VARIETIES OF QUIETISM[1]

I.   According to Simon Blackburn's definition in his *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, "quietism" in philosophy is the "doctrine (associated with Wittgenstein) that there is no standpoint from which to achieve the traditional philosophical goal of a theory about some concept or another (e.g. truth, experience)"[2].   An alternative formulation of this idea was recently provided by Kit Fine : "Philosophy, on this way of thinking, should abandon its pretension of presenting us with a higher-order view of how the world really is. Or rather, if there is a view, it is that there is no such view to be had"[3].   As Crispin Wright puts it more succinctly, quietism involves the claim that "significant metaphysical debate is impossible"[4]. In John McDowell's analogous expression, it entails "the avoidance of any substantive philosophy"[5].

Despite some worries about the theological origins of the meaning of the term and objections regarding the exact implications of the positions associated with it[6], one could accept it, at least tentatively, as a catchword allowing us to describe serious challenges to constructive philosophical thinking, as old as Pyrrhonian scepticism. A different objection to the use of the term is related to the fact that most kinds of

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[2] Blackburn 1992, 315.

[3] Fine 2001.

[4] Wright 1992, 202 and 202-230.

[5] McDowell 1994, 176.

[6] The term is a translation of the Greek word "hesychasmos", referring to the Orthodox monastic tradition of spirituality which goes back to the 5th century, and more particularly to the theological doctrine defended by Saint Gregory Palamas in the 14th century AD. Hesychasts rejected rational thinking in the attempt to attain some kind of cognitive access to or contemplation of God and developed a special kind of prayer, consisting of some form of incantation and involving bodily exercise, aiming at control of breath. In Western Europe, the term also referred to a heretical form of religious mysticism founded by Miguel de Molinos, a 17th-century Spanish priest. Molinism, or quietism, developed within the Roman Catholic Church in Spain and spread in France.   More generally, the quietist stance in theology imposes the avoidance of "involvement with the world, in favour of passive devotional contemplation". (Blackburn 1992, 315) For different uses of the term in literature, in works by Goethe, André Gide and Thomas Mann, see Schulte 2001.
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philosophical activity, even those leading to theory construction and aiming at a cognitive goal, may also aspire to some form of tranquillity, "quietude", or peace of mind, *at the end of inquiry*[7]. However that may be, I will bypass such qualms and proceed to explore the notion of philosophical quietism decribed by the above formulations.

We may begin with the observation that the apparent dead ends of metaphysical controversies in many areas, such as the debate on realism, eventually drive certain philosophers to the adoption of a quietist stance. Here, we should remark that, according to a widely accepted construal of Wittgenstein's thought on these matters, it would be better to talk about a stance, an attitude, or an approach, rather than about a theory, a doctrine or a thesis. Presumably, the idea of a more or less systematic quietist *theory* would be self-defeating. In fact, it is well known that one of the most common anti-quietist arguments is based on the idea that it is perhaps unavoidable to advance theses in philosophy, and that even anti-theory, whether its proponents admit it or not, presupposes some theoretical back up[8].

In any case, there are many forms of the stance in question, –indeed, there are different conceptions of it-, and there are various arguments, directly or indirectly employed, to support it. In what follows, I shall first try to sketch a map of quietist views, examining their main characteristics, relating them to a number of authors, and reconstructing the reasoning put forth in order to defend them.   I will then turn to recent discussions of a version of *semantic* quietism, concerning the construal of the notion of truth and relevant to conceptions of realism and anti-realism, in an effort to understand what is at stake. The purpose of my metaphilosophical analysis is not only to provide a taxonomy of quietist considerations, to study the logic of their articulation and to ponder their motivation, but also to put forth guidelines for a first assessment of their potential to limit effectively, or even to subvert substantive philosophical theorizing as a whole.

It could be observed that the first well-known example of quietist tendencies, backed up by powerful and mostly valid, if not always sound and convincing

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[7] On this, see Aristeidis Baltas' paper on philosophical silence (Baltas 1996).

[8] The problems of the inevitability of implicit theoretical commitments that can be easily traced in the Wittgensteinian corpus, and of the pragmatic, self-referential contradiction which seems to ensue when one tries to defend anti-theoretical, therapeutic views, have been discussed by various philosophers. See a.o. Avgelis 1983. On the parallels between Wittgenstein and the Pyrrhonian sceptics, see Fogelin 1994 and my paper forthcoming in *Neusis*.

argumentation, is that of ancient sceptics seeking precisely to attain mental tranquillity (*ataraxia*). Pyrrhonian sceptics abstain from theory construction, insofar as they are led to suspension of judgement (*epoche*) by the equipollence of reasons (*isostheneia*) adduced to defend any philosophical position. However, they are careful not to endorse any general thesis which would make them give up philosophical inquiry itself (*zetesis*). They are bound to keep on scrutinizing all sorts of claims put forth by their opponents, without being able to prejudge the outcome[9]. Moving to the modern era, one should explore the strategy followed by Kant in his attempt to set limits to conctructive philosophizing through his attack on dogmatic metaphysics, and the elaboration of his own critical metaphysics of experience. His enterprise could be considered as a *partial* or *moderate* form of quietism, since it allows for the defense of the substantive doctrine of transcendental idealism, however weakly or "epistemologically" interpreted.

