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Compelling evidence : a case for a verificationist account of meaning

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COMPELLING EVIDENCE:
A CASE FOR A VERIFICATIONIST ACCOUNT
OF MEANING

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of
Philosophy
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Tracy Russ
May, 1996

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ABSTRACT

COMPELLING EVIDENCE: A CASE FOR A VERIFICATIONIST ACCOUNT OF MEANING

by Tracy Russ

This thesis addresses the topic of the realist/anti-realist dispute within a theory of meaning. The realist considers understanding as manifested when a given sentence is properly called either true or false, independent of our capacity to gather determining evidence to verify it as either true or false. The work of Michael Dummett is used to show an alternative position which considers understanding a sentence as being bounded by the ability to recognize when statements are verified. There is no way that we can recognize evidence-transcendent truth-conditions. This thesis describes an evidence-immanent verification condition, called "verificationism with a difference." The case for evidence maintains that a fuller notion of sense, stronger verification, and rich descriptions can offer a level of justification which is preferable to social acceptance alone.

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CHAPTER 1

EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION STRATEGIES

This thesis is an attempt to focus on the role of justification in the field of epistemology. A special focus of this thesis will be on the anti-realist program of Michael Dummett. A proposal for a type of verificationist epistemic justification theory will be developed. This thesis draws upon the analytic tradition while nourishing alternative epistemologies by considering additional material that argues for the close ties of epistemic justification, truth, social practice, and historical analysis.

This thesis will develop a justificationist argument in which basic beliefs are viewed as being part of our practices and engagements. Beliefs can be justified, or found to not merit justification, based on assessment of what our practice is. Such assessment is to be carried on in a way that Cornel West has described as “thick historical narratives” and “by means of undogmatic social analysis and engaged cultural criticism.”¹ This can be formulated as a form of verificationism, which will be characterized as “verificationism with a difference.” Verification occurs where our understanding of a statement reflects our ability to recognize what establishes it as true. The distinctive character of “verificationism with” is that it includes historicity (historical actuality) and social grounding. It will also be shown to include a more

¹Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), p. 130. Exemplars of such “thick” historical narratives are cited by West as those of Karl Marx, Max Weber, Simone de Beauvoir, W.E.B. Du Bois and Antoino Gramsci.

developed and more effectual theory of sense. Beliefs are part of our experience and are validated through the duration of our experience (sense perception, cognitive and existential experience). Foundational basic beliefs are those referred to as self-justified or as self-evident.² Foundational basic beliefs are also referred to as reliabilist connections of our belief and the world, and perceptual experiences.³ Each form of noninferential justification presents a distinct view, yet each utilizes a form of basic belief. In the foundationalist program we terminate our chain of justification with basic beliefs. Such basic beliefs are noninferentially or immediately justified beliefs. This means that justification of basic beliefs “does not depend on the justification of further beliefs.”⁴ As such, it is the acceptance of foundational beliefs as having sufficient justification which characterizes them for the foundationalist. In the view of verificationism, it is through our use of language and our practices that we formulate what is warranted. In this arrangement, it makes sense to talk of contextually warranted basic beliefs.

²R. M. Chisholm is a proponent of self-justification, as he maintains that foundational beliefs justify themselves and do not require any evidential assistance from beyond themselves. This is seen in his support of the doctrine of “the given.” Roderick Chisholm, *Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964), pp. 261-86.

³David Armstrong and Alvin Goldman both advance reliabilist positions, wherein knowledge is identified with reliable true belief. For Armstrong, beliefs can reliably tell us the truth, similar to how a thermometer reliably tells us the temperature. David M. Armstrong, *Belief, Truth and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). For Goldman, beliefs are justified by how they balance out in a hypothetical normal world. Alvin Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

⁴Paul Moser, ed., *Empirical Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1986), p. 5.

Warrant is understood as meaning a type of appropriateness which pertains to a set of considered beliefs, including one's common sense experience. Warrant applies to one's considered belief that something is the case. Warrant is learned as we learn to understand the sentences of our language, and the appropriate use of language.⁵ Warrant is not equivalent to verification or to justification. Verification generally refers to an empirical method which determines the meaning of a sentence by means of observations which confirm or falsify the sentence. Justification is here to be understood as Dummett characterizes it; "the meaning of a statement... is determined by what has to be done by a speaker to vindicate the claim that he makes by means of that statement."⁶

Verification and justification are distinct from a pragmatic theory of truth, such as in the Jamesian tradition wherein truth is characterized by utility. Per James, "The true, to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as the right is only the expedient in the way of our behaving."⁷ Rather, in the verificationist mode, truth is reinterpreted as, or substituted with, assertibility. Assertion is a linguistic representation or utterance of our judgements. In the context of this thesis, linguistic

⁵In this thesis, warrant is not used in the specialized form advocated by Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga aligns warrant with the proper functioning of our faculties and the role which warrant has within a larger "design plan" which is "aimed at truth." Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Cambridge, MA: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 475.

⁷William James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*, Introduction by A.J. Ayer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 106.

representation and utterance are to be understood as referring to a set of marks which would be understood or recognized as constituting a utterance in the language. It bears meaning and a grammatical structure, and is not a random bunch of signs or noises.⁸ Assertibility-conditions are the type of knowledge of conditions we have which warrant assertion of our statements. What this means is that "understanding a statement is a practical, discriminatory skill" and is "the ability intelligibly to participate in the community's use of its language..."⁹ In the example of what I have characterized as "verificationism with a difference," part of the difference is in that truth, now understood in terms of assertibility, is determined by the meaning of our statements as they arise from their use and conditions of verification in a robust and narrative-inclusive manner. The process of verification is not just an a priori analytic enterprise, it is a discursive practice.

Basic beliefs, and how they are utilized, are a constitutive factor in establishing a theory of meaning. Basic beliefs are traditionally dealt with in epistemology, while a theory of meaning is traditionally dealt with in the philosophy of language. Basic beliefs have an integral and meaningful role in the fabric of justification, much different than the structural, formulaic role assigned to them under foundationalism. Within a foundationalist program, basic beliefs make up the base of the stepladder needed for epistemic ascent. Epistemic ascent results from moving up the scale of justification,

⁸Bernard Harrison calls this quality "the autonomy of language." Bernard Harrison, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 4-5.

⁹Crispin Wright, *Realism, Meaning & Truth*, second edition (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993), p. 358, p. 380.

transitioning from basic or immediate beliefs to non-basic or mediate beliefs, such that the “nonbasic beliefs are justified by appeal to basic beliefs”.¹⁰

Understanding a statement is a practical ability. It is the way we skillfully or not so skillfully participate in a communal use of language. In “verificationism with a difference,” the process of verification is not just an analytic enterprise, it is a discursive practice. Conditions of verification are well-done where they are carried out in a robust and narrative-inclusive fashion.¹¹ This process assimilates contextual and pragmatic elements of a general utility, and arises from the practical nature of understanding a language. Contextual elements include the bounds put into effect by our abilities, such as how adequately our assertions respond to our contexts. Using language involves an implicit practical knowledge such as an awareness of when and how a sentence is used appropriately or is adequately established. This recognition is what warrants the determination of verifiability of the declared sentence, and supports a verificationist conception of meaning. Any such determination will be infiltrated to varying degrees by our evidence. There will be situations where there simply is not enough relevant evidence to call a sentence determinately verifiable. These can be referred to as environmentally constrained sentences, or as cases with an evidence deficiency. There also will be cases which develop based on our

¹⁰John Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1986), p. 20.

¹¹Nelson Goodman makes moves in this direction with his notion of rightness where “rightness is a matter of fitting and working... fitting is neither passive nor one-way, but and active process of fitting together.” Nelson Goodman and Catherine Elgin, *Reconceptions in Philosophy & Other Arts & Sciences* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), p. 158.

skills or abilities in noticing, utilizing, and appropriating relevant evidence. For as one could argue, as the detective is surrounded with clues, we are always surrounded by evidence.

Recognizing evidence-transcendent truth-conditions is an ability we simply do not possess. Recognizing evidence-immanent verification conditions is part of our language use, and exists within our domain of real abilities. When we are exercising our use of language, we rely on the fact that meaning is public, and that meaning is manifested in observable behavior. Such recognitional capacity can be formulated something along the lines of establishing demarcations for descriptions. Demarcations are where we set upper and lower bounds, or general parameters or criteria for the situation or system we are looking at. Bounds could be of a variety of types. This assemblage of methods, and has been designated as "verificationism with a difference." The difference occurs by means of a significant involvement of historical actuality and social grounding. The measurement is the enabling of alternative outlooks and practices.

Is a theory of meaning the same thing as a theory of truth? Is the meaning of a sentence equivalent to the condition for the truth of that sentence? Dummett maintains that the meaning of a sentence is not to be understood as its truth condition, where a classical notion of truth is used. The concept of truth is not the central notion in a theory of meaning. Rather, a theory of meaning must be a theory of understanding. A theory of meaning is best formulated in terms of assertibility-conditions. With this, the meaning of a statement is given by the conditions in which it is justifiably assertible.

