

HILARY AND ME:
TRACKING DOWN PUTNAM ON THE REALISM ISSUE
In *Permutations: Essays on Hilary Putnam*
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Hilary Putnam's contribution to the Michael Dummett volume of the *Library of Living Philosophers*, "Between Scylla and Charybdis: Does Dummett Have a Way Out?" (2007), is on the realism issue. He concludes a brief defense of Dummett's anti-realism from my criticisms in *Realism and Truth* (1984/1991b) as follows: "Devitt's dismissive attitude is as unphilosophical as Samuel Johnson's stone-kicking" (p. 159). Dummett responds with delight: "I very much enjoyed Hilary Putnam's criticism of Michael Devitt's attempted refutation of anti-realism, and thought it wholly to the point". Dummett concludes that my argument is "a severe case of *ignoratio elenchi*" (2007: 184).

My paper is a response to these harsh comments, against a background of my thirty-year struggle with Putnam's views on the realism issue.¹

1. Introduction

The preface of the first edition of *Realism and Truth* begins: "I have always been a realist about the external world". But I immediately go on to list four major influences on "the present shape of my realism". The first of these "was Hilary Putnam in lectures at Harvard in the late sixties". I credit him, along with the writings of Quine, for "my view of philosophy and of the place of epistemology in it" (1984: vii). Putnam features again, but in a less favorable light, in my account of what prompted me to write the book. For, the third and final prompt was Putnam's *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (1978). The

¹ Maria Baghramian encouraged me to submit the paper for this volume but I do wonder whether she was right to do so. For, the volume arises out of the Dublin conference celebrating Hilary Putnam's 80th birthday and yet this paper is highly critical of Putnam's views. The paper I actually gave at the conference, "Resurrecting Biological Essentialism" (2008), was suitable for that celebratory event because it defended Putnam's position on biological essentialism (1975) from the consensus in the philosophy of biology. This consensus has led to some severe criticisms of Putnam. Michael Ruse, for example, places Putnam, along with Saul Kripke and David Wiggins, "somewhere to the right of Aristotle" on essentialism and talks of them showing "an almost proud ignorance of the organic world" (1987, 358n). John Dupré argues that the views of Putnam and Kripke are fatally divergent from "some actual biological facts and theories" (1981, 66). I argue that the consensus is quite wrong about essentialism and hence that these criticisms are misplaced. However, I could not contribute this paper to the present volume because the paper was to be published elsewhere. And I had nothing else suitable on that topic. Still, I very much wanted to contribute to a volume honoring my esteemed old teacher and friend. So I was persuaded by Maria to make the present critical contribution.

prompt was, on the one hand, “the shock of discovering that Putnam had joined the opposition”: and, on the other hand, “the baffling nature of the book. What, according to Putnam, was realism? What had it to do with truth? What had it to do with convergence? What had reference to do with truth? I found no clear answers in the book” (p. viii). But struggling with them led me, I like to think, to a much clearer picture of the realism issue.

Putnam looms large in the preface to the second edition too. First, in noting the extent and chaos of the realism debate in recent years, I remark: “Hilary Putnam ingeniously derives anti-realism from just about everything” (1991b: vii). Second, my own approach to the realism issue arises from the naturalism and physicalism I took from Quine and the early Putnam. This approach seems to be what Putnam is rejecting in saying that “scientism is...one of the most dangerous contemporary intellectual tendencies” (1983: 211). I do not take this criticism lying down: “I have a candidate for *the* most dangerous contemporary intellectual tendency. Sadly, it is a doctrine that Putnam himself embraces: ‘constructivism’” (1991b: viii). Finally, it is noteworthy that Putnam is the philosopher with the largest entry in the book’s index. Clearly, I have been bothered by his views on the realism issue!

Why am I bothered? First, I have a very big problem with his view of the nature of realism; in particular, with his conflation of metaphysical and semantic issues. In section 2, I shall set out my own view of what realism is. In section 3, I shall criticize Putnam’s view. It is a consequence of my criticisms that Putnam’s critique of “metaphysical realism”, particularly the famous model-theoretic argument, are largely beside the metaphysical point.

If a metaphysical issue of realism is, as I argue, sharply distinct from any semantic one, including one about truth, which issue should have priority? My second problem is that Putnam gives priority to the semantic. This is related to his mistaken attribution to realists of the (delightfully named) “God’s Eye View”. In section 4, I shall argue that we should “put metaphysics first”.

Putnam’s critique of realism leads him to a version of the sadly popular “constructivism”: we make the known world with our conceptual schemes. I take a very dim view of this doctrine in section 5.

Finally, in section 6, I turn to the harsh responses of Putnam and Dummett to my criticisms of Dummett.

My discussion in sections 3 to 5 draws heavily on earlier works, particularly on *Realism and Truth* (1984/1991b) and “Aberrations of the Realism Debate” (1991a). (It should be noted that this discussion addresses only the views of Putnam’s “interim period” of 1976 to 1989. I appreciate that some of his views have changed since then.)

