

# MIND, DAVIDSON AND REALITY

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## *Abstract*

*The aim of this article is to show that the prospects for intentional irrationalism are much brighter than it is generally thought. In the first section, I provide a general characterization of some of the various forms that the realism/irrationalism debates might take. In the second, I ask whether there is any defensible form of realism about intentional states. I show that most candidates are nearly trivially false, and that the only form of intentional realism which is not, is a restricted one which is prima facie no more plausible than the corresponding form of irrationalism. In the third and last section, I defend my interpretation of what intentional irrationalism amounts to against some possible misunderstandings, give some reasons why it should be taken seriously and argue that it could plausibly be attributed to Davidson.*

Zòt kwè nou se woman men lè w byen gade se blag nou ye, pa plis.  
(Some people believe that we are narratives, but seen from a different perspective, we're nothing but jokes.)  
Haitian Wisdom<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Some Varieties of Realism

Almost all philosophical discussions of realism begin by offering a preliminary characterization of the realist thesis which more or less invariably comes down to saying that the realist is the one who claims that there is an objective reality which exists independently of ourselves.

It is worth pointing out that this way of introducing the issue of realism says nothing at all about the means which we might have

(or lack) of making (true or false) judgements concerning the reality in question. As far as this formulation is concerned, it could be that none of the judgements (statements, or thoughts<sup>2</sup>) which we are able to make (or have) is “about” any aspect of this reality. But at least since Dummett’s works on the subject, we are accustomed to consider that realism fundamentally is an attitude concerning the status of various kinds of judgements which we are able to make, and that for each such kind of judgements<sup>3</sup> there is a corresponding realist thesis which says that judgements of this kind refer to “an objective reality which exists independently of ourselves,” or in other words, that their truth-value is determined by, or depends on, facts and/or entities which obtain/exist “objectively and independently of ourselves,” and a corresponding *irrealist* thesis which simply denies that this is the case.

There are several things that need to be sorted out here, but I want first to make a brief comment about the notion of objectivity and how it is used in explanations of realism/irrealism. This notion is rather troublesome and notoriously hard to elucidate. It is often applied to judgements, in such a way that a judgement is said to be “objective” when it possesses some sort of epistemic validity; but it clearly is not in this sense that the notion is used in formulating realist theses. Obviously, what is objective is supposed here to contrast with what is subjective, and it at least looks as if a subjective reality can only be one which exists only insofar as it is or can be given to some individual consciousness (or one which is wrongly thought or otherwise taken to exist at all). But if this is so, then to talk of something’s existing objectively *and* independently of our minds can only be redundant. As far as I can see, nothing would be lost if realist/irrealist theses just dispensed with the notion of objectivity, and I will accordingly not mention this notion again in what follows.

There are four distinctions that I would now like to introduce, in order to provide some background for what is to come. First, there is a contrast between fact-or-judgement-oriented and thing-or-term-oriented forms of realism/irrealism; second, there is a contrast between global and local forms of realism/irrealism; third, there is a contrast between a “formal” and a “material” way of ex-

pressing various forms of realism/irrealism; and fourth, there is a contrast between strong and weak realist/irrealist theses.

The first contrast is meant to capture the intuitive distinction between saying that certain *facts* obtain “independently of ourselves,” and saying that certain *things* (objects or entities) exist independently of ourselves. Obviously, if the truth-value of judgements of a certain kind is determined by facts which obtain independently of ourselves, then all the terms involved in these judgements will refer to things which exist independently of ourselves: any form of Fact-realism (“F-realism”) entails the relevant forms of Thing-realism (“T-realism”). But the converse does not hold: all the terms involved in judgements of a certain kind may refer to things which exist independently of ourselves, and yet, these judgements fail to be true or false independently of ourselves. In other words, a form of F-irrealism does not entail the relevant forms of T-irrealism, but any form of T-irrealism entails the relevant forms of F-irrealism.

It should be obvious that any form of T-realism can also be expressed as a form of F-realism, by replacing the claim that certain terms refer to things which exist independently of ourselves by the claim that the truth-value of the corresponding existential judgements is determined by facts which obtain independently of ourselves. If one is prepared to treat facts as complex entities of a kind, then it will also be possible to express any form of F-realism as a form of T-realism, by replacing the claim that the truth-value of judgements of a certain kind is determined by facts which obtain independently of ourselves, by the claim that judgements of this kind refer to facts which exist independently of ourselves. But even while remaining neutral with respect to an ontology of facts or states of affairs, such rewordings may be allowed as convenient turns of phrase. In practice, then, this first contrast can often be ignored. This explains why I will often be using “exist” ambiguously to mean “exist or obtain,” or switch without warning from “fact-language” to “thing-language,” and vice versa.

The contrast between global and local forms of realism/irrealism is meant to capture the distinction between realist/irrealist theses which are concerned with the totality of discourse or reality and

those which are restricted to judgements (facts) or terms (things) of a certain kind. Obviously, global forms of realism/irrealism are just a limiting case of local realisms/irealisms, where the relevant kind of judgements (facts) or terms (things) is the “universal kind” which includes all of them.

In what<sup>4</sup> I call the “material” (or non-semantic) mode, *strong* T-realism about some kind of thing K claims that all things of kind K exist independently of ourselves, and *weak* T-realism about K, that at least one thing of kind K exists independently of ourselves. Similarly, *strong* F-realism about some kind of fact K claims that all facts of kind K obtain independently of ourselves, and *weak* F-realism about K, that at least one fact of kind K obtains independently of ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

In the “formal” mode, by contrast, strong T-realism with-respect-to some kind of term KK claims that all terms of kind KK refer to things (of a certain corresponding kind K) which exist independently of ourselves, and weak T-realism with-respect-to KK, that at least one term of kind KK refers to something (of a certain kind K) which exists independently of ourselves. Similarly, strong F-realism with-respect-to some kind of judgement KK claims that the truth-value of all judgements of kind KK is determined (by facts of a certain corresponding kind K, which obtain) independently of ourselves, and weak F-realism with-respect-to KK, that the truth-value of at least some judgement of kind KK is determined (by facts of a certain kind K, which obtain) independently of ourselves.

Strictly speaking, no kind of fact or thing can be identical to a kind of judgement or term (which is not to deny that there may be kinds to which both facts and judgements, or terms and things, may belong). Hence, there is no single thesis to be expressed now in the formal mode and then in the material mode. But (as will have been gathered from the formulations given in the previous paragraph) each realist thesis expressed in the formal mode is actually concerned both with a certain kind of judgement/term and with a corresponding kind of fact/thing: it is realism *with-respect-to* a kind of judgement/term, *about* a kind of fact/thing.<sup>6</sup> Hence, for each realist thesis expressed in the formal mode, there is a corresponding one in

the material mode which is *about* the same kind of fact/thing (and which I call its material version or counterpart). But conversely, for each realist thesis expressed in the material mode, there is a corresponding one in the formal mode which is *about* the same kind of fact/thing, and which is *with-respect-to* a kind of judgement/term which purports to refer to this kind of fact/thing. For example, one could express one form of strong realism about numbers by saying, in the formal mode, that all numerals refer to things (namely, numbers) which exist independently of ourselves, or by saying, in the material mode, that all numbers exist independently of ourselves. Obviously, the realist thesis which has just been expressed in the formal mode is not “about” numerals, even though it is concerned with this kind of designator.

