SELF-REFUTATIONS AND MUCH MORE: THE DIALECTICAL THINKING OF HILARY PUTNAM†

Louise CUMMINGS*

* School of History, Philosophy and Politics, University of Ulster, Coleraine, County Londonderry, BT52 1SA, Northern Ireland, UK. E-mail: L.Cummings@qub.ac.uk

ABSTRACT: In the following discussion, I examine what constitutes the dialectical strain in Putnam's thought. As part of this examination, I consider Putnam' (1981) criticism of the fact/value dichotomy. I compare this criticism to Putnam's analysis of the metaphysical realist's position, a position which has occupied Putnam's thinking more than any other philosophical stance. I describe how Putnam pursues a charge of self-refutation against the metaphysical realist and against the proponent of a fact/value dichotomy, a charge which assumes dialectical significance. So it is that the self-refuting nature of these positions is linked to their unintelligibility. My conclusion relates Putnam's dialectical project to his wider philosophical ambitions, ambitions which are influenced in large part by Wittgensteinian considerations.

Keywords: Hilary Putnam, dialectic, self-refutation arguments, fact/value dichotomy, metaphysical realism, rationality, unintelligibility, reflective and explanatory practice, metaphysical standpoint.

CONTENTS

Introduction: delimiting Putnamian dialectic

Since his 1978 publication *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, Hilary Putnam has consistently expressed dissatisfaction with his former position of metaphysical realism. This critical phase in Putnam's thinking, a phase which has been ongoing for some twenty years, is essentially dependent on a dialectical mode of inquiry[1]. In this way, Putnam has become increasingly concerned with examining the structure of entire philosophical controversies. As part of this examination, he is interested in how the thesis

and counter-thesis of particular philosophical disputes tend to share similar presuppositions. He is also interested in how we go about refuting philosophical positions and, in particular, in the terms of criticism that we use in such refutations. So it is that Putnam sets out to demonstrate the unintelligibility, not the falsity, of the metaphysical realist's claims (The notion of unintelligibility is central to the following discussion. A proposition, statement or theoretical claim is unintelligible when the aconceptual perspective of a metaphysical standpoint is presupposed by that proposition, etc. From within this standpoint we lack the concepts that are required in order to confer sense upon (hence, the unintelligibility of) such propositions, etc.)

This 'dialectical turn' has resulted in the rejection of many of Putnam's own proposals -functionalism is a case in point- and has revealed yet other philosophical positions to be incoherent, positions to which precritical Putnam was himself committed. Yet it would be a mistake to describe this dialectical method solely in terms of its most readily apparent feature, that of the criticism of these various philosophical positions. To appreciate the mistaken nature of such a description, it will be necessary to circumscribe the domain of Putnam's dialectic. In doing so, I will be reconstructing the details of a method which has until recently remained largely implicit in Putnam's philosophy.

I described above how Putnam's dialectical method is in part a criticism of philosophical theories. Moreover, Putnam's challenge to philosophical theories comes from one who wishes to remain uncommitted (for good reasons, as we shall see) to both the thesis and counter-thesis of a particular dispute. At the same time, however, the type of dialectical inquiry that Putnam pursues moves beyond this criticism of theories in a number of ways. Firstly, it exposes illusions of thought to which we are subject, illusions which arise when we mistakenly believe that we have given a sense to the words used to frame philosophical 'problems'. In this way, Putnam is concerned to challenge the intelligibility of the metaphysical realist's claims, claims which achieve a metaphysical inflation of platitudes such as 'language represents the external world'. This challenge proceeds on the basis that no non-metaphysical sense has been given to the words 'language', 'represents' and 'world'.

A similar purpose underlies the procedure of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Wittgenstein is standardly credited with what Jaakko Hintikka has called a view of language as the universal medium (Hintikka's 'language as the universal medium' and 'language as calculus' distinction is a development

of an earlier distinction in the work of Jean van Heijenoort between 'logic as language' and 'logic as calculus'). As Hintikka portrays this view, it appears to have similarities to the conception of language that is central to Putnam's dialectical method, a conception which disavows the attempt to discuss issues such as the reference of language to the world from within the aconceptual perspective of a metaphysical standpoint:

> (...) one cannot as it were look at one's language from outside and describe it, as one can do to other objects that can be specified, referred to, described, discussed, and theorized about in language. The reason for this alleged impossibility is that one can use language to talk about something only if one can rely on a given definite interpretation, a given network of meaning relations obtaining between language and the world. Hence one cannot meaningfully and significantly say in language what these meaning relations are, for in any attempt to do so one must already presuppose them (Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, pp. 1-2).

The ineffability of semantics which derives from the conception of language as the universal medium ("the gist of this view of language as the universal medium lies in the thesis of the *ineffability of semantics*" (1986, p. 2; emphasis in original)) is taken by Hintikka and others to be the motivation for the say/show distinction which is standardly attributed to Wittgenstein:

> The first main thesis of this chapter is that Wittgenstein's attitude to the ineffability of semantics was rather like Frege's. Wittgenstein had, in both his early and his late philosophy, a clear and sweeping vision of how language and the world are connected with each other. Like Frege, he did not think that this vision could be expressed in language. Unlike Frege, the young Wittgenstein nevertheless believed that he could convey his vision by an oblique use of language. This nonliteral, secondary employment of language he had to consider as something different from *saying* what the semantics of our language is. This is the origin (...) of Wittgenstein's notion of *showing* as distinguished from *saying* (Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, p. 2; emphases in original).

However, this say/show distinction presupposes the existence of certain limits on our language ("There [in the *Tractatus*] the limits of language are connected explicitly with the doctrine of showing" (1986, p. 17)), limits the illusory nature of which it is now Putnam's concern to demonstrate. Putnam's claim is that, contrary to standard interpretation, the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* is concerned not with advancing theses about the logical structure of language (given, on this standard interpretation, the ineffability (inexpressibility) of semantics, the logical structure or syntax of language is the only thing that can be discussed), but with revealing the non-

sensical nature of such theses. Central to this activity -and I use the word 'activity' advisedly, for this is how Wittgenstein characterises philosophy- is an elucidatory strategy, one which reveals how we are *prone to believe* that we have given meaning to some or all of the constituent parts of a proposition (in this case, propositions concerning the logical structure of language) when we have not done so. Wittgenstein captures this thought in 5.4733 of the *Tractatus* by saying that if a sentence "has no sense, that can only be because we have failed to give a *meaning* to some of its constituent parts. (Even if we believe that we have done so)".

In describing this first feature of Putnam's dialectical method, I am de-scribing what is, in effect, the *content* of this method. For Putnam, a cen-tral strategy in the task of exposing illusions of thought consists in a type of self-refutation criticism. This criticism challenges the intelligibility of certain theoretical conceptions of truth and rationality through a demon-stration of the incoherence of those conceptions when they are examined against the various argumentative, descriptive and explanatory practices needed to establish them. In each such criticism, the emphasis on practice is intended to reveal a form of rationality which is excluded from the par-ticular theoretical conception of the case, but in the absence of which no sense can be made of that conception. What makes it seem that these theo-retical conceptions are even possible is the conviction that we can assume a metaphysical standpoint, a standpoint from within which we take ourselves to be attributing significance to those conceptions when in fact this is not the case -this standpoint lacks the concepts which are necessary for the mak-ing of such attributions. On the dialectical view that I am developing the assumption of a metaphysical standpoint is intimately associated with the activity of theorising. For theorising, at least within the context of philo-sophical discussions, consists in the attempt to fully circumscribe concepts such as rationality and reference, that is, to describe these concepts without in turn presupposing these concepts, an undertaking which derives the sem-blance of possibility from within a metaphysical standpoint, that is, from within a standpoint which does not presuppose rationality. I return to these issues in subsequent discussion. For the moment, I examine two other dis-tinctive features of Putnam's dialectical method.

The second and third features of Putnam's dialectic can be demon-strated by means of a comparison of that dialectic with aspects of Frege's thought. Putnam's dialectic assumes the role of a propaedeutic, a type of preparatory activity undertaken *prior to* philosophy, with the purpose of circumscribing the appropriate domain of study *for* philosophy. (As stated

here, the features of this propaedeutic have been left deliberately undeveloped to permit a comparison of this propaedeutic with the view of Frege). When Frege discusses elucidation it is with such a propaedeutical role in mind. In this way, Frege intends his elucidations to convey the logical distinctions which form the basis of his Begriffsschrift (concept-notation). However, these same elucidations cannot be expressed as part of the Begriffsschrift -they are strictly transitional in nature. It is what these elucidations give way to that provides the connection with the third feature of Putnam's account, its avoidance of theory. When Frege rejects any role for elucidations within his Begriffsschrift, he is in effect claiming that elucidations have no place in the system of a science. In this way, Frege conceives of two distinct types of activity, the one elucidation and the other the construction of a formal language in which the logical relations of ordinary language are rendered explicit. However, Putnam is anxious to avoid the type of theoretical system-building which underlies Frege's Begriffsschrift. As James Conant states in the introduction to Putnam's *Words and Life*, "He [Putnam] says that what he is offering should not be taken for a philosophical *theory* in the traditional sense" (1994a, p. xi). Just what sense of theory, if any, Putnam is prepared to countenance in philosophy is, at this time, more properly a matter of speculation. What is clear, however, is that Putnam is not content to rest with the Tractarian point that "The result of philosophy is not a number of 'philosophical propositions', but to make propositions clear" (4.112).

