

# Realism and Anti-Realism Are Both True (and False)

Eric Dietrich  
Philosophy Department  
Binghamton University, USA

## Abstract

The perennial nature of some of philosophy's deepest problems is a puzzle. Here, one problem, the realism–anti-realism debate, and one type of explanation for its longevity, are examined. It is argued that realism and anti-realism form a dialethic pair: While they are in fact each other's logical opposite, nevertheless, both are true (and both false). First, several reasons why one might think such a thing are presented. These reasons are merely the beginning, however. In the following sections, the dialethic conclusion is directly argued for by showing how realism and anti-realism satisfy Priest's "inclosure schema". In the last section and the conclusion, the conscious mind's role in creating realism and anti-realism is discussed. This role further supports the conclusion that realism and anti-realism form a dialethic pair.

## 1. Introduction

Philosophers have been arguing the relative merits of realism and anti-realism of all stripes – metaphysical, moral, scientific, etc. – for a very long time – from at least Protagoras (see, e.g., Jenkins 2005). This longevity alone is reason enough to consider that the two may form a dialethic pair: though contradictories, both may be true (and false).

*Dialetheism* is the thesis that some contradictions, sentences of the form  $p \wedge \neg p$ , are true (while also being false). Such a contradiction is often called a *dialetheia*. In classical logic and standard non-classical ones, contradictions entail all sentences – every sentence is provably true if a contradiction is allowed. This is why contradictions are not allowed. Those who embrace dialetheism deny that contradictions entail all sentences. Consequently, dialetheists embrace logics where contradictions do not entail all sentences. Such logics are called *paraconsistent logics*.<sup>1</sup>

Many philosophers are not dialetheists. But nowadays many at least refrain from dismissing or ignoring dialetheism outright. I argue that the realism/anti-realism contradiction is a dialetheia and that this best explains its persistence. Crucially, treating the contradiction as *true* is

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<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, the review of paraconsistent logic by Priest *et al.* (2018).

not the same as declaring the situation hopeless; indeed, in cases like this, dialetheism is the only way to avoid a council of despair.

After definitions, I present some positive arguments for each horn of the dialetheia. Then I present arguments purporting to show that each horn is also false. Neither of these classes of arguments are apodictic and may in fact underwhelm the reader: arguments for realism seem redundant or pointless (realism strikes one as truer than any premise in an argument for it), and arguments for anti-realism seem to always fall short, since the conclusion is impossible to hold for any length of time. However, these early arguments function as good intuition pumps. And although they are not apodictic, it is instructive to see how much tension the arguments generate when they are arrayed against one another.

Then, in the two following sections I attempt to strengthen our “dialetheic-pair” intuitions by first examining the epistemology of the realism/anti-realism contradiction, focusing especially on Fitch’s “knowability paradox”, then by examining the logic of the contradiction between the two. Finally, to derive the conclusion that realism and anti-realism form a dialetheia, I show that the realism/anti-realism contradiction fits Priest’s “inclosure schema” (Priest 2002). Doing this demonstrates that realism and anti-realism form a *limit contradiction*. Hence, both are true (if false, as well).

In Section 8, I go one step further, making the case that in a certain well-defined sense, realism and anti-realism are the same thesis. Then in the penultimate section, I examine the conscious mind’s role in creating the realism/anti-realism problem. Then I conclude.

## 2. Definitions

### 2.1 Intuitions

Damian Cox (1998) gets a basic intuition behind realism right: that

it makes perfect sense to talk of a God’s eye view of the world, a perfect representation of the world. Other apparently more developed positions – about the existence of universals, the mind-independence of ordinary objects, or the evidence-transcendent nature of truth – come to play a major role in the contemporary debate, but I think much can be gained by concentrating our attention on this central claim of the metaphysical realist.

Without getting into theology, it seems that even the idea of a “perfect representation” is too concessive for the unfettered realist, since a God’s eye view is not merely a perfect representation, rather, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* is simply *the way things are*.

However, since everyone would presumably agree that “things are the way they are”, we immediately start to see that it is not at all straightforward to pin down this intuition in a way that leads directly to fruitful, productive dialogue. If we adopt the narrower ontological formulation of *object realism*, as found in Devitt, that objects *exist independently of the mental*, then (Devitt 1991, p. 14)

some philosophers respond to a statement like [this] with a yawn. They think that nobody – at least, nobody sophisticated – denies realism in that sense. ... According to this response, the traditional doctrine called “realism” is true but boring, and is not to be confused with a quite different but interesting doctrine called “realism”

Pushed in this way, it seems that to make realism interesting, it has to contain an element of negativity: not only is there a way things are, and not only is it mind-external, but additionally it is *not* – what?

To be anything more than a truism, realism needs an antithesis, which brings us to *anti-realism*. The term “anti-realism” was introduced by Michael Dummett; here I will take it to be simply a denial of realism. Anti-realism is imagined by many to be a form of old-fashioned idealism (this is how Nagel (1986, Chap. 6) treats it) – that reality runs no deeper than sense data, and so is, without putting too fine a point on it, “mind-dependent”. Of course, idealists like Berkeley think of themselves as promoting the common-sense view of *reality*. So the issue becomes complicated very fast; the dialectic has an annoying habit of circling around on itself. Dummett (1982, p. 84), for example, says:<sup>2</sup>

An outcome which involves that a philosophical view ... that would ordinarily be taken as a prototype of anti-realism is better regarded as a sophisticated version of realism may seem to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of my proposed analysis of the concept of realism; but I do not think so.

It seems clear that a realist attacking a full-bore solipsist or the like is attacking only a straw man, just as much as an anti-realist has missed the opportunity for serious engagement when construing certain realists as transcendental, as in Quine’s (1953a, pp. 129, bracket p. 14):

The tired nominalist can lapse into conceptualism [“ ... there are universals but they are mind-made”] and still allay his puritanic conscience with the reflection that he has not quite taken to eating lotus with the platonists.

I will try to do better. I am after a realism and its opposite that abstracts away from all the debates in philosophical subfields. I intend

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<sup>2</sup>My conclusion in Sec. 8 that realism and anti-realism are logically equivalent is intended to explain this circularity, among other things.

this realism and its opposing anti-realism to be easily recognizable. Of course, with a debate so old and a literature so vast, and keeping things to a readable length, there is no hope of finding definitions that do not stir controversy and collapse subtle nuances. Nonetheless, I hope to capture something intuitively straightforward about the positions in question.

## 2.2 Objectivity and Intersubjectivity

A possible pivot-point are the notions of *objectivity* and its opposite *subjectivity*. The anti-realist is very impressed with the apparent constraints that locatedness – points of view – place on us. The realist considers these constraints to be ignorable.

A sentence is *subjectively true*, then, if it is true from a possible course of (maybe human, maybe not) experience, called an *epistemic viewpoint*. Taylor (2006) calls *realism* the claim that there is a set of sentences that is *objectively true*, where a sentence is objectively true iff it is true in the union of all viewpoints. To obtain *global* realism, Taylor brings in the further constraint that to this set of sentences cannot be added any more, on pain of inconsistency: the set is maximal. (A dialethic realist can weaken the condition to being maximal with respect to absurdity, rather than mere inconsistency.)

