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# CONCEPTUAL RELATIVITY, CONTEXTUALIZATION, AND ONTOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS

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This paper re-examines the issue of conceptual relativity and conceptual schemes, which became a major topic in (post) analytic philosophy through Donald Davidson's and Hilary Putnam's influential writings in the 1970s and 1980s. It is argued, consistently with Putnam's more recent pragmatist turn, that discussions of this issue should be contextualized by focusing, instead of abstract philosophical thought-experiments, on real-life examples drawn from vital human affairs, e. g., the conflict between scientific and religious perspectives on reality (or, on the meta-level, between perspectives that construe the relation between science and religion as a conflict and ones that do not), or the conflict between objectivity and relativism and ethical and interpretive issues.

## Introduction: the quest for an independent reality

In a series of works in the 1980s and 1990s, Hilary Putnam argued in favor of what he called *conceptual relativity* and *internal realism*, against *metaphysical realism* (see especially Putnam 1981; 1987 and 1990; for a detailed critical discussion of these debates, cf. Pihlström 1996). His main goal was to show the unintelligibility of the idea of the way the world is in itself, independently of human conceptualization. Reality can be structured, or conceptualized, by language-users from a number of different perspectives, none of which accurately represents a perspective-independent reality. Truth and existence are, thus, "internal" to a chosen conceptual scheme. This way of thinking has been criticized by anti-relativists like Donald Davidson (1984), who claim that the very idea of a conceptual scheme does not make sense,[1] and strong realists like John Searle (1995), who still

[1] In this paper, I am not concerned with the question of how to define the notion of a conceptual scheme. It suffices to characterize conceptual schemes as more or less systematic representations of reality by means of (usually linguistically expressed) concepts. Thus, we may loosely speak about, say, the conceptual schemes of quantum physics and of Christianity. I hope the notion will become clearer as my argument progresses, although nothing here depends here on any specific way of understanding of this notion. Conceptual schemes can be thought of being close to, say, Rudolf Carnap's "linguistic frameworks", Thomas Kuhn's "paradigms", or the even more loosely characterized "perspectives", "points of view", or "standpoints" that relativistically oriented philosophers often speak about.

hold a correspondence theory of truth, according to which truth is a non-epistemic relation between our statements and the world.

The purpose of this paper is to offer some novel insights into this debate between realism and relativism, partly by drawing on Putnam's recent pragmatist work, partly by comparing his views to those of some other thinkers. As an elaboration on the issues discussed by Putnam, Davidson and many others, let us briefly see how Barry Stroud (2000) has investigated what he calls the "metaphysical quest", as concerning particularly the question of whether the world is "really" colored or not. From the point of view of Putnam, as well as, say, P. F. Strawson (explicitly attacked by Stroud), there is something wrong with this question. There is something wrong with it according to Stroud, too, but in a different way. Stroud's book, *The Quest for Reality*, is an interesting critical examination of the idea that the "absolute" conception of the world makes no reference to colors (or other secondary qualities, or properties that do not seem to fit the physical world-view, such as values or modalities). Stroud, however, endorses the metaphysically realistic idea of there being an absolute, independent world, and this leads him to present his criticism in a manner that philosophers more sympathetic to conceptual relativity will not find appealing.

More specifically, we may employ Putnamean conceptual relativity considerations in order to defend Strawson (1985) from Stroud's criticism. Discussing Strawson's suggestion that we might accept both "standpoints", i. e., the one which says that ordinary objects are colored and the one which claims that scientific objects are not colored, and that there is only an "appearance of contradiction" instead of a real contradiction between these, Stroud (2000, 185 ff.) assumes that it makes sense to speak about the problem of whether *the objects* (the same objects) that can be seen either from a scientific, physicalistic point of view or from an ordinary experiential point of view *are* colored or not. He says:

> The originally felt conflict is between two opposed conceptions of what is so, or what the world is like. And [Strawson's relativizing] move does not give us the promised satisfaction on that issue. It is true that the two expanded statements [as relativized to "the human perceptual standpoint" and to the standpoint of "scientific realism"] do not conflict. But in believing both of those expanded statements, we do not thereby hold any belief as to *whether objects are coloured.* It was in answering that question in two apparently incompatible ways that the conflict arose (*ibid.*, 186; emphasis added).

He also remarks: "The thought that *a thing* cannot both be and not be yellow is precisely what forces the question of which of the things said from those two different standpoints [i. e., science and everyday experience] is correct" (*ibid.*, 185; emphasis added). If we say, "of the same thing", that it is red and that it is colorless, we arrive at a conflict (*ibid.*, 188). Now, this is where the mistake of the metaphysical realist's approach lies, according to philosophers like Strawson or Putnam. It was one of Putnam's main point, when he formulated his conceptual relativity arguments against metaphysical realists (e. g., in Putnam 1990), that we cannot just ask whether *objects* are colored or whether *a thing*—somer particular thing, common to, say, both the sci-

entific and the everyday standpoint—is colored; we have to specify the discourse or scheme whose objects we are speaking about. Different discourses, descriptions, or conceptual schemes individuate different things, different objects. There *are* different things within different contexts of conceptualization. This is the point of the Strawsonian relativizing move, too, which urges, with Putnam, that the very notions of object, existence, or reality are relative to a conceptual framework. Stroud assumes a metaphysically primitive notion of a "thing", which is something that Putnam's conceptual relativity argument should lead us to call into question.

Accordingly, we have to give up the assumption of there being a unique answer to the question of "what is so or of what to believe" in this case (Stroud 2000, 186). It is a crucial point of Strawson's (1985, 44–45) relativization of the different, only apparently conflicting realities of science and common sense, as it is of Putnam's conceptual relativity, that such a uniqueness assumption is meaningless. Stroud, then, does not go all the way toward the kind of rejection of metaphysics he might be able to reach through his critical account of the metaphysical quest, the quest for an answer to the question of whether the "independent reality", which is the way it is "anyway", is as our beliefs represent it to be. He does criticize this quest, urging, for instance, that "[w]e cannot get into a position to ask the metaphysical question about the reality of colour in the right way" (Stroud 2000, 209), but his criticism is the criticism of a disappointed metaphysician who would apparently hope to be able to carry through a metaphysics describing an independent reality. He does not set such metaphysics aside in the manner of conceptual relativity theorists like Strawson and Putnam.

In a word, Stroud, unlike Putnam, is a philosopher who believes, to cite the title of his earlier book, in the "significance of philosophical scepticism" (cf. Stroud 1984). He is a rather straightforward metaphysical realist when he states that "[w]e are interested in how things are, not only in how certain standpoints or sets of beliefs say things are" (Stroud 2000, 187), overlooking the significance of the idea that there is no way things are independently of our various practice- or discourse-involving standpoints within which it is meaningful for us to speak about how things are (even about how things are independently of standpoints). This metaphysical realism is manifested not only in his earlier entanglement with the problem of skepticism but also in his eschewing of transcendental idealism as an attempt to draw nonpsychological conclusions (e. g., about objects being really coloured) from psychological premises (e. g., our color experiences) (*ibid.*, ch. 9).

When rejecting Stroud's approach, we should, however, be careful in claiming that the way the world is is dependent on our conceptual schemes or perspectives. Putnam himself has been rather careless in some of his pronouncements, thereby inviting partly justified criticism; indeed, it is not always easy to see where exactly he differs from Davidson's position.[2] Fortunately, Putnam has in some recent publi-

[2] A detailed diagnose of the relation between Davidson and Putnam, fortunately, is not among my goals here. We may note, though, that Putnam may in his most recent writings have

cations attempted to clarify the points about conceptual relativity he made in the 1980s. Some of his responses to recent commentators turn out to be helpful here.