The verificationist theory of meaning advocated by Dummett is a theory he refers to as a "justificationist theory."¹² It is an epistemology of understanding, and is largely comprised by a criterion of meaning as use. Understanding involves assertibility conditions, and procedures of verification or proof. Understanding is a function of the exercise of abilities we use as language users. A use theory of meaning for a language entails that assertibility conditions are manifested, available publicly, or observable in behavior in specific settings. It is a practical ability of using sentences appropriately in concert with conditions in the world that we are capable of recognizing. It is the conditions under which they obtain (or do not obtain) that justifies (or denies) the assertion of the sentence. Understanding possesses the natural resources of evidence and the various constraints facing users of a language.

While there are undeniably many important disparities between pragmatism and verificationism, a central pragmatist theme parallels the verificationist concern with evidential constraints. This is the well documented concern with repudiating a notion of truth as correspondence to an independent reality, and supporting a view of meaning which develops out of the practical consequences or experiences of the application of our concepts. For example, William James held a style of pragmatism where, "[H]er only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of

¹²Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 475.

experience's demands, nothing being omitted."¹³ The primary untenable precept of metaphysical realism is the incorporation of verification-transcendent truth-conditions. Countering this, forms of anti-realism make use of general empiricist views such that our knowledge of matters of fact are based on experience. This is broadly opposed to the rationalist tradition with its reliance on reason, a priori knowledge, and in contemporary times, the form of objectivity characterized by Thomas Nagel as "the view from nowhere."¹⁴

Meaning is generally understood by Dummett as linguistic understanding, as in the meaning of a sentence. In turn, the meanings of sentences are usually characterized through truth conditions as a knowledge of truth conditions. Here the way we apply 'true' and 'false' have a direct implication for the meaning of a sentence. Truth conditions, from a realist viewpoint, have been defined as "The property of a sentence in virtue of which it is true if a certain situation in the world obtains and not true if that situation does not obtain."¹⁵ On such an account truth conditions pertain to sentences, and are understood as conditions which exist in the world if the

¹³William James. *Pragmatism* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Edition, 1981, first published 1907, p. 38. I also wish to follow Dummett's disagreement with those who are content with providing justification with a stance of "That is simply what we do." Dummett disagrees with such proposals because "... such meaning-theories are incapable of supplying a viable account of linguistic understanding." (Michael Dummett, *Seas of Language*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford Universtiy Press, 1993), pp. 477-478.)

¹⁴Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986.

¹⁵Michael Devitt and Kim Sterelny, *Language & Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), p. 255.

sentence is true, and as conditions which do not exist in the world if the sentence is false. A serious challenge to this realist theory of truth conditions comes from the view of justified or warranted assertion. As Bernard Harrison says, "[T]he shift simply involves reinterpreting the phrase 'the truth conditions of p' so that we take it to mean, not 'What conditions must obtain in the world if, and only if, p is true', but 'What conditions must be met, if, and only if, we are to be justified in asserting p.'"¹⁶

Conditions for justified assertion are varied. Characterizing basic beliefs as constitutive factors in a given justification strategy is not necessarily to say that they are the exclusive factors. The epistemological agent, be it an individual or a community, is marked with a facticity, while also bearing contingencies of various challenges: life-survival-death, the testament of an individual's subjectivity, personality or uniqueness, and the identity of a group are just some examples. Our knowledge encompasses knowing that, knowing how, and knowing others. When emphasis is put on the type of knowing verses what is known, we get a richer, yet still public, set of conditions for deciding which conditions must be met for justified assertion. The most instrumental part of the lesson here is that basic beliefs begin somewhere and with someone; they have particular groundings. Indeed, such is also the case, for the epistemic enterprise on the whole.

Part of what constitutes the grounding are the varying relations of

¹⁶Bernard Harrison, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 67.

contextual dependence. One example is that of an indexical component.¹⁷ An indexical component is a form of reference such that in order to know what particulars are being referenced, one must know who is speaking, and the place and time. Grounding is a situatedness, and can be mapped historically by environment, practices, inheritance, embodiment, involvement with other groundings, emergent properties, and a range of possible other coordinates. On this reading, there is no way to fully characterize basic beliefs without a consideration of groundings. Understanding a language is made possible by having practical knowledge that is actualized in the actual speaking or use of a language by speakers of the language. Such practical knowledge is an immanent set of abilities to recognize assertability conditions. As Dummett takes pains to illustrate, meaning and use are linked in such a way that meaning cannot transcend use. If one accepts the unavoidable inclusion of contextually-generated basic beliefs, then one may arguably also accept verification conditions. This would entail an environment without verification-transcendent truth conditions. More will be said about this later. A case also needs to be made for how this plan does not fall prey to relativism.

For present purposes, the expression 'verification-transcendent truth conditions' relies on a realist notion where truth may transcend evidence. This describes the case where the meaning of a statement is determined by truth-conditions which are independent of ways in which humans are capable of verifying and which transcend our range of awareness. Dummett

¹⁷David Leech Anderson, "The Truth in Anti-realism," paper delivered at the APA Central Division in Kansas City, May 1994, p. 8.

gives a condensed explanation of the two theories of meaning, (the truth-conditional conception and the concept of assertion condition or verification condition):

What differentiates such a theory [a theory of meaning in terms of verification] from one in which truth is the central notion is, first, that meaning is not directly given in terms of the condition for a sentence to be true, but for it to be verified; and secondly, that the notion of truth, when it is introduced, must be explained, in some manner, in terms of our capacity to recognize statements as true, and not in terms of a condition which transcends human capacities.¹⁸

This brings us to a major question; what does it mean to “recognize statements as true”? An argument will be presented to support the notion that our capacity to recognize and understand statements encompass a practical skill. In the essay ‘What is a Theory of Meaning (II)’, Dummett acknowledges the existence of truth conditions as one aspect of the meaning of any given statement.¹⁹ Dummett puts this in the context of a theory of reference, a theory of sense, and a theory of the force of assertions. As Pascal Engel explains,

...in the same way as for an intuitionist, an object exists (a statement is only true) if there is a way of *actually deciding* its reality (its truth) or having a proof of its existence (its truth); so, in semantics, a statement only has a meaning if it is possible to specify its verification conditions in addition to its truth conditions. In other words, Dummett does not totally reject the concept of ‘truth conditions’; but he substitutes *knowledge of truth conditions* for it.²⁰

¹⁸Michael Dummett, “What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)” chap. in *The Seas of Language* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 75.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Pascal Engel, *The Norm of Truth. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Logic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 133.

Exploring various possibilities of what it means to recognize statements as true, we can use scenarios from different types of conceptions, or ontologies. How do we recognize statements as true in cases where we are realists, anti-realists, or some hybrid? An example of a hybrid realist/anti-realist is the irrealism proposed by Nelson Goodman.

Irrealism does not hold that everything or even anything is unreal, but sees the world melting into versions and versions making worlds, finds ontology evanescent, and inquiries into what makes a version right and a world well-built.²¹

Goodman advocates a notion of rightness rather than a notion of truth. "Rightness" as Goodman intends it includes truth, yet also refers to "standards of acceptance that sometimes supplement or even compete with truth where it applies, or replace truth for nondeclarative renderings."²² Truth, along with utility, relevance, effect, and useability sometimes factor into rightness. Rightness happens within categories, versions, and worlds. As Goodman writes in *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences*, "... truth is an excessively narrow notion. Its range is limited to the verbal and, within the verbal, to statements."²³ Truth is also always

²¹Nelson Goodman, *Of Minds and Other Matters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 29. Nelson Goodman, *Ways Of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1978), especially Chapters I and VII.

²²Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1978), p. 110.

²³He continues, "It does not apply to predicates or clauses or to such sentences as questions or instructions. and it pertains only to what a statement says, taking no account of what it may refer to in other ways, as by exemplification or expression or allusion." Nelson Goodman and Catherine Z. Elgin, *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts & Sciences* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1988), p. 154.

immanent and occurring in a given world or version. In Goodman's reconception, what is important is learning the skill of determining rightness among a broad background of many forms of cognition, symbols and ways of referring.

Simon Blackburn's "quasi-realism" is yet another ontological variation with which we can test or exercise a notion of what it means to recognize statements as true. Blackburn offers his quasi-realism as an alternative to the truth-conditional approach.²⁴ Blackburn intends his quasi-realism as an exploratory method for examining the boundaries of the claims of realism and anti-realism. Other aspects of the quasi-realist view are a "relaxed pluralism" with regard to language games having truth-conditions that hold for them, e.g. mathematical truth, moral truth, etc.²⁵ An interesting element in Blackburn's argument is a "projectivism" where projectivism:

[Is a] mechanism whereby what starts life as a non-descriptive psychological state ends up expressed, thought about, and considered in propositional form....