In order to elaborate upon the propaedeutical and theory-avoidance features of Putnam's dialectic, I want to draw a distinction between the *context* of this dialectical method and the *outcome* of this method. The notion of context is central to the propaedeutical functioning of Putnam's dialectic. To see this, consider again how this propaedeutical component of Putnam's account was introduced in the above discussion. There the role of this component was described as one of circumscribing the appropriate domain of study for philosophy. That domain, I now want to suggest, is characterised by a descriptive process in which concepts are shown to be essentially interrelated and not, importantly, susceptible of any complete description of their extent. Yet it is only by virtue of the criticism of a prior *context* of inquiry, namely, that of the self-refutation arguments described earlier, that the need for such a descriptive process becomes evident (self-refutation arguments, I will demonstrate subsequently, reveal the conceptual dependence of a circumscribed concept of rationality on a prior notion of rationality, that is, on a notion of rationality which is not part of the circum-

scribed concept). The inquiry of this prior context eschews theory-construction in favour of a form of critical philosophy. Moreover, this critical philosophy is distinct in kind from the criticism which character-ises traditional philosophical inquiry -it consists in criticism of the oppos-ing positions of a philosophical debate in the absence of any prior com-mitment on the part of the philosopher to either of those positions (it should be noted that criticism from without a philosophical position is not the same as criticism from without a conceptual scheme -the former type of criticism is a description of the methodology of Putnamian dialectic, while the latter type of criticism is a description of the kind of theorising opposed by that dialectic). Now, while critical philosophy dominates this initial context of inquiry, it seems that this same critical approach can never be entirely lacking from the descriptive form of philosophical in-quiry which is established as the *outcome* of Putnamian dialectic. For re-gardless of the nature of this emergent inquiry, some ongoing assessment of its intelligibility is required, such is the pervasiveness of the illusions of thought to which we are subject in philosophy.

It can thus be seen that Putnamian dialectic functions by means of an in-teraction of the content, the context and the outcome features of that method. Undoubtedly, additional features of this method remain to be discovered and developed. For the moment, however, I consider the de-tails of this dialectical method such as they relate to the criticism of cer-tain philosophical positions.

1. The fact/value dichotomy

In his 1981 publication *Reason, Truth and History*, Putnam challenges a number of dichotomies, dichotomies whose influence extends beyond strictly philosophical concerns[2]. In relation to one such dichotomy, that of fact and value, he describes his method of argument as follows:

> The strategy of my argument is not going to be a new one. I'm going to rehabili-tate a somewhat discredited move in the debate about fact and value, namely the move that consists in arguing that the distinction is at the very least hopelessly fuzzy because factual statements themselves, and the practices of scientific inquiry upon which we rely to decide what is and what is not a fact, presuppose values (p. 128).

Putnam relates the discredited nature of such a move to a 'protective concession' advanced by the proponents of the dichotomy: "The defenders

of the fact-value dichotomy concede that science does presuppose some values, for example, science presupposes that we want *truth*, but argue that these values are not *ethical* values" (p. 128). In demonstration of the inadequacy of this view, Putnam invites the reader to entertain the hypothesis that we are all Brains in a Vat[3]:

> I want the reader to imagine that this crazy (and, I would claim, incoherent) theory, the theory that we are all brains in a vat, is held not by an isolated lunatic, but by virtually all the people in some large country, say, Australia. Imagine that in Australia only a small minority of the people believe what we do and the great majority believe that we are Brains in a Vat. Perhaps the Australians believe this because they are all disciples of a Guru, the Guru of Sydney, perhaps. Perhaps when we talk to them they say, 'Oh if you could talk to the Guru of Sydney and look into his eyes and see what a good, kind, wise man he is, you too would be convinced.' And if we ask, 'But how does the Guru of Sydney know that we are brains in a vat, if the illusion is as perfect as you say?,' they might reply, 'Oh, the Guru of Sydney *just knows.*' (1981, p. 131).

Putnam has a clear aim in this context: to expound the presuppositions of a scientific world view. This he achieves by bringing the scientist's view into conflict with the distinctly unscientific perspective of the Brain-in-a-Vatist. The scientist must defend his outlook in the presence of the vatist and it is here that appeal is made to a number of methodological virtues. Firstly, the vatist's world view lacks a certain *coherence*, the type of coherence which can be shown to characterise the scientific viewpoint: "One of the things that we aim at is that we should be able to give an account of how we know our statements to be true" (p. 132). The vatist, however, has no notion of coherence within his system:

> The Australians, remember, have themselves postulated an illusion so perfect that there is no rational way in which the Guru of Sydney can possibly *know* that the belief system which he has adopted and persuaded all the others to adopt is correct (p. 133).

Again, the vatist's world view lacks the *comprehensiveness* of the scientist's system:

> Their belief system (...) agrees with ours concerning what the laws of nature are *in the image*, but does it tell us whether or not the laws of nature that appear to hold in the image are the laws of nature that actually hold outside the vat? If it fails to, then it lacks a certain kind of comprehensiveness which we aim after, for it does not, even in its own terms, tell what the true and ultimate laws of nature are (p. 133).

Finally, the vatist's world view is not *functionally simple*:

> (...) the very fact that the Brain in a Vatist theory postulates all kinds of objects out-
> side the vat which play no role in the explanation of our experiences, according to
> the theory itself, makes it clear that this is a case in which we can definitely say that
> the maxim (...) 'don't multiply entities without necessity' is violated (p. 133).

I want to examine the dialectical nature of this case. For Putnam, the values discussed in this context, in addition to other values not evident in the present scenario, e.g. instrumental efficacy, build "a picture of science as presupposing a rich system of values" (p. 134). These value presuppositions, it was argued, enable the scientist to engage in discussion of his world view -the scientist is able to give an account of how he knows his statements to be true, of how the laws of nature represented by his theories are the true laws of nature and of how the objects postulated by his theories are essential to an explanation of his experiences. The vatist, on the other hand, has no such access to rational discussion. He has envisaged an illusion so perfect that the limits of his world view are coextensive with the limits of discourse itself -the vatist is, after all, to have no means of *knowing* that he is a brain in a vat. However, the circumscribed concept of rationality which follows from this view precludes all discussion and understanding of the vatist's position. In specific terms, the vatist cannot *say* how he knows his statements to be true -to introduce the notion of a correspondence to reality is, in fact, to invalidate the vatist's claim to be a brain in a vat[4]. Also, the vatist is at a loss to *explain* the role played by the evil scientist[5] in his account -he cannot even *think about* the evil scientist if he is a brain in a vat. And the laws which hold for him as a brain in a vat cannot be *described* or *explained* in relation to any sort of reality outside of the vat -the vatist has no access to this reality from his position within the vat. In each case, the explanation and reflection involved requires a prior notion of rationality, a form of rationality which exists apart from any attempted circumscription of rationality. Yet such a prior notion is entirely lacking within the vatist's account. Moreover, the vatist's problems do not end with a lack of rational discussion of his position. In the absence of a prior notion of rationality it is not even clear that there *is* a position to be discussed. The claim that we are brains in a vat only constitutes a *position* for the vatist by virtue of the fact that the context is one of an argumentative exchange with the scientist. Had the *purpose* for which the claim was employed been different or, as is currently being considered, had there been no purpose at all -in his pursuit of an all-encompassing illusion the vatist wants to deprive us of a prior

concept of purpose- then it is not clear in what sense the vatist could be said to have a position. Lacking the related concept of purpose, the entire notion of a position in this context begins to disintegrate.

However, the dialectical case against the vatist does not end here. The vatist, it will be recalled, has envisaged an illusion so perfect that he has no *rational* way of *knowing* that he is a brain in a vat. In the same way, he cannot be said to *say* or *think* that he is a brain in a vat. For his thought and assertion occur *within* the vat, a position which precludes all *reference* to the vat. To say or think the thesis 'we are brains in a vat' -in the only sense of saying and thinking which is intelligible to us, that which involves reference to an external world- requires that the vatist assume a position *outside of* the vat. Then, however, it cannot be the case that the vatist *is* a brain in a vat. The structure of a self-refutation argument is evident -if the statement that we are brains in a vat is true, then the fact of our saying or thinking this statement to be true shows that it must be false (reference to the state of affairs represented by the thesis invalidates the thesis). Hence, it is false[7]. For Putnam, the vatist's dilemma can be characterised as follows:

> Could we, if we were brains in a vat in this way, *say* or *think* that we were? I am going to argue that the answer is 'No, we couldn't.' In fact, I am going to argue that the supposition that we are actually brains in a vat, although it violates no physical law, and is perfectly consistent with everything we have experienced, cannot possibly be true. *It cannot possibly be true*, because it is, in a certain way, self-refuting (Putnam 1981, p. 7; emphases in original).

