Phil 420: *Metaphysics*
Spring 2008

[Handout 8]

Professor JeeLoo Liu

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

Main Objective: While the relation of the reasonable and the ethical is part of my story, my belief is that there is another part of the story that we must attend to. I hope to redirect philosophical energy to the task of providing meaningful, important, and discussable images of the human situation in the world.

[Summary of Main Theses]

[Reasonableness]

1. **Fanaticism is our worst enemy.** [Fanaticism can be seen in the idea of a statement whose complete and final warrant is wholly available to the speaker himself *no matter what happens*, or of a speaker who neither needs nor can benefit from the data of others.]
2. [**Truth]:** 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.
3. **[Rationality]:** If I am a rational person in the sense of having the aim of making statements which are true (humanly speaking), which can withstand rational criticism now and in the future, then I am committed to the idea of a possible community of inquirers.
4. **[The Ideal Community of Inquirers]:** A community which is competent to determine truth and falsity must be such that anyone in that community can *criticize* what is put forward knowing that his criticism will be attended to; it must also be possible for any member of a community of ideal inquirers to advance a hypothesis knowing that it will be heard.
5. **[The ethic of equality and intellectual freedom]:** The ideal community is a community which respects the principles of intellectual freedom and equality.

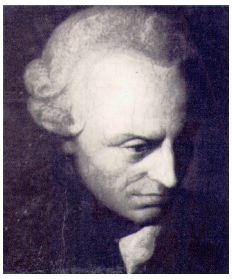
[Morality]

1. **[A Moral Image of the World]:** What we require in moral philosophy is, first and foremost, a moral image of the world, or rather, a number of complementary moral images of the world.
2. **[Virtue considered holistically – relational to the whole system of values]:** 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.
3. **[Pluralistic Moral Images]:** We need a more pluralistic vision than the eighteenth century (Kant) could foresee.

4. **[The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy]:** 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. The hope for a formal "scientific" method, capable of being isolated from our judgments about the nature of the world, seems to have been frustrated.
5. **[But NOT relativism]:** What is wrong with relativist views (apart from their horrifying irresponsibility) is that they do not at all correspond to how we think and to how we shall continue to think.
6. **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.**
7. **[Objectivity]:** One does not have to believe in a unique *best* moral version, or a unique *best* causal version, or a unique *best* mathematical version; **what we have are *better and worse* versions, and that is objectivity.**

Lecture III
Equality and Our Moral Image of the World

§ Putnam on Kant [How much does Putnam take from Kant?]



*** What Putnam rejects:**

the phenomenal world: the world of experience
___ scientific knowledge cannot go beyond this world

the noumenal world: the world behind the veil (God, Freedom, Immortality, etc.)

I am repelled by this dualism of a noumenal and a phenomenal world. But this is not Kant's only philosophy.

*** What Putnam embraces:**

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**

Kant's moral philosophy represents a rethinking of the values, in particular of 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 *prima facie* moral significance.

↔Moral elitism: there is no aspect of any significance with respect to which all human beings are equal. (e.g. Nietzsche)

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

What is "liberty"? ➔ Kant's maxim: *Think for oneself.*

3. **Autonomy and Heteronomy**

Kant thinks that what the Church tried to produce in the Middle Ages, what all churches have at times tried to produce, and what modern totalitarians try to produce, is heteronomous people.

[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

Kant makes the remarkable statement that it would be a bad thing if the truths of religion could be deduced by reason, because that would produce fanaticism. What makes the fanatic a fanatic isn't that his beliefs are necessarily wrong or his arguments incorrect. …. In fact the perfectly logical fanatic is the most dangerous kind of fanatic.

At the same time Kant is not advocating *fideism*. Basing religion on pure "faith" also leads to fanaticism.

Q: Where do we get any *content* for religion, if neither reason nor blind faith can provide it?

Kant: 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.

Freedom of though is essential, because the fundamental characteristic with respect to which we are equal is precisely our need for, and our capacity for, free moral thinking.

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.

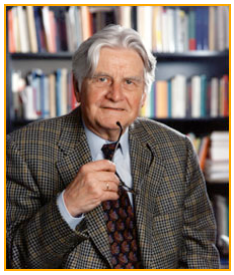
§ Putnam on the Frankfurt School

Another attempt to explain and justify the value of equality comes from the Frankfurt School.

Representatives:

Jürgen Habermas (1929 -)

Karl-Otto Apel (1922 -)



* [**An Ideal Community of Inquirers]**

1. The notion of a warranted or justified statement involves an implicit reference to a community.
2. Engaging in discourse which lays claim to rationality implicitly commits one to certain claims: to claim as to the truth, sincerely, justification, etc., of what one says.
3. The idea of a fully justified statement is the idea of a statement that can withstand tests and withstand criticism (not just 'justified on present evidence' or 'justified for someone in such-and-such a position').
4. The idea of a statement whose complete and final warrant is wholly available to the speaker himself *no matter what happens*, or of a speaker who neither needs nor can benefit from the data of others, is precisely the old notion of knowledge which is private and incorrigible.
5. "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.

➔ **An Ideal Community of Inquirers**

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.)

A community which is competent to determine truth and falsity must be such that anyone in that community 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: the principle behind 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.
Do you agree?

§ 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 years, 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 and fraternity (but not yet the liberal values of free and critical thinking)
(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: man derives his dignity and his identity from his membership in a *polis*, and his highest duty is not 'contemplation' but the exercise of civic virtues
(vi) The moral image of Kant's ethics – liberal values and intellectual freedom

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'?

Lecture IV
Reasonableness As a Fact and As a Value

Q: Don't you have to admit that there is much more agreement on scientific results than on ethical values? Doesn't that show that there is a kind of objectivity that scientific results have and that ethical values lack?

§ The *Supposed* Fact vs. Value Dichotomy

Fact	**Value**
Objective	subjective
Cognitively meaningful	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. The hope for a formal "scientific" method, capable of being isolated from our judgments about the nature of the world, seems to have been frustrated. (e.g. what analogies are *reasonable*; which predicates are *projectible*, etc.)
3. 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!
4. 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 (by Nozick): 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.

But NOT relativism:
___What is wrong with relativist views (apart from their horrifying irresponsibility) is that they do not at all correspond to how we think and to how we shall continue to think.

If we find that we must take a certain point of view, use a certain conceptual system, then we must not simultaneously advance the claim that it is not really "the way things are in

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

§ The Epistemological Problem in Ethics

What is objectivity?
___ One does not have to believe in a unique *best* moral version, or a unique *best* causal version, or a unique *best* mathematical version; what we have are *better and worse* versions, and that is objectivity.

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 more sense than the question: 'Does a man walk more essentially with his left leg or his right?' *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.

*** What are standards of right or wrong, better or worse?**
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.

*** The basis may be simply human 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]:
___ The notions of value, moral image, standard and need are so intertwined that none of them can provide a "foundation" for ethics. 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. Our moral images are in a process of development and reform. **We can no longer hope that criticisms will leave just *one* moral vision intact.**