On most of the standard construals of what it is to be “independent of ourselves” both strong and weak F-realisms are stronger in their formal versions than in their corresponding material versions. Obviously, if the truth-value of some judgement of a certain kind KK is determined by some independent reality, then there is such an independent reality; i.e., there is some fact, of some corresponding kind K, which obtains “independently of ourselves.” This shows that the formal version of any form of weak F-realism entails a corresponding material version. Now suppose that the truth-value of all judgements of kind KK is determined by facts which obtain independently of ourselves, but that it is not the case that all facts of the corresponding kind K obtain independently of ourselves. This requires that there is some fact which is such that (i) its obtaining depends on ourselves and yet (ii) it is not expressed by any judgement. But as pointed out above, and as will become clear below, on most of the standard construals of what it means to be “independent of ourselves,” this is something which can never happen: the obtaining of a fact can “depend on ourselves,” in the relevant sense, only if it can be expressed in some judgement. Hence, in most cases, the formal version of strong F-realism about KK will entail the corresponding material version.

Strictly speaking, neither the material version of weak F-realism about K, nor that of strong F-realism about K entail its corresponding formal version. Obviously, that there is a fact of kind K which

obtains independently of ourselves will not entail that the truth-value of at least one judgement of some corresponding kind KK is determined independently of ourselves, *unless* it is assumed that at least one such fact is expressed by some judgement of kind KK. In the same way, if all facts of kind K obtain independently of ourselves, it will not follow that the truth-value of all judgements of some corresponding kind KK is determined by a fact which obtains independently of ourselves, *unless* it is assumed that all judgements of kind KK do express facts of kind K. Hence, when such assumptions are in order (as I think often is the case) formal versions of F-realist theses will turn out to be equivalent to their material counterparts (and strictly stronger otherwise).

As far as I can see, the same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the material and formal versions of the various forms of T-realism. Note also that since irrealism is to be the denial of realism, strong irrealism about some kind K is the denial of weak realism about K, and weak irrealism about K, the denial of strong realism about K (in either the formal or the material versions).

It goes almost without saying, not only that weak realism about any kind K is compatible with weak irrealism about that same kind, but that there are probably many kinds about which both theses are endorsed by many or most philosophers. But there are also many kinds for which this is not so, and for which there is a serious dispute as between strong realism and weak irrealism or as between strong irrealism and weak realism.

My purpose in what follows is accordingly to discuss just one of these local disputes, namely that of whether our judgements about intentional phenomena (which constitute what I will call our “intentional discourse”) should be construed in a (strongly) realist or (strongly) irrealist manner. I will first try to clarify the nature of the problem, and then defend the view that most forms of intentional realism are false and that there is at least one interesting form of intentional irrealism which is not only attractive and coherent, but probably true.

A prior question admittedly arises here, as to whether there is room for a substantive or even intelligible philosophical debate on this issue. Crispin Wright recently published a paper (Wright 2002)

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in which he asks (in effect) what could an irrealist conception of intentionality possibly be, only to conclude that even the most plausible forms of intentional irrealism are “rationally indefensible.” In a companion to this paper, I show that his arguments are flawed, and this conclusion, unwarranted; but for now, I just want to suggest that it would be as good a question to ask what could a *realist* conception of intentionality possibly be, and that it is far from clear that the answer to this question should be very different.

## 2. The Prospects for Intentional Realism

In light of what has been said so far, the (strong) *intentional* realist is the one who claims that all our judgements about intentional phenomena refer to something which obtains/exists *independently of ourselves*, or that their truth-value is determined by, or depends on, facts and/or entities which *obtain/exist independently of ourselves*.

I want first to say a few words about this “ourselves.” It’s obvious that our characterization of realism makes the exact content of realist theses depend on the nature of what this word is taken to refer to. The realist certainly doesn’t mean to claim that something exists independently of our body; and realist views are indeed frequently expressed by substituting “independently of our mind” (or “independently of our cognitive/representational capacities”) for “independently of ourselves.” This invariably leads to the remark that this way of expressing the realist position isn’t fit to the purpose of expressing a realist conception of *the mind* (or of intentionality). For the existence of intentional phenomena (at least those of which we are the locus) obviously depends on our own existence, on that of our mind, or on that of our cognitive/representational capacities, in such a way that intentional realism, thus understood, could only be trivially false. This situation is often alluded to, in the context of general presentations of the various debates about realism, but only to suggest that it could easily be remedied, if one would only give it some thought.<sup>7</sup> My own feeling is that there may well be here a principled difficulty, one which would put the bur-

den of proof on the intentional realist's shoulders. It is therefore worth looking at more closely.

It has already been granted, though only implicitly, that if beings other than ourselves have intentional states, then a realist conception of *their* intentional states could easily be formulated and would not give rise to the problem. If this is so, then one could perhaps remove some pressure by recasting the debate at a more personal level, i.e., by considering it from the point of view of the agent who asks herself whether a certain region of discourse must be construed in a realist or an irrealist way. It seems reasonable to think that such an agent could easily express a realist conception of the intentional states of *others* by saying that all the judgements by means of which *she* attributes intentional states to others<sup>8</sup> refer to some reality which exists independently of her own intentional states.

It may be worth observing that such a formulation of the realist position would seem extremely odd in any context other than that of a discussion of realism *about the mental*.<sup>9</sup> For one hardly imagines that someone could claim to be endorsing, e. g., physical realism, by saying that the physical world exists independently of her own intentional states. This would be odd, because the thesis thus put forward is compatible with the possibility (which is generally meant to be excluded) that the existence of the physical world depends on the intentional states of others, on the hypothesis, of course, that the existence of the latter would itself be independent of the agent's intentional states (for otherwise, it could depend on the intentional states of others only if it also depended on the intentional states of the agent). Thus, if I maintain that the intentional states of others exist independently of mine (i.e., if I have a realist conception of the intentional states of others), then I must express physical realism by saying that the physical world exists, not only independently of my own intentional states, but also independently of the intentional states of others; while if I maintain that the intentional states of others depend on my own, then I will express it by saying only that the physical world exists independently of my own intentional states.