Taylor's formulation is good in the sense that it is intended not to beg questions against either party in the debate. One could worry, though, that his notion of objectivity seems to be equivalent to a very expansive sort of intersubjectivity. Modulo Cox's intuition about realism as a God's eye view thesis, it appears that Taylor is trying to smuggle in the questionable idea that there's nothing more to being epistemically independent over and above robust intersubjectivity. Whether or not this questionable idea is true is probably the hard heart of the debate. So, using it would beg all kinds of important questions.

## 2.3 Official Statement

The formulations I will work with are as follows.

ANTI-REALISM: There is nothing more to reality over and above intersubjectivity.

REALISM: There is something more to reality over and above intersubjectivity.

Put slightly differently, the realist thinks that only objectivity is sufficient for reality, while the anti-realist thinks that intersubjectivity suffices.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Intersubjectivity, on one reading, presupposes the reality of other subjects, other beings with experiencing minds. This reading, then, gives us a weaker form of anti-realism: there really are other subjects of whatever form, the rest is intersubjectively constructed. We can get a stronger form of anti-realism by reading "intersubjectivity"

Definitional note: I slice subjectivity very thinly. To do otherwise in this context would be to beg the question. I cannot just assume that there are non-identical individuals serving as loci of subjectivity, as the term “individual” is usually used. So I apply the term “intersubjectivity” to the individual, too: an individual is an integrated collection of subjectivities (of some complex, structured sort).<sup>4</sup>

Defined this way, realism is a doctrine about *truth* and, correlatively, *ontology*. Anti-realism is also a doctrine about truth and ontology, making just the opposite claims. This will do for now.

## 2.4 The Dialectic From Here

Everyone agrees that reality exists. This is an analytic truth if ever there was one. So wherein lies the disagreement? As Taylor (2006) puts it, realists are urging that some objects have “gold-class existence”, and anti-realists do not so urge. But this is just rough slang, and betrays mostly sentiment. For example, the mathematical anti-Platonist will say that the Platonist believes in some “spooky realm” of etherial objects. But who would sign up for a “spooky” doctrine? The realist does not claim that objects have gold-class existence; the realist merely claims that objects exist. The anti-realist agrees. Since neither party at this point feels very happy about the dialectic, though, there must be some disagreement about wherein lies the meaning of existence.

One core thesis in this paper is that the realist and anti-realist pictures of the world are in some sense *identical*. Both posit a world of objects, that is delineated in some way. The anti-realist draws the line at the limit of subjectivity; the realist draws the line further on, or at least appears to (see Sec. 8). But the pictures come out looking the same. The anti-realist must simply profess confusion as to what that “further” push the realist has given is about; similarly, the realist is certain that the anti-realist is being willfully obtuse, but cannot quite articulate why. I will further argue that the anti-realist’s claims are self-undermining, impinge their own negation (i.e., realism), *and* that the realist’s claims collapse into anti-realism.

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as short-hand for *the experience of intersubjectivity*. On the stronger form, there need be no other subjects, there is only the central self and its experience of other subjects (even philosophical solipists experience others). There is a bridge from the stronger form to the weaker form: one assumes only the experience of intersubjectivity and then from there posits a projective mental process that populates a centered world, centered on the experiencing self. In this paper, the weaker form is assumed. A full explication of the stronger form is for future work.

<sup>4</sup>How this collection is formed must be left unspecified. This is because the collection of subjectivities making up an individual is either *the self* or dangerously close to it. I say “dangerously” because the topic of the self is certainly one of the most vexed in all of philosophy.

I have done my best in a few pages to define the terms, but find that the terms' definitions are exactly the point of dispute. And so for the duration I will be arguing that, in the disagreement between realist and anti-realist, (i) there is no disagreement, and that (ii) the disagreement is not merely a verbal dispute.

In the following section, I present my positive arguments leading to the conclusion that realism and anti-realism are both true. This is followed by more formal argumentation – my negative arguments – that realism and anti-realism are both false.

### 3. The Positive Argument: Both Are True

So I begin by listing some beings, hands to be exact: a left hand and a right hand.

#### 3.1 Realism Is True

To obtain realism, which recall is the claim that only objectivity will do for reality (cf. 2.3), Quine's own criterion (Quine 1953b) – that “to be is to be the value of a bound variable” – does the trick. G. E. Moore (1939) already knew this when he presented his famous “two hands” argument. This is an argument with two true premises, and a valid inference:

1. I have a right hand.
2. I have a left hand.
3. Therefore, there are at least two hands.

Schaffer (2009, p. 357) spins this out into more detail:

Contemporary metaphysics, under the Quinean regime, has focused on existence questions such as whether properties, meanings, and numbers exist, as well as whether possible worlds exist, whether and when mereological composites exist, etc. I will glance at the debates over (i) whether numbers exist, (ii) whether properties exist, (iii) whether mereological composites exist, and (iv) whether fictional characters exist, and will use these examples to suggest that the contemporary existence debates are trivial, in that the entities in question obviously do exist. (What is not trivial is whether they are fundamental.) Start with the debate over numbers. Here, without further ado, is a proof of the existence of numbers:

1. There are prime numbers.
2. Therefore there are numbers.

1 is a mathematical truism. It commands Moorean certainty, as being more credible than any philosopher's argument to the contrary. Any metaphysician who would deny it has *ipso facto* produced a *reductio* for her premises. And 2 follows immediately, by a standard adjective-drop inference. Thus numbers exist. End of story. (Perhaps there are no completely knock-down arguments in metaphysics, but this one seems to me to be as forceful as they come ...)

This makes the point very quickly, by invoking what Schaffer calls *ontological permissivism*. He means this neither as a form of Meinongianism, nor deflationism about ontology, but rather that we should redirect our deep and important inquiries. What *exists* is a trivial matter. The atheist, for instance, should say that God exists; the atheist simply thinks that He is a *fictional* character. The important issue, says Schaffer, is about what is "fundamental".

### 3.2 Anti-Realism Is True

The anti-realist, recall, takes intersubjectivity to be sufficient for reality. The anti-realist *denies* that anything like objectivity can be had. An argument to this conclusion is Quine's well-known *indeterminacy of translation* argument.<sup>5</sup> The idea, recall, is that there may be meaningfully different but equally correct translations of one language into another (or into itself). In the canonical example, the utterance "Lo, a rabbit!" could mean any of the following: there's a rabbit; rabbithood is manifesting itself there; there are undetached rabbit parts. Quine's considered view is that "all objects [are] theoretical .... Even our most primordial objects, bodies, are already theoretical" (Quine 1981); and see Hylton (2010).

What does this mean? It means that the thesis "objectivity is necessary for reality" is itself a highly subjective, indeterminate, and inscrutable bit of verbal ejaculation.

### 3.3 Shifting Points of View

The reader might think that all I have done is replicate some arguments for realism and for anti-realism, and of course such arguments would clash. But my point is deeper than that. I *move* from objectively possessing hands to then seeing that referring to one's hands in an argument for realism ensnares one in intersubjectivity, with the revelation that that is all there is. But now note, I can easily move back to realism by noting that our definition of anti-realism, "there is nothing more to reality over and above intersubjectivity", draws a boundary at intersubjectivity, with

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<sup>5</sup>Of course, many philosophers hold that not much follows from indeterminacy. The tendency of indeterminacy to veer towards anti-realism is one reason for this.

the consequence that there is something more beyond this boundary – the objective, perhaps.<sup>6</sup>

These two are shifts in points of view. To bring this out clearly, I again present two arguments; one showing that anti-realism is true and one showing that realism is true, only this time, using points of view explicitly. Another reason I present my point-of-view arguments here is that I will need this apparatus for Secs. 7, 8, 9, and 10.

