



# Metaphysical Realism and Naturalised Epistemology

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## Abstract

The paper aims to examine Michael Devitt's arguments in favor of metaphysical realism, where he argued that the issue of realism is devoid of the issues of semantics and epistemology. He has tried to compress his argument by focusing on the metaphysical or ontological questions of realism, but he states that epistemological concerns can be taken only when epistemology is naturalised. Devitt, therefore, has considered naturalised epistemology as a method to give potency to his Realism. Realism, as defined by him, is having majorly two major characteristics, the independent dimension and the existence dimension, that is, the view of the reality in which the reality exists independent of the human mind. These independence and existence dimensions are not mutually exclusive.

**Keywords:** Metaphysical Realism, Anti-realism, Truth, Naturalised epistemology

## Introduction

Problems of realism have been dealt with by philosophers since the beginning of philosophical inquiry. Traditionally, realism has been analysed and contrasted with many other positions. Like in the ancient and medieval periods, the issue is over the real and objective existence of universals. The question that realists and their opponents tried to address is: Do universals exist independently of thinking minds? There are various ways of denying realism. One may not deny the very existence of universals but deny their mind-independence. For conceptualists, universals exist, but are not independent of human minds. Nominalists, on the other hand, deny

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the very existence of universals. They assert that there are particular objects and that everything is particular. Realists, as opposed to both, admit universals as objective entities. In modern philosophy, idealism appears as an opposition to realism, which holds that there are no material objects outside of the thinking being. Idealism in this context, idealism may take different forms, but they all have a common point to make: that is, the material objects that form part of the world depend for their existence on the thinking mind.

The debate between realism and opposing views takes a new turn in analytic philosophy with the advent of linguistic analysis. In a number of different forms, we still grapple with the same question in contemporary philosophy. As Putnam writes, “The great founders of analytic philosophy- Frege, Carnap, Wittgenstein, and Russell put this question “How does language ‘hook on’ to the world?” as the very centre of philosophy” (1987, p. 104).

With the advent of the linguistic turn in philosophy, language has been given a central place over the mind and that which, supposedly, stands over and against reality. So, the discussion has shifted from whether material reality is mind-dependent to the question about which sorts of true statements, if any, stand in representational relationship to nonlinguistic items. The question of realism is now connected with the question of objective truth (which is the position of anti-realists).

Philosophers of analytic tradition emphasize that the debate has arisen from the fundamental issue of the relation between language and reality, which has given rise to the problem of whether realism about the nature of truth and reality is possible at all. Neither truth nor reality can be disassociated from the language used by human beings and the forms of life associated with it. Truth and reality must be embedded in human language and forms of life, and this must replace the ready-made worldview of reality, which has been associated with transcendental metaphysics. So, the task of a philosopher is to understand the relationship between truth and reality. Realists and anti-realists differ in their understanding of this relationship.

Realists believe that truth is a matter of representation of the world in language, and that means since the world is independent of

human cognition, truth is beyond the capacity of human recognition. But the world as the subject matter of linguistic representation is challenged by the anti-realists. For them, the idea of truth as an absolute relation between language and reality must be revised as it utterly neglects the mind-dependence of truth. Truth independent of the human mind is a transcendental notion and, hence, must be rejected. Anti-realists claim, therefore, that truth is internal to the system of language and concepts we have. Thus, they advocate the internalization of truth and reality to the conceptual scheme and ultimately to the human standpoint. So, there are two forms of realism: One is metaphysical realism, which is concerned with the ready-made worldview, and another is semantic realism, which concerns with language being the representation of the independent reality therefore, the truth values of sentences are independent of anyone's knowing them to be true or false. For metaphysical realists, the theory of truth and reference presupposes a metaphysical harmony among thoughts, language, and the world as well. For them, there is a logical relation between language and thought on the one hand and the world on the other. This idea explains why the realists demand that language has to be a representation of the world.

There is an ongoing debate concerning realism and antirealism in contemporary philosophy. But my aim here is not to delve into this debate but rather to focus on the analysis of metaphysical realism and how it takes a way toward naturalised epistemology. I shall be dealing with this with reference to Michael Devitt. The paper is divided into two sections; in the beginning section, we will discuss Devitt's arguments for metaphysical realism and how he has tried to disassociate realism from semantics and epistemology. In the Second section, the relation between metaphysical realism and naturalised epistemology will be discussed.