It thus emerges that the vatist is compelled by the presuppositions of his own reflective practice to concede the incompleteness of his illusion. For the vatist to say or think that he is a brain in a vat presupposes a relation of reference to the vat. However, this same reference relation presupposes an epistemological standpoint outside of the vat, a standpoint which invalidates the vatist's claim to be a brain in a vat[8]. Moreover, the outcome of this dialectical criticism is a demonstration of the *unintelligibility*, not the falsity, of the vatist's claim[9]. The vatist's illusion is so perfect that it encompasses all forms of rational discourse. In such a case, however, there is no residual (prior) notion of rationality with which to *make sense* of the vatist's claim to be a brain in a vat. In fact, the notion of an epistemological standpoint and of a residual form of rationality amount to one and the same thing in this context -both ideas attest to the failure of the attempt to describe rationality in a fully circumscribed way. For any account of rationality or, in the present case, any illusion intended to be coextensive

with rationality, must itself presuppose rationality. This conclusion turns on a particular understanding of language 'use', one which Putnam attributes to the later Wittgenstein, in which to describe the words in a language-game (think of rationality as belonging to just such a language-game) requires that we employ the words within that same game:

> If one wants to talk of the use of the sentence "There is a coffee table in front of me", one has to talk about seeing and feeling coffee tables, among other things. In short, one has to mention *perceiving* coffee tables (Putnam 1994a, p. 283).

In the same way that any account of perception must first make use of perception language, so any account of rationality must first employ the language of rationality, i.e. the language of the game in which rationality has its home. Moreover, the decision to uproot the concept of rationality from its language-game -the favourite pursuit of philosophers and cognitive scientists[10] alike- is the decision which sets us on the route of attempting to formulate a *complete* account of rationality, i.e. an account which does not *presuppose* rationality. However, we cannot even make sense of a complete description of rationality, for the reason that we lack the concepts needed to make that description intelligible to us.

In the brains-in-a-vat scenario, the vatist rejects the notion of an epistemological standpoint in favour of a *metaphysical* standpoint. This standpoint exists apart from all human concepts and from all modes of conceptualisation. It is, to use Putnam's term, a God's Eye point of view, a vantage point from which the whole of rational discourse can be surveyed without in turn presupposing such discourse. The vatist believes that he can assume this standpoint and, through doing so, that he can achieve the completeness of his illusion through the total subsumption of rationality within that illusion. However, this completeness is achieved at the expense of the intelligibility of the vatist's illusion. For in the absence of a prior notion of rationality we cannot so much as make sense of this illusion. The unintelligibility of the vatist's claim, now identified as a problem of perspective, can only be adequately revealed through an understanding of the impulse to that perspective. Therefore, I turn to an examination of this impulse, such as it relates to the central metaphysical issue of realism.

2. Metaphysical realism

No single philosophical position has occupied Putnam's thinking more than metaphysical realism. This long-standing engagement with the meta-

physical realist provides fertile ground indeed for an examination of Putnam's dialectical method. Metaphysical realism is, as described by Putnam, "a bundle of intimately associated philosophical ideas about truth" (1988, p. 107). Its assumptions are threefold. Firstly, there is a unique correspondence relation between the propositions of language and features of the external world. Secondly, there is One True Theory of this external world or mind-independent reality. And thirdly, there is a commitment to bivalence, such that each proposition of language must be either true or false. Putnam employs these assumptions of the metaphysical realist within a model-theoretic or permutation argument.

LANGUAGE   POSSIBLE   POSSIBLE   PERMUTATION
                WORLDS   INDIVIDUALS

EXTENSION
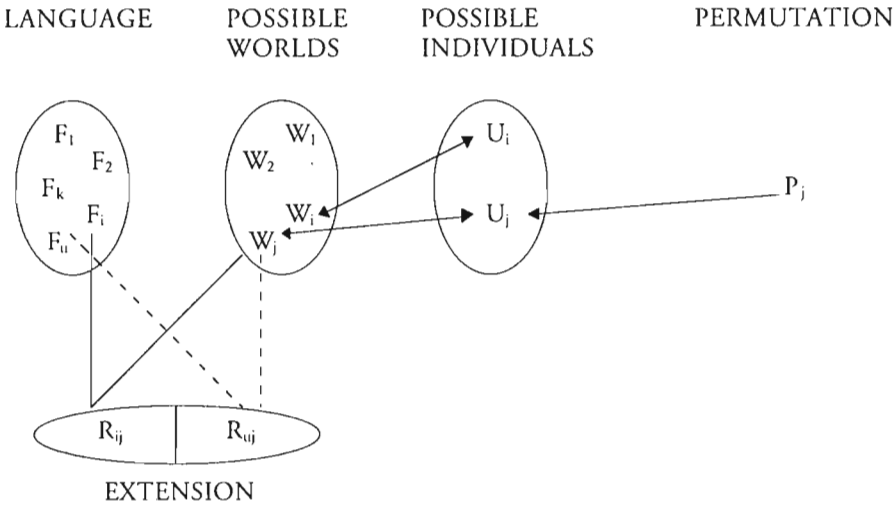
Notation

(1) $<U_j; R_{ij}(i=1, 2,..., k)>$ Intended model of the language in W_j relative to interpretation I
(2) $P_j(R_{uj}) \neq R_{uj}$ *PERMUTATION*
(3) $<U_j; P_j(R_{ij}) (i=1, 2,..., k)>$ *INTERPRETATION J*
(4) $P_j(R_{ij}) \neq R_{ij}$ *PERMUTATION*
(5) $<U_j; P_j(R_{ij}) (i=1, 2,..., k)>$
(6) $<U_j; R_{ij}(i=1, 2,..., k)>$ $\}$ *ISOMORPHIC*

Figure 1: MODEL-THEORETIC ARGUMENT
(based on Appendix, Putnam 1981)

Central to this argument is a language which has been formalised. This language contains a range of predicates which differ in their number of argument places. In this way, the language may contain monadic predicates, such as x is fat; dyadic predicates, such as x is the father of y; and triadic predicates, such as x is between y and z. This argument also employs a set of possible worlds. This set contains the actual world which differs from other possible worlds in that it is realised. Next, there is the set of possible individuals. U_i represents all the individuals in the possible world W_i, and equally, U_j represents all the individuals in the possible world W_j. Finally, there is extension, such that R_{ij} is the extension of the predicate F_i in the possible world W_j. Equally, R_{uj} is the extension of the predicate F_u in the possible world W_j. Three terms are closely related in this context. The first term is extension, the set of things that a predicate refers to in a single possible world. Next there is the intension of a predicate. An intension of a predicate is obtained when that predicate is assigned an extension in each possible world. Finally, there is the interpretation of the language. An interpretation is obtained when an intension has been assigned to every predicate of the language. Figure 1 represents one interpretation of the language, interpretation I. I want to look at a second interpretation of the language, interpretation J. This second interpretation is the result of a permutation performed on the set U_j. As can be seen from the interconnecting arrows on the diagram, such a permutation will effect changes in the entire system, such that the extension of F_i in the possible world W_j will no longer be R_{ij}, and the extension of F_u in the possible world W_j will no longer be R_{uj}. In effect, a situation is created in which one and the same predicate has a different reference relation under each new interpretation of the language, to the degree where F_i can refer to the set of things which are bald under interpretation I, the set of things which are fat under interpretation J, the set of things which are red under interpretation K, and so on.

To demonstrate this further, imagine the case of the actual world in which the cat is on the mat and the cherry is on the tree. In the actual world the term 'cat' refers to the set of cats and the term 'mat' refers to the set of mats. The statement 'the cat is on the mat' and the statement 'the cherry is on the tree' are both true in the actual world. A permutation which maps the set of cats onto the set of cherries and the set of mats onto the set of trees has the effect of maintaining the original truth-value of each of the statements (the different models of the language are, after all, isomorphic), while altering the reference relations of their component terms -the term 'cat' now refers to the set of cherries, etc. When this procedure is applied

across all possible worlds for each of the sentences of the language, the result is a thoroughgoing indeterminacy of reference:

> (...) there are infinitely many admissible models of our language, i.e., infinitely many models which satisfy all operational and theoretical constraints. If the entities that these models consist of are thought of as mind-independent discourse-independent entities, then the claim that just one of these models is the unique 'intended' model becomes utterly mysterious. Each of these models corresponds to a reference relation. So there are infinitely many admissible reference relations, R_1, R_2, R_3,... Someone who believes that just one of these, say R_{17}, *really is* the unique *real* reference relation, *the* reference relation, believes that the word 'reference' is attached to R_{17} (and not to R_1, R_2,...) with *metaphysical glue* (1983, p. 295; emphases in original).

As Putnam sees it, the problem with metaphysical realism is that "it leaves us with no intelligible way to refute ontological relativity" (1994a, p. 280). Yet we cannot accept ontological relativity, for we cannot even make sense

> of the idea that the world consists of objects any one of which is a quark in one admissible model, the Eiffel Tower in a second admissible model (...) but is no more intrinsically any one of these than any other (p. 280).

The paradoxical nature of a conclusion of ontological relativity is construed by Putnam as a rejection of the position, metaphysical realism, that led to that conclusion. In this way, Putnam is using his model-theoretic argument as a reductio argument against the metaphysical realist. Quine's response to this indeterminacy in our own language is to 'choose as our manual of translation the identity transformation, thus taking the whole language at face value' and he has it in mind that "reference is then explicated in disquotational paradigms analogous to Tarski's truth paradigm" (1990, p. 52). A different response to this indeterminacy is given by Michael Devitt (1984). For Devitt, the true relation of reference is itself a causal connection which, for the purposes of the present analysis, is exemplified by the relation R_{17} above. A more recent account, that of Jerry Fodor (1990), appeals to counterfactuals to explain reference. Fodor's counterfactuals express an asymmetrical dependence between truths of the form 'Xs cause "cat" tokenings'. In this way, the referent of 'cat' is arrived at through a counterfactual of the form "If cats didn't cause "cat" tokenings, then (...) (cat pictures, cat statues, the sound "meow", and so on) wouldn't cause "cat" tokenings either" (Putnam 1992, p. 38).