Of course, most contemporary models of quietism can be found in Wittgenstein's work, of both the early and the late period, in which, as it has been often pointed out, one could detect a strand of Kantianism and echos of classical Pyrrhonism[10]. Nevertheless, one should not overlook the alternative legacy of more or less scientistic positions elaborated by pragmatists and logical positivists, entailing the elimination of all metaphysics and the thorough-going critique of philosophical theorizing in many areas. Despite the novelty, the sophistication and the refinement of present day quietists, one can easily detect their indebtedness to some of the above sceptical and critical conceptions, ancient, modern and contemporary, reemerging in a variety of new guises.

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[9] See Sextus Empiricus 1976, *passim*. Here it is worth examining the extent to which the quest for peace of mind paradoxically goes along with a commitment to inquiry, and more particularly the exact nature of the kind of peace of mind sought and achieved fortuitously through a practice of suspension of judgment. Stroud has recently employed an approach that can be characterized as Pyrrhonian to the extent that he shows we have to recognize the force of arguments against anti-realist accounts of colour, without however being able to endorse realism in this area, and yet he claims that "we will keep on trying" to come up with a satisfactory philosophical analysis which might provide us with a more or less definitive answer about the reality or unreality of colour. See Stroud 2000, 208-209.

[10] For the attribution of quietism to Wittgenstein, see Blackburn 1984, 146, ("the belief of the later Wittgenstein that [metaphysical] problems require therapy rather than solution"), Wright 1992, 202-230, McDowell 1994, 93, 175-180, and for serious objections concerning the applicability of the notion to Wittgenstein's philosophy, see Schulte 2001. Brian Leiter does not hesitate to speak of "Wittgensteinian quietism", describing a broadly therapeutic approach to philosophical problems, which he presents as a characteristic trend of contemporary Anglophone philosophy, contrasted with the much stronger trend of post-Quinean naturalism that he favours. (Leiter 2004, 2-3ff).

Finally, one must take into account the quietist aspects and implications of views bearing the labels of *minimalism* and of *pluralism*. However, it is clear that these views are not identical with quietism and should not be treated as such. An example of a sloppy assimilation is provided by Simon Blackburn's denunciation of quietist elements in the work of Crispin Wright :

> "There is a contemporary river that sometimes calls itself pragmatism, although other titles are probably better. At any rate it is the denial of differences, the celebration of the seamless web of language, the soothing away of distinctions, whether of primary *versus* secondary, fact *versus* value, description *versus* expression, or of any other significant kind. What is left is a smooth undifferentiated view of language, sometimes a nuanced kind of anthropomorphism or "internal realism", sometimes the view that no view is possible: minimalism, deflationism, quietism. Wittgenstein is often admired as a high priest of the movement."[11]

 II. Indeed, we cannot proceed to an investigation of the general stance underlying all the approaches that could be characterized as "quietist", without trying to determine the criteria making it possible to isolate the relevant characteristics in more detail than what strikes us as sufficient at first sight. We shall then be able to identify and describe a broad range of particular positions and views. Such largely interrelated criteria may include the following elements : The *scope*, the *strength*, the *motivation*, - related to the *nature* and *function*- of the claims advanced and the *argumentative tactics* employed to develop and sustain them.

First of all, we must distinguish between *local* or *partial* and *global* forms of quietism, an important differentiation to which we have already alluded. It is one thing to argue that an area of philosophical inquiry, such as metaphysics, ontology or metaethics in general[12], should be jettisoned, and another to endorse a wholesale rejection of constructive philosophical theories or theses in all areas, as it seems to be the case with Pyrrhonian sceptics, or Wittgensteinian therapists. Furthermore, one could display quietist tendencies concerning only certain concepts, often construed in a metaphysical sense, such as truth and reality, while remaining eager to engage in

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[11] Blackburn 1998a, 157.
[12] Apart from the example of Kant that we have already mentioned, we could here refer to Quine's "ontological quietism", discussed by Huw Price (1992), and to Ronald Dworkin's "metaethical quietism" (Dworkin 1996, Virvidakis 1999b).

philosophical theorizing when dealing with other concepts that may be usually interpreted in a less technical or more "ordinary" way, such as objectivity.[13] Ontological and epistemological quietism do not necessarily go along with semantic quietism, and the semantics adopted by the Pyrrhonians does not have to be interpreted minimalistically[14]. Indeed, although, when we speak of quietism, it is usually metaphysics and ontology that we have in mind, we may come across all kinds of quietist attitudes, regarding epistemology, semantics, metaethics, or even normative ethics.

The question that we will have to ask ourselves at this point is whether certain species of local quietism might easily lead to more global forms, if we consistently pursued the reasoning that dictated their adoption in the first place. Indeed, one wonders whether local quietism can always be maintained as a stable option without inevitably spreading to many areas of philosophical inquiry. Thus, if irrealism regarding meaning is naturally construed as a version of quietism, it may be suspected that,

> "…the thesis that there are no facts of the matter as far as rules and meanings are concerned…must necessarily inflate… into a global irrealism: the thesis that there are no facts of the matter anywhere…If there are no substantial facts about what sentences say, there are no substantial facts about whether or not they are true. Thus, irrealism about meaning must enjoin an irrealism about truth, wherever the notion is applied. And irrealism about truth, wherever the notion is applied, is irrealism about all assertoric discourse" [15].

