

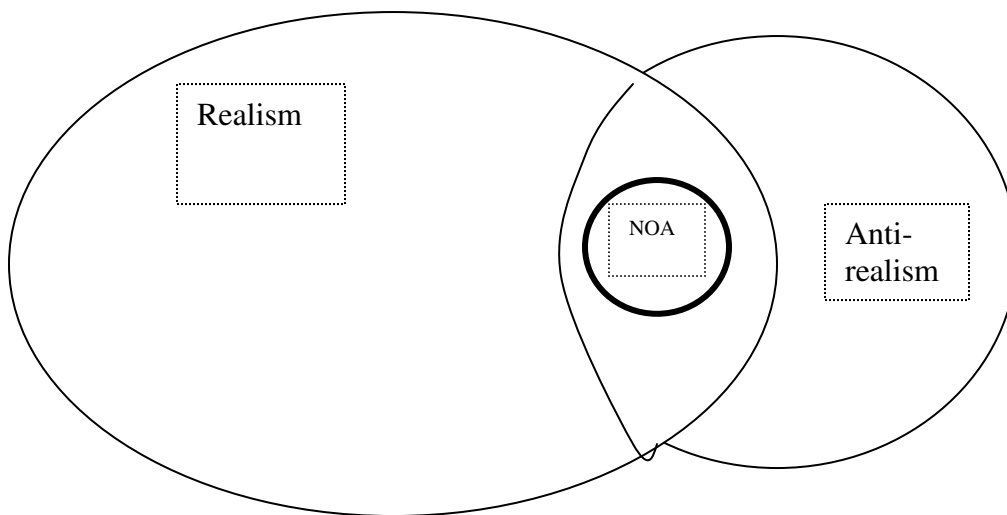
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***Parting Shot at the Realism/ anti-Realism Issue:  
Musgrave's Response to Fine***

Recall from **Lecture XI:**

**Arthur Fine's 'non-Realism' ('Just say no! to the realism/anti-realism debate)**

**The "Natural Ontological Attitude" (NOA)**



“The source of the realist’s failure is endemic to the methodological level, infecting all his[or her] arguments...repeated question-begging move from explanatory efficacy to the truth of the explanatory hypothesis.” (1192) (*contra Boyd’s virtuous circle*)

“Physicists have learned to think about their theory in a rightly non-realist way, and doing just that has brought about the most marvelous predictive success in the history of science.” (1195)

NOA: A common-sense (WYSIWYG<sup>1</sup> stance)

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<sup>1</sup> In computer science lingo, “What You See Is What You Get.”

“I think that NOA has only this to say. If you believe that guessing based on some truths is more likely to succeed than guessing pure and simple, then if our earlier theories were in a large part true and if our refinements conserve the true parts, then guessing on this basis has some likelihood of success...[On the other hand] NOA takes to heart the great lessons of 20<sup>th</sup> century analytic and Continental philosophy, that there *are* no general methodological or philosophical resources for deciding [realism/anti-realism debates]” (1202-1203)

- **Alan Musgrave’s Response<sup>2</sup>:** Fine’s N.O.A. ‘minimalist’ position is *not* “closet realism” (like his appraisal of BVF’s “constructive empiricism,”) it *is* realism!

According to Musgrave, Fine smuggles in realism, by way of his “homely truths” acceptance-based view comprising the N.O.A., which *prima facie* holds theoretical entities just as “true” (at “face-value”<sup>3</sup>) as we accept the “truth-at-face-value” ontology of ordinary objects.

“N.O.A. is the core position by itself, California-pure, without additives. This is mysterious. As usually understood, **the realism-antirealism issue centers precisely on the question of truth.**” (CC1998, 1209)

- Fine’s position is inconsistent, as his advertised “California-pure” (i.e. my WYSIWYG rendition) notion of a “core position” (shared by both realists and anti-realists alike<sup>4</sup>, *by Fine’s own lights!* For according to Musgrave, Fine argues that both realists and anti-realists harbor contrived notions of truth, hence “realists and anti-realists cannot both accept the core position, because there is no core position for them both to accept. Now we have *several different core positions...*[not] different core positions confusingly expressed by the same words, but *no core position at all.*” (1210-1211)
- **Note1:** Is this a slippery-slope maneuver on the part of Musgrave? Recall Putnam’s “vector-semantics” adopted by Hacking. Could Fine counter that NOA-ers agree on the same “meanings” of terms, insofar as the first three markers go? (Syntactic, semantic, stereotype?)

