

ON BRANDS

An Investigation into the Nature of Consumer Brands
Are they real or constructed?

by
Christine A. Liebig

A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
Philosophy

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2014

© Christine A. Liebig 2014

Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Christine A. Liebig
September 23, 2014

Abstract

This thesis investigates the nature of consumer brands in the context of the contemporary realism debate. It comprises three chapters. The first chapter introduces the what, the why and the how of brands, to wit: I describe what brands are and why brands exist, as well as how they are designed. In the second chapter, motivated by my pursuit to answer the question: *Are Brands Real?* I review three influential proposals by Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, Michael Dummett and Crispin Wright about how to distinguish realist from anti-realist views about disputed entities within particular domains, in order to develop a toolkit, which I will employ in the third Chapter to answer that key question. The result of this investigation shows that the answer, which prior to the inquiry might have struck some as obvious, is somewhat more nuanced and complex.

Acknowledgements

the thought is always consoling that, often in philosophy,
it is more instructive to travel than to get anywhere.

Crispin Wright | Realism, Anti-Realism , Irrealism, Quasi-Realism | P26

I take great inspiration from this thought, and am sincerely grateful to the philosopher Crispin Wright for expressing it in print, so that I may one day find it. For if he hadn't, and I didn't, I'm not sure I would have embarked on the arduous journey that this paper has taken me on. I am also deeply grateful to my thesis advisor, Professor and Chair David DeVidi for staying the course with me, as I would have otherwise undoubtedly drowned in the seas of language or, at the very least, been moored helplessly in its shoals.

I would also like to acknowledge and extend sincere thanks to my two departmental readers, Wolfe Chair | Dr. Carla Fehr and Dr. Gerry Callaghan, for their thoughtful comments and valuable insight.

Dedication

In memory of my father, Lars L. Liebig – I miss you each and every day. And to my mother, Hilde Högler Liebig – your selflessness generosity seems to know no bounds, and your passion for living is a constant inspiration.

My eternal gratitude to you both for all of the many gifts you have given me – most especially for your love, your patience and for the freedom you gave me to set my own path, even when I didn't know where I was going. Thank you.

ON BRANDS

An Investigation Into the Nature of Consumer Brands | Are they real or constructed?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	vii
Introduction	1
CHAPTER ONE ON BRANDS	5
1.01 The What and the Why of Brands	5
1.01.1 Brand and Branding Elements	9
1.01.1.1 Brand Elements	10
1.01.1.2 Branding Elements	15
1.02 The How of Brands	21
1.02.1 Designing Brand Identity	21
CHAPTER TWO A REALIST/ANTI-REALIST TOOLKIT	32
2.01 Realism <i>The Debate</i>	35
2.02 Geoffrey Sayre-McCord <i>A Conceptual Cartography</i>	37
2.03 Michael Dummett <i>Referential vs Justificationist Semantics</i>	41
2.04 Crispin Wright <i>Truth and Objectivity</i>	52
2.04.01 Euthyphro Contrast	60
2.04.02 Cognitive Command Constraint	67
2.04.03 Wide Cosmological Role	73
CHAPTER THREE SO, ARE BRANDS REAL?	77
3.01 Applying Sayre-McCord's Criterion for Realism	77
3.02 Applying Dummett's Criterion for Realism	81
3.03 Applying Wright's Criteria for Realism	83
Concluding Remarks	97
Appendix	98
Bibliography	104
Brand Glossary References	107

ON BRANDS

An Investigation Into the Nature of Consumer Brands | Are they real or constructed?

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Layers of “est”	14
Figure 2.	Layers of a Brand Real or Constructed?	21
Figure 3.	A Conceptual Cartography Sayre-McCord’s View	39
Figure 4.	A Conceptual Cartography Dummett’s Version	51
Figure 5.	Three Nature’s of Truth	59
Figure 6.	The Euthyphro Contrast A Non-linear Interpretation	86
Figure 7.	Scale of Objectivity	95

ON BRANDS

An Investigation Into the Nature of Consumer Brands | Are they real or constructed?

Introduction

Brands are everywhere. Recognized as products, Evian bottles wash up on shore, dumped by cruise ships far out at sea. You may drive “a Volvo” to work every day; or a Ford or a Chevy or a BMW – one that you've specifically chosen for a variety of (personal) reasons: design, safety, fuel economy, price, status etc. You dress in various brands of clothing – Fruit of the Loom, Levi’s, Ralph Lauren or Donna Karan – every morning before going to work or to school and you communicate using many of a growing number of them – Samsung, Blackberry, iPhone – “anytime, anywhere”. Evidence of brands in the form of logos and advertising can be seen on websites, sports uniforms, subways, airlines and grocery aisles. They are served up by Google and give rise to a forest of urban signs, both digital and traditional, that crowd our skylines. Yet, whether you’re pro-logo or no-logo,¹ brands are undoubtedly here to stay. And they are arguably more ubiquitous and proliferating faster than ever before, thanks to rapid developments in communications technology, particularly social media and the advent of celebrity and personal branding.

But what are brands really? On the one hand, they seem somewhat akin to products of artistic creation – at least in terms of their visual identity and advertising. As such, one might think to look to answer the question as to the status and nature of brands by

¹ Reference to Naomi Klein’s 1999 book *No Logo*.

referring to the plentiful literature written on aesthetics and the philosophy of art. And yet, though some brands arguably do have beautiful visual identities, print ads and videos, so created by a team of talented, specially trained designers, the motivation for brands is not as ends in themselves, but is of a more transactional nature. Specifically, brands are spurred into being by companies who wish to use them as a *call-to-action*² i.e. brands and forms of branding are created to capture the hearts and minds of a particular audience in order for the targeted audience to be persuaded to buy a particular product or service. In this way, brands are tools of commerce, funded to add corporate value and generate profits in an ever more competitive commercial landscape.

Brands are also unique in terms of how they are created. Works of art are often, but not always, created as the result of a vision of one artist, and often in relation to a particular subject matter. Brands, on the other hand, are created by teams of branding professionals, the vision of which is often co-created with the client/brand owner and refined during the process of brand building as a result of research conducted with an intended audience. In this way, brand builders, though firmly of the view brands are constructed, also grant an equal if not considerable process of discovery.³

As a creative professional, this thesis project began, for me, in the course of being tasked with the development and communication of client brands. Having studied under Charles Taylor as an undergraduate at McGill, my interest in philosophy flourished and persisted long after graduating. An avid reader of Plato, most particularly his Forms, I continued to

² For definitions for branding terminology see Brand Glossary references provided in the Bibliography of this thesis.

³ At least the ones that I've had conversations with.

take philosophy courses via the University of Waterloo's Centre for Extended Learning. Combining my personal and professional passion, I began to think about patterns in the nature of Forms and similar patterns in the nature of brands. And yet brands, on my view, were something uniquely different – something both real *and* concrete. Brands, it seems to me, are real, if abstract, things, with their own natures, things about which we could be right or wrong. And yet, unlike, for instance, numbers, where one could take straightforward Platonist realism seriously, brands are not timeless and immutable in our interactions with them, nor in our shared stories about them. What, then, is their metaphysical status? Are brands real? Or, are they merely constructed? The answer, I suggest, is both subtle and interesting in that it may not be a simple case of either/or.

It is the intent of this paper to investigate the nature of brands in order to show that this is so. I will confine my inquiry to the status and nature of *consumer* brands,⁴ as B2C (business to consumer) branding and marketing is my particular area of expertise - not because other types of brands are less worthy of investigation. The brands I will consider are large, multinational brands, which I have chosen strictly for the purpose of ease of recognition by most readers, wherever they happen to reside. Lastly, I limit myself to consumer brands rather than personal or B2B (business to business) brands in order to keep this project manageable, though I suspect the outcomes would be much the same, were I to apply the same lessons. However, I cannot make this claim with confidence, as I will not have done the work.

⁴ For simplicity, commencing in Chapter One, I will refer to consumer brands merely as brands.

Briefly, the narrative of my thesis – ON BRANDS – will proceed as follows. In Chapter One, I draw on existing literature on creating consumer brands and insights derived from interviews conducted with professionals within the creative industry, as well as my own experience, in order to review the nature of consumer brands and the creation of brand identity from the perspective of the professionals who participate directly in this process. In Chapter Two, I assemble a philosophical toolkit to address the question “*Are Brands Real?*” More precisely, I describe a few key currents in contemporary philosophical discussions related to the realism debate that address the question of how to make progress in debates about the reality of a particular class of things; influential currents that attempt to bridge the gap between hardened realists and anti-realists, offering common ground for a more constructive debate to take shape. I begin by outlining various, albeit limited, developments in meta-ethics as outlined by Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, then review the key proposal about realism and anti-realism found in the work of renowned philosopher Michael Dummett. I argue that these two proposals are not subtle enough to make the key distinctions that illuminate the true nature of brands. I then turn to an examination of Crispin Wright’s approach, especially as it is described in his seminal book *Truth and Objectivity*. Sympathetic to a pluralist view, the answer to the question “*Are Xs real?*” – if Wright is right – is almost always “*it depends what you mean.*” Finally, in Chapter Three, I apply the tools explored in Chapter Two to the nature of consumer brands as described in Chapter One and so am able to provide a plausible and coherent answer to what the question of whether or not brands are real depends on.

CHAPTER ONE | ON BRANDS

1.01 | THE WHAT AND THE WHY OF BRANDS

WHAT ARE BRANDS? WHY DO THEY EXIST?

In this chapter, I briefly examine the very complex nature of brands and to a lesser degree that of the branding process. As stated in the introduction, my particular interest and focus lies in the creative process of building brand identity. To begin, the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of brands will be explored. That is to say, I will ask and seek to answer the questions:

What are they? Why do they exist? What elements do they comprise? What is their function? Once a general overview of what brands are, and why they are, has been established, I will move on to unpacking the process of building brand identity. Note, the language used within this chapter is not philosophical, but practical. References to existence are not meant metaphysically, nor do the words “create”, “design”, “construct”, “build”, “truth” or “exist” anchor to any realist or anti-realist platform. The language within this chapter is the language used by professionals within the branding industry. My philosophical inquiry begins in Chapter Two.

WHAT IS A BRAND?

So, let’s start with the basic question: “*What is a brand?*” A seemingly simple and straightforward question in non-philosophical terms, and an equally simple and straightforward answer to which may be extracted from any dictionary. According to the

Concise Oxford Dictionary, a brand is “a trade mark” as in “goods of particular make or trademark.” So, a brand is a trademark. This naturally leads us to seek the definition of trademark, which, within the same source, is defined as a “device or word or words legally registered (or established by use) as distinguishing a manufacturer’s or traders goods.” And so we emerge with the first kernel of understanding what a brand is. A brand is a device or a word employed to differentiate goods (or services) from one another – similar or otherwise. Thus a brand identifies a good or service as unique and attributable to a particular producer or service provider. As an introduction, I hope this will suffice as to generally inform the question “*What is a brand?*” What I am confident will emerge through the course of this paper, however, is that brands are so much more than this preliminary description suggests.

WHY DO THEY EXIST?

Next question. “*Why do they exist?*” Admittedly, this seems a ridiculous question in our current age of brand ubiquity. Most of us would be hard pressed to fathom a place or an environment that has not somehow been infiltrated by brands – THE NORTH FACE in the arctic, Range Rover in the deserts surrounding Dakar, Blackberry in the hand of the President of the United States of America, Coca-Cola served on a flight to the Kingdom of Bhutan. Stand in the middle of Times Square⁵ and you’ll be visually bombarded with brands claiming every square inch of available advertisable real estate, for clothing, cosmetics, jewelry, music, travel, entertainment, celebrity – often all on one billboard. But you needn’t even venture so far afield; you merely have to take a look around the room

⁵ See live webcam of Time Square NYC, NY <http://worldcam.eu/25,1,32,webcam.html>

you're sitting in right now. There's bound to be at least ten branded items in plain sight, from the shoes on your feet and the type of coffee you are drinking, to the cell phone in your pocket and the computer you may be reading this thesis on. And it's not just things – no longer the exclusive domain of celebrities, everyday people like you and I are now encouraged to consider ourselves as brands and market ourselves in the workplace⁶ and socially⁷ etc. But I digress. The focus of this investigation is on brands as they pertain to consumer goods and services. Personal brands, albeit interesting and extremely curious, will have to wait for another day.

So, back to the questions: Brands | “*Why do we have them?*” And “*Why do they exist?*” Just because brands are everywhere now, doesn't mean it was always so. In fact, the actual origin of brands dates back to the days of medieval trading. The ancient Norse word brandr,⁸ means to burn (with a sword) and thus leave a (burnt) mark - on livestock, sheep for example, that would identify certain animals as belonging to a specific owner/seller when brought to market.⁹ Thus brands were a way for medieval market goers to not only to identify ownership, but also to determine, based on that unique mark, which livestock/product to buy based on the personal knowledge the buyer had of the seller and/or his product, or based on the reputation in terms of the quality or price of the products sold by a particular seller, as well as the reputation of the seller himself i.e. his honesty, integrity etc. This medieval practice serves to reveal what is still very much at the very core of the relationship between brands and consumers today – perception and

⁶ See many a profile on LinkedIn.

⁷ Ibid Facebook.

⁸ Clifton Simmons et al. *Brands and Branding*. Princeton: Bloomberg Press. 2004. 13.

⁹ Now as we all know – or at least those of us who count them - then as today, no two sheep are the same. Yet the important thing to note about brands in this sense (and in fact in every sense) is not so much the identity of the individual “sheep” themselves as to whom they belong.

trust i.e. what motivates consumers to choose to enter into a transaction – be it economic, social, cultural, or personal – with a particular brand(s) rather than another is still largely, if not wholly-based on recognizing the identity of and having trust in the reliability and value of the product/service, as well as believing in the integrity of seller. Consumers expect the value (or in industry terms the “brand promise”) presented by, or perceived to exist within, a particular brand is true and will be fulfilled if purchased. If fulfilled, consistently and hence reliably, consumer trust and thereby consumer loyalty is established through first-hand experience, or via less direct evidence, as the result of recommendation by a trusted source like a friend, family member or colleague etc.

Alina Wheeler, author of the quintessential branding guide *Designing Brand Identity*, offers perhaps the most succinct contextual answer to the blended questions “*What is a brand?*” And “*Why do they exist?*”

“As competition creates infinite choices, companies look for ways to connect emotionally with customers, become irreplaceable, and create lifelong relationships. A strong brand stands out in a densely crowded marketplace. People fall in love with brands, trust them, and believe in their superiority.”
(Wheeler 2).

So, to recap, a brand is a ‘mark’ that provides a product or service with a unique visual identity, which in turn enables a product/service to differentiate itself from other like products within a market characterized by competition. It is also the embodiment of a

brand promise. But a mark does not make a brand – at least not in the modern sense.

There are a variety of essential elements to a brand and the process of branding, which are necessary in order for brands to be authentic and to successfully convey, as well as reassure and engage consumers over the long term, that they are, and continue to be, the ideal choice¹⁰ within a crowded marketplace.

1.01.1 | BRAND AND BRANDING ELEMENTS

The terms brand and branding are often confused. Moreover, branding itself is often confused with marketing, PR and advertising.¹¹ In this section, I will outline the main elements of both terms in order to make clear to the reader that while brand and branding are both inter-related, they are also distinct. However, this will serve mainly as an overview and introduction to the section on building brand identity, which is the more relevant aspect of my philosophical investigation.

There are three main elements to a brand's identity. They are 1) the brand's visual identity, 2) the brand promise, and 3) the brand messaging. Once the brand's identity has been established, the process of branding (to the consumer) can begin. Branding is a process delineated by a brand strategy, which entails communications, marketing, PR and experiential/engagement components. The branding process is crucially concerned with not only communicating but also reinforcing the brand's identity with brand advertising,

¹⁰ Quote by David Haigh, CEO, Brand Finance in Alina Wheeler's *Designing Brand Identity*. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc. 2013), 2.

¹¹ Karin E. Klein, "A Practical Guide to Branding", Bloomberg Business Week, June 09, 2008; accessed 10 June 2014.

and, most importantly (to consumers), consistently delivering a cohesive, authentic and true brand experience via all its touch points¹² in order to secure the objective of every brand – consumer loyalty.

1.01.1.1 | BRAND ELEMENTS

Visual Identity

A brand's visual identity is perhaps the single most commonly associated brand element with *what a brand is*. And perhaps unsurprisingly so, as it's often the first thing one sees when encountering a brand. The visual identity of a brand is generally composed of a name, an icon/graphic element, a colour(s), a font(s) and a tagline. Taken together, a name, a specific colour or colours and an icon are commonly referred to as a *logo*. An example, of arguably one of the most recognized logos of this century, is the Coca-Cola™ logo:



Coca-Cola® Logo
Visual Identity

The purpose of a visual identity is to secure a consistent, and most importantly, coherent image in the mind of the consumer – an anchor, per se, to the brand.

¹² According to Alina Wheeler, brand touchpoints include: websites, newsletters, emails, signage, apps, employees, presentations, tradeshows, blogs, environments, mobile video, packaging and exhibits. For a comprehensive list see Building Brand Identity, 3.

Voice

Though not part of the visual identity, yet intimately related thereto, is the brand “voice” or “tone”, which is also crucial to brand consistency and coherence. Most immediately conveyed by the tagline, the brand voice/tone is also distinctly reflected in the colour(s) chosen for the visual identity, as well as in the copywriting for multi-channel media communications, traditional print marketing collateral and in the audio developed for media ads. A brand’s voice must reflect the brand’s personality seamlessly. A discordant voice brings discord to the brand, and thus the opportunity for audience to be confused or even repelled by the brand. For example, if McDonald’s launched a campaign in which its “*I’m lovin it*” tagline melody sounded like a funeral march layered onto a TV commercial of children playing in an outdoor playground while mischievously devouring their favourite French fries – the branding department and the creative agency hired, might have some explaining to do ...

Finally, brand owners take their brand’s visual identity very seriously. Small business owners may not be in the position to go the same lengths, merely because of the significant expense, but medium to larger companies usually register the trademark of their brand name, which you can recognize by the symbol ® for registered trademark, or ™ for trademark and even © for copyright.¹³

¹³ Please note that I do not own the copyright to any of these logos. I am merely using them to illustrate examples of visual identity.



Microsoft ® Logo



Christie (Digital) ® Logo



Google ™ Logo

Visual Identity | Sample Trademarked Logos

It is also common for large corporations also register the colour and often the fonts they use in their brand's visual identity e.g. the “IBM blue”, “Harley-Davidson orange”, “Coca-Cola red”. Some even go so far as to register their product's dye colour e.g. Heinz Ketchup red, French's Mustard yellow, and the arrangement of colours in patterns – as with Burberry's signature plaid – all with the aim of legally preventing imitators from co-opting the elements of their proprietary brand identities.

Brand Promise | to be the “est”

Brands are made up of both intangible and tangible elements. The tangible – that which we see – its visual identity, has been outlined above. The (only) intangible is its *core value* – that which the brand promises to deliver to the consumer: the *cleanest* laundry, the *sharpest* knife, the *safest* car, the *cheapest* prices, the most delicious coffee, the *best* fitting jeans, the most trustworthy news etc. Brand loyalty is that which consumers offer a company in exchange for a brand fulfilling its promise to be the “est”. If a brand does not (either once or consistently) fulfill its promise, consumers often can, and do, lose faith in a brand. If they choose to reject it, they may move to place their loyalty in a brand that does fulfill its promise and thus earns their trust. As such, a proven brand promise is arguably the single most important asset a brand has.

