

TWO DEFLATIONARY APPROACHES TO FITCH-STYLE REASONING

0. INTRODUCTION

In 1963 Frederic Fitch famously argued that the apparently innocuous claim that all truths are knowable—henceforth, *principle of knowability*—in conjunction with a handful of apparently highly plausible logical and epistemic principles entails the obviously absurd claim that all truths are known. The argument has become known as the *paradox of knowability*. Ever since philosophers of language and logic have tried to find ways how to resist the conclusion of Fitch’s argument, to solve the paradox. Hardly anyone, with Timothy Williamson (e.g. (2000)) as a notable exception, has paused to ask why we should find Fitch’s argument paradoxical in the first place. At the very least, it would seem, in order for it to be paradoxical each of the premises and the negation of the conclusion would have to be *highly intuitive*. It is not at all clear, however, that the principle of knowability enjoys very much by way of intuitiveness in the first place. After all, it seems plausible that this world hosts only a finite number of finite cognizers. It would seem, however, that finite cognizers can only come to believe a finite number of propositions. Since knowledge entails belief, finite cognizers can only come to know a finite number of propositions. Since there are only finitely many cognizers in this world that means that only finitely many propositions will ever be known. At the same time, there are infinitely many truths. In consequence, some of them must, necessarily, remain unknown.¹ If, given the vast number of true propositions and our finite cognitive capacities, intuitively, some propositions must remain unknown, then it is not intuitive that all truths are knowable. The ‘paradox of knowability’, then, isn’t a paradox in the first place.

Even if Fitch’s argument does not point to a paradox, it may pose a problem for certain philosophical theories. What’s more, the intuitive costs that a given such theory may incur by accepting the principle of knowability may be outweighed by the theoretical benefits that come with the view at issue. However, it is hard to see how the theoretical benefits of any view could outweigh the costs it would incur by accepting the conclusion of Fitch’s argument, viz. that we are omniscient. So, if there are such theoretical views, its defenders had better something to say in response to Fitch’s argument. In this paper, we will look at one—perhaps the only—theoretical view to which, on the face of it, the principle of knowability is of central importance. We will then consider two deflationary responses to Fitch’s argument on behalf of defenders of this view. While the first deflationary response, which weakens the factivity

principle for knowledge, may, at first glance, appear appealing we will argue that it does not stand up to closer inspection. As opposed to that, we will argue that the second response, which rejects the principle of knowability in favour of a weaker principle, does the job for defenders of the view at issue.

1. SEMANTIC ANTI-REALISM

The view to which the principle of knowability is, on the face of it, of central importance, is often labelled ‘semantic anti-realism’. As can easily be guessed from the name, semantic anti-realism is the rejection of realist theories of meaning (semantic realism). Semantic anti-realists find fault with and commonly motivate their position by pointing to defects in realist theories of meaning. In this section, we will outline the problem which, according to the semantic anti-realist, besets realist theories of meaning and show that accepting the principle of knowability will avoid this problem.

To begin with let us look at the credentials of realist theories of meaning. Realist theories of meaning are commonly construed as having the following two features:

- (1) The meaning of a statement is identified with its truth conditions
- (2) It is accepted that there are evidence-transcendent truths.²

From these features of realist theories of meaning it follows that some statements have evidence-transcendent truth-conditions as their meanings. A general constraint on a theory of meaning is that it also be a theory of understanding: For a theory of meaning to be satisfactory it must also provide an account of what understanding of competent speakers consists in.³ Semantic anti-realists suspect that realist theories of meaning will be unsatisfactory because they cannot give us a satisfactory account of our understanding of statements with evidence-transcendent truth-conditions.

Semantic anti-realists base their suspicion on a challenge to realist theories of meaning. They develop the challenge from what they consider an important insight into the nature of understanding due to Ludwig Wittgenstein, viz. that *understanding a concept consists in a set of practical abilities* rather than in a state of mind. Certainly, if one is to be credited with a given practical ability then one must be able to manifest that ability in one’s behaviour. For instance, a child will be credited with the ability to swim only if she manifests swimming behaviour in suitable circumstances. If Wittgenstein’s insight is taken seriously, that is, if understanding is conceived of as a set of practical abilities, then understanding must

be manifestable in behaviour too. The kind of behaviour in which understanding must be manifestable is, according to the semantic anti-realist, linguistic behaviour or use. Now, what would count as a manifestation by a speaker of his understanding of a statement in use? It would seem that, minimally, the speaker has to be able to *evaluate* his own and other people's use of the statement, and, if circumstances render it appropriate, to *adjust* his use of it.⁴