This suggests that there is some sort of hierarchical structuring of realist theses. In claiming that some thing X exists independently of some other thing Y, I affirm that X exists independently of everything whose existence depends on Y (i.e., independently of everything of which I have an irrealist conception, which could authorize the view that I must also have an irrealist conception of Y itself). But, once I have said that X exists independently of Y, I can further ask myself whether Z exists independently of X, independently of Y, and/or independently of both.

The debates about realism are generally pursued on the assumption that there is some unique Y such that for any X, a realist conception of X is one which claims that X exists independently of Y (which is then taken as a “reference point”). As I have indicated above, it is generally taken for granted that this Y, the reference point, simply is “our mind.” But nothing precludes one from choosing some other reference point, or even from retaining several. The space of the various traditional debates about realism would thus only be a sub-region of a much larger space, one which is essentially structured by some notion of “ontological dependence.”<sup>10</sup>

But let’s stay within this framework and continue to assume that there should be a single reference point. It is worth observing that no matter which Y is chosen as the reference point, one could only have an irrealist conception of it.<sup>11</sup> This naturally supports our initial impression that the traditional framework of the debates leaves no place for intentional realism to occupy. But it simultaneously opens up the possibility of expressing another form of intentional realism, one which would now have a substantial content, by choosing some other reference point. Suppose, for example, that we take a realist conception of X to be one which asserts that X exists independently of the physical/natural world. Within this perspective, intentional realism will be the view that judgements about intentional states refer to something which exists independently of the physical/natural world. Forget for a moment that in light of what has just been said, this would require one to endorse an irrealist conception of the physical/natural world. The point is that I don’t know of any philosopher, in the current philosophical mood, who would dare to propound such a view, i.e. to *deny* that inten-

tional phenomena somehow depend on physical/natural phenomena. This shows that even if it turns out to be possible, in reversing the perspective in favor of physicalism/naturalism, to reach a form of intentional realism which is not trivially false, this isn't enough to turn it into a more plausible view, or to relieve it from the burden of proof. On the contrary, intentional irrealism clearly gets the upper hand.

This last observation is likely to cause some discomfort, insofar as physicalism and naturalism are spontaneously understood as being varieties of realism; but seeing them in this way only makes sense from within what I've called the traditional perspective. And since in this perspective, the reality of something consists in its existing independently of "our mind," there simply is no place there for intentional realism. Of course, nothing forces us to keep this interpretation of what physicalism and naturalism amount to, and there is indeed good reason to think they would be better understood as claiming, not that the physical/natural world exists independently of "our mind," but that *nothing* exists independently of the physical/natural world. If this is so, then physicalism and naturalism turn out to be best understood as forms of (strong) global *irrealism*! In less provocative terms, these are doctrines which, in their respective perspectives, occupy the same position as (strong) global irrealism in the traditional perspective. The seemingly widely shared impression that physicalism and naturalism are compatible with intentional realism thus arises simply from a failure to keep track of the relevant perspectives.

It goes without saying that unless the existence of intentional phenomena depends on that of everything else, there will be perspectives in which intentional realism is correct. But even so, the importance and significance of such perspectives will have to be shown. It seems likely, for example, that the existence of intentional phenomena is independent from that of numbers. But who cares? Do *we* care? To ask *that* question is already to place oneself in the traditional perspective; a perspective in which intentional realism is trivially false.

One has to be careful here, of course. I didn't exactly show that all forms of intentional realism are trivially false in the traditional

perspective, the only one which *we* seem to care about. For I have in effect divided “full” intentional realism into hetero-intentional realism, on the one hand, and auto-intentional realism, on the other. But if the former claims (as I have suggested above) that the judgements by means of which I attribute intentional states to others refer to something which exists independently of *my own intentional states*, then it is far from being trivially false. However, for the second kind of (partial) intentional realism to take place in the same perspective, it will have to be the claim that the judgements by means of which I attribute intentional states to myself refer to something which exists independently of *the very same things*, namely, my own intentional states. And this of course can only be trivially false.

A few comments may help here to see more clearly why this is so. The judgements by means of which I can attribute intentional states, acts or attitudes (which I will henceforth refer to as “attributions of intentional states” or “intentional attributions”) themselves have an intentional content, and correspond to intentional states in which I have the capacity to be,<sup>12</sup> in the sense that they are part of my intentional repertoire, but in which I may actually fail to be, at any given time. It could then be asked whether, in saying that these intentional attributions refer to something which exists independently of my own intentional states, I mean to claim that this something is independent of the intentional states in which I actually am, or that it is independent of my capacity to be in the intentional states which constitute my repertoire (which include all the intentional attributions I have the capacity to make). It doesn’t take much reflection to convince oneself that the first interpretation is unlikely to reflect what is really at stake in this debate, and can thus be put aside.<sup>13</sup> Taking this into account (retaining the second interpretation), (strong) hetero-intentional realism becomes the claim that (all) my attributions of intentional states to others refer to something which exists independently of my capacity to be in the intentional states which are in my repertoire, and the corresponding form of (strong) auto-intentional realism becomes the claim that (all) my attributions of intentional states to myself refer to something which exists independently of this same capacity to

be in the intentional states in my repertoire. It is because this capacity includes my capacity to make such auto-attributions of intentional states that auto-intentional realism can only be trivially false.

What has just been said applies only to the specific form which auto-intentional realism would have to take if it were to be based on the version of hetero-intentional realism which I have given. But still other perspectives are available; and indeed, *lots* of them, since any mental feature can, in principle (and in keeping with the spirit of the philosophical tradition), be chosen to provide a perspective from which the realism/irrealism debates will take a particular shape. Among them, those provided by the following may be singled out for special attention: (i) the claim that my intentional attributions (or my intentional auto/hetero-attributions) refer to something which exists independently of my capacity *to be in any intentional state at all*, (ii) the claim that they refer to something which exists independently of my capacity *to attribute any intentional state at all*, (iii) the claim that they refer to something which exists independently of my capacity *to be in the very intentional states that they attribute*, (iv) the claim that they refer to something which exists independently of my capacity *to attribute these very intentional states* (to anyone), and (v) the claim that they refer to something which exists independently of my capacity *to make these very attributions* (i.e., to attribute these very intentional states to the very same people).

Strictly speaking, neither of the last three forms of intentional realism just introduced stems from a single, fixed, perspective. They would better be described as providing a “perspectival schema.” For I intend them to be read distributively, as claiming, respectively, that (iii’) every intentional attribution (or auto/hetero attribution) of mine refers to something which exists independently of my capacity to be in the very intentional state that *it* attributes, that (iv’) every intentional attribution of mine refers to something which exists independently of my capacity to attribute *this* very intentional state, and that (v’) every intentional attribution of mine refers to something which exists independently of my capacity to make *this* very intentional attribution (i.e., to attribute the very

same intentional state to the very same person). For each intentional attribution, then, there is a specific reference point with respect to which it must be considered.

