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Knowability paradox, decidability solution?

William Bondi Knowles

Philosophy Department, University of Warwick, Warwick, UK

Correspondence
William Bondi Knowles, Philosophy Department, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK.
Email: wbk1994@gmail.com

Abstract

Fitch's knowability paradox shows that for each unknown truth there is also an unknowable truth, a result which has been thought both odd in itself and at odds with views which impose epistemic constraints on truth and/or meaningfulness. Here a solution is considered which has received little attention in the debate but which carries prima facie plausibility. The *decidability solution* is to accept that Fitch sentences are unknowably true but deny the significance of this on the grounds that Fitch sentences are nevertheless decidable. The decidability solution is particularly attractive for those whose primary concern is an epistemic constraint on meaningfulness ('verificationists'). For those whose main concern is truth ('anti-realists'), the situation is more complex: Melia takes the solution to exonerate anti-realism completely; Williamson sees it as completely irrelevant. The truth lies between these two extremes: there is one broad anti-realist commitment to which the solution does not apply, but there is also one, the "fundamental tenet" of anti-realism according to Dummett, to which it does.

KEYWORDS
anti-realism, decidability, Dummett, knowability paradox, verificationism

1 | THE PARADOX

It is obvious, ignoring omniscient deities and strong anti-realisms, that many facts, though easily checkable, are never known. Suppose both (a) that my sock drawer contains fifty-five socks and (b) that this is never known, and let 'P' name the conjunction thus supposed to be true. So P is, by assumption, true. But it couldn't be known to be true. If it were, then conjunct (b) would be known, hence (b) would be true, hence (a) would not be known, hence P would not be known after all. So P cannot be known even in principle; not by us, not by anyone or anything.

The unknowability of truths like P has been claimed to be strange because such seemingly ordinary truths should not be in principle inaccessible. It seems implausible, Edgington says, that 'hosts of very mundane facts should be in principle unknowable'.[1] Like a proofless mathematical truth P is certainly not, nor does it concern "elusive" objects purportedly outside possible cognition or anything else which might be classed in the Weird category. Unknowability should not come so cheaply. The unknowability of P has also been claimed, with greater frequency, to cause at least prima facie problems at the very general level for two important philosophical theses: one about truth, one about meaningfulness.[2] The paradox is often discussed against the backdrop of Dummett's verificationist anti-realism, which combines these theses. That is also the case here, but it will nevertheless be useful to separate the truth thesis from the meaning thesis. The truth thesis is a moderate anti-realism which says, at its most general, that truth is subject to epistemic constraints. It is moderate because it does not say that reality cannot outstrip what is known, just that reality must in some way be open to inquiry. Such anti-realists might thus concede that an unperceived tree in the woods really makes a sound when it falls (and that it exists); they would be more doubtful of a tree outside our cosmic horizon. The meaning thesis says, at its most general, that there is an epistemic constraint on meaningfulness (of the cognitive, truth value-ensuring kind). In accordance with common practice this view will be referred to as 'verificationism', though the name is for reasons to be considered misleading.

The knowability paradox is therefore potentially significant for multiple reasons. But does the significance survive under scrutiny, or is the knowability paradox merely a technical problem to be solved without making any significant concessions? The solution considered here is to accept P's unknowability and deny its significance on the grounds that P is nevertheless decidable. The decidability solution has received some attention in the literature but is by no means prominent; for example in Brogaard and Salerno's survey article it is cited in the bibliography but not in the text, and it receives no discussion in Salerno's recent edited anthology on the subject.[3] No sustained attempt to judge the extent to which it succeeds as a solution is conspicuous in the literature (neither for nor against). Here the aim is to provide that assessment. Quick rejections of it from Williamson and others are, it will be seen, especially premature.

2 | THE DECIDABILITY SOLUTION

Our example of a Fitch statement is P:

> P: My sock drawer contains 55 socks and this is never known.

