

In my view this is a radically mistaken reading of Rawls's book *Political Liberalism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993/1996; hereafter PL). It ignores the fact that Rawls there disavows the priority of the right over the good (PL, pp. 51–3, 175–6) and advocates, in his idea of an overlapping consensus of comprehensive moral doctrines, a second (and, if you will, higher) level for justifying the principles for shared political institutions. Finally, it ignores Rawls's idea of 'wide public reason', developed in the second preface to PL (1996), which authorizes citizens to draw on preferred comprehensive doctrines and personal moral convictions in arguments about the constitution and about political policies in cases where there is not a firm agreement in such matters.

The essays in this book exhibit a commendably high level of scholarship. They are written by an accomplished group of thinkers (some of them well-known and well-established and some of them relatively new and worth keeping in view). All the essays are new to this book (except the two on rights). The book is well produced (I noted only a dropped note superscript in Gaus's chapter and a missing 'not' on p. 231). For persons interested in the history of recent ethics, in T. H. Green in particular, and in the continuing relevance of his political and ethical views, it will prove a valuable addition to the literature.

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Truth and the Past, by Michael Dummett. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Pp. x + 122. H/b £16.50, P/b £13.00.

Is it possible to endorse a justificationist theory of meaning without being forced to hold 'repugnant' views about the past? This is the problem that Dummett tackles in his latest contribution to an issue with which he has been engaged since the beginning of his philosophical career.

The first two chapters are devoted to explaining what a good theory of meaning does and how it relates to the notion of truth; the next three chapters discuss understanding tenses and the metaphysics of time. (Ch. 6 discusses the work of Bernard Williams, and is more like an appendix to the main book.) Different theories of meaning are characterized by what they take to be their fundamental semantic notion: truth-conditional theories take *truth* to be fundamental, whereas justificationist theories take *verification* to be fundamental. Dummett argues that an adequate theory of meaning must account for how we understand sentences, which, for Dummett, is given by how we *use* them. Truth-conditional theories, then, must show how the justificatory aspects of use—what entitles someone to assert a sentence, when must it be withdrawn,

what establishes it as correct, and so on—can be derived from the conditions for truth, whereas justificationist theories get this for free. He goes on to argue that, although truth is indeed indispensable to theories of meaning, this is not to endorse the truth-conditional theories: first, although truth is central to the meaning of assertoric sentences, there is more to the meaning of sentences than their assertoric content; second, it is one thing saying that truth is indispensable and another saying what truth *is*. Since truth is characterized in terms of the fundamental semantic notion of a given theory of meaning, theories with different fundamental semantic notions generate different concepts of truth. To establish their position, then, truth-conditional theorists need to show not just that truth is indispensable to meaning but that *their* concept of truth is. But since the semantic features of a theory are determined by the fundamental semantic notion adopted, there is no reason to think that familiar features of truth-conditional theories, such as bivalence, or the equivalence between ‘A’ and ‘It is true that A’, must be preserved in all other theories. Dummett takes future contingents to illustrate the point (p. 38). The principle of semantic ascent, taken by Dummett to be characteristic of truth-conditional theories, yields the conditional: if ‘Bush will veto a bill outlawing the death penalty’ is not true, then Bush will not veto a bill outlawing the death penalty. But justificationist theories may take the sentence quoted in the antecedent not to be true (because neither true nor false), without it following that Bush will never get round to vetoing it. Thus there is nothing compelling, independent of a particular theory of meaning, about the principle of semantic ascent.