Given that we understand what counts as manifestation of understanding in use in this way, however, it is hard to see how understanding of statements with evidence-transcendent truth-conditions could be manifested in use. After all, the truth-conditions of such statements are *evidence-transcendent*. So, there aren't any circumstances that would provide the basis for an evaluation of one's own or other people's use of such statements. And, similarly, there aren't any circumstances in the light of which one would adjust one's use of such statements. If there aren't any such circumstances, then understanding of statements with evidence-transcendent truth-conditions cannot be manifested. If understanding of such statements cannot be manifested, however, then it does not consist in a set of practical abilities after all – contrary to what the Wittgensteinian insight suggests. Accordingly, the challenge that semantic anti-realists pose to their realist opponents is to provide an account of understanding of statements with evidence-transcendent truth-conditions that is both faithful to the two core realist theses, (1) and (2), and respects the Wittgensteinian insight.⁵

A related challenge that semantic anti-realists pose to realists focuses on the acquisition of our understanding of statements with evidence-transcendent truth-conditions. Since if we accept a truth-conditional theory of meaning, we certainly acquire our understanding of a type of statement by bringing to bear evidence on the truth-values of instances of it, semantic anti-realists argue that it is hard to see how we could so much as acquire an understanding of statements with evidence-transcendent truth-conditions. Accordingly, semantic anti-realists challenge their opponents to provide an account of how we acquire our understanding of statements with evidence-transcendent truth-conditions.⁶

These two challenges were first advanced by Michael Dummett⁷ and have become known as the manifestation and the acquisition challenge respectively. Although there are further anti-realist arguments⁸ these two and, in particular, the manifestation challenge appear to be the most common reason why semantic anti-realists find realist theories of meaning problematic.⁹ Although semantic anti-realists commonly do not adduce explicit argument that their opponents cannot meet the challenges, they suspect that realists will be unable to come up with answers and propose to explore new paths. More specifically, semantic anti-realists have been driven to deny at least one of the two core claims of realist theories of meaning. It

seems that, initially, semantic anti-realists were tempted to deny the realist's first core claim, that is, the realist's commitment to a truth-conditional theory of meaning and replace it by a theory that identifies the meanings of statements with their assertibility conditions.¹⁰ More recently, however, this option appears to have become less appealing to semantic anti-realists. Rather, semantic anti-realists have tended to reject the realists' second core claim, viz. that there are evidence-transcendent truths. It can fairly easily be seen that if one accepts the principle of knowability, that is, recall, the claim that every true proposition is knowable, then one must deny the second tenet of realist conceptions of meaning, viz. that there are evidence-transcendent truths. Provided, as is plausible, that that in order to know a proposition one must also have evidence for it, then if every true proposition is knowable, it must also be possible to have evidence for those propositions. And that, in turn, means that they cannot be evidence-transcendent. So, accepting the principle of knowability allows the semantic anti-realist to reject the realist's second core claim that there are evidence-transcendent truths. Moreover, in doing so it will rid the semantic anti-realist of any worries that may arise over the manifestability or the acquisition of our understanding of such truths. If there aren't any such truths, then the fact that it is doubtful whether an understanding of them can be manifested or acquired won't be a problem for the semantic anti-realist. So, if the semantic anti-realist's suspicion that the realist won't be able to meet the manifestation and the acquisition challenge turns out to be correct, adopting the principle of knowability seems like a promising alternative to realist conceptions of meaning.

2 FITCH'S ARGUMENT

Now, if Fitch's argument goes through, that is, if the principle of knowability in conjunction with a handful of highly intuitive epistemic and logical principles entails that we are omniscient, then the semantic anti-realist had better had some way of rejecting the argument available. After all, it is an undeniable and, indeed, an obvious truth that we are not omniscient. In this way, if it turned out that semantic anti-realism entails that we are omniscient, then that would count as a straightforward *reductio* on semantic anti-realism. In order to be able to discuss some options the semantics anti-realist may or may not have to block Fitch's argument, it will be a good idea to look at how the argument proceeds in a bit more detail. First, we formalise the principle of knowability—all truths are knowable (by someone at some time)—in the following way¹¹:

$$(KP) \quad \Box P (P \Box \Diamond(\Box s, t) (Ks, t P))$$

Now we assume, for *reductio*, that one is not omniscient \square i.e., that there is some truth (we'll call it 'P₁') which is unknown:

$$(1) \quad P_1 \ \& \ \square(\square_{s_1,t_1} (K_{s_1,t_1} P_1))$$

Given (KP), however, one can straightforwardly derive (2):

$$(2) \quad \diamond(\square_{s_2,t_2} (K_{s_2,t_2} (P_1 \ \& \ \square(\square_{s_1,t_1} (K_{s_1,t_1} P_1))))$$

