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THE METAPHYSICS OF NONFACTUALISM

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1. Usual Characterizations of Nonfactualism

I am concerned with a doctrine that is often called "nonfactualism" and that encompasses "noncognitivism," "emotivism," "projectivism," and Simon Blackburn's "quasi-realism" (1984, 1993a, 1993b). Nonfactualism in an area is obviously a sort of antirealism or eliminativism about that area. But what sort exactly? The usual answers in the literature are along the following lines. Nonfactualism about some area of language—for example, moral language, causal language, or the theoretical language of science—is the view that the predicates in that area do not denote, correspond to, etc., properties.¹ Or it is the view that the indicative sentences in that area are not assertions or statements,² are not factual or descriptive,³ are not truth-conditional,⁴ and do not correspond to facts.⁵ Rather, those sentences have other functions like expressing attitudes or emotions, or prescribing norms or rules.⁶

These answers make it seem as if nonfactualism is, primarily at least, a semantic doctrine, a doctrine about what sentences mean and predicates refer to.⁷ Yet implicit in the answers is a certain metaphysical doctrine, a doctrine about the way the world is or is not. The answers suggest that, metaphysically, nonfactualism about some area is the view that there are no properties⁸ or facts⁹ appropriate to that area; for example, there are no moral properties or facts.

Of course, it is not surprising that nonfactualism should have an implicit metaphysics. Intuitively, the central underlying idea of nonfactualism in an area is that the putative reality in that area is problematic or defective. This idea supplies the *motivation* for giving nonfactualism's special treatment to the predicates and sentences of the language in the area. Thus, it is *because* some philosophers think that there are no moral properties that they deny that moral predicates refer. Yet, given the impact of the "linguistic turn" in philosophy, it is also not

surprising that language, not the implicit metaphysics, is the focus of discussion.

I think that the failure to focus on the metaphysical doctrine is a mistake.¹⁰ For, that doctrine is distinct from the semantic one and, as just indicated, importantly prior to it. Indeed, concerning realism issues in general, I have argued that we should distinguish metaphysical from semantic doctrines. (I shall return to this idea in section 3.) Furthermore, we should *always* "put metaphysics first" by establishing a metaphysical base with near enough no appeal to semantics and by arguing from that base for a semantics (1991a; 1996, particularly section 4.12).¹¹ Finally, in the case of nonfactualism, I shall argue, the failure to focus on the metaphysics has left the doctrine unclear. And the unclarity is not only in the metaphysics: it affects the semantics as well. It is my aim to remove the unclarity, so far as that is possible. I shall start with the metaphysics, leaving conclusions about the semantics until the end.

2. The Failure of the Metaphysical Characterizations

Immediately we do focus on the metaphysics of nonfactualism, we see that the implicit characterizations of this in the literature are unsatisfactory.¹² The problem is that the characterizations overlook the extent to which a philosopher's attitude to the metaphysics characterized might reflect a position on the *general* issues of realism about properties and facts rather than on the particular problematic area of reality that is the concern of the nonfactualist; for example, rather than a position on morality. Thus, consider a *nominalist*. She will agree that there are no moral properties because she thinks that there are no properties at all! Yet, manifestly, this alone does not commit her to nonfactualism; to thinking that there is something especially defective about moral reality, something that motivates a special nonfactual semantics for moral language. She might be as realist as could be *about morality*. Or, consider someone like David Armstrong (1978) who is a *selective realist* about properties. Armstrong thinks that empty predicates, disjunctive predicates, and negative predicates have no corresponding properties. He thinks that some predicates apply to the world in virtue of many properties. Most importantly, he looks to science to tell us which properties there are. Such a person might well be a reductive realist about morality thinking that a moral predicate may apply to an object in virtue of many properties *none of which are moral properties*; perhaps they are social and psychological properties. So he also agrees with the metaphysics implicitly attributed to nonfactualism and yet his metaphysics of morality is quite contrary to the antirealist one that we are attempting to characterize. Finally, consider the *unselective realist* who thinks that there is a property for each predicate. A nonfactualist might accept, as indeed Blackburn does (1993a: 206), that moral terms are predicates. If

such a nonfactualist is an unselective realist she will think that there *are* moral properties, thus *disagreeing* with the implicit characterization of moral nonfactualism. And even if the nonfactualist denies that moral terms are predicates and hence that there are moral properties, the implicit characterization of her nonfactualism is problematic: it "runs the wrong way." It finds a defect in moral reality because of something special about moral language where we need to find a defect in moral reality to motivate the view that moral language is special.

The general issue of realism about properties is independent of the issue of nonfactualism. Similarly, the general issue of realism about facts. If nonfactualism has a coherent metaphysics it should be possible for someone to embrace it or reject it whatever her position on these general issues. There should be a way of stating that metaphysics that is appropriate whatever the truth of the matter about the reality of properties and facts.