...we have sentiments and other reactions caused by natural features of things, and we 'gild or stain' the world by describing it as if it contained features answering to these sentiments, in the way that the niceness of an ice cream answers to the pleasure it gives us.²⁶

The backbone of this position is naturalism, where natural science is possible and which "has no first philosophy lying behind it," and a philosopher can "add nothing" to a scientific explanation.²⁷ Naturalism

²⁴Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 54.

²⁵Blackburn, pp. 6-9.

²⁶Blackburn, pp. 5, 152.

²⁷Blackburn, p. 166.

generally implies the position that natural things are what exists, and that the best studies are of the natural sciences. Naturalized epistemology generally refers to the position that epistemology is best conducted as a natural science, similar to psychology.²⁸ At any rate, while I believe that the issue of naturalism has merits and more could be said about it, Blackburn's projectivism is not quite satisfying. While projection in the sense of inductive inference is warranted, Blackburn seem to have a blind-reflex projectivism, one without any control of how projections are made.

Another alternative to realism, antirealism, irrealism and quasi-realism can be found in what Paul Moser labels "ontological agnosticism."²⁹ Ontological agnosticism claims that we may reject realism or any of its direct opponents, and, moreover, that it is possible for us to refrain from a conscious endorsement of any ontology whatsoever. Paul Moser writes:

...[ontological agnosticism results from] concluding that we have no effective-question begging epistemic reason to affirm realism, about objects or essences, if we take seriously familiar skeptical questions about truth and reliability.

...Agnostics recommend withholding judgment on the issue whether cognitively relevant processes ever relay conceiving-independent facts rather than generate their "input" on their own, even input that depends for its existence on our conceiving of it.³⁰

Such a wide variety of forms of realisms and anti-realisms offer varying views on how we recognize sentences as true. The more successful

²⁸Hilary Kornblith, ed., *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 2d ed., (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

²⁹Paul K. Moser, *Philosophy After Objectivity: Making Sense in Perspective* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 5.

³⁰Paul K. Moser, *Philosophy After Objectivity: Making Sense in Perspective* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 41, 43.

theories are those that somehow identify knowledge of truth conditions with epistemic justification. Justificatory strategies comprise the particular shape of any given epistemology. Some justificatory strategies include self-evidence, pragmatism, and inference to best explanation.³¹ A recent critique of inference to the best explanation argues that it is not “a foundational inference rule,” but is contextual and “dependent on substantive empirical assumptions.”³² In this vein, how have theories of justification and theories of truth traveled on different tracks (or have they not)? In his concern over the problem of scepticism, Michael Williams identifies philosophers who utilized one type of theory of knowledge in order to argue against a different type of theory of truth (and visa versa). He writes:

At first, it is not clear why there should be a dilemma with an epistemological theory as one horn and a metaphysical or semantic theory as the other. But there is no doubt that one has been perceived. For example, Schlick makes his argument for a foundationalist epistemology turn on his criticism of the coherence theory of truth. On the other side, his idealist contemporary, Blanshard, argues for his coherence theory of truth in part by arguing against notions central to foundationalist epistemology, such as Russell’s “knowledge by acquaintance.”³³

An example of where one type of theory of knowledge is paired with a different theory of truth can be found where justification functions in a coherence mode, while truth functions in a correspondence mode. Does this

³¹Gilbert Harman, “The Inference to Best Explanation,” *The Philosophical Review*, Volume LXXIV, Number 1, Whole Number 409, (January 1965): pp. 88-95. Also, Timothy Day and Harold Kincaid, “Putting Inference to the Best Explanation in its Place,” *Synthese* 98 (1994): pp. 271-295.

³²Day and Kincaid, p. 271.

³³Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), p. 231.

imply epistemic pluralism? What it does imply is that our tests for truth can be conceived apart from how we view the nature of truth. It also bears the strain of complications between the boundaries and disciplines of epistemology, metaphysics, and semantics.

These questions have bearing upon making a case for a verificationist based epistemology. Verificationism is a process whereby a statement is established as verified or not verified based on the strength of evidence provided for the statement. James Young comments that "[A]n anti-realist theory about meaning states that the meanings of sentences (in some class or classes) consist in the recognizable conditions which warrant the sentences."³⁴ Young is quick to mention that a theory of meaning has immediate bearing upon a theory of truth. "If the meanings of sentences consist in recognizable conditions, then truth cannot transcend what can be recognized."³⁵ What does the claim that "truth cannot transcend what can be recognized" mean? Such an assertion endorses two possible claims. One claim would be that meaning is grounded in assertion conditions not truth conditions, and is part of our experience. Verification-transcendent truth claims are incomprehensible. No source for the conceptual content of such claims can be focused on. How is it possible for us to have a clear concept of something that we have no way to experience, or no access to the state of affairs that would confer truth? So, if we do not have ability to recognize truth-conferring states of affairs, no form of realized understanding can take place.

³⁴James O. Young, "The Metaphysics of Anti-Realism," *Metaphilosophy*, Volume 23, Nos. 1 & 2, (January/April 1992): p. 68.

³⁵Young, p. 69.

Our understanding is largely a part of assertibility.³⁶ Recall Dummett's words about "the disputed class" and "the class of statements." Also recall how the debate about realism relates "not to a class of entities or a class of terms, but to a class of statements, which may be, e.g. statements about the physical world, statements about mental events, process or states, mathematical statements, statements in the past tense, statements in the future tense, etc."³⁷ The disputed class houses any statements that the realist position would endow with "an objective truth-value, independently of our means of knowing it."³⁸ Dummett describes this as follows:

We no longer explain the sense of a statement by stipulating its truth-value in terms of the truth-values of its constituents, but by stipulating when it may be asserted in terms of the conditions under which its constituents may be asserted. The justification for this change is that this is how we in fact learn to use these statements: furthermore, the notions of truth and falsity cannot be satisfactorily explained so as to form a basis for an account of meaning once we leave the realm of effectively decidable statements.³⁹

Dummett goes on to indicate that a consequence of explaining the sense of a statement by stipulating when it may be asserted is that "meaning, and hence validity, is no longer to be explained in terms of truth-values."⁴⁰

³⁶For such an assertibility-condition conception of meaning see Crispin Wright, *Realism, Meaning & Truth*, second edition, (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1993), pp. 357-358. Contrast with decidable statements.

³⁷Michael Dummett, "Realism," in *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 146.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Michael Dummett, "Truth," *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 18.

⁴⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

DUMMETT'S RESEARCH PROGRAM

Discussions of realism and anti-realism can currently be found in many areas of philosophy. As with all great debates, the realism/anti-realism debate may lead one to examine other topics and philosophical presuppositions with eyes sensitized to some new challenges. This debate concerns the relationship between users of a language, and views of truth. In part it also designs or delineates our visualization of what sort of reality we participate in. The following arguments will draw primarily from the version of anti-realism derived from the work of Michael Dummett.

At the outset, however, it needs mention that Dummett writes that he considers his work as an investigation or research program into a range of issues concerned with the dispute over realism. His approach has been to challenge various realist positions. He does not believe that he is proposing a new philosophical position. Instead, Dummett believes that anti-realism is a general thesis or strategy to give an account of the meaning of statements. The bottom line characterization is that when reports are made of Dummett's anti-realist position, they have attributed to Dummett a more specific thesis than he had intended; yet he does accept anti-realist as a general term to

depict his research program.⁴¹

Particular attention will be paid to Dummett's arguments against traditional metaphysical realism, and his recommendations for a type of warranted assertibility, or grounds of assertion. To understand a statement is to know the condition for it to be true.⁴² Is this a type of verificationism? Yes, but is it different from "The Verification Principle" as stated by A.J. Ayer in *Language Truth and Logic*, wherein "a statement is held to be literally meaningful if and only if it is either analytic or empirically verifiable."⁴³ For one thing, Dummett allows that we often do not have what amounts to "conclusive verification".⁴⁴ It would also seem that Ayer, a phenomenalist, was working in a different philosophical school, with different precepts and different worries.

So, in what sense is warranted assertibility a form of verificationism? Is it primarily a criterion of meaningfulness as logical positivists claim, or can

⁴¹Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 453-464, in the essay, "Realism and Anti-Realism". Gideon Rosen, "The Shoals of Language," review of *The Seas of Language*, by Michael Dummett, *Mind*, Vol. 104, Number 415 (July 1995): pp. 599-609. Gideon writes, "The Dummett of popular imagination is a confident anti-realist: the dogmatic purveyor of a sophisticated and comprehensive brand of idealism. As these essays make plain, however, the real Dummett is very different. He's not an anti-realist at all; he's just a guy with an argument..." See pages 599-600.

⁴²Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

⁴³Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language Truth and Logic*, second edition (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1952. Reprint of second (1946) edition), p. 9.

⁴⁴Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. xxxvii, and the essay "Realism" in the same volume, pp., 145-165.

we say that it is a type of epistemic justification? Warranted assertibility is a type of procedure where we can say what evidence we have for claiming some given statement to be verified or not verified. How can we evaluate it as a justificatory strategy? How do we show how it is an essential ingredient in anti-realist programs?

