

**Phil 420: Metaphysics
Spring 2008**

[Handout 7]

Professor JeeLoo Liu

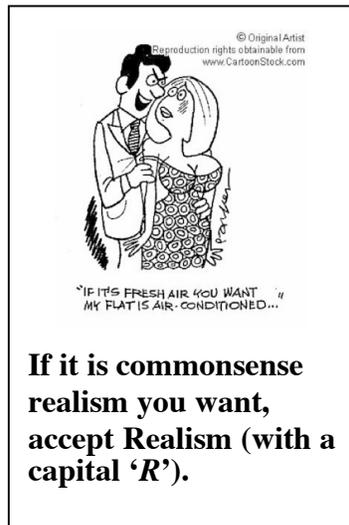
Hilary Putnam: *Many Faces of Realism* [I]

- * It is interesting that we are all either realists or anti-realists, even if we haven't thought about this issue. Unlike some other philosophical debates, with which we can remain indifferent, this debate is the one closely related to our daily life. If you are an anti-realist, then even the stars you gaze at would signify differently to you now.
- * Even though Putnam calls his view 'realism', he is generally regarded as defending anti-realism. He changed his realism view in 1980's. He used to be defending Realism (with a capital 'R'), and then claimed that it was incoherent. He argues that his view actually preserves commonsense realism. Do you agree with him?

Lecture I

Is There Still Anything to Say about Reality and Truth?

*** the story of the Seducer and the Maiden**



___ In the melodramas of the 1890s the Seducer always promised various things to the Innocent Maiden which he failed to deliver when the time came. In this case the Realist promises common sense (the Innocent Maiden) that he will rescue her from her enemies (Idealists, Kantians, and fearsome self-described Nelson Goodman) who (the Realist says) want to deprive her of her good old ice cubes and chairs. Faced with this dreadful prospect, the fair Maiden naturally opts for the company of the commonsensical Realist.

But when they have traveled together for a little while the ‘Scientific Realist’ breaks the news that what the Maiden is going to get *isn’t* her ice cubes and tables and chairs. In fact, all there *really* is – is what ‘finished science’ will say there is – whatever that may be. She is left with a promissory note for She Knows Not What, and the assurance that even if there *aren’t* tables and chairs, still there are some *Ding an Sich* that her folk physics picture. Some will say that the lady has been had.

Q: What is the point of this critique?

§ Two Kinds of *Realism*

It is clear that the name 'Realism' can be claimed by or given to at least two very different philosophical attitudes (and, in fact, to many.)

- (I) The philosopher who claims that only scientific objects 'really exist' and that much, if not all, of the commonsense world is mere 'projection'.
- (II) The philosopher who insists that there *really are* chairs and ice cubes.

Metaphysical Realism	commonsense realism
All properties of an object are our sense data projected onto a 'thing in itself' that is beyond our human cognitive capacities.	There are tables and chairs as we ordinarily believe them to be.
Scientific Realism	(Putnam thinks that his internal realism belongs to this camp. Do you agree?)
All there <i>really</i> is, is what 'finished science' will say there is (whatever that may be).	

These two attitudes, these two images of the world, can lead to and have led to many different programs for philosophy.

[Metaphysical Realism]: (*Realism* – with a capital ‘R’)

___ Commonsense objects do not *really* exist. All properties of an object are our sense data projected onto a 'thing in itself' that is beyond our human cognitive capacities.

___ The thing in itself may have some *intrinsic* properties that are not relative to human interests and human capacities.

___ The world is independent of any particular representation we have of it. Truth is determined independently of our theories and our methods of verification.

[Scientific Realism]: (Objectivism)

___ Only scientific objects 'really exist' and much, if not all, of the commonsense world is mere 'projection'.

___ All there *really* is, is what 'finished science' will say there is (whatever that may be).

§Putnam’s Critique

I want to suggest that the problem with the ‘Objectivist’ picture of the world (to use Husserl’s term for this kind of scientific realism) lies deeper than the postulation of ‘sense data’; sense data are, so to speak, the visible symptoms of a systematic disease.

§ Intrinsic Properties

The deep systematic root of the disease, I want to suggest, lies in the notion of **an ‘intrinsic’ property, a property something has ‘in itself,’** apart from any contribution made by language or the mind.

* The Origin: Locke’s distinction between the primary and the secondary qualities

<p>Primary qualities:</p> <p>___ The qualities that are truly in the objects.</p> <p>___ The qualities that are inseparable from the object, no matter what state the object is in.</p> <p>___ Our ideas of primary qualities <i>resemble</i> these primary qualities themselves.</p> <p>___ Examples: solidity, extension, figure, mobility/rest, and number.</p>	<p>Secondary qualities:</p> <p>___ The qualities that are not in the objects themselves. They are nothing but powers in the objects to produce various sensations in us by the objects’ primary qualities.</p> <p>___ Our ideas of secondary qualities <i>bear no resemblance</i> to qualities in objects, since there are no such properties in the objects themselves.</p> <p>___ Examples: colors, tastes, smells, sounds, etc.</p>
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*** Putnam’s Critique:**

1. Solidity is in much the same boat as color.
2. This is precisely the picture that denies the common man’s kind of realism.
3. Thus, the kind of scientific realism we have inherited from the 17th century has saddled us with a disastrous picture of the world.