The problem spills over into the characterization of another sort of antirealism, usually called the "error" doctrine. The metaphysical contrast between the two sorts is often brought out by saying that whereas nonfactualism about morality claims that there are no moral properties, the error doctrine claims that there are moral properties but they are not instantiated.¹³ This characterization of the error doctrine is unsuitable for anyone but an unselective realist about properties.

It is easy enough to remedy the situation for the error doctrine because that doctrine does not propose a special semantics. Let '*F*' be any predicate in the problematic area. The metaphysics of the error doctrine is: there are no *F*s (or *F* things): for example, there are no good people, right actions, and so on. And this brings out nicely an important contrast with nonfactualism. For, the nonfactualist is happy to say that there are some *F*s (or *F* things). Indeed, it is both a mark and an advantage of nonfactualism—as Blackburn (1993a) emphasizes in his ingenious defense of quasi-realism—that nonfactualism goes along with realism in this respect. Whereas an error doctrine claims that all moral utterances are false and so the practice of making them is mistaken, the nonfactualist is likely to think that many of these utterances express appropriate emotions or prescriptions and so the practice of making them is fine.

It is precisely this mark of nonfactualism that makes the problem of characterizing its metaphysics seem puzzling. The nonfactualist talks like a realist while giving that talk a special interpretation. How then can we describe nonfactualism in a way that distinguishes it from realism?

A feeling of vertigo may set in at this point. We are attempting a characterization of the metaphysics that must motivate the special semantic treatment that nonfactualism gives to a certain area of language. Yet our attempts seem doomed to vitiation by that very semantic treatment. Attempts in the "ordinary" language of metaphysical commitment will fail

because that language is interpreted so that it has no such commitment. So attempts are made in a "philosophical" language that talks of properties and facts, apparently on the assumption that this language is spared the nonfactualist interpretation. But we have seen that these characterizations are unsatisfactory. (And we may wonder why the philosophical language is spared the interpretation.) Nonfactualism is supposed to be a sort of antirealism and yet it seems impossible to state its antirealism. Realism issues begin to evaporate. Indeed, Blackburn sometimes comes very close to claiming that they have evaporated (1993a: 4, 15–34, 55–9; 1993b: 368).

3. Can We Really Do Metaphysics without Doing Semantics?

Before attempting to cure this vertigo, I pause to address a more general problem suggested by the discussion. The discussion may seem to threaten the whole enterprise of seeking nonsemantic metaphysical characterizations of antirealist doctrines. For, it casts doubt on my earlier assumption, argued for elsewhere, that we can sharply distinguish metaphysical issues about realism from semantic issues. The discussion suggests rather that metaphysical claims must be accompanied by a semantic theory about their interpretation. This suggestion is a common one and is an important reason why many philosophers insist on characterizing realism in semantic terms. Thus, objecting to my nonsemantic and objectual characterization of realism about common-sense and scientific physical entities (1991a), Michael Williams claims

that any such attempt to identify realism with commitment to a certain body of *truths*, rather than a view about truth, is bound to misfire. For we have to add the proviso that these truths be accepted at "face value" and explaining how and why this is so will inevitably reinvolve us with questions about what the truth of propositions of common sense and science should be understood to consist in. (1993: 212n)

Here is one way to develop this objection. Merely stating such truths as 'There exist stones', 'There exist trees', 'There exist cats', and so on, does not ontologically commit you to stones, trees, and cats, and so on. That commitment depends on accepting the statements at face value so that they have certain truth conditions; for, on that interpretation, those entities must exist for the statements to be true. The ontological question becomes clear only when we move into the metalanguage and consider this semantic question.¹⁴ The disagreement between the realist and the antirealist is not over statements like the one above but over how such statements are to be understood. So the disagreement is a semantic one.

It is indeed right that if object-language sentences like 'There exists cats' are to yield a commitment then they must, in some sense, be accepted

at face value: we must simply rely on our ordinary understanding of them.¹⁵ But it is wrong that this motivates any move to a metalinguistic semantic statement of truth conditions in order to establish a commitment; for example, a move to "Cats exist" is true if and only if there exists things that 'cat' applies to. For, *the very same problem arises for the semantic statement*: if that statement is to establish commitment, we must rely on our ordinary understanding of it.¹⁶ I don't claim that there is no problem in establishing a commitment in the object-language, but simply that any problem that there is arises as much in the metalanguage. If any language is to establish a commitment to anything, we have to rely on our ordinary understanding of some language. But it would be preposterous to claim that the language we rely on must be semantic; that commitment might come from 'There exist things that 'cat' applies to' but *could not* come from 'There exist cats'. Language does not suddenly become kosher when you start doing semantics. The idea that talk about the world is unclear and in special need of interpretation, yet talk about language and its relation to the world is straightforward on the face of it, reflects the damage of years of living under the linguistic turn.