Undoubtedly, it is metaphysically loaded notions, such as meaning, facts, truth, correspondence or reduction, that usually become interesting objects of a quietist treatment. "When *these* notions go, so goes the metaphysical enterprise associated with them", says Kit Fine, referring to factuality and reducibility.[16] If the rejection of what Robert Kraut describes as the "bifurcation thesis", roughly the assumption that some declarative sentences are descriptive and others only "expressive"[17] -not

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[13] Of course, the possibility to determine the extent to which some of these concepts lend themselves to "extraordinary" metaphysical construals which modify their "common" or "everyday" sense is a very controversial issue.

[14] See O'Leary-Hawthorne and Oppy 1997 on Michael Frede's account of the beliefs of the Sceptics. See also Paul Moser's semantic foundationalism that goes along with his epistemological and "conditional ontological agnosticism". (Moser 1993)

[15] Wright 1992, 211. See also the discussion in Rorty 1995, 295-300.

[16] Fine 2001.

[17] Kraut 1990.

reflecting facts of the matter, but projecting attitudes of human subjects- is not only a central argumentative ploy of many pragmatists, but also a key move at the heart of quietist tactics, one may worry that it opens a slippery slope to global or pervasive quietism.

Minimalists about truth, such as Wright, do resist this idea and try to allay the fears of philosophers, like Blackburn, who assume versions of the bifurcation thesis as the starting point of their analysis. Wright argues that we can maintain our commitment to the intelligibility of the notion of realism, while underplaying the importance of a distinction between *truth-apt* and not truth-apt sentences that are all surface–assertoric, and proposing other "cruces" or criteria of realism, beyond "heavy" truth-aptness, such as *cognitive command*, *best explanation* displaying *cosmological width*, *and order of determination of predicates* in biconditionals expressing the *Euthyphro contrast*[18]. In other words, one may become "soft" to a significant extent about truth aptness, as long as one respects a certain number of crucial platitudes about the role of truth as a norm of inquiry distinct from justification, and thus one does not become "soft" about meaning, which might indeed entail softness about everything. Indeed, one suspects that the adoption of thorough-going minimalism in the philosophy of language, may undermine substantive philosophizing as a whole.

III. The issue of the *scope* or *extent* of quietist approaches should not, I believe, be confused with that of their degree of *strength*. For instance, one could limit one's repudiation of traditional philosophical pretensions, only to the area of religion, thus staying quite close to a proper theological use of the notion of quietism, and still defend a very strong view that bans *all* theoretical talk about God, in the name of a more or less mystical stance towards the divine. A more moderate attitude pertaining to religion would allow the use of rational argumentation, but only for certain theological matters and only to some extent.[19] On the contrary, a follower of Kant could urge us to abandon the futile metaphysical quest for a knowledge of reality in

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[18] Wright 1992, 71-201.
[19] Concerning these issues, one could focus on the influence of Wittgenstein's thought on theology and on the philosophy of religion. See Kerr 1997, and Nielsen & Phillips 2005.

itself *in its entirety*, without however questioning the intelligibility of the very concept of such a reality and the legitimacy of some philosophical talk about it[20].

Similarly, one could go quietist about developing theories in *normative ethics*, because of a thorough-going particularism rejecting the possibility of any appeal to general principles, endorsing, for example, the intuitionist conception elaborated by Jonathan Dancy; at the same time, he may not want to deny that he is putting forth a sort of theoretical thesis at the level of *metaethics*.[21] Although such a case may be construed as a distinction of scope and not really of strength, since we are speaking of separate areas of philosophical inquiry, the close relations between metaethics and normative ethics may justify the claim that here also we are dealing with degrees of strength. On the other hand, Dworkin defends a position which could be interpreted as reversing Dancy's approach. He incites us to abandon metaethics altogether and limit philosophical discussion to normative ethics.[22] In any case, notwithstanding ambiguities due to the metaphoricity of the notions linked to the criteria we are trying to elaborate and to the lack of any acceptable metric of "degrees" of quietism, one could perhaps accept to distinguish between *strong* and *weak* and *mild* or *moderate* quietist approaches[23].

Naturally, the assessment of the strength of versions of quietism varies widely among philosophers. One could suspect a relativity of appraisal due to differences in the *seriousness* of quietist commitment. Thus, it is ironical that Blackburn, who detects dangerous quietist tendencies in Wright, because of the way Wright draws the "contours of the philosophical landscape", can be accused of making concessions to the quietist attitude, in his own way, insofar as his quasi-realism is a compromise position, lending itself to readings entailing the serious limitation of metaphysical thinking. Indeed, in his exchange with Dworkin, he doesn't hesitate to admit that he endorses *metaethical minimalism* himself, a position presumably distinct from full blown quietism.[24] Still, he places himself at the right of a line "occupied by Rorty at the far left and by Wright's minimalism in the center", because he claims to "see more

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[20] One could here wonder whether we might not characterize the defense of *descriptive*, as opposed to *revisionary* metaphysics, following Strawson's distinction (1959), as a first step in the direction of metaphysical quietism.

[21] See, Dancy 1993, 2004

[22] Dworkin 1996, 1997.

[23] For a discussion of analogous forms of more or less moderate *moral realism*, see Virvidakis 1999a.