“A brand promise is the commitment to deliver made between that brand and its audience. It’s made ... in order to encourage that audience to buy. Ultimately ... a promise lives or dies on whether it is believed and delivered on ... but the promise itself is shaped by a range of factors: the nature of the offering; the capabilities and capacity of the brand; the rival promises of competitors.”¹⁴

A brand’s core value, otherwise known within the industry as its *raison d’etre*¹⁵ or its truth or essence,¹⁶ as expressed by its brand promise, is also the source of a brand’s positioning i.e. how it distinguishes itself from its competition. Volvo for example, has a brand promise to be the safest car. Volvo consistently delivers on this promise.¹⁷ Volvo’s brand promise allows it to distinguish itself from other cars in its category – luxury mid-size cars such as Audi, BMW, Lexus, Lincoln, Mercedes¹⁸ – and thereby secure the “top of mind” position for whom safety is a primary, if not ultimate concern when purchasing a vehicle. To help visualize the brand promise’s layers of “est”, I offer the following diagram. For clarification, INTERNAL means that the brand owner and/or creative professionals have identified the core value(s) to be associated with the brand. EXTERNAL identifies the messaging orientation to external audiences i.e. consumers, not internal messaging to the company/brand itself. Note that some layers are either/or, some are both, and that each informs the other in chronological order.

¹⁴ Mark Di Somma. *Brand Strategy Insider*. “Brand Promise, Getting the Brand Promise Right” (26 June 2013) <http://www.brandingstrategyinsider.com/brand-promise>; accessed June 15, 2014.

¹⁵ <http://www.fastcodesign.com/3020822/innovation-by-design/6-branding-lessons-from-eurostars-first-ever-creative-director> (October 30, 2013).

¹⁶ Not to be confused with philosophical notions of truth or essence.

¹⁷ Safety Category: <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2014/02/2014-car-brand-perception-survey/index.htm> ; accessed 24 Aug 2014.

¹⁸ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/ratings/v/class-summary/midsize-luxury-near-luxury-cars>; accessed 2013.

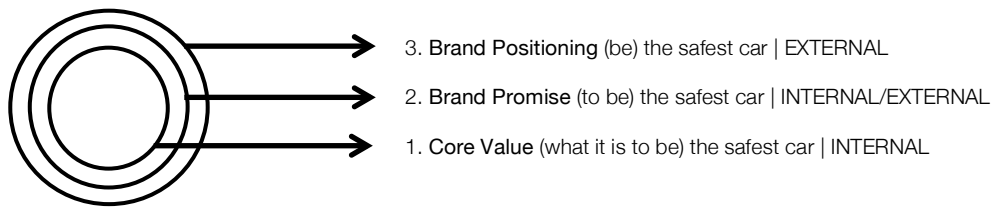


Figure 1. | Layers of “est”
 [From core value to brand positioning: 1 informs 2, 2 informs 3]

It is important to note that companies who are not clear on their brand’s core value are thus unable to clearly articulate their brand promise, which in turn makes it difficult for them to clearly communicate to their target audience what their position is within the competitive landscape i.e. who/what the brand is, why the audience should care and why they should buy.

Brand Messaging

“The best brands speak with one distinctive voice. On the web, in a tweet, in conversations with a salesperson, in a speech given by the president, the company needs to project the same unified message. It must be memorable, identifiable, and centred on the customer.” (Wheeler 26)

Brand messaging, in order to be “authentic” and thus successful, requires that a brand speak with a true¹⁹ “voice”. This voice conveys a distinct “personality” – one that, in tandem with its visual identity, conveys a unified brand identity to the consumer.

Brand personalities are crucial to brands. They serve to *humanize* the company,

¹⁹ We are not here speaking in terms of philosophical truth but in terms of being coherent, unified and in character, thus authentic.

product or service they represent/embody. This facilitates the development of a more intimate relationship with the consumer over the long term.

Central to brand messaging is the meaning behind what is to be conveyed to the customer. Of critical importance is assessing whether the customer understands what it is the brand is trying to say/convey. Of course brand promise and positioning feed into messaging, but this does not necessarily ensure that your messaging is clear and concise. “Brand messages work well if they distill the essence of the product or service.” (ibid). The message is projected by the voice and tone of the brand. If these are not in sync with the message, then not only will the message fall flat, but the brand will as well. Lack of a coherent and clear brand message, including voice, tone, content and language is the sure recipe for a failed brand.

1.01.1.2 | BRANDING ELEMENTS

The two main components that fall under the umbrella of “Branding” are Brand Communications and Brand Experience. Though essential to the brand, I will only briefly touch upon these categories and the elements of which they are comprised, and will focus instead on building brand identity in the next section.

Brand Communications | Awareness and a Call-to-Action

The goal of brand communications is to generate awareness for the brand, its product or service. More specifically, in strategic terms, the central task of brand communications is

to generate awareness of not only the brand, product or service per se, but the value of the brand, product or service embodies. In order to do this, brand communications strategies are focused on communicating the brand message across those channels relevant to the target audience. More robustly, brand communication is focused on communicating the brand *story* (its image, personality and its value and the tone and nature of the desired relationship with its audience) to both existing and new audiences (depending upon the timeline of a brand's lifecycle).

In addition to the goal of generating awareness, the underlying objective of brand communications is most often to motivate audiences to buy the product or services and thus incorporate the brand into their experience. How this is communicated is via what in industry terms is called a *call-to-action*. To generate awareness and communicate the value of a new or existing product or service in tandem with a call-to-action is the function of an in-house branding team, the execution of which may be assigned to an external creative agency.²⁰

Brand communications are meant to sustain the brand in the marketplace and build ongoing relationships with consumers²¹ for the lifetime of the brand. How effective a brand communications strategy is in telling the brand story is directly related to how relevant the brand's story is in relation to its intended audience's needs, wants, interests and values. If the audience can identify with the brand story i.e. if the brand story resonates with the aspirations, desires and/or motivation the audience has to fulfill a need,

²⁰ Smaller companies in the former case, larger in the latter.

²¹ Melissa Davis *The Fundamentals of Branding*. (London: AVA Publishing SA. 2009) 60.

problem, want, interest or value *and* thereby illicit a (trans)action, then its call-to-action is measured as successful. The main vehicle to transmit brand story is, of course, advertising.

As an aside, in an age of rapid technological advancements in communications channels²² and fickle attention spans, both the medium and the message are key in conveying the brand story in a clear, concise, engaging and effective manner. Getting the message just right, and consistently so, has become an unprecedented challenge with limits presented, for example, by 140 characters (or less).²³ Challenge or not, the future of brand communication knows no bounds. If they build it, brand communicators will be keen to discover ways of creating a message for it. Moreover, with the advent of social media, not only do the brands communicate their story, but consumers participate in developing it as well. This is a striking and complex phenomenon within the world of marketing and advertising – worthy of a thesis itself – thus I merely make mention of it here to highlight a new and interesting direction and move on.

Brand Experience

If you keep company with marketing professionals, it may seem everything today is about “*experience*” – user experience, student experience, customer experience – so it should come as no surprise that a central concern among brands and branding professionals is the brand experience i.e. the experience consumers (and prospective consumers) have when interacting with a brand once the visual identity, the brand promise, position, message and

²² Communications channels include traditional (print, radio, TV, event and in store) and digital media channels (social media and internet). Taken as a whole, this is currently referred to as ‘trans-media’, and thus ‘trans-media storytelling’ is a term used by the creative industry. The channels themselves are ever-changing, ever-evolving and ever-fragmenting the audiences attention.

²³ Reference to Twitter.

communications strategy are in place. Driven by the target market's point of view, all stages of brand interaction are analyzed and developed to enhance the brand experience. Hotels are an excellent example of this element of branding. From researching your accommodation online (was the site easy to navigate and informative?) to making the reservation – whether online or over the phone (was the technology secure, was the reservations person friendly and accommodating?) to your arrival (was the lobby clean?), your check-in (were check-in personnel knowledgeable, friendly and professional?), your stay (were the sheets turned back? did they provide enough clean towels?), your check-out (was the bill correct?) and your departure (did the shuttle bus to the airport arrive on time?), to your memory of your stay (do you remember a pleasant stay and the chocolates on your pillow, or the fact that they put you on a smoking floor when you specifically asked for non?), and any follow-up (did they send a customer satisfaction survey and offer you a valued customer discount off your next stay?), all falls under the umbrella of brand experience.²⁴ Designing the brand experience, or in essence, trying to manage how your customers feel when they interact with your brand, is an incredibly daunting and extremely difficult undertaking. To ensure 100% satisfaction 100% of the time, in view of the incredible variety of variables, is almost impossible. However, brand experience is often the only differentiating factor for brands in a crowded market place. Thus, it is imperative to a brand's survival to provide a seamless and coherent brand experience in order to remain competitive/viable.

“ Global competition is fierce. Consumers are inundated with choices. Brand builders need to think far beyond the point of sale, and use their strategic

²⁴ Wheeler, 19.

imagination and business acumen to deliver one-of-a-kind engaging experiences that no competitor can replicate.” (Wheeler 18)

So, to recap, in this first section of Chapter One | On Brands | *the What and the Why*, in exploring what brands are and why they are, we have determined the following:

A brand ...

- represents a good or service;
- has a visual identity which complements its personality, and further distinguishes it as unique from other like goods/services (in a competitive market);
- constitutes a brand promise, which gives voice to its core value(s);
- must deliver on its promise in order to remain viable/competitive;
- projects a distinct personality;
- must consistently, clearly and engagingly communicate its message and story;
- is experienced by its audience;
- must deliver a truly unique, customer-centric experience in order to retain the trust and loyalty of its audience.

I term these the ‘layers’ of the brand, or, in a similar vein to Frege, when he spoke of the words of sentences comprising a “material garment” which “clothe” a thought:

“The thought, in itself immaterial, clothes itself in the material garment of a sentence and thereby becomes comprehensible to us. We say a sentence

expresses a thought. A thought is something immaterial and everything material and perceptible is excluded from this sphere of that for which the question of truth arises. Truth is not a quality that corresponds with a particular kind of sense-impression. So it is sharply distinguished from the qualities, which we denote by the words " red ", " bitter ", " lilac-smelling ". But do we not see that the sun has risen and do we not then also see that this is true? That the sun has risen is not an object, which emits rays that reach my eyes, it is not a visible thing like the sun itself. That the sun has risen is seen to be true on the basis of sense-impressions. But being true is not a material, perceptible property.²⁵

Thus these are what I term to be the layers of a brand's clothing. Layer by layer, the brand identity is built. First, the intangible core, the brand's essential value (or as the industry has coined, its "brand truth"), is clothed in a layer of visual identity, in order that we, the consumer, might engage and interact with it in a sensory way and come to know it. How it is in turn layered in brand messaging and communications further enables us to make informed decisions as to whether or not we wish to (continue to) engage with it. In the final layer, how we experience the brand, judging it to our liking or not, we exchange our loyalty (or disloyalty) for the currency of a brand's success (or failure). It is these layers that intend to peel back in terms of how brands are constructed, in order to investigate the possibility of whether brands are real.

²⁵ Gottlob Frege. "The Thought: A logical inquiry." *Mind: A Quarterly Review*. Vol LXXV. No.259 (July 1956) 292.

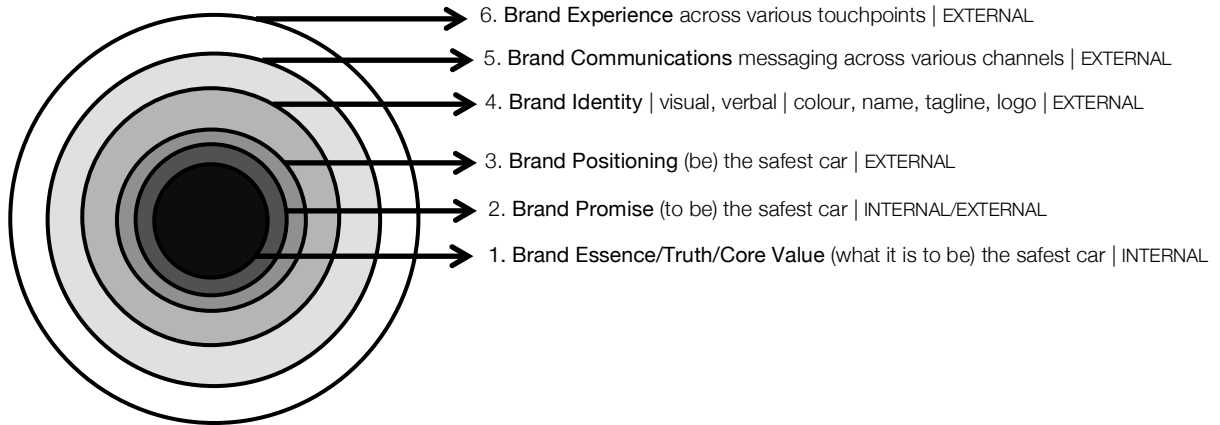


Figure 2. | Layers of a Brand | Real or Constructed?

1.02 | THE HOW OF BRANDS

HOW ARE BRANDS CREATED? HOW DO THEY COME TO BE?

The process is the process but then you need a spark of genius.

Brian P. Tierney, Esq.
 Founder, Tierney Communications

1.02.1 | DESIGNING BRAND IDENTITY

Tomes have been written on the subject of brand identity and volumes more will no doubt continue to be written. It is my aim to synthesize, to the best of my ability, the central aspects of building brand identity in order to give shape to my argument in Chapter Three. Fortunately, brand identity is the most easily understood aspect of brands and branding. Simply put, brand identity is the outward expression of a brand. Brand identity is that

which an audience or consumer interacts with – either mentally or physically, or both. It is constructed in collaboration between the brand owner and the branding agency and is therefore the creation born out of the motivation of what the creators want you to see/perceive.

“Brand identity is tangible and appeals to the senses. You can see it, touch it, hold it, hear it, watch it move. Brand identity fuels recognition, amplifies differentiation, and makes big ideas and meaning accessible and unifies them into whole systems.” (Wheeler 4)

As outlined above, the elements comprising a brand’s identity are both visual and verbal²⁶. Verbal elements include its name,²⁷ tagline(s)²⁸ and its (tone of) voice.²⁹ Its landmark³⁰ or visual identity, as mentioned in the previous section, is represented by wordmarks, emblems, letterform marks, icons, abstract/symbolic marks or characters,³¹ colours and typefaces.³² Building a strong and cohesive brand identity that resonates with an audience is the primary task of branding professionals from across the branding spectrum i.e. agencies (creative directors, designers, copywriters, brand strategists and brand experience specialists) and goods/services producers i.e. brand owners (in-house brand keepers, communications specialists and marketers)³³. In a nutshell, brand identity is that to which audiences are attracted and relate. The relationship between a brand’s

²⁶ Ibid, 113.

²⁷ For definition see Brand Glossary.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Simmons, 115.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Wheeler, 48-64.

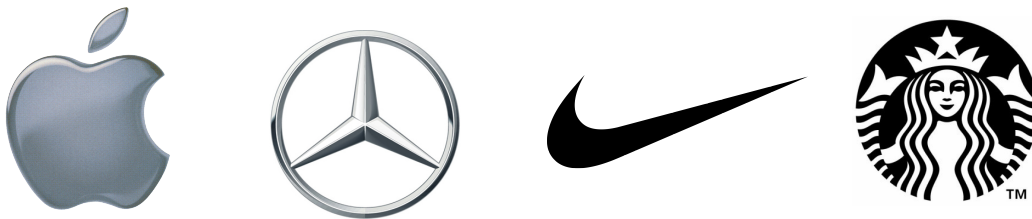
³² Simmons, 114.

³³ The process of brand building itself is addressed in the following section.

identity and the consumer is a rich and complex one. Consumers relate to a brand's identity based on the influence and perception motivated by psychological, economical, cultural, emotional and pragmatic factors.

How does a brand come to be? How is a brand created?

From blank white board to ubiquitous icon, the one bite Apple that is Mac, the star of Mercedes-Benz, the swoosh that is Nike or the twin-tailed mermaid of Starbucks, all are aggressively streamlined and refined brand symbols. They are the result of an extremely laborious and in depth process that is refined over time and is no doubt mysterious if not confounding to most – the process of building or crafting brand identity. Shrouded in secrecy and multi-chapter NDAs, one may wonder what lies behind the curtain of the Oz-like ad agencies that are tasked with creating and advertising brands.



Visual Identity | Sample Trademarked Icons

Alina Wheeler's book *Designing Brand Identity* has become the veritable bible of the branding industry. With brilliant simplicity, she makes transparent the structure by which brand identity is constructed. Wheeler, a renowned branding professional, demystifies the process of branding by identifying five clearly defined and sequential stages or

categories³⁴ that all branding teams ought consider, as well as execute effectively, when aiming to build a successful brand.

“The process is defined by distinct phases with logical beginnings and endpoints, which facilitate decision-making as the appropriate intervals.” (Wheeler 102)

The phases Wheeler engenders are as follows: 1) conducting research, 2) clarifying strategy, 3) designing identity, 4) creating touch-points, and 5) managing assets.³⁵ It is the designing identity phase that I wish to focus on here. At the outset of this phase, a creative brief – informed by the outcomes of the preceding phases, as well as input from the client (often in the form of a brand brief),³⁶ and (usually) the responsibility of the client brand and/or client account manager – is employed to give direction to the creative team regarding the task at hand; building the brand identity.

What exactly is a Creative Brief?

“In simplest terms, it is a framework or foundation for your creative approach. It contains a well-identified and articulated summary of the key factors that can impact a project: background overview, target audience details, information on competitors, short- and long-term brand and business goals, as well as specific project particulars.”³⁷

³⁴ Wheeler, 102-103.

³⁵ Wheeler, 6.

³⁶ A brand brief is an internal document that outlines the company’s value proposition, audience, mission, vision, values and brand messaging.

³⁷ Terry Lee Stone. “Creative Briefs in Shifting Times”. <http://www.commart.com/columns/creative-briefs-shifting>; accessed 27 Aug 2014.

The goal of every creative brief is to inspire the creative team to come up with a uniquely creative solution to the current problem or opportunity. A creative brief is a crucial tool that helps to unite the disparate members of a creative team – the designers, the strategists the copywriters, the user-experience (UX) designers, the videographers etc. – under one language; the language that will give shape, voice and identity to the brand. With regard to content, a creative brief typically contains the following elements:³⁸

- i. *Context*. Identifies the client and the good or service to be introduced. It outlines the brand value proposition or promise and what the brand stands for, as well as any research the client can provide regarding current market conditions for the category i.e. business climate.
- ii. *Project Overview*. Identifies the nature of the task at hand. What is the problem motivating the client to seek a solution? What is it that needs to be created?
- iii. *Key Drivers*. Identifies the goals of the project. It outlines the primary objective, as well as any other sub-objectives. What is the desired effect i.e. thought, feeling or action to be evoked by this project?
- iv. *Intended Target Audience*. Identifies the consumer for the product or service. Audience “personas”³⁹ and ethnographic data are provided of primary, secondary and tertiary audiences (if relevant).
- v. *Competitive Landscape*. Identifies the current and potential future players in the client’s category – and if possible, their strengths and weaknesses.
- vi. *Tone of Voice*. Identifies the brand’s personality in terms of vocabulary and behavioral style in terms of communicating the project’s message.
- vii. *Main Message*. What is the one thing that the client wants the intended audience to “take away” from the experience of interacting - whatever form(at) that might be - with this project?

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See Brand Glossary.

- viii. *Desired Visuals*. Identifies the parameters for desired visuals. Are they new? Repurposed? What is the subject matter? Are they to resemble any existing styles? Do they have to adhere to any existing brand guidelines or other limitations?
- ix. *Project Details*. Outlines all administrative requirements and deliverables, timeline and budgets.
- x. *Team*. Identifies those who will be part of the project, both agency-side and client-side; includes a reporting structure and required reporting methods.