It is a truism that a theory must be presented to us in language. So to draw any conclusions at all from the theory, whether about ontological commitment or the price of eggs, we have to understand the language in which it is presented. But this mundane fact supplies no reason for supposing that we must move to a semantic theory to determine the ontological commitment of our object theory, because the fact covers the semantic theory too: even semantics requires language. A semantic theory of a sentence could clearly help us to understand that sentence but the theory is not necessary for the understanding (else we would understand very little). And, equally clearly, even when the theory does help, it does not make the issue that concerns the sentence semantic.

I conclude that the enterprise of seeking nonsemantic metaphysical characterizations of antirealist doctrines is not threatened; we do not have to retreat into semantics to do metaphysics. I return now to our problems with nonfactualism in particular.

4. Rejecting Global Nonfactualism

Consider, first, the idea - perhaps endorsed by nobody—that realism issues evaporate entirely because of the possibility of "global" nonfactualism, the possibility that *all* of our language that seems to have realist commitments—in effect, all apparently factual or descriptive language—does not really do so. That is surely a possibility we need not take seriously. There certainly could be a language that was entirely nonfactual, making no claims about how the world is; for example, consider a segment of English that includes only certain commands. A realist doctrine could not

be stated in such a language. Neither, of course, could any other doctrine. But we have the best reason in the world for thinking that English as a whole is not like this; that parts of it are factual. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the nonfactualist, like everyone else, seems to think that semantic claims are factual (and if they were not, nonfactualism itself would be nonfactual!). She also seems to think that the unsatisfactory characterization of her metaphysics in terms of properties and facts is factual.

To dismiss global nonfactualism is not to claim that all apparently factual language must be taken as really being factual, thus making nonfactualism impossible. We can adapt Quine's favorite image from Neurath: rebuilding a boat whilst staying afloat on it. We can rebuild any part of the boat but in so doing we must take a stand on some other part. So we cannot rebuild it all at once. Analogously, we can reject any apparently factual sentence as not really being so but in so doing we must take some other apparently factual sentences for granted. So we cannot reject all apparently factual sentences at once. There must always be some factual language we take as really being factual in order to stay afloat.¹⁷

To dismiss global nonfactualism is not to claim either that some parts of our language must be truth-conditional. It is common to assume that the right semantics for factual language is truth-conditional. Combine this assumption with the rejection of global nonfactualism and it obviously follows that some parts of our language are indeed truth-conditional. I think that the assumption is right, but I have done nothing here to show that it is right. Non-truth-conditional semantics for factual language are possible. We shall return to this matter in section 9.

In sum, we need not worry that realism issues will evaporate because all of our language might be nonfactual. Yet, taking it for granted that some of our language is indeed factual, we still have a worry. The worry is that realism issues will evaporate because the language of *any* issue might be entirely nonfactual. Perhaps language is so "compartmentalized" that the language of a realism issue in any given area can be interpreted nonfactually and there is no way to use the factual language "from elsewhere" to distinguish the realist from the nonfactualist in the given area. We cannot go nonfactualist everywhere at once but perhaps we can go entirely nonfactualist anywhere.

I shall argue that we cannot. Roughly, language is not entirely compartmentalized because reality is not.

5. Characterizing the Metaphysics of Nonfactualism

To avoid the evaporation of the realism issue in some area, and to characterize the metaphysics of nonfactualism in that area, we must first find some language that is not just apparently factual but is treated by the

nonfactualist as *really* factual. We must then examine her statements regarding that language to find ones that disagree with realist statements about the area.

We have a reason to be optimistic that we will find these disagreements. I have noted that the motivation for a nonfactualist semantics in some area comes from dissatisfaction with the putative reality in that area, a reality that the realist embraces (section 1). A nonfactualist's statement of this dissatisfaction must be in the uncontroversially factual language if the dissatisfaction is really to play the motivational role. This statement should provide a genuine metaphysical disagreement with the realist.

There is thus something fundamentally misguided about attempting to defend antirealism in an area by claiming that *all* the language in that area has a nonfactual semantics. Such a claim both undermines the realism issue and leaves the semantics unmotivated. If the claim were true there would be nothing to distinguish realism from antirealism in the area and hence there would be no reason for any special treatment of its apparently factual language.

Two sorts of realist claim are the most promising candidates for denial by the nonfactualist. First, realists tend to offer some explanations of the *nature* of the problematic reality in language that the nonfactualist should agree is factual. For, the realist thinks that the problematic reality is constituted by, or supervenes on, a reality that should be *unproblematic* for the nonfactualist. Even though the nonfactualist claims to be able to accept many sentences that seem to describe the problematic reality, taking them as expressive, prescriptive, or whatever, she should not accept these explanations because, loosely, she does not accept that there is any such reality to be explained. Second, realists make claims in the uncontroversially factual language about the *causal role* of the problematic reality. For the realist thinks that the problematic reality is the cause or effect of some *unproblematic* reality.¹⁸ The nonfactualist should not accept these claims about the role of the problematic reality because, loosely again, on her view there is no such reality to play a role.¹⁹

Of course, this rejection of realist claims about the nature and role of the problematic reality may seem implausible. But that is the price that nonfactualism must pay for its motivation.

