PHIL 470: *Seminar: Metaphysics & Epistemology*
Truth and Reality

Handout (17)

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

Lecture III

§ Putnam on Kant

1. Internal realism

Kant [was] the first philosopher to reject the idea of truth as correspondence to a pre-structured Reality.

If Kant *was* saying that truth must not be thought of as correspondence to a pre-structured or self-structured Reality; if he was saying that our conceptual contribution cannot be factored out and that the 'makers-true' and the 'makers-verified' of our beliefs lie *within* and not *outside* our conceptual system; then Kant may properly be called the first 'internal realist.'

2. Internal realism in moral philosophy: The value of equality

Three traditional principles of equality:
  (1) There is something about human beings, some aspect which is of incomparable moral significance, with respect to which all human beings are equal, no matter how unequal they may be in talents, achievements, social contribution, etc.
  (2) Even those who are lease talented, or whose achievements are the least, or whose contribution to society is the least, are deserving of respect.
  (3) Everyone's happiness or suffering is of equal primal facie moral significance.

 Kant offered a radically new way of giving content to the notion of equality, a way that builds liberty into equality.

3. Autonomy and Heteronomy

[Heteronomy]:
___ One is heteronomous if one is simply browbeaten into accepting a moral system, or if one accepts a moral system just because one's parents and teachers believe it, or if one accepts a moral system 'unthinkingly,' that is, if it never even occurs to one to "think for oneself."

[Autonomy]:
___ Self-legislation.
___ The autonomous person asks, What should I do? How should I live?, and he uses his reason in trying to figure out the answer.

4. Reason and Religion

The truths of religion should be by their very nature *problematic* is a good thing, not a bad thing. It would be a bad thing if the truths of religion could be deduced by reason, because that would produce fanaticism.

But basing religion on pure "faith" also leads to fanaticism.

We have a religions *need*, but reason cannot tell us how to satisfy the need, and we also sound not make a 'leap of faith' into Fundamentalism of some kind in order to satisfy it.

The only content on which we are justified in relying is our right to *hope*.

We have to think for ourselves. *That* is the characteristic with respect to which we are all equals. We all are in the same predicament, and we all have the potential of thinking for ourselves with respect to the question of How to Live.

5. A Moral Image of the World

Kant's ideal community (*Kingdom of Ends*) is a community of beings who think for themselves without knowing what the "human essence" is, without knowing what 'Eudemonia' (Happiness) is, and who respect one another for doing that.

* A moral image is not a declaration that this or that is a virtue, or that this or that is what one ought to do; it is rather a picture of how our virtues and ideals hang together with one another and of what they have to do with the position we are in.

Putnam:
___ What we require in moral philosophy is, first and foremost, a moral image of the world, or rather – since I am more of pluralist than Kant – a number of complementary moral images of the world.

§ Putnam on the Frankfurt School

1. An Ideal Community of Inquirers

The notion of a warranted or justified statement involves an implicit reference to a community.

"Private language" and "incorrigible knowledge" are empty and fallacious ideas, and there is no such thing as a statement which is true unless there is the possibility of a community of testers or, at any rate, critics.

If I am a rational person in the sense of having the aim of making statements which are true humanly speaking, then I am committed to the idea of a possible community of inquirers. (In fact, to the idea of a possible community of potentially infinite size, since there can be no such thing as a final inquirer if every inquiry is allowed to be reopened.)

This community is a community in which anyone can *criticize* what is put forward knowing that his criticism will be attended to; if some criticisms are simply not heard, then the possibility of an irrational sort of 'protection of belief' rears its ugly head.

Not only must it be possible for any member of the community to ask a question or voice a criticism, it must also be possible for any member of a community of ideal inquirers to advance a hypothesis knowing that it will be heard.

It must, in short, be a community which respects the principles of intellectual freedom and equality. ➔ the ethic of equality and intellectual freedom

JeeLoo's example: Wikipedia ☺

Q: **Should we be *elitists* or *egalitarians*?**
___ A Nietzschean will insist that it is only in a certain kind of *inegalitarian* society that truth about human existence can shine through.
___ A democratically structured society produces *false consciousness*.