An essential feature of Fitch's argument at this point is a sub-argument to the effect that (2) is false. This proceeds by first assuming, for *reductio*, that the statement within the scope of the possibility operator at line (2) is true:

$$(3) \quad (\square_{s_2,t_2} (K_{s_2,t_2} (P_1 \ \& \ \square(\square_{s_1,t_1} (K_{s_1,t_1} P_1))))$$

Plausibly, knowledge distributes across conjunctions, such that if a conjunction is known, then so are both of the conjuncts:

$$(4) \quad (\square_{s_2,t_2} (K_{s_2,t_2} P_1) \ \& \ (\square_{s_2,t_2} (K_{s_2,t_2} \square(\square_{s_1,t_1} (K_{s_1,t_1} P_1))))$$

Most will also agree that knowledge is factive, such that if one knows a proposition, then that proposition must be true. We can thus conclude (5):

$$(5) \quad (\square_{s_2,t_2} (K_{s_2,t_2} P_1) \ \& \ \square(\square_{s_1,t_1} (K_{s_1,t_1} P_1))$$

This is, of course, a contradiction. Since the assumption of this sub-argument leads to contradiction, we can therefore infer the negation of this assumption:

$$(6) \quad \square(\square_{s_2,t_2} (K_{s_2,t_2} (P_1 \ \& \ \square(\square_{s_1,t_1} (K_{s_1,t_1} P_1))))$$

Moreover, since this result has been derived based on no assumptions, we can also conclude that it is a necessary truth:

$$(7) \quad \square\square(\square_{s_2,t_2} (K_{s_2,t_2} (P_1 \ \& \ \square(\square_{s_1,t_1} (K_{s_1,t_1} P_1))))$$

Using standard modal logic, however, we can infer (8) from (7):

$$(8) \quad \square\diamond(\square_{s_2,t_2} (K_{s_2,t_2} (P_1 \ \& \ \square(\square_{s_1,t_1} (K_{s_1,t_1} P_1))))$$

Now (8) is obviously inconsistent with (2). It therefore follows that the original assumption \square that we are non-omniscient \square must be denied. The anti-realist principle of

knowability, at least when combined with some very basic epistemic and modal logic, is therefore inconsistent with non-omniscience such that if we retain this principle then we must, it seems, accept the absurd conclusion that that all truths are known.¹² So if the semantic anti-realist were to reject the realist core claim that there are evidence-transcendent truths by adopting the principle of knowability, Fitch's argument may pose a problem for defenders of semantic anti-realism.

3 TWO DEFLATIONARY APPROACHES TO THE PARADOX OF KNOWABILITY

If the semantic anti-realist wants to hang on to his professed remedy to the deficiencies of realist theories of meaning, then he must find a way of blocking Fitch's argument. In the remainder of this paper we will explore two deflationary approaches of doing so. By 'deflationary approaches' we mean approaches that deny or weaken a common assumption that is needed to generate the problem. Once the assumption is denied (weakened), the problem no longer arises. Or so would be the hope of deflationists.¹³

3.1 An Unsuccessful Proposal: Weakening Factivity

The first deflationary proposal that we will be exploring in this paper considers the prospects of offering an anti-realist resolution to the paradox of knowability which denies the factivity of knowledge. It should be quite obvious that once the factivity of knowledge is denied, the argument that leads to the paradox, at least in its present form, will no longer go through. The step from (4) to (5) will no longer be valid.

Now, of course, it is easy to say that one does not accept factivity and that, therefore, one won't be impressed by Fitch's argument. However, factivity seems to play an important part in epistemology. It seems to be required to explain intuitions concerning the intension of the concept of knowledge as well as intuitions concerning its extension. We take it that there is a strong intuition, concerning the intension of the concept of knowledge, that one cannot know falsehoods. This intuition is borne out by a range of intuitions we have about the extension of the concept of knowledge. Suppose, for instance, I look at the Mueller-Lyer illusion and come to believe, falsely, that one line is longer than the other. Intuitively, my belief does not qualify as knowledge. At the same time, my belief seems to be perfectly justified. It has been generated by otherwise reliable visual processes, I am aware of the relevant facts that determine my justification etc. So, it seems that my intuitive ignorance

must be explained by the fact that my belief, although justified, is simply false. Since there are many such cases, it would seem that if one simply denounces the factivity of knowledge, one ends up with a massively implausible theory of knowledge. One would be able to solve the a problem that one's preferred theory of meaning encounters only on pain of massive costs in the theory of knowledge. It is, presumably, precisely for this reason that few commentators on the Fitch's argument have explored solutions that denounce the factivity principle.