[24] As he puts it, "the theoretical temperature should remain the same whether we say 'slavery is bad' or 'it is true that slavery is bad' or 'it is really true and corresponds to the world that slavery is bad'.. There is not a self-extracting ladder of philosophical ascent here". (Blackburn 1996).

scope for realist versus anti-realist theorizing". What he seems to forget is that his own approach could contribute to "debunking" the whole debate between realists and projectivists, "covering up" their crucial, deep difference, by an "as if" substitute, in order to do justice to the surface of assertoric discourse for everyday practices and to eschew the Frege-Geach problem[25]. To use Dworkin's description of his predicament, his quasi-realist projectivism may "swallow itself in the process", so that metaethical debate can come to an end, but there will be much left to theorize about by reference to substantive truth claims at the level of normative ethics[26].

No wonder then that Kit Fine is eager to classify Blackburn among true quietists, insofar as his arguments seem to commit him to the view that the metaphysical questions of factuality and reducibility are devoid of content. On the contrary, Fine describes Rorty's version of quietism, that he characterizes as "methodological", as moderate. Here, we could perhaps follow Nick Zangwill in distinguishing between quietist and less radical, "criterial" versions of quasi-realism, basically having to do with the motivation and intent involved[27]. To be fair to Blackburn, we should acknowledge that, at the end of the day, contrary to what his earlier pronouncements seemed to imply[28], he doesn't want us to consider his quasi-

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[25] See Blackburn 1998b for the most recent extensive elaboration of his quasi-realist metaethics. For the implications of the Frege-Geach problem, concerning the inability of expressivists to construct valid arguments in the course of ethical debates, insofar as they do not consider moral judgments as consisting of truth-apt beliefs, see Virvidakis 1996, 81-85.

[26] In Dworkin's words : "the strategy backfires, because it leaves the projectivist no way to disagree with anything and therefore with no philosophical position to defend…It aims at neutrality on substantive moral issues, but swallows itself in achieving it. (1997)

[27] As Zangwill puts it, while discussing possible construals of Blackburn's projectivist views, "…We need some *criterion* for determining when we are dealing with a range of thought whose *raison d'être* is that of matching facts…Quasi-realism tries to capture, on behalf of the projectivist, the features of ordinary thinking which a realist might naively propose as symptomatic of realism. This is one face of quasi-realism; let's call it 'criterial quasi-realism'. The second face of quasi-realism is its more radical potential for undermining the very difference between realism and projectivism. This sort of quasi-realism is not concerned with features which are allegedly symptomatic of realism, but with the very thesis itself. Here, the quasi-realist's ambition is not just to capture mind-independence and other such features, so that we can no longer tell whether or not our thought is realistic. The ambition is to undermine the content of the whole debate. This sort of quasi-realism attempts to show that realism about a subject matter (and equally its opposite) is *meaningless*, not *false*. The conclusion would be that there is no distinction which can be drawn between what we cognize in the world and what we project onto it. Blackburn calls this pessimistic metaphilosophy 'quietism'…" (Zangwill 1992, 161-162)

[28] In his "Truth, Realism and the Regulation of Theory" (originally published in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* V, 1980), Blackburn writes: "My trouble is this: I begin to doubt whether familiar ways of characterizing debates in the theory of truth –realism vs instrumentalism and so on actually succeed in marking out interesting areas of dispute" (Blackburn 1992, 15). However, he concludes his paper by refusing to endorse a clearly quietist attitude: "…If this is so, philosophy indeed leaves everything as it is. Yet, there may be reason to sympathize more with the anti-realist. He has earned the concepts

realism as a quietist option. Still, in his more recent writings, he explicitly endorses a more or less quietist approach towards the debate on scientific realism[29].

III. We should then focus on the key criterion of *motivation* that is intricately connected with the determination of the nature and the more general function of the attitude adopted.   Here, we may venture the application of a broader and looser set of qualifications, though at the risk of further indeterminacy in our classifications. Hence, we could contrast the elaboration of *sceptical*, *aporetic* or *agnostic* variants of quietism, most probably *consequent* to philosophical inquiry, in the sense of the "consequent" scepticism endorsed by Hume[30], eventually involving some form of suspension of judgment, to the adoption of more or less *programmatic* and usually *polemical* approaches, in most cases *antecedent* to other philosophical investigations. The latter usually aim at eradicating confusions, dispelling illusions, dissolving, rather than trying to solve, philosophical (pseudo)-problems, or overcoming useless "vocabularies". In fact, we could speak of a stance of consequent, sceptical quietism displayed in the works of Pyrrhonian sceptics and their descendants, while different models of antecedent quietism may be reconstructed from the writings of the logical positivists, Wittgenstein and many of his disciples[31], and Richard Rorty[32]. Certainly,

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associated with objectivity, while his opponent merely stole them; he has founded our practices on known facts about human capacities, while his opponent invents more…"(34)

[29] See Blackburn 2002.