The distance between Putnam and Davidson may seem shorter than earlier, if we note that Jennifer Case (2001, 420n15) has suggested that "what Putnam refers to as 'conceptual schemes' are not really schemes of distinct concepts but, rather, linguistic schemes distinguished primarily by their divergent ways of extending shared concepts", i. e., something that can be called "optional languages" (see also *ibid.*, 429). Optional languages are schemes that we may employ for some purposes but that we may as well refuse to employ. Putnam (2001b, 433) approves of Case's suggestion, admitting that he should have spoken of optional languages all along in his discussions of conceptual relativity. This would have helped him to avoid his critics' misunderstandings that "any body of thought and talk" could be a conceptual scheme and that every conceptual scheme (in such a misleading sense) has an incompatible alternative, so that conceptual relativity would extend to each and every statement (*ibid.*, 431–432). Optional languages include, e. g., mereology,[3] which we can decide not to employ, but as Putnam explains, we are not genuinely free to abandon, say, the familiar scheme of tables and chairs (*ibid.*, 434). Conceptual relativity concerns different "scientific images" and hence optional languages, leaving our everyday language intact (*ibid.*, 435). Furthermore, Putnam agrees with Case that conceptual relativity should be seen as a special case of the wider phenomenon of *pluralism*, which says that we can use, e. g., both the optional language of scientific physics and the natural language of everyday life "without being required to reduce one or both of them to some single fundamental and universal ontology" (*ibid.*, 437).[4]

In many of his recent writings, Putnam (1999; 2001c; 2001d; 2001e; 2002) has expressed a fundamental agreement with Wittgenstein's views on various issues.

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come closer to Davidson's views than he earlier realized. While he goes on to think that, "given Davidson's insistence that experience has only a *causal* and no *justificatory* role with respect to our beliefs, I do not think Davidson really *does* have a satisfactory answer to [John] McDowell's charge that it is unintelligible, on Davidson's picture, how sentences do have determinate truth conditions", he expresses some sympathy with Davidson by saying that "*if* Davidson has an answer, that answer depends on a kind of realism with respect to the semantical concept of *truth* that seems incompatible with [Bernard] Williams' [and other metaphysical realists'] identification of the 'absolute' with the physics of 'primary qualities'" (Putnam 2001a, 614). For some comparisons between McDowell and Putnam in terms of pragmatism and transcendental argumentation, see also Pihlström (2003), ch. 5.

[3] Mereology is a technical formal calculus invented by the Polish logician Lesniewski. Its basic idea is that individual objects can be added to each other to form "mereological sums", more complex individual objects.

[4] This sounds very much like the pluralistic arguments presented by William James in *Pragmatism* (1907) and elsewhere, and is thus well in line with Putnam's pragmatistic orientation (cf. further Pihlström 1996, 1998; see also Putnam's comments on James in his 1995; 1999).

What he often describes as the *context-sensitivity* of Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language can be seen as an expression of the pluralistic attitude which ought to be regarded as more fundamental in his work than the doctrine of conceptual relativity. This philosophical strategy of *contextualization* is particularly pertinent if one tries to understand Wittgenstein's struggle with the problems of language he investigated. Regarding Wittgenstein's notion of a perspicuous representation, Putnam (2001c, 466) remarks that "the perspicuity that Wittgenstein talks about is itself always *contextual*" and that, hence, "*there is no sense in speaking of THE grammar of the word 'know', or of any word, in Wittgenstein's sense, apart from a particular philosophical problem*".

In a pluralistic manner, we should be willing to endorse many different kinds of contextualization—not only linguistic (which is primary in Wittgensteinian cases) but also, say, ontological. We may see Putnam as accepting the pragmatist view, perhaps most effectively developed by John Dewey, that ontological or metaphysical views should be contextualized into the problematic situations in which they actually arise in the course of our lives (cf. Pihlström 1996). Now, such metaphysically relevant problematic situations do occur in real life. We must therefore explore the prospects of pluralism and conceptual relativity in such humanly important affairs.

**A real-life case**

The Stroudian example discussed in the previous section highlights the point well taken by Putnam, the view that basic ontological notions such as existence or object (or even the existential quantor itself, as used in quantified statements) do not have any metaphysically primitive use independently of the conceptual frameworks we employ or the language-games we engage in.[5] As a further application of this important lesson, we may now take a look at a more "real-life" case study, the contrast between *scientific and religious points of view* on the world and on human experience (or scientific and religious conceptual schemes, if you prefer). This is an

[5] (A note for non-philosophers: the existential quantor is a formal device attached to sentences stating the existence of some (kinds of) object(s). It can be read simply, "There is some $x$ such that...". Sentences in which either an existential quantor or a universal quantor, read "For all $x$'s", or both, is used are quantified sentences.) To be sure, metaphysical realists may also debate over the meaning of existential quantification. Lowe (1998, pp. 228–229), for instance, suggests that we may quantify over facts and other entities which are (in his view) not unproblematically individuable. Thus, instead of subscribing to the Quinean slogan, "No entity without identity", and interpreting the existence quantor as the phrase, "There is at least one thing, $x$, such that", we may reinterpret it more liberally as "There is something $x$ such that", where this something need not have precise identity conditions. Lowe does not seem to leave any relativity to the notion of existential quantification, though; what he suggests is (in his view) *the correct* reading of the existential quantor, a correction to the traditional more restricted one. From a Putnamean perspective, we might retain both readings and apply them whenever they meet our practical concerns in the practice of ontological commitment.

important contrast for Putnam, too, as he has recently written papers on the philosophy of religion, defending the possibility (and to some extent the "rationality") of religious faith, drawing inspiration from both Wittgenstein and the pragmatists, especially James (see Putnam 1992; 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; 2001c; cf. Pihlström 1999).[6] Here, again, we should see that it is not unproblematic to talk about "the objects" or some unspecified "things" and to ask whether or not they exist, independently of our choice of a (religious or secular) conceptual framework.

Some writers seem to rely on the assumption that it is always "one and the same proposition" whose truth-value is at issue in seemingly different conceptual structurings of the world: for instance, the existence of mereological sums can be denied by the "Carnapian" logician and the one who employs the language of mereology alike (see Raatikainen 2001). Similarly, as we saw, Stroud believes we can refer to the same objects when discussing the question of whether "they" (those objects) are colored, as our ordinary experience seems to show us, or uncolored, as our scientific theories might lead us to think. In the case we will now examine, it might be taken to be the proposition "There is a God" (or "God exists") that is affirmed by the theist and rejected by the atheist. Both apparently speak about the same object, God. Insofar as the discussants can genuinely disagree with each other on God's existence, their theses must, one may argue, be expressed in one and the same language. The languages themselves do not make ontological commitments; it would be absurd to think that the sheer choice of a "religious language" would be either causally or ontologically responsible for God's existence. On the contrary, it is an essential part of religious language itself that it is used in a way that presupposes God's eternal existence and his total independence and sovereignty in relation to human concerns like choices of language. For the one who speaks religiously about God's existence, God is surely real independently of God-talk.