By assumption, P is true, and we may allow that P is not knowable (in the face value sense of 'knowable' as having the property of being possibly known, i.e. being known in some possible world[4]). Since P is true it must

[1]Edgington (2010, p. 51).

[2]An early statement of which is in Hart (1979). The result itself is from Fitch, 1963.

[3]Brogaard and Salerno (2019), Salerno (2008).

[4]This qualification is needed due to the common stratagem of saving the knowability of Fitch sentences by re-interpreting 'knowability' in more or less elaborate ways, see e.g. Edgington (2010) or Weiss (2012) or Fara (2010).

be meaningful, hence it constitutes a counterexample to the knowability both of all truths and of all meaningful statements.

P is not, however, a counterexample to the *decidability* of all true statements. P is clearly decidable: first check whether my sock draw does contain fifty-five socks, then reject the first conjunct of P if it does not, or reject, after a moment's self-reflection, the second conjunct if it does. It is an unusual case because such inquiry only has one coherent result, falsify, and one can know this pre-investigation. This feature may make the inquiry seem pointless, but pointlessness does not entail impossibility. It is possible to know P to be false, hence it is possible to determine its truth value, hence it is decidable. It might not be possible to know *that P*, but it is possible to know *whether P*.

It may seem surprising that a statement can be decidable and true and yet not knowable, and inferences to knowability from decidability and truth are present in the debate (see the passage from Williamson below). I therefore stress that Fitch sentences themselves demonstrate the possibility of being true, decidable and yet not knowable. P is (by assumption) true. It is not possible (by concession) to know that P is true. But it is possible to determine whether or not it is true, because it is possible to know it to be false. So even though we are sensitive to whether P obtains, we are not able to recognise that it obtains, when it does. In possible world terms, P is: (a) true of the actual world, (b) not decided in the actual world, (c) known to be false in some possible world, and (d) known to be true in no world. There is no inconsistency in this distribution of facts to worlds.

The mechanism responsible for the breakdown of the entailment from decidability and truth to knowability of P is this: that in the very act of determining its truth-value one thereby causes things to be in such a state that P is false. The same situation occurs elsewhere. Fitch statements are *logically* unknowable even though decidable and true. A statement like 'Nothing is known' would be another logical example if that happened to be true instead of false, and there are also *causally* unknowable decidable truths such as, to use an example from the literature, when the temperature of a body of water is investigated by sticking a thermometer in it, thus slightly altering the water's temperature.[5] In most cases, of course, like when measuring the circumference of the Moon or what have you, this interference between investigation and fact does not occur, and the picture applies of us humans on one side as passive observers and the facts on the other ready to be observed. In such cases the entailment from decidability and truth to knowability holds.

As always when modalising one must avoid admitting illicit assumptions about the actual world. It might be thought that P is not *really* decidable, because if P is true (as assumed), then deciding it involves knowing it, and that is agreed to be impossible. All this shows, however, is that P is not decided in any possible worlds where P is true. This amounts only to relative, not absolute undecidability, and it is a form of relative undecidability without any particular relevance. In the context of verificationism, for instance, it hardly seems plausible that the kind of decidability relevant to the *meaning* of a statement need take into consideration the *truth-value* of the statement. The relative undecidability of P which holds fixed that P is true is especially uninteresting given that the condition being held fixed is one we could, if we wanted, easily overturn: all we would need to do is carry out the relevant investigation. As such, it is akin to the impossibility of my going to the shop tomorrow holding it fixed that I will just be staying home. Just like my ability to go to the shop survives such trivial impossibilities, so does the decidability of P.

In any interesting sense, P is decidable even if true and (absolutely) unknowable. There seems to be no way of reconstructing the paradox to find undecidable truths.[6] The prospect thus emerges of using the decidability of P to solve the paradox on behalf of verificationism and anti-realism, the prima facie promise of which springs from

[5]Weintraub (2003, p. 92).