I begin by noting that another, only slightly less remarked legacy from Quine is to cast doubt on the indubitable. According to *The Philosophical Lexicon*, the verb “to quine” means “to argue resolutely that something considered obvious doesn’t exist”.<sup>7</sup> In the next two sections, I first quine ordinary, external reality. This gives us my version of anti-realism. Then I quine the quiner, consciousness and all, leaving only ordinary, external reality. This gives us my version of realism.

### 3.3.1 *Quining Reality*

Quining ordinary, external reality is easy, Descartes already showed us how to do it – by using his *method of hyperbolic doubt* (Cottingham 1996). Sit somewhere quiet and imagine that some evil demon is fooling you into thinking that you are experiencing reality, including your body, when in fact nothing even remotely resembling reality and your body exists. It being impossible to *prove* something like this is *not* happening, hyperbolic doubt takes hold. Then all one has to do is remove the evil demon. This is easily done: you just imagine that everything that the evil demon would be doing to fool you, if such a demon existed, is actually just happening to you by chance.

This latter move is straightforward, given that cosmologists say that something pretty much just like this “actually” occurred: the Big Bang. According to cosmology, the entire universe just happened by chance. So, to complete the quining of reality, one need only note that there is no science of cosmology, really, because there is no cosmos. There is only you, whatever that is.

<sup>6</sup>This is the way of all boundaries. Here I mean to be echoing Wittgenstein’s point in his preface to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* where he says

“... in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought)”.

Of course, the realist points out that this case is the mirror image of Wittgenstein’s: by drawing the boundary at intersubjectivity, the anti-realist is trying to avoid thinking what cannot fail to be thought, *viz.*, that there is the objective. See also Priest (2002, p. 191).

<sup>7</sup>The actual definition given in *The Philosophical Lexicon* is “quine, v. (1) To deny resolutely the existence or importance of something real or significant.” This definition won’t work for my purposes. More importantly, this definition does not correctly capture how the verb “to quine” is actually used in practice. For example, in Dennett’s famous paper “Quining Qualia”, Dennett (1988) uses the verb in my sense: he argues resolutely that qualia don’t exist.



If the complications of invoking evil demons and then replacing them with chance are too much, consider perhaps the easiest route to quining reality: *dreams*. Dreams are the ultimate way to discover that one's senses can deceive, and a way also used by Descartes in his *First Meditation*. Again, hyperbolic doubt leaves us without a reliable way to distinguish between dreams and so-called reality. It is then an easy matter to see that neither dreams nor so-called reality has an indubitable claim to being the real reality. To complete the argument, if there were a "real" external reality, it would easily trump dreams by dint of being so much more real; therefore there isn't an external reality at all.<sup>8</sup>

The conclusion of such Cartesian meditations is that your body and the reality it appears to inhabit vanishes. So-called external reality is replaced by (1) you, but what you are is unknown – you are some sort of *res cogitans*, (2) your incorrigible experience of what seems to be reality, and (3) your knowledge that the experience in (2) is *merely* an experience, a dream, signifying nothing beyond itself ... nothing more than that the experience exists. Realism's reality is found to be indefensible in that its existence cannot be proved, or distinguished from its non-existence (whatever the latter would mean). Theoretical parsimony and simplicity indicate that it is prudent to commit only to intersubjective "reality". Hence, anti-realism.

Thus is reality quined.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.3.2 *Quining The Quiner*

Consider the self-reflexive aim of *quining the quiner* – that is, of peeking from the God's eye view that Cox suggests by removing our own consciousness. Clearly, as a goal for a journal article, this is more difficult. Fortunately, the key step can be practiced. What must be realized is that there is no *intersubjective* world because there are no subjects. There are no subjects because there are no minds; no one has a mind at all.

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<sup>8</sup>Austin (1962, pp. 12ff.), asserts that dreams are not illusions, they are dreams. Apparently, Austin neglected Zhuangzi:

"Once upon a time, I dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was myself. Soon I awaked, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man."

But Austin did read Descartes; he just disagreed with him. On what grounds? On the grounds that couching dreams as illusions or deceived senses is not how we ordinarily talk – it was called "ordinary language philosophy," after all. Which in turn leads to the standard objection to Austin and others of his ilk: one cannot do proper metaphysics by adhering to how we ordinarily talk. In any case, here we side with Descartes.

<sup>9</sup>The reader might worry that the anti-realism argued for here is stronger than the one given in the official definitions. But this worry is unfounded because of the way I defined subjectivity – see the definitional notes from Section 2.3.

Everything is entirely “world-dependent”, as it were. What really exists are non-self things and processes. Minds are only an illusion (a delusion, actually). *A fortiori*, consciousness is a delusion. No “one” has ever had qualitative experiences; no “one” ever has qualitative experiences. The key step puts “the reader” in position to “experience” the above realization. (Pay no attention to the words I have to use. They are an artifact of the delusion, merely showing how deep it runs.)

One way to realize all this is to move to what Nagel has called *the view from nowhere* (Nagel 1986), see also Nagel (1979, p. 208):

... the transition to a more objective viewpoint is not accomplished merely through intersubjective agreement. Nor does it proceed by an increase of imaginative scope that provides access to many subjective points of view other than one’s own. Its essential character ... is externality or detachment. The attempt is made to view the world not from a place within it, or from the vantage point of a special type of life and awareness, but from nowhere in particular and no form of life in particular at all. The object is to discount for the features of our pre-reflective outlook that make things appear to us as they do, and thereby to reach an understanding of things as they really are. We flee the subjective under the pressure of an assumption that everything must be something not to any point of view, but in itself.

Another term for this view from nowhere, which Nagel himself uses in the same paper, is the view *sub specie aeternitatis*. The latter term has some minimal claim to being preferred since the world *sub specie aeternitatis* is a centerless world. The view *from nowhere* is in fact a misnomer, brought on by the limitations of language. But those same limitations of language force use of the word “view”, too. Properly understood, *sub specie aeternitatis* entails that there is no location; there is no view. There is just the world, unadulterated and uninterpreted. So, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* is in fact the “view” of no one. Not no one in particular, but no one, period; not nowhere in particular, but nowhere, period.

With the relevant realization in place, a robust realism follows. “At” the “view” *sub specie aeternitatis*, there is the world, and only the world. “At” that “view”, there are no minds, no experiences, and no points of view. All is objective *sub specie aeternitatis*. Of course, the minds and partial views, of cats, dogs, lobsters, worms, African apes, and all other minded beings are “perceivable” from the “view” *sub specie aeternitatis*, but there is no mind *at that* “view.”

And now, it is appreciated how wrong it is to frame realism as the thesis that there is more to objectivity than intersubjectivity.<sup>10</sup> The official definitions were wrong because they define reality (and objectivity,

<sup>10</sup>So the original definitions in the official statement above (in Sec. 2.3) were wrong. Not surprising since, as discussed in Sec. 2.4, the definitions are the heart of the dispute.

for that matter) in terms of intersubjectivity and hence in terms of the mind. Rather, there is just the world; there is just reality, objectively real.<sup>11</sup>

This is not the standard realism “one” “thinks” of when “one” “thinks” of realism. But it will clearly do, since it satisfies the official definition (while revealing the weakness of the official definition, which weakness assumes importance in the next section). It is also, importantly, the direct opposite of the anti-realism established in Sec. 3.3.1. And (except for the annoying scare quotes) is cleanly argued for. Thus are minds and quining quined.