It is interesting to compare these realist claims with others that have been the subject of much discussion in the nonfactualism debate.²⁰ Take some simple sentence which, when affirmed on its own, is alleged to be nonfactual; for example, 'Lying is wrong'. Now consider the role of this sentence in conditionals; for example, in 'If lying is wrong, Alice should be punished'. How can the special nonfactualist semantics of the sentence when occurring on its own be applied to the sentence when occurring in the conditional? The two occurrences must be given closely related meanings if the intuitive validity of certain inferences is to be captured; for example,

the inference from these examples of a simple sentence and a conditional to 'Alice should be punished'. The task of providing the required semantics may be impossible and is certainly difficult.

I have suggested that the nonfactualist should reject realist claims about the nature and role of the problematic reality. Could she similarly reject these conditionals, and the arguments containing them, hence declining this difficult task? Both the friends and foes of nonfactualism clearly think not. They are surely right. However implausible it may be for nonfactualism to reject the claims about nature and role, it would surely be more so to reject the conditionals: it would make the nonfactualist view of the simple sentences very hard to accept. Furthermore, there is no pressing need to pay the price of *this* rejection, as there is the rejection of claims about nature and role, in order to motivate nonfactualism. For, important as these conditionals are in ordinary discourse, they are not central expressions of realist metaphysics.

I have suggested *nonsensational* ways to characterize metaphysical disagreements between realists and nonfactualists. Still, it must be acknowledged that the *discovery* of such a characterization in any particular case would be aided by some simple semantics: by a precise statement from the nonfactualist about the boundary between the language she takes to be factual and the language she takes to be nonfactual. But this semantics is only an aid to discovery. It is a preliminary to the characterization, not part of it. Furthermore, the semantic preliminary is not necessary: a discussion of the nature and role of the problematic reality will reveal the metaphysical disagreements.

Where we lack both the semantic preliminary and the discussion, any attempt to characterize nonfactualism in an area, particularly by a realist, must be tentative. We can hope to indicate the general area of nonfactualist disagreement with the realist but cannot be confident about the exact place. And, given that nonfactualism deprives us of much of our language for describing reality, we should not be surprised that neat and simple characterizations of the disagreement are hard to come by. Although realism issues do not evaporate in the face of the possibility of nonfactualism, they do become much more difficult to characterize. What appeared to be relatively tidy issues (to me, at least; 1991a) become decidedly messy.

I shall apply and develop these ideas for characterizing nonfactualism by considering three examples: instrumentalism, moral nonfactualism, and deflationary truth.

6. Instrumentalism

I start with a doctrine that is no longer popular: the traditional scientific instrumentalism urged with such success by the positivists. According to this instrumentalism, a theory is a partially interpreted formal system.

The vocabulary of the theory is divided into two parts, an "observational" part which is fully interpreted and a "theoretical" part which is uninterpreted. In our terminology, the observational part is factual whilst the theoretical part is a nonfactual "instrument" for generating factual claims. So far, all we have is semantics. What about metaphysics? The motivation for instrumentalism clearly comes from some general doubts about unobservable reality but the doubts are inexplicit (reflecting, of course, the positivist horror of all things metaphysical).²¹

It would be nice if we could take these doubts, straightforwardly, as being about whether the unobservables of science exist: the instrumentalist believes that they do not exist or that we cannot know that they exist. However, we will not find a simple expression of instrumentalist doubt about, for example, the statement 'Atoms exist'. The problem is that, for the instrumentalist, 'atom' is part of the uninterpreted nonfactual vocabulary and the statement is an implicit part of a theory that she is as ready to endorse as the realist.²² To find the appropriate expressions of instrumentalist doubt we must look for realist statements that are "about unobservables" and *yet are in the observational, hence factual, language*.

We can find these statements in realist views about the natures and roles of unobservables. Thus, consider what a realist influenced by the kinetic theory of gases might say "about molecules" without using 'molecule': that there are spherical, elastic, smooth entities constituting a gas; that their impact on the wall of a containing flask is responsible for the pressure exerted by the gas; that the temperatures of two gases are the same when the mean kinetic energy of those constituting entities of the two gases are the same; and so on. This language all seems observational and hence factual. Yet it posits entities that are unobservable. So the instrumentalist should deny this realist claim or remain agnostic about it. There are many other such realist claims. So the instrumentalist's antirealist metaphysics is characterized by her doubts about all these claims.