Once the client signs off on the contents of the creative brief, the creative team begins the process of building the brand's identity. (For the most part) there is no mystery to this phase. Each team member is skilled in his or her craft and executes according to task as outlined in the creative brief. The designers design, the writers write, the strategists strategize and the account/client manager manage(s) the account client. Yet before they can execute, they have to come up with the *big idea*⁴⁰ that will ideally address the nature of the problem the client is facing e.g. to create a new brand for a new line of flavoured water – say Vitamin Water (before it was), for instance. Generating ideas is, of course, not unique to branding agencies. Brainstorming or “blueskying” as it is sometimes referred to, is an integral part of any discipline or corporate strategy that seeks solutions to an existing problem. Yet in relation to designing brand identity, during this collaborative ideation phase, a brainstorming system is unique and central to the agency's methods. In general, the process can be articulated as something along the lines of the following: (ideally) the entire creative team (2 or more people depending on the size of the firm) sits around a table (or randomly/ leisurely throughout some sort of ‘space’) and usually in front of a white board or some such medium on which ideas can be “shared”. Moderated by the

⁴⁰ Wheeler, 16.

most senior members of the team, usually a creative director, the client's problem/objective/desire(s) and the creative brief's parameters are discussed, research data is presented and assessed, and ideas are generated based those criteria in order to develop creative solutions.⁴¹

Interestingly, many creative types will admit that they don't know where their creative ideas come from. "They just 'come out of nowhere.'"⁴² As curious and interesting as this aspect of building brand identity is, it will take us too far afield from the project of this thesis. So, for now, I will limit my investigation into brainstorming to something more process oriented. Again, ideas bounded by the parameters of the creative brief are bandied about and fuelled by copious cans or cups of caffeine and catered cravings (pending the project budget). Once the topic has been exhausted, usually a good day's work (or longer depending on project timeline and, again, the budget), the account manager distills the information and presents it to the creative director who polishes the concepts (often three alternatives) and sends instructions for the team to execute.

Once again, the designers design, the writers write, the strategists strategize and the account managers manage and report on the progress of the project. When complete to the satisfaction of the creative director, the client is invited back to the agency (or hosts the agency) for a "show and tell" meeting, wherein the agency pitches the concepts generated and the rationale behind them to the client. The client then reviews each concept and

⁴¹ As a quick segue, this activity is often romanticized in movies or on television when depicting ad agencies. On *Mad Men*, the "boys" are usually enjoying a glass (or two) or neat scotch and cigarettes or cigars to get the creative juices flowing. While magazines, whether business or creative, abound with images of funky loft spaces filled with beanbag chairs, basketball hoops and foosball tables, while greying executives dressed in sneakers, jeans and fashionably monikered t-shirts, wittily cajole their fresh-faced twenty-something staff drinking brand label coffee or ... you guessed it ... Vitamin Water (which is owned by Coca-Cola btw).

⁴² See the documentary film *Art & Copy* 2009.

decides which one in particular it wishes to pursue i.e. falls in line with its expectations, aspirations and objectives, and directs the agency to finalize the all features of the brand's identity⁴³ – which, depending upon the scope of the project, can take a matter of days, weeks or even months. Moreover, the client's decision may not always be cut and dry – like choosing B from a range of A, B, and C. Sometimes, the client chooses predominantly B, but wants to add some element of A and something similar to C. While not optimal to the process, this is not unusual – the client is always right after all, not to mention paying the bills. And so the brand concept is once more refined in order to accommodate the client's wishes – though it must be said, not always to the betterment of the brand, albeit sometimes.

What Constitutes Good vs. Bad Branding?

To attempt to discuss what constitutes good vs. bad branding may be as futile (not to mention volatile) as discussing what constitutes good and bad art. However, on one level, good branding may be somewhat easier to ascertain, as it is measurable by transactions. Sales of Coke over Pepsi,⁴⁴ for instance, would seemingly indicate that Coke is the more successful brand. Yet from the perspective of a financial officer, Coke may spend more advertising dollars than Pepsi, giving Coke an advantage that directly impacts sales, albeit at a higher operating cost. So what, other than favourable sales data, might constitute a successful branding? There are some general criteria that most in the branding profession could agree upon (if not consumers) as there are subtle differences between a “good” vs. a “successful” brand. Quite simply, however, a successful brand is a brand that endures. In

⁴³ This process applies not only to the building of brand identities, but also to promotional campaigns for existing brands and rebranding projects.

⁴⁴ Interbrand's 2013 Top 100 brands.

order to endure, the brand must, over time, consistently resonate with its audience and deliver on its promise. It does this by ...

- not alienating audiences with its visual or verbal identity;
- communicating its identity authentically to audiences with stories that resonate, are relevant and engage them;⁴⁵
- choosing platform(s)⁴⁶ which audiences use/are familiar with i.e. use;
- consistently delivering on its promise, which
 - a. generates trust/loyalty, and
 - b. motivates audiences to act.

A good brand need not be an ideal brand (such as Apple). Though ideal brands are good and successful brands, a good brand is simply one that is honest with itself and its audience and fulfills its promise;⁴⁷ and one that the audience identifies with, believes in and trusts. Though we are here speaking in mass terms, a successful brand is successful only because it wins over one customer at a time. That is to say in winning over one customer, it might also, coincidentally, be winning over your neighbour *at the same time*, and your neighbour's neighbour and so on⁴⁸ until it can be seen to effect an entire generation. This phenomenon can be illustrated through the success of Pears Soap over the years. You may currently use Pears Soap because, for example, your grandmother used Pears soap, your mother and aunts use Pears soap and so you too have grown fond and strangely loyal to Pears soap. But it may also be that every experience you have had with any other soap is just not the *same* as your experience with pear soap. It does not

⁴⁵ Its personality speaks to them.

⁴⁶ Technology/media platform.

⁴⁷ See Appendix for examples of what the branding industry consider good branding.

⁴⁸ This may remind some older readers of a 1980's Faberge Organics Shampoo commercial.

make you *feel* the same i.e. it does not have the same effect on you, and thus you don't have the same experience. The smell of Pears that evokes the memory of your grandmother is not present in any other soap, etc. Personal experience plays a substantial and significant role in the success of many brands, as do group/social and cultural factors – which, is why, en masse, brands can effect an entire generation – though not always.

As for what makes for poorly designed brands or bad/unsuccessful branding, sometimes it is more efficient to “show” rather than “tell”. To that end, I have added a small number of examples to the Appendix at the end of this thesis for those interested. However, some process-oriented factors that may contribute to unsuccessful branding are here worth considering.

1. The provider of the good/service is out of touch with its audience.
2. The agency does not listen to the client or does not fully adhere to the creative brief.
3. Incorrect assumptions are made during the research phase.
4. Incorrect interpretations are made of the data during the research phase.
5. Incorrect questions are asked during the research phase.
6. Ethnographic considerations are omitted.
7. The competitive landscape is misunderstood.
8. The market cannot absorb another similar product/service i.e. is currently saturated.
9. No research is conducted.
10. There is no use (need) for the product or service.

Bottom-line: Somewhere along the way⁴⁹ there is a *disconnect*. Errors have been made. Data has been misinterpreted or crucially overlooked. Markets have been misjudged. Cultural subtleties have not been considered. A disconnect between a brand and its audience is lethal, as can be seen in the case of the Eatons⁵⁰ department store chain in Canada and the near demise of the GAP.⁵¹

So, to conclude this section and thereby the first chapter of this thesis, the designing of a new brand identity requires that all stakeholders participate using the same information, follow the same designated framework and work within a flexible (and amply funded) environment that allows for an iterative process of revisions in order to create and launch a successful brand into the marketplace. What I hope has emerged as evident, is that building brand identity successfully requires not only accurate research and creative acumen, but it fundamentally necessitates the ability to translate the research data into not only “the big idea”, but “the right big idea”. This insight will be relevant in Chapter Three. But for now, I leave the world of brands and branding and turn my attention to the realism debate as mapped by Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, re-envisioned by Michael Dummett and refined by Crispin Wright, in order to ascertain whether or not it might be possible for brands to stand as *real* in a metaphysical sense or merely constructed.

⁴⁹ The way referring to Ms Wheeler’s 5 stages.

⁵⁰ <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/economy-business/consumer-goods/eatons-a-canadian-institution-1/end-of-eatons.html>; accessed 19 June 2014.

⁵¹ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/barbarathau/2013/08/16/the-gap-anatomy-of-a-brand-comeback/>; accessed 19 June 2014.

CHAPTER TWO | A REALIST/ANTI-REALIST TOOLKIT

As stated in my introduction, the project of this thesis is to investigate the metaphysical nature and status of brands. If mine were a contribution to a longstanding and ongoing metaphysical debate, such as the debate about numbers or mental states, there would be a vast repository of literature from which I could draw. There is, however, no such literature in the case of brands. And yet fortunately, in the latter half of the 20th Century, philosophers increasingly focused their attention on the higher-level question of how to characterize metaphysical positions and carry out what had become entrenched disputes in a new, productive and meaningful way; more specifically, what makes a view “realist” or “anti-realist” has become a crux in contemporary discussions of realism. So it is to this literature that I turn for guidance and assemble a toolkit to help me answer the question “*Are brands real?*”

In this Chapter, I examine influential and increasingly subtle proposals of three highly regarded philosophers engaged in current discussions of how we might make progress in debates about the reality of a particular class of things. First, I consider the simple yet effective conceptual approach, anchored predominately but not exclusively in ethics, offered by Geoffrey Sayre-McCord. However, Sayre-McCord’s proposal assigns “truth” as the property solely of the realist; that is, if there are claims about a class of entities that are *literally true* then, by McCord’s lights, realism is correct for that domain, which may prove problematic – in the case of Berkeley for example. Recall Berkeley’s famous proposal that claims about the non-mental world, are, properly understood, claims about

what it is possible for minds to perceive.⁵² As Berkeley insisted, this did not make claims about tables and chairs *untrue*. On this view, Sayre-McCord's account runs the risk of making Berkeley out to be a realist about physical objects – a categorization that might have pleased Berkeley, but most other philosophers would find genuinely disquieting. And so I move on to review Michael Dummett's pivotal contribution to this debate, isolating the category of semantic anti-realism.⁵³

Whereas Sayre-McCord recognizes the existence of views we might describe as semantic anti-realist, in his characterization all such views are relegated to the non-cognitivist category.⁵⁴ Dummett's account is profitably viewed as distinguishing notions of truth that make truth no longer the exclusive property of the realist. That is, he identifies notions of truth that allow for the truth of some claims about a certain domain (so the view is a cognitivist one), and yet qualifies as anti-realist. In tying truth to the internal rules of language for anti-realists and to reference for realists, the most interesting questions in debates about realism are, for Dummett, semantic questions – questions about what is required for *statements* in a particular class to be true. Yet despite its many virtues, including the attempt to bring both realists and anti-realists to the table by providing them with *uniform lines of argument*,⁵⁵ Dummett's account is criticized by many for producing a one-size-fits-all criterion for realism. This seems somewhat limiting and hence problematic, as it leaves us with a tool that, though allowing us to declare both claims about comedy and claims about morals as “unreal”, fails to make further, more refined

⁵² George Berkeley (1685-1753). *Esse is percipi - to be is to be perceived*. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/berkeley/>; accessed 9 Sept. 2014.

⁵³ Or, as he argues “research programme” Dummett, *Realism and Anti-Realism*, p463.

⁵⁴ As by his lights, realism relies on two main principles: 1) disputed claims must not only have truth-values (i.e. must satisfy truth conditions), but 2) that some of those disputed claims must have their truth-values *true*. (Sayre-McCord, 10)

⁵⁵ Michael Dummett. *The Seas of Language*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1993) 464.

distinctions. For instance, while the wrongness of bombing innocent civilians might not be real in the same way as the earth's atmosphere is real, surely such morally abhorrent acts could be argued to be *more real* than the infamous humor of Monty Python or Saturday Night Live?

Thus, in view of my aim to determine whether or not brands are real or constructed, I find both Sayre-McCord and Dummett's approaches wanting in terms of subtlety, as I suspect the answer to the question "*Are brands real?*" is somewhat more nuanced and complex than it seems on the face of it. And so I turn to examine a third account offered by Dummett's most famous pupil, Crispin Wright, in his seminal work *Truth and Objectivity*. For Wright, the problem with many debates about realism is that they assume that the question "*Are Xs real?*" has a "Yes/No" answer. While, if Wright is right, the question, like most pithy philosophical questions, is better answered: "*Well, quite frankly, it depends what you mean.*" According to Wright, the question of "reality" is not unambiguous. It is possible for entities of some sort to be real – or as he prefers to say, *objective* – in some respects, but not others. And so, in the third section of Chapter Two, I describe three different criteria for objectivity offered by Wright.

Finally, the purpose of this second Chapter is not to advocate any one of these accounts of realism/anti-realism over the others. Rather, I am herein merely assembling a toolkit, which I will employ in Chapter Three in order to construct a plausible answer to the question regarding the metaphysical status of brands. But first, in order to properly set the

foundation for my investigation, I begin with a general description of realism and the debate itself.

2.01 | REALISM *THE DEBATE*

WHAT IS REALISM?

So, *what is realism?* What and how can we know something to be true or false about a particular domain? Why all this talk about a debate? And why is it important? According to the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy (2nd Revised Edition), the realism debate is defined as:

“The standard opposition between those who affirm, and those who deny, the real existence of some kind of thing, or some kind of fact or state of affairs. Almost any area of discourse may be the focus of this dispute: the external world, the past and future, other minds, mathematical objects, possibilities, universals, and moral or aesthetic properties are examples.”⁵⁶

Interestingly, the argument between anti-realists and realists is not focused on the path of a discourse and what is being said, but *how* it is interpreted. (Sayre-McCord 2) Moreover, while it is possible to debate the question of realism *tout court*, it is more common to observe and/or participate in the realism debate with regard to a *particular* subject matter. (Dummett 473) As such, one can be a realist in one domain (e.g. mathematics), and be an

⁵⁶ Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy. Accessed 29 June 2014.

anti-realist in another (e.g. comedy).⁵⁷ The definition goes on to state:

“A realist about a subject-matter S may hold (i) that the kinds of thing described by S *exist*; (ii) that their existence is *independent* of us, or not an artefact of our minds, or our language or conceptual scheme; (iii) that the statements we make in S are *not reducible* to other kinds of statement, revealing them to be about some different subject-matter; (iv) that the statements we make in S have *truth conditions*, being straightforward descriptions of aspects of the world and made true or false by *facts in the world*; (v) that we are able to *attain* truths about S, and that it is appropriate fully to *believe* things we claim in S.”⁵⁸

A somewhat more straightforward version is offered by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP). Therein the debate is reduced to two generic yet crucial and distinct aspects realism is said to concern itself with claims regarding, (i) the *existence* of some class of entities and (ii) their *independence* i.e. the fact that X exists and has particular properties does not depend on “what we say or think about the matter.”⁵⁹ The author of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy’s Realism entry, Alexander Miller, synthesizes these two principles in the following succinct definition.

⁵⁷ “Realism”. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed 29 June 2014.

⁵⁸ Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy. Accessed 29 June 14, *italics* mine.

⁵⁹ “Realism”. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed 29 June 2014.

Generic Realism

“a, b, and c and so on exist, and the fact that they exist and have properties such as F-ness, G-ness, and H-ness is (apart from mundane empirical dependencies of the sort sometimes encountered in everyday life) independent of anyone's beliefs, linguistic practices, conceptual schemes, and so on.”⁶⁰

Unsurprisingly, anti-realists situate themselves in opposition to either the independence claim (Miller mentions expressivists here, but as we shall see, he ought also to have included other semantic anti-realists) or the existence claim (error-theorists), or both (quietists) depending on the subject matter.⁶¹ This general scheme is useful, as far as it goes. However, for my purposes in this thesis, it is important to have a somewhat deeper understanding of the typical reasons philosophers land on opposing positions in these debates, and to have a somewhat more detailed conceptual overview of the general terrain of the debate. To that end, I now turn to Geoffrey Sayre-McCord and the introductory article “The Many Moral Realisms” in his collection of *Essays on Moral Realism*.

2.02 | GEOFFREY SAYRE-McCORD *A ‘CONCEPTUAL CARTOGRAPHY’⁶²*

Though Geoffrey Sayre-McCord’s main interest in the realism debate pertains to moral realism, which he defines as “the view that there are moral facts that we can discover” (Sayre-McCord ix), the moral realism debate is too extensive and complex a debate to

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Geoffrey Sayre-McCord. *Essays on Moral Realism*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1988) 5.

review within the parameters of this thesis project, nor would it make sense to do so. However, Sayre-McCord does offer what I view to be a useful tool with which to orient the present investigation into the metaphysical status of brands. So, it is here where I begin.

In the introductory chapter “The Many Moral Realisms” to his anthology *Essays on Moral Realism*, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord suggests a “conceptual cartography”⁶³ of the moral realism debate – (it) is the view that some of the disputed claims *literally construed are literally true*”. (ibid) He unpacks his proposal thus: “ Wherever it is found ... realism involves embracing just two theses: (1) the claims in question, when literally construed, are literally true or false, and (2) some are literally true. Nothing more.” (ibid)

Sayre-McCord’s “conceptual cartography” first divides realists and anti-realists along the line of cognitivism and non-cognitivism. (See Figure 3 below.) By Sayre-McCord’s lights, non-cognitivists agree with *error* theorists that there are no ultimate properties or underlying facts of the matter about the domain in dispute. But rather than thinking that this makes statements false, non-cognitivists claim that the apparent statements of the domain are not in the business of predicating properties or making statements which could be true or false at all. Roughly put, *non-cognitivists (about X) think that statements (about X) have no substantial truth conditions.*⁶⁴ Furthermore, while it is conceptually possible to hold various sorts of non-cognitivist views, typically the non-cognitivist view is that when people utter sentences they are not typically expressing states of mind which are beliefs or

⁶³ Sayre-McCord, 5.

⁶⁴ italics mine.

which are cognitive in the way that beliefs are. Rather, they are expressing attitudes more similar to desires, approval or disapproval.”⁶⁵ This is captured as *expressivism*.

Cognitivism, on the other hand, holds that statements about the disputed class⁶⁶ do express beliefs about the existence of facts of the matter and are therefore apt for truth or falsity. However, cognitivism, according to Sayre-McCord need not be a species of realism since a cognitivist can be an *error theorist* by holding that all statements are false. “Still, realists are *cognitivists* insofar as they *think (moral) statements are apt for robust truth and falsity and that many of them are in fact true.*”⁶⁷ This view is categorized as success theory – the statements of the domain are apt for truth, and some of them succeed in saying something true.

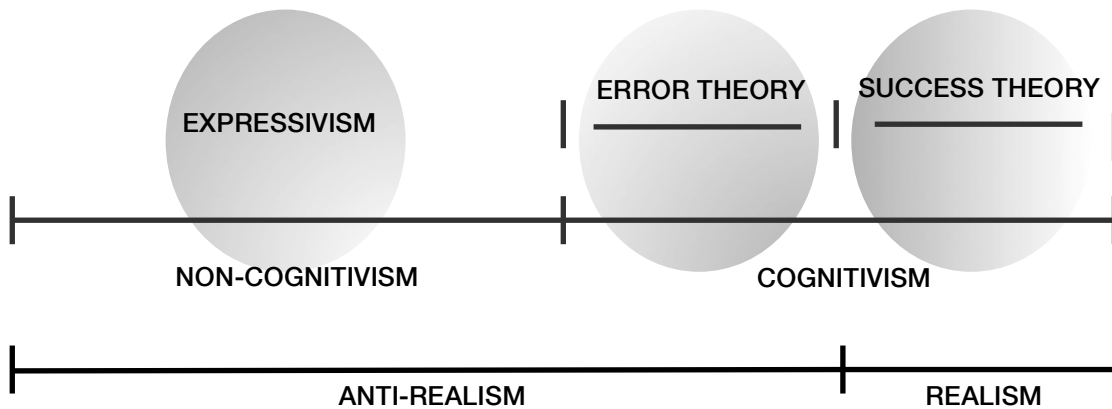


Figure 3.
A Conceptual Cartography | Sayre-McCord’s View (10)

⁶⁵ For further clarification, see Expressivism .