But what is at issue when people affirm or deny a wide-ranging metaphysical hypothesis such as the claim that God exists? It seems that in situations like this it is not always the case that a single proposition is affirmed from one conceptual perspective, or within one particular world-view, and denied from another. In the case at hand, the perspective (and the scheme-or-perspective-dependent ontological commitments) of a scientifically-minded atheist and of a religious believer may be extremely difficult to compare. It is not clear that these two parties to the debate *are* really speaking about the same thing when they appear to disagree with each other. The believer might, for instance, accept the naturalistic, scientific picture of the world defended by the atheist and claim that the view that God is real and perfectly good (etc.) is *not a scientific hypothesis at all*, neither a hypothesis supported by

[6] It should not be overlooked that Putnam does admit that there are also profound *dis*analogies between James's and Wittgenstein's views on religious belief (Putnam 2001c, 468).

scientific evidence nor one disconfirmed by its lack of evidence. Therefore, scientific and religious ways of thinking are not really rivals to each other at all; they *cannot* conflict with one another.[7] Moreover, the believer might go on to argue that the claim that God is real is not to be compared with any ordinary factual claims. It does not refer to the world in the sense in which statements about, say, the reality of tables do. To "choose" a religious language is to use language in a way entirely different from the use of ordinary factual language. This choice does not, to be sure, make God exist, but (according to Wittgensteinian philosophers, at least) it makes it possible for us to speak about God's existence in a manner that is not available to the one who does not use religious language and is not involved in a religious tradition.

Is a more fundamental form of relativism, then, unavoidable? Can we rationally compare different world-views, such as the atheist's and the believer's? Insofar as there is, in cases like this, no factual disagreement, as the rival conceptual schemes appear to speak about entirely different things rather than one common world, do we have to say that the schemes are incommensurable and untranslatable? Can the believer and the unbeliever argue about the same issue, the existence or non-existence of God, or are they unavoidably talking past each other by employing widely different contexts of meaningfulness?

There is no easy way to avoid such a relativistic picture, but we should not succumb to the temptations of an uncritical relativism which would make it impossible to discuss religious matters rationally at all. The problem of relativism, rather, presents itself as a continuous challenge for us, or for anyone seriously interested in inter-perspective or inter-conceptual-scheme comparisons. There is no short cut available for overcoming relativism for good; nor, however, is relativism a blind alley to which any attempt to account for the irreducible plurality of people's beliefs and life-practices will have to lead. Even Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion like D. Z. Phillips (1986) have repeatedly answered to their critics that religion is *not* an autonomous sphere of life (or language) on which other languages and cultural frameworks could have no influence. People's religious lives are inevitably affected by what happens outside the specifically religious aspects of those lives. In this sense, religion is answerable to critical interventions from outside religion, although it is not clear what it would mean to say that, e. g., scientific results could "prove" religion wrong or show that God's existence is an unnecessary hypothesis.

Peter Winch, another influential Wittgensteinian, reminds us that "sealing the door between the chapel and the laboratory" is a "travesty", both intellectually and religiously dishonest (Winch 1987, 121). Putnam, too, would undoubtedly subscribe to this. Yet, Winch argues against the relativism charge by pointing out that

[7] This argumentation would be typical of the "Wittgensteinian" orientation in the philosophy of religion (cf., e. g., Phillips 1986; Tilghman 1994; Putnam 1997a).

scientific and religious perspectives, such as the Darwinian and the Biblical accounts of life, are not necessarily contradictory:

> I want to say that, looked from one point of view, they seem to contradict each other, and looked at from another point of view, they seem not to. But I don't want to say that either point of view is '*the* right' one. We must not lose sight of either (*ibid.*, 137).

This is a fascinating and problematic passage. It now seems that the relativism issue rearises as the difficulty of comparing *these* points of view, the one from which science and religion (or Darwin and the *Genesis*) contradict each other and the one from which they do not, or, on a meta-level, Winch's position (which says that contradiction is not inevitable) and a rival one seeking *the* right point of view and thereby arriving at a contradiction between the two alternatives. Even though Winch's and other Wittgensteinians' way of avoiding simple relativism is admirable, their often-heard injunction, "why conflict or contradiction, why not just differences?" (cf. *ibid.*, 138), is relatively shallow (see also *ibid.*, 201, as well as Tilghman 1994, chs. 4 and 6). Winch remains a kind of relativist by holding that it is as impossible to translate, say, certain beliefs expressed in the language of the Azande into English statements as it is to translate mathematical beliefs into non-mathematical ones (Winch 1987, 198).

We still seem to be stuck in a situation in which the non-believer cannot critically assess, and can hardly understand, the commitments the believer makes by using religious language (and *vice versa*). These persons' conceptual schemes or contexts of rational argumentation are widely different from each other. *Pace* Davidson, massive differences appear to be possible here—if not simply between believers and non-believers, then at least on the meta-level between the position held by someone like Winch, on the one hand, and the one favored by, say, Davidsonian critics of relativism, on the other. Thus, *pace* Putnam, the Wittgensteinian strategy of contextualization does not lead us out of the problem of relativism, insofar as the contexts which give rise to our philosophical perspectives may differ radically.

**Other real-life cases**

Some further examples of relativity and contextualization might clarify the problems we are facing. As Putnam (1987; 1990; 1994) has repeatedly emphasized in his discussions of moral realism, there can be better and worse moral outlooks or "moral images of the world", even if there is no universally good way of living. Could this idea be carried on to the philosophy of religion? Would a Putnamean internal realist be able to endorse a religious pluralism according to which several religious ways of thinking and living are acceptable, even though all of them are not (i. e. , that it is not the case that "anything goes" even in religion)?

The problem with these proposals is that both ethics and religion are in some sense concerned with finding *the* correct image, or *the* correct outlook, that every-

body should share.[8] Arguably, ethics is about what one ought to do, period; it is not about what one might do, or fail to do, given certain background conditions, one's life-situation, and so forth (Johnston 1999), even though there may be a "truth in relativism" in the sense that our ethical views may arrive at irresolvable conflicts in which no agreement will be found (cf. Winch 1987, 188–189). Similarly, religion might be taken to be concerned with finding *the* correct way of living in harmony with a divine reality. Such an assumption of a unique correct solution guides people's moral and religious lives; those lives may, arguably, be meaningful only on the basis of this uniqueness requirement. Pluralism is, then, possible only on a meta-level, not within the life-practices themselves. The distinction between optional languages, to which conceptual relativity can be applied, and non-optional languages, which cannot genuinely be given up, is itself a context-relative distinction, potentially receiving a plurality of different interpretations from the perspectives of different ways of using language. It is up to *us* which languages are, for us, optional; and there is an ineliminable plurality in who "we" are. The distinction between optional and non-optional languages cannot be used to define the legitimate area of application for the doctrine of conceptual relativity (or pluralism), because this very distinction presupposes the kind of contextualization that doctrine is designed to capture.