Of course, this metaphysical position is not a comfortable one for the instrumentalist because the realist claims she is doubting are drawn from science. Yet she cannot accept the claims on pain of leaving her nonfactualist semantics unmotivated.²³

7. Moral Nonfactualism

Consider moral nonfactualism next. Speaking loosely and intuitively, the moral nonfactualist holds that the only reality underlying moral utterances is a realm of attitudes and/or emotions.²⁴ The task is to specify precisely, in uncontroversially factual terms, the richer reality of the moral realist that is thus denied. We shall have no success trying to do this with existential statements. The nonfactualist thinks that she can join the realist in saying, "there are good people," "there are right actions," and so on. To

find what the nonfactualist is most likely to deny, we must consider what the realist says about the natures and roles of good people, right actions, and so on.

Realists claim that there are things about a person *in virtue of which* she is good, *that make* her good; for example, being kind, considerate, generous, honest, etc. Similarly, realists claim that there are things about an action *in virtue of which* it is wrong, *that make* it wrong; for example, leading to unhappiness, being contrary to socially accepted rules, and so on. The language of these "in virtue of" clauses seems to be the sort that the nonfactualist will count as factual. (If not, she must help us find some other clauses along the same lines that she will count as factual.) The nonfactualist must reject all such "in virtue of" claims as totally misconceived. Consider crude "Boo-Hooray" nonfactualism, for example. Suppose that Mark says, "Alice is good." The nonfactualist, like anyone else, may explain in virtue of what Mark has the "hooray-attitude" that he thus expresses: something *about Mark*, his disposition to behave in certain ways, a certain physiological state, or whatever, makes it the case that he has this attitude. But this is very different from explaining in virtue of what Alice is good (supposing that she is). The realist thinks that there is something *about Alice* that explains this: it is *her* kindness, generosity, disposition to behave in certain ways, disposition to cause hooray-attitudes in others, or whatever, that make her good. The nonfactualist rejects any such explanation of Alice's goodness.

Realists think that explanations may be given of how a person came to be good: because she had loving parents, such and such genes, and so on. Realists think that there are consequences of her being good: she is admired, is sought after as a friend, causes hooray-attitudes in others, is taken advantage of, and so on. Realists think that it is because Hitler and his associates were deprived that we believe that they were deprived. And it is because they were deprived that they behaved as they did and that millions of people died in concentration camps. Realists think that there are consequences of an act being wrong: it causes boo-attitudes; the person committing it is condemned, avoided, and so on.²⁵ The language in the causal clauses of these explanations seems to be factual. The nonfactualist must reject all such explanations.²⁶ It is not the case that there are any causes or effects of things being good, deprived, wrong, and so on.

The moral realist thinks that there is a moral reality which, like any other reality, has a nature and has relations to other realities; and that this nature and those relations need explanations.²⁷ The nonfactualist reveals her antirealism by rejecting any such explanation. Even if she is right in thinking that she can join with the realist in accepting ordinary moral judgements, she cannot join with him in his explanation of the reality which he takes those judgements to describe.

8. Deflationary Truth

Finally, I turn to deflationary truth. According to the deflationist, the function of 'true' is not to describe a sentence, at least not to describe it in the way that a normal predicate like 'green' describes an object. Rather, the function of 'true' is logical or expressive, a convenient device for making assertions *about the largely nonlinguistic world*. Thus, instead of repeating a person's sentence about a movie, I can make the same point about the movie by saying "That is true". I can express general agreement with an article about the behavior of penguins by saying "Most of that article is true". I can assert Goldbach's Conjecture even though I cannot remember it by saying "Goldbach's Conjecture is true". 'True' is particularly convenient for the assertion of an infinite number of sentences.

This is all about the semantics of 'true'. What is the deflationist's metaphysics of truth? How does that metaphysics differ from the semantic realist's? (Here, the metaphysical issue between the nonfactualist and the realist is, confusingly, itself semantic.) They do not differ over whether there are true (false) sentences. They agree that there are. They disagree about the nature and role of truth.

In virtue of what is a sentence, say 'Schnee ist weiss', true? According to the realist the sentence is true because it is related in some way to the world. A substantial theory is then required to describe and explain this relationship. The theory might include causal theories of reference, claims about warranted assertability, or whatever. The deflationist rejects any such realist explanation of truth. (There is no controversy here about the factual nature of the language used in the explanation.) Furthermore, she has an interesting alternative along the following lines. Truth is basically "disquotational." There is nothing more to it than is captured by the infinite set of appropriate instances of the schema,

s is true if and only if *p*.

An "appropriate" instance is one where what is substituted for '*s*' names a "translation" of the sentence substituted for '*p*'. Given that 'snow is white' translates 'Schnee ist weiss', 'Schnee ist weiss' is true, according to the deflationist, *simply* in virtue of it being the case that snow is white. No deeper explanation is called for.

Realists give truth important explanatory roles: for example, to explain the success of science or the success of people in meeting their goals. In my view, the most interesting realist role for truth is in a truth-conditional explanation of meaning, where meaning itself plays a role in the explanation of behavior and in guiding us to reality (1996). The deflationist rejects all such explanatory roles for truth.²⁸ In virtue of the logical role of 'true', if a sentence to which 'true' is applied plays an explanatory

role, then so does 'true'. But, for the deflationist, truth can have no explanatory role beyond this trivial one because, crudely, truth "isn't anything."