### **Devitt on Metaphysical Realism**

The realism of the metaphysical kind has always contended that it is concerned with the ultimate nature of reality and that it proposes to bring out the essential structure of reality, which is usually hidden from us. From an early age, we come to believe that things in the world (such as stones, trees, and cats) exist, and subsequently, we believe these objects exist even when there is no one to perceive them. They do not depend for their existence on our opinions or anything

mental. Michael Devitt adheres to this position and claims realism as a metaphysical theory with no semantic-epistemological features. He maintains that reference and truth have no role to play in our discussion of realism. He writes,

Realism is an overarching ontological doctrine about what there is and what its like. It is committed to most of the physical posits of common sense, science, and to the view that these entities are independent of the mental. It has an epistemic aspect: the entities do not depend for their existence or nature on our opinion; they exist objectively. It is a very plausible doctrine, because it takes the posits of science and common sense pretty much at face value. (Devitt, 1984, p. 227)

Devitt explains that the metaphysical doctrine of realism has two dimensions: “existence dimension and the independence dimension” (1984, pp. 12-15). The existence dimension commits the realist to the existence of such common-sense entities as stones, trees, cats, and such scientific entities as electrons, neutrons etc. However, this dimension is insufficient to explain realism since opponents of realism can also accept it. Devitt says,

Typically, idealists, the traditional opponents of realists, have not denied this[existence] dimension; or, at least, have not straightforwardly denied it. What they have denied is the independence dimension. According to some idealists, the entities identified by the first dimension are made up of mental items: “ideas” or “sense data”. In recent times another sort of idealist has been much more common. According to these idealists, the entities are not in a certain respect ‘objective’: they depend for their existence and nature on the cognitive activities and capacities of our minds. Realists reject all sorts of mind dependencies. Relations between minds and those entities are limited to familiar causal interactions long noted by folk theory: we throw stones, plant trees, see cats, and so on (Devitt, 1999, p. 91; see also Devitt, 1991b, p. 44).

Even if Realists deny the mind-dependence view of the world, they allow the causal interaction between the mind and the world. That means the world acts on the mind, causing beliefs, desires, attitudes, sensations etc., and all these states cause behaviour that affects external reality, even creating some items (offspring, artifacts). These

relations, according to Devitt, long noted by folk theory and studied by science, pose no threat to realism (Devitt, 1984,).

Devitt has explained common sense realism by focusing on the independence dimension more than the existence dimension. And in the explanation of intangibility or unobservables within scientific realism, the main argument has been over existence (1984, 14-15). The following definition of realism by Devitt encompasses both the common-sense realism and scientific realism definitions:

Realism Tokens of most current common-sense, and scientific, physical types objectively exist independently of the mental (Devitt, 1984, p. 22; see also Devitt, 1999, p. 91 and 1991b, p. 45).

Thus, the doctrine contains both observables or common-sense realism with an independence dimension and unobservables or scientific realism with an existence dimension. For Devitt, statements of the independence dimension contain key terms such as external and objective. In addition to objective existence, the independence dimension requires that the material and physical world exist not only objectively but also non-mentally. Realism, thus, can be defined as a doctrine that holds an objective and independent existence of the world.

Devitt purports to say that objects have an objective existence in the world does not imply that they are unknowable or that we cannot have any true beliefs about them. For him, the objective existence does not depend upon our epistemic capacities. As he writes,

In insisting on the objectivity of the world, realists are not saying that it is unknowable. They are saying that it is not constituted by our knowledge, by our epistemic values, by the synthesizing power of the mind, nor by our imposition of concepts, theories, or languages; it is not limited by what we can believe or discover. Many worlds lack this sort of objectivity and independence: Kant's "phenomenal" world; Dummett's verifiable world; the stars made by a Goodman "version"; the constructed world of Putnam's "internal realism"; Kuhn's world of theoretical ontologies; the many worlds created by the "discourses" of structuralists and post-structuralists. (Devitt, 1991b, p. 45; see also Devitt, 1991a, p. 15; c.f. Devitt, 1984, p. 13)

Devitt, therefore, has abandoned explicitly the mind-dependent view of reality as embraced by anti-realists. He argued that this mind-dependency thesis of anti-realists is not intelligible as the world is not a creation of minds. And even if the anti-realist position is intelligible, it is false, and in so far as it is unintelligible, the realist needs no argument to dismiss it (Devitt, 1984).