There are many variants of realist positions, e.g., common sense realism about common objects, scientific realism with regard to generally unobservable entities like electrons, and Plato's realism with regard to essences. Realism is also exemplified by the view concerning acquaintance with what we are directly aware such as in Bertrand Russell's view:

..that we have acquaintance with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths. Thus in the presence of my table I am acquainted with the sense-data that make up the appearance of my table—its colour, shape, hardness, smoothness, etc.; all these are things of which I am immediately conscious when I am seeing and touching my table.⁴⁵

Yet another commentary on realism comes from William Alston. He writes, "Realism is here being understood as the view that whatever there is is what is regardless of how we think of it." And, "...where we have said what is true iff what we were talking about is as we have said it to be." ⁴⁶ Alston gives reference to Aristotle's formulation in the *Metaphysics* (1011b,

⁴⁵Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978?, p. 46. First published 1912.

⁴⁶William P. Alston, "Yes, Virginia, There is a Real World", in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Volume 52, Number 6, August 1979, pp. 779-780.

27) that "...to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true."⁴⁷ Also, "In the final analysis what makes our statement true or false is the way things are (the things that statement is about); not the reasons, evidence, or justification we have for it."⁴⁸

In addition to all of the above, another issue can be seen to bear upon the discussion. This issue concerns whether the way in which we are realists or anti-realists may or may not effect our epistemology. For example, whether we are foundationalists, coherentists or contextualists, and what sort of inferences we may see as being apt or inappropriate.⁴⁹ Dummett touches on the framing of the problem as this extended passage shows:

There can be such a guarantee [that every statement is either true or false] only if our notions of truth and falsity in some manner transcend our capacity for recognizing a statement as

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 805.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 780.

⁴⁹The realism vs. anti-realism discussion also may be useful in that its investigations may lend some understanding of basic beliefs. It seems plausible to say that how basic beliefs are justified is similar to how transcendental arguments are made and operate. Not to present an entirely too tidy package—but in a certain light, basic beliefs, transcendental arguments (if we make use of them) and our ontology, all stand and fall within one justificatory mode or environment; e.g. foundationalist through and through, coherentist all around, contextualist here and there. Despite the influence of any given particular system, it is not exactly such a purist development. Does this clearly move us away from contextualist epistemologies? What sort of relations can exist between basic beliefs, transcendental arguments, and ontological convictions? The expression, 'ontological convictions' refers to conceptions regarding existence which we hold either unconsciously (such as that the sun will rise tomorrow) or ontological convictions we arrive at after much meditation (such as a Western person raised in Protestantism, now fully adopting Buddhism). Ontological convictions (contrasted with the 'ontic') are what we see as possessing real existence as compared to what is mere appearance, or what such things as numbers, physical objects, or abstractions may be.

true or false: if we can form a conception of what it is for a statement to be true, or to be false, even when we are incapable in principle of recognizing it as such. Whether we can attribute to ourselves a grasp of such a conception, or whether our impression that we have it is an illusion caused by an illicit transference from the case of more primitive forms of sentence for whose understanding no such transcendental notion of truth and falsity are required, and, in the former case, when we are entitled to claim to have such a conception, is the fundamental question underlying the various disputes concerning realism.⁵⁰

It is worthwhile to look for other places where Dummett addresses this issue along these lines. The preceding passage is concluded by his remarks that the question belongs to the domain of a theory of meaning, and that "the theory of meaning underlies metaphysics."⁵¹ How can we form a conception of what it is for a statement to be true, or to be false while we are not able to recognize them as true or false? With the realist assumption of the verification-transcendence of truth, the notion of an objective reality independent of what we can know is what determines our thoughts to be true or false.

This raises questions about bivalence and the status and application of logical laws. One place where we can see more details on what Dummett may be describing with "more primitive forms of sentence for whose understanding no such transcendent notions of truth and falsity are required" is in his details of mathematical statements in mathematical reasoning.⁵²

⁵⁰Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), Preface, p. xl.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), Preface, pp. xl, 215-247. Michael Dummett, *Elements of Intuitionism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977).

This issue is significant and will be returned to later.

In contrast to these “metaphysical” variants of realism, Dummett advocates what may be called “semantic realism.” Michael Devitt’s metaphysical realism provides a sharp contrast to Dummett’s position. In *Realism and Truth*, Devitt defends realism and a correspondence notion of truth.⁵³ In generating a comparison between the views of Dummett (anti-realist) and Michael Devitt (realist), it is helpful and informative to map out how each employs various terms. Michael Devitt’s definition of realism is stated as “Tokens of most current common-sense, and scientific, physical types objectively exist independently of the mental.”⁵⁴ He accepts the phrase “independently of the mental,” whereas for Dummett and many others, that is a loaded expression deserving analysis, and not necessarily worthy of endorsement. Devitt also includes common-sense realism and scientific realism in his account of realism. In defending common-sense realism, Devitt assumes that it is “obvious that if this defense is good it will carry over to Scientific Realism.”⁵⁵ Such a step may not be obvious, and one that sparks some disagreement. (Devitt tends to want to be a realist in everything.) What is interesting is that he views scientific realism as an outgrowth of common-sense realism. The main distinction between the two forms of realism is that

⁵³Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984). Michael Devitt, “Aberrations of the Realism Debate,” *Philosophical Studies* 61 (1991): pp. 43-63. Alexander George, “On Devitt On Dummett,” *The Journal Of Philosophy* LXXXI, Number 9 (September 1984): pp. 516-527.

⁵⁴Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 234.

⁵⁵Ibid., p.196.

scientific realism asserts the existence of unobservable entities whereas common-sense realism only allows observable entities.⁵⁶ Devitt, contrary to Dummett, chooses to put semantic concerns at the back of the discussion. He puts metaphysical concerns as primary and fundamental, while “[S]emantic issues arise only in our theory of people (and their like) in their relation to that world.”⁵⁷ In connection with this, Devitt mandates that we also keep epistemic issues out of the fundamental discussion.

Now contrast that with Dummett:

Realism I characterize 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. ... That is, the realist holds that the meanings of the statements of the disputed class are not directly tied to the kind of evidence for them that we can have, but consist in the manner of their determination as true or false by states of affairs whose existence is not dependent on our possession of evidence for them.⁵⁸

The phrase “statements of the disputed class” refers to that group of sentences which (claim to) have evidence-transcendent truth-conditions. The attention here is on the meaning of statements, what their truth conditions are, and what the relations of meaning to truth-conditions may be. Note that there is clearly no denial that there is an external world, objects outside our head, and objects existing independently from our attention to them.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁸Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 146.

Can it be that because he is persuaded by an objectivist agenda Devitt does not see the essential semantic and epistemological component to the metaphysical part of realism?⁵⁹ Devitt also sets the realism/anti-realism dispute up in a particular and unusual way. He upholds his realist position wherein truth-conditions have the capacity of being evidence transcendent, and he utilizes a correspondence theory of truth. He maintains that correspondence is a much stronger position than what he considers to be the limited verificationist truth-conditions (i.e. of Dummett).

Devitt misunderstands Dummettian anti-realism. It seems that Devitt believes that Dummett wants to put philosophy of language and understanding as what is most fundamental. But Dummett's position is not just about philosophy of language or semantics it is a metaphysical claim that the realism issue is a semantic study. Dummett's view is that realism is semantic realism. Dummett's semantic elements are integral to his metaphysics in the sense that there is no way to do or to view metaphysics except as a semantic thesis. There is, for Dummett, no other way that we can know the world. Devitt seems resistant to even allowing that that is a metaphysical argument.

Dummett suggests a way to move beyond the metaphysical dispute between a realist and a non-realist view of reality. Without a method to decide which "picture of reality" is right, an alternative route would be to focus on the "picture of meaning."⁶⁰ Here we can work on establishing a

⁵⁹Devitt, p. 21.