2. The Nature of Realism

A striking aspect of the realism debate is that it contains almost as many doctrines under the name ‘realism’ as it contains participants.² However, some common features can be discerned in this chaos. First, nearly all the doctrines are, or seem to be, partly semantic. Consider, for example, Jarrett Leplin’s editorial introduction to a collection of papers on scientific realism. He lists ten “characteristic realist claims” (1984b: 1-2). Nearly all of these are about the truth and reference of theories. Not one is straightforwardly metaphysical.³ However, second, amongst all the semantic talk, it is usually possible to discern a metaphysical doctrine, a doctrine about what there is and what it’s like. Thus ‘realism’ is now usually taken to refer to some combination of a metaphysical doctrine with a doctrine about truth, particularly with a correspondence doctrine. The doctrine that Putnam famously named “metaphysical realism” is a paradigm: “there has to *be* a determinate relation of *reference* between terms in L and pieces (or sets of pieces) of THE WORLD... THE WORLD is...*independent* of any particular representation we have of it...*truth* is... *radically non-epistemic*” (1978: 125).⁴

The metaphysical doctrine, which is what I call “*Realism*”, has two dimensions, an existence dimension and an independence dimension (1984/1991b: ch. 2; 1997a: 302-4). The existence dimension commits the realist to the existence of such commonsense entities as stones, trees and cats, and such scientific entities as atoms, viruses and photons. Typically, idealists, the traditional opponents of realists, have not denied this dimension; or, at least, have not straightforwardly denied it. What they have denied is the independence dimension. According to some idealists, the entities identified by the first dimension are made up of mental items: “ideas” or “sense data”, and so are not external to the mind. In recent times another sort of idealist has been much more common. According to these idealists, the entities are not in a certain respect “objective”: they depend for their existence and nature on the cognitive activities and capacities of our minds. Realists reject all such mind dependencies. Relations between minds and those entities are limited to familiar causal interactions long noted by folk theory: we throw stones, plant trees, see cats, and so on.

Though the focus of the debate has mostly been on the independence dimension, the existence dimension is important. First, it identifies the entities that are the subject of the dispute over independence. In particular, it distinguishes a realism worth fighting for from what I call “Fig-Leaf Realism”: a commitment merely to there being *something* independent of us (1984: 22; 1991b: 23). Second, in the discussion of unobservables - the debate about *scientific* realism - the main controversy has been over existence.

I capture the two dimensions in the following doctrine:

² Susan Haack (1987) distinguishes *nine* “senses” of ‘realism’!

³ Some other examples: Hesse 1967: 407; Hooker 1974: 409; Papineau 1979: 126; Ellis 1979: 28; Boyd 1984: 41-2; R. Miller 1987; Fales 1988: 253-4; Jennings 1989: 240; Matheson 1989; Kitcher 1993; J. R. Brown 1994.

⁴ See also the account of realism by Arthur Fine (1986a: 115-6, 136-7).

Realism: Tokens of most commonsense, and scientific, physical types objectively exist independently of the mental.

This doctrine covers both the observable and the unobservable worlds. Some philosophers, like van Fraassen, have adopted a different attitude to these two worlds. So, for the purpose of argument, we can split the doctrine in two: *Commonsense Realism* concerned with observables, and *Scientific Realism* concerned with unobservables.

In insisting on the objectivity of the world, realists are not saying that it is unknowable. They are saying that it is not *constituted by* our knowledge, by our epistemic values, by our capacity to refer to it, by the synthesizing power of the mind, nor by our imposition of concepts, theories, or languages; it is not limited by what we can believe or discover.⁵ Many worlds lack this sort of objectivity and independence: Kant's "phenomenal" world; Dummett's verifiable world; the stars made by a Goodman "version"; the constructed world of Putnam's "internal realism"; Kuhn's world of theoretical ontologies;⁶ the many worlds created by the "discourses" of structuralists and postmodernists.

Realism takes both the ontology of science and common sense, and the folk epistemological view that this ontology is objective and independent, pretty much for granted. Science and common sense are not, for the most part, to be "reinterpreted".⁷ It is not just that our experiences are *as if* there are cats, there are cats. It is not just that the observable world is *as if* there are atoms, there are atoms. As Putnam once put it, *Realism* takes science at "face value" (1978: 37).

Realism is the minimal realist doctrine worth fighting for. Once it is established, the battle against anti-realism is won; all that remains are skirmishes. Furthermore, *Realism* provides the place to stand to solve the many other difficult problems that have become entangled with it.

Any semantic doctrine needs to be disentangled from *Realism* (1984/1991b: ch. 4; 1997a: 304-7). In particular, the correspondence theory of truth needs to be disentangled: it is in no way constitutive of *Realism* nor of any similarly metaphysical doctrine.

On the one hand, *Realism* does not entail any theory of truth or meaning at all, as is obvious from our definition. So it does not entail the correspondence theory. On the other hand, the correspondence theory does not entail *Realism*. The correspondence theory claims that a sentence (or thought) is true in virtue of its structure, its relations to reality, usually reference relations, and the nature of reality. *This is compatible with absolutely any*

⁵ For lots more on the independence dimension, including the independence of tools and social entities, see my 1991b: 246-58, 266.