Let us here make an excursus to one more "real-life" example, drawn from the aesthetic aspects of human life rather than religious or ethical ones. In addition to moral realism, one might try to defend a form of realism, and to criticize a corresponding form of relativism, regarding the criteria of interpretation in literature—and in art more generally (cf. here also the discussion in Pihlström 1996, ch. 5.2; as well as Pihlström 2000). This "interpretive realism", as opposed to interpretive relativism, in particular, can be seen, together with moral realism, as a species of what might be labeled "normative realism". Just as the moral realist insists that our moral judgments may be mind-independently true or false, or correct or incorrect (i. e. , that they are not simply, say, individuals' expressions of attitudes), the realist in the interpretive realm claims that there are (or at least can be) true and false, or correct and incorrect, interpretations of literary works and other artworks. However, in both cases a plausible realism ought to be defended moderately: the interpretive realist need not hold that there is in all or even most cases a single, unique truth regarding a given interpretive question—any more than the moral realist must hold that there is a single, universally true morality. In both cases, a milder,

[8] Are religious ways of using language "optional"? From the perspective of an outside observer, they undoubtedly are, because not every language-user is a religious person. But for the one seriously engaging in such language-use, it would be a grave misunderstanding to regard it as optional, because religious concepts are the ones that most intimately relate one to the deepest structures of the world and the meaning of life. It seems that Putnam has not paid due attention to the tricky issue of the relativity or context-sensitivity of the very optional vs. non-optional distinction itself. The case of religious language beautifully illustrates this issue.

essentially pragmatic version of realism is worth philosophical defense (cf. further Pihlström 1998; 2003.).

We should briefly take a look at the relativism issue that haunts realistic positions in the philosophy of literature. In particular, what the normative realist must resist is the extreme, uncritical relativism according to which "anything goes" in interpretation (or, *mutatis mutandis*, in morality). Such a relativism is, at least apparently, a threat in several currently popular literary theories, e. g., Stanley Fish's contextualism and Richard Rorty's neopragmatism. Yet, far from rejecting pragmatism as a general philosophical approach, the realist may attempt to develop a pragmatically contextualized transcendental argument in favor of a realistic account of the normativity embedded in our interpretive practices.[9] According to the pragmatist, the normative criteria whose objectivity, or at least intersubjectivity, is to be defended, ought to be contextualized to the various interpretive contexts within which our actual interpretations take place, i. e., relevant audiences, *Erwartungshorizonte*, etc. Even so, the objectivity of such criteria can be transcendentally defended as a necessary condition for the possibility of our actual interpretive practices themselves, i. e., of a phenomenon we take to be actual and, hence, possible.

We may proceed by briefly examining the notion of an "implied reader" (cf. Iser 1974; 1978) as a normative interpretive constraint assumed to be operative "between" the author and the real or actual, historically contextualized reader (interpreter). The problem of relativism will then be taken up in relation to the notion of an interpretive community (Fish 1980). Toward the end of this section, the ineliminability of normativity in interpretive practices will be demonstrated through a pragmatic (yet transcendental) argument,[10] which, however, can hardly liberate us from the relativism issue for good.

In a realistic (non-relativistic) framework of interpretation, there is a pragmatic need to postulate textual entities such as Booth's (1983) and Chatman's (1978) narratologist structures of narrators, implied authors, and corresponding listeners and readers (although we need not make any firm commitments either to narratologist or structuralist methodology in this paper). Furthermore, the tradition known as reader-response criticism, emphasizing the role of the reader—or, more generally, receiver or listener—in the constitution of the meaning of a literary work, is somewhat analogous and thus relevant here (Tompkins 1980). One of the theoretical concepts that have been used in this tradition to overcome relativism is Wolfgang Iser's (1974; 1978; 1989) and some other theorists' favorite notion, the

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[9] For an analogy of such an argument in the metaethical case, yielding a qualified pragmatic form of moral realism, see Pihlström (2003), ch. 8.

[10] Such a demonstration provides a case study on the possibility of a transcendental search for necessary (though contextualized) conditions of human experience, including interpretation, in a broader pragmatistic framework. For this general project, cf. Pihlström (2003).

implied reader, sometimes also labeled the "ideal", the "informed" (Fish 1980, 48-49), or the "postulated" reader (Booth 1983, 137-138, 428-431; cf. also Prince 1987, 43; Chatman 1978), 148-150).[11]

This is how Iser, a leading phenomenologically oriented theorist of aesthetic response, describes the concept of an implied reader: "This term incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the active nature of this process—which will vary historically from one age to another[12] —and not to a typology of possible readers" (Iser 1974, xii). Elsewhere, we are told that the implied reader "embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect— predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself" (Iser 1978, 34). It is the reading process and the interaction between the text and the reader that should be in the focus of a phenomenological inquiry (*ibid.*, 20 ff., 107 ff.). Accordingly, "the concept of the implied reader is a transcendental model which makes it possible for the structured effects of literary texts to be described. It denotes the role of the reader, which is definable in terms of textual structure and structured acts" (*ibid.*, 38). While the role of the reader (even the real-life reader) is taken seriously here, it is undeniable that Iser arrives at a strongly textualist and hermeneutically oriented position when affirming that literary interpretation must start from the object of reading, the text itself. The constitution of meaning and of the reading subject are "interacting operations that are both *structured by the aspects of the text*", even though "the reader's viewpoint has to be *prearranged* in such a way that he is not only able to assemble the meaning but also to apprehend what he has assembled" (*ibid.*, 152; emphasis added). It is the combination of determinacy and indeterminacy in the text itself that constrains the interaction between the text and the reader; this interaction, then, is not purely arbitrary or individually biased (see *ibid.*, 24).

The relativism issue, as applied to this case, can be formulated by saying, for instance, that interpretations of literary works may focus on the *world-view* of the implied reader (or, analogously, of the implied author), e. g., on whether the implied reader's views are primarily informed by certain aesthetic, scientific, religious, or other considerations.[13] The important thing to note is that no study of

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[11] Eco (1979, 7 ff.) speaks about the "model" reader, viewing the literary text itself as "the semantic-pragmatic production of its own Model Reader".

[12] It should be noted that Iser himself, while employing the notion of an implied reader, endorses historical variation and thus interpretive relativism to some extent. His implied reader is not an ahistorical, timeless entity but dynamically entangled with the historically changing reception of the text.

[13] Obviously, this narratological and response-theoretical idea by no means precludes cooperation with other theoretical frameworks, such as myth criticism or Marxism. The world-views embedded in implied readers' structures of meaning may be illuminated through such less structuralistically oriented perspectives.

world-views in literature, neither historical nor systematic, can overlook normative questions regarding its own contexts and criteria of interpretation. The very historicity of world-views and of the study of world-views is a normative phenomenon. Studying the world-view of a given (implied) author or reader requires commitment to one or another theoretically loaded world-view in some particular socio-historical context. The very idea of there being some specifiable (more or less carefully definable) world-view embedded in or presupposed by the structure of the text, especially its historically conditioned author-reader communication structure, precludes total relativism.

The relativism issue is, however, always reintroduced regarding our interpretive texts themselves and *their* criteria and contexts (viz., the relevant praxis of interpretation, or the interpretive communities we belong to). For instance, philosophical texts can in some cases be read as literature (Wittgenstein is the natural example that comes to mind), and it is obvious that philosophical problems are often treated in literary artworks. Thus, literature may serve as material for the study of a wide variety of philosophical issues: e. g., of difficult situations of moral deliberation,[14] of the relation between humans and God, as in Biblical writings (such as the Book of Job), of the fragility of our human ways of categorizing reality, in gothic horror stories (cf. Airaksinen 1999), or of the identity of the self in some "difficult" works of modern poetry. Rorty (1982; 1991), in fact, has redescribed philosophy simply as one mode of writing, not more directly in touch with reality as it is in itself than, say, poetry (cf., however, also several critical essays in Dickstein 1998); and Brandom 2000).. It is inevitably to some extent an open question which contexts (e. g., philosophical, religious, aesthetic) are relevant in the interpretation of a given work; the appeal to an implied reader only transforms this issue into the question concerning the sources of the implied reader's world-view(s).