⁶⁰Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Cambridge, MA: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 465.

theory of meaning and a process of monitoring and verification, and thereby get a dialog going. Dummett uses the case of an intuitionistic explanation as a model for a theory of meaning which does not have truth and falsity as the central concepts. In this example, the grasp of the meaning of a mathematical statement is an ability to recognize whether or not it provides proof of the statement.⁶¹ From there, Dummett maintains that it is easy to generalize to the non-mathematical case. An Intuitionist case is founded on a non-realist or non-truth-conditional theory of meaning. An Intuitionist view may be contrasted with the classical reasoning (platonist) in mathematics. Platonism affirms that sets and numbers have a real existence apart from our knowledge of them. We discover such truths which exist independent of our minds. Truth is the correspondence between propositions about mathematics and the mathematical structures to which they refer. Platonism makes assumptions about foundations, accepting them as given. Intuitionists, on the other hand, presuppose a basic capacity or intuition where the mind constructs mathematical objects. Such construction must be finite since we cannot comprehend an infinite sequence and have instead a sequence of choices. Intuitionists oppose conferring a transcendental existence (independent of our thought) to mathematical objects. Intuitionistic arguments concern the finite, specific, particular objects which are well defined. The means of constructing an object are established along with any assertion of existence of

⁶¹Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 70.

any such object.⁶²

Dummett casts the realism/antirealism debate in mathematical terms at the beginning, yet he also shows how it reflects back onto a larger, more general conception of meaning. A case is also made for how intuitionism in mathematics has bearing upon epistemology—which Dummett brings into the discussion as “knowledge of meaning, i.e. of understanding.”⁶³ Dummett admits that his utilization of intuitionism differs from that proposed by more traditional intuitionist programs which tend to minimize the significance of language and other forms of conveying thoughts.⁶⁴

Dummett straight away acknowledges language as a tool of communication. Avowing debt to Wittgenstein, Dummett’s whole proposal involves a commitment to the view that our theorizing takes place in a community through the use of language. In keeping with this backdrop, a powerful meaning-as-use argument is presented which supports an intuitionistic notion of proof or verification. When you have such state of affairs that justifies a claim, this state of affairs is an “epistemic,” not “an affective state.” Dummett considers such justification “wholly objective”—as

⁶²Everet W. Beth, *Mathematical Thought. An Introduction of the Philosophy of Mathematics* (Dordrech-Holland: D.Reidel Publishing Co., with New York, NY: Gordon and Breach, Science Publishers Inc., 1965), p. 94. Arend Heyting, “The Intuitionist Foundations of Mathematics,” in *Philosophy Of Mathematics, Selected Readings*, eds. Paul Benacerraf and Hilary Putnam, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964), pp. 42-43. Susan Haack, *The Philosophy of Logics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

⁶³Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 216-217.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 226. Dummett describes them as being “constantly disposed to slide in the direction of solipsism.”

our declaration can be clearly called correct or in error.⁶⁵ On Dummett's interpretation, declarations are viewed as "embodying objective claims but not having independent truth-conditions."⁶⁶ We are to begin or ground our understanding of statements as declarations, and then evaluate them. This is what Dummett has in mind with his advocacy of 'justificationist', rather than 'verificationist' in characterizing his position. An intuitionistic interpretation entails that the meaning of a statement "is determined by what has to be done by a speaker to vindicate the claim that he makes by means of that statement."⁶⁷ The non-intuitionistic type of statement express realist assertions; Dummett labels them "affirmations." These are purported to have truth-conditions independent from what the speaker can have knowledge of.⁶⁸

Dummett had an interest in the topic of how to challenge a law of logic, and intuitionism held appeal due to its promise in that area. In an interview with Dr. Joachim Schulte in October of 1987, Dummett discloses:

Much I learned for the first time when I became a Reader in the Philosophy of Mathematics at Oxford in 1962. I knew something

⁶⁵Michael Dummett, "Realism and Anti-Realism," *The Seas of Language* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 466.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 474.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 475.

⁶⁸What does Dummett find so productive in the formulation of an intuitionistic interpretation? Compared with other possible types of anti-realist positions such as phenomenalism, instrumentalism, neutralism (the view that there is no truth value for contingent statements about the future), intuitionism has a more comprehensive and detailed study of what affects a metaphysical and semantic anti-realism has on logic. See Michael Dummett, "Realism and the Theory of Meaning," *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 322.

of intuitionism before that: I had written a book I never published called *The Law of Excluded Middle*; I had studied intuitionistic logic, and was interested in the basis on which a law of logic could be criticized or challenged. ...At first I felt quite hostile towards intuitionism because of its psychologistic tone. But my interest in the question how one can criticize a fundamental law of logic compelled me to study it in some detail and with growing sympathy, as being the only existing theory of a constructivist or verificationist kind that had worked out the consequences for our modes of thinking and of reasoning.⁶⁹

Intuitionism provides an understanding of a mathematical statement based on what we would need to know in order to provide a proof of it. We can devise a proof for our mathematical statements and that is the notion of truth for them. Mathematical statements stand as declarations, rather than affirmations. Mathematical concepts need not be reduced to another separate language for the proofs. Mathematical concepts can be accepted and used as they are. Thus, intuitionism has benefits of not being formalistic or reductionistic. The fact that intuitionism is not a reductionistic type of anti-realism is significant, because as Dummett's analysis shows, anti-realist forms which have reductionism as an integral part, have not offered viable or effective opposition to realism. This is because the reductionistic move was not absolutely required in confronting realism.

The reductionistic method was to carry out a reduction of the statements at issue to a disjoint class. In contrast, the intuitionist method provided an alternate theory of meaning for the statements at issue, set on

⁶⁹Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), Appendix, p. 175.

non-realist, non-truth-conditional grounds.⁷⁰ Dummett maintains that non-reductionist anti-realist positions comprise stronger positions than their reductionistic counterparts.

If we contend that our practical use of language is characterized by our understanding of how language is established, then on this interpretation it shows that there is no additional, superimposed or transcendent meaning beyond what is verified by the use of the statement. How does Dummett shape his argument for intuitionism? On the one hand, he contends, "[T]he meaning of a mathematical statement determines and is exhaustively determined by its use."⁷¹ The meaning of a statement functions as a tool of communication between people. When two people agree on the use of a statement, they can be said to share in the understanding of its meaning. Our ability to use or respond to the way others use a statement indicates knowledge of meaning. For example, when we learn mathematics, we learn to use mathematical statements as a language, and how we employ such statements shows others that we understand the meaning of the language.

In arguing for the view of meaning as use, Dummett contends that if there were some part of meaning which was transcendent, then that would usher in a portion of private meaning. On the other hand, one could argue that to claim that use fully and completely establishes meaning, could indicate that because a statement could mean whatever we wanted it to mean there is no place for modifying or rejecting any statement. This view may be

⁷⁰Michael Dummett, "Realism and Anti-Realism," *The Seas of Language* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 471.

⁷¹Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 216.

justified by a holism with regard to language. Dummett describes holism in the following manner:

On such a view, it is illegitimate to ask after the content of any one single statement, or even after that of any one theory, say a mathematical or a physical theory; the significance of each statement or of each deductively systematized body of statements is modified by the multiple connections it has, direct and remote, with other statements in other areas of our language taken as a whole, and so there is no adequate way of understanding the statement short of knowing the entire language.⁷²

The holist argues against mathematical statements having an essential meaning in themselves. According to Dummett, holism is committed to the view that meaning simply consists in the place which it occupies in the complicated network which constitutes the totality of our linguistic practices.⁷³ While there is some coherentist or contextualist appeal in such a characterization, Dummett is concerned about the loss of determinate individual content of statements, and is opposed to holism as it is characterized here. The meaning of the components of a sentence, as well as how they are involved in the meaning of a simple or complex sentence as a whole, are both part of a theory of meaning where meaning has a non-transcendent relation to the notion of "use." Dummett writes:

....a theory of meaning, if one is to be possible at all, must accord with an atomistic, or at least a molecular, conception of language, not a holistic one; that it must be full-blooded, not modest, and rich, not austere. It need not issue in any direct ascriptions of meaning; but it must give an explicit account, not only of what anyone must know in order to know the meaning of any given expression, but of what constitutes having such

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 218-219.

knowledge.⁷⁴

Critics of the holistic view may inquire about the possibility of knowing an entire language. How, for instance, could one prove that they knew an entire language? A major difficulty with holism so described, is that without determinate individual content for statements, they become unsuited for verification or rejection.

Dummett prefers the molecular view where "there is, for each sentence, a determinate fragment of the language a knowledge of which will suffice for a complete understanding of that sentence."⁷⁵ However, there is a formulation where holism can allow for observation statements which recount immediate experience, and in this regard they have "a determinate and individual content."⁷⁶ Dummett draws from the analysis of Quine:

[T]hese observations statements lie, in Quine's famous image of language, at the periphery of the articulated structure formed by all the sentences of our language, where alone experience impinges. ...No comparable model of meaning is available for the sentences which lie further towards the interior of the structure: an understanding of them consists solely in a grasp of their place in the structure as a whole and their interaction with its other constituent sentences.⁷⁷

So, for a relatively small number of such observation statements or so called "peripheral sentences," meaning is constructed through observation and immediate experience. Our philosophical instincts may easily encourage

⁷⁴Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 24.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁷⁶Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 219.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 219.

us to jump into the brawl, as an either/or mentality leads us to either defend or discredit holism. What if neither approach suffices? Perhaps it is an issue of context or domain; holism with regard to mathematical statements is not workable, yet in the epistemological context, some sort of holism can be provident. Dummett often refers to how mathematics is one thing, and language is another. So, following the line of thought above, it would seem to be the case that holism is not workable for intuitionist mathematics, yet perhaps holism can have a place in a theory of meaning.⁷⁸

Our language forms a body or unit, made up of sentences. The sentences on the periphery are observation statements. The further you