⁶ For fairly accessible accounts of these worlds see, respectively: Kant 1783; Dummett 1978: preface and chs. 10 and 14; Goodman 1978; Putnam 1981; Kuhn 1962.

⁷ For the reasons for the qualification, see my 1991b: 18-19, 131-2. Brian Ellis demonstrates nicely some further reasons for qualification; 1985: 52-8.

metaphysics. The theory is often taken to require the objective mind-independent existence of the reality which makes sentences true or false; for example, Putnam's metaphysical realism. This addition of *Realism's* independence dimension does, of course, bring us closer to *Realism*. However, the addition seems like a gratuitous intrusion of metaphysics into semantics. And even with the addition, the correspondence theory is still distant from *Realism*, because it is silent on the existence dimension. It tells us what it is for a sentence to be true or false, but it does not tell us which ones *are* true and so *could* not tell us which particular entities exist.

Not only is *Realism* independent of any *doctrine* of truth, we do not even need to use 'true' and its cognates to *state Realism*, as our definition shows. This is not to say that there is anything "wrong" with using 'true' for this purpose. Any predicate worthy of the name "truth" has a "disquotational" property captured by the "equivalence thesis". The thesis is that appropriate instances of

s is true if and only if p

hold, where an appropriate instance is obtained by substituting for ' p ' a sentence which is the same as (or a translation of) the sentence referred to by the term substituted for ' s '.⁸ Because of this disquotational property, we can use 'true' to talk about *anything* by referring to sentences. Thus we can talk about the whiteness of snow by saying "'Snow is white' is true". And we can redefine the metaphysical doctrine *Realism* as follows:

Most common-sense, and scientific, physical existence statements are objectively and mind-independently true.

This redefinition does not make *Realism* semantic (else every doctrine could be made semantic); it does not change the subject matter at all. It does not involve commitment to the correspondence *theory* of truth, nor to any other theory. Indeed, it is compatible with a *deflationary* view of truth according to which, roughly, truth isn't anything.⁹ This inessential redefinition *exhausts* the involvement of truth in constituting *Realism*.¹⁰

⁸More needs to be said to allow for the paradoxes, ambiguity, indexicals, and truth value gaps.

⁹ It is tempting to say that, according to deflationism, the equivalence thesis captures all there is to truth (Horwich 1990: 12; Devitt 1991c: 30; Richard 1997: 57). I have argued that this is a mistake (2001b). According to deflationism properly conceived, the equivalence thesis explains the meaning of the truth term but *not* the nature of truth. Indeed, truth has no nature to explain. "Tarski's theory of truth" is not a theory of truth; it is a theory of some truth terms.

¹⁰Some will object that we cannot assess *Realism* until we have *interpreted* it and this requires a semantic theory that talks of truth (S. Blackburn 1980: 354; Fine 1986a: 138-9, 152; 1986b: 175-6). I have argued against this line of thought at length elsewhere (1984: 40-6; 1991b: 50-9; 1996b; 1997a: 304-20).

Realism is about the nature of reality in general; it is about the largely inanimate impersonal world. If correspondence truth has a place, it is in our theory of only a small part of that reality: it is in our theory of people and their language.¹¹

Objection 1. “You are simply insisting that the *word* ‘realism’ be used metaphysically not semantically. That is a merely verbal point”.

My main point is not verbal at all. I am insisting on a distinction between two doctrines, whatever they are called. I am insisting on carving theory at reality’s joints.

On the verbal point, I claim that metaphysical doctrines like mine capture the only thing that is *distinctive* about views that have been called “realist” about the external world throughout the long debate. I have already indicated that correspondence truth is not distinctive. It would be rather perverse to use ‘realism’ to refer to a doctrine that had no metaphysical intent.¹²

Objection 2. “Your realist doctrine is not what all the argument is about”.

All the argument is not about this doctrine, but part of it certainly is. It is precisely because the doctrine is so often denied in philosophy that it is worth asserting. For examples of its denial one need only look to the history of idealism. And it is still being denied; see above. Either familiar ontic commitments are, explicitly or implicitly, paraphrased away, or, more frequently, the world is made strangely mind-dependent. It is because of these somewhat scandalous facts that the realist goes in for the “desk-thumping, foot-stamping shout of ‘Really!’” that Arthur Fine likes to mock (1986a: 129).

The realism dispute arises from the age-old metaphysical question, “What ultimately is there, and what is it like?” I am sympathetic to the complaint that *Realism*, as part of an answer to this question, is rather boring. Certainly it brings no mystical glow. Nevertheless, it needs to be kept firmly at the front of the mind to avoid mistakes in theorizing about other, more interesting, epistemological and semantic matters where it makes a difference.

3. Putnam on the Nature of Realism

Why has metaphysics been conflated with semantics? I have made a few suggestions before (1991b: 48-50), one of which is particularly pertinent to my disagreement with Putnam. For, Putnam is one of the most influential conflaters.

Though doctrines of truth are not in any way essential to *Realism*, they have traditionally played a very significant role in *the way the issue has been argued* and the

¹¹ My view that realism does not involve correspondence truth flies so much in the face of entrenched opinion that I went on to labor the point (1991b: 46-8).