§ Pluralistic Moral Images of the World

We need a more pluralistic vision than the eighteenth century (Kant) could foresee.

> (i)   The moral image of the *Brave New World* – in this society everyone is naïvely *happy*; they would not have chosen a different world. [It is a great pity that this book has been relegated to the high school hears, where it can be presented as a criticism of 'them' – the totalitarians – and not as a criticism of *us*.)
> (ii)   The moral image of the Jerusalem-based religion – equality
> (iii) The moral image of the Greek world – fraternity (human family)
> (iv)   The moral image of the French Revolution – liberty, equality, fraternity
> (v)   The moral image of the Roman civic republicanism
> (vi)   The moral image of Kant's ethics

A moral image is more than a characterization of some one trait or some one mode of behavior as virtuous. It is a *vision* which includes and organizes a complex system of values.

***Q*: Individual values, duties, virtues, and so forth, are hard enough to justify; how on earth can one hope to justify a whole moral vision, a 'Philosophical Anthropology'?**
___ Both the complexity and the elasticity, or possibility of different interpretations, of the aims which are organized by any moral image is going to be a source of difficulty.

Lecture IV

§ The Fact vs. Value Dichotomy

Fact	**Value**
Objective	subjective
Cognitive	non-cognitive
Non-controversial (eventually)	controversial
Public knowledge	Not public knowledge
Can be demonstrated *scientifically*	cannot be demonstrated *scientifically*
Can in principle be established in a way that will command the assent of all rational persons (educated persons or intelligent persons)	cannot in principle be established in a way that will command the assent of all rational persons.

Putnam's Criticism:
1. It is not at all clear that this idea of *fact* is correct even for the 'hard sciences.' Science has changed its mind in a startling way about the age of the universe, e.g. If establishing something beyond controversy is establishing it *for all time*, as opposed to merely establishing it so that it is the accepted wisdom of one time, then it is far from clear how much fundamental science is, or ever will be, 'established beyond controversy.'
2. If we take seriously the idea that controversiality indicates lack of 'cognitive' status, then we would be compelled to believe that the historian reconstruction of the past (example given on p. 65) has made no 'cognitively meaningful claim' – a conclusion which seems absurd on the face of it!
3. It is possible that most ethical disagreement is an unrecognized by-product of factual disagreement: if people agreed on social and psychological theory (conception of human nature, and society, e.g.), then they would come to agree on most disputed ethical issues.

* An interesting question to muse over: How do you present an argument to show that Hitler is a bad man *that would convince Hitler himself*?

My purpose is to break the grip that a certain picture has on our thinking: the picture of a dichotomous division of our thought into two realms, a realm of 'facts' which can be established beyond controversy, and a realm of 'values' where we are always in hopeless disagreement.

No sane person should believe that something is 'subjective' merely because it cannot be settled beyond controversy.

§ The Epistemological Problem in Ethics

Once we have given up the picture of a totality of Noumenal Objects and Properties from which our different conceptual schemes merely make one or another selection, the picture of a **Noumenal Dough** which our conceptual schemes merely 'slice up' differently, we are forced to recognize… that the question as to how much of our web of belief reflects the world 'in itself' and how much is our 'conceptual contribution' makes no sense. *The trail of the human serpent is over all.*

In particular, our moral beliefs are not approximation to The Universe's Own Moral Truths, just as our scientific beliefs are not approximations to The Universe's Own Scientific Theory.

The moral images are human creations (we make them), but they are not arbitrary. It also doesn't mean that the statements we make, using the language of one or another such moral image, cannot be right or wrong.

* standards
Standards and practices, pragmatists have always insisted, must be developed together and constantly revised by a procedure of delicate mutual adjustment. The standards by which we judge and compare our moral images are themselves creations as much as the moral images.

* needs
It is because there are real human needs, and not merely desires, that it makes sense to distinguish between better and worse values.

But Dewey tells us that human needs also do not pre-exist, that **humanity is constantly redesigning itself, and that we *create* needs.**

[Conclusion]:

Hence, there is no possibility of a "foundation" for ethics, just as there is no possibility of a "foundation" for scientific knowledge, or for any other kind of knowledge.