The realistic spirit has been partially described through a discussion of the ways in which someone pursuing philosophy in that spirit might respond to a range of realist theories. Readers will have recognised in the description some continuities with tenets of empiricism. In this chapter, I seek to further characterise the realistic by bringing out some differences (and similarities) between it and certain empiricist theories, and I do so by considering what is unrealistic in (some of) Berkeley and (some of) Russell. Doing so reveals two structural similarities between those empiricist views and a view which constitutes a plausible understanding of the solipsism of *TLP*, namely a connection between the meaning of our expressions and a perspective on the world which no human speaker can occupy. I hypothesise that it is this solipsism that Ramsey considers to be ‘mystical’, and so unrealistic, and that he seeks to eliminate from his deflationary, proto-realistic ‘Critical Notice’ reading of *TLP*, discussed in Chapter 4.

### 2.1 Empiricism and the Realistic

I have described Ramsey as criticising a number of realist views for their willingness to endorse theories that propose the existence of entities or make claims that are such that we cannot explain how we could know those entities or understand those claims. Such views, I suggested, are normatively inert since, as they offer us no means of detecting or correcting failures in our practices relative to the postulated reality, the very notion of correct or incorrect going on in respect of those practices is rendered a scholastic question, impotent to affect the things that we do or think. Empiricism has historically entailed the rejection of various forms of realism; if one starts from the thought that our conceptual
repertoire can derive only from immediate experience, then the coherence of views committed to entities which appear to lie beyond any possible experience is easily denied. So that is one sense in which the realistic spirit and empiricism may be thought to overlap.

Cora Diamond has argued that Ramsey is an empiricist of a kind that is continuous with Berkeley. She begins by drawing a parallel between Berkeley’s rejection of realism about matter and Ramsey’s rejection of realism about laws of nature as resting on the realist’s being ‘taken in by illusions which the [realistic spirit] can see to be illusions, irrelevant to any distinction which we might have the least use for’ (1991, p. 42). This is, in part, what Diamond takes being realistic, in Ramsey’s sense, to mean, and I am in agreement with her. She ends by arguing that Berkeley’s and Ramsey’s (putative) empiricism prevents them both from being fully realistic in the way that she attributes to Wittgenstein.

I think that Diamond’s focus on Berkeley in order to diagnose what is unrealistic in some versions of empiricism is extremely astute, and I begin by following her lead. I shall, however, locate the unrealistic in Berkeley in a slightly different place, and I bring it out in connection with some of Russell’s thought in 1914; there will, I think, be parallels detectable between these views and the unrealistic picture that arises from a reading of *TLP* discussed in the last chapter. So that ought to help to see more clearly what is realistic in the views that I attributed to Ramsey in the last chapter. I will then argue that even on Diamond’s characterisation of the realistic spirit, we need not accuse Ramsey of giving an unrealistic account of laws of nature in *GP&C*, though a version of the worry that she raises will be discussed in Chapter 9.

2.1.1 Berkeley, Russell and the language of God

For Berkeley, a commitment to empiricism meant a resistance to accounting for the world as we experience it in terms the meanings that cannot be accounted for by reflection upon our experience. The distinction that we can do without is that between matter and sense experience, and we can do without it, holds Berkeley, because every sentence expressing a content about the material world which the materialist takes to be true, the subjective idealist takes to be true too. After all, Philonous is not a sceptic about the existence of the ‘real’ objects of which we predicate various properties in our descriptions of the world; he seeks instead to promote an account of the real compatible with empiricist methodology (1996, pp. 40, 150–152). In fact, Philonous’s treatment of the materialist Hylas rather neatly puts the latter into the position of the sceptic when he finds himself torn between his empiricist scruples