Of course some of these forms of intentional realism are stronger than others. It should be obvious, in particular, that (i) is stronger than (ii), (ii) stronger than (iv), and (iv) stronger than (v). It is just slightly less obvious that (iii) is stronger than (iv). But this follows from the fact that no one can have the capacity to attribute an intentional state without having the capacity to be in that state.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, then, they will all be false provided only that (v) is. I will shortly argue that (v) is indeed bound to be false.

First note that by isolating my capacity to attribute intentional states from my capacity to be in intentional states, I have, in effect, started partitioning my own mind; and there is nothing to prevent me from going on. I can single out those of my intentional states which are not attributions of intentional states, and call them intentional states of level zero (or “0-intentional states”). I can then single out those of my intentional states which are attributions of intentional states of level zero, and call them intentional states of level one (“1-intentional states”). And so on. In this usage, *to attribute* an intentional state of level  $n$  is *to be* in an intentional state of level  $n+1$ .

The observation I made when I pointed out that (iii) was stronger than (iv), namely, that no one can have the capacity *to attribute* any intentional state without having the capacity *to be* in this intentional state (the principle of intentional descent, ID) can now be expressed in the following way: for any  $n$  different from zero, one could not have the capacity to be in any given intentional state of level  $n$  without having the capacity to be in the corresponding (i.e., embedded) intentional state of level  $n-1$ . In somewhat more explicit terms, this is just the almost trivial point that no one can have the capacity to judge *that someone thinks that  $p$*  without having the capacity to think *that  $p$* .

Trivial as it may be, it suffices to show that (iii) above must be false. For suppose I attribute the thought that  $p$  to myself. I am thereby in some intentional state of level  $n$  (for some  $n$  different from zero). But according to what has just been said, I cannot be in

any such state unless I have the capacity to be in the corresponding state of level  $n-1$ , i.e., unless I have the capacity to think that  $p$ . But (iii) just is the claim that my attributions of intentional states refer to something which exists independently of my capacity *to be in the very intentional states that they attribute*; this amounts, in this instance, to the claim that I could think that  $p$  without having the capacity to think that  $p$ !

The falsity of (iii) seems to rest on the fact that my *auto-attributions* of intentional states fail to refer to something which exists independently of my capacity to be in the very intentional states that they attribute, leaving the possibility that my *hetero-attributions* do refer to such things untouched. Indeed, it looks as if my judgement that some other agent  $S$  thinks that  $p$  could very well *be true* even if  $I$  didn't have the capacity to think that  $p$ , though  $I$  would of course not be able to *make* this judgement (to attribute the thought that  $p$  to  $S$ ) if  $I$  didn't have this capacity. Of course, my judgement that  $S$  thinks that  $p$  could not be true if  $S$  didn't have the capacity to think that  $p$ ; but this doesn't conflict with (iii). What conflicts with (iii) is the trivial claim that for any  $S$ , no intentional state of  $S$  is independent of  $S$ 's capacity to be in it; or in the formal mode, that *no matter who actually makes it*, no judgement attributing some intentional state to  $S$  refers to anything which exists independently of  $S$ 's capacity to be in this intentional state.<sup>15</sup>

The foregoing shows that if any form of intentional realism is to stand any chance of extending to one's own intentional states, it will have to be weaker than (iii). So let's turn to (iv)-(v).

The relevant point, here, is that it seems highly plausible (as I have suggested elsewhere<sup>16</sup>) that no one can have the capacity *to attribute* an intentional state of level  $n$  (for any  $n$ ) without having also the capacity *to attribute* a corresponding (i.e., embedding) intentional state of level  $n+1$ ; or in other words, that no one can have the capacity *to be* in some intentional state of level  $n$ , *for some  $n$  different from zero*, without having the capacity *to be* in some corresponding intentional state of level  $n+1$ . This is the principle of higher intentional ascent (HIA), which can also be expressed in somewhat more intuitive terms, by saying that no one can have the

capacity to judge *that someone thinks that p* without having the capacity to judge *that someone thinks that someone thinks that p*.<sup>17</sup>

It will be easier to see how this conflicts with (v) if I first switch to the material mode. Transposed in this mode, the claim (v) that my intentional *attributions* refer to something which exists independently of my capacity to make these very attributions, is the claim that the intentional states I can attribute exist independently of my capacity to attribute them, i.e., independently of my capacity to be in corresponding intentional states of higher levels. Now suppose that I judge that S thinks that p. I am thereby in some intentional state of level n, for some n different from zero. According to what has been said above, I cannot be in any such state unless I have the capacity to be in a corresponding state of level n+1, i.e., unless I have the capacity to judge *that I judge that S thinks that p*. But this capacity is the capacity to attribute the judgement that S thinks that p to myself. Hence, my judging that S thinks that p doesn't exist independently of my capacity to attribute this very judgement to myself, which contradicts (v).

Returning to the formal mode, the reasoning can be put thus. Suppose that I judge *that I judge that S thinks that p*, thus attributing the judgement that S thinks that p to myself. I am thereby attributing an intentional state of level n (for some n different from zero) to myself. According to what has been said above, I cannot be in any such state of level n unless I have the capacity to be in a corresponding intentional state of level n+1, namely, a state consisting in judging that I judge that S thinks that p. Hence, my attribution of the judgement that S thinks that p to myself refers to something (i.e., my judging that S thinks that p) which could not exist if I didn't have the capacity to make this very attribution (i.e., to judge *that I judge that S thinks that p*). But (v) just is the claim that my intentional *attributions* refer to something which exist independently of my capacity to make these very attributions, and must therefore be false.

As was the case with the reasoning about (iii), this reasoning about (v) rests on special features of my auto-attributions of intentional states and is compatible with the possibility that my hetero-attributions of intentional states do refer to something which exists

independently of my capacity to make them. Yet it remains the case that for any S, no *higher-level* intentional state of S is independent of S's capacity to attribute it to him/herself; or in the formal mode, that *no matter who actually makes it*, no judgement attributing some higher-level intentional state to S refers to anything which exists independently of S's capacity to make this judgement.

So, even if S's higher-level intentional states are independent of my capacity to attribute them to him/her, they won't be independent of *his/her* own capacity to attribute them to him/herself, and hence, they won't be independent of anyone's having the capacity to attribute them to him/her. It would therefore be odd to interpret this as vindicating a realist conception (even) of the intentional states of others. For just as physical realism is the claim that the physical world exists independently (not of my mind, but) of anyone's mind, intentional realism ought to be the claim that one's intentional states exists independently of anyone's having the capacity to attribute them to one. This shows that it was a mistake to think it would be easier to be realist about the intentional states of others than about one's own intentional states. No form of realism need be stated from anyone's particular perspective.