Conclusion: Anti-realism and realism are both true. As noted in Sec. 1, this conclusion is not apodictic; one could object to it, and reject it. But it is a conclusion and thereby worth considering.

#### 4. The Negative Argument: Both Are False

Having cultivated some intuitions to the effect that realism and anti-realism are both true, I now argue the opposite: both are false. I consider several arguments. There is a central argument, though. The structure of this argument to come is simple and reinforces my positive claims: Since realism is the negation of anti-realism, if realism entails its own negation, then anti-realism is true; but if anti-realism entails its own negation, too, then by double negation elimination, realism is true. (For dialetheists, *reductio* is a valid inference.) This then shows not only that both are true, and that both are false, but that (i) realism is true *if and only if*

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Perhaps the reader now will appreciate that stating a realism that moves beyond the objective/intersubjective divide requires beginning with that very divide.

<sup>11</sup>An interesting version of the key step is shown in Douglas Harding’s *On Having No Head* (Harding 1961):

“The best day of my life – my rebirthday, so to speak – was when I found I had no head. This is not a literary gambit, a witticism designed to arouse interest at any cost. I mean it in all seriousness: I have no head. What actually happened was something absurdly simple and unspectacular: I stopped thinking. [...] There existed only the Now ... To look was enough. And what I found was khaki trouserlegs terminating downwards in a pair of brown shoes, khaki sleeves terminating sideways in a pair of pink hands, and a khaki shirtfront terminating upwards in – absolutely nothing whatever! Certainly not in a head.

It took me no time at all to notice that this nothing, this hole where a head should have been, was no ordinary vacancy, no mere nothing. On the contrary, it was very much occupied. It was a vast emptiness vastly filled, a nothing that found room for everything – room for grass, trees, shadowy distant hills, and far above them snow-peaks like a row of angular clouds riding the blue sky. I had lost a head and gained a world.”

As noted, it might take practice to realize that one has no head. If one wants, here are some exercises that might help: [www.headless.org/on-having-no-head.htm](http://www.headless.org/on-having-no-head.htm). There is nothing unusual in this: Gödel’s incompleteness proof can also take practice to see how it establishes its conclusion.

anti-realism is true, and (ii) realism is true *if and only if* anti-realism is false, and vice versa. That is, they are equivalent, and opposed – self-contradictory.

#### 4.1 Against Realism

This is Berkeley’s master argument. Suppose that realism is true. However this is expressed, it is *expressed* – which is to say, the thesis is available only as a cognitive, linguistic expression and nothing more. But realism is precisely the idea that there *is* something more. There is, it seems, simply no way to get at the part of objectivity “over and above” the intersubjective, without doing so in a way that can be completely intersubjectively accounted for. So realism is false.

It might be objected here that though necessarily the *thesis* of realism is expressed (theses being what they are), what the thesis points to, *reality*, needn’t be expressed. But this fails, and for a similar reason. As argued in Berkeley (1713) – see also Priest (2002, Chap. 4) – given the indefinite description “an uncognized bit of reality”, any object it picks out is *ipso facto* cognized. Realism undermines itself in its very enunciation.

As raised in the discussion of definitions, *of course* the anti-realist thinks that “the mind-external world exists”. The anti-realist simply can’t see how this could mean more than something about our cognitive and semantic apparatus. It appears that the sentiment behind realism is either very mundane, in which case it is not the intended thesis, or else very extraordinary, in which case it is not expressible at all, and inconsistent if expressed.

#### 4.2 Against Anti-Realism

Suppose that anti-realism is true. Objectivity is nothing over and above intersubjectivity. Then it is objectively true that objectivity is nothing over and above intersubjectivity. But this claim is not only intersubjectively true; it is a claim about how the world is, over and above subjects. Again, given the indefinite description “an uncognized bit of reality”, we see that to assert the thesis of anti-realism is to transgress the very boundary it seeks to draw. Like realism, it is self-undermining in its enunciation. This is the point made above in Sec. 3.3.

The gist of my argument is Quine’s well-known *Plato’s beard problem* (Quine 1953b). To deny the ontological existence of *X* appears to presuppose the existence of *X*. On its own, this is not a terribly strong move, since it would make *any* negative ontological claim problematic – but in this context, it is a serious issue; it does capture the intuition behind what I want.<sup>12</sup> The move here is also similar to the thought that

<sup>12</sup>Parmenides was among the first philosophers to note this problem with negative

occurs to bright undergraduates when they learn about skepticism: if *nothing* can be known, then that very fact cannot be known, which seems to undermine the truth of skepticism.

Again, I return to the Moorean-style arguments.

1. Berkeley denies the existence of the mind-external world.
2. Therefore, there is a mind-external world.

This inference is valid (at least, given the Schafferian definition of “exists”), and it is important in the special case of ontology itself. After all, isn’t it a triviality that “everything exists”? Schaffer (2009, pp. 361f, his emphases):

... contemporary metaphysics, insofar as it has been inspired by the Quinean task, has confused itself with trivialities. ... The deep questions about numbers, properties, and parts (*inter alia*) are not *whether* there are such things, but *how*.

## 5. Two More Arguments

The realism/anti-realism debate is often couched in more epistemic terms than I have been favoring. Goldberg (2008, p. 149) defines realism as follows:

Some empirical truths are not knowable through even ideal human inquiry (performed under ideal conditions, including ideal cognitive conditions for the inquirer).

Presuming that anti-realism is the negation of realism, then it is the thesis:

All empirical truths are knowable, at least through ideal human inquiry.

Call this form of anti-realism the *empirical omniscience principle*. Having made my point already from the objectivity/subjectivity angle, it will repay us to look at the issue more in terms of *knowledge*, by revisiting some aspects of the venerable Fitch’s Paradox.<sup>13</sup>

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ontological claims and to take it seriously. He claimed that there was no such thing as a negative fact. In his *On Nature*, he was brave enough to follow this idea to its logical conclusion: there is only one thing, and it never changes. There’s no such thing as change, since for X to change to Y, there has to be at least one negative fact: “Something is no longer X”. Parmenides’s idea strikes many as crazy, but Zeno of Elea, using his structured array of paradoxes, made concluding this somewhat hasty. The calculus of Cauchy and Weierstrass is widely regarded as having put an end to Zeno’s paradoxes once and for all, and hence many have thought we can shelve once and for all Parmenides’s crazy idea. This of course is incorrect. The calculus didn’t even dent Zeno’s paradoxes (see Papa-Grimaldi 1996, Dietrich 2020). At the very least, therefore, motion remains problematic. So perhaps we shouldn’t blithely dismiss Parmenides.

<sup>13</sup>For an excellent collection of recent work on this paradox see Salerno (2009).