[6]A confused challenge to this is from Musgrave (1997, p. 495), who proposes to call truths which, like P, are decidable but not knowable 'queer' and assumes (rightly) that anti-realists will still be committed to the knowability of truths which are not queer. He concludes (rightly) that there is at least one truth which is not queer and not known, apparently under the impression (wrongly) that the resulting Fitch sentence will be an unqueer, unknowable truth. Obviously it would be no such thing, indeed in the example used here as the unknown truth (that there are 55 socks in my sock drawer) is not queer in his sense, yet the Fitch sentence P is.

the fact that decidability, being an epistemic notion, can be deployed to articulate an epistemic constraint on meaningfulness and truth. The knowability of all true/meaningful statements might thus be possible to sacrifice. The decidability solution also benefits from its comparative simplicity: no more or less elaborate re-interpretation of 'knowable' is needed, nor does it rely on finding a non-ad hoc restriction of the principle that all truths are knowable to a base class of sentences, which is how Dummett seeks to solve the paradox.[7]

The decidability solution is not absent from the debate. An early (negative) assessment of it is in Routley from 1981, and it is embraced by Melia in a discussion note from 1991. Others have subsequently cited it approvingly in more general treatments of verificationism or anti-realism,[8] but in writings dedicated specifically to Fitch's paradox, the reception has been largely unenthusiastic. Nobody denies that Fitch sentences are decidable, but it has been asserted, often without argument, that this decidability is irrelevant and that anti-realism just is committed to the knowability of all truths.[9] Precisely why such a summary dismissal has been thought appropriate is not easy to tell. It cannot be denied that anti-realists like Dummett and Wright often do state their thesis in terms which would commit them to the knowability of all truths, but that does not show that they must say it; that they cannot make the essential points by reframing their epistemic constraints in terms of decidability.

Williamson recognises that something needs saying about why anti-realists could not state their view in terms of decidability. He claims that the familiar arguments from Dummett and Wright for anti-realism cannot be repurposed for such a statement of anti-realism (see note 21). That is slightly surprising to hear from Williamson, because elsewhere he reconstructs the anti-realist reasoning leading to the knowability of all truths as follows:

> A sentence s as uttered in some context expresses the content that C only if the link between s and the condition that C is made by the way speakers of the language uses; their use must be sensitive to whether the condition obtains; that requires of them the capacity in principle to recognize that it obtains, when it does so.[10]

If the commitment to the knowability of all truths was just the result of this illegitimate inference from their decidability, cutting it loose would of course be of no detriment. The point of mentioning this is not to score a cheap ad hominem point against Williamson; it is to justify a closer look at the different views and their motivations and to work out when the decidability solution applies and, perhaps, when it does not. To this end it will be useful to discuss verificationism separately from anti-realism, because whether the epistemic constraint is imposed on meaningfulness or truth is relevant to how the decidability solution applies.

3 | VERIFICATIONISM

If an epistemic constraint on meaningfulness should be understood in terms of decidability, then verificationism, contrary to what is often claimed in the debate,[11] will be unaffected by the knowability paradox. Beginning with the traditional, Viennese verificationists, it seems overwhelmingly plausible that the intended necessary condition on meaningfulness was not verifiability but instead verifiability *or falsifiability*, that is, decidability. Thus, Ayer said that the criterion for meaningfulness is whether 'any observations [are] relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood.' According to Carnap, 'the meaning of a sentence is in a certain sense identical with the way we

[7]Dummett (2001).
[8]Moore (2012, ch.14), Weintraub (2003, p. 92).
[9]Routley (1981), Künne (2002, p. 163).
[10]Williamson (2000a, p. 100).
[11]E.g. Hart (1979), Mackie (1980), Routley (1981).

determine its truth or falsehood'. Even the most ardent verificationists, the hard-liners from the "right wing" of the Vienna Circle, accepted the qualification, with Schlick saying that 'stating the meaning of a sentence amounts to [...] stating the way in which it can be verified (or falsified)'. The point has also been acknowledged by opponents of verificationism, including Russell, who reported the verificationist principle as being that 'what cannot be verified or falsified is meaningless'.[12]