However, while the argument given above establishes that not all attributions of intentional states refer to something which exists independently of anyone's having the capacity to make them, it doesn't show that no attribution of intentional state refers to any such thing. As far as the argument goes, this holds only for attributions of intentional states of higher levels (i.e. of levels higher than zero). Hence, there is indeed room for a restricted form of (strong) intentional realism, though it will not be one which separates *my own* intentional states from those of others, but one which claims that all attributions of intentional states of *lower level* (i.e., of level zero) refer to something which exists independently of anyone's having the capacity to make them.

If there is a form of intentional realism which constitutes a real challenge for the irrealist, it certainly is this one; and it probably is this claim which intentional realists primarily (though perhaps sometimes confusedly) have in mind when they declare their faith. But the fact remains that even if this more modest thesis were



shown to be true, this would at most show that intentional realism is *partially* true, which would put it, at best, on the same footing as intentional irrealism.

### 3. Where Some Possible Worries are Addressed

So far, I have focused on intentional realism, and relied on a certain way of expressing realist theses, according to which a realist thesis is a claim to the effect that certain kinds of things/facts exist/obtain independently of certain other kinds of things, or that judgements of certain kinds refer to things/facts which exist/obtain independently of certain other kinds of things/facts. But it may well be asked what would happen if we considered alternative ways of understanding what a realist thesis consists in.

The difficulties of intentional realism, at least those I have been mentioning, all come, in one way or another, from the fact that it is of “ourselves” that, in the traditional perspective, reality is supposed to be independent. Much weight is put, not only on the choice of a suitable “reference point,” but also on the notion of independence, and one could deny that this notion really has the crucial role that I have assumed it to have. But delete the notion of independence, and what you get is a simple existence claim. There is no denying that the existence of this or that kind of thing/fact is of course a major philosophical issue, but the question is whether there is a relevant distinction to be made between this issue and the issue of realism.

One thing I could say for my defence, is that my characterization of realism is *by no means* idiosyncratic, and that many discussions of the realism debates start with a general characterization of the very same kind,<sup>18</sup> one which acknowledges that both existence and independence have a crucial part to play in any kind of realist position. Crispin Wright (1992), for example, gives an intuitive description of the realist position which is very close to the one I have provided, and then goes on to propose and discuss several criteria which might be used to argue that a given area of discourse should be understood in a realist or irrealist way. The point is that

nowhere does he reject the intuitive characterization he has given at the beginning, or even suggest that it needs revision. Instead, he embarks on a search for strategies which could help one to resolve the various debates opposing the realist to the irrealist.

So I'm quite comfortable with my understanding of what realism fundamentally is. Yet it may be worth saying a few words about the existence claim. Consider the (strong) realist thesis according to which all judgements of a certain kind refer to something which exists independently of some reference point Y. There are several ways of denying such a claim, giving rise to as many corresponding forms of (weak) irrealism. One can deny that there really are judgements of the relevant kind (or, to borrow Crispin Wright's phrase, that they are "truth-apt"), or one can deny that they refer to anything at all, or else that what they refer to is independent of Y.<sup>19</sup> This third form of irrealism accepts the existence claim; it is non-eliminativist, non-fictionalist and non-expressivist. I will call it a "cognitivist" irrealism.

I am now in a position to say more explicitly how the realism issue relates to that of reductionism. The relation between these is often perceived as confused or problematic. It is sometimes suggested that there is no direct connection between them, on the ground that one can well have a realist conception of, e. g., moral facts, while maintaining that the latter are reducible to natural facts (on the assumption, of course, that one has a realist conception of natural facts). This observation is right, but only from shifting perspectives, and gives a somewhat incomplete picture. For the notion of "reduction" is no less relational than that of "dependence." In endorsing a realist conception of moral facts, one is claiming that they exist independently of "ourselves" or "our minds," which is to say that one is then taking a stance on the relation which is supposed to hold between these moral facts and something like the mental facts of which we are the locus, but *not* on the relation between moral facts and natural facts. Clearly, if facts of a certain kind exist independently of ourselves or of our minds, then they cannot be reducible to mental facts (since if X reduces to Y, then X depends of Y). In other words, any realist conception of X implies that X is not reducible to the reference point chosen, and

therefore counts, in its own perspective, as a non-reductive conception of X. In this sense, there is no reductive realism.

It is easily seen, on the other hand, that (cognitivist) irrealism can be either reductive or non-reductive, i.e., that it is neutral with respect to the issue of reductionism. For example, cognitivist irrealism about moral facts claims that the existence of such facts depends on ourselves or on our minds, or that moral judgements refer to facts whose existence depends on our minds. In so far as this thesis is concerned, the relevant facts (i.e., moral facts) could themselves be either mental facts, or facts (which reduce to facts) of any other kind, provided only that the latter depend on mental facts.

I think I now have reduced to a minimum the risk of being misunderstood in claiming that there is a form of (strong, but partial) intentional irrealism which seems to me highly plausible, and even probably true. This is the cognitivist irrealist thesis according to which:

(HII) all attributions of intentional states of level  $n$  (for any  $n$  different from zero) refer to something whose existence depends on someone's having the capacity make them (i.e., to be in some corresponding intentional state of level  $n+1$ ),

which I will refer to below as (strong) "higher intentional irrealism," since it is restricted to intentional states of level higher than zero. In the material mode, this is the claim that all intentional states of level  $n$  (for  $n$  different from zero) depend on someone's having the capacity to attribute them.

In the previous section, all candidate formulations of "full" (and strong) intentional realism have been shown to be (nearly) trivially false, and only one form of "partial" (strong) intentional realism stood up as having some real chance of being true, namely, the lower (strong) intentional realist thesis according to which:

(LIR) all attributions of intentional states of level zero refer to something whose existence is independent of anyone's having the capacity to make them.

In the material mode, this is the claim that all intentional states of level zero are independent of anyone's having the capacity to attribute them.

But even so, there is nothing so far to rule out the possibility that lower intentional realism turns out to be false, or to suggest that it would be irrational or somehow self-defeating to defend the (strong) full intentional irrealist thesis according to which:

(FII) all attributions of intentional states (of any level) refer to something whose existence depends on someone's having the capacity to make them (i.e., to be in some corresponding intentional state of higher level).

However that may be, I will now try to put these issues in some wider perspective.

First note that from our current point of view, nothing stands in the way of our returning to the original "ourselves" formulation of realism/irrealism, provided it is understood that "ourselves" is really short for "at least one of us." Higher intentional irrealism, for example, could be expressed by saying that all attributions of intentional states of level  $n$  (for any  $n$  different from zero) refer to something whose existence depends on *our* capacity to make them (i.e., our capacity to be in some corresponding intentional state of level  $n+1$ ). And similarly for all other relevant realist/irrealist theses.