### 5.1 Realism Cannot Be Known

Let us have an operator  $K$ , read as “is known by someone at some time” (I will use shorthand versions of this). And let’s consider the following “non-omniscience” principle

$$\exists p(p \wedge \neg Kp)$$

which says that some truth is not known. The non-omniscience principle is entailed by the epistemic version of realism we just accepted (tentatively). This is because an omniscience principle entails anti-realism. For suppose that every true  $p$  is known. Then at least as a matter of contingency, reality is only intersubjectively real. From this anti-realism follows trivially. Thus, since realism is the negation of anti-realism, it entails non-omniscience. And no surprise here.

But, necessarily, the non-omniscience principle cannot be known, on pain of contradiction. To prove this, let’s first assume realism. The non-omniscience principle follows (per the above). If the existential claim is true, so is an instance of it:  $p \wedge \neg Kp$  (we obviously meet the usual restrictions).

Let  $K$  have the following reasonable properties:

1.  $(Kp \rightarrow p)$  (knowledge implies truth)
2.  $K(p \wedge q) \rightarrow Kp \wedge Kq$  (knowing a conjunction entails knowing its conjuncts)

Also assume:

3. If  $\vdash \alpha$  then  $\vdash \Box\alpha$

First, let’s prove, via *reductio*, that  $\neg K(p \wedge \neg Kp)$ .

1.  $K(p \wedge \neg Kp)$  (assume for *reductio*)
2.  $Kp \wedge K\neg Kp$  (by Property 2)
3.  $Kp \wedge \neg Kp$  (by Property 1 applied to right conjunct)
4.  $\neg K(p \wedge \neg Kp)$  (by *reductio* from 1–3)

Now we can derive  $\neg \Diamond K(p \wedge \neg Kp)$ .

5.  $\Box \neg K(p \wedge \neg Kp)$  (by modal rule)
6.  $\neg \Diamond K(p \wedge \neg Kp)$  (by rule:  $\Box \neg \alpha \vdash \neg \Diamond \alpha$ )

So, however plausible the non-omniscience thesis seems, it cannot be *known* to be true, on pain of contradiction (remember, not all contradictions can be true). Since realism entails non-omniscience, realism cannot be known to be true, either – at least, on pain of contradiction. This does not show that realism is false, but it makes realism a very awkward

theoretical stance: realism is itself a true but unknowable fact. And not even *that* can be known.<sup>14</sup>

## 5.2 Anti-Realism Can Be Known – Along with Everything Else

Trouble for realism? Perhaps, especially if consistency was the goal. However, a strong version of anti-realism is in trouble on similar grounds. Consider a formalization of the verification principle:

$$p \rightarrow \diamond Kp \quad (\text{if } p \text{ is true, then it's possible to know } p)$$

This is not an unfair thesis to attribute to an anti-realist, in light of Dummettian comments like (Dummett 1982, p. 106):

meaning is, ultimately, a matter of knowledge. The meaning of an expression is what a speaker must know if he is to be said to understand that expression.

But as Fitch (1963) shows, this principle is in deep trouble. Recall that non-omniscience is the claim that, not only are some truths unknown, but there have to be unknown truths of this form:  $p \wedge \neg Kp$ . Pick one. Then by verificationism, this truth is knowable:

$$\diamond K(p \wedge \neg Kp)$$

This contradicts the result about omniscience above (line 6). Thus the verificationist has to deny non-omniscience, giving us

$$\forall p(p \rightarrow \diamond Kp) \rightarrow \neg \exists p(p \wedge \neg Kp),$$

which is just:

$$\forall p(p \rightarrow \diamond Kp) \rightarrow \forall p(p \rightarrow Kp),$$

i.e., if all truths are knowable, then all truths are known. So, reasonable, hopeful, possibly eventual omniscience implies full-on, God-like omniscience occurring right now – a rather unhappy result.<sup>15</sup> As with realism, this does not show that anti-realism in its verificationist mode is false. But it does make the stance extremely awkward.

So, epistemic versions of realism and anti-realism stand revealed as very expensive, even strange, theses.

## 6. What Does Logic Tell Us About the Debate?

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<sup>14</sup>Since paraconsistent logic is in the background here, the reader might think that all the above proof shows is that something is both known and not known. In fact, given the epistemic version of the Liar Paradox and some basic reasoning, then the Knower Paradox, “This very sentence is not known”, was already sufficient for dialetheism about knowledge. See Beall (2000).

<sup>15</sup>For details, see, e.g., Kvanig (2006), Salerno (2009) and Wierenga (2017).

Dummett famously casts the realist/anti-realist debate in terms of the law of the excluded middle (LEM), that for every sentence,  $A$ , either  $A$  or  $\neg A$  is true. His anti-realist is an anti-classicist, too, in that he thinks the LEM is not universally valid. For Dummett, truth (at least within certain debates) cannot transcend the evidence. If the evidence is inconclusive, then the relevant proposition is neither true nor false. This is the denial of the excluded middle. It is also anti-realist because it defines truth based on what we can know.

Dual to this, this paper argues for an inconsistent thesis, so I invoke a logic in which the law of non-contradiction (LNC) fails, i.e.  $\neg(A \wedge \neg A)$  is not universally true. An escape from both the conclusion of Fitch's paradox and the overall thesis of this paper is to deny, as the anti-realist will, the law of the excluded middle. Accordingly, double-negation elimination (DNE) will be denied. *Neither* realism *nor* anti-realism is true. Or, even *if* anti-realism is false, then this does not make realism *true* (if realism = not-anti-realism).

But then, with failure of the LEM, and given Dummett's idea that failure of bivalence for undecidables is sufficient for anti-realism, isn't some sort of anti-realism true? And we are back into the circle again.

For simplicity, suppose that the anti-realist denies the LEM and the paraconsistentist denies the law of non-contradiction. There is a widely remarked upon symmetry between these positions, as follows.

The denier of LEM cannot *assert* the LEM, but cannot assert its negation either, since the de Morgan laws say that

$$\neg(A \vee \neg A) \vdash \neg A \wedge \neg \neg A$$

and  $A \wedge \neg \neg A$  would further double negation eliminate to  $A \wedge \neg A$ . Even without DNE, though, we have a contradiction, and this is not intuitionistically acceptable. When asked for an official statement on the universal validity of the LEM, the thorough-going intuitionist must adopt *principled silence*. This is extremely awkward if the debate is framed in terms of an official standpoint on the LEM.

The denier of LNC is in a superficially similar position, though. The paraconsistentist accepts the full equivalence of  $A \vee \neg A$  and  $\neg(A \wedge \neg A)$ , and can *assert* both of these, and their negations. (So the paraconsistentist is superficially in line with the intuitionist, in asserting the negation of LEM.) But the paraconsistentist is unable to express *denial* in any robust way. When I remark  $\neg A$ , this may be what I mean; but, you want to know, what do I think about  $A$ ? After all, I do not think negation *rules out* a negand. If I want to say that  $\neg A$  is true and *only* true, then unless  $A$  is *absurd* (in the sense of implying every sentence whatsoever) I do not have any obvious resources to do so – in a consistent way. I can say that  $\neg A$  is true only, with the caveat that “true only” does not rule out false (see Beall *et al.* 2011). So dual to the intuitionist, the paraconsistentist must adopt



a *principled inconsistency*, which is awkward insofar as paraconsistency is cast as the thesis that some *but not all* contradictions are true, and this very thesis turns out to be subject to inconsistency.

