how the ethical quasi-realist can accept certain claims that might initially sound like claims of essential independence. For instance, the quasi-realist can accept that '[w]hat makes cruelty abhorrent is not that it offends us, but all those hideous things that make it do so' (1993, p. 172). For the

standards according to which we apply moral censure are concerned solely with the relevant features of actions, and make no mention of us or our attitudes to those actions. For all that, we are at liberty to regard moral censure as the expression of an attitude. So the quasi-realist can imitate the realist when it comes to saying what *makes it the case that p*.

But that is not the same thing as imitating her when it comes to saying *what it is for p to be the case*. In asking what makes it the case that p, we are asking what standards have to be met in order for p to be correctly asserted. We are asking after sufficient conditions: what it *takes* for p to be the case. That is not the same thing as asking what it *is* for p to be the case.

An example may help to elucidate this point. What it *takes* for Blackadder to be funny is for him to refer to Baldrick's cunning plan in a particular tone of voice, or get drunk and start singing that song about a goblin, or do any of a number of other things. But what it *is* for Blackadder to be funny is for him to make us laugh. When we are asked for a (non-trivial) account of what it is for X to be funny, our anti-realism about humour will out, even though it can be concealed if we ask only what it *takes* for X to be funny, what *makes* X funny, or even what it is *in virtue of which* X is funny.⁶

Questions about what it *takes* for p to be the case can be made internal to the target discourse by making them questions about the standards for accepting that p is the case – either questions about what those standards are, or questions about whether they are met in particular cases. This is what is happening when the quasi-realist interprets that claim that lying would have been wrong however things had been with us as the claim that our standards for disapproving of lying make us responsive to other factors than our own attitudes. The reason the quasi-

realist can adopt the ‘realist-sounding’ answers to these questions is that answering them tells us nothing about what the standards are standards *for*, i.e. *what it is* to meet those standards, and it is precisely on this point that the realist and the quasi-realist disagree. That is why the quasi-realist need not retract any of the realist-sounding internal claims he has made as soon as the external perspective is adopted.

Can we make assertions of essential independence internal? In asking *what it is* for p to be the case, can we be taken as asking a question on the same level as the question of *whether* p is the case or *what it takes* for p to be the case? The usual quasi-realist strategy does not deal easily with this challenge: in asking what *it is* for p to be the case, it does not seem we that we can be understood as asking what the standards for accepting p are, or as asking whether these standards are met in any particular situation. Rather, we are asking directly after the nature of p’s being the case.

How might the quasi-realist understand, in a way which makes it acceptable to him, the claim that it is no part of what it is for lying to be wrong that we have a negative attitude to it? Is there is a sense, for instance, in which a quasi-realist can say in good faith that what it is for lying to be wrong is for it to be dishonest, and there’s no more to it than that? Surely, if dishonesty is the feature of lying that we are responding to when we say it is wrong, there is nothing more to lying’s being wrong than its being dishonest.

This seems like a false start. If dishonesty is the feature we are responding to when we disapprove of lying, all that means is that lying’s being dishonest is *sufficient* for lying to count as wrong. It shows that lying’s being dishonest is what it *takes* for lying to be wrong, not what it *is* for lying to be wrong.

There is also a serious problem with the subtler suggestion that we should interpret the target claim as the claim that our ethical standards for saying what it is for lying to be wrong do not simply make us responsive to whether or not we have a negative attitude to lying. The difficulty here is that, insofar as we *have* standards for talking about what it is for lying to be wrong, the essence of lying's being wrong, they are not ethical standards, so we have not made the target claim internal to ethical discourse. Those standards are, in fact, precisely the ones we use to assess the external, meta-ethical, question on which the realist and the quasi-realist disagree, namely, the question of whether or not something's being wrong (meeting the standards for being accounted wrong) is a matter of our taking a negative attitude towards it. Hence, if the quasi-realist were to endorse the claim that our standards for what it is for lying to be wrong do not simply make us responsive to whether or not we have a negative attitude to lying, he would be making a meta-ethical claim which was in tension with his anti-realism.

In sum, Blackburn is right to note that many of the usual ways of spelling out what 'mind-independence' amounts to do not help us distinguish the realist from the anti-realist. But that this is because they do not capture the sense of 'mind-independence' which best characterizes realism. The conflation of essential and modal independence leaves the realist open to quasi-realist re-interpretation. But by being clear that it is an essential independence claim the realist intends to assert, we can, at the very least, present the quasi-realist with a significant new interpretative challenge.⁷

Notes

¹ Fine's 1994 provides an interesting point of comparison with this distinction between essential and modal independence. Fine argues that modal notions come apart from the notion *what something is*, much as it is argued here that modal notions come apart from the notion of *what it is* for something to be the case.

² Although it is unusual to see modal and essential independence clearly separated, a notable exception to the rule is Peacocke, who defines 'The Subjectivist Fallacy' as the move 'from a premiss stating that certain mental states are sufficient, or stating that certain mental states are necessary, for a given content to be true to the conclusion that the truth of the content consists, at least in part, in something subjective or mental' (2004, p. 226; the remainder of §7.4 is also interestingly related to the present discussion).

³ Two small reservations should be mentioned, however. The first is that some Dummettian influence may be responsible for Wright's describing the realist's 'independent' reality as being also 'determinate'. Dummett certainly suggests in many places that realists are committed to determinacy in the sense that they are committed to bivalence for statements about the subject matter under consideration (see e.g. Dummett 1963, p. 146 and 1967, p. 202). I do not see that we need include anything of this kind in a definition of realism. The second reservation is due to the fact that, as will be argued shortly, there is a perspective from which it seems wrong to describe modal independence claims as a way of making essential independence claims 'more concrete'. (This is the perspective

on which the two kinds of claim are two-way independent.)

⁴ A similar line of argument can be found in Berkeley's *Dialogues* (1713, p. 35). Hylas claims to have imagined an unconceived object, but Philonous points out that, in imagining it, Hylas himself has conceived the object. Hylas can imagine a possible world with an unconceived object in it, but, Philonous claims, this does not prove that objects can exist independently of the mind in the deep sense he is interested in.

⁵ Blackburn suggests that rejecting the claim that lying would have been acceptable had we but approved of it is a matter of expressing *moral disapprobation* of the kind of ethical standard which links the acceptability of lying to our attitude towards it in this manner (see e.g. Blackburn 1981, p. 179 and 1988, p. 173). But the expression of disapprobation of these standards would seem to be inessential to the quasi-realist's story (although of course such disapprobation may often also be present). As long as the quasi-realist can hear the claim that lying would have been acceptable had we but approved of it as the claim that our standards for disapproving of lying make us responsive to our attitudes about lying rather than to lying's other salient features, she can reject it as *false*, regardless of whether or not it is morally reprehensible.

⁶ Note that realists about a subject matter may find it hard to give any non-trivial account at all of what it is for something to be the case; but insofar as they can give such an account it will not be one which makes reference to our mental lives (except in mundane ways).

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