The existence and independence dimensions both sufficiently define Devitt's use of realism. The existence dimension without the independence dimension leads to various forms of idealism, and the independence dimension without the existence dimension leads to what Devitt calls "Weak, or Fig-Leaf Realism," which is defined as merely a commitment to there being something independent of us without specifying its nature (1984, p. 22). Though for Devitt, this doctrine is so weak as to be uninteresting, he believes that it is worth stating because many so-called realists are committed to nothing more than this Fig-Leaf Realism, and thus he entitles this as a "minimal realist" (1999, p. 91; see also Devitt, 1991b, p. 45; 1984, p. 22) doctrine, which he accepts and which according to him is worth fighting for. He uses "Realism" with capital "R" to describe his formulation of realism, which he refers to as fig-leaf or minimal realism.

Devitt's acceptance of a strong common-sense view of reality is strengthened by the belief that things of the world exist even when they are not perceived by us, and their existence in the natural world is not limited to our abilities to apprehend them. He holds that these beliefs about ordinary objects are central to our whole way of viewing the world, to our conceptual scheme. The doctrine defined to capture these beliefs is aptly named 'Common-Sense Realism', because it is, in fact, the core of common sense (Devitt, 1991b, p. 45).

Thus, a realist asserts those tables, chairs, cats, the moons of Jupiter or Saturn, and so on, exist and that these entities exist objectively and independently of the mental and are not constituted by our knowledge, epistemic values, capacity to refer to it, by the synthesizing power of the mind, by our imposition of concepts, theories, or languages. Nor is it made up of sense-data or mental states, whether as characterized by Descartes or by modern materialism. Devitt, therefore, holds that minimalist realism is a

strong worldview that needs to take care of all such mind-dependence problems. He says,

Realism is the minimal realist doctrine worth fighting for. Once it is established, the battle against antirealism is won; all that remains are skirmishes. Furthermore, Realism provides the place to stand to solve the many other difficult problems that have become entangled with it. Any semantic problem needs to be disentangled from Realism. In particular, the correspondence theory of truth is in no way constitutive of Realism, nor of any similarly metaphysical doctrine. (1991b, p. 45)

By denying semantics analysis of the world, Devitt discards any doctrine that takes semantics to know the reality. At this juncture he has expressed his unwillingness towards a form of anti-realism which describes realism as a semantic issue altogether. Devitt holds that since correspondence theory is a semantic theory, it must be rejected as a constitutive of Realism or any similarly metaphysical doctrine (1991b, p. 45.); he says, "Correspondence truth is a semantic doctrine about the pretensions of one small part of the world to represent the rest" (1991b, p. 49). Realism therefore does not involve correspondence theory nor any other theory of truth and meaning. So, "Realism does not strictly entail any doctrine of truth at all. It follows that a person could, without consistency, be a Realist without having any notion of truth in his theory" (Devitt, 1984, p. 35).

Devitt claims that we must settle the realism issue before any epistemic and semantic issue.

As he says, "Realism says nothing semantic at all beyond, in its use of 'objective', making the negative point that our semantic capacities do not constitute the world" (1984, p. 39). He adds, "The semantic cart should not be put before the metaphysical horse" (Devitt, 1984, p. 40).

By saying that the realist explanation of the world is unclear, anti-realism emerges by taking semantics as a device, which, according to Devitt, is not the right way to understand reality. Semantics has been at the center of contemporary anti-realist arguments. Therefore, he views that the linguistic turn in philosophy is a mistake. Devitt admits that the theory of language is important, but it is only one

theory among many others about the world we live in. Metaphysical issues are distinct from semantic ones and cannot be established by doing semantics. He argues that his position on “ontological commitment” does not need any semantic analysis (Devitt, 1984,40). It is implausible to say that the word “exist” can only be semantically understood or that it is ontological only in terms of semantic understanding. His unwillingness towards the semantic move is expressed in the following passage,