¹² For more on the verbal point, see my 1988: 160-1; 1991b: 40.

degree to which it seems interesting and controversial. But, of course, arguments are one thing, their conclusions another.

The typical argument against realism has been along the following lines:

(1) If the realist's independent reality exists, then our thoughts/theories must mirror, picture, or represent, that reality.

(2) Our thoughts/theories cannot mirror, picture, or represent the realist's independent reality.

(3) So, the realist's independent reality does not exist.

The center of the debate about this argument has been on (2); that is to say, the center has been about the correspondence of our ideas or language to independent reality. Traditionally, the problem has come up in epistemology: "How could we know about such a reality?" More recently, the problem has come up in the theory of reference or intentionality: "How could our language or thought refer to such a reality?"

These questions have seemed metaphysically important only because (1) has been assumed, mostly without argument. Indeed (1) has seemed so irresistible that to deny a correspondence theory has often been seen as tantamount to denying realism. Consider, for example, this statement by Putnam:

whatever authority [ontology and epistemology] had depended entirely on our conceiving of reality and sensations as, respectively, the makers-true and the makers-justified of the sentences we produce - not the makers-true and the makers-justified from within the story, but the things outside the story that hook language onto something outside itself. (1985: 78; see also 1987: 15-16)¹³

Irresistible or not, (1) is false: "to question whether our theories aim at 'picturing' the world" is not "to question whether electrons 'really' exist" (Leeds 1978: 119). *Realism* may make the rejection of correspondence truth implausible, but it does not make it paradoxical or incoherent.

It follows from this discussion that a metaphysical doctrine like *Realism* cannot be attacked *simply* by arguing against certain semantic theories of truth or reference; for example, against correspondence truth. As a result, much contemporary anti-realist argument is largely beside the *Realist* point. Putnam's famous model-theoretic argument is an example (1978: 125-7; 1983: 1-25).¹⁴

¹³ A similar view may lie behind Kim 1980: 596-97. See also Wright 1986: 1-2.

¹⁴ Three other examples are Laudan 1981, discussed in my 1991b, ch. 9 (and 2005c); Rorty 1979, discussed in ch. 11; Dummett 1978, discussed in ch. 14.

Putnam's argument is against "metaphysical realism" and in favor of "internal realism". Putnam starts by arguing that there cannot be determinate reference relations to a mind-independent reality. As a result, there is no way in which the "ideal" theory - one meeting all operational and theoretical constraints - could be false. So metaphysical realism is "incoherent". The argument has generated a storm of responses.¹⁵

Now whatever the rights and wrongs of this debate, the issue has no direct bearing on *Realism*.¹⁶ It has to do with reference, with the theory of representation. Metaphysical realism, as noted, is a hybrid of something like *Realism* with something like correspondence truth. The only part of this hybrid that *may* be directly affected by Putnam's argument about reference is correspondence truth. Indeed, the challenge of Putnam's argument can be posed, and often seems to be posed, in a way that presupposes *Realism*: a representation is related by one causal relation to certain mind-independent entities and by another causal relation to other such entities; which relation determines reference?

Putnam's critique of metaphysical realism proceeds by surrounding the metaphysical core of the doctrine, *Realism*, with a variety of other doctrines, none of which are essential to the core, and attacking those. The model-theoretic argument against correspondence truth is one example. Here are two others.

First, Putnam commits the metaphysical realist to the doctrine that "there is exactly one true and complete description of 'the way the world is'" (1981: 49). One wonders what it is to be a "true and complete" description of the world. Whatever it is, there is no reason why a *Realist* has to be committed to there being just one.

Putnam alleges that the doctrine that there *is* just one, together with correspondence truth, require "a *ready made* world...: the world itself has to have a 'built-in' structure" (1983: 211). Now, whatever we think of this doctrine, it follows from my argument that the *Realist* does not have to go down *this* route to it. Still, what attitude should the *Realist* take to the doctrine anyway?

The *Realist* commits himself to independent objects of kinds like *cat* and *atom*, picked out by words in common sense and science because these objects are the ones he can be precise about. He should allow that there are objects of indefinitely many other kinds, equally independent, that for one reason or another we have not picked out by words. In this respect, *Realism* is "modest", as Curtis Brown nicely puts it:

¹⁵ Lewis 1984 is a particularly helpful one. My own response criticized Putnam's dismissal of the causal-theory solution: the point of the solution is not that the causal theory's use of 'cause' determines reference but that causation itself does (1983b; 1984: 188-91; 1991b: 225-9). Putnam was not impressed (1983: xi-xii, 295-6). I have responded (1997a: 330-38; 1997b).

¹⁶ Cf., for example, three responses to Putnam: Heller 1988; Fales 1988; Lepore and Loewer 1988. See also T. Blackburn 1988: 179.

when we develop a language we are not imposing an organization on the world, but selecting one of the world's organizations for our own use. On this view the world 'in itself' has *more* objects than we usually talk about, not fewer. (1988: 148)

The *Realist* agrees with Putnam's metaphysical realist that there is "a *ready made* world", but this is not a commitment to the world having *just one* "built-in structure".