Many will have noticed that what I have called "(strong) full cognitivist intentional irrealism" defines a position which can fairly uncontroversially be ascribed to Donald Davidson, who thereby counts (on what I argued above is a fairly standard understanding of what realism/irrealism is all about, and despite Davidson's own disclaimers) as one prominent intentional irrealist. Given the enormous influence which Davidson's writings have had in this area, this should convince anyone that intentional irrealism is no mere exotic curiosity.

And as if this were not enough, there seems to be interesting connections between FII and at least one further Davidsonian claim; namely, the claim that intentional states are essentially public, in the sense that no one can have the capacity to be in any intentional state unless someone else also has this same capacity.

Insofar as the view that thought is essentially public is something which many philosophers feel at least attracted to, this might contribute to make cognitivist intentional irrealism itself look more appealing, or at least to provide some insight into some famous Davidsonian theses.

In order to see these connections, one must first grant (what is yet another application of Evans' Generality Constraint, namely) that no one can have the capacity to attribute intentional states to oneself unless one also has the capacity to attribute intentional states to others, and conversely; or in other words, it must be assumed that one's capacity to make auto-attributions of intentional states and one's capacity to make hetero-attributions of intentional states mutually depend on one another.<sup>20</sup>

Next, it must be realized that to obtain full intentional irrealism from higher intentional irrealism it suffices to add the principle of lower intentional ascent, according to which:

(LIA) no one can have the capacity to be in any intentional state of level zero without having the capacity to attribute it to oneself

to the previously mentioned principle of higher intentional ascent. This yields the principle (of full intentional ascent, FIA) that no one can have the capacity to be in any intentional state of any level without having the capacity to attribute it to oneself; from which it immediately follows both that all attributions of intentional states (of any level) refer to something whose existence depends on someone's having the capacity to make them (= FII), and (given what has been granted in the previous paragraph) that no one can have the capacity to be in any intentional state (of any level) without having the capacity to attribute it to others.

There is fairly clear evidence that Davidson (1982: 102) does endorse FIA, or something very close to it, when he claims that no one can have beliefs without having the concept of belief. And even though he introduces this principle in the context of an argument aiming to show that thought depends on language, it will easily be granted that at least part of what he thereby wishes to establish is that thought is essentially public. As has often been

observed, the reasoning which is supposed to lead from there to the conclusion that no one can have the capacity to be in any intentional state unless someone else also has this same capacity is less than perfectly clear/convincing (not to mention the fact that LIA has proved to be highly controversial).

Well, nobody would expect to be able to conclude that there must be more than one bearer of intentional states, from premises none of which requires the existence of more than one individual. One obviously needs further ingredients, such as the claims that intentional contents are normative and that normativity requires more than one agent, or perhaps the claim that one could not have the capacity to attribute intentional states to others unless there are others who actually have the capacity to be in intentional states. But however that may be, there still is something to be concluded about the publicity of thought from the material before us. For, short of being able to establish that necessarily, if anyone has the capacity to be in any intentional state, then someone else also has the capacity to be in the same intentional state, someone interested in the claim that thought is essentially public might perhaps be satisfied with the weaker claim that (necessarily) if anyone has the capacity to be in any intentional state, then it is possible that someone else has the capacity to be in the same intentional state.<sup>21</sup> But now observe that if no one can have the capacity to be in any intentional state (of any level) without having the capacity to attribute it to others, then it is likely that no one can have the capacity to be in intentional states unless one conceives (or at least has the capacity to conceive) them as being essentially *sharable* (i.e., unless one thinks that someone else could be in the same intentional states). This of course doesn't establish that intentional states actually are sharable, but it would seem to follow at least that it cannot rationally be denied that they are (which arguably is the next best thing that could happen to a claim, short of being plainly true).

All this rests on acceptance of the highly controversial principle of lower intentional ascent; but it may be worth pointing out that should this principle be rejected, higher intentional ascent would still be sufficient (on the same auxiliary assumptions) to argue for

the limited claim that it would be irrational to deny that intentional states of *higher levels* are essentially sharable.

In any case, one of the main lessons of the foregoing is that the fate of full intentional irrealism (and hence, of lower intentional realism) depends entirely on that of lower intentional ascent. It is not my purpose here to try to decide this issue, but I can at least observe that there is some real possibility that at least some restricted form of lower intentional ascent could turn out to be defensible. In particular, there is some hope that the principle could be sustained at least for *conceptually* contentful intentional states, though I must here leave the matter.

Since I am not yet in a position to go further into this matter, I will conclude with some brief comments about Davidson's own attitudes towards intentional irrealism. To my knowledge, there is only one place (Davidson 1997a) where Davidson explicitly addresses the question whether his views lead to some form of irrealism (or as he calls it, "antirealism") about the mental. And even then, the discussion focuses on the more specific question whether embracing the indeterminacy thesis forces one to deny the reality of thoughts or intentional attitudes, to which Davidson (1997a: 70) gives a clearly negative answer.<sup>22</sup> Such focus on indeterminacy is understandable, since indeterminacy certainly is and has always been a main source of inspiration for various forms of intentional irrealism, as illustrated, *inter alia*, by the fact that Crispin Wright (2002) mentions indeterminacy as the only plausible ground on which to rest a case for intentional irrealism, not to mention the fact that Piers Rawling (2003: 85–6), in a recent study of Davidson's views on interpretation, has contended that Davidson's version of indeterminacy commits him to the view that "there are no propositional attitude states." It is, however, potentially misleading to approach the question from this angle, insofar as it suggests that intentional irrealism can be nothing but a denial of the existence of intentional states (while it may be limited to a denial of their independence, as I have emphasized above).

What must be asked, at this point, is whether Davidson's understanding of intentional irrealism accords with mine. For if it is substantially different, then his rejection of the claim that indetermi-

nacy leads to intentional-irrealism-as-he-construes-it would be no evidence that he would not want to acknowledge being committed to intentional-irrealism-as-I-construe-it (and the fact that indeterminacy doesn't lead to his version of intentional irrealism, if it is a fact, would be no evidence that he isn't actually committed to my version of intentional irrealism). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Davidson's (1997a) own discussion provides no perfectly conclusive answer to this question, as I will now explain.

What happens is that Davidson gives various intuitive (and somewhat "loose") characterizations of irrealism (antirealism), which he uses more or less interchangeably, but which (in my opinion) point in substantially different directions. He first says (1997a: 69) that irrealism denies the *existence* of anything beyond the scope of human knowledge; he then grants that some forms of irrealism are "better expressed in terms of epistemic limitations on the concept of truth" (1997a:69), but only to conclude that "[t]he outcome is the same: the real or the true is cut down to the size of a favored form of knowledge" (1997a: 70).