It is important to note, however, that the proposal the semantic anti-realist might be tempted by is not so much that the factivity of knowledge should be denied outright, but rather that this principle needs to be slightly weakened. Here is factivity again, stated more formally:

$$(FAC) \quad \Box P \Box s \Box t (Ks,t P \Box P)$$

And here is the alternative principle that the semantic anti-realist might be tempted by:

$$(FAC^*) \quad \Box P \Box s \Box t (Ks,t P \Box \Box P)$$

Within an intuitionistic logic, which does not incorporate double negation elimination (DNE), the consequent of (FAC*) does not entail the truth of the proposition known. In effect, what (FAC*) says is that if one knows a proposition then that proposition is not untrue. However, this will be inconsistent with the truth of the negation of the target proposition, which means that (FAC*) will not be consistent with knowledge of untruths after all. This supports the claim that, for the semantic anti-realist at least, denying (FAC) in favour of (FAC*) will not have the disastrous consequences that one might have initially supposed it to have. In particular, a logically weaker theory of knowledge which incorporated (FAC*) rather than (FAC) would still be able to capture our deep intuition that one cannot know falsehoods and would predict ignorance in cases like the one above where I believe, falsely, that one line in the Mueller-Lyer illusion is longer than the other. At the same time, (FAC*) is logically weaker than (FAC), and thus it holds out the hope of being able to play a role within a deflationary approach to Fitch's argument.

Unfortunately, however, closer inspection reveals that the present proposal is ultimately not successful. True, on the face of it, (FAC*) blocks the move from line (4) to line (5) in that it only gives us

$$(5^*) \quad Kp \ \& \ \Box \Box \Box Kp$$

Crucially, however, this triple negation collapses into a single negation, even within an intuitionistic logic, and thus one will be able to derive line (5) of the paradox of knowability anyway, even without having to appeal to (FAC).

So, one won't solve the paradox of knowability by rejecting the factivity of knowledge and replacing it by the ever so slightly weaker (FAC*). In order to get this line to work one would have to replace the factivity-principle by something that is weaker even than (FAC*). The problem with such a proposal threatens to be, however, that it will not be able to do full justice to our intuition that one cannot know falsehoods and our intuitions about various individual cases. In this way, it is highly doubtful whether the present deflationary strategy can ultimately be successful.¹⁴

3.2 A Successful Proposal: Weakening the Epistemic Constraint

While there is little hope for the semantic anti-realist to block Fitch's argument by weakening the factivity principle, it seems to us that the following approach is more promising. Rather than weakening certain principles of the governing the concept of knowledge that is central to the principle of knowability, the semantic anti-realist may reject the principle of knowability in favour of some weaker principle. The principle we would like to propose on behalf of the semantic anti-realist takes the following shape. For all true propositions, it must be possible to justifiably believe them. Or, formally:

$$(JP) \quad \Box P (P \Box \Diamond(\Box s, t) (JBs, t P))$$

In order to see why this principle of justified believability, as we will call it, suits the purposes of the semantic anti-realist it is important to notice, first, that it still does justice to the semantic anti-realists' worries over realist theories of meaning. Recall, that the semantic anti-realist found that realist theories of meaning will have a problem in explaining how we can acquire and manifest the meaning of statements with evidence-transcendent truth-conditions in understanding. Recall, furthermore, that we saw that accepting the principle of knowability will avoid this problem in that, given the plausible additional assumption that one knows a proposition only if one also has evidence for it, if all truths are knowable, then it must also be possible to have evidence for them. If it must be possible to have evidence for all true propositions, however, then there can be no evidence-transcendent truths. In this way, the semantic anti-realist can resist the realist's second core claim that there are evidence-transcendent truths by accepting the principle of knowability. Notice, however, that a parallel

argument will show that accepting the principle of justified believability will do the job just as well. After all, it is also plausible that one justifiably believes a proposition only if one has also evidence for it. That means, however, that if, for all truths, it must be possible to justifiably believe them, then it must also be possible to have evidence for them. If it must be possible to have evidence for all true propositions, however, then there can be no evidence-transcendent truths. In this way, the semantic anti-realist can resist the realist's second core claim by accepting the principle of justified believability. So, accepting the principle of justified believability will do the job for semantic anti-realist just as well as the principle of knowability.

Notice that while replacing the principle of knowability by the principle of justified believability will allow the semantic anti-realist to avoid the conclusion that we are omniscient—after all, justified belief is not knowledge—, that does not mean that the semantic anti-realist no longer is susceptible to refutation by Fitch-style arguments. After all, a parallel argument for justified belief threatens to show that the principle of justified believability entails that all statements are justifiably believed. And that, it would seem, is almost as bad for the semantic anti-realist as the original conclusion of Fitch's argument. So, there is still work to be done.

One might think, however, that even if there is work to be done, it is not much work. After all, justified belief, as opposed to knowledge, is not factive. That is, one can justifiably believe a falsehood. For instance, it would seem that when I look at the Muller-Lyer illusion and come to believe that one line is longer than the other, then my belief enjoys some degree of justification. At the same time, my belief is false—the two lines are, in fact, of equal length. Since Fitch's argument relies on the factivity of knowledge, it follows that it will not go through if the knowledge operator is replaced by a justified belief operator. So, it would seem as though all the semantic anti-realist has to do is to reject the principle of knowability by the principle of justified believability in order to avoid the conclusion of Fitch-style reasoning.