Consider one of the kinds that we have so far overlooked: the kind of object that strains the credulity of tourists from Peoria. Let us introduce a name for this kind of object: "peorincred". Now, as a matter of fact, echidnas are peorincreds. But our linguistic decision did not make them so: they always were peorincreds and would have been even if we had never introduced the word 'peorincred' nor any other word. Peorincreds are part of the independent ready-made world. Indeed, select any set of physical objects at random and name the kind consisting of those objects, "blah". Even blahs are part of the independent ready-made world.

To think clearly about realism issues it is vital to distinguish sharply two sorts of freedom, a freedom we have and a freedom we don't have. The freedom we *do* have is to choose to name any kind we like, whether for explanatory reasons, for frivolous reasons, or for no reason at all; naming kinds is a subjective matter. The freedom we *do not* have is to choose whether something is a member of a kind, whatever our reason for naming that kind in the first place; kind membership is an objective matter. We have chosen to name cats for very good explanatory reasons and peorincreds for no good reason at all. But peorincreds exist as objectively and mind-independently as cats. My naming them "peorincreds" didn't make them peorincreds any more than people naming cats "cats" made them cats. It is common to talk as if, in doing science, we impose our concepts to "carve up reality". But this is not literally so: we choose our concepts in an attempt to discover the causally significant features of a nature that is already "carved up". The importance of distinguishing theory making from world making could hardly be exaggerated¹⁷

The *Realist* may be thought to deny the freedom we do have by holding that there is something special about the kinds *Realism* is committed to. The *Realist* need not hold this. Clearly, our choices about which kinds to name are guided by our interests: explanatory interests, practical interests, perhaps playful interests. A kind picked out by an explanatory

¹⁷ It is easy even for staunch realists to slip into loose ways of talking that suggest world making. Thus Hilary Kornblith says that when we "group objects together under a single heading on the basis of a number of easily observable characteristics...we thereby create a nominal kind" (1993: 41). But we don't! We create a *concept* that picks out a kind that may or may not be "real" in Locke's terms but which has its members independently of our creation. And Richard Boyd, talking of kinds with nominal essences, says that their "boundaries" are "purely matters of convention" (1999: 142). But they aren't! Our naming a kind picked out by a certain set of descriptions is conventional but the boundary of the kind thus picked out is not. I think that Locke's distinction between nominal and real essences can lead to confusion here (2008: 346, n. 4).

interest may qualify as a “natural” one. I think that the kinds of objects that *Realism* is committed to *are* mostly natural ones and hence in that respect special. However, this opinion is not important because *Realism* does not involve any claim to that effect. *Realism* does not claim any special status for its kinds, except their independence. Whether there are any natural kinds, and if so, which they are, is another matter.¹⁸

Second, Putnam commits the metaphysical realist to a form of essentialism (1983: 205-228). The realist's belief in independent objects of various kinds is alleged to require that those objects be essentially members of those kinds. Putnam's criticism of this essentialism is “bluff and parody” as Nicholas Wolterstorff points out (1987: 251). More importantly, it is irrelevant to *Realism*. The *Realist* need not accept this sort of individual essentialism and, even if he does accept it, he will surely want to be committed to the independent existence of objects of kinds that are *accidental* to the objects (p. 252).

Even if Putnam's criticisms of these surrounding doctrines were correct, they would leave the *Realist* core largely untouched.

4. Putting Metaphysics First

I have been emphasizing that the metaphysical issue of *Realism* is distinct from semantic ones. Similarly, it is distinct from epistemic ones. So, the question arises: Which issue should we start with? Traditionally, philosophers started with an epistemic issue and argued for anti-realism on the ground that the realist's world would be unknowable. Recently, philosophers have tended to start with a semantic issue and to argue for anti-realism from verificationism. (I gave the general form of such arguments in section 3.) But suppose that we start with the metaphysical issue. I have argued that we can then establish *Realism* (1984/1991b: ch. 5; 2002, 2005c) and proceed by abduction to nonverificationism: the best explanation of language in a *Realist* world is one involving correspondence truth (1996a; 1997a: 320-30). Which starting place is better? We should start with *Realism*. We should, as I now like to say, “put metaphysics first” (1999, 2001a, 2002).

Consider the priority of *Realism* over semantics, for example. The argument for *Realism*, independent of semantics, is very strong. The argument for verificationism, independent of metaphysics, is very weak. Indeed, that argument seems to rest entirely on a priori reflections about linguistic competence. Why should we believe these claims about what meanings we could grasp and what concepts we could have, particularly since they threaten something as plausible as *Realism*? What is the *basis* of these claims? Whence cometh this knowledge (1984: 204-20; 1991b: 268-86)? (This bears on the discussion of Dummett in sec. 6).

¹⁸ I am writing in an ontologically robust way about kinds. Nominalists might well object. I sympathize, for I have nominalist leanings. However, the talk is just a very convenient manner of speaking. The *Realist* insists that whether or not something is a cat or a peorincred is not a matter of our linguistic doing. Whether or not there are kinds *cat* and *peorincred* is another matter.