[30] For the distinction between *antecedent* and *consequent* scepticism, see Hume 1975, section XII, 149-151

[31] Here, we have in mind the traditional, "orthodox" reconstruction of Wittgenstein's views, elaborated in the commentaries of P.M.S. Hacker and the early Gordon Baker. (For the employment of the controversial term "orthodox", widely used by the Greek Wittgenstein scholar Costis Coveos in his writings, see Kahane, Kanterian & Kuusela 2007, 4-7) We would construe Wittgenstein's "quietist" attitude in a different way, if we endorsed interpretations of his thought which do not ascribe to him any general methodological tenets, such as an initial anti-theoretical presumption, or an *a priori* conception of criteria of non-sense. See the approach developed along the lines of the so-called "resolute" reading of the *Tractatus* and of Wittgenstein philosophy as a whole. For a first introduction, see Crary & Read 2000, Theodosiou 2007. See also above, note 10.

[32] Even the label "eliminativism" could perhaps be introduced at this point –despite its somewhat misleading implications and its alliance with different kinds of non-quietist reductionism of contemporary scientistic thinkers, since we are asked to try to get rid of entire domains of metaphysical discourse. In any case, we find it very difficult to associate quietism with any revisionary argumentative strategies. Quietism, by definition, seems to be non-revisionist – to respect ordinary practices. In many cases, -though not in that of Rorty- such strategies aim at reestablishing the *status quo* of our common linguistic practices, acquiescing in the pre-philosophical uses of words in our language-games. Metaphysical constructions must be dismantled but not replaced by new "houses of cards". For Rorty's revisionist conception of "philosophy as cultural politics", entailing the rejection of old "vocabularies" and metaphors and the aspiration to their replacement by new ones, see Rorty 1998, 229-350, 2007 *passim*, and particularly his paper, "Naturalism and Quietism"(2007, 147-159), where, drawing on suggestions by Huw Price and Bjorn Ramberg, he explicitly endorses a form of

we must not forget that according to Wittgenstein we shall never manage to be cured completely from the recurring craving for metaphysics, and we should engage in philosophical therapy again and again.

From another point of view, we could distinguish *genuine*, *full-blown*, -one would dare say *substantive* quietism, if this did not seem to imply a kind of contradiction in terms-, the intent of which is usually *therapeutic* and more generally *diagnostic*[33], from *methodological* and *instrumental* quietism of a global or partial character, usually presented in the guise of minimalism. In the latter case, it is probably a mistake to consider the positions espoused as manifestations of sincere or genuine quietism, especially insofar as their defense may be part of a large-scale constructive strategy. They may be put forth with a view to dealing with particular philosophical quandaries, such as, for example, the Frege-Geach problem[34], and they wouldn't reveal any overarching goal of unmasking or debunking the core concepts of traditional metaphysical discussions. On the contrary, they may constitute only *a move in a complex dialectic*, helping to shift the focus of argumentation, to reassess the burden of proof and to renegotiate the terms of disagreement, eventually facilitating the final quest for an answer. In fact, this is the way, I believe, that we should interpret Crispin Wright's advocacy for semantic minimalism and to evaluate its significance for the transformation of the debates on realism.

IV. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we should concentrate on the main characteristics of the various argumentative strategies and particular tactics followed by quietists of different persuasions. Their correct appreciation may also help us understand how they could perhaps be countered in an effective way. In fact, without dwelling on the details of such strategies and tactics, we may be able to indicate the directives apparently guiding them.

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quietism involving "pragmatic naturalism" and "semantic deflationism", pertaining to linguistic behavior: "Most people who think of themselves in the quietist camp, as I do, would hesitate to say that the problems studied by our activist colleagues are *unreal*. They do not divide philosophical problems into the real and the illusory, but rather into those that at least those that retain some relevance to cultural politics and those that do not. Quietists, at least those of my sect, think that such relevance needs to be demonstrated before a problem is taken seriously. This view is a corrolary of the maxim that what does not make a difference to practice should not make a difference to philosophers."(149)

[33] See Michael Williams' distinction between "therapeutic" and "theoretical" diagnoses. According to the former, one treats philosophical problems as "pseudo-problems, generated by a misuse or misunderstanding of language". According to the latter, the problems "are genuine, but only given a definite background of theoretical presuppositions." (Williams 1991, xv-xviiff.)

[34] See above, note 25.

We could distinguish between two basic sets of considerations, presented below as an array of interrelated positive and negative presumptions, which determine the selection of the main premises and the key steps in the reasoning deployed. Their parallel study covers a wide range of arguments, put forth by quietists of any kind, and casts light on the relative force of their conclusions.

Thus, we may begin by identifying a *negative* approach to constructive philosophy, backing quietist attitudes, which involves *presumptions of inappropriateness* or *vacuity (lack of content)*, especially concerning metaphysical and epistemological theorizing. More particularly, we could isolate a variety of presumptions of :   a) *nonsensicality*, familiar from the works of Wittgenstein, logical positivists and ordinary language philosophers, drawing primarily on conceptual, semantic or linguistic considerations; b) *uselessness / idleness*, justified on the basis of pragmatic – practical priorities insisted upon by pragmatist thinkers; c) *historical error*, according to certain historical or genealogical hypotheses advanced by historicist, mostly Nietzschean and Heideggerian thinkers;   d) *explanatory or justificatory inappropriateness* (or *impropriety*), deriving from ideological preferences of positivistically and scientistically inclined philosophers, who preach the wholesale rejection of metaphysics; e) *anti-archimedeanism*, leading to the defense of epistemological (and perhaps semantic) anti-foundationalism.