When Devitt discusses causal relation it is with an explanatory role in mind:

> So his [the realist's] answer may include a sentence roughly like
> Term x is causally related in way A to object y and to nothing else
> as an explanation of another sentence
> x refers to y and to nothing else
> In such circumstances he will regard the reference of x as determinate (1984, p. 189).

Again:

> We could have foretold that we would be able to find *some* causal relation between the entities, because causal relations are ubiquitous. We need to see the one we have picked out as explanatorily special (1984, p. 87; emphasis in original).

The metaphysical realist is concerned to establish the following chain of explanation. His aim is to explain the success of science in terms of the *reference* of the theories of science to subsets of the totality of all objects. His reductionism, particularly his predilection for physicalistic description, leads him to pursue an *explanation* of reference in terms of a causal relation. However, it is Putnam's claim that no *intelligible* explanation of the 'facts of language' -for example, that we often assert 'there is a castle in view' just when there is a castle in view and not when an igloo is in view- can proceed in the non-intentional manner typical of reductionist analysis[11]. An *intelligible* explanation of reference must appeal to a notion of *epistemic priority*, such that the explanans -in this case, a causal relation- exhibits a greater degree of supportive *warrant* than the explanandum, here the notion of reference. Warrant presupposes the concept of *evidence*, evidence which is essential to the confirmation of the causal relation in this context. Moreover, the evidence in support of this causal relation presupposes the satisfaction of certain standards of *relevance* to that relation. Relevance is not an isolated notion, but one which is further dependent on the concept of *meaning* -to understand the relevance of the evidence of the present case is to understand the way in which the content of this evidence bears upon the content of the causal relation. In short, a pattern of interrelationships can be shown to exist for a range of such epistemic and normative notions, a pattern which constitutes a complex network of these different concepts.

However, it is just these normative and epistemic notions which are unavailable to the causal theorist. He is pursuing a reductionist analysis -an account of the intentional from within the non-intentional- an essential fea-

ture of which is its rejection of all things normative. With this rejection of normativity and of the epistemic concepts described above comes the causalist's failure to provide an *intelligible explanation* of reference. For we cannot even *make sense* of an explanation which, by its very nature, resists description in terms of relevance, epistemic priority, and so on. The *dialectical* significance of explanation in this context stems from its role in Putnam's charge of *self-refutation* against the causalist. That charge results from Putnam's application of the causal theorist's claims to a statement of the causal theorist's own position. In this way, if it is true that reference is (explained by) a causal relation, then at the very least a causal relation should be capable of explaining the referential nature of that fact. However, we have just seen the Utopian nature of such a demand -no causal relation that is acceptable to the causalist can assume the essentially intentional character of explanation. Yet causal theories must achieve exactly this much if they are to continue in their role as an *explanation* of reference. For Putnam, the sense in which causal theories are self-refuting is that in order to *explain* the reference of the claim 'reference is (explained by) a causal relation', the causalist must appeal to a notion of explanation which exceeds description by a causal relation. In this way, reference cannot be (explained by) a causal relation. Hence, it is false that reference is (explained by) a causal relation. The causalist is confronted with the following option. He can either conclude that his causal theory, lacking as it is in normative resources, fails as an explanation of the referential relation of the aforementioned fact. Or he can successfully pursue an explanation of the referential nature of this fact, but in doing so he is substituting a theory which differs significantly from the causal one he wishes to advance.

In 1994, Putnam delivered the Dewey Lectures (Putnam, 1994b). These lectures represented Putnam's most explicit formulation of the motivation for the reductionism of causal theories of reference and, a fortiori, of metaphysical realism itself (I say his most explicit formulation because for a number of years prior to his presentation of the Dewey Lectures, Putnam had effectively been locating the source of the urge to reduce intentionality in an interface conception of mind. For example, in *The Many Faces of Realism* Putnam remarks

> This is the famous picture, the dualistic picture of the physical world and its primary qualities, on the one hand, and the mind and its sense data, on the other, that philosophers have been wrangling over since the time of Galileo, as Husserl says. And it is Husserl's idea -as it was the idea of William James, who influenced Husserl- that this picture is disastrous (1987, pp. 6-7)).

For Putnam, causal theories are founded upon the mistaken assumption that the facts of various scientific disciplines, be they hard or soft in nature, have an informative light to shed on what has traditionally been described as the problem of intentionality. With the presentation of his Dewey Lectures, Putnam attempted to articulate further his dissatisfaction with the metaphysical realist's position. The focus of his attention at this time shifted from the scientific reductionism which motivates metaphysical realism and the causalist response to the indeterminacy of reference, to the question of why it seems that a reductionist approach is the only serious contender when our inquiries turn to problems in the philosophy of mind. Of course, eliminativists[12] like Stephen Stich and Richard Rorty would deny such a claim -for these writers, intentional notions like reference and reason can simply be eliminated. However, it is Putnam's claim that what motivates the case of reductionism -what Putnam, following John McDowell, has described as an *interface* conception of mind- similarly motivates the case of eliminativism. Indeed, once one has accepted an interface conception of mind, then one must either proceed by reducing intentionality or explaining intentionality away.

To see this, consider how reference is accounted for within an interface conception of mind. In his Dewey Lectures, Putnam (1994b) argues:

> Early modern realism's philosophy of mind was an attempt to save some room for our everyday descriptions while fully accepting [the idea that our everyday descriptions cannot possibly apply to the things "as they are in themselves"]. According to this new philosophy of mind, our "experience" is entirely a matter taking place within the mind (or within the brain), within, that is to say, a realm conceived of as "inside", a realm where there are certainly no tables and chairs or cabbages or kings, a realm so disjoint from what came to be called the "external" world that (as Berkeley insisted) it makes no sense to speak of any experience as *resembling* what the experience is "of". Nevertheless, according to those philosophers who were not willing to follow Berkeley into idealism, "external" things are the *causes* of our "inner" experiences, and, while the person on the street is mistaken in thinking that he or she "directly perceives" those things, still we "indirectly perceive" them, in the sense of having experiences caused by them. Moreover, even color and warmth and the other "secondary qualities" (as they came to be called) can be granted a derivative sort of reality -they do not exist as "intrinsic properties" of the things "in themselves", but they exist as "relational properties", as dispositions to affect our minds (or brains) in certain ways (pp. 468-469; emphases in original).

In the above passage Putnam describes a type of philosophical 'solution' to the 'problem' of explaining the relationship of perceptual experiences to the physical world.[13] Although seventeenth century in origin, this same 'solution' effectively exhausts the type of explanation that is traded within

present-day philosophical accounts of intentionality. For while it is gener-
ally held that we can explain our perceptual interaction with the world us-
ing some suitably formulated causal mechanism, a similar mechanism is
presumed to operate within our talk of thoughts referring to features of re-
ality. Moreover, as part of these accounts it is argued that these causal rela-
tions (1) bridge the gulf brought about by the dualist's dichotomy of the
mental and the physical (a gulf over which our conceptual powers cannot
extend) and (2) secure a type of objectivity, in that both perceptual experi-
ence and the referential capacity of language are not the products of some
fanciful creation on our part, but are ultimately 'caused' by an external
world. Indeed, it is by virtue of these causal relations that we can assign
content to our thoughts and perceptual experiences -outside of these rela-
tions, thoughts and experiences are taken to exhibit syntactic structure only.
Putnam describes the varied nature of this interface of perception and con-
ception as follows:

> In the tradition, these "interfaces" (...) were originally thought of as mental (...) It
> is not, however, essential to an interface conception of either perception or concep-
> tion that the interface be mental -in materialist versions, the interface can be a
> brain process or brain state. In Quine's version of the interface conception of per-
> ception, it is nerve endings on the surface of my body that play the role of the inter-
> face. In the case of conception, the interface has recently been conceived of as con-
> sisting of "marks and noises" (Rorty); although the interface is not literally "in-
> side" us on this Rortian conception, it turns out to generate the same problematic
> "gap" between thought and the world. (There is also a version -Fodor's- in which
> the interface is sentences, but not sentences in a public language -marks and noises-
> but in a language "inside" our brains, "mentalese". This is a kind of combination
> of the linguistic conception of the interface with the conception of the interface as
> "inside the head"). (Unpublished lecture notes).

Within an interface conception of mind our cognitive powers extend as
far as an interface which is variously represented by sense data, qualia or, i f
your interests are Quinean in nature, by the stimulation of the body's sur-
face neurons. In general, everything enclosed by this interface is of one
kind, a strictly mental realm, and everything beyond the interface is of a
quite different kind, physical relations devoid of all intentional character.
According to one version of this picture, that advanced by Jerry Fodor, in
order to explain how our thoughts can be about anything, one must first as-
sume the existence of syntactically characterised structures, mental entities
described in terms of their syntactic components. To this one must add a
semantics, physical relations which uniquely determine the truth-values of
each of the previously specified syntactic structures. It is by means of a re-

duction to these physical relations that the causalist proposes to explain reference. The eliminativist, sceptical of the prospect of a successful outcome to this reductionist project, pursues an elimination of intentionality itself. Motivating both responses in this context is the notion of an interface between an inner mental realm and an outer physical world, an interface which is bridged by a complete reduction of the mental to the physical in the case of reductionism and which is explained away along with intentionality in the case of eliminativism.