Now one might think that this conclusion is either false or uninteresting. First, one might think that it is false because even if justified belief is not factive, the following reflection principle does, nonetheless, hold: If, at a certain time, one justifiably believes that one does not at that time justifiably believe a proposition, then one does not justifiably believe that proposition—at least not at that time. So, one might object that the mere fact that justified belief is not factive does not get the semantic anti-realist off the hook, since it is still plausible

that justified belief satisfies the reflection principle which, it would seem suffices to generate the Fitch result.

On the other hand, one might object that the result is uninteresting because it has long been established that the semantic anti-realist can resist the conclusion of Fitch-style argument by stating the epistemic constraint on truth in terms of justified believability. J.L. Mackie makes the point in the following passage:

Suppose we read K [the knowledge operator in Fitch's argument] as 'It is justifiably believed at t_1 that ...'. This will distribute over $\&$, but we might expect the argument now to fail at step 4 [to 5 in the above statement of the argument], since this K is not truth-entailing. But step 4 [to 5] still goes through. If it is justifiably believed that p at t_1 that p is not justifiably believed at t_1 , then p is *not* justifiably believed at t_1 . On the other hand, if we read K as 'It is justifiably believed at some time that ...', then step 4 does not go through. It does not follow that if it is justifiably believed at any time that p is not justifiably believed at any time, then p is not justifiably believed at any time. It might be justifiable at t_1 to think that p is false and never has been and never will be justifiably believed and yet there might be some other time t_2 at which p was, or will be justifiably believed. So the argument does not enable us to reject the principle that what is true can be justifiably believed at some time.¹⁵

In this passage, Mackie distinguishes between two reflection principles for justified belief one of which he deems plausible, while he rejects the other one. The plausible reflection principle has it that if it is justifiably believed at t_1 that it is not justifiably believed at t_1 that p , then it is not justifiably believed at t_1 that p . Or, formally,

$$(RP^1) \quad \Box P \Box s \Box t (JB_{s,t} \Box JB_{s,t} P \Box \Box JB_{s,t} P)$$

According to the implausible reflection principle, if someone at sometime justifiably believes that no-one ever justifiably believes that p , then no-one ever justifiably believes that p . This principle can be formalised in the following way:

$$(RP^2) \quad \Box P ((\Box s,t) (JB_{s,t} \Box (\Box s_1,t_1) (JB_{s_1,t_1} P)) \Box \Box (\Box s_1,t_1) (JB_{s_1,t_1} P))$$

Mackie claims, correctly and for the right reasons, that (RP^2) is false. He goes on to claim, again correctly, that the conclusion of Fitch's argument can be avoided if the epistemic constraint is construed in terms of justified believability at some time, i.e. what we have called the principle of justified believability. Unfortunately, however, Mackie's correct claim is made for the wrong reasons. For, as we are about to show, Fitch's conclusion can be derived from (RP^1) , which Mackie deems plausible, and the principle of justified believability.

To begin with, we start with the relevant assumption for *reductio*: Someone at some time justifiably believes that p and that no-one ever justifiably believes that p .

$$(3^*) \quad (\Box_{s_2, t_2} (\text{JB}_{s_2, t_2} (P_1 \ \& \ \Box (\Box_{s_1, t_1} (\text{JB}_{s_1, t_1} P_1))))$$

If (3*) is true, then so is an instance of it. Or in other words, if someone at some time justifiably believes that p and that no-one ever justifiably believes that p , then there must be a particular epistemic subject who believes this conjunction at a particular time. Let epistemic subject and time be s_3 and t_3 respectively. We then get

$$(4^*) \quad \text{JB}_{s_3, t_3} (P_1 \ \& \ \Box (\Box_{s_1, t_1} (\text{JB}_{s_1, t_1} P_1)))$$

Since justified belief distributes across conjunctions, we get

$$(5^*) \quad \text{JB}_{s_3, t_3} P_1 \ \& \ \text{JB}_{s_3, t_3} \Box (\Box_{s_1, t_1} (\text{JB}_{s_1, t_1} P_1))$$

Now if one justifiably believes that there is no-one at any time who justifiably believes P_1 is true, then one also justifiably believes that, currently, one does not justifiably believe P_1 oneself.¹⁶ Accordingly, from (5*) we can derive

$$(6^*) \quad \text{JB}_{s_3, t_3} P_1 \ \& \ \text{JB}_{s_3, t_3} \Box \neg \text{JB}_{s_3, t_3} P_1$$

