

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics  
Prof. Funkhouser  
Putnam, “Pragmatic Realism”

I.

- Q: Is there a conflict between the common sense and scientific (or philosophical) accounts of the world? And if so, will common sense have to go?

- Putnam distinguishes 2 kinds of Realism:

... the name ‘Realism’ can be claimed by or given to at least two very different philosophical attitudes (and, in fact, to many). The philosopher who claims that only scientific objects ‘really exist’ and that much, if not all, of the commonsense world is mere ‘projection’ claims to be a ‘realist’, but so does the philosopher who insists that there *really are* chairs and ice cubes (and some of these ice cubes really are *pink*), and these two attitudes, these two images of the world, can lead to and have led to many different programs for philosophy. (592)

- Historical precedent: the Galilean Revolution, and its mathematization of objects and the primary/secondary quality distinction.

What there really are, in Sellars’s scientific metaphysics, are objects of mathematical physics, on the one hand, and ‘raw feels’, on the other. This is precisely the picture I have just described as ‘disastrous’; it is the picture that denies precisely the common man’s kind of realism, his realism about tables and chairs. (593)

- Putnam claims that the *intrinsic vs. projected* properties distinction is a bad dichotomy.

- Even dispositions, like solubility, end up in the “projected” camp.

- What does Putnam mean by *projection*?

Projection is thinking of something as having properties it does not have, but that we can imagine (perhaps because something else we are acquainted with really does have them), without being

conscious that this is what we are doing. It is thus a species of *thought* — thought about something. (594)

- And on “Objectivist assumptions”:

By the ‘fundamental Objectivist assumptions’, I mean (1) the assumption that there is a clear distinction to be drawn between the properties things have ‘in themselves’ and the properties which are ‘projected by us’ and (2) the assumption that the fundamental science — in the singular, since only physics has that status today — tells us what properties things have ‘in themselves’. (595)

- Even intentionality comes out as projected, by the Objectivist’s lights. But this cannot be right, as the concept of projection presupposes intentionality. (596)

- Putnam proposes *internal realism* (=pragmatic realism) as an alternative to *metaphysical realism*:

Internal realism is, at bottom, just the insistence that realism is *not* incompatible with conceptual relativity. One can be *both* a realist *and* a conceptual relativist. (597)

- Very important passage:

And it is no accident that metaphysical realism cannot really recognize the phenomenon of conceptual relativity — for that phenomenon turns on the fact that *the logical primitives themselves, and in particular the notions of object and existence, have a multitude of different uses rather than one absolute ‘meaning’*. (597)

- Putnam expresses his skepticism about ontological questions, such as disputes over mereology and the status of space-time points.

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. (598)

## II.

- Q: What attitude should we take toward dispositions and counterfactual conditionals? (Relatedly, should we take non-strict laws seriously?) Are dispositional and counterfactual ascriptions *really* true (and false)? Or, are they merely our projections?

Notice how these last questions presuppose the intrinsic vs. projected property distinction.

◦ Compare: There is no sharp objective/subjective dichotomy, but rather a spectrum.

• Note Putnam's discussion of the "cookie cutter" metaphor, beginning at the top of p. 603.

The cookie cutter metaphor assumes that all existence statements that we count as true in our several versions really are true; it's just that the variables of quantification pick out different mereological sums as their ranges in the case of different languages. The device of *reinterpretation* goes beyond this in recognizing that one person's 'existence' claim may be another person's something else. (603)

• "Of course, the adoption of internal realism is the renunciation of the notion of the 'thing in itself'." (604)