This interface conception of our cognitive functioning has been, and continues to be, enormously influential, so much so that, as Putnam has argued, it can come to seem like 'post-scientific common sense'. Notwithstanding the appeal of this picture, the interface conception of mind is inherently unintelligible. Its unintelligibility stems from a certain metaphysical standpoint, one which assumes that we can compare thought and language with reality in itself. For Putnam, the notion of a mind-independent reality, a reality described 'in itself' without the presupposition of concepts, is quite simply unintelligible[14]. That notion and the standpoint which generates it were already under challenge in *The Many Faces of Realism* on the grounds of their unintelligibility. In that text, Putnam rejects the traditional realist assumptions of (1) a fixed totality of all objects; (2) a fixed totality of all properties; (3) a sharp line between properties we "discover" in the world and properties we "project" onto the world; (4) a fixed relation of "correspondence" in terms of which truth is supposed to be defined. Each of these assumptions, Putnam argues, presupposes that we can give some sense to the notion of a reality in itself, a reality which can be finitely described in the language of mathematical physics (Putnam describes how Husserl describes "the idea of the 'external world' as something whose true description, whose description 'in itself', consists of mathematical formulas" as "what above all came into Western thinking with the Galilean revolution" (1987, p. 5)).

However, the problem with such a presupposition can be seen as soon as we attempt to characterise the properties which supposedly constitute a reality in itself. For even properties such as solubility, which were traditionally conceived as being the "intrinsic' properties of 'external' things', can be shown to fail of any finite characterisation in the language of mathematical physics and cannot, for this reason, be described as part of a reality in itself:

> If the 'intrinsic' properties of 'external' things are the ones that we can represent by formulas in the language of fundamental physics, by 'suitable functions of the dy-

namical variables', then *solubility* is also not an 'intrinsic' property of any external thing (Putnam 1987, p. 11; emphasis in original).

In the present context, what *appears* to the causalist to be the *possibility* of a reality in itself motivates his attempt to explain reference in terms of a causal relation. For the essential feature of a causal relation, at least this is how it appears to the causalist, is that it, like the notion of a reality in itself, exists apart from all conceptual schemes and can be described ultimately in the language of fundamental physics. However, if the project of reducing solubility to the language of fundamental physics has failed, then the vastly more complicated project of reducing reference to the language of fundamental physics -the physical descriptions of causal relations- is also doomed to failure. A fortiori, in the same way that it is unintelligible to talk of a reality in itself -we cannot so much as make sense of a notion which, by its very nature, resists capture by concepts- it is unintelligible to talk of a non-intentional causal relation -it is the intentional notions that the causal theorist wishes to set apart from his causal theory of reference that effectively confer sense on the causal relations that are central to that theory. Moreover, it is not a solution to this particular set of problems to say that we *cannot* compare thought and language with reality in itself. For in employing the notion of a reality in itself, this negative thesis falls foul of the same unintelligibility from which it is intended to be an escape. For Putnam, a way through this impasse is to be found in Wittgenstein. As James Conant has argued in the introduction to Putnam's *Words and Life*:

> The readings of (both early and later) Wittgenstein which Putnam (now) wishes to take issue with are all readings which understand Wittgenstein to be calling upon us to acknowledge the existence of certain *limits* (the limits imposed on thought by the logical structure of language, or the limits imposed on knowledge by the contingent nature of our forms of life). Wittgenstein (according to the readings Putnam opposes) shows us how to acquiesce in -rather than chafe against- these limits. Most of the readings of Wittgenstein which are presently in circulation (however much they may otherwise differ from one another) are of this variety, counselling us to resign ourselves to our inability to transcend the conditions of human knowledge. The readings of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations* that Putnam himself (now) urges are ones which take Wittgenstein to be concerned to show that the limit against which, in our philosophizing, we (imagine ourselves to) chafe is an illusory limit. On this reading of Wittgenstein (...) "we cannot know the world as it is 'in itself' (...) not because the 'in itself' is an unreachable limit, but because the 'in itself' doesn't make sense" (1994a, p. xl; emphasis in original).

Conant's use of the expression 'our philosophizing' is significant in this context. Its significance stems from what Cora Diamond, Putnam and

Wittgenstein all see as what becomes of our concepts under the pressure of *doing philosophy*. In an attempt to understand the effects of this pressure, Putnam has drawn upon the insights of American pragmatism, the principal appeal of which, in his opinion, has been an emphasis on the primacy of practice. Just such an emphasis is at the heart of Putnam's pragmatic (internal) realism[15] (a further feature of this realism, its emphasis on common-sense realism, will be described subsequently). The ways of talking and thinking which are fundamental to our practices give rise to pictures, pictures which can all too easily become the source of much metaphysics in philosophy. In demonstration of this, consider the case of our 'using a picture' and the case of our 'being in the grip of a picture'. The former is the concern of Diamond's realistic spirit, a spirit which aims to recover the role that various concepts play in our lives. The latter is the work of the metaphysical spirit, the characteristic activity of which is a laying down of metaphysical requirements about what must be the case in order for something -reference, determinacy of sense, knowledge of other minds, and so on- to be possible. The satisfaction of these requirements results in an inevitable distortion of the very concepts that we are seeking to understand. This same distortion continues to haunt the endeavours of those who wish to escape from metaphysical realism. Such is Putnam's criticism of Rorty's attempt to abandon notions like representation.

Rorty was content at a time to express his dissatisfaction with metaphysical realism in terms of the unintelligibility of the metaphysical realist's claims. In a 1993 paper entitled 'Putnam and the Relativist Menace', Rorty rejected his earlier criticism concerning the unintelligibility of what it would be to represent the world as it is, in favour of what he described as the *relative inutility* of such a claim. For Putnam, Rorty's charge of relative inutility is the expression of a desire to avoid all further examination of the kind of failure evident in the case of metaphysical realism. Rorty, in shifting the focus of his criticism from the unintelligibility to the relative inutility of metaphysical realism, remains blind to the hyperbolical standards of certainty that the metaphysical spirit imposes on our concepts. These metaphysically sublimed counterparts of our concepts mimic the grammar of ordinary concepts while draining them of their content. For Rorty, a retreat into scepticism appears inevitable given the failure of metaphysical realism to adequately account for representation. However, this retreat is characterised by the same unintelligibility from which it is an attempt to escape. Rorty appears to operate with the assumption that if the metaphysical realist fails to account for representation, then our words

simply do not represent anything. He fails to see that even in his scepticism, he is allowing the metaphysical realist to hold the concept of representation hostage to certain metaphysically inflated standards. It is in this sense that Putnam takes the thesis and counter-thesis of a dispute to share similar presuppositions, the unintelligibility of which is his reason for remaining uncommitted to both types of claim. What emerges from these considerations is that to truly overcome metaphysical realism and, also, vatism, we must begin by recovering the ordinary concepts of language.

It is part of Putnam's own attempt at recovery -what he has described as a common-sense realism and a "deliberate" or "second naiveté" about conception- that he would have us take seriously the teachings of Wittgenstein. Sections 25 and 95 of *Philosophical Investigations* typify the picture that Putnam has in mind:

> Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing (25)
>
> when we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we -and our meaning- do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean *this-is-so* (95)

Much of the necessary groundwork for this picture -and I use the term 'picture' to distinguish what I have to say from a fully developed philosophical view[16]- is already in place. It was described above how metaphysical realism was rejected not on the basis of its falsity, but rather on account of what was described as its dependence on the unintelligible notion of a reality 'in itself'. Just such a rejection forms the cornerstone of Putnam's common-sense realism:

> (...) it is a view that takes our familiar common-sense scheme, as well as our scientific and artistic and other schemes, at face value, *without helping itself to the notion of the thing 'in itself* (1987, p. 17; emphasis added).

What gave this idea of a reality 'in itself' an initial degree of plausibility was the thought that we could assume a certain metaphysical standpoint. Under the influence of the metaphysical spirit we all too readily conceived of our epistemological standpoint *in* the world as akin to that of a God's Eye point of view, that is, as a metaphysical standpoint *out of* the world. It was further argued that it was central to the workings of the metaphysical spirit that concepts such as reference and representation underwent a type of inflation, the effect of which was to distort the applications of those notions within ordinary language. In fact, the idea of an out-

of-the-world metaphysical standpoint and the idea of the metaphysical inflation of concepts are intimately linked. For the level of certainty which the metaphysical spirit demands of us and which ultimately becomes an integral part of concepts themselves, is only attainable from a God's Eye point of view.