⁶⁶ I will henceforth omit this qualifying phrase when doing so should not engender confusion.

⁶⁷ “Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism”. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. *Italics mine*. Accessed 07 Jan 2014.

So, all told, according to Sayre-McCord, “there are (but) two ways to be an anti-realist: embrace a non-cognitivist analysis of the claims in question, or hold that the claims of the disputed class, despite their being truth-valued, are none of them true (say, because they all share a false proposition).” (5) Notice that what this conceptual sketch of the realism debate does *not* do is speak to any central claims of objectivity, existence, mind independence, or any semantic thesis on the transcendent nature of truth⁶⁸ and our ability to recognize it. (ibid) This, claims Sayre-McCord, is a “virtue,” as it allows the map to be as neutral and inclusive of all forms of realism as possible, and anchors it to his literal construal of the criterion for truth. (6)

“By abstracting from these (often contentious) notions, the account I offer is in a position to explain why they are so often central to the realist’s position *even though none of them is always central*. The governing idea is that independence, bivalence, existence, etc., come into play when, but *only when*, they are relevant to whether the disputed claims, literally construed are literally true.” (ibid)

Of crucial import, moving forward, is that the *structure* of the debate is interpreted, *not* as metaphysical, but *semantic*. What Sayre-McCord understands ‘*literally construed are literally true*’ to *mean* and what theory of truth is applied are crucial to his account of the realism debate itself.⁶⁹ Moreover, Sayre-McCord believes an “important constraint ... is that the semantics offered must be *seamless*; whichever theories of meaning and truth are

⁶⁸ See Dummett in the following section.

⁶⁹ Sayre-McCord, 6.

offered for the disputed claims must be extended as well to apply to all claims ... What our choice of semantic theories will influence is our understanding of what it is to say that some of the disputed claims, literally construed are literally true. *The choice won't settle whether any of the claims actually is true (italics mine).*" (6)

In sum, though rather simplistic, Sayre-McCord's "conceptual cartography" offers what I would term a *generic classification benefit*, one that captures, in rough sketch, the scope and general characteristics of the various camps in the debate. Though keeping in mind, I have already noted a concern about the ability of Sayre-McCord's cartography to properly classify positions like Berkeley's phenomenalism. And so I move on to review Dummett's pivotal proposal highlighting semantic anti-realism, in order to discover whether he might provide me with a more refined framework.

2.03 | MICHAEL DUMMETT

REFERENTIAL vs JUSTIFICATIONIST SEMANTICS

"We cannot leap from a recognition that *some* notion of truth is needed for an account of our use of many of our statements to an embrace of full-fledged realism: rather we have to undertake a research programme. We have to examine piecemeal which features of our linguistic practice call for a notion of truth, and what notion they call for ... In the course of this investigation, we have, at each stage, to consider whether it is plausible to attribute to a speaker a grasp of such a notion of truth, and how his grasp of it is to be

explained. All this is what I meant by saying that we have to *win through* to a notion of truth.”

Michael Dummett. “Realism and Anti-Realism”. 477

In contrast to Sayre-McCord’s account of realism, which assumes that we clearly understand what is meant by a “literal construal of truth”, Michael Dummett proposes that the inherent weakness of existing defenses of realism is that they do not *win through* to a suitable notion of truth. Realism requires a referential semantics i.e. an account of meaning wherein a mind independent reality fixes the truth conditions of sentences, because sentences refer (or purport to refer) to mind independent objects in the world, with the result that some claims we might make about those objects are evidence transcendent. So motivated, Dummett introduces an anti-realist justificationist semantics to defend the use of certain assertions which he believes serves to validate a more reasoned account of truth, and challenges defenders of realism to explain how truth could be *anything more* than what this justificationist semantics requires truth to be. This is a significantly different approach to truth than Sayre-McCord’s account for a variety of reasons. However, before I begin to examine the way in which Dummett’s view differs from Sayre-McCord’s, allow me the indulgence of stepping back a bit to introduce how his groundbreaking proposal, based on a semantic, rather than a metaphysical notion of realism, finds its footings.

A Common Framework

In the final chapter⁷⁰ of his voluminous and acclaimed book *The Seas of Language*, Michael Dummett wrote of his view for the need a “comparative study” of the many entrenched disputes over realism⁷¹ one finds in philosophy. Motivated by the lack of an agreed upon method of resolving such disputes, Dummett believed a “common framework” could and ought to be employed in pursuit of order, consistency and a “generic means of referring to particular subject matter” within each of these disputes, in order to make room for advances within these debates.⁷² Dummett believed the (abstract) structure of arguments for and against realism, though not identical, were similar enough to warrant such a framework, “from which principles would emerge for deciding in which cases the realist was right and in which cases his opponent.” (463-4).

A Class of Statements

Arguably his most significant philosophical contribution,⁷³ Dummett turned the realism debate on its head by proposing that we look, not to the status of metaphysical entities, but to the *meaning(s) of a disputed class of statements* – of the future or past tense, or ethics for example.⁷⁴ “Very often, realism of a particular variety is referred to as realism about some particular class of putative entities – mental events, for example or mathematical objects. I chose to speak instead of the ‘disputed class of statements’, rather than of the ‘disputed class of objects’.” (465) This shift in view was sparked by the keen

⁷⁰ This chapter was written and delivered as a valedictory lecture at Oxford in Trinity Term, in 1992 (see Realism and Anti-Realism footnote, 462).

⁷¹ Dummett, 463.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Gideon Rosen. “The Shoals of Language”. *Mind*. New Series, Vol.104, No.415 (July 1995) Oxford University Press. 599.

⁷⁴ Dummett, 230.

observation that not only were many of the disputes not over entities at all, but were also between fundamentally differing “pictures of reality.” (ibid).

“... [S]ince these metaphysical disagreements embodied divergent pictures of the reality to which the statements in question related, it seemed to me apparent that what underlay them were divergent pictures of the meanings of those statements. Since no means offered itself for deciding which pictures of reality was correct, the more fruitful approach lay in determining which picture of meaning was, since in this case there was a theory of meaning to be constructed and a linguistic practice against which to check it.” (ibid)

Dummett’s proposal is thus to root metaphysical debate in the relationship between language, reality and the theory of meaning, and not an attempt to debate metaphysical views of the existence of objective entities directly. Predominately misconstrued as advancing single unitary thesis by his peers⁷⁵ – that is, being misconstrued as advancing a *global anti-realism* – Dummett steadfastly insists that his desire is merely to put forth a “research programme” in order to pose “of a question how far, and in what contexts a certain generic *line* of argument can be pushed.” (464) If successful, which of course some would argue it is not, his is no small philosophical achievement, as what his uniform line of argument offers those actively participating in the contemporary realism debates does, is a considerable amount of the “heavy lifting” that will allow them to advance an argument that has some prospect of being persuasive.

⁷⁵ Dummett, 464.

Mastery of Use

Dummett, a self-professed follower of Wittgenstein and an expert on Frege, proposes a “non-realist, non-truth conditional, theory of meaning” as a starting point for debates over realism. According to this theory, meaning hinges upon “a mastery of the use in practice of statements of the disputed class (and which) can be explained in terms of a *grasp* of what we take as establishing the truth of those statements.” (471, *italics* mine). As a fundamental underpinning to his theory, Dummett believes that we can frame the challenge confronting realists in terms of it. “[S]ince we accept mastery of use as confirming grasp of meaning, how can grasp of meaning involve *more than* mastery of use?” (ibid, *italics* mine). The roots of this theory of meaning lie in Wittgenstein’s doctrine, that “meaning is use”. “To know the meaning of a word is to understand that word, and to understand it is to be able to use it correctly. Of course, in order to be able to determine the significance of the claim that meaning is use, we must be able to spell out precisely what is involved in being able to use a word correctly.”⁷⁶ Dummett takes this to entail that the truth conditions of our statements must be “exhaustively manifestable⁷⁷” in order to be learnable and properly understood.⁷⁸ By “manifestable” he means that we can exhibit the correct use of the word, which depending on the subject matter, means that correct statements must be demonstrable or provable, or in some other appropriate way, a competent speaker must know what would be required to show conclusively that the claim is true.

⁷⁶ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Michael Dummett: 2 a) Wittgenstein – Meaning is Use <http://www.iep.utm.edu/dummett/>; accessed 9 September 2014.

⁷⁷ Gideon Rosen quoting Dummett in his article: *The Shoals of Language*. Oxford Journals: Oxford University Press. 601

⁷⁸ Np. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed 08 July 2014.

A Referential Semantics

Dummett's view is that realism involves a commitment to a particular semantic view – “a thesis about what in general, renders a statement of a given class true, when it is true”⁷⁹ – under which truth is tied, not merely to the internal laws of language, but to its relation to reality. Dummett's position is that “[t]he very minimum that realism can be held to involve is that statements in the given class *relate*⁸⁰ to some reality that exists independently of our knowledge of it, in such a way that that reality renders each statement in the class determinately true or false, *independently* of whether we know, or are even able to discover, its truth-value.” (ibid, *italics* mine).

Dummett thus identifies that which distinguishes a semantic realist from a semantic anti-realist as the acceptance of the principle of *bivalence*. “Locating disputes over realism in the choice of a model for the meanings of statements of the disputed class tends to make the acceptance of bivalence a criterion for being a realist.” (467) The principle itself can be stated as: *every* statement is either determinately true or false, “that is, there are just two values a proposition may take”.⁸¹ Further, Dummett's criterion for realism, unlike Sayre-McCord's,⁸² *requires* a notion of truth that is possibly *evidence transcendent* – which is the crux of anti-realist discontent.

“The anti-realist accuses the realist of interpreting (those) statements in the light of a conception of mythical states of affairs, not directly observable by

⁷⁹ Dummett 230.

⁸⁰ Or equally, *refer*.

⁸¹ Classical two-valued semantics Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199541430.001.0001/acref-9780199541430-e-401?rskkey=nxqEvd&result=403>; accessed 06 July 2014.

⁸² i.e. claims when literally construed, are literally true.

us, rendering them true or false. According to the anti-realist, what makes them true or false are the observable states of affairs on the basis of which we judge of their truth-value. On the realist's interpretation, these merely provide evidence for the truth or falsity of the statements, or constitute an indirect means of judging them true or false; the anti-realist retorts that they are the most direct means there could be." (468-9, parenthesis mine)

Made plain, the semantic anti-realist's position on bivalence is as follows: *to understand a sentence is to be capable of recognizing what would count as evidence for or against it, and nothing more.*⁸³ Thus "the criterion for having an anti-realist view becomes that of occupying a position that undercuts the ground for accepting bivalence." (467) For Dummett, and for many anti-realists, the central concern is: *How do we grasp these truth conditions if they are evidence transcendent?* If one can't, as Dummett says, "win through to the truth" i.e. explain how our language manages to depend on things to which we have no epistemic access, realism cannot be correct. How can the meaning of words be given by a referent that it is beyond our cognitive ability to grasp?

Of course, making the debate over realism one that turns on the question of bivalence is somewhat overly simplified. For example,

"A formulation of bivalence must allow for vagueness. The thesis that every statement is determinately either true or false, even if it is vague, can be sustained only on the implausible supposition that our use of vague expressions confers on

⁸³ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/dummett/>; accessed 05 July 2014 (italics mine).

them meanings, which determine precise applications for them that we do not know. A realist must therefore hold that, for every vague statement, there is a range of statements giving more precise information of which a determinate one is true and the rest if false. An anti-realist may deny this, holding that reality may itself be vague, whereas, for the realist vagueness inheres only in our forms of description.” (468)

However, moving forward, and for purposes of efficiency and expediency, we will set aside issues such as vagueness. I will use “referential semantics” to capture this collection of Dummettian ideas – that the sentences of a discourse in a particular domain get their truth values because they refer to a suitably mind-independent, and potentially evidence transcendent reality, in a way that makes the principle of bivalence true.

A Justificationist Semantics

By Dummett’s lights, there are many ways language allows us to make claims that are true or false. However, he goes on to argue, this does not commit us to the existence of objects in the world to which our language refers. For instance, there are areas of language where justificationist semantics are correct; that is, to say that something is true is just to say that we have a proper justification for saying it. Dummett’s proposal for a justificationist semantics evolved from his desire to identify a coherent line of argument, in terms of adherence to a logic acceptable *whether or not* bivalence is true,⁸⁴ that applies

⁸⁴ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (*italics mine*). Accessed 08 June 2014.

in all debates over realism. He found inspiration and a possible way forward via the structure of philosophical reasoning that underlies intuitionism in mathematics.

“Although intuitionists denied that we have any conception of the truth for mathematical statements other than our possessing proofs of them, they did not postulate any language for describing proofs, to which the language of mathematics, taken as disjoint from it, could be reduced: they *accepted* mathematical concepts as indispensable, neither to be eliminated nor to be explained away. Instead, they propounded a new conception of what it is to *understand* a mathematical statement: *not to know what it is for it to be true, independently of whether we are able to recognize its truth or falsity, but to know what is required to prove it.* This means of rejecting a realist conception of mathematics appeared to me a prototype for a sustainable version of anti-realism in all other cases.” (470, *italics mine*).

What Dummett extracted from intuitionism and applied to the realism debate in support of an anti-realist view, may be summarized as follows: Since there is no guarantee that every declarative sentence is determinately either true or false,⁸⁵ evidence transcendent truth conditions are illegitimate. They can be supplanted by truth conditions based on justification conditions. Unless the realist can justify bivalence via evidence transcendence, we have an argument undermining the claim that X is real. Evidence transcendent truth conditions thus fall to the wayside in favour of a justificationist theory of meaning.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

A Conceptual Cartography Revisited

Just how Dummett's view alters Sayre-McCord's 'conceptual cartography' is perhaps best demonstrated with a revised map that incorporates the new category Dummett adds to the realist/anti-realist mix. It is my hope that this diagram (see Figure 4 below) retains the original's clarity, despite its alteration. To begin, the entire map is converted to a semantic cartography. Second, by Sayre-McCord's lights, error and success theorists occupy the cognitivist side of the scale as anti-realists and realists respectively; this much is retained. But Sayre-McCord does not take into account Dummett's justificationist semantics and the type of anti-realism he supports. Thus a new category needs to be added that, like error theory is both cognitivist and anti-realist, but denies that referential semantics is true, and therefore avoids the error theorist's claim that all the substantial claims in the domain in question are fundamentally false.

It is important to note that the added category of non-referential or justificationist semantics serves to confirm bivalence as a necessary but not sufficient condition for realism – as error theorists can happily accept bivalence. Further, as there is no real name that applies to those who accept referential semantics, since some of them are realists and some are not, I leave the field to the right of semantic anti-realism intentionally blank. Finally, Dummett's realist, who accepts referential semantics and holds that some claims are true, finds him/herself quite comfortably in line with Sayre-McCord's success theorist realist.

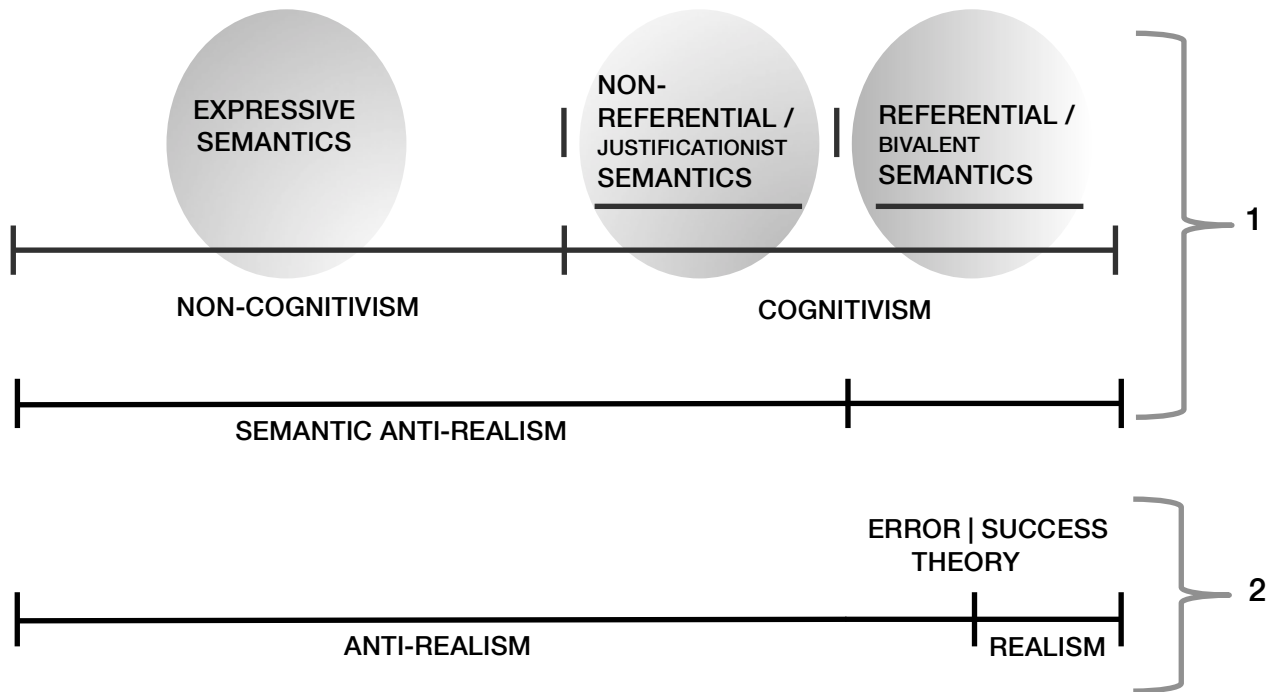


Figure 4.
A Conceptual Cartography | Dummett's Version

Of course, as with any ambitious influential philosophical project, Dummett's proposal has not gone unchallenged. Some criticisms and attempted modifications are aptly described in Gideon Rosen's review "The Shoals of Language". In it, he makes plain neither Dummett, nor his "single big idea" – that "the theory of meaning underlies metaphysics" should be underestimated (Rosen, 599). He also points out the general weaknesses of semantic realism in terms of it, a) being a viable alternative to metaphysical realism, and b) whether bivalence and truth-value gaps really hold on precluding the status and commitments of realists. He questions why Dummett "does not take Crispin Wright's long-standing suggestion to set the issue of bivalence to one side and to identify anti-realism directly with the thesis that truth is epistemically constrained."

(ibid) Conveniently, it is to Crispin Wright and his seminal work, *Truth and Objectivity* that I now turn, and leave Dummett behind. But, not without adding his notion of bivalence as criterion for realism to Sayre-McCord's literal construal of truth, and thus strengthen my toolkit for its task in Chapter Three.

2.04 | CRISPIN WRIGHT

TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY

Crispin Wright, a former pupil of Michael Dummett, also gives an account of realism and anti-realism under which truth is not the sole property of the realist. However, rather than giving a generic line of argument in favour of anti-realism, Wright begins with a “metaphysically lightweight”⁸⁶ or “minimalist” account of truth that applies in all areas of discourse and suggests that the argument between realists and anti-realists for any particular domain is a debate over the nature of the “local” truth predicate for that domain.⁸⁷ As such, he considers truth minimalism the “default” stance in the debate over realism. (174) For Wright, minimal truth is characterized by certain constraints he coins “platitudes” or “a priori laws”,⁸⁸ which the truth predicate must satisfy. And like Dummett, Wright believes the onus falls on the realist to demonstrate “that the minimal platitudes leave out features of the local truth predicate which substantially justify the rhetoric of independence, autonomy and full-fledged cognitive interaction” (by which realism pre-theoretically defines itself). (ibid) And yet, Wright himself is curious as to

⁸⁶ Wright, 74.