It is not just a historical fact that traditional verificationism was often stated in terms of decidability; that is also, on reflection, how it makes most sense to state the view. An initial consideration in this direction is that the aim of verificationism is to give an epistemic constraint on meaningfulness, and meaningfulness is neutral with respect to truth or falsity; the meaningfulness of a sentence leaves it completely open whether it is true or false. One would expect this neutrality to be matched by the epistemic constraint, and then it is neither verifiability nor falsifiability alone which is needed, since these are obviously geared towards respectively truth and falsity in some way, but their disjunction: decidability.

And this initial expectation is borne out by the arguments. If one stated the criterion as verifiability alone, then a statement which was falsifiable but not verifiable would fail the test of meaninglessness, while its negation would pass it (since falsification is equivalent to verification of negation), with the absurd consequence that a statement could be meaningless and its negation meaningful. That this consequence would not come to pass if it is was impossible for a statement to be falsifiable without being verifiable is of little importance, for that is by no means impossible. The positivists themselves cited universal scientific laws as examples which could be falsified but not (by some high bar) verified.[13] There are also examples which are logically unverifiable but still falsifiable, such as mathematical falsehoods. $2+2$ is 5 in no possible world, hence it cannot be true, hence it cannot be known; yet we can (and do) know it to be false, so it is falsifiable. This example might not seem overly significant for traditional verificationists, who tended to distinguish between the meaning of non-contingent and contingent statements, but (a) some modern verificationists working in the positivist tradition do not recognise this distinction,[14] and (b) there are logically unverifiable but falsifiable statements in the contingent realm, e.g. 'Nothing is known'.

The argument extends to other ways of understanding the epistemic constraint on meaningfulness. Aside from the complete divergence in basic philosophical outlook, one of the main differences between Dummett and the traditional verificationists is that Dummett did not actually deny the meaningfulness of all undecidable sentences. One of the reasons he gives for this (here in the context of intuitionism) is that 'our understanding of a statement consists in a capacity, not necessarily to find a proof, but to recognise one when found.'[15] The relevant epistemic ability is thus a form of conditional verifiability, but for the same reasons as above this will need augmenting with a disjunctive clause. It is unfeasible to account for understanding of necessary falsehoods by our conditional capacity to recognise proofs of them when found, because our "capacity" to recognise a proof when found of, say, '$2+2=5$' is obviously of little substance: it seems defensible only on the grounds that the condition for its exercise (the finding of a proof) is unsatisfiable, but then it could hardly constitute our understanding of the sentence. More plausibly, then, a disjunctive clause should be added, such that our understanding of a statement would consist in a capacity to recognise a proof when found *or* to recognise a disproof when found.

There are thus good reasons for understanding the epistemic criterion for in terms of decidability rather than knowability. That is how verificationists of various stripes have stated their view, it is what is natural in order to match the truth neutrality of meaningfulness, and it is required to account for the meaningfulness of statements which can only be verified or falsified, not both.

[12]From respectively: Carnap (1936, p. 420), Ayer (1936, p. 8), Schlick (1936, p. 341), Russell (1956, p. 275).
[13]E.g. Hempel (1950).
[14]Weintraub (2003).
[15](1996, p. 70). It might be of interest that Dummett often states intuitionist semantics in terms of decidability himself, e.g. at several points in the introduction to Truth and Other Enigmas (1978). At other times he states the epistemic constraint in quite different terms, for example when he considers which of falsifiability and verifiability should be the main concept for a non-truth conditional semantics and concludes, in a rather surprising Popperian twist, that the meaning of a sentence is its method of falsification (1996, p. 84).

