The position indicated by the term "antirealism" has come to the fore in philosophical discussion during the last thirty years, largely as a result of the writings of Michael Dummett. Prima facie one would expect an antirealist critique of realism to comprise two parts: a negative part (as the name indicates) criticising the realist view, and a positive part setting out a constructive alternative to the realist position. The tradition starting with Dummett, it is fair to say, has mainly been concerned with the negative part of antirealism. Here, however, the antirealist appears to have a large, and definite, disadvantage in his perennial discussion with the realist, purely in virtue of the chosen label; his position is laid down negatively in opposition to a prior realist position. Accordingly, the antirealist’s campaign will be fought on a field determined by his opponent, and in terms chosen by him. Therefore, in this Chapter, I do not take the views of Dummett as my point of departure, especially since the need for a survey of antirealism from this perspective has been excellently met by Hale (1997). Furthermore, in a Handbook of Epistemology, this manner of proceeding (that is, not taking Dummett’s views as the point of departure) is quite appropriate, since one of Dummett’s main tenets is the primacy of the theory of meaning over the theory of knowledge. Instead, I discuss a number of traditional epistemological notions and theories from an antirealist standpoint, and I also treat of the early work in modern mathematical intuitionism that provided the inspiration for much of the current work on semantical antirealism. Thus the present Chapter can be seen as providing an epistemological and philosophico-mathematical background to the modern semantical versions of antirealism.

1. THE ROLES OF TRUTH IN RELATION TO THE TRADITIONAL THEORIES OF TRUTH

Dummett famously recasts the debate between realism and idealism as a semantical dispute concerning the form that a proper theory of meaning has to take, and, in particular, what role has to be played by the notion of truth in such a theory. However, independently of these specific Dummettian concerns, it is clear that truth does have a major semantical role to play: after Frege and Wittgenstein many hold it to be a truism that

the meaning of a declarative sentence is given by, or in terms of, its truth-condition.  

This semantical office, however, is not the only one in which truth has to serve; an equally important epistemological role for truth is given by a similar truism:
what is known has to be true.

Finally, a third, metaphysical role of truth, so firmly stressed by Frege in the preface to his Grundgesetze, is that of making objectivity possible:

really being true is conceptually different from appearing to be true, that is, the distinction between appearance and reality must be upheld.

In view of their truistic character, an account of truth, meaning and knowledge that respects these platitudes is, ceteris paribus, preferable to an account that does not, and one would certainly expect a correct account to throw light on why the maxims in question have been considered truistic.

The epistemological tradition knows various so called theories of truth. What these traditional theories offer are general conceptions of truth; in the modern jargon they are theories of truth, that is, of, or about, the concept of truth, but they are not (Tarskian) truth theories that tell us under what condition the sentences of a certain language are true. These general conceptions of truth turn out to be admirably geared towards various offices as given by the above truisms. Thus, for instance, the evidence theory of truth, according to which what is true is what can be made evident (that is, known), caters very well for the epistemological role. Indeed, on this evidence-theoretical reading the maxim

what is known has to be true

becomes

what is known (what has been justified, warranted, made evident, etc.) has to be true (justifiable, warrantable, evidenceable, knowable, etc.),

and this is a priori obvious from the ab esse ad posse principle: what has already been done is certainly doable. Similarly, the traditional correspondence theory considers certain truth-bearers, be they judgements in the mind, or declarative sentences in the language, or propositions in the third realm of abstract entities, and relates these to appropriate truth-makers in the world:

a truth-bearer is true if a corresponding truth-maker exists.

When the truth-bearers are sentences, this maxim provides just the sort of language-world link required for the semantical role of truth.

Finally, the metaphysical role of truth is catered for by the pragmatic and coherence theories of truth. The main task for the notion of truth when serving in this office (and perhaps even in general) is to hold open the possibility of making mistakes, that is, to rule out epistemological nihilism, by which I mean an epistemological counterpart to moral nihilism. This ethical position is characterised by the maxim