

Formal Objects and the Argument from Knowledge

Jessica Leech

University of Geneva, Switzerland

As well as the familiar objects of everyday life, some philosophers talk about objects such as propositions, facts, states of affairs, and so on. Across a number of works, Mulligan describes these as formal objects. Mulligan has offered an “argument from knowledge” for the existence of certain formal objects, namely, facts or obtaining states of affairs. After presenting this argument from knowledge, the aim of this paper is to consider two questions: can this kind of argument be extended to other kinds of formal object, and if so, what does this tell us about the nature of formal objects? It is suggested that, given an identification account of knowledge, the argument can be extended to argue for the existence of things such as values and propositions. Mulligan makes his argument more palatable to the realist by arguing that facts, and other formal objects, are not ontologically fundamental. This, together with the argument from knowledge, suggests that formal objects are to be understood as things which are ontologically dependent upon intentionality and hence on creatures capable of having intentional states and performing intentional acts.