4 | ANTI-REALISM

Anti-realism is a view about truth, requiring, at its most general, that there be an epistemic constraint on truth. Truth is not "transcendent" on this view, and *pace* realists there can be no true undecidable statements in mathematics (possibly like Goldbach's conjecture) or truths about "elusive" objects outside of possible cognition. Other problem cases, familiar from Dummett's writings but which depend on what kind of modality is invoked, include counterfactual conditionals, quantifications over infinite totalities and statements about the past.

Melia claims that the unknowability of the (assumed) truth P leaves anti-realism intact, since P is still decidable. This is overly general. He is right that there is one broad type of anti-realist commitment to which the decidability solution is applicable, but there is also one to which it is not. The difference lies in where the epistemic constraint is imposed. One sort of anti-realism claims only that the bivalence of a statement is an epistemic matter; the other that it is an epistemic matter that the statement is true as opposed to false (or false as opposed to true). The first anti-realism thus sees it as an epistemic question only whether a statement is determinately true or false. The second sees it as an epistemic matter which truth-value the statement has.

Evidently the decidability solution cannot apply to the second kind of anti-realism. Decidability, being truth-value neutral, is not an appropriate notion to explain that a sentence is true rather than false. To say that something is decidable is only to say that *a* truth-value can be determined, not *which*. If the decidability solution applies to anti-realism at all, it must therefore be to the first commitment. The aim of this section is to determine whether this is indeed so.

Dummett, incidentally, held both commitments. That the bivalence of a statement is not an epistemic matter is how he influentially defined the "fundamental tenet" of realism; the fundamental tenet of anti-realism is that realism is false, hence that a statement has a determinate truth-value independently of whether we can 'decide' it.[16] Simultaneously he held an epistemic account of truth, according to which, roughly, truth is justified assertibility. Since such an account gives a sufficient condition for being true, it falls on the second half of the distinction, leaving no way for the decidability solution to apply to all parts of Dummettian doctrine. There is, however, no obvious need to hold the second commitment just because one holds the first. Denying bivalence for undecidable statements certainly does not entail any particular view on what it takes for a statement to be true as opposed to false. The question of this section may be taken as whether there is some other reason why someone who held the first commitment would be compelled to hold the second. If there is no such reason, there is also no reason to deny that the decidability solution applies to Dummett's "fundamental tenet" of anti-realism. This would be of particular interest since it is a common opinion among commentators that Dummett's view can be improved by dropping the commitment to (what they take to be) implausible accounts of truth in terms of justified assertibility.[17]

The anti-realist commitment under consideration, then, is that only decidable sentences are determinately true or false. The reason given for the non-bivalence of undecidable sentences is not that they are downright meaningless, but there is one meaning component they are claimed to lack: truth conditions. Thus it is not denied that decidable sentences have truth conditions (although their possession by a sentence is to be analysed in terms of speaker dispositions to assert or deny the sentence – Dummett: 'we may say that the speaker's knowledge of the condition for it to be true consists in his mastery of the procedure for deciding it'[18]). What is denied is that this extends to undecidable statements, our understanding of which is instead to be framed in terms of verification and falsification conditions. The truth-conditional approach as a general theory of meaning is thus rejected.

(A caveat: not all anti-realists of the relevant kind take their arguments to entail a rejection of truth-conditional account of meaning. The alternative, preferred by Wright, is to retain a truth-conditional theory of meaning but

[16]Dummett (1981, p. 466). See also McDowell (1976, p. 48), Loar (1987, p. 81).
[17]See e.g. Kirkham (1989, p. 210), Rumfitt (2015, p. 127).
[18](1996, p. 46).

understand truth in the anti-realist way as something like justified assertibility.[19] This is an issue on which Dummett is well-known to have vacillated, with a resulting split in how he should be interpreted, and more broadly in how anti-realism should be formulated.[20] Here no stand is needed on this issue. Discussions of it largely turn on the merits of an epistemic necessary-and-sufficient condition on truth. Since the aim here is to consider an anti-realism without a commitment to such an account, anti-realism can justifiably be taken as rejecting truth-conditional semantics.)