⁸⁷ This can be inferred from Wright's text on page 24. However, I would like to thank my advisor, Professor and Chair David DeVidi for summarizing Wright's account so succinctly.

⁸⁸ Wright, 72.

“whether any of the properties of a local truth predicate additional to the essential minimal set may somehow justifiably inspire a realist perspective on the discourse concerned.” (78) It will thus be useful to begin with Wright’s characterization of realism in general.

Modesty and Presumption

Realism about the external world, Wright muses, is a blend of both “modesty” and “presumption.”⁸⁹ He characterizes the realist as modest in terms of the claim that the external world is “independent of human cognitive activity,” and that “at best, human thought offers merely a *map* of the world.”⁹⁰ By the same token, realists are also presumptuous. They believe that despite the independence of an external reality, we are still able to win through to the truth about the external world in favourable circumstances.⁹¹ Further, since realists must be both presumptuous and modest in these ways, there is more than one way to reject realism, as the degrees of modesty and presumption will vary by subject matter. Our presumption regarding the matter of humour is quite high, for surely we can win through to the reasons why some things are funny and some are not – despite, and perhaps precisely because, there is no guaranteed convergence in the matter. And thus humor, at the end of the day, is dependent upon the mind. Modesty, of the relevant sort, however, does not, in this case, apply. Whereas, in the case of morals, a realist would be both highly modest *and* highly presumptuous in

⁸⁹ Wright, 1.

⁹⁰ Wright, 2.

⁹¹ Ibid

terms of arguing for the existence of moral facts which lie beyond the ability to provide empirical proof.⁹²

Deflationism

Wright begins by distinguishing his minimal account of truth from Deflationism.

Deflationists, he points out, hold that truth is nothing more than assertoric warrant – a device of disquotation and “not a substantial property.”⁹³ Though he acknowledges his minimal account of truth as “a species of deflationism”,⁹⁴ he argues that (even) minimal truth must be more than that. To wit, while truth and warrant are “normatively coincident – reason to regard a sentence as T is reason to regard it as warrantably assertable and conversely”⁹⁵ – that cannot be all there is to truth. Rather, truth must be a property of statements and not merely an endorsement.⁹⁶ By these lights, Wright dismisses the deflationist notion of truth as inherently unstable.⁹⁷ Instead, he proposes “that when a predicate has been shown to have the relevant features, and to have them for the right reasons, there is then no question about the propriety of regarding it as a truth predicate. Minimalism is thus, at least in principle, open to the possibility of a pluralist view of truth: there may be a variety of notions, operative within distinct discourses, which pass the test.” (24-25)

To advance his proposal of both a minimal and pluralist theory of truth, Wright sets out to achieve two goals. The first is to establish metaphysically neutral ground on which the

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Wright, 18, 24.

⁹⁴ Wright, 24.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Wright, 71.

⁹⁷ Wright, 21.

debate may be staged. The second is to discern what the realist/anti-realist debate is actually about once truth has been “metaphysically emasculated.” (76)

Minimal Truth Platitudes

“A basic anti-realism minimalism about a discourse contends that nothing further is true of the local truth predicate which can serve somehow to fill out and substantiate an intuitively realist view of its subject matter.” (174)

To quickly recap, Wright seeks to establish an inclusive notion of truth in discourses that might appeal to anti-realists and realists alike. In order to motivate a metaphysically neutral starting point for the realist/anti-realist debate, Wright argues that truth is not exclusive to the domains where realism is correct. (75) Rather, he advocates for minimal truth constraints for all assertoric content in order to assign a justifiable truth predicate. (76) Beginning with two foundational platitudes:⁹⁸

- 1) Asserting a proposition is claiming that it is true.
- 2) Every proposition has a significant negation.

Wright buttresses the Deflationist’s Disquotational Schema (DS)

- 3) “P” is T, if and only if P

⁹⁸ “By ‘platitude’, philosophers generally mean certain uncontroversial expressions about a given topic or domain. Beyond that, conceptions about what more something must be or have to count as platitudinous vary widely.” (SEP – Pluralist Theories of Truth)

(albeit with the strict understanding that truth is to be understood as the property of declarative sentences and not merely an endorsement⁹⁹) with the following additional (platitudinous) constraints a truth predicate must satisfy in order to be true.¹⁰⁰

- 4) Content is true just in case it corresponds to the facts, depicts things as they are, etc.
- 5) Truth and warrant are distinct.
- 6) Truth is absolute (not more or less true).
- 7) Truth is stable (eternal).¹⁰¹

With Wright's minimal truth constraints identified, I now briefly review the interrelation of realist and anti-realist notions of truth.

Superassertibility and Truth

Superassertibility (SA)¹⁰² can be construed as an extension of warranted assertibility. For clarity, Wright provides the following definition: "A statement is superassertible ... if and only if it is, or can be, warranted and some warrant for it would survive arbitrarily close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily extensive increments to or other forms of improvement of our information." (48) As such, SA is an evidentially constrained notion.¹⁰³ Wright admits the definition is somewhat vague, but counters: "wherever our discourse displays some measure of convergence about what is warrantably assertible, a corresponding notion of SA has to be intelligible to us. This notion may be unclear in

⁹⁹ Wright, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Wright, 174.

¹⁰¹ Note Wright is not tied to platitudes five and six (rooted in the work of Hilary Putnam) and recognizes them as being controversial.

¹⁰² Hereinafter, for efficiency I will use the acronym SA unless in a quotation.

¹⁰³ Wright, 77.

various respects, but they will be respects in which the relevant notion of warranted assertibility was already unclear.” (ibid)

The following quote outlines Wright’s alternate approach to Dummett’s principle of bivalence which holds that truth is intimately related with the feature of evidence transcendence, and which is, of course, unsatisfactory to the anti-realist.¹⁰⁴

“Realism is the idea that the *sources* of truth in the discourse in question somehow distance themselves from the matter of what meets our most refined standards of acceptability.” (81)

What it lays bare is this. Truth and SA are distinct for the realist. In some domains there may be statements that are true without being SA i.e., which are evidentially unconstrained. But truth and SA don’t need to diverge in extension to be distinct concepts. In fact, if truth is always determinable but this is a matter of detection¹⁰⁵ of something independent of us, truth is still conceptually detached from SA. Thus Wright captures Dummett’s insight by arguing that, for the realist, truth must be *more than* SA i.e. in some way truth must go beyond our ability (even in principle) to ascertain it. But this doesn’t require that it actually sometimes must *be* undetectable. Truth is thus something “which is wholly between the statement and its truth-maker.” (77)

Here is essentially what is at stake in Wright’s mind with regard to the realism debate:

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Wright, 77.

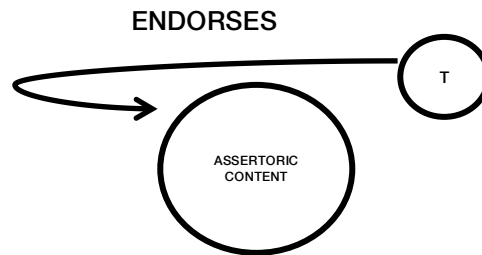
IF the anti-realist wins: “the truth predicate within the discourse may be construed in terms of superassertibility, and its applicability taken as nothing more than a reflection of the minimally assertoric character of the declarative sentences in question.”

vs.

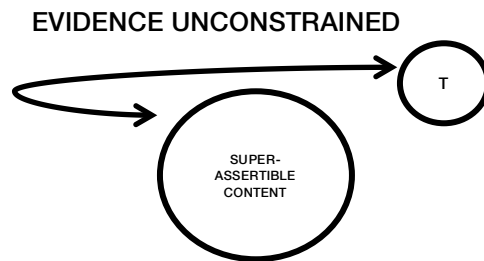
IF the realist wins: “it would appear to be impossible to take that view of the discourse’s truth predicate. Rather, we shall be forced to think of the truth of (its) statements as truth as conferred by factors other than those which determine proper practice within the discourse, and hence as being ... not of our making but rather a matter of a substantial relationship between language, or thought and independent states of affairs.” (78)

Wright challenges the thinking behind the extensional and divergent relationship between truth and SA in the realist case. He questions whether “extensionally coincident predicates” might not “nevertheless express different properties?” (79) As such, Wright suggests *other criteria*, besides evidence transcendence, which may distinguish truth predicates for which realism is true, and for those it is not. To help illustrate, I now turn to Plato’s famous Euthyphro dilemma and so introduce the first tool at my disposal in the investigation into whether brands are real. However, before we continue, it may be of benefit to visually recap the three versions of the nature of truth covered thus far.

1. DEFLATIONISM = Assertoric content is warrantably assertible, therefore truth is merely a grammatical endorsement, and *not* a property of statements.



2. SEMANTIC REALISM = Truth is evidence transcendent and therefore extensionally divergent from SA. Truth and SA also have different sources.



3. TRUTH MINIMALISM = Truth is evidence constrained and (warranted) assertoric content is truth apt in virtue of satisfying the minimal constraints i.e. the (7) minimal truth platitudes. Truth is therefore not extensionally divergent from SA and shares the same source.

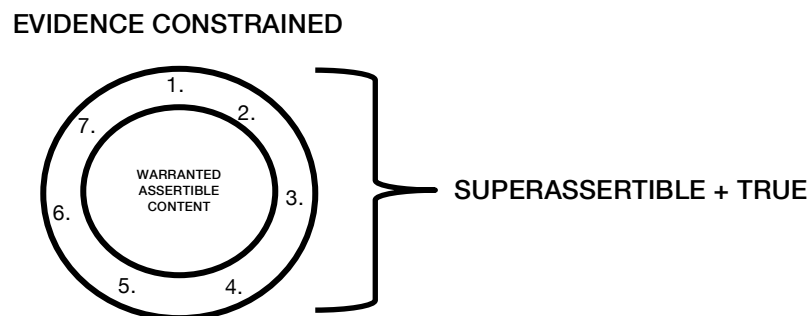


Figure 5.
Three Natures of Truth

2.04.01 | EUTHYPHRO CONTRAST

Consider the following claims:

(S.R) “It is because certain acts are pious that they are loved by the gods,” and

(E.AR) “It is because they are loved by the gods that certain acts are pious.” (79)

[Where (S.R) = Socrates/Realists i.e. Truth is *detected*, and (E.AR) = Euthyphro/Anti-Realists i.e. Truth is *projected*.]

The actual truth-value of the respective claims notwithstanding, note the causal direction that the term ‘because’ implies. In (S.R) the causal direction is from acts to gods, whereas in (E.AR) the causal direction is from gods to acts. Now consider the content asserted in terms of its truth-value. In (S.R), that certain acts are pious is constitutively independent of the gods, and, it is their pious nature that explains why such acts are so loved by them. (S.R) The suggestion is that the gods have a unique faculty for “detection/tracking” of pious acts i.e. they “are, by their natures, cognitively responsive to piety.” (79-80) Moreover, “we might say: the piety of an act is one thing, and the gods’ estimate of it another.” (80) In contrast, (E.AR) suggests that it is the gods that deem the acts pious via some sort of conceptual capacity (of determining) and so they (the acts) are “constitutive” of the determination of the opinions of the gods (ibid). A quick way to capture these two positions is as *detective* and *projective* ways of looking at the world.¹⁰⁶

Thus, in terms of truth and SA, one could frame the claims as follows:

(R) “It is because certain statements (in the discourse in question) are true that they are superassertible.”

¹⁰⁶ I would like to thank my thesis advisor Professor and Chair David DeVidi for pointing this out to me.

vs.

(AR) “It is because they are superassertible that such statements are true.”¹⁰⁷(80)

So, in relation to truth and SA, (R) demonstrates that truth and SA extensionally coincide and yet are divergent in source¹⁰⁸ i.e. the “claim will intend to advert to some constitutive independence of truth from SA” (81), whereas (AR) explains their co-extensiveness in terms of truth and SA having a common source i.e. they are not constitutively independent. Thus, in terms of investigating the nature of the relationship between truth and SA, the Euthyphro Contrast gives us insight into certain debates about realism that cannot be captured by discussing Dummettian referential semantics,¹⁰⁹ but which are “essentially complementary.” (ibid) The Euthyphro debate plays nicely to discourses wherein we have “assurances” as to the co-extension of truth and SA and “Dummett’s debate will be the natural focus” in discourses on the past and pure number theory, where our assurances are less clear and infinitely less stable. (ibid)

So, to recap, we are now in a position to spell out what is required of a realist in light of the Euthyphro Contrast. A realist has two avenues to show that more than a minimal truth predicate applies in a particular domain; either by arguing that 1) truth is evidence transcendent – and so truth need not coincide with SA, or 2) even if truth and SA *do* coincide, they have distinct and separate sources. However, Wright argues, these are not the only two routes to realism. I now turn to another alternative, which involves showing that there is a way in which a particular truth platitude for a predicate gives a “thick”

¹⁰⁷ or (R) $S = T \therefore SA$ vs. (AR) $SA \therefore S = T$

¹⁰⁸ Wright, 80.

¹⁰⁹ Wright, 81.

meaning beyond the (“thin”) meaning required merely for the predicate to satisfy one or another of the platitudes.

Truth and Correspondence

Thus having reviewed what Wright considers the “first strategy or direction of debate,”¹¹⁰ the second strategy, to which we now turn our attention, focuses on searching for aspects of the truth predicate that exceed the minimal platitudes, without compromising the truth predicate and its relationship to SA, that may justify a realist view. (82)

If we approach the Correspondence Platitude (CP)¹¹¹

“For a statement to be true is for it to correspond with the facts, tell it like it is, etc.”

formulated as:

(CP) “Snow is white” is true if and only if things are as “Snow is white” says they are.

from a basic anti-realist point of view, we determine that there is nothing obviously pointing to something external/representative of what the minimal truth constraints might require.¹¹²

“The question should be, I suggest, whether our understanding of what it is for this relation to obtain has, in the case of any particular discourse, more to it than can be derived from the co-permissibility of the claim that it obtains with the claim that a relevant statement is true,

¹¹⁰ Wright, 82.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Wright, 83.

and the co-permissibility of the latter with the claim that the statement is assertible.” (84)

Wright's suggestion here is that the platitude is always true because it is always permissible when someone might say "It is true that X" to instead say "X corresponds to the facts" and vice versa. The realist says, roughly, "there's more to it than just that fact about what one is allowed to say." So where do we look for the “additional substance/content” putatively required by realism? (ibid) Wright suggests we have two avenues at our disposal: 1) the *relational term* – the idea of representation, or correspondence which must somehow exceed the minimal truth constraints, and 2) the object term – *the facts* – which must be more vigorously conceived than currently supported minimalist notion of “is true” as “corresponds to the facts.” (ibid) And so it is to these two avenues that we now turn. However, first, a brief overview of convergence is in order.

Convergence

To introduce the notion of convergence, Wright highlights, as per David Wiggins, that “ a defining mark of an expression’s functioning as a truth predicate within a discourse (is) that there should be a tendency for competent practitioners to converge (subject to certain conditions) in opinions concerning its application.” (88, parenthesis mine). Yet the obvious lack of convergence on certain subject matters, such as morals across cultures,¹¹³ for example, motivates Wright to pose the critical question: “[W]hat

¹¹³ Wright interestingly interjects but does not pursue the notion that a profound lack of convergence on such issues may indicate that discourse on these matters may not be “in the business of truth or falsity at all”. (88)

exactly is supposed to be the guiding connection between convergence and truth aptitude?” (ibid) The following is a brief synopsis of his effort to answer this question.

Wright begins by refining a definition for convergence thus:

Convergence 1

“A class of statements are apt to be true only if there would be a tendency, in suitable circumstances, for competent subjects to agree on the truth, or falsity, of members in that class.” (ibid)

Wright believes *Convergence 1* tests minimal truth aptitude well enough and is a characteristic of SA.¹¹⁴ However, this, he feels, does little more than “the claim that the possession of assertoric content is a necessary condition of truth.” (88) Its weakness lies in that “it applies to an entire class of statements with no explicit constraint on each individual statement within it.”¹¹⁵ For instance, despite widespread agreement across cultures on certain moral issues, it is still the case that within that domain, particular individual issues/moral claims exist about which there is no convergence, but which *Convergence 1* would not address – the net being not fine enough. As such, Wright believes *Convergence 1* sets the bar too low for any anti-realist wanting to win through their case¹¹⁶ i.e. “(f)or the purposes of an anti-realist who wants to make capital out of what she takes to be an irremediable lack of convergence in opinions held in some area, it is therefore too easy a test to pass.” (ibid) By his lights, the important question to be asked

¹¹⁴ Wright, 89.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

and answered is whether “any convergence property is plausibly to be viewed as a necessary condition of aptitude for substantial truth?” (90)

At bottom, what Wright wants to bring to light is that *convergence* may be a fundamental “crux” between anti-realists and realists. And, problems of vagueness aside, “it ought to be a global property of statements at issue.” (ibid) Yet convergence does not preclude disagreement. He gives the example of the (lack of) objectivity of comedy highlighting the fact that despite a high degree of divergence of opinion regarding humor, there may still be a degree of convergence “in some ... comic opinions”. (ibid) He emphasizes that “a discourse’s being minimally truth-apt” does not preclude it from allowing disagreement. “Minimal truth aptitude requires the operation of standards of proper assertibility, and consequently, the existence of criteria for the ascription of ignorance and error.” (ibid) So, in order to eliminate natural differences of opinion which impede convergence, Wright removes the permissive tendency of “tendency” (in the definition of *Convergence 1*) and thus strengthen his first draft, refined as:

Convergence 2

“A class of statements are apt for substantial truth only if each of them will, under suitable conditions, command a convergence of opinion about its truth or falsity.” (90)

As revised, this version is now handily “disagreement free” and thus applicable to statements of genuine facts, but only those advancing “the possibility of evidence

transcendence truth”.¹¹⁷ So far, so good. Yet despite the improvement, Wright asks just how do we determine/converge on what counts for suitable conditions/favourable circumstances? For if there is no good answer to this question, then the distinction between minimal truth and substantial truth would collapse. Thus a dilemma presents itself between applying a condition of “convergence tout court” and the umbrella of conditions that would promote “the emergence of a consensus”. (91) It is with this observation that Wright introduces the notion that perhaps convergence and substantial truth do not mesh.¹¹⁸

This dilemma, Wright believes, points to the need for an additional platitude that links convergence with the idea of representation. He opts for a metaphor of a technological device – specifically a camera, fax machine, or printer – the functionality of which is to produce representations and thereby offers what he believes to be incontrovertible:

Convergence/Representation Platitude

“If two devices each function to produce representations, then if conditions are suitable, and they function properly, they will produce divergent output if and only if presented with divergent input.” (91)

There certainly are a lot of ‘ifs’ in this platitude. Yet the Representation Platitude definitely merits a closer look. Wright believes such an analogy to be congruent with a realist line of thinking in representational terms of the world as it is. “Realism ... is

¹¹⁷ Wright, 91.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

exactly the view that the opinions to which we are moved in the prosecution of a favoured discourse are the products of representational function, and are thereby endowed with representational content.” (92) Again, he uses the example of comedy as an illustration tool – this time to demonstrate the possibility of functioning representationally in forming our views on comedy. By the Convergence/ Representational Platitude, “our disagreements in output ... require less than suitable conditions, or less than proper function, or divergent input.” (ibid) Yet, Wright points out, we don’t normally/naturally characterize our disagreement(s) regarding comedy along these lines. So what factors are “intractable *divergences* in opinion”¹¹⁹ attributable to? This question leads Wright to argue that perhaps the intuitive core of anti-realism (about comedy anyway) may have nothing to do with convergence per se, but instead has to do with comedy’s lack of representational content. Wright’s answer, and a second tool at my disposal for purposes of evaluating the metaphysical nature of brands, is the Cognitive Command constraint.