⁷⁸On the other hand, it opens the debate of computational mental processes. For example, see Jerry Fodor, *The Elm and the Expert: Mentalese and Its Semantics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994). Fodor pits his intentional psychology against semantic holism. Holism supports the view that the content of a thought is made in the way it is situated in a belief system, or that the meaning of a word is devised from its role in the language (or Form of Life). Fodor maintains that such holism is at odds with an intentional psychology wherein psychological states (beliefs, actions, desires) are developed in conjunction with their intentional contents, or an intentional object. He argues, "If what you're thinking depends on all of what you believe, then nobody ever thinks the same thing twice, and no intentional laws ever get satisfied more than once; which is tantamount to saying that there aren't such laws." (*Ibid.*, p. 6.) That is his argument for why semantic holists convert to semantic eliminativism. Contra Fodor, the possibility of having intentionality not constrained in such fixed intentional laws, may offer an alternative. His form of intentionality seems to be dependent upon an exclusivity which is anti-historical, separatist, modular but with no cohesion as to project. He argues that holism is diffuse, yet a counter-argument could state that such strict intentionality results thought being effectively and exclusively dependent upon the intentional object of the moment. The other issue deeply connected with this, is his argument for externalism in semantics. In the crude sense (cut broadly), Fodor is using the term externalism to express a priority for the world in statements like, "a thought relating to the world," or a thought is constituted primarily by its relation to the world.

move from periphery observation sentences to interior, more-theoretical sentences, the more understanding sentence is based on their relation to other parts of the language and less on direct observation. How do we justify or give truth-conditions for the theory of language in question? One method would be to conduct a consistency proof for the interpretation of the statements. However, Dummett describes the holist as being not concerned with soundness or with providing justification. A casual acceptance of methods which have worked in the past, satisfies for the holist as enough justification of this type. These are basically on the level of stimulus-response.

CHAPTER THREE

VERIFICATIONISM

Contemporary epistemology can be loosely described as the study of belief, meaning, truth, justification, verification, and the relationships between them. How these elements and the dealings among them are characterized is significantly affected by where one stands relative to the debate between a truth-conditional theory of meaning and a verificationist theory of meaning. In the following pages I will argue for a verificationist theory of meaning according to which the meaning of a sentence consists in its verification. A verificationist theory of meaning is characterized by situations where we know the meaning of a sentence when we are able to recognize it as verified or falsified, whenever the relevant conditions obtain. The practice of being able to recognize sentences as being established or refuted can involve linguistic and observational components. Just as proofs in mathematics are the vehicles by which statements are established as true, verificationism describes our capacity to recognize when the truth of statements has been established. This involves our use of sentences in our language, and inferential procedures or inferential connections between sentences.⁷⁹ As Dummett states it, a verificationist theory of meaning is where:

...the meaning of each sentence is given by specifying what is to be taken as conclusively establishing a statement made by means of it, and what is conclusively falsifying such a statement, and so long as this is done systematically in terms only of conditions

⁷⁹Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 70-71.

which a speaker is capable of recognizing.⁸⁰

What happens to the notion of truth in a verificationist theory of meaning? It is plausible to think that within a verificationist scheme, any notion of truth will be a relativistic account, or at least highly pragmatic. Dummett, however, secures a notion of truth with a notion of validity as truth-preserving.⁸¹ A notion of truth maintains importance within a verificationist scheme in virtue of its relationship with deductive inference. We are not always so fortunate as to be in a position where we have direct verification or direct and conclusive evidence for establishing the verification of statements. It is commonplace to employ the operations of deduction and deductive arguments. These can give conclusive, albeit indirect verification, and involve a notion of truth that is not identical to direct verification. Dummett reminds us that even within intuitionistic mathematics there is a notion of truth which cannot be identified with our having a proof for the mathematical statement.⁸² We can have a concept of truth within our verificationist theory of meaning such that the notion of truth will not be the controlling factor. The meaning of a sentence is conferred through an act of verification employing our ability to recognize statements as true. The meaning of a sentence is not given in terms of the truth of the sentence, nor is the notion of truth an evidence-transcendent one that is beyond our ability to recognize it.

What are the components of such recognitional capacity? What import

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 74.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid., p. 75.

can it have for a verificationist theory of meaning? In general, recognitional capacity refers to a practical ability to use a sentence appropriately, contingent upon conditions which if they obtain (and whose obtaining we can recognize), will then justify the verification or refutation of the sentence. Crispin Wright has referred to this condition as one in which truth is essentially evidentially constrained. In one formulation: "If P is true, then evidence is available that it is so."⁸³ This nice and simple principle is, however, disturbed by the issue of negation. If no evidence is available, then P would be false, and the negation of P would be true. This case would seem to be more in line with the conception of realism as Dummett frames it, in that we can understand sentences as being true or false, independently of any evidence we have, and irrespective of any ability or capacity we may have to verify or refute it. In contrast, a verificationist alternative could propose that in cases where there is no evidence, or not enough evidence to say whether P is true or P is false, we will need to accept the state of affairs that no effectual evidence is available and leave it at that.

Wright brings in what he calls "the standard Negation Equivalence" as a de facto ingredient, which goes as follows: "It is not the case that P" is true if and only if it is not the case that "P" is true.⁸⁴ Wright's way of exploring this is to seek "a way to reconcile the Negation Equivalence with an insistence that truth is evidentially constrained and the admission that not every issue can be guaranteed to be decidable, even under epistemically ideal

⁸³Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 41.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 40.

circumstances. "⁸⁵

Wright carries the argument through. "If no evidence is available for P, then evidence is available for its negation." This makes an assumption that there is evidence (in principle or in practice) to either prove P or to disprove P. This assumption is based on the law of excluded middle, which maintains that propositions of the form "A or not-A" are true. This is otherwise stated as the principle of bivalence, where every statement is either true or false. If we do not have as a premise that evidence either is available or is not available, then it may be possible to block the equation where absence of evidence for a statement is taken as being equivalent with evidence for negation of a statement. This leads Wright to the conclusion that if truth is evidentially constrained, then a revision of classical logic is required.⁸⁶ This, in turn, leads him to establish a position which he terms superassertibility. This is a variant of warranted assertibility. A sentence has warranted assertibility when there exist reasons to assert a sentence, or to support the assertion of the sentence; thus it is relative to a given state of affairs or information. Superassertibility is different than forms of idealized assertibility. One form of idealized assertibility was proposed by Hilary Putnam as "a true statement is one that could be justified were epistemic conditions ideal."⁸⁷ Putnam writes, "It is the picture that truth comes to no more than idealized rational acceptability. ... All I ask is that what is proposed to be "true" be *warrantable* on the basis of experience and intelligence for

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁷Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, James Conant, ed., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. vii.

creatures with "a rational and a sensible nature."⁸⁸

Rather than building upon a notion of idealized warranted assertibility, Wright looks to "ordinary carefully controlled investigation...which justifies the statement, and...once justified, that statement continues to be so no matter how much further information is accumulated."⁸⁹ This type of assertibility is characterized by statements being justified by arguments or states of affairs, and then continuing to be justified, even as the arguments develop or improve. Justification will be stable throughout any enhancements to the warrant-conferring circumstances. What Wright seems to be imposing is a robustness to the notion of warranted assertion, or verification.

Superassertibility is a property of a statement "which 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."⁹⁰ The nature of the improvement involved is such that it does not carry with it the parameter of an ultimate limit or idealized circumstances. This is a kind of best explanation method. What this affords is some criteria from which one can choose among alternative explanations. A best explanation method is exemplified by 'the inference to the best explanation' or a form of abduction or inference. In Gilbert Harman's formulation, "one infers, from the premise that a given hypothesis would provide a "better" explanation for the evidence that would

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁸⁹Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 47.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 48.

any other hypothesis, to the conclusion that the given hypothesis is true.”⁹¹

What can be said of such moves to bring in notions of superassertibility and idealized warranted assertion? While arguably very distinct, and even opposites of sorts, both superassertibility and idealized warranted assertion are modes of supervaluation. Supervaluation can be described as a form of meta-language standing in relation to an object-language. It would seem that even as the case is made against having truth as a central and controlling notion, that some sort of theoretical replacement is brought in. It can be argued that these types of moves are misguided, in that they do not contribute to the productivity of a theory of meaning. It is not clear how they can have any bearing on what it is that a speaker knows when he or she understands a sentence or a linguistic expression. If understanding a sentence is on a par with knowing the conditions that must obtain for that sentence to be verified, how can a superassertible or idealized assertibility condition help at all? On the contrary, the strongest meaning theory is one sourced in the capacity of speakers of a language to recognize conditions which obtain, when they obtain. When we understand an expression, we know the meaning of the expression. No higher level court of appeal is needed. The distance between evidence-transcendent claims and claims of superassertibility or idealizations, is conspicuously fuzzy. This runs along similar lines to the alluring position of internal realism, which attempts to have its cake and eat it too. As Putnam characterizes it:

‘Truth’, in an internalist view, is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability—some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs

⁹¹Gilbert Harman, “The Inference to the Best Explanation,” *The Philosophical Review* Volume LXXIV, Number 1, Whole number 409 (January 1965): p. 89.

with each other and with our experiences as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system—and not correspondence with mind-independent or discourse independent states-of-affairs.⁹²

Rather than look for validation or support for our notion of verification or warranted assertibility by means of meta-level tricks, we can look to the theory of meaning itself and find sufficient support. In Dummett's view, a theory of meaning should be atomistic or molecular, not holistic. It should not be modest like a translation manual which is filled with predetermined meanings to sentences, and as such not built around language as an active and central theme. The particular form of verificationism to be described here contains a rich notion of sense, building upon the manner in which justification attributes a particular sense to a sentence. Drawing from the philosophy of language, the sense of a sign is its "mode of presentation," while the reference is the object.⁹³ A theory of sense is here linked with understanding.