My view of where to start reflects my naturalism. I take the theory of language to be an empirical, conjectural, theory like all others. So there is no question of giving semantics an unearned privileged position in deciding what there is and what it is like. Perhaps naturalism is *needed* to justify my view of where to start. If so, so be it.¹⁹

Putnam has a different view of the priorities: we should start building a metaphysics from semantics. This mistake seems to be related to a certain caricature of realism. Realism requires “a transcendental match between our representation and the world in itself” (1981: 134). It requires a “God’s Eye View” (p. 74; see also pp. 49, 73), “direct access to a ready made world” (p. 146), the capacity to “say *how* THE WORLD is theory-independently” (1978: 133; see also 1981: 49). Similar remarks are made about the realist’s view of reference. “To pick out just *one* correspondence between words or mental signs and mind-independent things we would have already to have referential access to the mind-independent things” (1981: 73; see also pp. 46-7, 51, 66, 211). There is “a puzzle how we could *learn to express*” what the realist wants to say (p. 46).

Putnam’s view is that realism requires our knowing the unknowable and speaking the unspeakable. Much the same view of realism can be found in many other places. Thus, according to Richard Rorty the realist believes that we can “step out of our skins” (1982: xix; see also 1979: 293) to judge, without dependence on any concepts, whether theories are true of reality. Fine has a similar view (1986a: 131-2; 1986b: 151-2). But, of course, no sane person believes any of this. What realists believe is that we can judge whether theories are true of reality, *the nature of which* does not depend on any theories or concepts.

What lies behind these bizarre, and always undocumented, anti-realist fantasies?²⁰ I think that the answer is clear: the Cartesian picture.

According to this picture we start the quest for knowledge locked in our minds, contemplating our ideas, and asking the following questions: Is there a world out there causing this inner show? Does it resemble the show? How can our ideas reach out to this world? But the naturalist does not start from scratch with epistemic and semantic questions. Those questions arise when we already have wide-ranging, well-based, opinions about the world, opinions derived from common sense and science. The questions arise when we focus on a small part of the world: people. We go on to seek empirical answers to those questions; we seek a naturalistic epistemology and semantics. The theories that result have no special status. Indeed, given our lack of confidence in these areas, the theories should have rather a lowly status. To suppose that we can derive the right metaphysics from epistemology or semantics is to put the cart before the horse.

¹⁹ I have defended my naturalism elsewhere (1998, 2005a,b, 2011).

²⁰ Bill Lycan has nicely mocked the fantasies with his name “Turtle Realism”: antirealists should go all the way and accuse realists of believing that the earth sits on the back of a giant turtle (1988: 191). Australian realists believe that the turtle sits on the back of a giant crocodile: “Crocodile Realism”.

From the naturalistic perspective, the relations between our minds and reality are not, in principle, any more inaccessible than any other relations. Without jumping out of our skins we can have well-based theories about the relations between, say, Barack and Hillary. Similarly, we can have such theories about our epistemic and semantic relations to Barack and Hillary.

5. Putnam's Constructivism

Putnam's solution to the problem posed by his model-theoretic argument is a form of constructivism. He gives up the idea that reference is to a mind-independent world²¹ and adopts "internal realism". Just as Kant closed the epistemic gap by bringing the world into the mind in some sense, so likewise, Putnam closes the referential gap. In what sense? Putnam offers "the metaphor" that "the mind and world jointly make up the mind and the world" (1981: xi). How is the metaphor to be cashed? "'Objects' do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description: (p. 52). This construction of objects is not from conceptually uncontaminated experiential inputs, for those inputs are "themselves to some extent shaped by our concepts".

Is there anything that is uncontaminated? Presumably there must be, to account for the constraints other than coherence on construction: that is, to account for the extent that inputs are *not* shaped by our concepts. Putnam does talk in a Kantian way, of the noumenal world and of things-in-themselves as constraints, thus implying that he is what I call a Fig-Leaf Realist (1991b: 23). However, he seems ultimately to regard this talk as "nonsense", even if perhaps psychologically irresistible (1981: 61-2, 83). I think the talk probably is nonsense (1991b: 237-8). But if it is, there is nothing that Putnam can say about the constraints (except coherence). This avoids the "facile relativism" of "anything goes" (1981: 54) by fiat: we simply are constrained, and that's that. Even if the talk is not nonsense, it lacks any explanatory power. To say that our construction is constrained by something beyond reach of knowledge or reference is whistling in the dark. We might as well settle for dogmatic anti-relativism.

Worse still, if that is possible, is the idea that Putnam shares with the most relativistic constructivist: we make the known world of stones, trees, cats, and the like with our concepts. How could dinosaurs and stars be dependent in any way on the activities of our minds? It would be crazy to claim that there were no dinosaurs or stars before there were people to think about them. Constructivists do not seem to claim this. But it is hardly any less crazy to claim that there *would not have been* dinosaurs or stars if there *had not been* people (or similar thinkers).²² And this claim seems essential to Constructivism: unless it were so, dinosaurs and stars could not be dependent on us and our minds.

²¹ It is not clear how this helps, as Curtis Brown points out (1988: 152).