2.04.02 | COGNITIVE COMMAND CONSTRAINT

“We may say that a discourse exerts Cognitive Command if and only if ... [i]t is a priori that differences of opinion formulated within the discourse, unless excusable as a result of vagueness, in a disputed statement, or in the standards of acceptability, or in variation in personal evidence thresholds, so to speak, will involve something which may properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming.” (144)

¹¹⁹ Wright, 92.

Wright's Cognitive Command constraint can be captured by the basic premise that same inputs ought produce the same outputs. Thus satisfying the constraint entails, as levied by the Convergence/Representation Platitude, that disagreement(s) within a particular discourse are the result of an input error or "cognitive shortcoming." (93) As an example, in terms of divergent moral views, what would follow, according to Wright, is precisely this: "the notion of representation, and its cognates, featuring in such (moral) phrases would not be able to draw the additional substance conferred upon it when a discourse satisfies Cognitive Command – the additional substance imposed by the analogy which may then be displayed, in the context of the Convergence/Representation Platitude, with the products of other everyday representational systems." (ibid).

What Wright here looks to be saying is, "Okay, we actually do say things like: To say that it's wrong to abuse helpless creatures is to say something that corresponds with the facts. However, just because it's okay to say this doesn't mean that claims about wrongness are truly representational. The reason for this is that claims about wrongness and rightness do not display cognitive command."

It is important to note the following points. First, Wright seeks to stress is that "Cognitive Command is a significant additional constraint on minimally truth-apt discourses." (94) Why? Because the standards of minimally truth apt discourses, he points out, are "highly tolerant, or underdetermine a substantial class of potential disagreements ... and so permit divergences of opinion in which ... no shortcoming need be involved." (ibid). Secondly, Wright stresses the importance that the Cognitive Command constraint be framed "in

terms of *apriority*: of its being a priori that disagreements are attributable to factors within the prescribed range” in order for it to ensure its “intuitive bearing”.¹²⁰

So, to quickly recap, Wright proposes that Cognitive Command “is really what’s at stake in the long-standing debates about realism that have centered on *convergence*.” (146) In attempting to refine “the basic idea we have about objectivity ... where we deal in a purely cognitive way with objective matters,” he suggests, “*the opinions which we form are in no sense optional*”¹²¹ ... but are *commanded* of us i.e. that there will be a robust sense in which a particular point of view *ought* to be held, and a failure to hold which can be understood only as a rational/cognitive failure.” (ibid). Finally, Wright suspects that the Cognitive Command constraint, while not the be-all-and-end-all for the realism debate, must surely be that constraint which “all roads to realism have to go through.” (148)

Where the Cognitive Command constraint focuses on the relation of representation, Wright highlights an additional proposal, which focuses on “the facts” and serves to “beef up” the Correspondence Platitude. (176)

Best Explanation of Belief / Inference to the Best Explanation

“The scientist sees a vapour trail in a Wilson cloud chamber, and he says

“there goes a proton”. The scientist counts as observing a proton because the

¹²⁰ Re: objectivity. (ibid)

¹²¹ *Italics* mine.

best explanation of his visual state is that there is a vapour trail, and the best theoretical explanation of the vapour trail itself is a proton.”

David Wiggins. *Needs, Values, Truth*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell (1987) 156.

This is David Wiggins’ interpretation of an idea Gilbert Harman expressed in his book *The Nature of Morality*.¹²² The important ‘take away’ is that the scientist forms a belief, on two levels, as a result of the information processed by his senses. 1) He sees and registers a vapour trail; and 2) A proton, according to our best scientific theory, creates a vapour trail its wake. Therefore, he believes a proton is passing through the chamber. Thus the scientist’s justified true belief is formed as a result of observable data, which is cast as a feature of the best explanation of (the scientist’s) belief.¹²³ The Best Explanation of Belief (BEB) aka Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE) is often taken to be a fundamental part of scientific practice and the justification of beliefs about the world. Harman offers IBE as a test for the reality of a class of entities.

Harman’s *Best Explanation Test* is stated thus:

“A discourse is more than minimally truth-apt only if mention must be made of the states of affairs which they concern in any best explanation of those of our beliefs expressed within it which are true.” (177)

Wright finds Harman’s test to be insufficiently subtle and so reformulates it into something he deems more suitable for his purposes. Since Wright’s proposal defends

¹²² Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

¹²³ Note: Inference to the best explanation (IBE) is often taken to be a fundamental part of scientific practice and the justification of beliefs about the world. Harman offers inference to the best explanation as a test for the reality of a class of entities. My thanks to Professor and Chair David DeVidi for pointing this out to me.

minimal truth aptitude as defined by the parameters determined within language i.e. “the syntax and internal discipline of the discourse,” the question for Wright becomes how do we step beyond minimally truth-apt contents in order identify features that are “relevant to realism?”¹²⁴ Of course, as Wright recognizes, "mention of the states of affairs" is not an entirely clear notion, especially if the task is to distinguish "real" mention of such states of affairs from merely platitudinous ones. After all, if asked – "Why did he laugh?" "Because the joke is funny." – is an apt reply. But presumably we do not want to allow realism about humor to be correct on that account. Wright therefore spends some effort distinguishing genuine mentions of states of affairs from platitudinous ones. He begins with a discussion of something Dummett says about Frege:

“[P]ure abstract objects are no more than reflections of certain linguistic expressions, expressions which behave, by simple formal criteria, in a manner analogous to proper names of objects, but whose sense cannot be represented as consisting in our capacity to identify objects as their bearers.” (178)

Wright believes we should interpret that what Dummett is after is a minimal and *thin* “notion of singular reference as applied to pure abstract singular terms, and thus insufficient to warrant the kind of realism about platonic mathematical objects”. (179) As such, what Wright wishes to here make clear is that though we might appear to mention states of affairs involving numbers when explaining mathematical beliefs for example, this is not enough to satisfy Harman’s criterion (when properly formulated).

¹²⁴ Wright, 178.

On the issue of pure abstract objects having the capacity to identify objects as their referents,¹²⁵ contrary to Dummett's interpretation, Wright expresses what he believes to be the crucial notion¹²⁶ as: "there is no linguistically unmediated cognitive contact with abstract objects: abstract objects can, in general, impinge upon us only as referents of understood abstract singular terms." (180) To refine the comparison, Wright adjusts Dummett's original passage as follows:

"The states of affairs which (merely) minimally true sentences represent are no more than reflections of those sentences, sentences which behave, by simple formal criteria, in a manner analogous to sentences which are apt to depict real states of affairs, but whose senses cannot be represented as consisting in our capacity to identify state of affairs necessary and sufficient for their truth." (181)

The outcome of Harman's constraint can be summarized as follows:

- 1) "If unsatisfied, nothing more than the minimal truth-apt platitudes feature in our best explanation of belief;
- 2) If satisfied, these "shadows" are shadows no longer and "we are forced to think of such states of affairs as lying at the source of acceptable practice within the discourse and as having the autonomy which that role demands." (182)

¹²⁵ Wright, 180.

¹²⁶ And key to understanding his (pluralist/anti-realist) position.

There are two plausible objections originating in the sciences to Harman’s constraint. One is, for those who believe “in the unifiability of science,”¹²⁷ the Inference to Best Explanation (IBE) limits itself to states of affairs that correspond to physical laws.¹²⁸ The other is that “theoretical science will *fail* the test.”¹²⁹ For scientific theories are prone to be defeasible – consider Phlogiston for example (once invoked as the best explanation for fire). Restated, the dilemma of IBE is twofold: first, IBE should seemingly be immediate and invariant i.e. regardless of what x is, and yet, IBE ought also, if true, make reference to actual ultimate causes. The problem is – how far back do you go? And how do you know you’ve achieved the true knowledge of (an) ultimate cause? (191) Thus Wright concludes, based on the challenges presented by immediate vs. ultimate causes, “... it is actually very unclear what should count as a best explanation for the purpose of the intended constraint.” (ibid).

In light of IBE’s obvious shortcomings in terms of how to best explain one’s beliefs, Wright offers the third and final tool for my toolkit to assess the metaphysical status and nature of brands – a Wide Cosmological Role. It is to it that we now turn.

2.04.03 | WIDE COSMOLOGICAL ROLE

“The crucial question is not whether a class of states of affairs feature in the best explanation of our beliefs about them, but of what else there is, other

¹²⁷ Wright, 189.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Wright, 190.

than our beliefs, of which the citation of such states of affairs can feature in good enough explanations.” (196-7)

Wright here makes it clear that he believes Harman’s Best Explanation constraint has got things turned ‘round. Rather than focus on the states of affairs responsible for our attitudinal judgments, he suggests that what we ought to be asking is: “*What in general can the citation of such states of affairs help to explain?*” (192, *italics mine*) Of interest here is the change in causal direction¹³⁰ from the abstract to the concrete. In effect, Wright moves to replace IBE with Wide Cosmological Role (WCR) in proposing the following alternative:

“Let the *width of the cosmological role* of the subject matter of a discourse be measured by the extent to which citing the kinds of states of affairs with which it deals is potentially contributive to the explanation of things *other than, or other than via*, our being in attitudinal states which take such states of affairs as object.” (196)

In order to demonstrate, as he does, the *width of cosmological role* practically applied, I now reproduce Wright’s exercise comparing the *wetness of these rocks* with the *wrongness of that act*.¹³¹ Wright writes, “the wetness of these rocks can contribute towards explaining at least four kinds of thing:” (197)

¹³⁰ Wright, 192. What Wright refers to as a “shift in focus” of “causal power”.

¹³¹ Wright, 197.

- a) My perceiving, and hence believing, that the rocks are wet.
- b) A small (prelinguistic) child's interest in his hands after he has touched the rocks.
- c) My slipping and falling.
- d) The abundance of lichen growing on them.

Four types of evidence constrained “consequences” of wider cosmological interaction and effect over and above the statement's minimal truth aptitude are thus attributed to the *wetness of these rocks*:

- 1) *Cognitive effects* (attitudinal belief), as related to a) above;
- 2) *Precognitive-sensuous effects*, as related to b) above;
- 3) *Effects on us as physically interactive agents*, as related to (c) above; and
- 4) *Certain brute effects on inanimate organisms and matter*, as related to d) above.

When considering the *wrongness of that act*¹³² by contrast, it seems that cognitive effects i.e. the vindicatory explanation¹³³ of one's moral disapproval of the action (setting fire to a cat) and the spin off effects “on the world” such moral disapproval may serve to generate,¹³⁴ are the only consequence of moral judgment – which, Wright muses, bodes badly for moral realism in this context.¹³⁵

¹³² See Wright 176 for Harman's full account of the wrong act re: Hooligans who set fire to a cat. Albeit not the place for further discussion, I find the word hooligan a curious choice in this context.

¹³³ For a definition of vindicatory explanation see page 184.

¹³⁴ Wright, 197.

¹³⁵ Wright, 198.

Thus illustrated, this pluralist constraint has now generally been made clear. “There are some kinds of explanatory citation of the states of affairs with which a discourse deals which are licensed purely and simply by that discourse’s minimal truth aptitude – by its exhibition of the appropriate syntax and discipline.” (197) So we can say that “a subject matter has a wide cosmological role tout court just in case mention of the states of affairs of which it consists can feature in at least some kinds of explanation of contingencies which are not of that sort – explanations whose possibility is not guaranteed merely by the minimal truth aptitude of the associated discourse.” (198)

So, to conclude this section on Wright (and Chapter Two), what he offers is a range of different approaches one might take to argue for *more than minimalism* for a particular domain. Since there are, at times, good reasons to suppose that some domains might satisfy some of the criteria for realism but not others, the question of realism or anti-realism may not be regarded as a black and white, either/or matter. Instead, if Wright is right, the question to ask is “*In what respect is this domain a more than minimal one?*”

CHAPTER THREE | SO, ARE BRANDS REAL?

UNPACKING THE TOOLKIT

In this final chapter I gather the “tools” gathered in Chapter Two – key proposals offered by Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, Michael Dummett and Crispin Wright about how to identify realist and anti-realist views regarding disputed entities within a particular domain – and apply them to the question “*Are brands real?*” Each approach provides an increasing degree of subtlety and refinement to help answer the question. I apply each “tool” in turn, beginning with Sayre-McCord’s *literal construal* criterion for realism, then Dummett’s *bivalent* criterion, and ending with Wright’s advocating a *pluralist* approach to the question of realism.

3.01 | APPLYING SAYRE-McCORD’S CRITERION FOR REALISM

A LITERAL CONSTRUAL OF TRUTH

As reviewed in Chapter Two, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord’s fixed account of realism is composed of two simple premises: “1) the claims in question, when literally construed, are literally true or false (cognitivism), and 2) some are literally true.” (Sayre-McCord, 5) On this account, “the notions of ‘literal construal’ and ‘literal truth’ will obviously carry a lot of weight.” (6) Thus in posing the question – *Are brands real?*– the answer will turn on the question of whether claims we make about brands, when literally construed, are

sometimes literally true. I propose to address that question by considering the following hypothetical scenario:

It's the year 2014 and JuiceCo, a national, family-run, beverage company, has hired a reputable design firm to create a brand for their newest line of carbonated natural fruit beverages for children. This product is the first of its kind in the market place and so affords JuiceCo both a unique first-to-market opportunity, as well as a distinct value proposition. It is important to note that this is JuiceCo's first foray into the nature fruit juice market, having previously specialized only in soda pop-type beverages. Moreover, JuiceCo has developed their ideas for the brand's creative brief entirely in-house i.e. no external/ market testing has been undertaken to vet their new product positioning.

The design firm has reviewed JuiceCo's creative brief and undertaken an exhaustive market research project, the outcome of which skews the orientation away from the brand proposition JuiceCo's in-house branding team had devised for their product. The design firm decides to create two brand concepts to accommodate the differing data sets and present it to their client, along with the motivations for each individual concept.

BRAND CONCEPT | A

Brand Essence/Core Value | WHOLESOME | based on creative brief supplied by JuiceCo.

Product | *sparkling fruit juice for children*

Name | **Granny's Fruit Juice**

Tagline | *Tastes like old times* | as supplied by JuiceCo's branding team and approved by CEO)

Product Line | Granny's Peach Juice, Granny's Apple Juice, Granny's Orange Juice, Granny's Grape Juice.

Ad Campaign Story Board | Norman Rockwell-esque Kitchen scene with Granny standing in front of an open fridge stocked full with Granny's Fruit Juice; little Johnny and Beth standing prim and shy, waiting to be given their Granny's Fruit Juice.

Background Audio | None. Real-time studio foley¹³⁶ of opening fridge door and voiceover.

BRAND CONCEPT | B

Brand Essence/Core Value | FUN | Based on independent market research

Product | *sparkling fruit juice for children*

Name | **FIZZ**

Tagline | *Fresh Fruit Fun*

Product Line | Peach FIZZ, Apple FIZZ, Orange FIZZ, Grape FIZZ

Ad Campaign Story Board | Cartoon-like animation shows children in a sun-filled, park-like playground opening their colourful FIZZ bottles out of which carbonated juice bubbles in the form of fruit float into the sky as the children, giggling, try to catch them.

Background Audio | Happy, child-like music accompanied by fun fizzy/bubbly noises.

The CEO and Brand Manager of JuiceCo consider both brand concepts and approve Brand A, Granny's Fruit Juice, much to the chagrin of the design team as they know that, clearly, this is not the right choice for the brand. A

¹³⁶ Real-time, in studio produced sound effects.

condensed version of reasons are as follows: a) the market research data the design firm compiled pointed to resoundingly to *fun* as a main motivator to get children to drink healthy alternative beverages; b) *wholesome* was not a motivator for the vast majority of parents polled in focus groups and in grocery stores; c) Granny's Fruit Juice creative (ad design and brand visual identity) speaks to an audience of conservative grandparents, not children, nor their parents; d) *Tastes like Old Times* evoked a negative response from both young and older audiences polled, despite JuiceCo's insistence that the nostalgic tagline would spark memories in parents of their grandparents, and back to the days when fruit juice was natural, wholesome and homemade; and e) nothing about the Granny's brand speaks to the carbonated aspect of the natural fruit beverage which is its main differentiator.

Thus clearly, JuiceCo has made a mistake in opting for the Granny's Fruit Juice brand concept. Not only does the Granny's brand fail to reflect market preferences, but JuiceCo has also failed to capture and clearly identify the product's core value. Under this lens, the answer to the question "*Are brands real?*" – if Sayre-McCord is right about the nature of realism – is plainly yes. There is, quite literally, a mistake being made by JuiceCo. When there can be mistakes, there are true and false claims nearby. Literally construed, one can make true or false claims about brands – and similarly some that are, in some cases, literally true. So brands are real! And yet this seems somehow too easy. To establish a metaphysical claim about the status of brands, one would think, would require more

philosophical “work” – especially if you consider that the natural inclination of many is to doubt the status of brands as *real*.

3.02 | APPLYING DUMMETT’S CRITERION FOR REALISM

A REFERENTIAL SEMANTICS BIVALENCE & EVIDENCE TRANSCENDENT TRUTH

From the discussion in Chapter Two, we know that Dummett’s view is that a realist must be committed to the principle of bivalence – that is, the principle that states that every claim is either determinately true or determinately false, even if we cannot acquire evidence for it (even in principle). Commitment to bivalence follows from acceptance of a referential semantics; antirealists, on Dummett’s view, argue that the realist about a particular domain appeals to an unjustified notion of truth, because they have not accounted for how we could come to understand a claim whose truth or falsity may be evidence transcendent. The next question for us is whether Dummett’s criterion for realism makes for an interesting tool with which to work out the project of this thesis, namely, to answer the question “*Are brands real?*”

Given the information on brands outlined in Chapter One, we know that much of designing brand identity, in all of its forms, is the result of human processes. Brands are constructed by branding professionals. Intuitionistic mathematicians are known as constructivists, and it is no accident that they are Dummett’s paradigm of anti-realism. It is not clear how there could be unknowable truths about something that is a human

creation. Indeed, reflection on the tangible properties of and facts about brands – from the visual identity i.e. the name, colours and icons chosen, to the analysis of the data provided by market research which informs brand positioning, brand experience and advertising – show no truths which are evidence transcendent. Put simply, there are no truths about brands that we cannot, in principle, come to know. By these lights, realism, according to Dummett’s criterion, is not true in the case of consumer brands, or so it seems.

Yet, allow me to point out one possible vulnerability. The core values of brands are, some would argue, chosen and thus mind dependent. On the other hand, whether brand professionals choose the “correct” core value¹³⁷ is also, one might argue – indeed, I did argue as much when discussing Sayre-McCord’s criterion of realism above – something about which we can be mistaken and so not a matter of choice. But that is not enough to ground a claim to realism. Mathematics is, according to the Intuitionist, constructed, but that doesn’t mean that it is “up to us” what is correct.

Notice that this is not the same as the question of where these core values we choose among come from. It may be fair game for realists to argue about the existence of these values, if, for instance, these values prove simple and unanalyzable in Moorean fashion, then core values may pose a potential exception to justificationist semantics. But, in and of themselves core values cannot be said to be brands. Fundamentally, they lie at the core of the brand as seen in the diagram in Chapter One and feature in brand construction in

¹³⁷ As we saw in the previous section’s hypothetical example between Brand A. Granny’s Fruit Juice (Wholesome) and Brand B. Fizz (Fun).

various ways – as raw material from which to choose, or the provision of inspiration and impetus for the overall construction process.