Neither of these are in fact drawbacks. They are speech-act level recapitulations of the underlying positions (coherent, if not consistent, with the ideology). The intuitionist must exemplify that LEM fails *all the way down*, although to acknowledge or express this would be self-undermining. The paraconsistentist must assert that LNC fails *all the way down*, because denying it at any level would be self-undermining, too.

It is at the “bottom” of the “all the way down” that we find the two positions coinciding and contradicting. The contours of the positions themselves – their respective pictures of reality, as either overdetermined or underdetermined – are exactly the contours of the realism/anti-realism debate. The realist asserts more than can be asserted; the anti-realist denies what cannot be denied.

## 7. At the Limits of Thought, and Beyond

The *sine qua non* of dialethic contradictions is that they are *limit contradictions* – they occur at some limit (conceptual, sayable, utterable, etc., see Priest 2002). To conclusively nail down my paper’s thesis, I need to show that the realism/anti-realism contradiction is a such a limit contradiction. To do this, I have to show that the contradiction conforms to the inclosure schema (Priest 2002). I do this here.

### 7.1 The Inclosure Schema

Limit contradictions comprise a family of paradoxes. This family contains the well-known mathematical paradoxes such as those unearthed by Burali-Forti (there is a largest ordinal number, which is also not the largest), Cantor (there both is and isn’t the set of all sets), and Russell (there is a set containing all sets that aren’t members of themselves; this set both does and doesn’t contain itself), as well as many others.

All members of this family of paradoxes share a similar structure. The structure is that there is a collection – a totality – of all things all having some property, and an operation – a “diagonalizer” – that generates an object that is both outside of the collection and also inside of the collection. The first condition is called *transcendence* and the second is called *closure* (Priest 2002, pp. 3f).

The generation of the relevant object requires self-reference and negation; indeed, both of these are crucial to all limit contradictions. Russell’s paradoxical set is a good example. This set contains all and only the sets that don’t contain themselves as members. Call this set *R*. Ask: Is

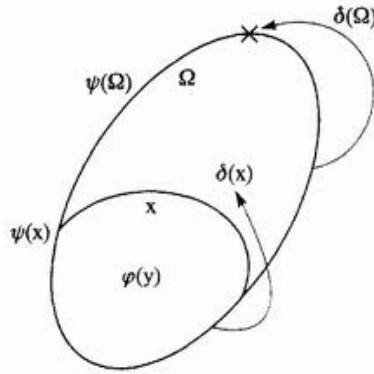


Figure 1: A picture of the inclosure schema (Priest 2002, p. 156).

$R \in R$ ? If it isn't, then  $R$  doesn't contain itself, but since  $R$  contains *all* the sets that don't contain themselves, it follows that  $R$  must contain itself. Hence  $R \notin R$  implies  $R \in R$ . Apparently then,  $R$  contains itself:  $R \in R$ . But since  $R$  contains *only* the sets that don't contain themselves, it follows that  $R$  must not contain itself. Hence  $R \in R$  implies  $R \notin R$ . But either  $R \in R$  or  $R \notin R$  (as noted, dialetheists accept excluded middle). So,  $R$  both doesn't contain itself (transcendence), and does (closure). Contradiction.

Russell was the first to formulate this structure in an explicitly general way (see Russell 1905). Here, I follow Priest's reformulation of Russell's idea. Priest calls this the *inclosure schema*. Let  $\varphi$  and  $\psi$  be properties, and  $\delta$  be a function (the diagonalizer), then the inclosure schema is (see Figure 1):

- |                                                                |               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| (1) $\Omega = \{y \mid \psi(y)\}$ exists and $\varphi(\Omega)$ | existence     |
| (2) if $x \subseteq \Omega$ and $\psi(x)$ then                 |               |
| (a) $\delta(x) \notin x$                                       | transcendence |
| (b) $\delta(x) \in \Omega$                                     | closure       |

Letting  $x = \Omega$ ,  $\delta$  gives us our object that is both within and without  $\Omega$ . My task now is to find in the realism/anti-realism contradiction the relevant  $\Omega$ ,  $\delta$ , and  $\varphi$  and  $\psi$ .

## 7.2 Points of View

Following the methodology introduced in Sec. 3.3, I am going to use points of view to construct the relevant limit contradiction between realism and anti-realism. First, I need to flesh out points of view a bit more. Points of view are observational relations (construed very broadly)

between an observer, who is at some location (however defined), and something taken to be *not* the observer which is at some other location (again, however defined). (Perhaps the most usual and natural way to construe this “not the observer” property is to assume that the observed thing is *external* to the observer. But this is far from the only construal.)

The assumption that the observed thing is *not* at the location the observer is at is both crucial and very plausible. If *O* is the thing observed and *V* is the relevant location from where *O* is observed, then *O* cannot be at *V*. A consequence of this condition is that an observer cannot observe the point of view she is currently at. To view that point of view, the observer must go to another point of view. Note that moving from one point of view to another does not require moving spatially. Shifting one’s attention or focus counts as also moving from one point of view to another. We will consider this property in more detail in Sec. 9.

To get the needed limit contradiction, start with an observer (e.g., an experiencing self), observing what it does from some location. Then have the observer “move out” from there. By “moving out” I mean moving to greater objectivity. This is crucial and at the same time easy. Nagel (1979, p. 208) describes it well, so let’s have his observation again:

... the transition to a more objective viewpoint is not accomplished merely through intersubjective agreement. Nor does it proceed by an increase of imaginative scope that provides access to many subjective points of view other than one’s own. Its essential character ... is externality or detachment. The attempt is made to view the world not from a place within it, or from the vantage point of a special type of life and awareness, but from nowhere in particular and no form of life in particular at all. The object is to discount for the features of our pre-reflective outlook that make things appear to us as they do, and thereby to reach an understanding of things as they really are. We flee the subjective under the pressure of an assumption that everything must be something not to any point of view, but in itself.

And Nagel (1986, p. 4):

To acquire a more objective understanding of some aspect of life or the world, we step back from our initial view of it and form a new conception which has that view and its relation to the world as its object. In other words, we place ourselves in the world that is to be understood. The old view then comes to be regarded as an appearance, more subjective than the new view, and correctable or confirmable by reference to it. The process can be repeated, yielding a still more objective conception.

Nagel considers the switch from subjectivity to objectivity to be accomplished by standing back and including one’s own previous subjective view

within a new view. I agree. Let's call this sort of moving *backing out*. Backing out increases accessibility and hence objectivity.

Here's an example: Imagine you're having a square-shaped, red, visual experience. Call this *RedView<sub>1</sub>*. A point of view is more objective, relative to a starting point of view, to the extent that it doesn't rely on your specifics: the more accessible to a variety of conscious agents the information content from a certain point of view is, the more objective it is. If your square-shaped, red phenomenal experience is caused by, say, looking at a large, red square on a wall (*RedView<sub>2</sub>*), then *RedView<sub>2</sub>* is more objective since the red square is an object external to you and hence is more public and accessible to others. Getting from *RedView<sub>1</sub>* to *RedView<sub>2</sub>* requires backing out.

Still more objective points of view can be got by considering the red square not as causing red sensations but as reflecting light of wavelengths between 630 and 740 nanometers, since more kinds of conscious creatures have access to these measurements than to the red experience (colorblind people for example). Call this *RedView<sub>3</sub>*. And, since nanometers are a human form of measurement, a still more objective point of view of this situation can be obtained by considering the square as reflecting light of some wavelength specified by whatever measurement a perceiver of the square might happen to use (*RedView<sub>4</sub>*).

