



REALISM AND ANTI-REALISM

• Introduction	138
• Delineating the realist/anti-realist dispute	140
• Case study I: character	142
• Case study II: the past	144
• Anti-realism: motivation and assessment	146
• Anti-realism disproved?	148
• Concluding remarks	150

INTRODUCTION

Realism about some subject matter (Fs, say) is normally understood as the view that Fs exist, and do so independently of us. ‘Independence’ is not a transparent notion, but we can say that Fs exist independently of us if any of the following three conditions hold:

- (i) If we hadn’t existed, Fs would still have existed.
- (ii) If we were to cease to exist, Fs would still exist.
- (iii) The nature of Fs is not determined simply by whatever we take their nature to be.¹

Intuitively, we are realists about the planets ([i]–[iii] are all true of the planets), but non-realists about the fashionable (none of [i]–[iii] is true of the fashionable: something is fashionable only because people treat it a certain way).

Opposition to realism about Fs can thus take either of two forms: the insistence that Fs do not exist or the insistence that, although Fs exist, they do not exist independently of us. Error theories (advanced, e.g., about moral discourse and arithmetic) and expressivism (advanced, e.g., about moral discourse) are examples of the first kind of non-realist

strategy.² Idealism is an example of the second kind of strategy. Bishop Berkeley thought that the planets existed, but since they are composed of ideas, they do not exist independently of minds (human or divine). In this chapter I want to look at a more recent example of the second kind of non-realist strategy, first introduced in the 1960s by Michael Dummett. Dummett calls his brand of non-realism ‘anti-realism’, and he can be seen as attempting to forge a new sense in which the existence of Fs might not be independent of us.

Dummett suggests that traditional disputes in metaphysics might be advanced, or even settled, if pursued within the framework of the debate between realism and anti-realism. Although this is a debate about meaning and truth, Dummett felt that it could cast light on traditional metaphysical disputes about the nature of mathematics, other minds, material objects and the reality of the past and future.

Drawing on two early papers, ‘Realism’ (1963) and ‘The Reality of the Past’ (1969), I will question whether Dummett’s realist/anti-realist framework really is a fruitful one for the furtherance of metaphysics.³ I will also look at a well-known argument which seems to show that anti-realism leads to contradiction.

Realism

For many, realism is the default view of the world. Mountains, continents and planets, for example, exist independently of us. Had we not existed, they would still have existed; if we were to cease to exist, they would still exist; and their nature is not fixed by whatever we take their nature to be. Mountains, continents and planets exist and do so in complete independence of us. Idealism involves a sharp rejection of such realism. According to the idealist, mountains, continents and planets are mind-dependent entities. For such entities, to be is to be perceived (*esse est percipi*) – either by a human mind or a divine one. According to the idealist, were there no minds, there would be no mountains, continents or planets. Dummett's anti-realism is intended to occupy a position midway between realism and idealism. The world is not independent of us, since statements about the external world cannot be unrecognizably true. But the existence of the planets, for example, does not depend on their being perceived by some mind. The planets would still have existed even if there had been no minds.

DELINEATING THE REALIST/ANTI-REALIST DISPUTE

The first task, of course, is to clarify what Dummett means by the terms 'realist' and 'anti-realist'. Dummett says that realism about Fs, in his sense, is not the doctrine that there are Fs (where Fs are entities of some disputed sort), nor anti-realism its denial. Thus the realist/nominalist dispute over the existence of universals is not an example of a realist/anti-realist dispute in Dummett's sense (see Chapter 3). Dummett's realist/anti-realist dispute is not concerned with the existence of some purported class of entities, but with features of certain classes of statements (statements about other minds, mathematics, the physical world, the past and future, etc.) Dummett is fond of quoting Kreisel's dictum that **Platonism** in mathematics is best understood, not as a doctrine about the existence of mathematical objects, but a thesis about the objectivity of mathematical statements. Realism, in Dummett's sense, is one expression of such objectivity.