²² Constructivism is so bizarre and mysterious that one is tempted to seek a charitable reinterpretation of constructivist talk. But, sadly, charity is out of place here (1991b: 239-41).

If it proves very difficult to naturalize reference, then perhaps we should seek a nonreferential theory of mind and language. If we were *completely* desperate, perhaps we *might* contemplate giving up naturalism. What we should *never* countenance for a moment is constructivism. To accept that idea is not to rebuild the boat whilst staying afloat, it is to jump overboard.²³

6. Putnam's and Dummett's Responses

As noted at the beginning of this paper, according to Putnam my criticisms of Dummett are “as unphilosophical as Samuel Johnson’s stone-kicking” (2007: 159). Dummett is delighted, and adds insult to this injury by describing my argument as “a severe case of *ignoratio elenchi*” (2007: 184). Both these responses to my argument are careless (to put it delicately).

Putnam starts by attributing to me the following view: “the realism issue is simply, ‘Is there a mind-independent reality or not?’ (*thump*) and *that* question has nothing to do with semantics” (2007: 158). This is not precisely my view – see the definition of *Realism* in section 2 - but it captures the spirit of it well enough. After a short digression on Lenin, however, Putnam takes my realism to be a commitment to the view that “the behavior of the stars is independent of human sensation and thoughts and beliefs”? I am alleged to portray anti-realists as denying this. What I actually, and quite plainly, portray anti-realists as denying is that *the existence and nature* of the stars are in various ways independent of our minds. But this misrepresentation pales into insignificance beside the following: “Devitt’s argument...simply assumes – what anti-realists of course deny - that the anti-realist cannot *interpret* the sentence ‘the behavior of the stars is independent of human sensation and thoughts and beliefs’ in a ‘justificationist’ way, interpret it so that it is ‘true’ (in the anti-realist sense)” (p. 158). This claim is the full extent of Putnam’s argument against my critique of Dummett. (There is an implicit “*thump*”.) This is his sole basis for the stone-kicking charge.

So, according to Putnam, I make that mistaken assumption about interpretation and thus conclude that the Dummettian anti-realist cannot accept (something like) my *Realism*. Hence, presumably, Putnam thinks that I take my *Realism* to refute that anti-realist. This is preposterous! Putnam simply ignores the significance of the most prominent distinction in my discussion of realism, the distinction between *metaphysical* doctrines like my *Realism* and any *semantic* doctrine at all.²⁴ The distinction is, of course, crucial to my discussion of Dummett because Dummett *identifies* realism with a semantic doctrine: he identifies it with a commitment to sentences having “evidence-transcendent”

²³ For some helpful criticisms of the idea and what leads to it, see Aune 1987; Wolterstorff 1987; C. Brown 1988; McMichael 1988; and, most enjoyable, “Philosophy and Lunacy: Nelson Goodman and the Omnipotence of Words” in Stove 1991.

²⁴ Putnam’s Lenin scholarship is faulty too. He rightly supposes (2007: 166 n. 12) that the title of my early criticism, “Realism and the Renegade Putnam” (1983), was a play on the title of a famous article by Lenin. However, that title was not “Marxism and the Renegade Kautsky” but rather “The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky”.

truth conditions.²⁵ I have argued at great length against this identification; see section 2 and the items it cites. So, in my view, we have two distinct issues: the metaphysical issue over doctrines like my *Realism* and the semantic issue over doctrines like Dummett's anti-realism. It is then, of course, appropriate to probe the relations between these two issues. *Realism and Truth* does this extensively in discussions that Putnam seems to have missed.²⁶

First, I do not “simply assume” but rather *argue* that an epistemic doctrine of truth like Dummett's, is *likely*, though not certain, to lead by abduction to the rejection of *Realism* (1984: 39-40; 1991b: 44-6). It is very difficult for a *Realist* to find a plausible epistemology to accompany an epistemic doctrine of truth. But my most important point is that this way of proceeding - from semantics to metaphysics - is precisely the wrong way. Semantics is among the weakest places to start from. We should put metaphysics first; see section 4 above and the items it cites.

²⁵ In *Realism and Truth* (1984: 198-200; 1991b: 261-3), I cite evidence that Dummett makes this identification. In the “Afterword” to that book (1997a: 307), I find further evidence in Dummett's valedictory lecture in Oxford (1993: 468). Panu Raatikainen has drawn my attention to an earlier part of that lecture where Dummett seems, however, to accept that the metaphysical and semantic issues are distinct whilst finding the semantic one more interesting (p. 465). Indeed, as I noted in the book, “Dummett attaches no significance to the difference between these two views” of the issues (1984: 199; 1991b: 262). The view that the semantic issue has a certain priority over the metaphysical one is certainly more reasonable than the identification of the issues but a central tenet of my book is that the view is very wrong (except, perhaps, in the realm of Dummett's favorite example, mathematics; 1984: 200-4; 1991b: 263-7).

