

Patricia Blanchette (University of Notre Dame): “Mathematical Realisms”

Mathematical realism is the view that the things that form the subject-matter of mathematics exist independently of us. It is therefore importantly similar to scientific realism, the view that the true statements of empirical science owe their truth to an independent reality. But mathematical realism is considerably more controversial than is scientific realism, and has often been taken to imply some rather far-fetched claims about the nature of mathematical knowledge and its objects. A mark of the implausibility of some of these claims is that they entail that it is philosophy, rather than mathematics, that tells us what the mathematical objects are “really” like. This talk argues that mathematical realism need not do this, and that a sensible mathematical realism can be extricated from its problematic philosophical embellishments. It will also be argued, time permitting, that this is essentially Frege’s realism.