Nothing in this formulation of the first anti-realist commitment requires the knowability of all truths. On the contrary, the description of the "fundamental tenet" of realism from Dummett explicitly employs decidability as the operative epistemic notion. This is natural for the same reason as in the previous section: the possession of a truth-value is neutral to which truth-value is possessed; hence one would expect the epistemic criterion to be similarly neutral. On this conception of anti-realism, the world is an essentially investigable place, and where there is no decidability there is no fact of the matter to whether it is true or false. Reality does not extend that far; the statement, though meaningful by some metric, is not truth-conditional, and bivalence will not apply. This suffices for a contrast with typically realist intuitions concerning problem cases in mathematics and metaphysics, and since it imposes a necessary condition on truth or falsity, it *a forteriori* imposes a necessary condition on truth. Fitch sentences, being decidable, pose no threat to this anti-realism.

Still, it may be that a commitment to the knowability of all truths is incurred not in the statement of the view, but in the argument for it. That is Williamson's claim:

> The arguments advanced by Michael Dummett, Crispin Wright, and others for the weak verificationist thesis [that all truths are knowable] cannot be reinterpreted as arguments merely for the weak decidability thesis [that all bivalent statements are decidable]. The point of those arguments is to identify a difficulty in the supposition that speakers' use of a language sometimes associates a sentence with a truth-condition that can obtain even when they have no disposition to recognize that it obtains. This supposed difficulty is in no way met by the concession that, in some circumstances in which the truth-condition does not obtain, speakers recognize that it does not obtain. For that does not explain why the sentence expresses a truth-condition which does obtain unrecognizably in other circumstances.[21]

The essential premise of this passage is that anti-realist arguments identify a difficulty in a sentence possessing a truth-condition which can obtain even when we have no 'disposition to recognize *that* it obtains'. Can the arguments instead be understood as identifying a difficulty in a sentence possessing a truth-condition even when we have no disposition to recognise *whether* it obtains?

The best-known arguments for anti-realism come, as Williamson says, from Dummett and Wright, and among them the so-called manifestation argument seems to be agreed to be most potent.[22] Here is how Wright states the outline of the argument.[23] Wittgenstein's insight that meaning is use enjoins that understanding a sentence must be manifested in certain practical abilities. When knowledge of a sentence's meaning is knowledge of truth conditions, this implies that understanding must manifest itself as a recognitional capacity with regard to those truth conditions. In decidable cases this is unproblematic. For statements like 'This tastes sweet' and 'This tastes salty', for instance, our understanding manifests itself, in Wright's words, as 'the ability to recognise the taste of

[19]Wright (1987, p. 38).
[20]Kirkham (1989, p. 210) reports inter alia Devitt and McGinn as seeing Dummett as a truth-conditional theorist; Appiah and Rorty are cited as supporting the opposite interpretation. Exegesis aside, it is commonly believed that anti-realism is better understood as rejecting truth-conditional semantics, see note 17.
[21]Williamson (2000b, p. 290).
[22]As reported in Lievers (1998, p. 199), Skorupski (1988, p. 509).
[23]Wright (1987, pp. 16–8).

the samples by placing them in one's mouth, and thereby to verify or falsify descriptions of their taste'. But what can be said for an undecidable sentence? We know what to do with such a sentence to a limited extent, like recognise its logical consequences or 'appraise (inconclusive) evidence for or against it'. But descriptions of these abilities, says Wright, make no mention of truth-conditions. Hence the meaning of undecidable sentences cannot be understood in terms of truth-conditions.

What the argument establishes, if anything, is disputed. The point here is that, on this statement of it, which is copied directly from Wright at relevant junctures, the Wittgensteinian requirement of truth-conditional meaning is that it manifests itself as the ability to tell *whether or not* the truth-condition obtains. In other words, *pace* Williamson, it rules out truth-conditional treatments only for undecidable sentences, not for those, like P, which are decidable and true but not knowable.