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<sup>2</sup> “NOA’s Ark, Fine for Realism”

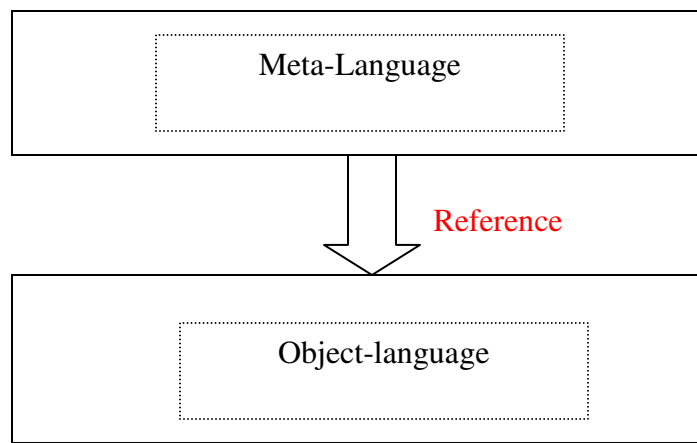
<sup>3</sup> A notion, interestingly, that is not free from contrivance and controversy, as we’ll see (as Ian Hacking’s ‘constructive realist’ position is underwritten by Putnam’s “vector” semantics, recall **Lecture XI**, so Fine’s “truth at face value” is underwritten by Tarskian semantics.)

<sup>4</sup> Recall **Lecture VIII**, Boyd’s refusal to engage ‘The Skeptic’, only the ‘selectively skeptical’ anti-realist (who according to Boyd is ‘selectively skeptical’ concerning his or her assent to the belief in the referents of theoretical entities.) By the same token, argues Fine, (CC1998, 1198), most anti-realists aren’t [S]keptical when it comes to assenting in some minimal notion of ‘face-value truth’, hence, he argues, most anti-realists as well as realists alike harbor (in his opinion) the unproblematic core NOA position. **It is precisely this move that Musgrave rejects.**

- **Note2:** Of course, Fine does *not* adopt Putnam, but rather Tarski, whose theory of truth appears especially to focus on issues concerning reference (viz. metalanguage/object-language) so *prima facie* Musgrave may have a point concerning the issue of different meanings of terms. But Musgrave seems to conclude something stronger above, reminiscent of the ‘incommensurability’ thesis. Simply stated: do *different* core positions imply *mutally exclusive* ones?
- On top of that, whither Fine’s admission of Tarski-Davidsonian Semantics (TDS) as underwriting the NOA-ers notion of “truth-at-face-value?” What’s so “natural” about *that*?

### TDS

Though a complex theory, its underlying notion of ‘truth’ has often (as Musgrave himself does) been ascribed as “deflationary.”<sup>5</sup> Recall **Lecture I:**



- **Truth** is a predicate in the **meta-language**, ascribed to sentences in the **object** language:

**For all  $x$ , TRUE( $x$ ) if and only if  $\phi(x)$**

(where  $\phi$  never contains an instance of the predicate **TRUE**.)

Example: “Every raven is black” is **TRUE** iff Every raven is black.

<sup>5</sup> A philosopher’s term often used when some presumably thorny or ‘hard problem’ has been presumably de-thorned. Deflationists concerning questions of ‘truth’ usually argue that there’s no metaphysical fact of the matter here, but a semantic one (in response to Pontius Pilate’s age-old question: “But what is truth?”)

- **Note 3:** *Not* a circular (or impredicative) definition (because **TRUE** doesn't appear on the RHS of the above logical equivalence.) Another way to state this is that in the *metalanguage*, we argue that a claim in the object-language (for instance, science) is **TRUE** provided that claim *holds* in the object-language.
- **Note 4:** Though not a circular definition, it *can* be recursive (the essential notion of compositional semantics). That is to say, one can speak of **TRUE<sub>k</sub>**, where *k* is a *k*th-level metalanguage with respect to object-language on level (*k* - 1) (which in turn can be a metalanguage with respect to and object language on level (*k* - 2), etc. For example, I can say: "What I told you yesterday was **TRUE**", and the referential sentence (so long as it doesn't include the predicate TRUE) is a statement in a the object-language (what I spoke when I uttered the sentence.) But that object language can obviously be a metalanguage with respect to some other object language, etc. For example: "It's **TRUE<sub>2</sub>** that I told you yesterday that 'Every raven is black.'" Moreover, "Every raven is black" is **TRUE<sub>1</sub>** *iff* Every raven is black, etc.

- The deflationary (or metaphysically agnostic) view of TRUE in this scheme is alluded to in the (Correspondence-Conventional) "scheme *T*". Substitute this notion with expression: "to take at face value."

For example, 'Ronald Reagan gives me the creeps' obviously doesn't imply that one must assent to the existence of mysterious 'creeps-entities' in order to assert its truth-at-face-value, as is evidenced by replacing the above sentence idiom with 'makes me nervous,' etc. (1214)

*Conversely*, logical anti-realists (e.g. H. Field) can accept statements like "2+2=4" in the face-value Tarskian sense, and *deny their* (metaphysical) 'truth' by rejecting Platonism about numbers. (Recall Russell's famous example: "The present King of France is bald." True or False?)