If the dichotomy between philosophy and literature is given up, in Rorty's way or anyone else's, we cannot avoid the following problems: Should literary critics study philosophical works as literature, as works to the interpretation of which methods of literary criticism (e. g., narratology) can be applied? Should philosophers apply literary-critical methods in studying works of literature that contain philosophical problems? How are literary methods of presentation, such as narrativity, present in other kinds of texts and cultural formations that philosophers are typically interested in (e. g., science)? Thus, in our multi- and interdisciplinary days, philosophers cannot just overlook the methodological requirements of literary theory—and *vice versa*. Questions like these are contextualized manifestations of the conceptual relativity issue examined above.

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[14] Several "Wittgensteinian" moral philosophers have emphasized this dimension of literature (see, e. g., Phillips 1992).

Fish, a well-known critic of formalistic and textualistic assumptions, became famous decades ago by emphasizing, relativistically, the "authority" of interpretive communities:

> [The interpretive strategies] proceed not from [the reader] but from the interpretive community of which he is a member; they are, in effect, community property, and insofar as they at once enable and limit the operations of his consciousness, he is too. [...] Indeed, it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties (Fish 1980, 14).

Fish's emphasis on contextuality and on the ubiquity of interpretation is overwhelming: "A sentence is never not in a context. We are never not in a situation. A statute is never not read in the light of some purpose. A set of interpretive assumptions is always in force. A sentence that seems to need no interpretation is already the product of one" (*ibid.*, 284). While reminding us that there are no constraints on interpretation "that are not themselves interpretive" (Fish 1989, 8), he seems to think that his communal emphasis saves him from the relativism issue (Fish 1980, 319), and argues that the notion of interpretive communities "stands between an impossible ideal and the fear which leads so many to maintain it. The ideal is of perfect agreement and it would require texts to have a status independent of interpretation. The fear is of interpretive anarchy, but it would only be realized if interpretation (text making) were completely random. It is the fragile but real consolidation of interpretive communities that allows us to talk to one another, but with no hope or fear of ever being able to stop" (*ibid.*, 172).[15]

These statements might as well have been written by Rorty, whom many critics consider the ultimate relativist and ethnocentrist. Those who simply nod to each other, "yes, we know", belong to the same interpretive community, or a Rortyan *ethnos* (cf. Rorty 1991; Brandom 2000) whose members need not justify their beliefs to outsiders but only to each other. It is, however, extremely doubtful that mere contingent community norms could suffice for overcoming relativism. On the contrary, such norms are themselves grounded in the pragmatic fact that we do at least occasionally succeed (as well as fail) in our interpretive interchanges with other people, both with members of our community and with others.[16]

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[15] And further: "The only 'proof' of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a third party: 'we know.'" (Fish 1980, 173.) Thus, "if, rather than acting on their own, interpreters act as extensions of an institutional community, solipsism and relativism are removed as fears because they are not possible modes of being." (*ibid.*, 321.) For Fish's specific criticisms of Iser's attempts to avoid relativism, see Fish (1989), ch. 3.

[16] For relevant critiques of Rorty, see Putnam (1990) and (1992); cf. also Pihlström (1998), ch. 7. It must be admitted, however, that Putnam's formulations of conceptual relativity in

A pragmatic context-dependence of the meaning of texts has also been emphasized in a Wittgensteinian setting by, among others, Lars Hertzberg (2001), who argues for the central role played by the listener (or, more generally, the receiver) in the interpretation of any linguistic communication. A certain "bit of writing" is, and can be, a story (or anything else specific) only "against the background of the sort of interchange we have in telling and listening to stories" (*ibid.*, 255). It seems that neither Wittgensteinian investigation of language-games nor response-theoretical analysis of the constitution of meaning in literature can abandon irreducibly normative notions such as the notion of an implied reader or (in Hertzberg's words) a "normal reader"; yet, such a reader can, circularly, only be defined as someone capable of responding to the text in the appropriate way (*ibid.*, 258). Hence, as Hertzberg makes clear, the "normal" or implied reader is not a context-independent notion. The very identity of the text, its structure as a particular kind of text (and not simply as a bit of writing of an unspecified kind), requires a context of interpretation, and thereby the notion of the reader, but no normatively constrained notion of reader is possible, if there is no text "out there" independently of actual individual reading processes. It has, indeed, been argued that literary texts (or other works of art) *exist* only as interpreted, *in* an interpretive context provided by the relevant "artworld"—i. e., that their very identity requires an interpretive practice (Haapala 1989; Margolis 1995; Pihlström 1998). This can be interpreted as a transcendental argument referring to the conditions necessary for the interpretation of a text as any particular kind of text at all (cf. further Pihlström 2000).

The philosophical and other ideas surrounding a literary text do, then, provide *a* constraing for interpretation. For example, the implied reader of a literary work may be committed to a metaethical view according to which there can be no sharp fact/value dichotomy; this will enable the interpreter to argue that a morally significant meaning can be attached even to the apparently ethically neutral sentences uttered by the narrator of the work.[17] But this already requires that we set the work (and its implied reader) in an interpretive context where we are familiar with all kinds of ethical and metaethical theories surrounding the fact/value distinction. We will never get rid of the contextuality of our interpretations—nor, hence, of the relativism issue. But we need not succumb to the temptation to fall into uncritical relativism, because we can always try to bring our interpretations closer to the meaning we attach to the implied reader's world-view. Interpretations are never detached from the normatively constrained task of finding *correct* or *justified* ways of reading a text. Our interpretive practices are committed to such normativity simply by being interpretive practices; something qualifies as a "practice" only if it is normatively constrained and not just arbitrary.

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terms of "optional languages" (see above) sounds rather Rortyan. How, for example, is the kind of pluralism Putnam advances in the end distinguished from Rorty's idea of historically contingent "final vocabularies"? The thorny question concerning the (dis)similarities between Putnam's and Rorty's versions of pragmatism and pluralism must be left for another occasion.

[17] Cf. Diamond's (1996) examples of such passages in literature.

Thus, while we should agree with Fish and others on the primacy of interpretation in literature, we may doubt that we could simply ground our interpretive practices in the communal agreement of interpreters within an interpretive community. Such a view leads to unacceptable relativism. We do need a normative structure, e. g., the notion of an implied reader, in order to let the interpreted reality, a text, guide our interpretive efforts. It is only insofar as we have correct and incorrect interpretations of the structures of texts that we can have so much as interpretive communities. Therefore, members of interpretive communities are constantly called upon to self-critically scrutinize their community standards. The notion of an implied reader (and possibly other textual structures employed by narratologists and response-theoreticians as well) is important, if we are to understand literary criticism as a genuinely normative practice. And we do. Hence, such a notion is pragmatically necessary for us. This is a simple transcendental argument for normative, in this case intepretive, realism.