Now, there are some obvious ways in which we may react to such quietist methods: if we are in a position to trace verificationist assumptions of different kinds we may easily challenge their correctness; if we are presented with pragmatist appeals to the "cash value" of our concepts and to a pessimistic metaphilosophical induction concerning philosophical theories, we shall object to the practical ideals motivating conceptions of more or less crude pragmatism; when we are offered genealogical attempts at demystifying our metaphysical tradition, supposedly undoing past errors and overcoming dichotomies that still "hold us captive", we will try to resist them by proposing alternative narratives, historical explanations and assessments of further prospects;   if we are asked to espouse reductionist projects limiting legitimate philosophizing to a narrow application of scientific methods in philosophy, we shall respond by questioning their ideological or metaphilosophical credentials[35].

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[35] How far can an explanation go, what is there to explain, to what extent can it be explained or justified and how? The resistance to the assimilation of philosophy to science, the defense of the irreducibility of the philosophical outlook may be thought to involve the tacit acceptance of more or

Here, it is worth focusing on the nowadays common presumption that we dubbed "anti-archimedeanism", that is, the rejection of any philosophical enterprise involving the quest for a "God's eye point of view", a "view from nowhere", or the perspective of a "cosmic exile", related to an emphasis on the post-Cartesian "absolute conception of reality"[36], usually entailing foundationalism, but also essentialism about our key epistemological concepts[37]. Philosophy is not supposed to be able to reach any higher or deeper level, in order to allow us to look at the world "sideways on" and thus to make it possible for us to engage in any special, explanatory, justificatory, and eventually revisionist enterprise pertaining to the relations between mind, language and the world. For most quietists, but not for all, if we agree on the classification of approaches and positions described so far, philosophy has to "leave everything as it is"[38]. There is no archimedean vantage point for philosophical theorizing, although there may be some scope for a descriptive intellectual activity, which could also serve diagnostic and therapeutic purposes and provide us with a necessarily limited "overview" (*Übersicht*) of our concepts employed in particular contexts. This is what we might consider as a commitment and restriction to the "ground level" of our conceptual or linguistic practices. However, the question that would remain to be adressed is whether the elucidation of our concepts can actually remain at the "natural", or "ordinary" ground level of everyday domains of discourse, –if there is such a ground level in the first place-, or whether what we regard as the pre-philosophical experience of common usage may not eventually lead us to constructions that are no different from the supposedly artificial, contingent and ultimately useless edifices of philosophers, standing in need of demolition, dissolution or deconstruction[39].

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less questionable presuppositions, such as the analytic-synthetic distinction. On the other hand, the enthusiastic promotion of reductionist programs, may be regarded as a symptom of the uncritical commitment to scientistic dogmas.

[36] These metaphorical expressions are used, in ways reflecting more or less quietist or anti-quietist attitudes, respectively in Putnam 1981, Nagel 1986, McDowell 1981, Williams 1978. Of course, we should be careful in interpreting them because they are not exactly equivalent in meaning and their use may give rise to misunderstandings.

[37] For a critique of contemporary epistemology involving the allegation of some form of epistemological essentialism concerning our concept of knowledge, see Williams 1992.

[38] We have seen that positivists and pragmatists envisaging a revolutionary change of our philosophical vocabulary express a quietism aiming at the *revision* of our linguistic practices. See Rorty's views, mentioned above, note 32.

[39] See Stroud 2000: xii-xiii.

In fact, turning to the positive considerations which could provide substantial argumentative support to the metaphilosophical moves we are interested in, we should recognize different presumptions justifying the adoption of a quietist stance in various areas, that we might describe as *presumptions of the supposedly natural "default position"*, usually revealed through the elaboration of minimalist and pluralist accounts. These include presumptions of: a) *austerity* or *neutrality* –leading to minimalism; b) *irreducibility* (e.g recognition of an irreducible variety of language-games or contexts) – leading to pluralism; c) *naturalness* or *ordinariness* – leading to the affirmation of the importance of common intuitions or "platitudes";

Now, the above criteria and the positions that they help sustain require proper interpretation and qualification. To begin with, austerity doesn't necessarily coincide with neutrality. Moreover, the pluralism in question can be construed in different ways, and its adoption doesn't have to entail the elimination of all kinds of metaphysical theorizing[40]. Here, one should distinguish between Huw Price's "vertical" and Michael Lynch's "horizontal" pluralism: The former involves the irreducibility of different discourses or levels of discourse, while the latter the mutual irreducibility of facts within one level of discourse[41]. In any case, quietism in its various guises is related to the idea of the "natural", the "ordinary", or the "commonsensical" which is taken to define the default position, not needing theoretical support[42].

Indeed, at this point we should bring to mind the methodological significance of the reference to platitudes. A careful study of recent debates, such as the exchange between Blackburn and Wright, shows that the conflict between opposed views might be adjudicated if we came to agree on the platitudes supposedly associated with our linguistic practices. It often seems to be tacitly assumed that only if we resorted to such platitudes could we elucidate the meaning of our basic concepts[43]. Thus, to take

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[40] Here, we suspect that there might often be a tension between the desiderata of *minimalism* and of *pluralism*.

[41] For this contrast, see Price 1992 and Lynch 1998.