Given (RP¹), however, the second conjunct of (6*) entails that s_3 does not justifiably believe P_1 at t_3

$$(7^*) \quad \text{JB}_{s_3, t_3} P_1 \ \& \ \Box \neg \text{JB}_{s_3, t_3} P_1$$

From here the Fitch-style argument proceeds as rehearsed. So, we can argue to its conclusion without having to appeal to the implausible reflection principle (RP²). All that we need is (RP¹) which Mackie deems a plausible reflection principle. So, Mackie's distinction between the two reflection principles will not help the semantic anti-realist. If the semantic anti-realist is to get any mileage out of rejecting the principle of knowability and replacing it by the weaker principle of justified believability, then he must have some other way of resisting the Fitch-style conclusion.

Fortunately for the semantic anti-realist, there is excellent reason to believe that the reflection principle (RP¹) does not hold. Consider the following case due to Saul Kripke: Pierre is a Frenchman who has lived most of his life in France. Having just returned from a trip to London, one of Pierre's best friends asserts: "Londres est jolie." Since Pierre knows his friend to be a man of exceptional taste he believes what his friend asserted. Pierre comes to believe that London is pretty. Now suppose that, by some unfortunate circumstance, Pierre

finds himself stuck in a particularly unattractive part of London. Pierre is forced take on a badly paid job that will just pay him enough to buy food and accommodation. He learns English in the streets, by ‘direct method’ without referring to translation manuals etc. Pierre uses the term ‘London’ as his neighbours do and learns everything his neighbours know about it which, suppose, is not very much. On the basis of his experiences in the city he comes to believe that London is not pretty. At the same time, Pierre, is still sometimes thinking about his nice life in France, and sometimes even of his friend who told him about the pretty city London. In such moments Pierre thinks to himself: “Si seulement je serais en Londres...” Obviously, Pierre still believes that London is pretty. Pierre has inconsistent beliefs. Moreover, his inconsistent beliefs are both justified. The testimony from a person with exceptional taste justifies his belief that London is pretty while his direct experiences justify his belief that London isn’t pretty.

It is plausible that whilst having inconsistent beliefs that are both justified, Pierre may also believe, justifiably, that he does not believe that London is pretty. Perhaps some psychologist analyses him and tells him that the source for his recent unhappiness is simply that he no longer believes to be living in a pretty city. Pierre comes to believe, justifiably since on the basis of testimony from the psychologist, that he does not believe that London is pretty. But if one justifiably believes that one does not believe a proposition, then one also justifiably believes that one does not justifiably believe that proposition, Pierre also justifiably believes that he does not justifiably believe that London is a pretty city.

Pierre’s case thus indicates that one can simultaneously justifiably believe a proposition, P , its negation, $\text{not-}P$, and that one does not justifiably believe P . Given that this is so, however, it can easily be seen that the reflection principle (RP^1) must fail. For if (RP^1) held, it would follow that Pierre both does and does not justifiably believe that London is pretty. (RP^1) turns an inconsistency in Pierre’s belief-system (in conjunction with a second-order belief), into an inconsistency in the world. So, it must be false.¹⁷ If (RP^1) is false, however, then the relevant Fitch-style argument no longer goes through. The semantic anti-realist is off the hook.

There is, however, a further difficulty for the semantic anti-realist who endorses the principle of justified believability. It remains true that since there are some statements that are true but will never be justifiably believed, it must, by the principle of justified believability, also be possible for someone at some time to justifiably believe an instance of it. Among other things that means that it must be possible for someone at some time to justifiably believe statements of the form “ P but no-one ever justifiably believes P ” and, similarly, “ P but I don’t

justifiably believe P ". And, as Dorothy Edgington has pointed out, one might think that this is already bad enough for the semantic anti-realist. After all, it would seem that one just couldn't have any evidence for statements of either form. If so, then it would seem that one also cannot justifiably believe such statements. So, even if the semantic anti-realist can deny the reflection principle, (RP¹), Fitch's argument shows that things are already bad enough for him before the problematic principle comes into play.¹⁸ And Edgington seems to be right. After all, recall that the semantic anti-realist introduces the principle of justified believability in order to ensure that meaning, construed truth-conditionally, can always be manifested in use. If there are truths of the form " P and no-one ever justifiably believes P " and " P and I don't justifiably believe P ", then one must be able to manifest the meaning of those statements in understanding. Since justified believability is supposed to secure manifestability, it must be possible to justifiably believe statements of the form " P and no-one ever justifiably believes P " and " P and I don't justifiably believe P ". If it is impossible to have evidence that would support statements of this form, the one cannot justifiably believe such statements. The semantic anti-realist defender of the principle of justified believability is again in trouble.