A couple of pages later, he suggests that "having a reason to doubt the reality of mental states and events" is more or less the same as "having a reason to doubt the objective status of the propositional attitudes" (1997a: 72), and opposes the claim that anomalous monism yields a form of intentional irrealism by stating that "mental events are as real as physical events, being identical with them, and attributions of states are as objective" (1997a: 72). In the very next sentence, he makes what he clearly intends to be the same point by saying that "Quine's description of attitude attributions as dramatic portrayals does not imply that *there is nothing to portray*" (my emphasis). Another couple of pages later (1997a: 74), he states that (since beliefs are not "entities" of any kind) "[t]he real issue is whether or not attributions of attitudes are objectively true or false"; a question which he later (1997a: 82) equates with that of whether there are "objective grounds" for choosing among conflicting interpretations.

It is rather unclear, in light of such remarks, whether Davidson allows that one may deny objectivity without denying existence, and whether he understands the claim that attributions of inten-



tional states are not objectively true or false as meaning that no attribution of intentional state is true (or has any truth-value at all), or as meaning only that though all attributions of intentional states do have a truth-value, they don't have it *objectively*. There is however some evidence that he would read it in the first way, and indeed, that he is generally inclined to assume that a failure to be *objectively* true or false is a failure to be true or false at all (and thus, a failure to "portray" anything at all). Here is one statement which clearly seems to support this interpretation: "To have the concept of truth is to have the concept of objectivity, the notion of a proposition being true or false independent of one's *beliefs or interests*" (Davidson 1995: 10; my emphasis).<sup>23</sup>

In allowing, above, that irrealism might take the form of *cognitivist* irrealism, and thus, that a judgement might be true/false without being *objectively* true/false, I obviously have parted company with Davidson. But this is not yet to say that he is committed to rejecting cognitivist intentional irrealism, for the latter doesn't claim that the truth-value of attributions of intentional states depends on the "beliefs or interests" of those who make them, but that their truth depends on someone's having the capacity to make them (in the sense that no such attribution could be true if no one had the capacity to make it). As far as I can see, there is nothing to prevent Davidson from endorsing such a claim, and some reason to think that he actually is committed to it. Whether he would be happy to see himself as thereby embracing a kind of intentional irrealism is of course another matter, but one I need not dwell upon.

Seeing Davidson as an intentional irrealist, even of the *cognitivist* variety, does however raise a difficulty which must be dealt with before concluding. The problem is that adding intentional irrealism to token-physicalism (which Davidson explicitly endorses) seems to lead to the view that some physical states/events depend on our having the capacity to make intentional attributions, which looks very much like a form of (weak) physical irrealism. For if intentional states are identical to physical states, attributions of intentional states actually refer to physical states. But according to FII, all attributions of intentional states (of any level) refer to some-

thing whose existence depends on someone's having the capacity to make them; from which it would seem to follow that attributions of intentional states refer to *physical* states whose existence depends on someone's having the capacity to refer to them in certain kinds of judgements, and hence, that at least some physical states (namely, those which also are intentional states) would not exist if we didn't have the capacity to refer to them. But this is puzzling.

The puzzle can be dissolved, I think, by paying due attention to the distinction introduced earlier (section 1), between Fact-realism/irrealism and Thing-realism/irrealism. First, it must be noticed that the various forms of intentional realism and irrealism which have been considered so far are all forms of F-realism/irrealism. This means that FII would be more carefully expressed by saying that the truth of any intentional attribution depends on someone's having the capacity to make it, in the sense that no intentional attribution could be true if no one had the capacity to make it (or in the material mode, by saying that no intentional fact could obtain if no one had the capacity to judge that it obtains, i.e., to conceive it). The corresponding form of (full) intentional T-irrealism, which has so far not been mentioned, would be the claim that all intentional terms (i.e., terms like "the belief that p," "Paul's intention to A," etc...) refer to things whose existence depends on someone's having the capacity to refer to them. It is this claim (and emphatically *not* intentional F-irrealism) which would be most naturally transposed in the material mode by saying that all intentional states or events depend on someone's having the capacity to refer to them. For intentional F-irrealism concerns the instantiation of intentional properties or the obtaining of intentional facts, but not the existence of objects or "things" of any kind. It should be stressed that intentional T-irrealism is no part of anything I have been defending, and as far as I can see, it is not entailed by intentional F-irrealism.

Let us now turn to strong physical realism. In accordance with what has just been said, (strong) physical realism could be understood either as the F-realist claim that the truth of any physical judgement (i.e., any judgement concerning physical matters) is independent of anyone's having the capacity to make it, or as the

T-realist claim that all physical terms refer to things which exist independently of anyone's having the capacity to refer to them. It seems fairly obvious that even assuming token-physicalism, both strong physical F-realism and strong physical T-realism are compatible with (full) intentional F-irrealism.

The trouble is with physical T-realism, which is indeed incompatible with the conjunction of intentional T-irrealism and token-physicalism. For if (as claimed by physical T-realism) all physical objects exist independently of anyone's having the capacity to refer to them, and physical states/events are taken to be physical objects, then it must also be the case that all intentional states/events (if they are identical to physical states/events) are independent of anyone's having the capacity to refer to them; and hence that intentional T-irrealism must be false. But intentional T-irrealism is no part of anything Davidson is committed to, nor of anything I have been trying to promote.

This yields an interesting picture of Davidson's views, as embracing both full (strong) intentional F-irrealism and full (strong) intentional T-realism! A simple analogy will help to see what this looks like, and why it is not obviously incoherent or indefensible. Consider an ordinary red billiard ball. This certainly is a physical object, whose existence is independent of anyone's having the capacity to refer to it or to conceive of it in any way. The same holds for its being red, but arguably not for its being a *billiard* ball, for nothing could be a billiard ball unless someone had the capacity to take it as a billiard ball. In just the same way, consider some intentional state/event *e*. Assuming token-physicalism and physical T-realism, the existence of *e* is independent of anyone's having the capacity to refer to it or to conceive of it in any way. The same holds for its having any physical property it may happen to have, but arguably not for its having such properties as being a belief that *p* or an intention to do *A*, etc. But to claim that *S*'s believing that *p* or something's being a state of believing that *p* depend on someone's having the capacity to judge that *S* believes that *p* or that it is a state of believing that *p* just is to endorse intentional F-irrealism.<sup>24</sup>

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### Keywords

Realism, intentionality, objectivity, dependence, Davidson.

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## Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é mostrar que as perspectivas para o irrealismo intencional são muito melhores do que geralmente se pensa. Na primeira seção, pergunto se há alguma forma de realismo acerca de estados intencionais que seja defensável. Mostro que a maioria dos candidatos são praticamente trivialmente falsos, e que a única forma de realismo intencional que não é falsa é uma forma restrita que, à primeira vista, não é mais plausível que a forma correspondente de irrealismo. Na segunda seção, defendo minha interpretação do que significa o irrealismo intencional contra alguns possíveis mal-entendidos, apresento algumas razões por que deveria ser tomado seriamente, e argumento que poderia ser plausivelmente atribuído a Davidson.