Where the 'disputed class' refers to the class of statements in some area over which there is a realist/anti-realist dispute, Dummett characterizes realism as: 'the belief that statements of the disputed class possess an objective truth-value, independently of our means of knowing it: they are true or false in virtue of a reality existing independently of us.'⁴ In contrast:

The anti-realist opposes to this the view that statements of the disputed class are to be understood only by reference to the sort of things which

we count as evidence for a statement of that class. . . . [t]he meanings of those statements are directly tied to what we count as evidence for them, in such a way that a statement of the disputed class, if true at all, can be true only in virtue of something of which we could know and which should count as evidence for its truth.⁵

Hence:

The realist and anti-realist may agree that it is an objective matter whether, in the case of any given statement of the class, the criteria we use for judging such a statement to be true are satisfied: the difference between them lies in the fact that, for the anti-realist, the truth of the statement can only consist in the satisfaction of those criteria, whereas, for the realist, the statement can be true even though we have no means of recognizing it as true.⁶

Later he writes:

the dispute can arise only for classes of statements for which it is admitted on both sides that there may not exist evidence either for or against a given statement. It is this, therefore, which makes acceptance of the law of excluded middle for statements of a given class a crucial test for whether or not someone takes a realist view of statements of that class. The anti-realist cannot allow that the law of excluded middle is generally valid.⁷

Consequently, ‘The dispute . . . concerns the notion of truth appropriate for statements of the disputed class; and this means that it is a dispute concerning the kind of *meaning* which these statements have.’⁸

To each disputed class of statements there often corresponds a reductive class of statements. Thus, to the disputed class of statements about material objects there corresponds the reductive class of statements about sense experience. To statements about other minds there correspond statements about behaviour. In speaking of a ‘reductive class’, Dummett means to imply that statements of that class can be understood independently of statements of its corresponding disputed class. In such cases, the anti-realist view is that the truth of a statement in the disputed class consists in the truth of some statement, or set of statements, drawn from the reductive class.⁹

However, anti-realism should not be identified with reductionism: reductionism is neither necessary nor sufficient for anti-realism. It is not necessary since there is no reductive class for the disputed class of mathematical statements (*viz.*, those mathematical statements quantifying over an infinite domain).

WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED METAPHYSICS?

Evidence for a mathematical statement is proof or computation. Yet a proof is a proof *of* a mathematical statement. Hence the notion of a proof is not intelligible independently of the notion of a mathematical statement, and thus cannot constitute a reductive class for mathematical statements.

Similar considerations hold for statements about the future or the past. Part of the evidentiary basis for statements about the past is memory, yet a memory is always a memory of a past state of affairs, so cannot be characterized independently of the past. Part of the evidentiary basis for statements about the future is intention, yet an intention is always an intention to do something in the future, so cannot be characterized independently of the future.

Reductionism is not sufficient for anti-realism, since it is possible to take a realist view of statements of the reductive class. In such a case, the truth of a statement of the disputed class may be true in virtue of the truth of some statement or set of statements of the reductive class, but since we are realists about the reductive class, we must be realists about the disputed class.

We will examine the motivation for anti-realism in due course. But it may be useful to look in some detail at two realist/anti-realist case studies which Dummett offers – one about character, the other about the past – in order to get a sense of the dispute and of the various moves open to realist and anti-realist. Dummett describes the case of character as one in which ‘very few people would seriously adopt a realist attitude.’¹⁰ As we shall see, this is far from clear.

CASE STUDY I: CHARACTER

The character trait in question is bravery. In setting up the example, Dummett makes two simplifying assumptions. First, he assumes that there is no vagueness involved in the application of the predicate ‘brave’. Any response to a dangerous situation can be classified either as brave or as not brave. Second, he assumes that a single brave action is enough to justify the ascription of the character trait of bravery to an agent. Neither assumption is true, but Dummett thinks this no great matter, and simplifies his attempt to illustrate the essentials of the realist/anti-realist dispute.

Let us now ask of the imaginary, and recently deceased, Jones whether he was brave or not. Suppose Jones led a sheltered life at a university and never encountered danger. Thus we have no evidence for ‘Jones was brave’ and no evidence for ‘Jones was not brave’. In that case, says Dummett, ‘Jones was brave’ is true only if the counterfactual conditional ‘if Jones had been exposed to danger, he would have acted bravely’ is true. Similarly, ‘Jones was not brave’ is true only if the counterfactual conditional ‘if Jones had been exposed to danger, he would not have acted bravely’ is true.