The metaphysical spirit urges us to proceed in our philosophising by considering concepts apart from their applications in the different domains of our lives. When we do eventually set about examining their applications, we can only see these concepts through a lens of metaphysically imposed standards. As James Conant has remarked, "This is one way into metaphysics" (Putnam, 1994a, p. liii). To overcome the domination that the metaphysical spirit has over us and, in so doing, find a way back out of metaphysics, we must first reverse the order of this examination, a task which is the concern of the realistic spirit. The realistic spirit encourages us to begin by looking and seeing just how concepts are applied within our various practices. This requires that we engage in a process of description, the aim of which is an accurate characterisation of the consequences that a particular picture, and the concepts inherent in it, has for its user. In his *Lectures on Religious Belief,* Wittgenstein describes the considerations that are subsumed within this type of description:

> "God's eye sees everything" - I want to say of this that it uses a picture.
> I don't want to belittle... the person who says it...
> We associate a particular use with a picture...
> What conclusions are you going to draw?... Are eyebrows going to be talked of, in connection with the Eye of God?...
> If I say he used a picture, I don't want to say anything he himself wouldn't say. I want to say he draws these conclusions.
> Isn't it as important as anything else, what picture he does use?...
> The whole *weight* may be in the picture... When I say he's using a picture, I am merely making a *grammatical* remark: [What I say] can only be verified by the consequences he does or does not draw...
> All I wished to characterise was the consequences he wished to draw. If I wished to say anything more I was merely being philosophically arrogant (pp. 71-72).

The most outstanding feature of this descriptive process is the restrictions placed on the extent of the description. Wittgenstein doesn't want to say anything he [the user of the picture] himself wouldn't say; indeed, to say more is 'being philosophically arrogant'. In fact, to say more is to proceed to philosophise in the manner urged by the metaphysical spirit, a manner in which we describe the application of a picture through an understanding of that same picture in isolation from its applications. Under the

influence of the metaphysical spirit, we inevitably go forward by erecting standards about what must be the case in order for our thoughts to represent (refer to) reality. The typical manifestation of these standards is in the form of a philosophical theory, thus explaining Putnam's concern that 'what he is offering should not be taken for a philosophical *theory* in the traditional sense'.

In relation to the issue of reference, the realistic spirit encourages us to see that there is no problem of how our words and sentences can refer to (represent) entities and states of affairs in the external world. Representing the world around us through thought and language is an activity comparable to a vast number of other activities and requires no special metaphysical relation, such as a causal relation, to underwrite it[17]. An accurate description of this activity involves us in an examination of the many and varied ways in which the world is represented in science, in art and in a range of other areas of human concern. Moreover, an accurate description of representation requires us to reconceptualise the very medium -language- through which representation is achieved. As Putnam remarks:

> When we know and use a language well, when it becomes the vehicle of our own thinking and not something we have to translate mentally into some more famil-iar language, we do not, *pace* Richard Rorty, experience its words and sentences as "marks and noises" into which a significance has to be read. When we hear a sen-tence in a language we understand, we do not associate a sense with a sign-design; we perceive the sense *in* the sign-design. Sentences that I think, and even sentences that I hear or read, simply do refer to whatever they are about; not because the "marks and noises" that I see and hear (or hear "in my head", in the case of my own thoughts) in-trinsically have the meanings they have, but because the sentence in use is not just a bunch of "marks and noises" (1994b, p. 491; emphasis in original).

Language within a common-sense realism is not a syntactic structure to which an interpretation must be added ('we do not associate a sense with a sign-design'); indeed, it is only when we dispense with this interface con-ception of language and representation, without dispensing with the notion of representation itself, that we can be said to have truly captured the es-sence of Putnam's common-sense realism:

> But there is an alternative, as more than one philosopher has recently pointed out - namely, to distinguish carefully between the activity of "representation" (as some-thing in which we engage) and the idea of a "representation" as an *interface* be-tween ourselves and what we think about, and to understand that giving up the idea of representations as interfaces requiring a "semantics" is not the same thing as giv-ing up on the whole idea of representation. (Putnam 1994b, p. 505; emphasis in original).

With the rejection of an interface conception of language comes the dissolution of even the appearance of a problem of how thought and language can represent (refer to) the world. That problem appeared to be very real in the context of Putnam's model-theoretic argument -it seemed that we needed to offer some type of explanation (e.g. a causal explanation) of how language could determinately refer to the world as a way out of the conclusion of referential indeterminacy that was demonstrated by that argument. However, as one writer -Bas van Fraassen- has shown, by instituting in the place of the conception of language that is central to the model-theoretic argument (this conception is effectively an interface conception[18]), a 'use conception of language', the question of how language can determinately refer to the world is none other than a 'pseudo problem':

> I will offer a different way to look at Putnam's model theoretic argument. If we insist on discussing language solely in terms of a relation between words and things, we may well be forced into a metaphysical realist point of view, on pain of paradox. But on the level of pragmatics, in a discussion of language that also addresses the roles of user and use, the air of paradox dissolves all by itself (1997, p. 17).

According to van Fraassen, within a use conception of language we do not understand language by obtaining an interpretation of language (and Putnam's model-theoretic argument is flawed for its assumption of just this point); rather, language understanding proceeds by means of pragmatic tautologies. As examples of pragmatic tautologies, the reader is asked to consider the following sentences:

"cat" denotes cats.
"Paul is a cat" is true if and only if Paul is a cat.

> (...) the first and second sentences are paradigmatic examples of pragmatic tautologies in my language. They are undeniable by me, exactly because I acknowledge "cat" to be a word in my language (...) If our language had developed differently in a certain way then "cat" would have denoted gnats, rats or bats. Under such circumstances, uses of "cat" would not have been acts referring to cats, and "Paul is a cat" would have been used to state that Paul is (not a cat but) a gnat, rat, or bat. Pragmatic tautologies (for me) are sentences of my own language which state something that could indeed be (or could have been) false but which I cannot coherently deny (p. 35).

In relation to the problem of reference, then, van Fraassen claims that these pragmatic tautologies are central to an explanation of why there is no problem of which we can speak. His argument can be summarised as fol-

lows. Being able to explain the problem of reference requires that we show why the predicates of our language have the extensions that they do have, and not some deviant set of extensions, and this in turn requires that we be able to state the conditions under which our extensions are the correct ones. While the demand to establish such conditions has the form of an intelligible demand, it actually constitutes a type of 'pseudo problem', according to van Fraassen:

> Now, what is the worry when we worry that this word ["green"] might not have the right extension? The only answer I can come up with here is:
>
> The worry that there are lots of green things out there which aren't in the extension of "green" and/or things that are not green yet are in that extension.
>
> But what sense do I make if I say to myself:
>
> There are green things which are not in the extension of "green".
>
> There are some things x such that x is green but "is green" is not true of x.
>
> If I say this sort of thing I do not make sense. I may convey through this utterance either that I have no grasp of the philosophical jargon ("extension", "is true of"), or that I do not acknowledge the words (e.g. "green") in that sentence as belonging to my vocabulary. The worry that there might be green things out there not denoted by "green" -or cats not denoted by "cat"- is a pseudo problem (1997, p. 36).

It is a pseudo problem more particularly because in order to explain the conditions under which "cat" denotes cats (a pragmatic tautology) and not, say, dogs or cars, one must assume a metaphysical standpoint. From within that standpoint the whole question of what it is for language to refer to the world appears to be intelligible -this question appears to amount to nothing more than an explanation of why we subscribe to certain pragmatic tautologies. Yet such an explanation is unintelligible and necessarily so. Pragmatic tautologies constitute the referential framework which confers sense upon such an explanation, indeed, renders such an explanation possible. By making pragmatic tautologies the *subject* of this explanation -this is effectively what we are doing when we attempt to address the question of what it is for our language to refer to the world- we are at the same time guaranteeing the unintelligibility of these tautologies.