It would seem, however, that there are ways for the semantic anti-realist to respond to this difficulty. Let us begin with statements of the form " P and I don't justifiably believe that P ". In order to argue that statements of this form can be justifiably believed, the semantic anti-realist can simply point to Pierre's case again and claim that Pierre might well come to believe that London is pretty (by believing that the proposition expressed by "Londres est jolie" is true) and that he does not believe that London is pretty (by believing that the proposition expressed by "I don't believe that London is pretty" is also true). Since both of his beliefs are justified and since we typically acquire a justified belief in a conjunction by conjoining the justification we have for the beliefs in the conjuncts¹⁹, it would that the semantic anti-realist can comfortably allow that Pierre justifiably believes that London is pretty and that he does not justifiably believe that London is pretty.²⁰

Things are a bit more difficult when it comes to statements of the form " P and no-one ever justifiably believes that P ". However, the situation is not hopeless for the semantic anti-realist. Consider, for instance, a case in which I am stranded on a lonely island. The only thing I have with me is a book about psychology, which is written in English, say. I read about a brain lesion, named 'X', and learn that the only symptom of X, which occurs in 99% of the cases, is a continuous strong belief on the part of the patient that has X. I introspect my mind and find that I don't believe that I have X. I come to believe that I don't believe that I have X. My belief, since based on reliable introspective capacities, is justified. I justifiably believe

that I don't believe that I have X. Since if one justifiably believes that one does not believe a proposition, P , then one also justifiably believes that one does not justifiably believe P , if justifiably believe that I don't justifiably believe that I have X. Moreover, since I am on a lonely island, without drinkable water and since I have every reason to believe that no-one come to my rescue and that I will die fairly soon, I also justifiably believe that no-one will ever justifiably believe that I have X. To finish the story off, suppose that just before I left for my holiday, I called my doctor to get the results for some brain tests that they had done on me. My doctor told me that everything was fine except that I have a brain condition called 'Y', which is completely harmless, and that I could go on the trip without any problem. On the basis of the testimony from my doctor I come to believe, justifiably, that I have Y. Now, since I am German and have talked to my German doctor our conversation was naturally in German. What I don't know is that the German expression 'Y' and the English expression 'X' are names for the same brain lesion and that I am among the lucky 1% of patients who don't suffer from the symptoms. I am now in a condition in which I justifiably believe that I have X (on the basis of testimony from my doctor: 'Sie haben Y') and I also justifiably believe that no-one ever justifiably believes that I have X (on the basis of introspection, what I have read about X in the psychology book and my unfortunate predicament of being on a lonely island about to die). If I were to conjoin my two beliefs, I would justifiably believe that I have X and that no-one ever justifiably believes that I have X.

There is, thus, a way the semantic anti-realist to respond to Edgington's worry if he replaces the principle of knowability with the principle of justified believability. The semantic anti-realist may point out that, contrary to what Edgington claimed, one can justifiably believe statements of the form " P and I don't justifiably believe P " as well as " P and no-one ever justifiably believes P ". The semantic anti-realist is, again, off the hook.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, then, we have seen that there is reason to believe that the Fitch's argument does not point to a paradox because one of the crucial assumptions of the paradox is not intuitive. It is not intuitive that all truths are knowable. We have found, however, that the Fitch's argument may still pose a problem for certain theoretical views, namely those that rely on the principle of knowability. We have also found that semantic anti-realism was one, and perhaps the only, theoretical view to which the principle of knowability might be important. We then considered, on behalf of the semantic anti-realist, two ways of resisting the conclusion of

Fitch's argument. The first one, which turned out to be unsatisfactory, weakened one of the central epistemic principles for knowledge. The other one rejected the principle of knowability in favour of the principle of justified believability. We found that justified belief does not satisfy the reflection principle and that one can justifiably believe a proposition, P , whilst, at the same time, also believe, justifiably, that one does not justifiably believe P (and indeed that no-one ever justifiably believes P). The second proposal thus succeeds where the first one failed. For that reason semantic anti-realists can solve the problem Fitch's argument posed for their theory by rejecting the principle of knowability in favour of the principle of justified believability.

REFERENCES

NOTES

¹ Alternatively, for those who believe that we can have infinitely many beliefs, it would still seem that given that we are finite cognizers, the infinite set of beliefs a given cognizer can have is only rather small. And given that there are only finitely many of us, there will still remain some propositions (of the very large infinite set of true propositions) that must remain unknown. The point does not depend on whether or not we are willing to accept that finite cognizers can have infinitely many beliefs.

² Cf. Wright (1993), pp. 247-248

³ Cf. Wright (1987), p. 47 in (1993), p. ??

⁴ Cf. Wright (1993), p. 247

⁵ Cf. Ibid., p. 247-48.

⁶ Cf. Ibid., p. 87.