We can agree with Dummett on this point. However, this does not entirely establish what Dummett would like, namely that it is the theory of meaning, and hence concept of truth employed, that determines whether such statements are determinately true or false or not. If the principle of semantic ascent is constitutive of a certain concept of truth, then rejecting it is, indeed, to offer a different concept. But this is not to say those who take truth to be the fundamental semantic notion cannot also reject semantic ascent in future-contingent cases. For what drives the need to say that future-contingent statements are neither true nor false need not have anything to do with adopting a different fundamental semantic notion, such as verifiability, but may be simply a consequence of holding a view about the *metaphysics* of the future, such as that there are *no* facts to make determinate statements about it, or that there are *too many* facts to make determinate statements about it, as with a branching future. (The former is why, e.g. Tooley in *Time, Tense and Causation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, holds that future contingents are neither true nor false; the latter is why I do in *A Future for Presentism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.) As I see it, the rejection of semantic ascent rather highlights a specific problem that minimalists about truth have in accommodating indeterminate future-tensed statements; it does not show that what is at issue is a difference in the fundamental semantic notion employed. For two people could agree that truth is the fundamental semantic notion, and agree that

truth is, say, correspondence with reality, but disagree over whether future-tensed statements are determinately true or false (for instance, if one holds that the future exists and is linear, whereas the other holds that it branches). So although a different fundamental semantic notion may well lead us to think that future-tensed (or, indeed, past-tensed) statements are not determinately true or false, this is not the only route to that conclusion. (Dummett has responded (private correspondence) that if meaning is to be explained in terms of truth, then statements that are neither determinately true or false can have no meaning, making this a position too radical to be worth considering. But it is a mistake to equate having an indeterminate truth-value with having no truth-conditions: we can state the conditions under which such statements would be true; it is just that the world is such that they are not. This no more makes them meaningless than those statements that turn out to be determinately false.) Thus it will not quite do to claim the debate between realists and antirealists (about the past or future) amounts to establishing the correct theory of meaning for tensed language.

Nevertheless, Dummett's main concern is whether justificationism can be adopted without it landing us with an implausible view of the past. The important aspects of his argument go as follows. Suppose we say that to be justified in asserting *p*, it must be that we have verified that *p*. This is too strong: if 'we allow as true only those statements about the past supported by present memories and present evidence, then large tracts of the past would continually vanish as all traces of them dissipate ... This conception ... is repugnant' (p. 44). But we can avoid this repugnant view by weakening our standards of justification. No longer need *we* verify *p*, so long as *someone* does. We should accept the testimony of others in our community, including those located in the past and future who can directly verify *p*. But, of course, there may not be anyone at those locations, so Dummett weakens the standards further: 'if the truth of a proposition consists of its being the case that someone suitably placed *could have* verified it, or have found a cogent ground for asserting it, then our conviction is vindicated' (pp. 44–5).

In chapter five, Dummett discusses four models of time: (1) presentism; (2) only the present and future exist; (3) only the present and past exist; (4) past, present and future all exist. He rejects models (2) and (3) on the grounds that there is no reason for treating the past and future asymmetrically; asymmetries are accounted for by the direction of causation not the nature of time. Presentism is rejected because reality must extend to the past and future to provide truthmakers for past- and future-tensed statements (since appealing to no more than present traces for truthmakers leads to the repugnant view). We are left with model (4). Dummett endorses the tenseless version of it but with the justificationist spin: past, present and future are equally real, and time itself does not flow, but reality only extends so far as what the wider community, that is, past, present and future individuals, can know. This way, justificationism can be had without the commitment to the repugnant view.