Backing out can be continued in this way, perhaps indefinitely. Nevertheless, following Nagel, from the most robustly subjective point of view, *RedView<sub>1</sub>*, one can back out further and further until one is at a limit: *all* points of view are in one's purview. One "sees" reality *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is transcendence: one has transcended the collection of all points of view. We "see" reality for what it really and truly is; one "sees" things for what they really are. Realism is vindicated. (Note: scare quotes are mandatory, "see" is the most relevant verb we have, but its sensory connotation is of course inadequate.) So, the relevant totality is the collection of all points of view. The observer is now beyond that; the observer is "viewing" the world from nowhere.<sup>16</sup>

But then one reflects on all the backing out that one did to get to the view *sub specie aeternitatis*, whereupon one realizes that merely by noting that one is at the view *sub specie aeternitatis*, one has backed out again and so the view *sub specie aeternitatis* was a point of view all along as is the point of view  $\{sub\ specie\ aeternitatis + 1\}$ . The scare quotes were a mere sham. One can never get outside of seeing from some perspective. And that always puts one at a point of view. So there is no such thing as

<sup>16</sup>If one is not convinced that the view *sub specie aeternitatis* is in fact beyond all points of view, then consider a modification of the view. Nagel (somewhat mistakenly) dubs the view *sub specie aeternitatis* the *view from nowhere*. Perhaps a better name would be the *view of no one*. Of course, now the term "view" has to be put in scare quotes. In any case, the "view" of no one does the trick: it is beyond all points of view.

reality independent of perceiving. Anti-realism is vindicated. Closure.

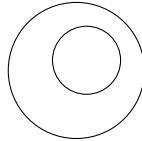
This then is my needed contradiction. The diagonalizer is “backing out”.  $\Omega$  is the totality of all points of view.  $\varphi$  is just the property of being a point of view, and  $\psi$  is the property of being a point of view one can back out of.

Transcendence is realism; closure is anti-realism. Hence, realism and anti-realism constitute a limit contradiction. They are both true, and, of course, false as well.

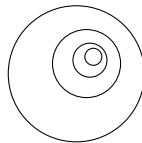
## 8. Diagrams

We can go one step further. It is not just that realism and anti-realism are both true and both false, but that they are in some sense the same thesis. Here is a diagrammatic way to put my position.

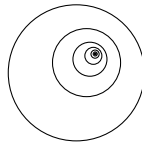
The pre-theoretical picture is of a cognizing agent situated in a properly larger world. Draw this like so:



Now, we all agree that within the agent’s cognitive representation is included the agent in this very situation:



For elegance (although it may not be empirically correct), I further assume that these two steps have defined a recursion, with self-similar diagrams down and down.



The anti-realist then argues that the surrounding circle is inappropriate, spooky stuff beyond our ken, and deletes it. Alternatively, the realist argues that the anti-realist’s diagram has excluded something over and above this mere theorizing, namely the blank field behind or outside the circles, and moves to add explicitly an extra surrounding “world”

in which the agent can sit. The result looks like the *same figure* either way. The realist/anti-realist debate seems to boil down to what “level of resolution” we should take the pre-theoretical diagram to be getting at – whether making the background explicit as a part of the theoretical machinery is the right thing to do or not.

The realist includes “the background”, but in doing so only makes it part of the foreground. The anti-realist leaves the background implicit, in principled silence, making it the content of the cognizing agent’s mental representations or mind, but in so doing seems to omit an obvious and important bit of data from the theory.

## 9. Digging Deeper: The Role of Consciousness in the Dialethic Nature of Realism and Anti-Realism

There are conscious minds in our universe (assuming a realist point of view). Among the puzzles this fact creates is this one: Consciousness could be responsible for the realism/anti-realism dichotomy and in their both being true but opposite. Consciousness so seems because it itself has two contradictory properties: It supplies and then connects us to the world, and it separates us from and then removes the world.

In Sec. 3.3., movement between specific points of view was used to argue that both realism and anti-realism are true and false. The points of view were *objectivity* and *intersubjectivity*. Sec. 7 presented an argument that these two points of view could be usefully recast respectively as *transcendence* and *closure*. Doing this allowed me to show that the realism/anti-realism contradiction satisfies Priest’s inclosure schema, resulting in the conclusion that realism/anti-realism form a dialethic pair. Though we have usefully labeled them, the question now is: Where do these points of view come from? Our answer will be that they come from conscious minds, either realistically or anti-realistically.

When we are conscious and awake (not dreaming), we are conscious of the world around us. We see tables and chairs, hear music, smell wet dogs, taste coffee, etc. Let’s call such quotidian consciousness *level-1 consciousness*. Humans, at least, can also become conscious of their “level-1” conscious states. Again, suppose you are looking at a red square in front of you. You are then conscious of the red square. This is a level-1 conscious experience. But then you can be conscious that you are having a red square experience, having what we can call a level-2 experience.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>See Chalmers (1996, pp. 175f). There are more levels than these two. Chalmers allows for at least a third: being conscious of an abstract property of conscious experiences. As we saw in Sec. 7.2, Nagel (1979) allows for many levels. One could make the case that Nagel’s levels differ from Chalmers’s: Nagel’s are part of a march towards objectivity. Chalmers’s may be, too, but this is far from obvious. If Chalmers’s levels

We can think of level-1 and level-2 as two different points of view – they nicely satisfy the definition given in Sec. 7.2. From the level-1 point of view, you are conscious of the red square out in the world. From the other, level-2, you are conscious of having the conscious experience of the red square. Because of their being differing points of view, the experiential focus is different at each level. At level-1, the focus is the red square (in the world – we will return to this aspect of the experience in the next paragraph). At level-2, the focus is the *red-square-experience*, not moored to any external reality. More succinctly, level-1’s focus is on an object in the world, and level-2’s focus is on the conscious experience itself, the one that has that previous object as its focus.

Part of your conscious experience at level-1 is that there is an external world and you are seeing a red square that is a member of this world. Of course, this description is unlikely to completely capture fully this external-world-experience accompanying your level-1 red square experience. But it will do.<sup>18</sup>

Does level-2 have an analogous accompanying experience? Yes, under the right conditions. Level-2 experiences tend to engender the accompanying feeling that any supposed external world is irrelevant to having the given level-2 experience *provided that* one has already had such an irrelevance experience. And most of us have indeed had such an experience – many of them, in fact. Dreams are obviously a source for such experiences. At one time or another (perhaps nightly), we have all dreamed that we are somewhere strange doing something unusual, yet, upon waking, we discover that we were not somewhere strange nor were we doing something unusual. We were sleeping in our bed. This seems to indicate directly that our experiences can be what they are independently of the world we inhabit.<sup>19</sup>

Continuing, the failure from time to time of our senses also suggests irrelevance of the world – that conscious experiences need not be connected to or caused by our world. We hear someone’s voice who is not present, we see things that are not there, etc. Again, what we mistakenly hear and see seems to be derived from genuine previous hearing and seeing, but this doesn’t alter the fact that at the relevant times, our senses are

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are different, then to assess the number of levels, we would have to take the set union of both Chalmers’s and Nagel’s. And this would be only a start – other philosophers find still more levels. Also, note that moving to level-2 is a kind of backing out.