With this clarification, Dummett’s criterion for realism still does not hold in the case of brands. The answer, by his lights, is “*No. Brands are not real.*” However, just as Sayre-McCord’s criterion seemed to provide a too-simple positive answer to our key question, Dummett’s seems to have answered the question somewhat too readily in the negative.

Having so far applied the criteria for realism offered by Sayre-McCord and Dummett to the question “*Are brands real?*” and having found them somewhat limiting in terms of the insights provided by applying them, I now look to the more subtle criteria offered by Wright with the view of a wider horizon and a satisfying conclusion to my investigation into the metaphysical status of brands.

3.03 | APPLYING WRIGHT’S CRITERIA FOR REALISM

PLURALIST CONSTRAINTS

Wright’s pivotal contribution to the realism debate is motivated by the fundamental question “*whether any of the properties of a local truth predicate additional to the essential minimal set may somehow justifiably inspire a realist perspective on the discourse concerned.*” (78) Thus, key to understanding how his position differs from Dummett is his view that “ [w]e ought to be receptive to the possibility that a truth

predicate may have certain more-than-minimal features ... which in some way define and substantiate realist intuitions about the discourse in which it operates *without* entailing a lack of evidential constraint and enforcing a distinction from superassertibility for that reason.” (ibid, *italics* mine). Thus for Wright, as distinct from Dummett, truth and SA may be co-extensive in certain domains – which is to say that truth is epistemically constrained – and yet “realism” may still be, in some sense, correct for such domains.

The reader will recall from Chapter Two that Wright considers three different criteria by which one can determine that truth for a particular domain is more than mere superassertibility (and so “realism” and “objectivity” are words suitably applied in that domain): 1) the Euthyphro Contrast, 2) Cognitive Command, and 3) Wide Cosmological Role. It is to these three “tools” that I now turn, applying each of them in turn to the overarching question of this thesis project: “*Are brands real?*”

APPLYING THE EUTHYPHRO CONTRAST

We begin by illustrating what I think is a not-very-promising way to apply Wright’s test, namely by trying to find a suitable biconditional and asking directly in which direction it makes sense to read it with a suitable insertion of the world “because.” Consider the following Socratic/Euthyphronic formula¹³⁸ as applied to Volvo’s core value:

(B.R) It is because Volvos are safe, that certain consumers buy them.

(B.AR) It is because certain consumers buy them, that Volvos are safe.

¹³⁸ Where (B.R) identifies a brand realist statement and (B.AR) identifies a brand anti-realist statement.

(B.R) sounds reasonable enough. Some people, especially those with small children, do choose to buy vehicles for safety reasons, Volvos being the number one choice among them.¹³⁹ (B.AR) however, obviously makes no sense. The mere act of buying a car cannot bestow a feature upon it – least of all safety! Still, there seems little support for realism about the Volvo brand in this fact. For it is at least plausible, on this interpretation, that it is facts about *the cars* and not the brand that guides behaviour here, though the line between the two is arguably blurred. Thus, B.AR seems more plausible if we read “Volvos” as referring to the brand and not just the cars – that is, it is because consumers buy them for their safety that it is part of the Volvo brand that Volvos are safe. Admittedly, we seem here not to be making much progress.

So, let’s try again, this time from a macro-level rather than using a specific brand.

(B.R) It is because brands are real, that consumers engage with them.

(B.AR) It is because consumers engage with them, that brands are real.

This recalibration pitches the question at a more appropriate level. Yet I fear it merely entrenches the existing Euthyphro Contrast. Rather than a linear approach, let’s try something different to illustrate the dilemma.

¹³⁹ According to the 2014 Brand Perception Survey in Consumer Reports Magazine. See Safety Category: <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2014/02/2014-car-brand-perception-survey/index.htm> ; accessed 24 Aug 2014.

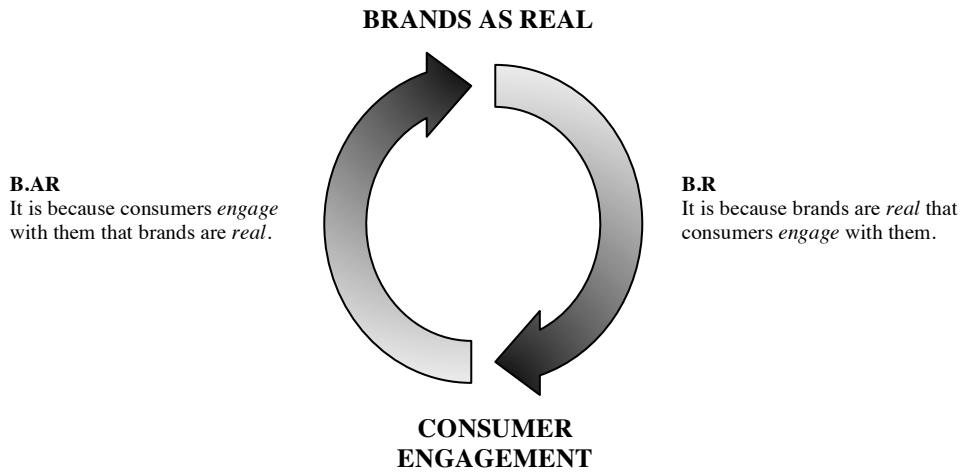


Figure 6.
The Euthyphro Contrast | A Non-linear Interpretation

Visualized thus, one could argue the debate over realism, at least as it pertains to brands, is regulated to never-ending circularity. However, the problem is not with the Euthyphro test, I suggest, but with the attempt to apply it too directly. Recall from Chapter Two that what Wright uses this contrast for, is to draw attention to the distinction between cases where truth and superassertibility are coextensive *because the relevant truths are detectable* from cases where the justification conditions for the claim *constitute* the truth of the claim. So perhaps a more appropriate and relevant approach to the Euthyphro question in relations to brands is the particular outcome of my field research. As I described in Chapter One, based on my interviews with brand practitioners, fifty percent of the brand identity building process is deemed creative, and fifty percent investigative. The creative half is itself fifty percent *detective*, and fifty percent *projective*, as these brand developers describe things, requiring both creative insight and attention to the instruction/guidelines provided by the creative brief for the task of brand building (or campaign design); the investigative half involves interfacing with audiences and carrying

out brand research i.e. customer surveys, interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, embedded ethnographic research and competitive analysis. Thus it is the *process* of designing, albeit not evenly split, is that brands can be characterized as both constructed *and* discovered. What this brings into view is a scenario in which we are faced with an interesting tension between anti-realism and realism within the creative and strategic process of designing brand identity (and thus by Wright's lights, a tension in the nature of the relationship between T and SA), and which offers up no clear victor. As such, the Euthyphro criterion seems to provide no clear answer when applied to the question "*Are brands real?*" or, perhaps, the answer is not wholly either/or, yes or no.

APPLYING THE COGNITIVE COMMAND CONSTRAINT

As reviewed in Chapter Two, Wright's Cognitive Command criterion works to "beef up" the first part of the Correspondence Platitude, which pertains to *representation*.¹⁴⁰ Using the analogy of a camera (among other technological devices whose function it is to reproduce data), the constraint suggests that, within a particular discourse, the same input ought to translate into the same output. Divergent output (or differences of opinion), "unless excusable as a result of vagueness", are therefore the result of "divergent input" identified as either "error", "ignorance", "unsuitable conditions" or "malfunction" which serve to produce some sort of deficiency or "*cognitive shortcoming*." (93/144) To illustrate just such a scenario, I will apply the Cognitive Command constraint to the process of building a new brand identity using the following example:

¹⁴⁰ Wright, 147.

Rebranding Campaign | National Blue Bank of Canada

Suppose the National Blue Bank of Canada has decided, after 100 years, that it is time to rebrand its identity. A well-established and trusted institution, known for its conservative, no-nonsense investment and customer service practices yet high rates of return, has been steadily losing market share to other banks, who, despite being less established, are perceived as being more client-focused and in tune with a younger demographic – as well as offering competitive interest rates and services. To hedge against any further decline in market share, NBBC has decided to undergo a change in brand identity (rebranding initiative) with the added hope of reclaiming its former status as Canada’s premier banking institution.

To that end, the NBBC branding team enlists the services of a world-class creative agency – World-Class Agency Global – to design its new brand. Due to the size of the account, the Creative Director assigns the project to two separate internal teams, one based in Canada, and one in England, in order to maximize and harness the vast creative potential within the firm. Each team receives the same brand brief, developed by the client, which outlines the “*who we are*” and “*why we exist*” of the existing NBBC brand narrative.¹⁴¹ Elements within this brief include: NBBC’s mission, vision, values, brand essence, value proposition, target audience, guiding principles, key markets, competitive advantage, stakeholders and driving force.¹⁴² The Creative Director then develops a creative brief with key senior internal and client stakeholders. Once approved, “the creative brief synthesizes what the creative team needs to know in order to do responsible work aligned with the overall objectives of the

¹⁴¹ Wheeler, 138.

¹⁴² Wheeler, 139.

project.” (Wheeler 139) This may include, but is not limited to: team goals, functional and performance criteria, communications goals of all brand identity elements, positioning, protocols, SWOT (strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats) list, functional and performance criteria, benchmarks and presentation dates, etc., and is reflected to the creative teams.¹⁴³ Using both the brand brief and the creative brief, World-Class Agency Global’s strategy is to have each creative team come up with one brand identity concept to present to the client, who will then choose between the two. Briefs in hand, the creative teams go off behind their respective curtains and, a few months later, return to present NBBC with two alternative brand identities. Let’s see what they’ve created.

The creative team of World-Class Agency Canada, a division of World-class Agency Global has created the following new brand identity for the struggling National Blue Bank of Canada: FIRST NATIONAL (BANK). The creative team retained the original blue of NBBC visual identity and incorporated NBBC’s desire to re-establish itself as Canada’s premier bank via adding the word “First” in its name. The team created a new logo that added a more modern spin to the original design as a subtle bridge from the “old” to the “new”. It also developed a new, more approachable brand personality/voice and tagline, as well as new look and feel for its website and its “bricks and mortar” branches. NBBC is pleased with the presentation given by World-class Agency Canada, as the team has clearly addressed all of the concerns and guidelines outlined in the creative brief and not completely discarded the old brand for the sake of something entirely new, which might alienate NBBC’s more traditional, established client base.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Next, World-Class Agency England present their interpretation of the NBBC creative brief as follows. The new bank brand is unveiled as: ROYAL NATIONAL (BANK). The creative team has also retained the original NBBC blue and created a less conservative brand personality/voice and tagline. But unlike World-Class Agency Canada, World-Class Agency England has designed a completely new logo. As with World-Class Agency Canada, NBBC branches and website would also undergo a new look and feel according to World-Class Agency England's brand redesign specifications. The client, in this case, is not as impressed as with World-Class Agency England's proposal. How can this be? What went wrong? Both teams received the same brand brief and same creative brief. Both teams participated in a launch meeting with senior client stakeholders and the World-Class Agency Global Account Lead and Creative Director. Both creative teams are equally talented and experienced, spent the same amount of time and resources on the project and had access to all the same research data. And yet, according to the client, World-Class Agency England's brand identity concept proposal missed the mark. This, if brands are "real" and according to Wright's Cognitive Command constraint, must be due to a cognitive shortcoming on the part of the World-Class Agency England's creative team. But what could that be? Let's briefly examine two possible options from an acutely high level. 1) *Cultural Misinterpretation*. NBBC is a Canadian Bank. Thus, despite both teams residing in the British Commonwealth, World-Class Agency Canada may have had a slight advantage understanding the nuances of financial/banking landscape in Canada over the World-Class Agency England, and thus may have positioned the new brand more accurately. 2) *Client Misinterpretation*. It is exceedingly difficult to "know" exactly what clients mean when they say they want change – and specifically to what *degree*. World-

Class Agency Canada seems to have better interpreted the conservative nature of the client by retaining the following features of the old brand: the colour, the icon (though adding a modern spin) and the word 'National' in the name. Most importantly, it added the word "First" to accommodate NBBC's desire to reclaim its original position as Canada's premier national bank. Taken together, World Class Agency Canada retained more features of the old brand and combined it more accurately with NBBC's new brand objectives than did World-Class Agency England. This facilitated less internal resistance from key NBBC decision makers i.e. Board Members and other senior stakeholders who have an extended history with the bank and who are more resistant to change.

Thus, according to Wright's Cognitive Command constraint, the fact that World-Class Agency Canada's FIRST NATIONAL (BANK) brand was chosen as the preferred brand identity over World-Class Agency England's proposed ROYAL NATIONAL (BANK) identity is not attributable to divergent input *per se* i.e. talent, opportunity, information or resources, but to what Wright would attribute to an interpretive error/cognitive shortcoming *that arose when interpreting the input*, thus causing World-Class Agency England's to miss the mark. So, fundamentally, what the Cognitive Command constraint helps to identify, in the case of designing brand identity as illustrated above, is the very real cognitive shortcomings presented by the inputting of "the facts" and very real possibility (if not significant probability) of divergent "representational" outputs.

Taken generally, within this domain, many similar cases exist (and will continue to occur). Of course, all divergent outcomes won't model the same. For instance, NBBC could have misinterpreted the needs and expectations of their existing audience, as well as

what a younger, more moderate clientele was looking for in a bank. Thus the launch of newly rebranded NBBC bank as First National bank may actually miss the mark and fail to resonate with audiences – new and old. Had they chosen the Royal National brand as presented by World-Class Agency England – NBBC would have made successful inroads with new clients and not at all alienating existing clients, which they so feared. But now there is more cognitive blame to go around. Though proper investigations were executed on both sides, it is always possible that the right questions were not being asked, and thus both the data and the interpretation thereof is skewed, leading to a tangible error. Thus for every variation that gives rise to disagreement (of the relevant sort¹⁴⁴), one will find reason for “blame” that underlies it. Or so it seems. Hence the Cognitive Command criterion seems to give reason for belief in the reality of brands.

APPLYING WIDE COSMOLOGICAL ROLE

According to Wright’s Wide Cosmological Role (WCR) criterion, if facts about brands can be used to explain a wide variety of phenomena, we have good reason to regard brands as objective or real. Let’s turn to the question of what sorts of things can be explained by appeal to facts about brands.

As most would by now agree, the Apple brand has been constructed, and arguably, extremely successfully so. Apple is a global consumer technology brand and thus has global influence, impact and appeal. Apple has for decades produced premier

¹⁴⁴ Note the use of “relevant sort” in this description. What will be facts about brands, where disagreement will require that someone is wrong, are in substantial areas core values, name, tagline etc. If the two branches came back with briefs that agreed on crucial details but disagreed about whether the person making the pitch in the TV ads should have a west coast or an east coast accent, neither needs to be wrong. But this is at a level of detail to which cognitive command needn’t apply – both accents are consistent with all the facts about the brand.

technological devices including the original MacIntosh computers, the iMAC, the MacBooks Air and Pro laptops, the iPad, the iPod and the iPhone. It also developed iTunes, an online music subscription service, as well as a vast array of production-based software including GarageBand, iPhoto and iMovie, and other apps. But what sorts of phenomena can the Apple brand, *explain*? Candidates include:

- 1) The ubiquitous mobility of music, information and communication (via iTunes, the MacBook, iPhone, iPad, and iPod).
- 2) The influence of purchasing decisions (motivated by a “cool” factor) and a technological divide between the “have” and “have-nots” (due to price).
- 3) The creation of segregated technology ecosystems (e.g. PC vs MAC, and more recently iPhone, Blackberry and Android, and the available software compatible with each of them).
- 4) The rise and movement towards minimalist, next generation user-experience-based (UX) design in all aspects of life (e.g. home, cars, technology, clothing).
- 5) The advent of lifestyle marketing/branding and customer experience marketing rather than merely product market/branding.
- 6) The rise in acceptance of subscription-based content vs. ownership (e.g. iTunes).

Can the Apple brand really “explain” all (or any) of these things? While I don’t want to detour through a deep investigation of the nature of explanation, it is common ground to think that if S explains P, then (barring crazy stories of overdetermination), P would not

have happened if S hadn't. So, let's consider a scenario in which the Apple brand would not have been created.

- 1) Macs, MacBooks, iPhones, iPads, iPods and iTunes would not exist.

And (therefore) arguably,

- 2) The mobility of music, information and communication would have been slower, or more slowly adopted.
- 3) In the absence of a “cooler” alternative to the plethora of PCs available, there would not be a competing influence on purchasing decisions, and thus probably no divide between have and have-nots. (I take it that this is consistent with less significant divides within the PC landscape, say between Toshiba and Dell; Toshiba being the more expensive of the two.)
- 4) Distinct technology ecosystems would not exist, as most non-Apple software is universally compatible i.e. across Android and PC platforms.
- 5) Minimal UX design would not currently be trending in all aspects of our lives.
- 6) Lifestyle and customer experience-based marketing would not exist, or at least would be less prevalent and of a different nature than what we now see.
- 7) Before iTunes, subscription-based content, particularly music, was facing an almost impossible, uphill battle.¹⁴⁵ With the introduction of iTunes everything changed. Without Apple/iTunes, the take up rate on subscription-based services would have been markedly slower.

¹⁴⁵ I myself worked for Bell-Globemedia during the DotCom era and was responsible for launching subscription-based music and games services on Sympatico.ca. It was an incredibly difficult proposition – despite or in spite of the hype at the time.

In light of these considerations, the Apple brand and its products explain a variety of very real phenomena/states of affairs affecting our daily lives and thus has a wide cosmological role to play in “a more robust understanding of the Correspondence Platitude.”¹⁴⁶ WCR thereby demonstrates, at least in the case of (successful) brands, that additional properties of the local truth predicate do exist which make realist considerations viable i.e. *good enough*,¹⁴⁷ without necessitating reference to evidence transcendence. So, if we were to attempt to situate facts about brands on the scale of objectivity Wright alluded to between moral facts and facts about “the wetness of rocks”, I would, in light of the Apple example, argue that facts about brands fall somewhere in the middle. This may be illustrated as:



Figure 7
Scale of Objectivity

Where moral facts are mediated at the level of individuals and by their influence on our beliefs; brand facts help to explain economic facts, sociological developments and changes in production, technology, human interaction, learning and communication etc.; while physical facts such as moisture explain all manner of effects or consequences, including cognitive, precognitive-sensuous, physically interactive and brute.¹⁴⁸ So, while brand facts don’t seem to figure in brute physical explanations the way the wetness of

¹⁴⁶ Wright, 193.

¹⁴⁷ Wright, 197.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

rocks might, they definitely, at least in Apple's case, cover many more scenarios than moral facts. Thus, it would seem, brand facts are "*more real*" than moral facts.

Having investigated three significant philosophical accounts of the criterion/criteria for realism, we are now in a position to summarize an answer to the question "*Are brands real?*" We have reviewed criteria varying from literal truth to evidence transcendence, to a pluralist assortment of ever more subtle refinements – from detection and perception to cognitive shortcomings, to a variety of consequences perceptible in the world as it is/states of affairs. We journeyed from looking inward to belief, to looking outward to effects on the furniture of the world for explanation. When asking the question about the metaphysical status of a particular subject matter within a certain domain, I have come to agree with Crispin Wright, that the answer to the question "*Are brands real?*" does indeed depend on what is meant by the question. So if, by "*Are brands real?*" we mean do they exist independently of our minds, then, by the survey of this thesis, the answer is *No*. Brands are the products of human design and construction and therefore not *real* in the Dummettian sense.¹⁴⁹ However, if by "*Are brands real?*" we mean do brands serve to explain certain states of affairs or phenomena that comprise the furniture of the world, then *Yes*, brands are indeed real. And so I conclude by offering that consumer brands may be viewed as a hybrid, both real *and* constructed.