²⁶ Curiously, Putnam is not alone in missing these discussions. (i) Alexander Miller (2003), who agrees with my rejection of what I call “the Metaphor Thesis” – metaphysics beyond meaning is mere metaphor (1991: 264), and of Dummett's identification of the realism issue with a semantic issue, thinks that I have “overlooked” (2003: 192) “that Dummett's arguments against semantic realism can be viewed as attempting to establish that common-sense realism cannot be conjoined with [the Truth-Conditional Conception of meaning and understanding] (p. 207). (ii) Drew Khlentzos – whose 2004 is, according to Putnam, “a convincing criticism” of my response to Dummett (2007: 166, n. 10) - includes me among philosophers who think that “all they need do to disarm the antirealist's challenge is show that the metaphysical issue of realism has nothing to do with disputes about the nature of truth” (16). In fact, to repeat, I consider the relationship between the metaphysical and semantic issues at some length (see also 1999: 93-8).

Another point to note in assessing Khlentzos' criticisms (31-5), is that my commitment to “evidence-transcendent” truth conditions is *only* a commitment to the view that “statements have truth conditions that are not in any way constrained by our epistemic capacities (Maxim 5). So it is *possible* that a statement might be true and yet we might not be able to detect this (which is not to say that the truth of any true statement is *actually* undetectable; 3.5, 7.4)” (1991b: 260).

When we do put metaphysics first, we can present a powerful argument for *Realism* that makes no appeal to semantics (1984/1991b: ch. 5; 2002; 2005c). Then we see what follows about semantics. I have labored mightily to come up with a good abduction from *Realism* to the semantic realism of a correspondence theory of truth. The first edition of *Realism and Truth* proposed one (1984: 73-103; 110-12). I had scarcely sent that off than I had second thoughts. In time these led to the very different abduction in the second edition (1991b: 83-107; 121-3). My confidence in this did not last long either and I proposed another abduction in the “Afterword” (1997a: 320-30, based on my 1996a). I still stand by that one. If it is right, then any epistemic doctrine of truth, including Dummett’s semantic anti-realism, is wrong. So Dummett cannot “interpret” my statement of *Realism*, indeed any statement of anything, “in a ‘justificationist’ way”.

In sum, I argued against Dummett’s identification of the metaphysical issue of realism with a semantic issue. With the issues distinct, I argued that we should proceed from the metaphysics to the semantic. I presented a case for *Realism* and, from that basis, have given three different arguments for correspondence truth and against Dummettian semantic anti-realism. All in all, my critique of Dummett is about as far from dismissal by stone-kicking as one could get.

Putnam and Dummett wonder what I mean by ‘independent’ and see a choice between *logical* and *causal* independence. I am quite explicit about what I mean and it is neither of these. I mean *constitutive* independence: thus, as I say above (sec. 2), the known world “is not *constituted by* our knowledge, by our epistemic values, by our capacity to refer to it, by the synthesizing power of the mind, nor by our imposition of concepts, theories, or languages; it is not limited by what we can believe or discover.” In contrast, Dummett decides, without apparently bothering to check, that I must mean causal independence. He responds: “Of course the behavior of the stars is causally independent of human sensations, desires and beliefs” (2007: 184). So, he thinks, his anti-realism is untouched by my argument for *Realism*. The problem with this is that, with Putnam’s help, he has simply invented the argument he attributes to me and ignored my actual one. So his response is “a severe case of *ignoratio elenchi*” if ever there was one. Versions of my actual argument have been available in several places for twenty five years (1983; 1984, ch. 12; 1991b, ch. 14). It would be interesting to know his response to those.

7. Conclusion

There is a metaphysical doctrine of realism about the external physical world. I have named that doctrine “*Realism*”. It has two dimensions, an existence dimension specifying the sorts of entities it is committed to, and an independence dimension claiming that those entities are, in almost all respects, independent of our minds. No doctrine of truth is part of this doctrine. Putnam’s “metaphysical realism” entangles this metaphysical doctrine with a doctrine of correspondence truth. Even if his famous model-theoretic argument against metaphysical realism was good, it would strike at correspondence truth. It is largely beside the point of a metaphysical doctrine like *Realism*.

Given that the metaphysical issue of realism is sharply distinct from any semantic one, including one about truth, which issue should have priority? I have argued that we should put the metaphysical one first because we know much more about the metaphysics that we do about the semantics. Putnam has a different view which is related to his attribution of the “God’s Eye View” to realists. That attribution reflects the grip of the Cartesian picture. From a naturalistic perspective, that picture must be rejected.

Putnam’s critique of realism leads him to a version of constructivism. This doctrine is *very* bad news. On the one hand, it leaves us with no possibility of explaining the constraints on our theorizing. On the other hand, the idea that we make the known world with our conceptual schemes is about as implausible as it gets.

Finally, I turned to the harsh responses of Putnam and Dummett to my criticisms of Dummett. Putnam accuses me of “stone-kicking” without apparently attending to any of my arguments. In particular, he ignores my argument that, contrary to what he suggests, it is very difficult to combine an epistemic notion of truth, hence Dummettian semantic anti-realism, with *Realism*. And he ignores my abduction from *Realism* to correspondence truth..

It is nicely ironic that Dummett should describe my argument as “a severe case of *ignoratio elenchi*. His own argument is a paradigm of that failing.

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