

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

- Sosa identifies 4 arguments that Putnam offers in support of pragmatic realism. Sosa will evaluate all of these arguments, but for Putnam’s “model-theoretic” argument.

I.

- The first argument Sosa evaluates argues from the supposedly perspectival character of causation and reference to the conclusion that reality itself is perspectival. The argument is presented in helpful and explicit form at the beginning of this section. Sosa’s response is succinct:

It is true that our talk and even, granted, our *thought* is in fact largely perspectival. It may well be, moreover, that the perspectival character of our thought is not eliminable except (at best) with a very high practical and intellectual cost. But from the fundamentally and ineliminably perspectival character of our thought it does not follow that reality itself is fundamentally perspectival. Everything that is true relative to a perspective and everything that is false relative to a perspective may be as it is as a necessary consequence of the absolute and nonperspectival character of things. (608–609)

II.

- Putnam argues against the “objectivist”, who he characterizes as a scientific realist:

The objectivist believes that only what would be reflected in finished science is truly real (the rest will amount at most to heuristically or practically valuable talk, and cannot truly represent reality). But, as we have seen, perspectival concepts like those of reference, correspondence, and causal explanation will not be reflected in finished science, in the science to be converged upon by all determined inquirers, whatever their perspective or context. So the objectivist seems committed by Putnam’s reasoning to

holding that he is not really thinking at all, nor referring to anything (assuming, again, that Putnam's reasoning about reference, correspondence, and causal explanation is correct). (610)

- Sosa reminds us, right hand column p. 610, of the four dichotomies that Putnam rejects.

◦ Putnam rejects these dichotomies because he does not think that there are things-in-themselves with intrinsic properties. But why does he think this? Sosa formulates Putnam's reasons at the very top of p. 612. Putnam believes that things-in-themselves and intrinsic properties would be those things and properties discovered by finished science. But there will be no finished science (or, at least, no *unique* finished science), so there are no such things-in-themselves or intrinsic properties.

Q: Is Putnam guilty of inappropriately blending epistemology with metaphysics?

III.

- Putnam's mereology example, and his comments on it, should remind us of Carnap's skepticism of external questions. Sosa notes this as well:

The Carnap-Putnam line is now this: *which statement we accept* — (3) or (4) — *is a matter of linguistic convenience*. The language of mereology has criteria of existence and identity according to which sums of individuals are objects. The language of antimereology rejects such criteria, and may even claim that by its criteria only individuals are objects. (612)

◦ If Putnam's linguistic relativity point is simply that sentences are true or false only relative to a language, then Sosa grants that this is true—but trivially so. What more could Putnam mean? (Sosa argues that there are no plausible alternatives — pp. 613–614.)

◦ Understand what is meant by a “semantic ascent”—see p. 613.

- Sosa's snowball example — p. 615. The lesson is:

Supervenient, constituted entities do not just exist or not in themselves, free of any dependence on or relativity to conceptual scheme. What thus exists relative to one conceptual scheme may not do so relative to another. In order for such a sort of entity to exist relative to a conceptual scheme, that conceptual scheme must recognize its constituent form as an appropriate way for a separate sort of entity to be constituted. (615)

Q: But do these “snow-objects” exist *simpliciter*?

◦ This example is supposed to illustrate that there are 3 ontological options: eliminativism, absolutism, and conceptual relativism. (617) Putnam argues against eliminativism and absolutism, and in favor of conceptual relativism.

Q: But what’s so bad about the “explosion of reality” that comes with absolutism?