**"Realists need Tarski's theory of truth—but they also need more" (1215)**

- a.) & b.) Truth-at-face-value (logical/semantic) + convention *T*
- b.) *Accept*<sup>6</sup> some of those statements (a.) & b.), avoiding *negative claims*.<sup>7</sup>

**"[Fine] applies Tarski's scheme...and accepts appropriate theoretical statements as true. All this places Fine's NOA squarely in the realist camp." (1215)**

<sup>6</sup> Recall BVF's notion of accepting a theory, viz. understanding that the theory professes *literal truth* of the terms (in his case, substitute 'empirical adequacy.'

<sup>7</sup> Recall Russell's famous quip: What would the set-of-all-things-that-is-not-a-teacup contain?

Response to Fine's (*ad hominem*) maneuver, i.e. the 'foot-stamping' realism

"What exactly is wrong with the realist metaphysical picture? Is not NOA committed to precisely the same picture?" (1216)

Recall (**Lecture VI**) "truth" as linguistically and conceptually mediated does *not* (or should not) imply linguistic relativism! ("We are not trapped inside language in the *serious* sense that all we ever talk *about* is language. To think otherwise is to ignore the hard-won distinction **between use and mention.**"<sup>8</sup>) (1217))

- Recall Hacking's *causal notion of representing/intervening*. What Hacking sees as a primary *evidence* for realism (viz. patterns of causal intervention) Musgrave accuses Fine and Kantians (in general) as seeing such notions as 'contaminating' (insofar as introducing ontological distinction between 'X-as-reciprically-experienced' [i.e. Kant's *phenomena*] versus 'X-in-itself.' **But it's not clear that Fine or even for that matter latter-day Kantians are guilty of such a flat-footed reification in which for X to be "really 'real'" it must lie outside experience, i.e. be an X-itself. What's wrong with admitting (recall Anderson here<sup>9</sup>) "is not carved up according to some linguistic or conceptual scheme. It is we who carve things up according to such schemes."**) (1219)

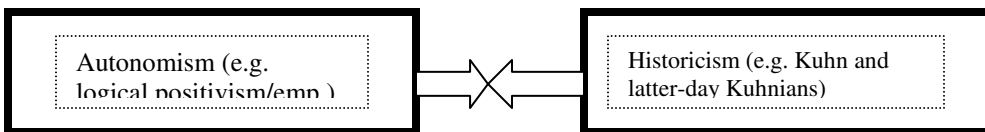
In other words, for Musgrave to accuse those who assent in such a notion of sliding down the slippery slope to subjectivism/idealism seems to rely on an equivocation between 'world' (as referenced) versus 'world' (comprising the linguistic/conceptual sphere). *Is Fine (and for that matter are present day Kantian) guilty of such an equivocation? It's unclear. Musgrave's dismissal appear overhasty.*

"The unphilosophical NOA does not just know nothing philosophical—he knows nothing at all." (1223)

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### HOW DO THEORIES CHANGE?

Richard Burian (1986) problem of conceptual change in science must involve notions of *values* (anticipating H. Longino<sup>10</sup>)



<sup>8</sup> Recall metalanguage/object language distinction here: 'April has 5 letters' *mentions* the word, while 'April is the cruelest month' *uses* it to talk about the month. (1217)

<sup>9</sup> The world doesn't present itself in ready-made categories

<sup>10</sup> Though she was focused more on issues concerning *objectivity*, as we've seen.

- **Burian's Six Constraints: *Acceptable Philosophical Accounts of the Problem of Conceptual Change need to***
  - 1.) **Take issues of conceptual disruption/discontinuity seriously (e.g. Kuhn's 'crises'), not just explain them away.**
  - 2.) **In terms of 1.), account for diminishment in explanatory scope, in the nascent framework.<sup>11</sup>**
  - 3.) **Such evaluations should be in principle conducive in 'real-time' while actual scientific research is going on.**
  - 4.) **Philosophers shouldn't eschew *a priori* methods for evaluating conceptual schemes, in an external sense.**
  - 5.) **In reference to 5.) must allow for a point-by-point comparative evaluation across paradigms/conceptual schemes.**
  - 6.) **Philosopher's theory of meaning should *not* render 5.) impossible.**

Burian accuses autonomists as guilty of flouting 1.)-3.) and historicists as guilty of flouting 4.)-6.)

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<sup>11</sup> Hence challenging steady-growth picture. Example: Dalton's quantitative chemistry diminished explanatory scope of phlogiston theory, as not accounting for behavior of metals. "*Why should the inability to account for the qualitative properties of metals count less against quantitative chemistry than the inability to account for weights?*" Burian concedes the realist historian/philosopher may counter.