**Palavras-chave**

Realismo, intencionalidade, objetividade, dependência, Davidson.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Christine Tappolet for this piece of “Haitian” wisdom.

<sup>2</sup> Except when explicitly indicated, I will be using the term “judgement” as a generic term covering any intentional state, act, or attitude which can be described as true or false, whether or not it is linguistic in nature.

<sup>3</sup> Or, in Dummettian terminology, for each “region” or “area” of discourse.

<sup>4</sup> Following Carnap (1937).

<sup>5</sup> More accurately, strong F-realism claims that for every p such that p only if various conditions are satisfied, whether it is the case that p is independent of ourselves, and weak F-realism, that for some p such that p only if various conditions are satisfied, whether it is the case that p is independent of ourselves.

<sup>6</sup> Which is not to say that there can be no realism *about* judgements or terms. Actually, this is one aspect of the problem of intentional realism, which will be the main concern of this paper.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Loux (2002: 254–5) and Miller (2002: 3).

<sup>8</sup> I said above that judgements about intentional phenomena constituted what might be called “intentional discourse.” Thus understood, intentional discourse certainly includes, but is not restricted to, attributions of

intentional states, and the form of intentional realism expressed in the text would seem to be incomplete. However, there is a sense in which attributions of intentional states are *basic* to intentional discourse, for it would seem that the truth-value of any judgement “about” intentional phenomena will depend at least in part on that of some attributions of intentional states. Taking now attributions of intentional states as constituting “basic intentional discourse,” it will appear that a realist conception of intentional discourse (in the wide sense) should entail a realist conception of *basic* intentional discourse, though not conversely. It follows that an irrealist conception of *basic* intentional discourse is sufficient for an irrealist conception of intentional discourse as a whole. Since I am mainly interested in defending intentional irrealism and attacking intentional realism, it seems apt to concentrate on attacking the weakest forms of realism and defending the strongest forms of irrealism. Furthermore, I take it that no one would seriously want to endorse a realist conception of intentional discourse as a whole (i.e., when it is construed as including all judgements “about” any intentional state or attitude). For this would require that every judgement to the effect that a certain intentional state possesses some property P refers to something independent of “ourselves,” which in turn requires that something’s being P be independent of “ourselves.” The trouble is that (unless one is a global realist) some such properties will belong to areas of discourse about which one will not want to be an realist. This explains why I think intentional realism/irrealism is best construed as pertaining primarily (if not exclusively) to the status of *basic* intentional discourse. I will accordingly restrict myself to this part of intentional discourse.

<sup>9</sup> And as will shortly be made clear, it remains problematic even in this case.

<sup>10</sup> The term “ontological dependence” is more fit to the “thing” language in which most of the foregoing remarks are put; for it denotes a relation between the existence of something and the existence of some other thing. But the relation I have in mind has wider scope and should rather be seen as a relation between propositions (or states of affairs). The claim that “X depends on Y” may be read either as the claim that the existence of X depends on the existence of Y (when X and Y are taken as objects) or as the claim that X’s obtaining/being true depends on Y’s obtaining/being true (when X and Y are taken as states of affairs or propositions). What is distinctive of the traditional realist debates is that the reference point is taken to be either something like “ourselves” or “our minds,” or (in the

“fact” language) our possessing certain “mental” features. Some discussion of the restricted notion of ontological dependence can be found in Lowe (1994) and Fine (1995).

<sup>11</sup> I’m unable to say, in general, on what condition it would be true that X would not exist/obtain if Y didn’t exist/obtain, but I take it as trivially true that Y would not exist/obtain if Y didn’t exist/obtain. One could be under the impression that no matter which Y is chosen as the reference point, it would be correct to say that, in the corresponding perspective, it is something the existence/obtaining of which doesn’t depend on that of anything else, with the result that, far from being conceived in an irrealist way, the reference point would actually be posited as something which is somehow “more real” than anything else. But one must be careful here; it is not the claim that something depends on something else which is “perspectival.” It is the act of taking something as the reference point which creates the perspective, and the fact that something Y is taken as the reference point doesn’t by any means imply that its existence/obtaining doesn’t depend on that of anything else.

<sup>12</sup> More accurately, they are intentional acts which I have the capacity to perform, and correspond to thoughts and beliefs I have the capacity to have. But for the purpose of this paper, and for the sake of simplicity, I intend the phrase “intentional state” to cover all kinds of intentionally contentful acts, states or attitudes.

<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that the other interpretation doesn’t make sense. It’s only that it yields weaker forms of intentional realism, which an intentional irrealist may not want to challenge. For even an intentional irrealist may want to grant, for example, that Paul may believe that the sky is blue even when she is not actually attributing this belief to him.

<sup>14</sup> Recall that we are here concerned with *basic* intentional discourse.

<sup>15</sup> Trivial as it may be, this fact will play an important role below in helping us to reach a more satisfying understanding of what intentional realism really ought to be.

<sup>16</sup> Laurier (2001).

<sup>17</sup> That much arguably follows from Evans’ well known Generality Constraint. See Evans (1982: 104).

<sup>18</sup> Miller (2002) is a very clear example.

<sup>19</sup> One can also deny that Y itself exists. But it is interesting to note that this doesn’t necessarily yield an irrealist thesis. If there is no Y, then if the relevant judgements refer to something, this something can only be independent of Y. To get an irrealist thesis by denying the existence of Y, one



must also explicitly deny that what the relevant judgements refer to is independent of Y. But one then finds oneself in the case where it has simply been denied that the judgements in question refer to anything at all.

<sup>20</sup> It may be worth observing that this assumption amounts to *denying* two theses which could *arguably* be described as forms of intentional realism: (i) one claiming that my capacity to make auto-attributions of intentional states is independent of my capacity to make hetero-attributions of intentional states, and (ii) the other claiming the converse.

<sup>21</sup> See Laurier (2004) where the two claims mentioned in the text are distinguished as “strong” and “moderate” versions of the thesis that thought is essentially public.

<sup>22</sup> This is not to say that he sees himself as an intentional realist. For in the introductory paragraphs of this same paper, he rejects realism on the ground that we have no clear grasp of the idea that “there is something in or about the world that makes our thoughts and assertions true when they are true” (1997a: 70).

<sup>23</sup> Further, if somewhat less compelling, evidence is to be found in Davidson (1997b: 129) and (2001b: 141).

<sup>24</sup> Parts of this paper have been read at the *Fourth Principia International Symposium* in Florianópolis (August 2005).