<sup>18</sup>It may be that this accompanying external-world-experience has to be learned. See Drescher (1991).

<sup>19</sup>This point about dreaming is, as with everything else about consciousness, contentious. One objection is that often our dreams seem to us, upon remembering them, to be at least abstractly related to events in our lives. Maybe, but the term “abstraction” is doing a lot of work here, and what work exactly it is doing and how remain obscure. To handle the objection, though, we can focus when need be on any dream’s details, which often seem to differ from anything going on in our daily lives.

mistaken – they provide conscious information that is not actually being produced by things in the world. So, dreams and apparently mistaken sensory information combine to sever any necessary connection between our alleged worlds and our conscious experiences.<sup>20</sup>

If we let these Cartesian conclusions inform our level-2 experiences (and how could we prevent them from doing so?), we get an inferentially stronger level-2 experience. Whereas, as noted above, level-2 experiences can seem unmoored to their experiencers, when informed by Cartesian conclusions about dreams and sensory information, we get that these *enhanced* level-2 experiences are often also accompanied by a sharper experience: that our experiences are utterly independent of any way the world is; indeed, there might be no world. We can call this intuition, which is very common even among non-philosophers, our *Cartesian intuition*. It is this Cartesian intuition that makes the movie *The Matrix* so compelling.

To sum up, level-1 experiences of something (a red square, say) have an accompanying external-world-experience: the experience is of something *out there*. Whereas enhanced level-2 experiences have an accompanying world-independent-experience: the experience seems utterly independent of any way the world could be.

It is now easy to see that level-1 experiences engender experiencing a real, external world; hence they engender realism. And likewise, it is easy to see that enhanced level-2 experiences engender a feeling that the world experienced *is* the world; hence they engender anti-realism. So, level-1 experiences are points of view engendering realism and enhanced level-2 experiences are points of view engendering anti-realism. Let's call this

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<sup>20</sup>Descartes (1641) famously made great use of both these phenomena to produce doubt about any external world. In his *First Meditation*, he combines both unreliable senses and dreams:

“All that I have, up to this moment, accepted as possessed of the highest truth and certainty, I received either from or through the senses. I observed, however, that these sometimes misled us; and it is the part of prudence not to place absolute confidence in that by which we have even once been deceived. But it may be said, perhaps, that, although the senses occasionally mislead us respecting minute objects, and such as are so far removed from us as to be beyond the reach of close observation, there are yet many other of their informations (presentations), of the truth of which it is manifestly impossible to doubt; as for example, that I am in this place, seated by the fire, clothed in a winter dressing gown, that I hold in my hands this piece of paper, with other intimations of the same nature. But how could I deny that I possess these hands and this body, and withal escape being classed with persons in a state of insanity, whose brains are so disordered: and clouded by dark bilious vapors as to cause them pertinaciously to assert that they are monarchs when they are in the greatest poverty.”

Descartes then uses dreams to refute this thought:

“Though this be true, I must nevertheless here consider that I am a man, and that, consequently, I am in the habit of sleeping, and representing to myself in dreams those same things, or even sometimes others less probable, which the insane think are presented to them in their waking moments. How often have I dreamt that I was in these familiar circumstances, that I was dressed, and occupied this place by the fire, when I was lying undressed in bed?”



conclusion the *Points of View Conclusion*.

There is an ambiguity in how we construed level-1 experiences. If we assume that the accompanying external-world-experience of any level-1 experience is *produced* by the level-1 point of view, then the Points of View Conclusion is itself anti-realist, for it then says that realism is the *result* of a point of view of consciousness which supplies an accompanying external-world-experience. Alternatively, we can say level-1 experiences have an accompanying external-world-experience because there is an external world, independent of mind, out there, and that this external world is experienced as a sort of back-drop to our, say, red square experience.

There is an analogous ambiguity in level-2 experiences. If we wanted to be realists, we could say that enhanced level-2 experiences *sever* our connection to an external world – the external world is out there, but our connection to it is severed. Or, if we wanted to be anti-realists, we could say that level-2 experiences remove the world created by level-1 experiences.

We now have an answer to our question from above: Where do these points of view come from? They come from conscious minds. But it is now clear that conscious minds replicate the realism/anti-realism debate. For anti-realists, we can say that it is not too much of a leap to conclude that this replication is itself due to consciousness. For realists, we can say that it is not too much a leap to conclude that this replication is recognized by or perceived by conscious minds. For the first, we get an anti-realist conclusion that anti-realism is a product of our minds; hence so is realism. For the second, we get the conclusion that the world itself carries the realism/anti-realist divide in itself; our conscious minds just perceive what's really there.

From here matters start getting rather complicated – and recursive. It is time to conclude.

## 10. Conclusion

The anti-realist begins with an embarrassing question: If realism is true, why is it so hard to prove? The anti-realist has a point. Given the definition of “realism”, given what reality is supposed to *be*, its truth should not even be questionable, let alone in dispute ... if it were in fact true.

The realist counters with an equally embarrassing question: If anti-realism is true, why is there any intersubjective agreement at all? In fact, why is there anything called “the intersubjective”? The realist has a point. A stunning proof of realism is experiencing some unpredicted publicly shared calamity.

The anti-realist is unmoved. If realism were true, how would we know? In order to know, explicitly, that realism is true, we'd first have to conceive

it as a proposition which might be false. But if realism is true, it wouldn't be dubitable, so we couldn't conceive of it as a proposition which might be false. Since we do, it must not be true.

But anti-realism suffers from a similar problem. How could one possibly know that anti-realism was true, if it was? How is it possible to know that you can't get outside the mind? If it's impossible to know anything except as it is, say, mentally represented, then one of the things that you can't know is that it's impossible to know anything except as it is represented. (Fodor (1988, p. 78) makes a similar point.) So, anti-realism's truth is impossible to know. But we do know ... or at least, via the argument in Secs. 3.2, 3.3.1, and 9 we can put ourselves into such an epistemic position, even if we can't dwell there. So anti-realism must be false.

This claim shows that anti-realism is self-refuting, and therefore false. Hence, it's opposite, realism is true. But now we have: Anti-realism is the negation of realism, and since anti-realism is self-refuting, anti-realism is its own negation. Therefore, anti-realism is identical to realism. If we insist that one of them has to be true (by the law of the excluded middle, which dialetheists usually assume), they both are, and, of course, they are both false. They are in fact dialethic, identical theses.

When the anti-realist and the realist roll up their sleeves and get down to doing serious philosophy, they find that their positions are fundamentally the same, and that both are true, and both false. Furthermore, each thesis is itself both true and false.

The arguments given in this paper show a bit more, because of the use of points of view: Reality with minds in it turns out to be contradictory – both dependent and independent of the minds it “contains”. Realism and anti-realism are simply a matter of where one's mind is focused.

The results in this paper are surprising. This very surprise is itself an argument for a kind of realism. But even the solipsist doesn't deny that she exists and experiences surprises. So the surprises in this paper could just as easily be an argument for a mind-based anti-realism, where the mind turns out to be more complicated than the anti-realist (solipsist) initially thought. And that is the main lesson here. A century after the mind's banishment from philosophy by the Vienna Circle and a host of others, the ultimate conclusion here is that the mind is back ... with a vengeance.

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