Now, van Fraassen is claiming that the paradox created by Putnam's model-theoretic argument stems directly from the conception of language that is integral to this argument. This conception of language posits a syntax to which we must then add an interpretation. However, the assumption that we can grasp an interpretation is as unintelligible as the assumption that we can somehow justify the particular pragmatic tautologies that we do in fact subscribe to -in both cases, we lack a conceptual perspective
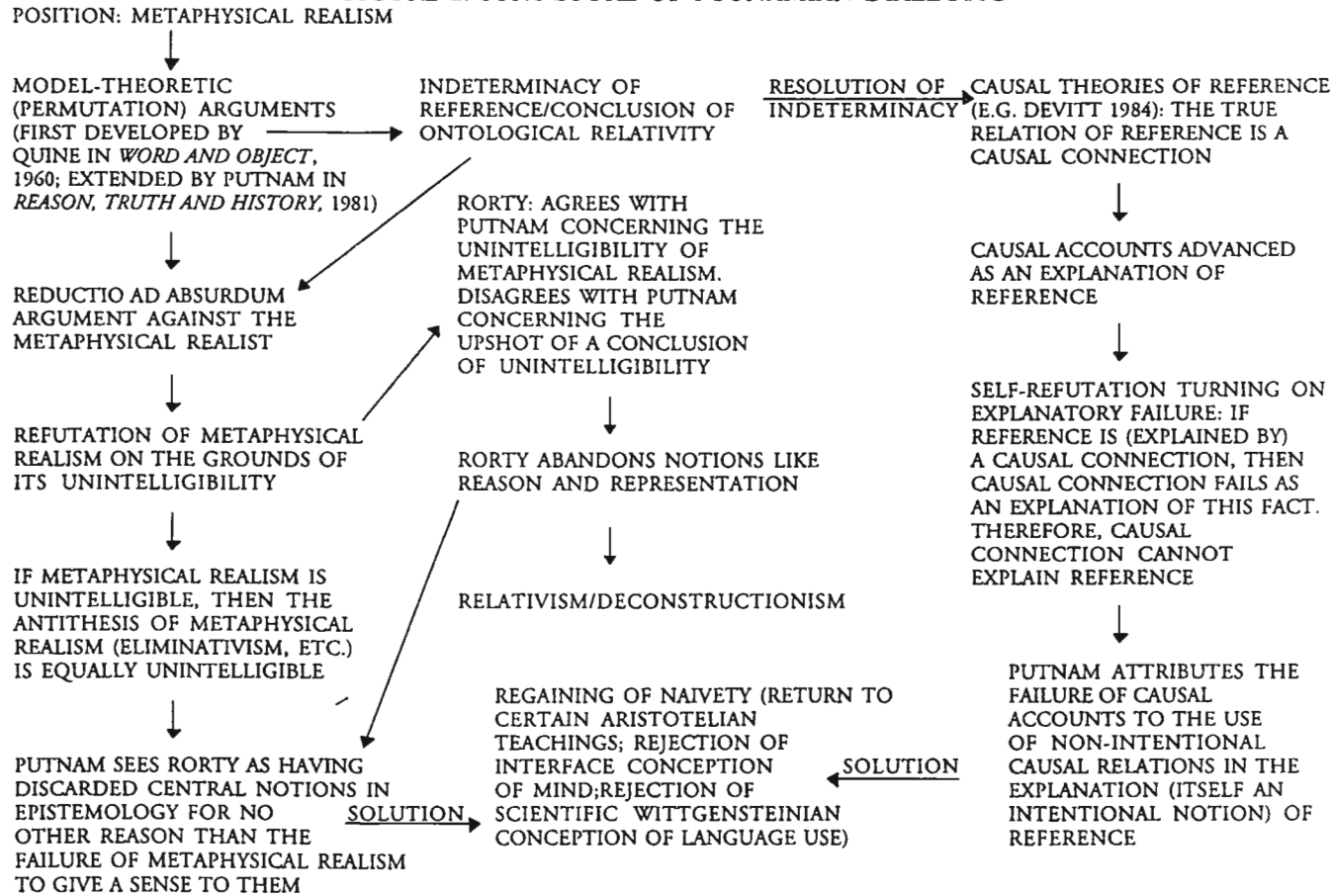
from which we can proceed to grasp an interpretation and justify a pragmatic tautology. As van Fraassen remarks:

> This picture is nonsensical, as comes to light as soon as we ask: in what language is this grasp expressed, in what language do we describe this interpretation that we grasp (p. 39).

Given that a particular conception of language is generative of the paradoxical conclusion of Putnam's model-theoretic argument, it is this conception, van Fraassen claims, which we must dispense with. Yet, van Fraassen's objections to the contrary notwithstanding, this is effectively what Putnam is also claiming[19]. The very reason why "Putnam would appeal to [this conception of language in 1976] implicitly and expect his audience to go along" (p. 23) is that this is the only conception of language which is consistent with a metaphysical realist viewpoint. In rejecting metaphysical realism, Putnam is, in effect, rejecting the conception of language that is motivated by metaphysical realism, a conception in which language consists in an interpretation and a separately identifiable syntax (writing, as he is, in 1997, van Fraassen should be aware of this, given Putnam's earlier criticisms of the interface conception of both perception and conception). It thus emerges that van Fraassen and Putnam are both equally opposed to the same conception of language, an interface conception, and that their views on the upshot of the model-theoretic argument converge rather than, as van Fraassen is claiming, diverge (The various stages of Putnam's dialectical examination of metaphysical realism are summarised in Figure 2).

In this paper, I have examined the evolution of a type of dialectical thinking (criticism) in the philosophy of Hilary Putnam. This examination has taken the form of a detailed analysis of this thinking, as it is manifested in Putnam's discussion of the fact/value dichotomy and metaphysical realism. These areas do not simply represent Putnam's present-day philosophical concerns, but they span, in effect, many years of philosophical reflection for Putnam. It is their perpetual emergence in this reflection which renders them suitable scenarios for study, when that study is of a type of dialectical thinking which has undergone, I am claiming, its own development as part of this reflection. Indeed, it is only in Putnam's more recent work that this dialectic has achieved its most developed (and most explicit) form, a form which, I have been arguing, consists in criticism and exposure of unintelligibility in philosophy.

FIGURE 2: STRUCTURE OF PUTNAMIAN DIALECTIC

POSITION: METAPHYSICAL REALISM

MODEL-THEORETIC (PERMUTATION) ARGUMENTS (FIRST DEVELOPED BY QUINE IN *WORD AND OBJECT*, 1960; EXTENDED BY PUTNAM IN *REASON, TRUTH AND HISTORY*, 1981)

INDETERMINACY OF REFERENCE/CONCLUSION OF ONTOLOGICAL RELATIVITY

RESOLUTION OF INDETERMINACY

CAUSAL THEORIES OF REFERENCE (E.G. DEVITT 1984): THE TRUE RELATION OF REFERENCE IS A CAUSAL CONNECTION

RORTY: AGREES WITH PUTNAM CONCERNING THE UNINTELLIGIBILITY OF METAPHYSICAL REALISM. DISAGREES WITH PUTNAM CONCERNING THE UPSHOT OF A CONCLUSION OF UNINTELLIGIBILITY

REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM ARGUMENT AGAINST THE METAPHYSICAL REALIST

CAUSAL ACCOUNTS ADVANCED AS AN EXPLANATION OF REFERENCE

REFUTATION OF METAPHYSICAL REALISM ON THE GROUNDS OF ITS UNINTELLIGIBILITY

RORTY ABANDONS NOTIONS LIKE REASON AND REPRESENTATION

SELF-REFUTATION TURNING ON EXPLANATORY FAILURE: IF REFERENCE IS (EXPLAINED BY) A CAUSAL CONNECTION, THEN CAUSAL CONNECTION FAILS AS AN EXPLANATION OF THIS FACT. THEREFORE, CAUSAL CONNECTION CANNOT EXPLAIN REFERENCE

IF METAPHYSICAL REALISM IS UNINTELLIGIBLE, THEN THE ANTITHESIS OF METAPHYSICAL REALISM (ELIMINATIVISM, ETC.) IS EQUALLY UNINTELLIGIBLE

RELATIVISM/DECONSTRUCTIONISM

REGAINING OF NAIVETY (RETURN TO CERTAIN ARISTOTELIAN TEACHINGS; REJECTION OF INTERFACE CONCEPTION OF MIND;REJECTION OF SCIENTIFIC WITTGENSTEINIAN CONCEPTION OF LANGUAGE USE)

PUTNAM ATTRIBUTES THE FAILURE OF CAUSAL ACCOUNTS TO THE USE OF NON-INTENTIONAL CAUSAL RELATIONS IN THE EXPLANATION (ITSELF AN INTENTIONAL NOTION) OF REFERENCE

SOLUTION

PUTNAM SEES RORTY AS HAVING DISCARDED CENTRAL NOTIONS IN EPISTEMOLOGY FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN THE FAILURE OF METAPHYSICAL REALISM TO GIVE A SENSE TO THEM

SOLUTION

Notes

† This paper was written while the author was a Visiting Fellow affiliated with the Department of Philosophy at Harvard University. The author wishes to acknowledge her indebtedness to Hilary Putnam, Harvard University, for discussion of a number of the issues addressed in this paper and to two referees of this journal for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

1 The dialectical character of Putnam's work has been commented upon by James Conant in his introduction to *Words and Life* (Putnam, 1994a): "Some of them [Putnam's essays] begin with a dialectical overview of a philosophical controversy (often in order to try to bring out how the crucial presuppositions are ones which both parties to the dispute share). The proximate goal of these essays therefore is not to attempt to have the last word about a philosophical problem, but rather to give the reader a sense of the *shape* and the *depth* of the problem -of how, for example, in a particular philosophical dispute, thesis and counter-thesis bear one another's stamp and how each of the pair comes with its own false bottom, hiding the true dimensions of the problem from view" (p. xiii).

2 The objective-subjective and fact-value dichotomies are evident in discussions in linguistics: "Most listeners know of linguistic varieties that they do not like, but we should recognise that these feelings are very *subjective* and have no basis in *objective linguistic fact*" (Trudgill 1983, p. 224, emphases added). Again: "We also want to suggest that linguists should, in addition, resist *value judgements* about language on other counts, notably that of the 'inadequacy' of certain language varieties, and that of the inferior 'aesthetic' quality of certain types of speech, since judgements of this type are also important in the educational field" (p. 201, emphasis added).

3 The part of the argument which I will not examine involves a comparison of the values presupposed by science with 'paradigmatic value words'. The comparison includes the following factors. Both groups of values (1) are used as terms of praise, (2) are historically conditioned, (3) "figure in the same sorts of perennial philosophical controversies" (p. 136) and (4) are equally difficult to justify: "The question: *which is the rational conception of rationality itself* is difficult in *exactly* the way that the justification of an ethical system is difficult. There is no *neutral* conception of rationality to which to appeal." (p. 136, emphases in original). In this way, Putnam's argument for the fuzziness of the distinction between fact and value proceeds by first identifying the values which are presupposed by scientific inquiry and then by demonstrating how these values are similar, in essential respects, to paradigmatic value terms.