In this example, as in the previous two, I have claimed that the nonfactualist is distinguished from the realist by her denial of the realist's explanations of the nature and role of the problematic reality. But what about someone who claims to be a realist but does not see the need for any such explanations? For example, consider someone who simply insists that truth is "robust" or "substantive" but offers no explanation of it; and he thinks that truth is "epiphenomenal" not explanatory.²⁹ It is hard to see how this position can be distinguished metaphysically from nonfactualism. And this surely adds to the implausibility of the position.

9. The Semantics of Nonfactualism

I turn finally to the special semantics of nonfactualism. I began this paper with the usual characterizations of this semantics. Many of these are unsatisfactory.

I have argued that the implicit characterization of the metaphysics of nonfactualism, talking of properties or facts, is unsatisfactory (see: 2). It follows that characterizations of the special semantics of nonfactualism in those terms are also unsatisfactory. Thus, we cannot capture that semantics with the claim that predicates in the problematic area do not refer to properties; nor with the claim that the sentences in that area do not correspond to facts. A person might accept these claims because of general views about properties or facts, views that have nothing to do with nonfactualism about the problematic area.

Another common characterization is also inappropriate: that the sentences in the problematic area are not truth-conditional. This characterization is not general enough. It is suitable only for someone who believes that the right semantics for *factual* language is truth-conditional. Many have this belief—and I am one of them—but it is inappropriate to presuppose it in characterizing nonfactualism. It should be possible for a verificationist who rejects truth-conditional semantics *altogether* to be a nonfactualist about, say, morality; indeed, Ayer, a famous moral nonfactualist, is presumably an actual example. Yet, if even factual sentences are not truth-conditional, then the *distinctive* thing about moral sentences that makes them nonfactual cannot be that they are not truth-conditional. And it should be possible for someone who is a deflationist, hence a nonfactualist, about truth to be a nonfactualist about something else like morality. Yet a deflationist is likely to think that *all* indicative sentences, including moral ones, are deflationarily truth-conditional.³⁰

The claim that the indicative sentences in the problematic area are not assertions or statements comes closer to a satisfactory characterization of

nonfactualism. But the closest will usually be the claim that the problematic sentences are not factual or descriptive but rather expressive, prescriptive, or whatever. We take it for granted that many indicative sentences are factual (since global nonfactualism is not feasible). We take it for granted that many nonindicative sentences have other functions like expressing attitudes or emotions, or prescribing norms or rules. The nonfactualist is claiming that, despite appearances, the problematic sentences have a semantics like the latter not the former. If she is a truth-conditionalist about the factual sentences, she will think that the problematic sentences have no truth conditions; if a verificationist, that they have no verification conditions. (Even this usually satisfactory characterization is unsuitable for deflationary truth, as Scott Soames has emphasized to me. Here we say that 'true' does not have the semantics of a normal descriptive predicate, perhaps not that of a predicate at all, but rather a certain logical or expressive role.)

This characterization of nonfactualism's special semantics makes vivid the need for an independent characterization of its metaphysics, a need that I have been at pains to emphasize. For, although this semantic characterization may seem a natural bedfellow for an antirealist metaphysics, it fairly obviously does not entail any such metaphysics; it tells us nothing at all about the nature of nonlinguistic reality.

10. Conclusion

I have argued that the usual characterizations of nonfactualism are unsatisfactory. The problem partly comes from focusing on nonfactualism's special semantics instead of on the antirealist metaphysics that must motivate that semantics. The problem also comes from the genuine difficulty in characterizing this metaphysics because nonfactualism goes along with many realist utterances, claiming to be able to interpret them in a special way. I have rejected the usual implicit characterizations of the metaphysics: that there are no properties or facts in the problematic area. Using the examples of instrumentalism, moral nonfactualism, and deflationary truth, I have argued for a general method for characterizing this metaphysics: make precise the idea that, in the problematic area, there is no reality with a nature to be explained and with a causal-explanatory role. There should always be some uncontroversially factual language in which to state this rejection of the problematic reality. Of course, the rejection may seem implausible, but that is the price that nonfactualism must pay for its motivation. Finally, I turned to the special semantics of nonfactualism, rejecting accounts of this in terms of properties, facts, and truth conditions, but accepting ones that contrast the apparently descriptive or factual function of indicative sentences in the problematic area with their alleged function as expressive, prescriptive, or whatever.³¹