But subscribing to this argument does not entitle us to say that the text, as an autonomous entity (any more than the reader or the interpretive community—or the author, for that matter), would be an unfailing authority for interpretation. There are no such authorities. The notion of an implied reader is a community-embedded standard, but it is simultaneously a community-transcending "transcendental model" and a regulative principle based on the community-independent structure of the text. This double role enables us to avoid both objectivism (the analogue of metaphysical realism in interpretive matters), according to which literary works have one single meaning (either embedded in the text itself or concealed in the author's mind), and full-blown relativism, according to which "anything goes". Avoiding both extremes is a vital pragmatic need for our interpretive practices. A pragmatic contextualization of normativity is inevitable, as Fish (1989, 13) tells us: "It is simply not possible even to conceive of a constraint (or rule or law or principle) without already having assumed a context of practice in relation to which it is intelligible". No constraints can be "more than the content of a practice from which they are indistinguishable" (*ibid.*, 14). Yet, no pragmatist should follow Fish in drawing the unpragmatic conclusion he draws from this, namely, that (literary) theory (such as, presumably, Iser's model of the implied reader) has "no consequences" in interpretive practices (*ibid.*, and *passim*). It is the very theoretical points of view themselves—such as Iser's or indeed Fish's own—that invite the relativism issue by appearing to lead into massive differences in the conceptualization of our interpretive practices. These theoretical conflicts call for normative notions, which can never permanently settle interpretive or theoretical disputes but are pragmatically useful in an on-going evaluation and re-evaluation of the commitments made in those disputes.[18]

[18] Clearly, on Fish's own principles, disputes such as the one between Iser and Fish are irresolvable, manifesting a divergence of interpretive communities or points of view. It is unclear how Fish (or Rorty, for that matter) can really hope to be offering a (normative) *critique* of his less relativistic rivals.

**Pragmatism, commonsense realism, and the mind-dependence of ontology**

Ethical and religious confrontations between rival conceptual schemes or perspectives are, we have seen, genuine disputes where people's lives are really at stake. So are interpretive disputes concerned with the objectively correct or intersubjectively acceptable meaning of literary (and other) texts. These real-life controversies, which we have discussed at some length in order to contextualize the pragmatic principle of contextualization that is part of Putnam's pluralism, would qualify as genuine disputes in terms of, say, William James's (1907) pragmatic principle, which James adapted from Charles Peirce's pragmatic maxim but which he applied more broadly, also in non-scientific, *weltanschaulich* contexts that Peirce himself did not find philosophically significant. What this principle says is, roughly, that we should evaluate our philosophical (and non-philosophical) conceptions and disputes in terms of their conceivable practical results in our (future) actions. Putnam's interest in comparing different perspectives can be fruitfully interpreted in terms of James's pragmatism.[19]

There are surely several philosophical issues that may, by employing the pragmatic method, be argued to be vacuous or practically insignificant. Unlike the comparison between the religious and the atheist views of the world and human life, or the one between the moral realist and the moral skeptic, the opposition between, say, ontologies postulating tropes (concrete particular property instances, such as the redness of a particular tomato) and ontologies postulating universals (such as redness in general, which is shared by several distinct particulars and is thus "one over many") does not, it might be claimed, affect our lives—either our ordinary everyday lives or our scientific inquiries—in any specific way. If one accepts universals in one's ontology, one will be able to say that there is one single redness that applies to several instances; if one accepts tropes but not universals, one will say that there are several rednesses which are in some cases exactly alike.[20] There

[19] One may also refer to Wittgenstein's (1953) language-games here; indeed, Putnam's (1994; 1995; 1999; 2001e) recent pragmatism is, as we have seen, developed in a profoundly Wittgensteinian spirit and is thus in some respects close to Winch's above-cited ideas (cf. also below). The fact that the method of contextualization has been used in the pragmatist tradition has explicitly been emphasized, in relation to Dewey, by Tiles (1988, 109), who observes that any factual discourse must (according to Dewey–and also according to other pragmatists) be assessed in relation to a wider context of some purpose-guided human project. This is one illuminating characterization of what pragmatists have meant by the pragmatic method, and it brings out clearly the close relation between this method and the idea of context-sensitivity Putnam finds in Wittgenstein, in particular.

[20] Among recent metaphysicians, Armstrong (1997) defends an "Aristotelian" immanent realism about universals, while Campbell (1990) prefers tropes; Lowe (1998), in turn, somewhat more liberally accepts both but refuses to treat tropes (or, as he prefers to call them, modes) as independent "objects". (It is a further problem how the similarity relation ought to be understood in the trope theory.) More generally, a quick look at latest metaphysical litera-

appears to be little difference in terms of world-views between the position according to which there is a single universal redness and the one according to which there are several exactly similar rednesses (or the one which endorses both universals and tropes). Following James (and possibly Wittgenstein), one might argue that no difference in practice, either in our factual daily language-use or in our actions with the language we have, follows whether one accepts universals or tropes, any more than in the case Putnam (1990) discusses, viz., the choice between the "Carnapian" language and the mereological one. The dispute between theories of universals and theories of tropes, one might conclude, has little significance in human affairs.

Thus, do the universals theorist and the trope theorist employ different conceptual schemes (assuming that they do not employ different languages but use a commensurable language for stating or denying the existence of certain entities)? Do they really structure the world they live in differently? Or is their dispute "merely" verbal or conceptual? Indeed, it is not easy to determine whether there is, pragmatically, any genuine dispute to find here. On the other hand, one should be careful in calling any philosophical problem—even the choice between universals and tropes—a pseudo-issue, because the *universalia* problem may be rendered even practically relevant by connecting it with the need to explain, for instance, the possibility of there being mind-independent natural laws. Even so, the pragmatist is probably willing to view this dispute not in terms of metaphysical first philosophy but in close relation to the conceptualization of properties in historically developing human practices of predication and inquiry (see Pihlström 2003, ch. 4). Furthermore, even if we admit that problems like this are often "merely" conceptual, there certainly is no denying of the fact that at least sometimes conceptual or terminological issues are philosophically highly important, because philosophical problems and traditions evolve in the course of our talking about them and (re)describing them in specific ways.

Another topic to which the pragmatic method might be applied is the general issue of realism itself and the closely related problem of truth. Winch—in a manner actually closely resembling James and Putnam— attacks traditional correspondence theories of truth on the grounds that the correspondence formula does not tell us how to *apply* the notions of truth and falsity (Winch 1987, 184–185; for comparisons, see James 1907, ch. 6; Putnam 1981, 1990). Surely, the realist or correspon-

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ture reveals many problems whose significance might be attacked by employing the pragmatic method: is it, for instance, really important to decide whether the particular sphericity of a rubber ball is the same particular sphericity as the one that the rubber the ball is made of "possesses" or not? (Lowe wisely uses examples like this in order to attack the view that tropes have identity conditions, but otherwise his discussions are conducted in an uncompromising metaphysically-realist spirit, which construes metaphysics as an *a priori* analysis of the basic categories of being, as carefully distinguished from epistemic categories.)

dence theorist will respond that this is not what the theory is supposed to do in any case; it is designed to offer an analysis of the meaning of truth rather than any criteria of truth (cf. Niiniluoto 1999). But the pragmatist (or Wittgensteinian) will answer that the normative criteria governing the application of the truth-predicate in concrete cases are, by the pragmatic method, parts of the "meaning" of truth; the correspondence theorist's sharp distinction between meaning and criteria is misleading, because the meaning of any word, including "correspondence" or "true", lies in and is inseparable from its use in human language-games. Here the practical applications of the word, its employment within a conceptual scheme, are what counts. Yet, there is something correct in the correspondence idea: even Winch admits (and, again, Putnam would be the first to admit this, too) that it is a simple truism that "[i]t is one thing for a man to think that something is so and quite another thing for what he thinks to be so" (Winch 1987, 194). On the other hand, this does not prevent Winch from distancing himself from crude forms of realism: "What is real and what is unreal shows itself *in* the sense that language has. Further, both the distinction between the real and the unreal and the concept of agreement with reality themselves belong to our language" (Winch 1972, 12). Winch, as much as Putnam, rejects "metaphysical realism".