Elsewhere, admittedly, Wright describes the Wittgensteinian requirement of truth-conditional meaning as that it manifests itself in an 'ability to detect an obtaining truth-condition as such.'[24] This would wrongly rule out the truth-conditionality of Fitch sentences. But the argument would be no better with this premise than the other – in fact, it would be worse. The argument here mirrors that of the previous section. How could our understanding of, say, '$2+2=5$' be manifested by an ability to detect its obtaining truth-condition as obtaining? '$2+2=5$' has a truth condition which never obtains, not in any possible world, hence an ability to detect it in counterfactual circumstances where it obtains is at best vacuous: there are no such counterfactual circumstances. What we can do with '$2+2=5$', of course, is manifest our understanding of its truth condition by carefully considering its implications, spotting a contradiction, and denouncing it as impossible. Hence the Wittgensteinian requirement should be stated as an ability to recognise something as true *or false* – that is, decide it.

Should the reader, like Wright's Cautious Man, have little faith in the modality invoked in this argument, another is available. The question is whether the speaker's practical abilities manifest a grasp of the sentence's truth conditions. It seems that in the case where someone is able to decide the sentence, that is, when they are able to carry out the decision procedure for the sentence and reliably judge the result of that procedure, that in itself seems sufficient to be credited with such a practical ability. It is true that for cases like P one lacks the ability to recognise its 'obtaining truth condition as such'; but it's not as if the truth of P paralyses us or blocks our investigative powers. One doesn't lose the capacity to determine P's truth-value in circumstances where it is true; one just doesn't exercise that capacity.

Neither in statement nor in its most important motivation, then, does this anti-realist commitment involve the knowability of all truths. The conclusion of this section is therefore that the decidability solution's supporters and critics alike have mis-estimated its power. It is not right, as Melia's titular claim has it, that the decidability solution leaves anti-realism "untouched"; nor is it right, as Williamson thinks, that it does nothing for anti-realism. The decidability solution is available, rather, for one broad kind of anti-realist commitment and not for another. Since the view to which it applies is commonly regarded as definitional of anti-realism, this should be of some interest.

5 | CONCLUSION AND STRANGENESS

The most newsworthy parts of the paper, about how the paradox affects verificationism and anti-realism, are behind us. I wish finally to turn to the appearance that there is something odd about the unknowability of P, and to what the decidability of P might do to combat it. Certainly there is now nothing unexplained in the unknowability of P itself; it is a result of the fact that in investigating whether or not *P* we thereby ensure that not-*P*. The inquiry interferes with the facts being investigated. That is why we cannot know it to be true. In this respect Fitch

[24]Wright (1987, p. 20).

sentences are not alone, other examples of similar phenomena are, as mentioned, 'Nothing is known' and testing the temperature of a piece of water by inserting a thermometer.

What Edgington appears to find strange is how cheap P's unknowability is: how can something so ordinary not even be knowable in principle?[25] From the current vantage point, however, there is nothing strange about the a seemingly mundane truth like P joining the coveted ranks of other purportedly unknowable truths like those about elusive objects or unprovable mathematical conjectures. P's membership of that class is like pool membership at the golf club: just a cheap ticket without access to the main event. What distinguishes the genuinely interesting cases from P is that we can't even reach a decision about them, we can't evaluate them, they're closed off from us. And this is a serious impossibility worthy of the name: we can no more access the supposed facts than exempt ourselves from a law of nature; if we tried, we would fail. None of this is true of P. P as a truth might be inaccessible to us, if by that it is meant that P is undecidable while keeping it fixed that P is true. This is not a serious block to our evaluative powers because the condition being held fixed is one we can alter. An attempt to evaluate P would succeed with minimal fuss.

The decidability solution, in conclusion, is not a general solution to the knowability paradox. But conversely, it does show that the knowability paradox is far from a general problem for those who wish to articulate epistemic conditions on truth and meaningfulness, and thus it helps to unveil the true significance of the paradox.

ORCID


William Bondi Knowles https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7986-0502

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