(1) First Intrinsic Property: Dispositions

A disposition that something has to do something *no matter what*, I shall call a *strict disposition*. A disposition to do something under ‘normal conditions,’ I shall call an *‘other things being equal’ disposition*.

It turns out that all dispositions are “*other things being equal*’ disposition.” [This makes the property *relational to other things*; not an “intrinsic” property.]

Why should we not say that dispositions (or at least other things being equal dispositions) are also not ‘in the things themselves but rather something we ‘project’ onto those things?

(2) Second Intrinsic Property: *Intentionality*

Putnam: I have given up ‘functionalism’ because I believe that there are good arguments to show that mental states are not only compositionally plastic but also *computationally plastic*. [There are infinitely many ways to compute the same mental process, just as there are infinitely many physical compositions for the same mental state.]

I do not believe that even all *humans* who have the same belief (in different cultures, or with different bodies of knowledge and different conceptual resources) have in common a physical *cum* computational feature which could be ‘identified with’ that belief. The ‘intentional level’ is simply not reducible to the ‘computational level’ any more than it is to the ‘physical level.’

If this is right, then the Objectivist will have to conclude that intentionality *too* must be a mere projection (what we project onto the world; not really in the world itself.)

§ Putnam’s Own Position

My old-fashioned story of the Seducer and the Innocent Maiden was meant as a double warning: a warning against giving up commonsense realism and, simultaneously, a warning against supposing that the seventeenth-century talk of ‘external world’ and ‘sense impressions’, ‘intrinsic properties’ and ‘projections’, etc, was in any way a Rescuer of our commonsense realism.

[Internal realism]: (realism – with a small ‘r’) OR: [Pragmatic realism]

- 1. Realism is *not* incompatible with conceptual relativity.**
- 2. Objects do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description.**
- 3. Different versions of conceptual schemes are *equally* right, as long as they are correct (coherent?). No view is *absolutely* right. Our descriptions reflect our interests and choices.**
- 4. The mind and world jointly make up the mind and the world.**
- 5. Reference is *not* a relation to a mind-independent world.**
- 6. A being with no values would have no facts either. To talk of 'facts' without specifying the language to be used is to talk of nothing.**
- 7. There are no 'things in themselves'. The phrase simply makes no sense – *NOT* because we cannot know the things in themselves (as Kant thinks). (So, Putnam is not an agnostic in this respect.) We simply don’t know what we are talking about when we talk about “things in themselves.”**

8. Commonsense realism is true: there *are* tables and chairs as we commonly perceive them.

Conceptual relativism sounds like ‘relativism,’ but has none of the ‘there is no truth to be found...“true” is just a name for what a bunch of people can agree on’ implications of ‘relativism’.

Example:

WORLD 1
x1, x2, x3

(A world à la Carnap)

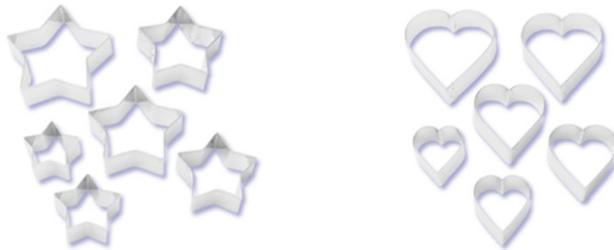
WORLD 2
x1, x2, x3, x1 + x2
x1 + x3, x2 + x3,
x1, + x2 + x3

(**same** world à la Polish logician)

Given a version, the question ‘How many objects are there?’ has an answer, namely ‘three’ in the case of the first version (Carnap’s world) and ‘seven’ in the case of the second version (‘The Polish logician’s world’). Once we make clear how we are using ‘object’ (or ‘exist’), the question ‘How many objects exist’ has an answer that is not at all a matter of ‘convention.’ That is why I say that this sort of example does not support *radical* cultural relativism. Our concepts may be culturally relative, but it does not follow that the truth or falsity of everything we say using those concepts is simply ‘decided’ by the culture. But the idea that there is an Archimedean point, or a use of ‘exist’ inherent in the world itself, from which the question ‘How many objects *really* exist?’ makes sense, is an illusion.

___ To require that all of these must be reducible to a single version is to make the mistake of supposing that ‘What are the real objects’ is a question that makes sense *independently of our choice of concepts.*

* [the metaphor of cookie cutter]: The things independent of all conceptual choices are the dough; our conceptual contribution is the shape of the cookie cutter.



*** How the world is shaped depends on what cookie cutter we use.** [Is the basic unit of the world particles or strings? The answer depends on which cutter do you want to use?]

How we go about answering the question 'How many objects are there?' – the method of 'counting', or the notion of what constitutes an 'object' – depends on our choice (call this a 'convention').

What we *cannot* say – because it makes no sense – is what the facts are *independent of all conceptual choices*.

The notions of 'object' and 'existence' are not treated as sacrosanct, as having just one possible use. What would be right is to say that existence is relative to the language. Take the position that Carnap and the Polish logician will be equally right in either case, then you have arrived at the position I have called 'internal realism'.