Although I agree that moderate justificationism can be combined with a tenseless model (4), I disagree that justificationism is forced in the direction of realism. Dummett's apparent lack of awareness of better versions of presentism than the ones he considers (the repugnant version, and the view that there are *no* truthmakers for past- or future-tensed statements) hinders him seeing alternatives for justificationism. For presentism *can* appeal to determinate facts to make past-tensed (and, perhaps, future-tensed) statements true, for instance, by claiming that these are brute present facts (as in Arthur Prior's work), or by claiming that such facts are given in some ersatz account of the past (as in my 2006 cited above). We could then give presentism the justificationist spin and say that the determinate past facts consist in what *was* (or even *could have been*) known, without being committed to the existence of such people. (Of course, if Dummett means by 'realism' the idea that there are such determinate facts, then these versions of presentism count as being realist views of the past. But if he does, I would take it to be a poor definition of 'realism': if, by this definition, presentism turns out to be a realist view about the past, it is a good reason to reject tying realism to the notion of bivalence!) Thus, all theories of time can be phrased in either moderate justificationist or truth-conditional terms; so, adopting a particular theory of meaning (so long as it is not strong justificationism) does not entail a particular theory of time, and vice versa. Indeed, we could have arrived at this conclusion sooner, since weakening the standards of justification to what *could* be verified by a suitably placed person renders the *actual* existence of such individuals irrelevant. The most that moderate justificationism requires is determinate truths about the past; it does not require its concrete existence in the form of model (4), as Dummett thinks.

Given that either theory of meaning is compatible with any theory of time, the only remaining question is whether moderate justificationism itself is plausible. With the concessions it makes, it is not clear how much can be salvaged of the original justificationist project. Dummett set out to show how *we* understand tenses, but it is not obvious how the move from the individual to the wider community really helps with this, since *we* have no obvious epistemic access to hypothetical individuals and states of affairs. We may well be able to assert past-tense statements if the relevant subjunctive statement is true, but this just shifts the question back to how we are to understand subjunctive claims, and what justifies our asserting *them*. (Dummett is aware of this problem, but I did not manage to discover a clear answer in this book.) Dummett would not want it to be simply the bare truth of these conditionals, independent of our epistemic access, if only because it is hard to see how this improves on the truth-conditional theories. But it is equally hard to see what epistemically accessible feature of the world could ground such conditionals. Ultimately, the account will have to assume some uniformity in nature (e.g. of laws governing light and human physiology, etc.). But this already has built into it the notion of what *has* and *will* happen and thus helps itself to notions

that it was trying to elucidate. The prospects for even a moderate justificationism look slim.

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Experience and the World's Own Language: A Critique of John McDowell's Empiricism, by Richard Gaskin. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006. Pp. viii + 251. H/b £37.00.

John McDowell occupies a unique place in analytical philosophy. Eschewing the trend for working in narrowly defined 'research programmes', McDowell has spent the last thirty years or so setting out a broad, expansive philosophical vision. Drawing on influences as diverse as Aristotle, Kant, Wittgenstein, Sellars, and Davidson, McDowell has produced a body of work that is peerlessly profound and illuminating in the way in which it grapples with some of the grandest, most challenging of philosophy's perennial questions. Indeed, the sympathetic and understanding reader of his most substantial philosophical work to date, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996; paperback edn.), is drawn into a compelling conceptual drama in which McDowell attempts to render intelligible the relation between thought and reality, and to reconcile what he characterizes as the dualism of reason and nature, whilst bringing to the fore some of the deepest questions about the nature of philosophy itself.

Paradoxically, however, some of the very features of McDowell's work that I have just praised may well prompt concerns in those readers who can be placed less equivocally within the 'analytical' tradition than can McDowell himself. Specifically, the abstract and expansive nature of McDowell's philosophical style might cause one to question whether the details of his position are fully worked out; and the fact that McDowell's own philosophical influences are so wide-ranging might make one wonder whether his thinking is ultimately consistent. It is fair to say that Richard Gaskin, although sympathetic with McDowell's thinking, shares such worries. Always concerned to uncover what he takes to be the implicit commitments of McDowell's position, Gaskin does an invaluable job of surveying the totality of McDowell's written work and examining it with a rigorous (even ruthless), sceptical eye.

The feature of McDowell's standpoint that is the focus of Gaskin's book is what McDowell himself has called his 'minimal empiricism' (*Mind and World*, introduction). Minimal empiricism is McDowell's response to the question of how our minds can be in touch with empirical reality at all, and its central plank is that experience should be conceived as a kind of openness to the world. Rather than constituting an *interface* between our minds and reality,