⁷ Dummett (1978), (1993). Note that we have been following Crispin Wright's (1993) outline of the challenges.

⁸ Crispin Wright outlines a challenge that proceeds from the normativity of meaning (cf. Wright (1993)). Hilary Putnam adduces the so-called model-theoretic argument (cf. Putnam (1981)).

⁹ Most contemporary anti-realists appear to accept the manifestation challenge: Cf. Dummett (1978), (1993), Wright (1993), Tennant (1997).

¹⁰ Cf. Wright (1993), early essays vs. later essays

¹¹ We will take quantification over propositions (P , P_I etc.), subjects (s , s_I etc.), and times (t , t_I etc.) for granted. For a statement of the argument that does not rely on substitutional quantification see Kvanvig (1995).

¹² See Williamson (1988; 1992) for an argument to the effect that the conclusion just canvassed – that all truths are known – will not follow within intuitionistic logic from Fitch's reasoning, even though it does follow that non-omniscience is false. For an excellent overview of the debate regarding Fitch's puzzle, see Brogaard & Salerno (2004).

¹³ Deflationary approaches are most commonly prominently pursued in the theory of truth. A problem that has been of central importance in the theory of truth is what exactly the nature of truth consists in. Historically, there has been a variety of proposals. Some have construed the nature of truth as causal correspondence with the facts, other have maintained that it consists in coherence with some preferred set of beliefs and yet other have argued that the nature of

truth is utility. Each such proposal, however, runs into difficulties in that there is some discourse the statements of which are, on the face of it, truth-apt, while they it is not at all clear how, given the proposed nature of truth, statements of these discourses could be true. The metaphysics of the discourse seemed not to mesh with the proposed nature of truth. For instance, the statements of mathematical discourse are, on the face of it, truth-apt. However, it would seem that we stand in no causal relation to mathematical facts. So, those who maintain that the nature of truth consists in causal correspondence with the facts will be in quite some trouble when it comes to explaining how the statements of mathematical discourse can be truth-apt. As opposed to that, while coherence and pragmatic theories of truth do not face problems when it comes to mathematical discourse, it seems that they fail to do full justice to the discourse about middle-sized dry goods, for instance. For it would seem that there is simply no guarantee that reality will be the way that some coherent set of beliefs, for instance, takes it to be. Deflationary theories of truth react to this sort of problem by denying an assumption that has been taken for granted in the generation of the problem, viz. that truth has an underlying nature. Once the assumption is rejected, once it is denied that truth has an underlying nature, the problem that arises over whether the nature really fits the metaphysics of all apparently truth-apt discourses simply does not arise.

¹⁴ It might be worth pointing out that there are a couple of epistemologists, viz. Finn Spicer and Allen Hazlett, who have become suspicious of the factivity of knowledge and want to maintain, instead, that knowledge is merely *reliable* belief. Such a view would take a deflationary stance on the factivity principle in that it rejects factivity in favour of some weaker, viz. merely probabilistic, relation between knowledge and truth. Anti-realists could then block the paradox of knowability by adopting this conception of knowledge. Furthermore, they could avail themselves of the considerations below to argue that Fitch's argument won't go through if knowledge is analysed in terms of reliable belief.

¹⁵ Mackie (1980), pp. 91-2.

¹⁶ Some may object that the step from (5*) to (6*) will not go through because justified belief is not closed under known entailment (never mind under entailment *simpliciter*). However, the argument does not depend on such closure principles. It is plausible that if (RP¹) is valid—that is if one justifiably believes at t_1 that one does not justifiably believe that p at t_1 , then one does not justifiably believe that p at t_1 —then so is the following reflection principle: If one justifiably believes at a given time that no-one ever justifiably believes that p , then, at that time one does not justifiably believe that p . Or formally,

$$(RP^3) \quad \Box P \Box s \Box t (JB_{s,t} \Box (\Box_{s_1,t_1} (JB_{s_1,t_1} P) \Box \Box JB_{s,t} P))$$

(RP³) will validate the step from (6*) to (7*) without relying on any further closure principles.

¹⁷ If one wants to run the argument by appeal to (RP³) instead of (RP¹) one will need a slightly different case to make the present point. We provide such a case below (pp. 13-14).

¹⁸ Cf. Edgington (1985), p. 558.

¹⁹ Cf. Kvanvig (2006), p. 21.

²⁰ Of course, another consequence is that Pierre can come to justifiably believe a contradiction. This may initially seem an unwelcome consequence of the view. However, it is not clear why one could not justifiably believe a contradiction (at least so long as its not an obvious one). A clever logician could easily tell me that what, in effect, is a complicated contradiction is true and I could come to believe this contradiction on that basis. Since the logician is an otherwise reliable informant on such issues, and since testimony of reliable informant furnishes us with justified beliefs, my belief in the contradiction is justified.