The untested Jones

Professor Jones led a sheltered life in his university town, ensconced in his book-lined study, rarely venturing out to those parts of town where ruffians and footpads hold sway. Jones never encountered danger. He was never threatened or attacked himself, nor did he witness such outrages being committed against others. Nothing in his behaviour provides evidence for the truth of 'Jones was brave' or for the truth of 'Jones was not brave'. Nor are we in possession of any method that will enable us to decide the issue by a mechanical procedure in a finite time. Let us suppose, further, that no relevant evidence will turn up in the future. Then, says Dummett, it's not the case that 'Jones was brave' is either true or false. The realist, in contrast, says that 'Jones was brave' is a precise, unambiguous declarative sentence of English, true if Jones had the quality of braveness, false otherwise. Since Jones either possessed that quality or not, 'Jones was brave' is either true or false, even if we have no idea which. Our evidence for a statement is one thing, its truth or falsity another.

As Dummett says, we might have indirect evidence for one of these counterfactuals if bravery was associated with other character traits, and we had evidence that Jones possessed some of the accompanying traits. But let us suppose that we have no such auxiliary evidence. In that case, we have no ground for asserting either counterfactual.

Dummett then makes a further claim: a counterfactual conditional cannot be barely true. If a counterfactual conditional is true, it is true in virtue of the truth of some categorical (non-conditional) statement. As Dummett says, this principle is 'intuitively compelling'.¹¹ We can illustrate this principle in the case of a dispositional property such as solubility, which is best understood in terms of a counterfactual. A lump of sugar is soluble if, and only if, were it placed in water, it would dissolve. This counterfactual is true in virtue of some categorical fact about the chemical structure of sugar.

All of the above, we are assuming, is common ground between realist and anti-realist. The argument now proceeds in either of two directions. The anti-realist reasons that neither of our pair of counterfactuals about Jones is true, since there is no true categorical statement about Jones's actual behaviour that grounds either counterfactual. But if neither counterfactual is true, then 'Jones was brave' is neither true nor false. Hence, we have the distinctively anti-realist thought: 'Jones was brave' is neither true nor false because we have no evidence counting for or against the statement, nor any guarantee of ever acquiring such evidence.

In contrast, the realist concedes that the truth of a counterfactual statement must be grounded in the truth of a categorical statement, but holds that one

WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED METAPHYSICS?

of the counterfactuals is grounded in a true (but unknown) categorical statement about Jones's character. Thus, it may be that the counterfactual 'if Jones had been exposed to danger, he would have acted bravely' is true in virtue of the categorical truth (unknown to us) 'Jones was brave'.

The realist regards the counterfactual as true in virtue of some truth about Jones's character, whereas the anti-realist regards Jones's bravery (or lack of it) as grounded in some truth about his behaviour (hence, if there is no such truth about his behaviour, there is no fact of matter as to whether Jones was brave). The realist assumes that 'Jones was brave' is either true or false, even though we can't know which. The anti-realist assumes that since we can't know which, 'Jones was brave' is neither true nor false.

According to the realist, 'Jones was brave' must *be* either true or false, since the man's character – conceived of as an inner mechanism which determines his behaviour – must either have included the quality of bravery or lacked it.¹² However, Dummett adds, 'only a philosophically quite naïve person would adopt a realist view of statements about character.'¹³ Well, naïve or not, the realist view of the matter is intuitive. We think of psychological characteristics as lying behind and giving rise to behaviour. We behave as we do *because* we are in certain mental states (e.g., we raise our voice because we are angry). Our mental states are not to be identified with our behaviour, but rather cause our behaviour. Equally, we have no difficulty with the idea that, due to self-control or external circumstances, another person may have a certain psychological quality even though it never shows up in his behaviour. In contrast, anti-realism distorts our conception of others' mental states and presupposes a naïve and implausible **behaviourism**. What else but a commitment to behaviourism could motivate the anti-realist's restriction of the relevant counterfactual-grounding categorical statements to those about Jones's publicly observable behaviour?