A more recent incarnation of Putnam, in agreement with Winch, believes that one can reject metaphysical realism while remaining a realist—though *not* by defending "internal realism", as Putnam did in the 1980s, but by accepting conceptual relativity within a more diversified position labeled "commonsense realism", a view which, according to Putnam (1999, 2001e), can be derived not only from pragmatists like James and Dewey but especially from Wittgenstein. While maintaining the basic realistic insight that there is some sort of "objectivity" to be gained in our commitments not only to the existence of directly observable material objects but also to the truth of, say, mathematical and semantic statements or ethical value judgments, Putnam argues that the metaphysical realist's idea of a correspondence between our statements and something out there in the world is more misleading than helpful. We should reject the imagery of correspondence and "truthmaking",[21] trying to get rid of the unhelpful dichotomy between strong metaphysical assumptions (e. g., Platonism in the philosophy of mathematics or in moral theory), on the one side, and the skeptical and anti-realistic views that seem to follow from our abandoning such assumptions (e. g., mathematical conventionalism or Saul Kripke's notorious "skeptical solution" to the rule-following problem discussed by Wittgenstein), on the other side. We can, according to Putnam, retain realism without metaphysics, and we can retain conceptual relativity without full-blown relativ-

[21] On the importance of the notion of truthmaking in metaphysics, see Armstrong (1997). We need not here determine whether this notion is inseparably connected with the correspondence theory of truth or not.

ism, by emphasizing the plurality of our natural human practices of coping with the world and the practice-ladenness, and hence context-embeddedness, of our ontological commitments (cf. further Pihlström 1996).

Returning to Winch, we should appreciate the point that "it is *speakers* of a language [rather than the language itself] who attempt to say what is true, to describe how things are. They do so *in* the language they speak; and this language attempts no such thing, either successfully or unsuccessfully" (Winch 1987, 196). Language makes beliefs possible but must not be equated with beliefs; the grammar of a language itself is not an expression of any particular beliefs or theories, although this distinction is unstable in the sense that grammar has "its concrete realization *in* the expression of particular beliefs (though not only there)" (*ibid.*, 206–207). If no one never used the language of religion, for instance, to express religious beliefs, that language would lack its distinctive grammar. And similarly, though more trivially, for clearly optional languages like mereology. Presumably, Putnam would have nothing against these formulations, either. Accordingly, it is possible to have a religious language and to refuse to make an ontological commitment to God's existence. (One may, for instance, lose one's faith and accuse God of it.) Questions of existence are not *simply* questions of choosing languages but accepting postulates or other existence claims within chosen languages (Raatikainen 2001, 173). This is trivially true, also in the case of the religion vs. science opposition. One may choose to use a religious language, but one also has to believe in God—to postulate God's existence, if this terminology is allowed—in order to commit oneself ontologically through that language-use. Exactly as Winch argued, it is we language-users that state, in language, something about how things are in the world.

The important point here is that these arguments have no bearing on the issue of whether there is a metaphysical, independent world out there in which, say, God either exists or fails to exist. Ontological commitments may still very well be grounded in our human habits of action in the linguistically shaped world we live in, even if they are not simply grounded in choices of languages.[22] Only very naive pragmatists would argue that language-use creates existence, and it is hard to believe that Putnam (in his better moments) could have held anything like this. Putnam is not careful enough here, but the basic ideas of his Wittgensteinian pragmatism can be more carefully formulated. The fact that mereology, the example he employs in his defense of conceptual relativity, is—as Raatikainen notes (*ibid.*, 174)—controversial and counter-intuitive, is irrelevant to our wider concerns, because it is only an arbitrary—an all too simple—example, which Putnam undoubt-

[22] It must be admitted that this point was not at all clearly made in Pihlström (1996); to this extent Raatikainen (2001) has done valuable work in criticizing the assumptions of some of Putnam's followers, including the present author.

edly chose in order to make his purely conceptual point. Had Putnam been more faithful to his pragmatist orientation, he would have chosen more real-life examples, such as the relation between religious and scientific or secular conceptual schemes (as, indeed, he has done in some of his more recent papers, cited above). Both in his early and his later works it is easy to find arguments focusing on conceptual schemes or uses of language we find indispensable in our lives, e. g., ethical vocabularies and "moral images of the world", as connected with factual discourse (cf. Putnam 1981; 1987 1990; 1995).

Thus, relevant examples abound, and they are usually highly complicated; these examples have to do with our need to conceptualize our world in terms of, say, mental and normative ontologies, or even religious ones. In cases like these, existence questions are inseparable from our practical needs, interests, and purposes. While these questions are not decided by simple choices of language, they can only be decided within a human normative orientation. Similarly, the "existence" of theoretical entities, such as implied readers, needed in literary theory can only be determined within a normative practice of interpretation guided by certain human values and goals, which themselves constantly require interpretation and reinterpretation.

So far our reading of Putnam and others has not taken us beyond a commonsensical, realistic picture of the world as relatively independent of human beliefs, perceptions, language-use, or practices, although, of course, text- or interpretation-dependent constructs such as implied readers are unproblematically human products. It is high time to pay attention to what may seem to be an inevitable consequence of the pluralistic, contextualistic position I have (following Putnam) favored, namely, to something that might be labeled the *mind-dependence of ontology*. Insofar as our conceptions of the world are inevitably rooted in the pragmatic contexts out of which they arise, it does not seem to be meaningful to construe ontology (or metaphysics) as an attempt to describe the mind-independent and language-independent structure of the world as it is in itself.[23] Rather, ontology—and not merely the ontology of humanly created artefacts and normative meaning-structures—becomes internal to our practice-embedded attempts to cope with the world we live in (see Pihlström 1996; 1998). This, at least, is how it has often been interpreted in the pragmatist tradition, insofar as ontology has found a place at all within pragmatism.

In fact neither Putnam nor his friendly commentator Charles Travis abandons the idea of mind-dependence. In his contribution to a collection of essays on Putnam, Travis (2001, 504–505) sets out to defend, by Wittgensteinian means,

[23] This conception of ontology is, obviously, diametrically opposed to the metaphysically realistic one assumed by Armstrong (1997), Lowe (1998), and many other contemporary discussants.

a kind of mind-dependence of properties that "is visible from entirely ordinary human points of view", requiring no "extra-human perspective" but only "that there are many different ordinary perspectives, that we in fact view things in different ways on different occasions" (see also *ibid.*, 510). In short, the kind of mind-dependence Travis (like Putnam) defends is a direct consequence of the kind of contextualizing approach to philosophical problems we saw Putnam endorse. We may let Travis describe at some length the notion of mind-dependence he has in mind:

> [A]ny way for a thing, or things, to be that we can speak of, or identify, admits of understandings. So as to what things are, or are to be counted as, any such way depends on how one understands being the way in question – on what one understands that to be. [...] Such ways cannot be right absolutely – full stop. They must be right for beings such as us, given that we think, and live, as we do, in circumstances in which we think, or say, what we do. The correctness of our judgements thus depends on our ways of thinking, our perceptions of things. And that dependence penetrates not just to deciding what it is we speak of [...] but all the way to deciding what, for purposes of our judgements, would count as any given way we may think a thing to be. That is mind- or subject-dependence running deep (*ibid.*, 509).