It is a truism that a theory must be presented to us in language. So, to draw any conclusions at all from the theory, whether about ontological commitment or the price of eggs, we have to understand the language in which it is presented. But this mundane fact supplies no reason for supposing that we must move to semantic theory to determine the ontological commitment of our object theory, because the fact covers the semantic theory too: even semantics requires language. In sum, a person can be implicitly committed to the existence of something by the semantic criterion only because he can be explicitly committed to its existence by the non-semantic criterion. (Devitt, 1984, pp. 42-43)

As a consequence of linguistic turn, anti-realists deny the realist’s arguments of mind-independent reality and view this position as obscure and metaphorical. Dummett is a famous example of such criticisms as he thinks that any metaphysical view outside meaning analysis is a metaphor. Devitt, against anti-realists, writes, “Is it really claimed, for example, that there could not have been stars and dinosaurs if there had not been people? If not, in what way, precisely, are dinosaurs and stars supposed to be dependent on us and our minds? No clear answer emerges. However, this obscurity is a problem about antirealism not realism” (1991b, p. 53).

Therefore, Devitt views anti-realism as an unintelligible thesis. He holds “...realism allows for the familiar causal interactions between minds and the world. Realism disallows all other dependencies. That is sufficient to characterize realism about “natural” objects like stones, trees, and cats, but not artifacts like chair, pens, and cars. These objects owe their nature to purpose for which we built them or to the way we habitually use them. So realism must further qualified to allow for that sort of mind dependency too” (1991b, p. 53).



Since Devitt admits the causal interaction between the mind and the world, this leads him to accept the causal relation between our words and their objects (1984). Devitt accepts Kripke's formulation of the causal theory of reference. For him, such a theory is conceived to provide the definition of reference, which it does in a "physicalistic manner" (Devitt, 1991b, p. 74). It thus defines it in physicalistic terms, i.e., in terms of the underlying physical traits of different things, the unique relation of our words with the objects outside, irrespective of any particular language.

The key argument, according to Devitt, for Realism is a negative one, it is to show that the arguments against it and the alternatives to the Realism thesis fail. Therefore, he inscribes, "the defence of realism depends on distinguishing it from other doctrines and on choosing the right place to start the argument" (1999, p. 90). Devitt's starting point is made apparent by the five maxims he lays out at the beginning of his book *Realism and Truth* which form the basis of his defence of Realism. They are,

Maxim 1: In considering realism, distinguish the constitutive and evidential issues.

Maxim 2: Distinguish the metaphysical (ontological) issue of realism from any semantic issue.

Maxim 3: Settle the realism issue before any epistemic or semantic issue.

Maxim 4: In considering the semantic issue, don't take truth for granted.

Maxim 5: Distinguish the issue of correspondence truth from any epistemic issue. (Devitt, 1984, pp. 3-4)

Devitt's defence of these maxims, and the starting point they dictate, is largely based on his leaning towards "naturalism," the view that "there is only one way of knowing, the empirical way that is the basis of science" (Devitt, 1991b, p. 5; see also Devitt, 1999, p. 96).

### **Naturalised Epistemology and Metaphysical Realism:**

Devitt accepts that though he defined Realism as a metaphysical doctrine, still it is, to some extent, epistemological. As he writes, "The independence dimension denies that the world is dependent

for its existence and nature (except in the familiar ways) on what we believe. This denial is the full extent to which Realism is epistemological” (1991b, p. 53). He writes,

Realism like anything else, must be argued for by giving evidence. Historically this has immediately raised an epistemic question: Is that evidence good enough? The answer has dominated the debate. Skeptical doubts about the evidence have been the main motivation for antirealism. (1991b, p. 54)

Devitt argued that anti-realists’ narration of realism is odd, and the reason behind this is the Cartesian picture (1991b, pp. 56-57). He claims that anti-realism has flourished because of skepticism and the Cartesian picture. It becomes popular because of these two. Therefore, he thinks it is better not to start with semantic or epistemology issues as it is done by anti-realists and by some traditional philosophers (Cartesian picture is an epistemological doctrine). He believes that naturalism may justify its view of where to start. He writes the distinction between Cartesian picture and naturalism in the following manner,