CASE STUDY II: THE PAST

On one view of future contingent statements, e.g., 'there will be a sea battle tomorrow', such statements are deemed neither true nor false. However, philosophers who hold this view do so, not because of anti-realist considerations, but because they hold that the future is unreal. There are no future facts to make our statements about the future true or false now. Traditionally, a similar view has not been held about past-tensed statements since, on most views of time, the past is real. (See Chapter 5.) However, Dummett thinks that an anti-realist argument can be developed for both kinds of statement, though here we will discuss only statements about the past.

In 'Realism', Dummett briefly outlines how a realist/anti-realist dispute about the past can arise. There are presumably many statements about the past for

which we currently have no evidence for or against, and may never have any evidence (e.g., 'Caesar had eggs for breakfast on his thirtieth birthday'). The realist will insist that such statements, if not defective because of vagueness, ambiguity or reference failure, are either true or false. The anti-realist will insist that, in the absence of present or future evidence, such statements are neither true nor false.

In 'The Reality of the Past', Dummett suggests the following strategy for the realist. The realist can justify his understanding of statements about the past by appealing to truth-value links between present-tensed and past-tensed statements. If I say 'Garrett is in his office', this must have the same truth value as the statement made one year hence 'Garrett was in his office a year ago.' It is impossible that these statements have different truth values: hence the truth-value link. According to Dummett, the realist must say that it is 'from an understanding of the truth-value link, as exemplified in such a case, that we derive a grasp of what it is for a statement in the past tense . . . to be true.'¹⁴

Three points are noteworthy. First, Dummett assumes that, if we were realists about the past, we could be so only by appealing to truth-value links connecting present-tensed statements with past-tensed ones. But why should a realist accept this? To concede this is to concede a distinctively anti-realist thought: that we struggle to an understanding of past-tensed statements from evidence available now or in the future. For a realist, in contrast, 'Caesar had eggs for breakfast on his thirtieth birthday' is a perfectly clear, meaningful declarative sentence, intelligible in its own right to speakers of English. It does not stand in need of truth-value links to give it a determinate truth value.

A pattern is beginning to emerge: in the Jones example, Dummett assumed that statements about other minds must be grounded in statements about behaviour. Now he assumes that statements about the past must be grounded in statements about present and future evidence. Both assumptions distort our understanding of other minds and the past. No realist (or anyone else, for that matter) should accept them.

Second, anti-realism about the past is counter-intuitive. We take it that there is one real, actual past, and it either includes Caesar's having eggs for breakfast on his thirtieth birthday or it does not. How then can it fail to be either true or false that Caesar had eggs on his thirtieth birthday?

Third, there is a further oddity. We are supposing that there is no present or future evidence that might bear on 'Caesar had eggs for breakfast on his thirtieth birthday'. The anti-realist claims that the statement expressed by this sentence is neither true nor false. Suppose that we have evidence that Caesar had eggs for breakfast on his thirty-first birthday. Then we are entitled to think of this statement as either true or false (since we now have evidence for its truth). But is it not odd that two such similar statements should differ so markedly with respect to their possession of a determinate truth value?

WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED METAPHYSICS?

Anti-realism about mathematical statements is not implausible in this way. The anti-realist will allow that mathematical statements ranging over a finite domain, however large, can legitimately be thought determinate in truth value. Statements ranging over an infinite domain, for which we have neither proof nor counter-example, cannot be thought of as determinate in truth value. Thus, the anti-realist allows that 'The first billion billion even numbers are the sum of two primes' is either true or false, even if no one has actually verified or falsified it, since it could be verified or falsified in a finite time using a mechanical decision procedure. But Goldbach's conjecture – every even number is the sum of two primes – cannot be thought of as either true or false since, at present, we have neither proof nor counter-example and no guarantee of ever acquiring either. Here, at least, there is a categorical difference between those statements to which an anti-realist is willing to grant determinate truth value, and those to which he is not. Anti-realism about the past allows no such demarcation.