Dummett discusses Frege's theory of sense and reference, depicting some illuminating characteristics regarding a theory of sense.⁹⁴ Connections can be made with the importance of a theory of sense for developing a verificationist argument. According to Dummett "...the theory of sense has

⁹²Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 49-50.

⁹³Bernard Harrison, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

⁹⁴Michael Dummett, *Frege. Philosophy of Language, Second Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). Michael Dummett, *The Interpretation of Frege's Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 116-144.

not only to specify what the speaker knows, but also how his knowledge is manifested.”⁹⁵ A fuller expression of the notion of sense, would allow a more descriptive, and thus arguably a better or stronger verification. A theory of meaning is composed of a theory of reference, a theory of sense, and a theory of force. The theory of meaning is a semantical relationship between a sign and an object. A theory of sense refers to what a speaker knows when he or she know the meanings of expressions in a language. The sense of an object is a description of it or a way we recognize it. It is what we recognize when we understand it, or the mode of presentation. In this regard it can be viewed as extensible or expandable. For example, the name ‘Las Vegas’ refers to the city of Las Vegas. The sense of ‘Las Vegas’ is given by a description such as the lighted desert, or the main city of Nevada. By extension, sense is a part of our communal public language and is involved in how words are used as a language. Two names (the Morning Star, and the Evening Star) can have the same reference and different senses. The theory of force is an account of the possible types of linguistic behavior or elements, such as posing a question, or making a claim. Dummett agrees with Frege’s distinction between sense and reference, yet he makes an additional claim.

Frege’s argument is that the theory of reference does not fully display what it is that a speaker knows when he understands an expression—what proposition is the object of his knowledge. I have here endorsed that argument, but have, in addition, gone one step beyond it by maintaining that, since the speaker’s knowledge is for the most part implicit knowledge, the theory of sense has not only to specify what the speaker knows, but also how his knowledge is manifested; this ingredient in the argument here used for the necessity of a theory of sense is not

⁹⁵Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 85.

to be found in Frege.⁹⁶

The distinction between sense and reference is characterized such that the sense of an expression is what confers new information, associates concepts, presents cognitive content, and assists in the communicative power among speakers of a language.⁹⁷ This is knowledge or information that is acquired when we know the meaning of a sentence and accept it to be true.

A close connection exists between the sense of our sentences and the means we have of recognizing the truth value of or truth conditions for sentences. The actual means we have of recognizing truth value will be a key element in a justificationist (or verificationist) theory. The public aspect of meaning is such that both the acquisition and manifestation of meaning must be observable. There must be something shown in the behavior of one who knows the meaning of a sentence. The knowledge must be manifest in use, and recognition is an observable practice. Neil Tennant describes this process of recognition as a "successful and observable exercise of appropriate recognitional capacities."⁹⁸ Tennant clarifies this process of recognition of meaning and understanding of truth conditions:

The predicate '... is a brother' is the result of existentially quantifying the relation '... is a brother of—'. To say that John is a brother is to say there is someone of whom he is a brother. The two-place relation is primitive; the apparently simple one-place predicate is revealed, by this analysis to be logically complex. The same holds for '... is true'. It is the result of existentially quantifying the relation '... establishes-as-true—'. To say that A

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

⁹⁸Neil Tennant, *Anti-Realism and Logic: Truth as Eternal* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 129.

is true is to say that some construction (in mathematics, some proof; in other areas of discourse, some body of evidence presented in a particular way) establishes-as-true the statement A.⁹⁹

Tennant goes on to make the additional point that there is “a tightly constitutive back-and-forth between words and world.”¹⁰⁰ The exercise of establishing-as-true reiterates the shift that Dummett’s analysis invokes. This is the shift of how we can effectively recognize something as verified when appropriate conditions obtain, verses an evidence-independent postulation of the truth of that something. The central notion becomes one of verification rather than of truth.¹⁰¹

In contrast, so-called verification transcendent sentences have no observable verification procedures which could verify them. However, according to the metaphysical realist, verification-transcendent sentences may be conferred the status of being true or false, even though we may never be in a position to recognize either condition. The truth-conditions realist claims the right to be able to make the designation of truth or falsity where no evidence exists, based on the privilege of metaphysical realism.

Many questions arise. One question concerns the mostly still unsettled terrain of just what it is to recognize when an instance of truth or falsity has been established or obtains. This calls to the fore the dilemma of how the

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 131

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹Pascal Engel, *The Norm of Truth. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Logic* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto, 1991), p. 133. Neil Tennant, *Anti-Realism and Logic: Truth as Eternal* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 5.

world is known, and how the social world or communal understanding is made. Recalling such alternatives to realism as irrealism or the world-making of Nelson Goodman mentioned in the earlier portion of this paper, we could add other proposals. One proposal comes from the work of Hilary Putnam who claims that "the mind and the world jointly make up the mind and the world."¹⁰² Other options implicate the constructivist/objectivist debate in that they baffle the question; do we create or discover the world? What are the standards, if any, for what is involved in recognizing something as true or false? Dummett seems to suggest that we recognize truth and falsity in some manner which linguistic practice and implicit knowledge make possible. The relations and connections between linguistic practice and implicit knowledge point to some transference and trafficking between what is linguistic and what is epistemological. A theory of meaning is really a theory of understanding a language. Perhaps some of what Dummett has in mind is indicated by his reflections:

I now think that a knowledge of a language has a substantial theoretical component; better expressed, that the classification of knowledge into theoretical and practical (knowledge-that and knowledge-how) is far too crude to allow knowledge of a language to be located within it... Secondly, the classic examples of pure practical abilities, like the ability to swim, are those in which it is possible, before acquiring the ability, to have a fully adequate conception of what it is an ability to do. By contrast, there is a clear sense in which it is only by learning a language that one can come by a knowledge of what it is to speak that language, just as it is only by learning how to play chess that one

¹⁰²Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. xi. Nelson Goodman, *Ways Of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1978). Idit Harel and Seymour Papert, eds., *Constructionism* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1991), pp. 1-12.

can come by a knowledge of what it is to play chess. Knowledge of a language is therefore not a pure example of a practical ability.¹⁰³

In order to learn and use a language, we require a certain manifold (interactive world). When we learn a language, our world becomes structured in a particular way and it is perhaps in this regard that "meaning is use" can be interpreted. For a verificationist theory of meaning, knowing when it is appropriate to assert a sentence involves knowing the conditions and contexts in which the sentence occurs. The way that speakers use a language consists of a range of "abilities to recognize or to verify the truth conditions of the sentences that they use."¹⁰⁴

The issue becomes one of how we establish the verification or falsity of statements and how conclusively we do so, rather than what it is for sentences to be true or false. This is in agreement with Dummett that, "the central notions of a theory of meaning must, therefore, be those of verification and falsification rather than those of truth and falsity."¹⁰⁵ One by-product or environmental element would be a possibly larger body of statements acknowledged to be undecidable.

An undecidable sentence is simply one whose sense is such that, though in certain effectively recognizable situations we acknowledge it as true, in others we acknowledge it as false, and in yet others no decision is possible, we possess no effective

¹⁰³Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. x.

¹⁰⁴Pascal Engel, *The Norm of Truth. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Logic* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 130.

¹⁰⁵Michael Dummett, *Frege. Philosophy of Language, Second Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 467.

means for bringing about a situation which is of one or other of the first two kinds. Instead of appealing to hypothetical faculties, which we do not possess, conceived of by analogy with those we do possess, which would enable us to convert such an undecidable sentence into a decidable one, we should describe things as they actually are.¹⁰⁶

Under a truth-conditional or metaphysical realist framework, undecidable sentences could be said to be true or false, even though we are unable to recognize them as such. This reflects the semantic principle of bivalence which states that a proposition either has the value true or the value false. In other words, every sentence is determinately either true or false, independent of any means we have of knowing what its truth value is. Regarding the case of bivalence, interesting arguments range from claiming that realism insists on bivalence, anti-realism rejects bivalence, to maintaining that bivalence is not the pivotal issue between assertibility and truth.