[42] See also Arthur Fine's conception of a "natural ontological attitude" as a way out of the debate between scientific realism and anti-realism (Fine 1984). It must be emphasized that the sense of "naturalness" we are discussing here is not related to accounts of philosophical naturalism.

[43] Platitudes can be described as "those assumptions which all theorists irrespective of their particular metaphysical commitments are prepared to make." (Frank Jackson quoted in Divers and Miller 1994, 16). In fact, we should not forget that such platitudes are also invoked by philosophers interested in the technical "network analysis" of concepts, such as Frank Jackson and Michael Smith, who are not only happy to accept the legitimacy of metaphysical commitments, but may also be reluctant to embrace some forms of semantic minimalism. Wright's appeal to platitudes for the elucidation of the concept of

an example from recent discussions, agreement on platitudes about beliefs would perhaps entitle us to adopt some kind of minimalism about belief, which would go along with minimalism about truth aptitude. Unfortunately, philosophers find it very difficult to agree whether the idea that "beliefs always have to combine with desire" to guide us around the world, should or should not be considered as a *non semantic* platitude about belief [44].

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V.   At this stage of our analysis, we should eventually attempt a thorough examination of particular instances of elaboration of the above presumptions, which can be isolated in the works of thinkers often described, despite their many differences, as embracing genuine, more or less global and strong forms of quietism, a characterization that they might partly acknowledge themselves. I have in mind philosophers such as contemporary "orthodox", or "new" Wittgensteinians, Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, seeking his "second naivete" as a realist[45], and John McDowell proposing a way to cure our "transcendental discomfort" through an appeal to views such as "minimal empiricism" and "naturalized Platonism" that are not really philosophical theses, but "reminders" of the obvious aspects of our epistemological predicament, or reaffirmations of our ordinary beliefs[46].

Nonetheless, since such a thorough investigation cannot be undertaken in the context of this paper, in the last section of my presentation I shall restrict myself to a brief discussion of versions of quietism that I have characterized as *methodological* or *instrumental* and that appear in the guise of *minimalism* or *pluralism* about key semantic notions. Such a discussion, however sketchy, may provide us with insights into the relations among quietism, minimalism and pluralism and help us reach some tentative conclusions.

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truth is much looser and doesn't amount to strict network analysis. In any case, there are various unanswered questions regarding the sufficiency of platitudes for the reducibility of concepts, as well as their epistemic status – *a priori* or not. For the important role of platitudes in conceptual analysis, see Smith 1994c, 29-32 and *passim.* See also Lynch 2001.

[44] See the debate concerning these issues, pertaining also to the adjudication of claims about the correctness of the Humean theory about the role of belief and desire in action. See Smith 1994a, 1994b, Horwich 1994, Divers and Miller 1994, 1995 and also Jackson, Oppy, & Smith 1994.

[45] For the different interpretations of Wittgensteinian views, see above, note 31. For Putnam's recent adoption of a kind of "naïve" or "common sense" realism", see Putnam 1994a, 1994b.

[46] See McDowell, 1994 and his more recent writings discussed in Virvidakis 2006. The trouble with McDowell is that his complex argumentative edifice cannot be so easily regarded as just a therapeutic, dialectical device which will help us jettison bad metaphysical theorizing before getting back to the "ground level" of our ordinary discourse.

What does emerge from the exchange between Blackburn and Wright on minimalism about truth (or rather about truth-aptitude), is, I think, the fact that Blackburn misses the non-quietist thrust of Wright's account, precisely by neglecting the context of Wright's overall argumentative strategy. Wright doesn't actually limit the space, or rather the scope of theorizing about realism and antirealism, as implied by Blackburn. On the contrary, by securing truth-aptness across the board and by exploring ways to "re-inflate" the import of truth claims, beyond the platitudes governing the use of the minimal concept of truth, he encourages the elaboration of new perspectives for the realism-antirealism debate[47]. It is rather Blackburn's expressivist commitments that could undercut more or less constructive metaphysical thinking, especially when his projectivism is supposedly enriched by the gambit of quasi-realism. It is Blackburn and his followers who seem to limit substantive discussion of realism, by providing the logical means allowing the antirealist to "earn the right" to avail herself of the resources of the propositional surface of assertoric discourse. Thus, it is Blackburn, beginning with a traditional conception of the opposition between realism and antirealism, and apparently regarding the Humean analysis of belief and desire as part and parcel of our semantic platitudes about belief, who, rather paradoxically, threatens to undermine further metaphysical theorizing, supposedly fruitful and interesting, at least as he originally seemed to assume. And it is Wright's ingenious use of minimalism, with a view to shifting the focus of argumentation, which opens the way to enhancing the perspectives of the ongoing inquiry into the very notion of realism[48].

It should be noted that somewhat analogous considerations apply to the kinds of pluralism that were mentioned in the course of our survey of different conceptions of quietism. Far from discouraging philosophical theorizing, these positions call for the rejection only of *some* traditional dichotomies and presumably spurious unifying principles, as in the case of Price's repudiation of any clear, general factual / non-factual distinction. Price does consider his approach as an extension, or rather a

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[47] See Wright 1992.