According to this [Cartesian picture] we start the quest of knowledge locked in our minds, contemplating our ideas, and asking the following question: Is there a world out there causing this inner show? Does it resemble the show? How can our ideas reach out to this world? But the naturalist does not start from scratch with epistemic and semantic questions. Those questions arise when we already have wide-ranging, well-based, opinions about the world, opinions derived from common sense and science. The questions arise when we focus on a small part of the world: people. We go on to seek empirical answers to those questions; we seek a naturalistic epistemology and semantics. The theories that result have no special status. Indeed, given our lack of confidence in these areas, the theories should have rather a lowly status. To suppose that we can derive the right metaphysics from epistemology or semantics is to put the cart before the horse. (1991b, p. 57)

Devitt has considered naturalised epistemology as a method to give potency to his Realism, and this undertaking is influenced by Quine’s view. I am not going to discuss Quine’s view on

epistemology naturalised in detail rather, I shall simply reflect upon his idea to understand Devitt's position.

The philosophers and the scientists are in the same boat, according to Quine, and "unlike the old epistemologists, we seek no firmer basis for science than science itself" (1995, p. 16). The futility of trying to doubt everything all at once or trying to achieve an external position is replaced by the analogy of Neurath's mariner who "has to rebuild his boat while staying afloat in it." (Quine, 1969, p. 84). Epistemology concerns with the foundations of science. Our elementary knowledge of the natural world is related to science. By expressing his dissatisfaction with foundationalism, Quine assumes that any foundation in epistemology is doomed to failure.

For Quine, epistemology "simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science" (1969, p. 82). It views the human subject as a natural phenomenon, and uses empirical science to study epistemic activity. Epistemology, in its new setting, is seen as a scientific study of how the human subject takes sensory stimulation as input and delivers as output a theory of a three-dimensional world.

In our attempt to answer the central epistemological question- how we acquire such a responsible theory of the external world? Quine answers that we are free to use the fruits of science to investigate its roots. He writes,

Epistemology is best looked upon then as an enterprise within natural science. Cartesian doubt is not the way to begin. Retaining our present beliefs about nature, we can still ask how we arrived at them. Science tells us that our only source of information about the external world is through the impact of light rays and molecules upon our sensory surfaces. Stimulated in this way, we somehow evolve an elaborate and useful science. How do we do this, and why does the resulting science work so well? These are genuine questions, and no feigning of doubt is needed to appreciate them. They are scientific questions about a species of primates, and they are open to investigation in natural science, the very science whose acquisition is being investigated. (1975, p. 68)

This suggests that the use of science to scrutinize its own achievement and acquisition of knowledge is a major break from

traditional epistemology, for it renounces the quest for a non-scientific justification of our knowledge of the external world. Quine, points out that naturalism reflects an “unregenerate realism” (1981, p. 72). He inscribes,

The naturalistic philosopher begins his reasoning within the inherited world theory as a going concern. He tentatively believes all of it, but believes also that some unidentified portions are wrong. He tries to improve, clarify, and understand the system from within. He is a busy sailor adrift on Neurath’s boat (Quine, 1981, p. 72).

For Quine, “there is nothing we can be more certain than external things—some of them anyway—other people, sticks and stones” (1981, pp. 1-2). In addition to it, he further adds, “there remains the fact—a fact of science itself—that science is a conceptual bridge linking sensory stimulation to sensory stimulation.” (1981, pp. 01-02)

The upshot of Quine’s analysis is that we can always fight over which theory or set of theories should be accepted based on pragmatic and epistemic grounds, but it is insignificant to inquire into the absolute correctness of a conceptual scheme as a mirror of reality for “we cannot detach ourselves from it and compare objectively with an unconceptualized reality” (1953, p. 79). Quine suggests that since science is a linguistic structure that is keyed to observation only at points, our talk of the external world “is just a conceptual apparatus that helps us to foresee and control the triggering of our sensory receptors in the light of previous triggering of our sensory receptors” (1981, p. 1). Our conceptual schemes are imposed in our understanding of the world, but as Quine suggests, we are not stuck with the conceptual scheme that we grew up in. We can change it minutely so that there is nothing to carry us along but the evolving conceptual scheme itself. Quine states,

We can improve our conceptual scheme, our philosophy, bit by bit while continuing to depend on it for support; but we cannot detach ourselves from it and compare it objectively with an unconceptualized reality. Hence it is meaningless... to inquire into the absolute correctness of the conceptual scheme as a mirror of reality. Our standard for appraising basic changes of conceptual scheme must be, not a realistic standard of correspondence to reality, but a pragmatic standard (1953, pp. 78-79).