Notes

1. See, e.g., Ayer 1952: 89; Sayre-McCord 1988c: 7; Boghossian 1990a: 157–161; 166; 1990b: 266.
2. See, e.g., Ayer 1952: 103; Haldane and Wright 1993b: 11; Hale 1993: 337.
3. See, e.g., Ayer 1952: 107; Wright 1988: 29; Sayre-McCord 1988c: 4; Blackburn 1993a: 3, 60; Haldane and Wright 1993b: 11–12.
4. See, e.g., Ayer 1952: 103, 107; Sayre-McCord 1988c: 5; Boghossian 1990a: 160–1, 164; 1990b: 266; Blackburn 1993a: 60; Hale 1993: 337, 340; Haldane and Wright 1993b: 11.
5. See, e.g., Wright 1988: 29; Sayre-McCord 1988b: ix–x; Boghossian 1990a: 160; Haldane and Wright 1993b: 12.
6. See, e.g., Ayer 1952: 103, 107; Sayre-McCord 1988c: 4, 8; Boghossian 1990a: 160; Blackburn 1993a: 3, 60; 1993b: 365; Hale 1993: 337; Haldane and Wright 1993b: 11. Strictly speaking these accounts of nonfactualism need qualification because the sentences in question may be *partly* assertions, *partly* truth-conditional, and *partly* factual. We can ignore the qualification.
7. Caution is required in taking what appear to be semantic claims as really being so. The apparently semantic terms may be playing only a “disquotational” role (see sec. 8). So a claim that a predicate does not refer may be just a way of claiming that a property does not exist.
8. See, e.g., Ayer 1952: 89; Boghossian 1990a: 157–9, 161–2; Blackburn 1993a: 3.
9. See particularly Wright 1988: 29–30; Sayre-McCord 1988b: ix–x, 4; Blackburn 1993a: 3, 52, 57; Hale 1993: 337; Railton 1993: 280.
10. Some “no fact of the matter” doctrines do focus on metaphysics, of course; for example, doctrines about absolute space-time or inverted spectra. But these doctrines do not involve the semantic claims in my opening paragraph. Those semantic claims are an essential part of the nonfactualism I am concerned with.
11. In discussing realism about the external world, I capture these ideas in two maxims:

Maxim 2: Distinguish the metaphysical (ontological) issue of realism from any semantic issue. (1991a: 3)

Maxim 3: Settle the realism issue before any epistemic or semantic issue. (p. 4)

According to Maxim 2 no semantic doctrine about truth constitutes the metaphysical doctrine of realism. This is not to say that there are no connections between the two sorts of doctrine. I follow Duhem-Quine in thinking, roughly, that everything is evidentially connected to everything else. In particular, I agree with many that the metaphysical doctrine of realism is very hard to support if we argue from an epistemic view of truth (sec. 4.3). But, according to Maxim 3, that is the wrong way to argue: we should argue from metaphysics to semantics. So I reject John Haldane and Crispin Wright’s implication—in arguing for Michael Dummett’s close connection between metaphysics and

- semantics—that an evidence-transcendent doctrine of truth is a necessary “semantic preparation” and “groundwork” for the metaphysical doctrine (1993b: 5–6). The metaphysical doctrine needs no such preparation or groundwork. Rather, the doctrine of truth needs the metaphysical groundwork.
12. The unsatisfactory ones include my own in discussing quasi-realism (1991a: 55).
 13. I.e., see Boghossian 1990b: 265. A paradigm example of an error doctrine is John Mackie’s view of morality (1977).
 14. This develops the objection so that it strikes at what I call, “the existence dimension” of the metaphysical doctrine of realism. Williams himself is more concerned with what I call “the independence dimension” of the doctrine: the view that the world is, as he says, “objective” and “independent of how we think.” The objection encourages him to continue thinking that “the obvious way to unpack” the independence dimension is in terms of “a radically non-epistemic” notion of truth (p. 193). I argue that the dimension can and should be unpacked without any mention of notions of truth (1991a, particularly secs. 2.2, 1.3.5–1.3.7).
 15. My discussion of this draws on my 1991a: 50–7.
 16. This point does not depend on any particular view of the nature of our ordinary understanding of a language. So the point survives the common, though I think mistaken, view that this understanding consists in (tacit) semantic propositional knowledge about the language. I argue (most recently in 1996: ch. 2), that this common view implies an unargued and implausible Cartesian access to semantic facts. We should take our linguistic competence to be simply a skill, a piece of knowledge-how not knowledge-that.
 17. The argument against global nonfactualism has certain parallels with the argument against global “response dependency.” The conclusion of the latter argument is that global response dependency amounts to constructivist antirealism (1991a: 251–6).
 18. What if she is also a *causal* nonfactualist? Then the suggestions of this paragraph would have to be adjusted by replacing the allegedly nonfactual causal external reality underlying causal talk; say, constant conjunction.
 19. It is usual to take realism to involve some claim about the objectivity and independence of the problematic reality’s nature and role. We need not be concerned with such claims because nonfactualist disagreement comes “earlier” with the claims that there is a reality with such a nature and role.
 20. See, e.g., Geach 1960; Dummett 1973: ch. 10; Blackburn 1984: 189–96; 1993a: ch. 10; 1993b; Wright 1988; Hale 1993.
 21. One might be dubious of unobservable reality in general, or of some parts of it in particular, and hence be an instrumentalist in some sense, without embracing the described semantics. But that semantics is essential to traditional instrumentalism and makes it an example of the sort of nonfactualism I am discussing (cf. note 10).
 22. My earlier discussion of this is, therefore, mistaken; 1991a: 129.
 23. Can she accept the claims but resist the realist interpretation of them by treating uses of ‘there are’ in “talk about unobservables” as uninterpreted?