ANTI-REALISM: MOTIVATION AND ASSESSMENT

As will have become evident from the foregoing, the anti-realist project is generated from considerations to do with meaning and truth. But what considerations exactly? In his earlier article, Dummett says little beyond the following: for the anti-realist 'the meaning of a statement is intrinsically connected with that which we count as evidence for or against the statement.'¹⁵ He is a little more forthcoming in his later article. There the anti-realist:

maintains that the process by which we come to grasp the sense of statements of the disputed class, and the use which is subsequently made of these statements, are such that we could not derive from it any notion of what it would be for such a statement to be true independently of the sort of thing we have learned to recognize as establishing the truth of such statements. . . . In the very nature of the case, we could not possibly have come to understand what it would be for the statement to be true independently of that which we have learned to treat as establishing its truth: there simply was no means by which we could be shown this.¹⁶

It is hard to feel the force of these considerations. Consider again Goldbach's conjecture that every even number is the sum of two primes. This is a conjecture for which we have, at present, neither proof nor counter-example. Since the even numbers form an infinite series, there is no guarantee that we will ever obtain either. It is thus a conjecture which is in dispute between realist and anti-realist. Some of Dummett's remarks give the impression that the anti-

realist must hold the sentence ‘every even number is the sum of two primes’ to be meaningless. If meaning is tied to evidence, and we have no evidence for or against this sentence, then is it not meaningless? However, this is not Dummett’s considered opinion, which is just as well since the sentence obviously is meaningful.

Dummett’s complaint is not that the sentence is meaningless, but that we have no conception of ‘what it would be for such a statement to be true independently of the sort of thing we have learned to recognize as establishing the truth of such statements’ (in this case, a proof).¹⁷ In the absence of evidence for or against, and no guarantee of acquiring such evidence, we cannot think of the conjecture as determinately either true or false. In his earlier paper, Dummett expressed this by saying that we should regard a disputed statement, such as Goldbach’s conjecture, as neither true nor false. However, this is amended in the later paper to the claim that we are not entitled to assert that Goldbach’s conjecture is either true or false (where not being entitled to assert P is not the same as being entitled to deny P). This is a subtle but important shift. It would obviously be absurd to hold that Goldbach’s conjecture is neither true nor false simply because we have, at present, neither proof nor counter-example. We would then have shown Goldbach’s conjecture to be untrue simply because we lack a proof or a counter-example. Mathematical results are not that easy to obtain! Simply refusing to assert that Goldbach’s conjecture is either true or false does not have this absurd consequence.

What of the motivation for anti-realism about mathematics? Why think that our conception of what it is for Goldbach’s conjecture to be true depends on our possession of a proof of it or on our ability to recognize a proof if one were presented to us? Such evidential considerations seem irrelevant to questions of understanding. When I come to understand ‘every even number is the sum of two primes’, I take it, as I take any precise, unambiguous declarative sentence of English, to be making a clear and definite claim about reality. The sentence ‘every even number is the sum of two primes’ represents reality (in particular, that portion of reality consisting of the series of even numbers) to be a certain way. The sentence is true just if reality is that way; otherwise it is false. This captures exactly what is involved in my understanding of Goldbach’s conjecture, and it makes no reference to any evidence I may have for or against the conjecture. These remarks are the merest platitudes, yet they serve to cripple the anti-realist project at the outset. In which case, we are quite entitled to regard Goldbach’s conjecture as either true or false, even though we have no idea which truth value it has.¹⁸

Dummett doubtless conceived anti-realism to be an improvement on A. J. Ayer’s logical positivism.¹⁹ Logical positivism was a theory of (literal) sentence meaning. According to it, a declarative sentence was literally meaningful only if it was either analytic (true or false in virtue of meaning alone) or empirically verifiable. Ayer saw himself as part of the great British empiricist tradition