[48] As Wright says, "Even if there were an intelligible and necessary explanatory task for quasi-realism to take on –a task which *Truth and Objectivity* would lead us to shirk- the work could start only *after* we had made a distinction between cases where realism is acceptable and propositional surface consequently unproblematic, and cases where neither is so. So it is presupposed that we already know what realism *is* –what is to take a realist view of an area of thought, how such a view might be justified and what it would be to avoid it. These are issues which are evidently at the heart of the metaphysical question, not things to take a stance on before starting work." (Wright 1998,195)

radicalization of Blackburn's quasi-realism, in so far as he subverts the simple opposition between descriptive and expressive discourse. However, he doesn't shy away from putting forth his own commitment to a plain conception of realism and from qualifying his pluralism as "metaphysical", hardly a quietist selection of terminology[49].

Similarly, Michael Lynch observes that an austere conception of truth, objective and non-relative, cannot provide a basis for deepening, let alone adjudicating the metaphysical issue of realism before it is further interpreted in a pluralist direction[50]. Nevertheless, according to Lynch, this in no way implies global quietism. Pluralism *is* a metaphysics of a respectable and promising form. :

> "Metaphysical pluralists are often portrayed (and portray themselves) as anti-metaphysical and even anti-philosophical. The point of many pluralist leaning writers is that once we see that there are many equally correct metaphysical views, we should stop doing metaphysics. But the idea that once we accept metaphysical pluralism we should stop doing metaphysics and get on with doing something useful, like (say) science, betrays a lingering allegiance to absolutism. It reveals that one is still caught up in judging an enterprise by its ability to gain absolute access to ultimate truth; if metaphysics has no such access, we must rinse our hands of it…Of course, in advocating that we must conceive of facts as relative to conceptual schemes, pluralism might be taken as *extending* our minimal conceptions of truth and fact in relativist directions. But this does not mean that we should or even can (in a practical sense of "can") let go of our minimal concepts of fact, truth and proposition. Minimal concepts are the stepladder to metaphysics… Pluralist philosophies that deny the possibility of metaphysics are built on a lie. Metaphysical pluralism is not just concerned with metaphysics; it is a metaphysics…
> … The revision of our worldview and conceptual schemes is accomplished by the extension of our basic and minimal concepts. Pluralism…is as revisionary as it is descriptive. In telling us that the world is many and not one, the pluralist too is extending our minimal concepts. The result is that pluralism doesn't call for an end to pictures. It paints us another.[51]"

Actually, Lynch's more recent functionalist view of truth betrays his attempt to have it both ways; that is, maintain a unitary, minimal notion of truth at the level of a higher-order functional property and at the same time recognize the existence of a

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[49] See Price 1992.

[50] Lynch 1998. More recently, Lynch has elaborated a "functionalist" concept of truth, in Lynch 2001.

[51] Lynch 1998, 139-140, 157.

plurality of realizer-properties in different areas of discourse. Thus, his pluralism becomes "vertical as well as horizontal"[52].

Now, there are many issues that I haven't properly addressed and many questions that must be left unanswered for the time being. It may still be the case, and there are technical arguments to that effect that minimalism about truth may easily spread to a global form and this might be considered as particularly annoying and anyway has a quietist resonance[53].   It may be the case that the pluralist views advocated by Price and Lynch are unstable, or do imply an objectionable relativism. We haven't been able to come up with reliable criteria as to which platitudes are indeed platitudinous, for whom and to what extent, and as to which dichotomies are bogus and must be jettisoned, or, as Wright puts it in a recent critique addressed to McDowell,   which dichotomies do and which do not point to distinctions that should not be missed[54].   Moreover, we haven't focused enough on the allure of global and strong quietism and haven't tried to develop and assess the anti-quietist strategies and argumentative tactics we referred to in the course of our discussion.

Unfortunately, we cannot pursue a more detailed investigation of forms and aspects of quietist views in the context of this paper. We shall conclude by summarizing the main points of our discussion and by formulating a few general conclusions which may provide a basis for further research:

1) The notion of philosophical quietism must be analyzed carefully in each case and should be properly elucidated in the relevant context, if it is not to remain an obscure, vague and elusive concept. 2) Quietism should not be simply assimilated to minimalism, although of course there is a close connection. 3) The most important criterion for the identification and the specification of forms of quietism is probably that of motivation determining to an important extent the nature and function of the quietist stance or position in question. 4) Unfortunately there seems to be an intrinsic, perhaps ineliminable, relativity involved in the appraisal of quietist views, as well as

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[52] See his examples – such as truth in law – with a reference to Dworkin- and his appeal to analogies in the philosophy of mind.   See Lynch 2001.

[53] Wright tries to deal with the problem in his response to Blackburn's strictures. See Wright 1998.

[54] See Wright 2001, 444-462, especially 462, where he refers to the controversial rejection of the scheme/content distinction. Notice the implications of the selection of terminology itself, "dichotomy" – "distinction" etc., betraying a positive or negative attitude regarding the issues in question.

in the specification of what exactly counts as substantive, robust, austere, ordinary, neutral, minimal or platitudinous. 5) Our overall approach depends largely on the general theoretical and ideological commitments informing our metaphilosophy, which may not be amenable to adjudication by rational argument. 6) In any case, it is very difficult to achieve complete, global neutrality, at some form of elementary, "ground" level of our practices. A "zero degree" of ideological commitment or theoretical involvement of any kind, if possible at all, would indeed signify the end of philosophizing as we know it.

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Stelios Virvidakis

University of Athens

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