4 Myerson (1994) summarises this point as follows: "In sum, the fact of knowing about the illusion falsifies the theory!" (p. 92). How this particular consideration relates to Putnam's charge of self-refutation against the vatist will be examined subsequently in the text.

5 The evil scientist in Putnam's brain in a vat scenario controls computer impulses to the vatist from a position outside the vat.

6 Putnam signals the absence of a *rational* route to knowledge through his emphasis in "Oh, the Guru of Sydney *just knows*" (1981, p. 131).

7 Of course, the vatist may choose to concede the absence of rational discourse, a move which restores consistency to his account -in such a case, *saying* and *thinking* and the notion of *reference* that these practices presuppose could not enter into a charge of self-refutation against the vatist. However, not only does the proponent of the brains-in-a-vat thesis *engage* in a number of rational activities which involve this thesis (argument, explanation, etc.), but it was argued in the main text that a move of this kind would serve only to preclude any and all discussion of the vatist's position and, in the final analysis, would serve to bring about the dissolution of that position. It seems unproblematic to suggest that the vatist would find these particular outcomes unacceptable.

8 There are two components to this line of thinking -(1) rationality (represented here by an epistemological standpoint) is presupposed by the vatist's reflective practice and (2) the rationality of this standpoint cannot be identified with the rational discourse subsumed by the vatist's illusion.

9 Logical symbolism assumes a dialectical role -the dissolution of nonsense- for Wittgenstein and Frege: "Wittgenstein continues to share with Frege the idea that a well-regimented logical symbolism provides a notation for perspicuously displaying inferential relations, thereby providing a window onto the logical structure of our language and furnishing a dialectical tool for dissolving philosophical confusion" (Conant, 1991, p. 141).

10 Under 'cognitive scientists' I include reductionist researchers in the fields of artificial intelligence, cognitive psychology and linguistics.

11 Proponents of reductionist analysis typically *explain* intentionality using a range of scientific languages in addition to that of physics: "Reductionism, with respect to a class of assertions (e.g. assertions about mental events) is the view that assertions in that class are 'made true' by facts which are outside of that class" (Putnam 1981, p. 56). An example frequently discussed in this regard is one in which thoughts are 'made true' (given content) by physical facts. "For another example, the view of Bishop Berkeley that all there 'really is' is minds and their sensations is *reductionist*, for it holds that sentences about tables and chairs and other ordinary 'material objects' are actually made true by facts about sensations" (1981, p. 56; emphasis in original). A third form of reductionist analysis, this time relating not to truth but to rationality, is that of cultural relativism "(...) the cultural relativist's paradigm is a *soft* science: anthropology, or linguistics, or psychology, or history, as the case may be. That reason is whatever the norms of the local culture determine it to be is a reductionist view inspired by the *social* sciences, including history" (Putnam 1983, p. 235; emphases in original).

12 A different tendency is exemplified by the eliminativist views of thinkers like Richard Rorty, Paul and Patricia Churchland, Stephen Stich and, to some degree, W.V. Quine. Rorty, like Putnam, rejects the central tenet of metaphysical realism, that our mental representations are in correspondence with a mind-independent reality. However, the failure of metaphysical realism holds a fundamentally different significance for these two writers. Putnam's response is to question the dualism behind the metaphysical realist picture, whereas for Rorty the very notion of representation

should be abandoned: "(...) his [Rorty's] entire attack on traditional philosophy is mounted on the basis that the nature of reason and representation are non-problems, because the only kind of truth it makes sense to seek is to convince one's cultural peers" (Putnam 1983, p. 235). In fact, Rorty has moved from a relativist to a deconstructionist position.

13 In proposing a return to an Aristotelian conception of the mind and its relationship to the world, Nussbaum and Putnam, in 'Changing Aristotle's Mind' (*Words and Life*), reject that there is any 'problem' to which we must find a 'solution': "As Aristotelians we do not discover something behind something else, a hidden reality behind the complex unity that we see and are. We find what we are in the appearances. And Aristotle tells us that if we attend properly to the appearances the dualist's questions never even get going" (1994a, p. 55).

14 For Putnam, the metaphysical realist "assumes that there is an intelligible distinction *within* our conceptual system between what it is possible to conceive of within that system and what is really (independently of all conceptual systems) the case" (1983, p. 111); "The deep systemic root of the disease [of which sense data are a symptom], I want to suggest, lies in the notion of an 'intrinsic' property, a property something has 'in itself', apart from any contribution made by language or the mind" (1987, p. 8).

15 Putnam describes how other writers have relinquished a metaphysical standpoint ('the spectator point of view in metaphysics and epistemology') in favour of a picture which emphasises the significance of our various practices: "Like the great pragmatists, these thinkers [Davidson, Goodman and Quine] have urged us to reject the spectator point of view in metaphysics and epistemology. Quine has urged us to accept the existence of abstract entities on the ground that these are indispensible in mathematics, and of microparticles and space-time points on the ground that these are indispensible in physics; and what better justification is there for accepting an ontology than its indispensibility in our scientific practice? he asks. Goodman has urged us to take seriously the metaphors that artists use to restructure our worlds, on the ground that these are an indispensible way of understanding our experience. Davidson has rejected the idea that talk of propositional attitudes is 'second class', on similar grounds" (1987, pp. 20-21).

16 On this account, a fully developed philosophical view is none other than a philosophical theory which is, in turn, the manifestation of metaphysics in philosophy.

17 "The metaphysical realist (...) feels compelled to appeal to something that *underlies* our language games: a mysterious property that stands behind -both in the sense of remaining invisibly in the background and in the sense of guaranteeing- our ordinary ways of speaking and acting" (Putnam 1994b, p. 500).

18 Van Fraassen defines that conception of language as one in which "to understand or have a language is to know its syntax and to grasp an interpretation of that syntax" (1997, p. 39).

19 In fairness to van Fraassen, he does at least hint at the possibility that Putnam is making a similar claim to his own: "On my reading of Putnam's model-theoretic argument, the paradox dissolves. What remains is a striking reductio of a certain view of language, which we can independently verify to be inadequate. Perhaps that was just what Putnam intended; perhaps the view of language found wanting is implied by that correspondence theory of truth which Putnam locates at the heart of metaphysical realism.

I would like to think so; but authorial intent is notoriously indiscernible; the text has broken its moorings and must in any case be dealt with on its own terms" (1997, p. 34).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Conant, J.: 1991, 'The Search for Logically Alien Thought: Descartes, Kant, Frege, and the Tractatus', *Philosophical Topics* 20/1, 115-180.

Cummings, L.: 1998, 'The Scientific Reductionism of Relevance Theory: The Lesson from Logical Positivism', *Journal of Pragmatics* 29/1, 1-12.

Cummings, L.: 2000, 'Petitio Principii: The Case for Non-Fallaciousness', *Informal Logic* 20/1.

Cummings, L.: 2000, 'Mind and Body, Form and Content: How Not To Do Petitio Principii Analysis', *Philosophical Papers* (forthcoming).

Devitt, M.: 1984, *Realism and Truth*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Diamond, C.: 1991, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind*, Cambridge, MIT Press.

Fodor, J.: 1990, *A Theory of Content*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

Hintikka, J.: 1979, 'Frege's Hidden Semantics', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 33, 716-722.

Hintikka, M.B. & Hintikka, J.: 1986, *Investigating Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Myerson, G.: 1994, *Rhetoric, Reason and Society: Rationality as Dialogue*, SAGE Publications.

Putnam, H.: 1978, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Putnam, H.: 1981, *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge University Press.

Putnam, H.: 1983, *Realism and Reason*, Philosophical Papers 3, Cambridge University Press.

Putnam, H.: 1987, *The Many Faces of Realism*, La Salle Illinois, Open Court.

Putnam, H.: 1988, *Representation and Reality*, The MIT Press.

Putnam, H.: 1992, *Renewing Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

Putnam, H.: 1994a, *Words and Life*, edited by James Conant, Harvard University Press.

Putnam, H.: 1994b, 'The Dewey Lectures 1994: Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind', *The Journal of Philosophy* XCI/9, 445-517.

Quine, W.V.: 1990, *Pursuit of Truth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Rorty, R.: 1993, 'Putnam and the Relativist Menace', *The Journal of Philosophy* XC/9, 443-461.

Sperber, D. & Wilson, D.: 1995, 1986, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Trudgill, T.: 1983, *On Dialect*, Blackwell.

Van Fraassen, B.C.: 1997, 'Putnam's Paradox: Metaphysical Realism Revamped and Evaded', *Philosophical Perspectives* 11, Mind, Causation, and World, 17-42.

Van Heijenoort, J.: 1967, 'Logic as Language and Logic as Calculus', Synthese 17, 324-330.

Wittgenstein, L.: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D.F. Pears and B. McGuinness (London, 1961).

Wittgenstein, L.: 1963, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford, Blackwell.

Louise Cummings pursues within her research an examination of the applications of Hilary Putnam's philosophy to theoretical frameworks in both philosophical and non-philosophical (primarily linguistic) areas of inquiry. This is reflected in publications in the *Journal of Pragmatics*, where a Putnam-informed challenge to the reductionism of Sperber and Wilson's (1995, 1986) relevance theory is mounted, and in *Informal Logic* and *Philosophical Papers*, where Putnam's thinking informs the analysis of an informal fallacy, that of petitio principii.