A. J. Ayer (1910–89)

Sir Alfred Jules Ayer was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford. He became Grote Professor at University College, London, before taking up the Wykeham Chair of Logic at Oxford in 1959. A colourful and controversial figure, he had a wide circle of friends and divided much of his time between London and Oxford. He is undoubtedly the only philosopher to have made a record with Lauren Bacall. One of the leading British philosophers of the last century, fame came early in life with the publication of *Language, Truth and Logic* in 1936. The propositions of metaphysics were declared meaningless since neither analytic nor empirically verifiable. Propositions of logic and mathematics, indeed all *a priori* propositions, were counted analytic. Ethical sentences, such as 'torture is wrong', which are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable, were deemed meaningful by virtue of expressing attitudes or emotions, rather than by stating ethical facts. Though Ayer later modified the stark doctrines of his early work, he never relinquished his empiricist outlook.

stretching back to John Locke, and as a slayer of metaphysical dragons. Logical positivism was certainly an **empiricist** theory, and it was a theory that had implications for the meaningfulness of certain sentences of English. Thus consider the sentence 'everything is doubling in size'. This sentence is neither analytic nor empirically verifiable. Even in principle, we could have no sensory evidence for or against the sentence (since there is no neutral vantage point from which it could be assessed). Hence, logical positivism would have to declare this sentence meaningless. Yet the sentence clearly is meaningful. We know exactly what it says.

One supposed advantage of anti-realism was that it would avoid the consequence that a sentence such as 'everything is doubling in size' is meaningless. Rather, the point would be that we are not entitled to think of the sentence as determinately either true or false. But, on reflection, this is hardly less counter-intuitive. There is no reference failure or vagueness or ambiguity in the sentence. It is a declarative sentence of English, making an intelligible claim about reality. How can reality fail to be either the way it describes or some other way? In which case, we cannot but think of it as either true or false. It may be admirable that Dummett should struggle to keep alive the spirit of the great British empiricist tradition, but it is a lost cause nonetheless.²⁰

ANTI-REALISM DISPROVED?

The above discussion has not been kind to the anti-realist polemic. Unfortunately, things are going to get worse. In addition to the counter-intuitive claims

of anti-realism, and its lack of any plausible motivation, there is a powerful argument against the coherence of anti-realism. The argument was originally due to F. B. Fitch, and first published in 1963.²¹

It is a consequence of anti-realism that there are no unknowable truths. If there were unknowable truths, then a statement could be true, and hence determinate in truth value, even though there was no possibility of us ever coming to recognize it as true. It is precisely such independence of mind from reality that the anti-realist wishes to outlaw. Realism, in contrast, is quite consistent with the existence of unknowable truths.

Thus we can take it that the anti-realist is committed to the following principle:

(KP) For all statements p , if p is true, it is possible to know p .

In order to state Fitch’s argument, we need one further assumption. Although the anti-realist cannot countenance unknowable truths, he must allow that some truths are unknown. This is simply an expression of our lack of omniscience. Unlike God, we don’t know all the truths there are. Despite some ambiguous formulations, Dummett’s anti-realist is happy to allow that there are many truths for which we have no evidence (e.g., because no one has bothered to gather the evidence, or because it would take too long for humans to gather it). Thus, for the anti-realist, although there are no unknowable truths, there are many unknown truths. Let q be such an unknown truth.

Fitch’s proof proceeds as follows (where ‘K’ stands for ‘it is known that ...’ and ‘~’ stands for ‘not’):

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| (1) q and $\sim Kq$ | Assumption |
| (2) Possibly $K(q$ and $\sim Kq)$ | (1) [(KP)] |
| (3) Possibly $(Kq$ and $K\sim Kq)$ | (2) (distribution of knowledge over conjunction and possibility principle) |
| (4) Possibly $(Kq$ and $\sim Kq)$; | (3) (knowledge entails truth and possibility principle) |
| (5) (KP) is false; | (4) <i>reductio</i> |
| (6) Anti-realism is false. | (5) (Anti-realism entails [KP]) |

We begin with (1). Premise (1) is an assumption everyone accepts. It expresses our lack of omniscience. Premise (2) follows from (1) by (KP) (substituting ‘ q and $\sim Kq$ ’ for ‘ p ’). (2) says that it’s possible to know $(q$ and $\sim Kq)$. Premise (3) follows from (2) by the principle that knowledge distributes over conjunction, together with the possibility principle. The former says that anyone who knows a conjunction thereby knows each conjunct: from ‘ X knows A and B ’ we may infer ‘ X knows A ’ and ‘ X knows B ’. The latter says that from ‘Possibly R ’ and ‘ R entails S ’ we can infer ‘Possibly S ’.

WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED METAPHYSICS?

Premise (4) follows from (3) by the principle that knowledge implies truth: from 'X knows that A' we may infer the truth of 'A'. This principle is regarded as essential to knowledge, and is one crucial respect in which knowledge differs from 'non-factive' states such as belief (from 'X believes that p' we cannot infer 'p' – X may be wrong).²² The move from (3) to (4) also requires an application of the possibility principle.

But (4) is impossible; hence, some earlier premise or principle must be false. Premise (1) is unassailable; the possibility principle and the principles that knowledge distributes over conjunction and that knowledge implies truth seem undeniable; hence the source of the contradiction must be (KP). So (KP) is false, and since anti-realism entails (KP), anti-realism is false.

Although I am happy to treat Fitch's proof as a straightforward refutation of anti-realism, it has to be said that some philosophers regard Fitch's reasoning as paradoxical and attempt to disclose some fallacy in his argument.²³ To accept Fitch's proof is to accept that if some truths are unknown, then some truths are unknowable. By **contraposition**, this is equivalent to the principle that if all truths are knowable then all truths are known. This principle may be thought counter-intuitive, independently of the realist/anti-realist dispute.²⁴ However, there is no consensus on what is supposed to be wrong with Fitch's proof, and until a consensus emerges it is quite reasonable to treat Fitch's proof as a refutation of (KP) and, hence, as a refutation of anti-realism.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Dummett's anti-realist project has not fared well in our discussion: it is counter-intuitive, inadequately motivated and open to refutation by Fitch's proof. This conclusion bodes ill for Dummett's wider project of attempting to place the theory of meaning at the centre of philosophy. Dummett tried to delineate a new sense in which the world (or some aspect of it) is not independent of us and our evidence-gathering abilities. In this he failed, but others may yet succeed.²⁵

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What is involved in being a realist about some area?
- How would you characterize Dummett's anti-realism?
- Is it plausible to think that 'Jones was brave' is neither true nor false?
- Can you think of any compelling motivation for anti-realism about some subject matter?
- How might an anti-realist reply to Fitch's proof?

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin) 1976, especially Ayer's Introduction and Chapter 1. Ayer's book is the classic statement of logical positivism, and that doctrine can usefully be seen as a (close) ancestor of anti-realism.
- M. A. E. Dummett, 'Realism' and 'The Reality of the Past', in his collection *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press) 1978. Both articles are quite difficult, but 'Realism' is the more accessible of the two.
- D. Edgington, 'The Paradox of Knowability', *Mind*, Vol. 94, 1985. A useful if high-level discussion of Fitch's paradox.
- J. McDowell, 'Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge', in J. Dancy (ed.), *Perceptual Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1988. A nice critique of the epistemological underpinnings of anti-realism. Clearly written, but demanding.
- C. Wright, *Realism, Meaning and Truth*, second edition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell) 1993. The articles in this collection are all concerned with the realist/anti-realist debate but too difficult for the novice. However, Wright's Introduction is indeed a genuine introduction to the debate and can be recommended to the enthusiastic tyro.

INTERNET RESOURCES

- B. Brogaard and J. Salerno (2004) 'Fitch's Paradox of Knowability', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2004 edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Retrieved 31 May 2006 from <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2004/entries/fitch-paradox>>.
- E. Craig (1998) 'Realism and Antirealism', in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved 31 May 2006 from <<http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/N049>>.
- A. Miller (2005) 'Realism', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2005 edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Retrieved 31 May 2006 from <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2005/entries/realism>>.
- B. Taylor (1998, 2004) 'Dummett, Michael Anthony Eardley', in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved 31 May 2006 from <<http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/DD083>>.