¹⁴⁹ Though again, a door is plausibly open to evaluate the layers of a brand individually in order to determine their unique status within the realism debate. Here realists may argue that a brand's core values are indeed real.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This has been a novel journey. Investigating the metaphysical nature and status of brands using current accounts for the criterion/a for realism, is, I believe, a first. And in being first there are challenges. But with those challenges come great insights – at least for the author. I have gained an incredible degree of respect and appreciation for the current realism debate and for those who fuel it. Through the course of my investigation, I have become aware of, and impressed by, the depth and layers of perception and discernment a pluralist view offers traditional philosophical investigation. There is both comfort and curiosity in the response “It depends.” Comfort, in that the burden of absolute correctness of Yes/No, Either/Or is mitigated by nuanced and more tolerant pluralist alternatives. Curiosity, in that philosophical inquiry continues to move forward and does not become moored or stagnate in the now still waters of traditional debate. That said, I believe it important not to abandon those roots entirely. Speaking of moving forward, it is with great interest that I now turn to focus my attention on new paradigms and their (possible) effect on the status and design of brand identity, specifically how consumer-based participation and engagement via social media and channels still to be determined may affect the question “*Are brands real?*”

APPENDIX

GOOD BRANDING/ADVERTISING

Disclaimer:

For reference purposes only.

All logos and advertising herein are trademarked and/or under copyright.

The views expressed in/by these examples are of the authors of the citations and not of the author of this thesis, nor of the University of Waterloo.

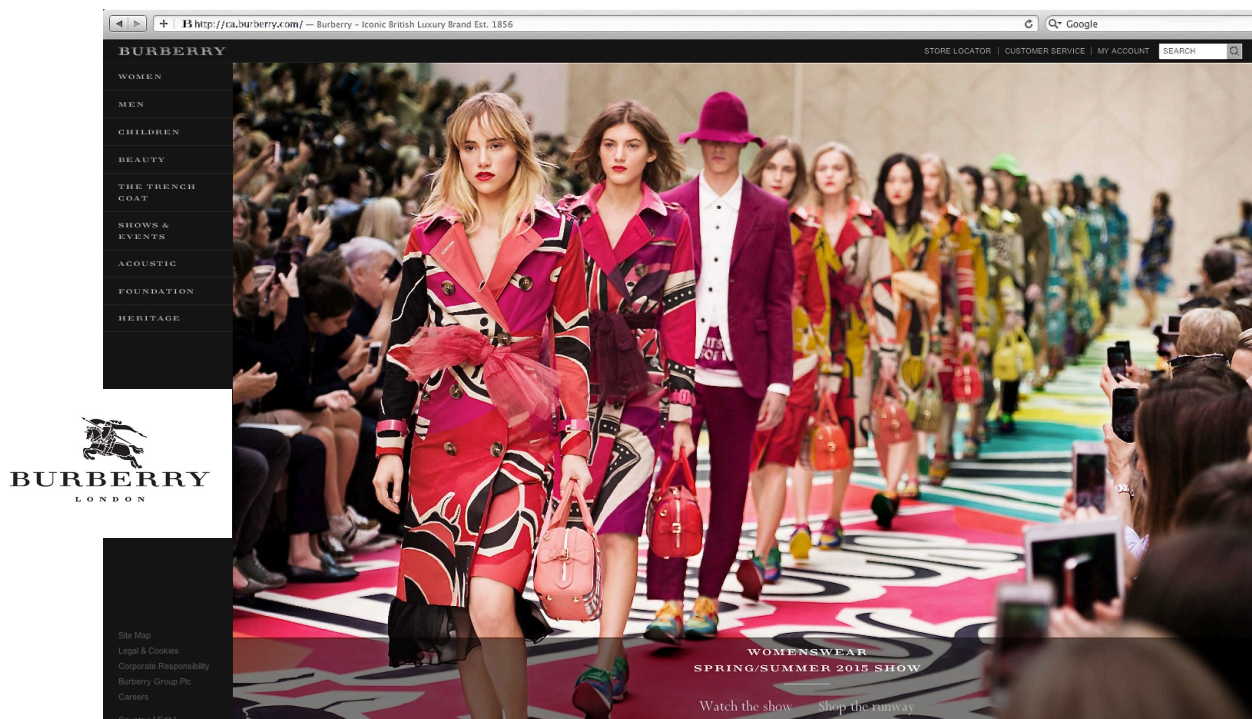
ONLINE

PRINT | <http://devisefunction.com/2010/04/05/50-beautiful-print-advertisements-for-inspiration/>; accessed 29 Aug. 2014.

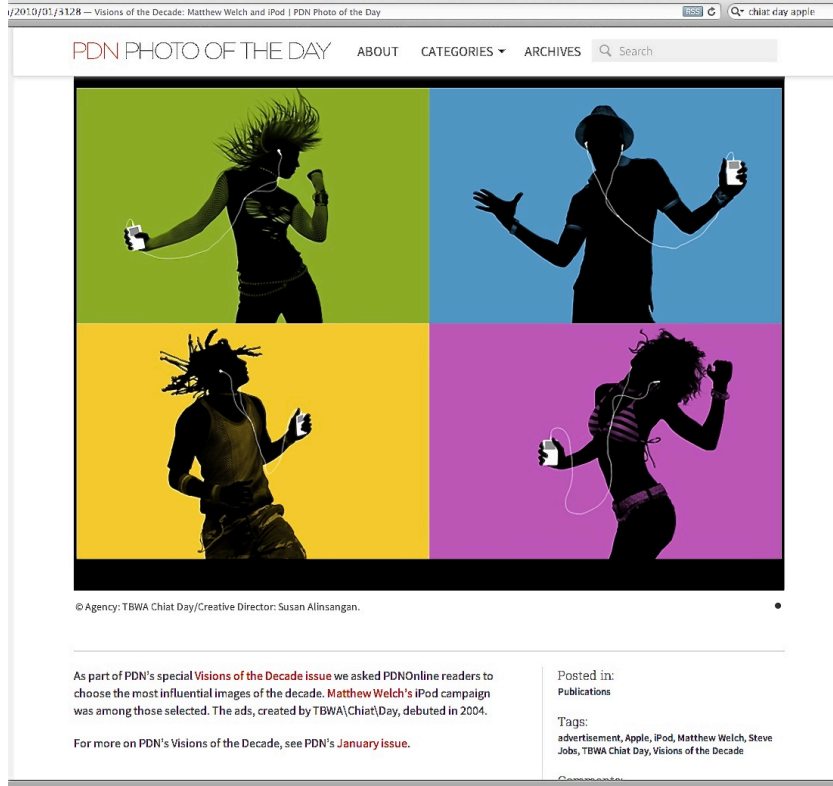
TV | <http://www.adweek.com/news-gallery/advertising-branding/10-best-ads-2013-154404#dove-real-beauty-sketches-1>; accessed 29 Aug. 2014.

PRINT/ONLINE

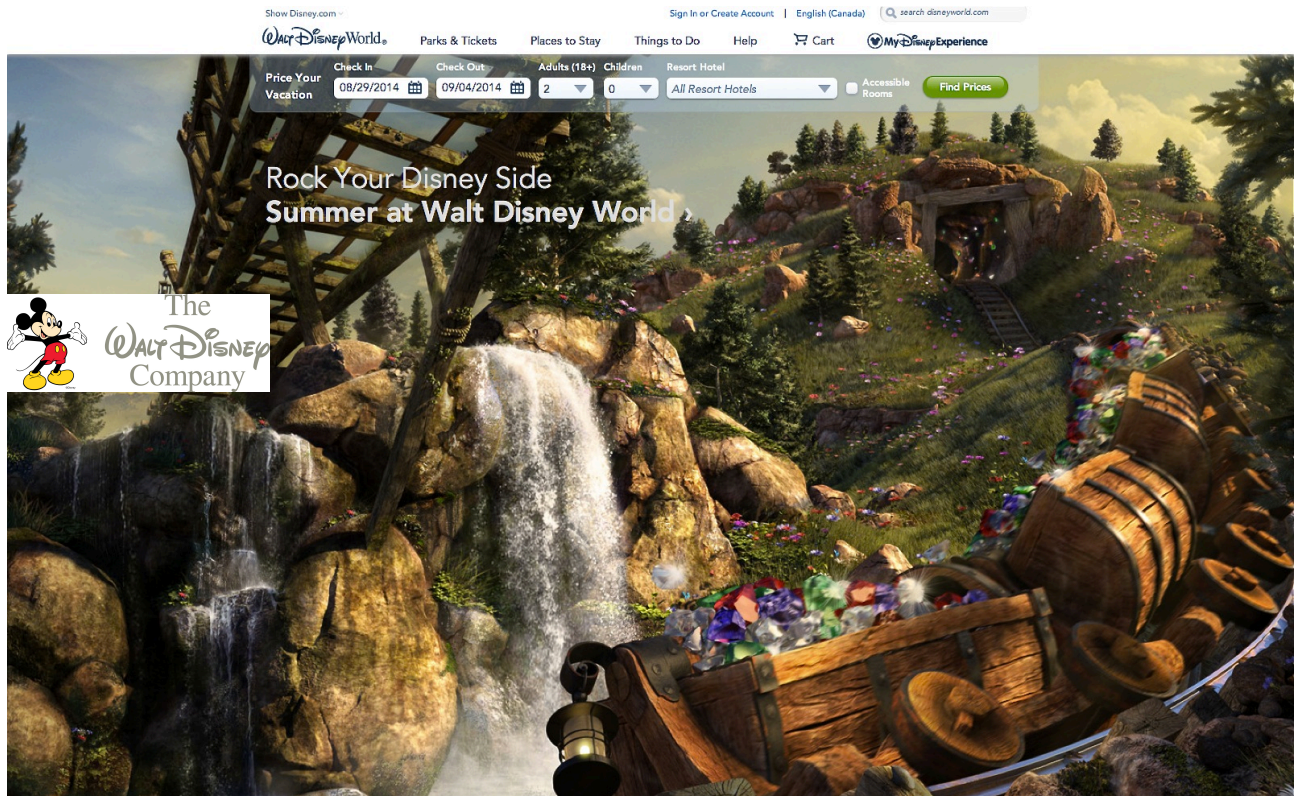
1. **Burberry Logo & Burberry Website Homepage** (Source: ca.burberry.com) Accessed 17.Sept. 2014



2. **IPOD | 10,000 songs in your pocket campaign Chiat/Day** (Source: potd.pdonline.com/2010/01/3128) Accessed 17 Sept. 2014



3. **Walt Disney Logo & Disney World Website Homepage** (Source: disneyworld.disney.com and disneydreaming.com) Accessed 29 Aug. 2014



APPENDIX

BAD/POOR BRANDING/ADVERTISING

Disclaimer:

For reference purposes only.

All logos and advertising herein are trademarked and/or under copyright.

The views expressed in/by these examples are of the authors of the citations and not of the author of this thesis, nor of the University of Waterloo.

LOGOS | <http://fortune.com/2014/07/21/branding-gone-wrong-when-bad-logos-strike-back/>; accessed 29 Aug. 2014.

PRINT | <http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/bad-grammar-are-bad-branding-157579>; accessed 29 Aug. 2014.

1. **Lululemon** (Source: adweek.com) Accessed 26 Aug. 2014.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying "lululemon-1 - The 25 Biggest Brand Falls of 2013 | Adweek" and the search bar containing "biggest ad falls 2013". The page content includes a social media sharing sidebar on the left with counts for Facebook (2.4k), Twitter (1.3k), LinkedIn (1.3k), StumbleUpon (121), Dribbble (132), and Email (156), along with Print and Email icons. The main article content features a red circle with the number "1" and the title "Lululemon". A "BACK" button and "1 of 25" indicator are visible. The article text reads: "Having problems with lululemon yoga pants? It's probably your fat thighs that are the problem. That's according to the brand's founder, Chip Wilson. The year's biggest fail—prompting a firestorm of criticism—didn't end well for Wilson. He semi-apologized in November, but by December he'd been forced out. Later, skater." Below the text is a photograph of a woman in a blue Lululemon top performing a yoga pose. At the bottom of the page, there is a "Topics: Lists" link and a promotional banner that says "Subscribe to Adweek today. Now on the iPad!"

2. **Ernst & Young** (Source: underconsideration.com) Accessed 26 Aug. 2014.

of 2013, Part 1: The Best Reviewed 2013, Part 2: The Worst Reviewed

No. 2
EY
Designed by BrandPie
[SEE ORIGINAL POST](#)

ERNST & YOUNG

EY

It's sometimes hard to distinguish between good minimalism and bad minimalism in logo design. This, rest assured, is the bad kind with a poorly resolved "EY" monogram that is unclear whether it should be read as "E, period. Y, period." or as a rhyme of "Hey" and a yellow beam that just shoots out with barely any relation to the monogram. It's just plain boring.

Poll Results (Total Votes Cast)	Great	Fine	Bad
On Monogram (1,099)	1%	25%	74%
On Beam (1,197)	8%	33%	59%
On EY Name (1,116)	6%	35%	59%

3. **SPY Sunglasses** (Source: adweek.com) Accessed 26 Aug. 2014.

ing-branding/20-biggest-brand-fails-2012-146137#spy-sunglasses-13 - The 20 Biggest Brand Fails of 2012 | Adweek

December 20, 2012, 9:33 AM EST

2.4k
1.5k
336
0
1
64
Email
Print

13 **Spy Sunglasses** **BACK** 13 of 20 **NEXT**

HAPPY TO SIT ON YOUR FACE

SPY+

001593

This "Happy to sit on your face" billboard, for Spy sunglasses, was supposed to stay up in its Encinitas, Calif., location for five weeks. It was taken down in September after just one week due to complaints.

4. **Hitler Clothing** (Source: adweek.com) Accessed 26 Aug. 2014.

4 **Hitler store** BACK 4 of 20 NEXT

1.5k
336
0
1
64
Email
Print

Don't name your store Hitler. This one in India did, and quickly had to change it after a global outcry.

5. **JC Penny** (Source: underconsideration.com) Accessed 26 Aug. 2014

of 2013, Part 1: The Best Reviewed 2013, Part 2: The Worst Reviewed

No. 1 JC Penney
Designed by Unimark (1968)
[SEE ORIGINAL POST](#)

JCPenney lands the top spot this year not because the new-slash-old logo is bad — it's not and neither is it any good — but because in a span of two years, JC Penney has mismanaged its logo and brand to the point of having to issue 30-second televised apologies while confusing consumers and spending money on poorly concocted schemes of signaling positive change through logo changes, starting with the idiotic and offensive 200-logo bake-off of 2011. Time to get your shit together JC Penney, because even this return to the old logo isn't the right move to stay relevant.

Poll Results (Total Votes Cast)	Great	Fine	Bad
On Return to 2011 Logo (1,314)	55%	38%	7%

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BRANDS

Art & Copy. Dir. Doug Pray. Perf. David Kennedy, George Lois, Hal Riney, Mary Wells et. al. Art & Copy Film, USA. 2009. DVD.

Author not cited. (8 September 2001). "Brands, Who's Wearing the Trousers?" *The Economist.com*. Web. <http://www.economist.com/node/770992>; accessed 11 Oct. 2013.

Author not cited. (8 September 2001). "Brands: The Case for Brands." *The Economist.com*. Web. <http://www.economist.com/node/771049>; accessed 11 Oct. 2013.

Clark, Kevin A. *Brandscendence: Three Essential Elements of Enduring Brands*. Chicago: Dearborn Trade Publishing. 2004. Print.

Davis, Melissa. *The Fundamentals of Branding*. London: AVA Publishing SA. 2009. Print.

Mishra, P, Maurya, Upendra Kumar. "What is a brand? A Perspective on Brand Meaning." *European Journal of Business and Management* Vol 4 No.3 (2012): 122 – 129. Print.

Olins, Wally. *ON B®AND*. New York: Thames & Hudson Inc. 2004. Print.

Simmons, Clifton, et al. *Brands and Branding*. Princeton: Bloomberg Press. 2004. Print.

Wheeler, Alina. *Designing Brand Identity*. 4th Edition. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc. 2013. Print.

Author not cited. (8 September 2001). "Brands, Who's Wearing the Trousers?" *The Economist.com*. Web. <http://www.economist.com/node/770992>; accessed 11 Oct. 2013.

Author not cited. (8 September 2001). "Brands: The Case for Brands." *The Economist.com*. Web. <http://www.economist.com/node/771049>; accessed 11 Oct. 2013.

Interbrand. "The Best Global Brands 2013." *Interbrand.com*. Web.

[http://www.interbrand.com/en/best-global-brands/2013/Best-Global-Brands-](http://www.interbrand.com/en/best-global-brands/2013/Best-Global-Brands-2013.aspx)

[2013.aspx](http://www.interbrand.com/en/best-global-brands/2013/Best-Global-Brands-2013.aspx); accessed 10 Jan. 2014.

PHILOSOPHY

Beaney, Michael. "Realism - The New Philosophy." *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford Press, Google Books, 396-400. Web. 19 Aug. 2013.

Dummett, Michael. "Realism and Anti-Realism." *The Seas of Language*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1993. 462-478. Print.

Frege, Gottlob. "On Sense and Nominatum." *Meaning and Truth: The Essential Readings in Modern Semantics*. Ed. Jay L. Garfield and Murray Kiteley. New York: Paragon House. 1991. 35-51. Print.

---. "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry." *Mind, A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* Vol. LXV No. 259 (July 1956): 289-311. Print.

Glanzberg, Michael. "Truth." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2013 Edition)*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 13 June 2006. Web. 23 Nov. 2013.

Horgan, Terence. "Crispin Wright, Truth and Objectivity Review." *NOUS* Vol.29 No.1 (March 1995): 127-138. Print.

Khrentzos, Drew. "Challenges to Metaphysical Realism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2011 Edition)*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 11 Jan. 2001. Web. 13 Dec. 2013.

Mackie, J.L. "The Subjectivity of Values." *Essays on Moral Realism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1988. 95-118. Print.

- McDowell, John. "Values and Secondary Qualities." *Essays on Moral Realism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1988. 166-180. Print.
- Mill, John Stuart. "Of Names and Propositions." *Meaning and Truth: The Essential Readings in Modern Semantics*. Ed. Jay L. Garfield and Murray Kiteley. New York: Paragon House. 1991. 8-32. Print.
- Miller, Alexander. "Realism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2012 Edition)*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 8 July 2002. Web. 20 October 2013.
- Pedersen, Nikolaj Jang Lee Linding and Wright, Cory. "Pluralist Theories of Truth." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2013 Edition)*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Web. 16 July 2014.
- Putnam, Hillary. "Meaning and Reference." *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol.70 No.19 Seventieth Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division (Nov.8, 1973): 699-711. Print.
- Rodriguez-Pereyra, Gonzalo. "Nominalism in Metaphysics." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2011 Edition)*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 11 Feb. 2008. Web. 28 Sept. 2013.
- Rosen, Gideon. "The Shoals of Language." *Mind*. Vol. 104 No. 415 (July 1995): 599-609. Print.
- Sayre-McCord, Geoffrey. "The Many Moral Realisms." *Essays on Moral Realism*. Ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988. 1-23. Print.
- Taylor, Barry. "The Truth in Realism." *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 41(1986): 45-63. Print.
- van Inwagen, Peter. "Metaphysics." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2013 Edition)*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. September 10, 2007. Web. 17 Aug. 2013.

Wright, Crispin. "Realism, Antirealism, Irrealism, Quasi-Realism." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XII (1987): 25-46.

--- . *Truth and Objectivity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992. Print.

BRAND GLOSSARY REFERENCES

For those interested in a gaining a better understanding of branding terminology, please see the following Brand Glossary references:

ONLINE | BRAND CHANNEL

http://www.brandchannel.com/education_glossary.asp#A

PRINT | INTERBRAND'S *THE BRAND GLOSSARY*

<http://www.amazon.ca/The-Brand-Glossary-Interbrand/dp/1403998094>