She could (although I don't think that she would), but doing so will not help her. 'There are' would still have its other, interpreted, use and the instrumentalist cannot prevent the realist from employing that use in these claims. The instrumentalist must still have doubts about the claims, *so interpreted*.

24. One sort of moral antirealist thinks that a moral judgement is implicitly *relative to some norm*; for example, the utilitarian norm. Thus a person ought to do such and such *only* in that she ought to do it relative to some implicit norm; there is no "absolute" respect in which she ought to do it. This, combined with the view that no one norm is objectively better than any other, yields a fairly straightforward nonfactualist metaphysics, as Harry Field (1994: secs. 3-4) shows in discussing Allan Gibbard (1990). This antirealism does not involve a semantics of the sort that is definitive of the nonfactualism I am discussing.
25. Peter Railton (1986) and Nicholas Sturgeon (1988) are realists who emphasize the explanatory role of moral reality. Similarly, Michael Slote (1971) emphasizes the explanatory role of aesthetic reality. John Mackie (1977) and Gilbert Harman (1977) are antirealists who deny the explanatory role of moral reality. Blackburn may disagree:

If you tell me that injustice caused the revolution, I understand that there is some property that you take to give rise to injustice, and that caused the revolution. I must, in my own assessment, separate the truth of the causal story you are pointing toward, from my own verdict on whether it amounts to injustice. . . . Perhaps I would not myself call [the causal feature indicated] unjust, but I can assent to the explanation without endorsing the verdict on the feature. (1993a: 205-6)

- He can but he surely should not. If he does not think that the feature amounts to injustice then he does not think that injustice caused the revolution.
27. Note that this is true even of a subjective realist. The subjectivist agrees with the nonfactualist that only certain attitudes or emotions underlie moral talk, but disagrees in thinking that moral utterances describe rather than express that underlying reality.
28. Or should do, at least. Sometimes deflationists wrongly claim an explanatory role for deflationary truth; see, e.g., Horwich 1990, p. 45, and my 1991b, pp. 278-80.
29. Thomas Nagel (1980: 114n) thinks that moral reality need not be explanatory. Ayer muddies the water somewhat by denying that ethical statements are true or false (1952: 103, 107). Given his view that truth is merely deflationary (pp. 87-90), this denial must be a mistake unless he believes that ethical statements should not be asserted. For, on his view, saying that a statement is true is simply asserting it. So saying that it is true does not tell us that it is factual, nor anything else about it.
31. My views on nonfactualism benefited greatly from discussions with Georges Rey while writing Devitt and Rey 1991. Some of the present paper builds on and modifies a brief discussion of the issue in that paper. (That paper was a response to Boghossian 1990b, which was a response to Devitt 1990, which was a response to Boghossian 1990a.) I thank the following for helpful com-

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AGAINST METAPHYSICAL VAGUENESS

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Thesis: The world is not a fuzzy place; objects, independent of how they are described, do not have indeterminate boundaries. Section I will argue for a limitation on how fuzzy the world can be, and Section II will argue that, given that limitation, there is no motivation for positing any fuzziness at all.

I. Determinate Indeterminacy

God and I are standing near the top of Mt. Everest. There are many flags nearby, planted by previous climbers proud to have achieved their goal. We agree to play the vagueness game. It does not matter exactly where we begin, so long as we are close enough to the top that I can see the flags. The rules of the game are that God is to take uniform, finitely small steps as we walk due south and that with every step God is supposed to tell me whether he is on Everest. If at any step it becomes even the slightest bit less true that he is on Everest, in any plausible sense of 'less true', God is no longer supposed to say that he is on Everest, but is instead supposed to say to the best of his ability what his condition is with relation to Everest. What alternative assertions we think are possible for God will depend upon which is our favorite theory of vagueness. Let us run through some of the options.

God starts the game by saying 'I am on Everest', and we set off. The game continues in this way. God asserting 'I am on Everest' for quite a while. What might God say after the next step? He might say again, 'I am on Everest', in which case we have learned nothing interesting yet, and we take another step.

He might say 'I am now off Everest'. Given his omniscience and honesty, his saying this would entail that Everest has determinate boundaries, or at least that they are no more indeterminate than the length of one step. There are no borderline cases of being on Everest, or at least, whatever borderline cases there are, they fall within the space of a single divine