It is indeed often supposed that naturalism is hostile to a priori justification of belief. For example, Ronald Giere takes this to be a defining characteristic of naturalised epistemology. Giere writes, "Epistemologically, naturalism implies the rejection of all forms of a priori knowledge, including that of higher-level principles of epistemic validation" (Giere, 2000, p. 308). Similarly, Laurence Bonjour claims that Quine repudiates the concept of a priori justification altogether (1995, p. 29)

Thus, from the point of view of naturalism, philosophy becomes continuous with science. Devitt attempts, therefore, to maintain an empirical-based metaphysics, and use that as evidence in an empirical study of what we can know and how we can know it: epistemology itself becomes part of science, "naturalised epistemology" (Devitt, 1999, p. 96). Devitt says that naturalised epistemology takes science, and hence it posits pretty much for granted. An obvious starting assumption is that things exist objectively and independently of the mind. So, it approaches epistemology from a Realist standpoint; it is in accord with Maxim 3 (Devitt, 1991a, p. 76).

Hence, for Devitt, realism, which is scientifically informed, can be best supported by naturalised epistemology. The naturalised epistemology confirms that our talk of objects like stones, trees, cats, and electrons have the independence and objectivity that is ultimately common-sensical and scientific. He holds that naturalism is "an epistemological doctrine and is opposed to a priori knowledge" (1998, p. 46). Therefore, Devitt claims that when metaphysics is considered empirically, then Realism becomes the only option available to a philosopher, as he puts it, "Realism alone explains 'the regularities in our experiences'. It lends itself to a plausible epistemology" (1984, p. 68).

The upshot of this whole argument about naturalism is, "epistemology is one of the weakest parts to stand on. So also is semantics" (Devitt, 1999, p. 97) Therefore, they cannot be the issues to start with to know the world. Devitt thus takes naturalism as his starting point and holds the naturalised version of semantics and epistemology. Devitt writes,

Quine is fond of vivid knowledge taken from Otto Neurath. He likens our knowledge – our “web of belief” to boat that we continually rebuilt while staying afloat in it. We can rebuild any part of the boat, but in so doing we must take a stand on the rest of the boat for the time being. So, we cannot rebuild it at all at once. Similarly, we can revise any part of our knowledge, but in so doing we must accept the rest for the time being. So we cannot revise it all at once. And just as we should start rebuilding the boat by standing on the firmest parts, so also should we start rebuilding our web. Epistemology is one of the weakest parts to stand on. So also is semantics (Devitt, 1999, pp. 96-97).

Naturalism itself informs us that our knowledge of external objects is mediated through sensations or experiences, or stimulations, which receive conceptual interpretation through our activities of enquiry. Both Quine and Devitt accept naturalised epistemology and deny a priori justification. They view philosophy as continuous with empirical procedures of science and hence view metaphysics as similarly empirical.

Devitt wants to argue for something stronger than Fig-Leaf Realism; he argues that tokens of most common-sense and scientific physical types objectively exist independently of the mental. To do this, he must specify what these types are, or at least what many or most of them are. It is unclear how he can do this without involving himself in disputes over what conceptual scheme to apply, an issue that is usually relative to pragmatic, epistemic, and linguistic concerns. However, in response to this, Devitt and Sterelny write,

Philosophers have had a lot to say about linguistic competence. Implicitly, at least, they have been concerned with competence in the full semantic sense, for they have attended to truth and reference. Yet interestingly enough they have typically made two mistakes that are parallel to the two major mistakes of linguists. First, they conflate the theory of competence with the theory of symbols. Second, they write as if that competence consisted in propositional knowledge of the language. (Devitt and Sterelny, 1987, p. 147)

Of the conflation between the theory of symbols and the theory of competence, Devitt and Sterelny hold that this mistake is certainly

made by Michael Dummett, which is reflected in his slogan, “a theory of meaning is a theory of understanding (Devitt and Sterelny, 1987, p. 147).

Devitt and Sterelny claim that the subject matter of semantics is linguistic expressions and their relations to extra-linguistic reality, and it is wrong, to import psychological considerations, such as considerations concerning the speaker’s competence in terms of the speaker’s understanding, into a semantic theory.