Dorothy Edgington, in her essay "Meaning, Bivalence, and Realism,"

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 467-468. There are sentences which are in principle, undecidable. We can, however, characterize them into types such as those involved in the subjective conditional, the past tense or other inaccessible blocks of space-time, and quantification over unsurveyable or infinite totalities. See Dummett's "What is a Theory of Meaning (II)."

offers a cogent and fairly balanced discussion of some difficult points.¹⁰⁷ Edgington ends up with a twist on the verificationist program by offering a proposal for a "realist assertibility-conditions theory of meaning." Her proposal centers around her concern to retain bivalence because of the practical benefits it offers in making inferences, its usefulness in probabilistic reasoning, and in making propositions by establishing its negation as inconsistent. She believes in the rule of inverse relation where "[T]he justification for asserting '-A' varies inversely with the justification for asserting 'A'."¹⁰⁸ She admits that this commits her to bivalence, which in her estimation classifies her as falling within a realist framework.

Her main tack is to show that conclusive verification is a myth, and to review how assertibility-conditions are defeasible, demonstrating that there can be no conclusive grounds for assertion. This leaves her with a defeasible assertibility-condition. Dummett has since made motions in the direction

¹⁰⁷Dorothy Edgington, "Meaning, Bivalence and Realism," *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Volume LXXXI, 1980-1981, p. 154. For others who discuss the issue of bivalence and whether it is a pivotal criterion for realism or not, see: John Wright, "Realism, Verificationism, and Underdetermination," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Volume XXIII, No. 4, 1985, pp. 503-529; S.D. Guttenplan, "Meaning and Metaphysics," in *Meaning and Interpretation*, Charles Travis, editor, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp. 177-200; and, John McDowell, "Truth Conditions, Bivalence and Verificationism" in *Truth and Meaning*, Gareth Evans and John McDowell, eds., Oxford, 1976.)

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 168. Her position is within what she calls probabilistic semantics. "Both intuitionist logic and epistemic probability theory could be seen as motivated by a (quite inevitable) gap in classical logic: given one's state of information, many propositions are neither provable nor refutable. The intuitionist objects to Bivalence, given the gap, and changes his logic. The epistemic probability theorist, by treating of a weaker relation between propositions than proof, closes the gap." *Ibid.*, p. 172.

that perhaps "bivalence should not be taken as a sufficient condition for realism." In this case, Dummett is proposing "the weaker principle that every unambiguous statement must be determinately either true or not true (let me dub this the principle of valence)."¹⁰⁹

To sum up a bit, the bottom-line problem which the previous arguments address is the conviction that, at this point in our understanding, there can be no theory of meaning or of truth that can have a basis in a truth that is without any evidence. If correct, it follows that an alternative account becomes necessary. This conviction is supported by the belief that a theory of truth and a theory of justification have an important relationship, and that in the showing of the relationship, much will be told about epistemology. Working through these theories is a challenge, and an ongoing, live philosophical issue.

Perhaps it is worthwhile to, at least once in a while, ruminate on the situation that Dummett's example shows. His stance is ecumenical in that he maintains that the two theories of realism and anti-realism should not be in conflict with one another; he approaches it as a "research program" wherein "Neither is a worked-out theory: the justificationist principle is an unavoidable starting-point, the truth-conditional one no more than a hoped-for goal."¹¹⁰ It remains to be seen just what can be derived from such an interesting prophesy. At this point in the lesson, we begin with the justificationist principle, as that is where it all must start.

¹⁰⁹Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.) See the essay, "Realism and Anti-Realism," p. 467.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 473-474.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPELLING EVIDENCE

In an essay entitled, *The Source of the Concept of Truth*, Dummett advocates conducting a research program, yet clearly and strongly challenges proponents of the established tradition to more fully explicate the realist conception of truth to which they pledge allegiance. Dummett sees that the realist notion of truth is embedded in even the most pre-theoretical parts of our understanding of our use of language. His claim is that the status of this notion of the concept of truth is inadequately argued for, and hence it illegitimately lords over our philosophical landscape.

A theory of meaning is a theory of understanding, or what someone knows when they know a language. Learning the meaning of a concept or sentence is to learn how to use it and to make warranted assertions regarding it. Sentences have meanings in as much as we can state the evidence for the beliefs that they express. Meaning is use of language in a public arena. The truth conditions of a sentence are recognized as obtaining in the instances when they do obtain. If a sentence has truth-conditions, they must be manifestable in our behavior and in communication through language. Is linguistic understanding possible through any such grasp of evidence-transcendent truth conditions? No. When the truth conditions of a sentence are undecideable—they are just that; indeterminate.

Dummett makes an analogy of mathematical statements with empirical statements. He puts good force and faith into the promise of using intuitionism in mathematics as a model for a broader theory of meaning. It

may be possible to criticize Dummett for that. As one commentator points out regarding this aspect of what he refers to as the “Dummettian Case for Anti-Realism”:

The problem is that the relatively sharp notion of intuitively acceptable proof in the mathematical case corresponds to the much messier notion of empirical warrant in the general case. The central challenge for the anti-realist who is not content simply with the destructive phase of The Case is therefore to provide a corresponding “justificationist” theory of meaning of each of the interesting empirical cases; and here the problems are considerable. For example, it cannot be said that to understand a sentence about, say, the past is to know what observations in the present would conclusively verify it, since conclusive justification is impossible in such cases. Nor can it be said that to understand a sentence is to know everything that would count as *prima facie* grounds for asserting it. For whether *P* counts as evidence for *Q* is nearly always an empirical matter—a matter of scientific expertise, broadly construed—and not something one knows simply by being a competent speaker of the language.¹¹¹

Dummett views the status of (anti)realism such that that he holds it as a semantic notion rather than a metaphysical notion. This is one of the big gaps which appears between the interpretation of someone like Michael Devitt and that of Michael Dummett. When one sees Dummett’s analysis showing how language is where our misunderstandings of truth occur, then it makes perfect sense that language is where the problem is resolved—rather than being solved in metaphysics.

The challenge to Dummett’s position posed in the quote above, also reflects the reasoning that knowing a language is a minimal form of knowledge. In contrast, empirical evidence is much more; it is scientific and

¹¹¹Gideon Rosen, “The Shoals of Language,” review of *The Seas of Language*, by Michael Dummett, In *Mind*, Vol. 104, Number 415 (July 1995): pp. 601-602.

connotes a skill level of expertise. It is empirical and substantive.

The realist/anti-realist debate can be viewed as a dispute about a theory of meaning, or more specifically, as an effort to understand what it means for a sentence to function informatively. The realist would consider understanding as being manifested when a given sentence is properly called either true or false, independent of our capacity to gather relevant, determining evidence and independent of our ability to verify it as either true or false. In comparison, the Dummettian-inspired anti-realist would consider understanding a sentence as being bounded by the practical ability shown by using such sentences in a responsive way to the context at hand. Using such sentences involves a recognition of when and how a sentence is used appropriately or adequately established. However, the verification conditions here will be heavily constrained by our evidence. There will be cases where there simply is not enough relevant evidence to call a sentence determinately true or false, and thus it may not always be possible to commit to bivalence. If our evidence can not supply us with the fodder to determine if a sentence is true or false, and if evidence-transcendent truth-conditions are unacceptable to us, then bivalence will no longer have its traditional logical force.

Several threads follow. One is that our epistemology is de facto constrained by evidence, or by what we can recognize. There is no convincing portrait of how we are to recognize evidence-transcendent truth-conditions. We can though, make a case for evidence-immanent verification conditions. A notion of truth as justification dwells in our lived world. We are in effect always constrained by evidence. In some ways we may be

hampered by evidence. This would be so in situations where our evidence fostered suspicions regarding its accuracy, was wildly contradictory, scant, or inconclusive. There may be other situations, however, where we may benefit from being constrained by evidence. Such positive constraints can be viewed as demarcations for descriptions. Such constraints encourage us to look at the richness, descriptive depth, quality, character, and the narrative of a segment of evidence. This area in particular holds great promise as an area where epistemology may evolve. A richer notion of sense can also be developed. This may be found to relate to recent trends in philosophy regarding a reappraisal of objectivity, and greater inclusion of the forces of care and human agency. There are many forms of human agency, and each individual and group has specific experiences. Context and historical situatedness have much to offer in a reevaluation of justification. With an evidence-constrained world, whether bivalence holds or not is decided by the issue—by the evidence—and not by means of a distanced perspective where we decide what logical get-up we think we want to keep or throw out. Sentences are decidable or undecidable based on evidence for them. Bivalence is acceptable for decidable sentences, and just does not apply to undecidable sentences. Likewise, aligning truth and justification with evidence and verification, entails that we cannot go along with identifying truth with social acceptance, as in some types of pragmatism. There may be instances where evidence and acceptance are distinguished by a very thin line, and evidence does have an ingredient of acceptance. However, the case for evidence maintains that it is still better to make a case, to describe and explain, rather than to go with social acceptance alone.

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