Lecture II Realism and Reasonableness

Main Thesis:

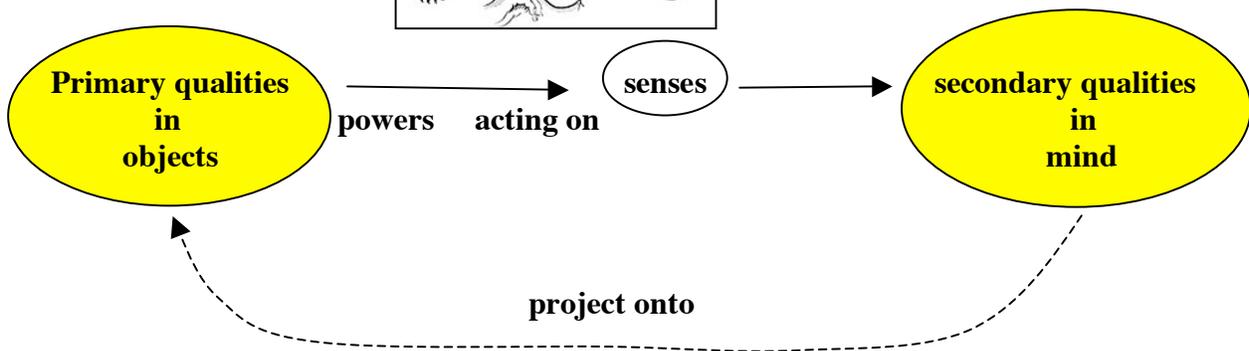
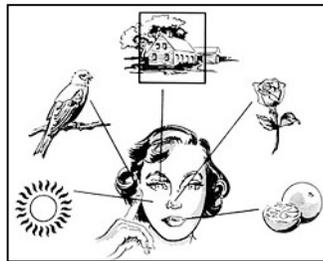
___ **A world without dichotomies.**

* A 'dichotomy' is a division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or very different.

§ The Rejected Dichotomies:

If I reject the dichotomies I depicted, it is not, then, because I fail to recognize their intuitive appeal, or because that intuitive appeal counts for nothing in my eyes. It is rather because these dichotomies have become distorting lenses which prevent us from seeing real phenomena – the phenomena I have been describing – in their full extent and significance.

Locke:



1. Property of the thing in itself ↔ Projection
2. Property of the thing in itself ↔ 'Power'
3. Intrinsic properties ↔ extrinsic properties
4. Truth conditions ↔ Assertability conditions

Q: What other dichotomies could you think of? Would Putnam reject them as well?

§ Putnam's Arguments Against Realism (with a capital 'R')

[Putnam's Argument against Realism]: #1

1. According to Realism, properties such as solidity and motion are *really* in the objects (i.e., they are *intrinsic properties*), while properties such as colors or sounds are either our sense data projected onto objects, or some power in the objects to produce those sense data in us.
2. But such a distinction cannot be sustained, since even so-called *intrinsic* properties are not really in the objects.
3. Therefore, Realism is giving us a Reality that none can approach.
4. Therefore, Realism is the foe, not the defender, of commonsense realism.

[Putnam's Argument against Realism]: #2

1. According to Realism, all different sciences will eventually converge into one unified fundamental science. It is the fundamental science, in particular, physics, that tells us what reality truly is.
2. But there is no proof that such a convergence is ever possible.
3. Therefore, Realism is giving us a false promise. Under this theory, we may never know this "Reality."

[Putnam's Conclusion]:

Reality without the dichotomies

The collapse of the dichotomy:

1. There is no 'thing in itself' – the notion simply doesn't make sense.
2. There is no *dough* to be cut by the cookie cutter.
3. There are no *facts* that are waiting to be discovered by us.
4. There is no *totality of all facts* and no absolute truth relation between sentences and facts *in themselves*.

What does the world look like without the dichotomies? It looks both familiar and different. It looks familiar, insofar as we no longer try to divide up mundane reality into

a 'scientific image' and a 'manifest image'. Tables and chairs exist just as much as quarks and gravitational fields.... But mundane reality looks different, in that we are forced to acknowledge that many of our familiar descriptions reflect our interests and choices.

Rejecting the dichotomy within kinds of 'truth' – kinds of truth in the commonsense world – is not the same thing as saying *anything goes*.

We can and should insist that some facts are there to be discovered and not legislated by us. But this is something to be said when one has adopted a way of speaking, a language, a 'conceptual scheme'. To talk of 'facts' without specifying the language to be used is to talk of nothing; the word 'fact' no more has its use fixed by Reality Itself than does the word 'exist' or the word 'object.'

Discussion

*** Q: When we have seen the paradigm shift in science throughout human history, what attitude should we take toward the truth of our present science?**

- Devitt, realism-t
- Neurath, the raft of human knowledge
- Putnam, conceptual relativism
- Scientific Realism, approximation to truth

Putnam:

Science is wonderful at destroying metaphysical answers, but incapable of providing substitute ones. Science takes away foundations without providing a replacement.