Devitt claims that the naturalistic approach has committed us to many entities of a largely impersonal world. It has not committed us to sense data; therefore, there is no point of asking how the gap between sense data and the world can be bridged. From the perspective of naturalism, the relationship between our minds and the world is no more inaccessible than any other relationship. Devitt argues,

...objections to Common-Sense Realism have come from speculations in epistemology and semantics. From the naturalistic perspective, there can be no question of these speculations being known a priori. Once they are seen as empirical, they are far too ill-based to justify any metaphysical conclusion. We should put metaphysics first, and then Realism is the only doctrine that can be taken seriously. (Devitt, 1999, p. 98)

That is why Devitt has also discarded the theories given by Dummett and Putnam, as they treat Realism as a semantic issue. He has also argued against Kuhn as a constructivist and relativist. Devitt renounces Dummett’s verificationism theory, which has been propounded in order to abandon the realism issue. He also rejects Dummett’s assertion that the theory of meaning is the theory of understanding. That is why he questions, “How could a semantic dispute about the truth conditions of sentences be a psychological dispute about the competent speaker’s understanding? How could disputes about such different sorts of property be same?” (Devitt, 1984, p. 204). Yet Dummett does equate the two disputes.

Therefore, Devitt by rejecting Realism to be regarded as a semantic issue, writes, “What has truth to do with Realism? On the face of it, nothing at all. Indeed, Realism says nothing semantic at all beyond, in its use of ‘objective’, making the negative point that our

semantic capacities do not constitute the world” (Devitt: 1991a, p. 39; c.f. Devitt, 1984, p. 34)

The way that the realism issue is posed by the British School founded by Dummett is mistaken. The School starts with a properly metaphysical statement of the issue. This is immediately replaced by a formulation in terms of truth, which is then taken ...as part of a theory of meaning. Whatever the merits of the various theories of meaning then proposed, the theories are [almost] irrelevant... to the metaphysical issue which they are alleged to settle. For the metaphysical issue is not one about meaning (Devitt, 1991b, p. 51).

Devitt, regarding the relativism and incommensurability thesis (Kuhn and Feyerabend), holds that their discussion focuses on epistemic and semantic issues, saying very little about the reality to which people are epistemically and semantically linked. They are, according to Devitt implicitly anti-realist (Devitt, 1984, pp. 135-36). He further holds that the thought that “existence-relative-to-theory” (Devitt, 1984, p. 140) is literally incoherent, and phrases like “imposition on the world” (Devitt, 1984, p. 140) should be taken as a metaphor. In rejecting that sort of position, Devitt says,

There is no doubt that we construct our theories of the world; and that the theories we construct are determined by the experiences we receive and our innate predispositions to respond selectively to experiences. So we can make good sense of talk of our imposing on, organizing and cutting up. Talk of imposing (etc.) the world must be a metaphor. Yet it is very important to the appeal of the imposition view that this metaphor be taken literally. For then we still seem to have the world. Once the metaphor is recognized, we are left only with the organizing mind and its experiences; we are left with radical idealism like Hume’s (Devitt, 1984, p. 140).

Devitt’s main aim is to defend Realism, by proving all the alternative hypotheses of realism as unintelligible, be it Descartes’ skepticism, foundationalism, relativism, incommensurability, interest relative descriptions, warranted assessability, and so on.

## **Conclusion**

Even if the realism of the metaphysical sort espouses the independent and objective existence of the world, we can never step



outside our own conceptual scheme, language, or theory to settle the issue of realism. The reality that matters most to us is not alien to us or our conceptual scheme. By being internal to our conceptual scheme, the issues of realism and objectivity make any sense. Devitt overlooks the critical role that conceptual scheme and language play in settling the ontological case.

It is discussed that realism concerns entities, the referents of our thoughts, and objectivity affects the states of affairs in which such referents can partake. The point to be marked is that both concepts concern, a yet to be specified independence, of that which we think about from any consciousness of it. Ordinarily, terms such as realism and objectivity are considered the concerns of metaphysics rather than semantics, so at this stage, one may rightly wonder why an investigation into the nature of thought takes these concepts as their central topic. However, semantics and metaphysics are more closely connected than one may initially believe.

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