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Ramsey, Frank P. (1903–30) Mathematical logician who made significant contributions to theories of TRUTH and PROBABILITY, and whose early death was deeply mourned by many, including WITTGENSTEIN.

Rationalism In the usage of philosophers, the word 'rationalism' refers to the kinds of philosophical theory which claim that we can arrive at substantial knowledge about the nature of the world by pure reasoning, without appeal to any empirical premises. It is in that sense that DESCARTES, LEIBNIZ and SPINOZA are traditionally quoted as classical examples of rationalism. Rationalism is opposed to EMPIRICISM – the doctrine that experience is a necessary basis to all our knowledge – but neither term has a precise meaning. Thus we might expect that a pure empiricist would claim that all knowledge requires empirical premises, and J. S. MILL did at times make this claim; for him even mathematical truths are empirical generalizations. But most empiricists have admitted that mathematical truths are a priori; they are still considered to be empiricists if they claim that mathematical truths are analytic, formal truths which give no information about the nature of the world. Thus there is a tendency to consider that a rationalist is one who claims to have synthetic a priori knowledge, and who claims to know, wholly or in part, what the world is like by pure reason. But Leibniz is usually considered to be the most extreme of the rationalists because he claimed that in principle all truths could be known by pure reasoning, experience being but an inferior substitute for reason; yet Leibniz held that all truths of reason were guaranteed by the principle of contradiction and therefore, in modern terminology, analytic. However, Leibniz's claim that the contradictory of every true proposition is self-contradictory is very paradoxical, and we may say that the rationalist is one who claims knowledge which is not based on sense-experience and which cannot be regarded as purely formal. But this is still inadequate: KANT recognized synthetic a priori knowledge, only about phenomena as opposed to things themselves; he thought that it was one of the main virtues of his critical system that it avoided both rationalism and empiricism. (J.O.U.)

Rawls, John (1921–2002) American political philosopher, born in Baltimore, who transformed Anglo-American POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY with a series of articles published in the 1950s and 1960s culminating in *A Theory of Justice* (1971). In opposition to UTILITARIANISM, with its exclusive concern with aggregate happiness, Rawls argues that the fundamental political value is individual rights, or 'justice as fairness'. Rawls proceeds by reviving and generalizing the hypothesis of the SOCIAL CONTRACT as found in LOCKE, ROUSSEAU and KANT. The best political principles, he argues, are those which rational citizens would agree upon if they were to choose the 'basic structure of society' whilst a 'veil of ignorance' prevented them from knowing their own eventual position within it. According to Rawls they would recognize a general presumption in favour of equality, and hold that 'all social values – liberty and opportunity, income

and wealth, and the bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage'.

On this basis, Rawls attempted to justify two principles of justice. The first and overriding one states: 'each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others'. The second specifies conditions under which inequalities may nevertheless be justified: 'Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.'

Debate about Rawls' system has concentrated on part (a) of the second principle, which is known as 'the difference principle'. It implies that inequalities cannot be justified unless they are to the advantage even of the least privileged. Left-wing critics have feared that this opens the way for attempts to justify unacceptable inequalities. Right-wing critics (such as NOZICK) have argued that, provided the better-off gain their advantages rightfully, they are under no obligation to bother about the disadvantaged. Either way it seems that 'self-respect', which Rawls regards as 'perhaps the most important primary good', may not be safe in Rawls' system.

Rawls consolidated his positions in *Political Liberalism* (1993); *The Law of Peoples* and *Collected Papers* (1999); and *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (2000). See also LIBERALISM AND COMMUNITARIANISM. [J.R.]

Realism Realism is sometimes said to be the view that some things exist essentially independently of any mind. For example, realism about UNIVERSALS holds that they exist independently of any mind; and NOMINALISM denies it. Mathematical realism claims that numbers exist independently of mind, which discovers rather than creates them. Realism about the external world asserts that physical objects exist essentially independently of the mind of any perceiver. PHENOMENALISTS (sometimes called 'subjective idealists') deny realism about external physical objects; John Stuart MILL, for instance, held that physical objects are nothing more than sets of actual and possible sensory data, which themselves have existence only as the contents of a mind. Realists about social phenomena deny that social wholes can be accounted for entirely in terms of the psychological states of individuals (cf. HOLISM).

Some realists formulate their claims in terms of essential independence from human activity, since acting, in its proper sense, presupposes that the actor has intentions and purposes, and hence a mind. Contemporary thinkers normally restrict 'mind' to human minds; but traditionally, anti-realists such as BERKELEY and HEGEL allowed objects to be essentially independent of all human minds, but dependent on infinite mind, or the Deity.

The word 'essentially' is important here. It would not refute a realist about the external world if every bit of reality had depended in some causal or contingent way upon mind, and one can be a realist about objects (for instance, to use MARX's example, a cultivated cherry tree), which would not have existed without human activity. If such dependence is inessential to the thing, in the sense that the object logically could have existed independently of mind or activity, it poses no problem for a realist. But this characterization of realism has the unfortunate consequence of rendering realism about the mind impossible by definition, since

obviously no mind can exist essentially independently of itself. One could avoid this difficulty by defining realism as the view that a thing could exist independently, not of mind in general, but more specifically of any beliefs or thoughts we might have about it. We are realists about mental contents like pain if we hold that one can be in pain even if one does not believe it. We are realists about morality if we think that actions can be right, or things can be good, whether or not anyone believes that they are. In this sense, realism is connected with the epistemological idea that what is real can always serve as an objective 'other' against which our beliefs can be tested. The important point for realism, recharacterized in this way, is that it is always possible either that our beliefs are wrong, or that we are wrong about which beliefs we have. Error and mistake are always possible. In epistemology, the correspondence theory of TRUTH is naturally associated with the metaphysical doctrine of realism.

Scientific realism can be characterized using this second definition. It is the view that scientific theories about unobservable entities should be construed at face value, as attempts to describe an independent even if unobservable reality. Instrumentalists (like PEIRCE) and phenomenalists (like MACH) argue for an anti-realist view, that scientific theories do not refer to an independent reality, but are either heuristic tools for the prediction of empirical data, or shorthand summaries, equivalent to the set of empirical statements which follow from them. Of course, scientific realists need not deny the factual or causal dependence of some part of reality upon theory, for example, in the case of self-fulfilling predictions which bring about the facts that make them true. But for the scientific realist, any factual ties between reality and scientific theory are always logically or conceptually inessential.

Sometimes anti-realism is described more weakly as the view that our knowledge of reality is theory-dependent, or that it necessarily depends on language. It then might seem an easy step to conclude that reality itself is dependent on language or theory. But this characterization would be a mistake: a clear distinction must be drawn between the mind-dependence of language or theory and the alleged mind-dependence of the world itself. A scientific realist can accept that all descriptions of the world are theory-dependent (POPPER is a clear example of this). Suppose we have to use theory T in order to describe reality. Our descriptions of the world will be T-dependent, and T is certainly something we have created. But it does not follow that without theory T the world could not have been the way it is; all that follows is that without the theory we would not be able to describe the world that way.

The great problem that faces realism is that, since it places a gap between mind on the one hand and reality on the other, it has to say that real objects transcend the contents of our experience. Realists believe that material objects and theoretical entities are more than the experiential content of our minds; that social phenomena are more than the individuals who participate in them; and that universals are irreducible to the particulars of which those universals are true. But if real objects transcend experience, how is knowledge of reality possible? See also RELIGION. [D.-H.R.]

Reductio ad absurdum A technique of refutation in which a proposition is shown to entail a contradiction.

Reid, Thomas (1710–96) Thomas Reid was the originator of the Scottish