Travis goes on:

> Whether the items we speak of are or are not truly describable (by us) as the ways we speak of depends not only on what those ways are, but also on the right ways of thinking of them, or the right ways for us to think of them, in the circumstances in which we speak. [...] [W]hat is in the world independent of us – its objects and properties – does not by itself, independent of our thinking, decide what we may think truly of it. We cannot factor out from the phenomenon of true thought a component which is a purely worldly contribution, and on which alone the truth of what we think depends (*ibid.*, 510–511).

This, as Travis admits (*ibid.*, 511), is very much a Putnamean idea, and it goes without saying that it is also a Kantian idea. Replying to Travis, Putnam (2001d, 525–526) agrees with him that "the properties we speak of must not be thought of as having extensions which are completely fixed in advance" but must be seen as requiring interpretation; thus, as the reasonableness of interpretations inevitably "depends on the human interests and practices that figure in the particular context of speaking", properties are in a sense mind-dependent (see also Putnam 2002, 101)—although, for a pragmatist, a better term might be "practice-dependent". At this point Putnam goes on to refute the metaphysical realist, typically a reductionist physicalist who believes in the complete describability of the world by means of precise scientific concepts and thus in the metaphysical primacy of the causal structure of the physical world, by reminding such a thinker that the predicate "causes" is itself context-sensitive, too (Putnam 2001d, 531). Insofar as it is only in an idealized scientific conceptual scheme that the fundamental causal structure of reality is to be described, the problem once again returns, because the

legitimacy and application of idealizations is context-dependent and interest-relative (*ibid.*, 533).[24]

But how can Putnam or Travis think their position could have any argumentative resources against the metaphysical realist who goes on to claim that it is irrelevant to argue for the mind-dependence of properties relying on the context-dependence of their identification by us? Such a realist might argue that it is one thing to *identify* properties (however context-sensitively) and quite another thing for those properties, whether correctly identified or not, to *exist* in the human-independent world. So, how *could* Putnam's or Travis's position, as it stands, even be thought of as an argument against forms of metaphysical realism such as, say, Armstrong's (1997) or Lowe's (1998)? Metaphysical realism, in brief, says that the existence or reality of objects or properties (or whatever there is) is totally independent of our being able to identify or describe them, however context-dependent the latter might be. The metaphysical realist would insist on distinguishing between "are" and "are to be counted as" in the first quotation by Travis given above.

It would be helpful, in this argumentative *impassé*, if Putnam (or Travis) explicitly admitted that the kind of mind-dependence he endorses amounts to something like Kantian *transcendental idealism*, while the kind of commonsense realism which is compatible with it is reinterpretable as Kantian *empirical realism*. This, for some reason, is a move that Putnam has not wanted to make. It is, however, not at all odd to interpret pragmatism in a Kantian manner (cf. Pihlström 2003). How such an interpretation would transform Putnam's position must remain a topic for some other discussion; in any case, Putnam is (but should not be) guilty of the typical way of thinking among most twentieth-century analytic philosophers, according to which Kant's transcendental idealism somehow must be wrong or cannot even be understood (cf. Hanna 2001). There is much more sense in such an idealism than those realists can perceive who believe idealism to be just a naive acceptance of the mind-dependence of pretty much everything. As Travis (2001, 516, 522–524) also argues, subscribing to what Putnam (1981, 55) once called "objectivity humanly speaking", objectivity (or the lack of it) is a real feature of our representations of the ways things are; it is just that there is no purely "worldly" contribution upon which such objectivity solely depends. Indeed, interpretive objectivity (cf. above) may give us a good model for objectivity in other realms as well.

Furthermore, if the realist believes real objects and properties ought to have some sort of identity criteria, the transcendental idealist *à la* Travis or Putnam

[24] Another argument often relied on by Putnam *contra* metaphysical realists concerns the (in)determinacy of semantic relations. Returning to his old disputes with Bernard Williams, Putnam (2001a, 608) repeats the charge that the notion of an "absolute conception of the world" cannot itself be absolute but must be only "perspectival" inasmuch as it is defined in semantic terms and semantic relations themselves do not belong to the world as it is in itself, independently of us, as seen in the absolute conception.

can argue that such criteria[25] can eventually only be provided by our interpretive linguistic practices. There is no identification, and hence no acceptable ontological status, of properties (or anything else) in the absence of *our* being engaged in practices—contexts—within which we actually count something as real, or commit ourselves ontologically. Our very commitments are in this sense *prior* to the identities of the things they are commitments *to*. Here, in the end, we reach the point of agreement between pragmatist (or Wittgensteinian) and transcendentally idealistic approaches in (meta)ontology, an inextricable entanglement of the conceptual (our commitments, or practices of making commitments) and the factual, i. e., the worldly objects themselves (the content of our ontological commitments).

## Conclusion

The relevance of the phenomenon of conceptual relativity—or pluralism, more generally—must not be underestimated. Something close to conceptual relativity, pluralism, or context-dependence, something not very much unlike Putnam's internal or pragmatic realism, will be needed, if one, say, wants to account for the objectivity of morality (moral realism) in a situation in which natural science is about to explain, in a reductive causal way, the functioning of our minds (or, rather, brain)—or for the objectivity of interpretations of literary works in a postmodern chaos of different, apparently incommensurable ways of reading. We *need* the equal legitimacy of different descriptions, the possibility of viewing the "same" events from various perspectives (from physical-causal and ethical ones, among others), of different "versions" of the world, etc.;[26] although we equally need normative criteria of the correctness or adequacy of our perspectives, both in science and in the humanities. It is, in any case, futile to fight against the materialist orthodoxy of contemporary metaphysics and philosophy of mind in *scientific* terms; what is required for more "humanistic" concerns is precisely conceptual relativity or pluralism which lets scientists make genuine scientific progress but reminds them, and us, that no such progress eliminates our ethical responsibilities. A similar pluralistic argumentation may be applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, in the case of religion, analyzed above, but we need not draw any conclusions regarding the viability of religious faith in contemporary culture from these preliminary and rather meta-level discussions. Analogously, we should adopt a pluralistic attitude to the correctness

[25] This, of course, is a complex issue endlessly debated among contemporary ontologists (cf. again, e. g., Lowe 1998).

[26] The notion of a "world version" is due to Nelson Goodman, whose radically constructivist and relativist views on "worldmaking" we have deliberately avoided here. For comparisons to Putnam, see Pihlström (1996) and (1998).

of various different interpretations of literary (and other) works, while remaining committed to an on-going normative evaluation of the grounds upon which claims to correctness are made.

I have no final answer to the easily recurring question of what the normative criteria should look like by means of which we have to assess and reassess our descriptions of the world. We have to go case by case, closely examining particular situations of bewilderment caused by major differences between rival ways of conceptualizing a given phenomenon. We may, of course, define some important normative criteria, such as logical consistency or compatibility with accepted scientific theories, but the relevance of such criteria must always be (normatively) pragmatically re-evaluated in a specific problematic situation. (Again, religion would be a case in point: one of the questions debated in the science vs. religion controversy is what, e. g., "compatibility with accepted scientific theories" actually means.) Since there are essential differences between different kinds of disputes between rival conceptual schemes (for example, ethically or religiously relevant disputes are pragmatically different from abstract philosophical disputes such as the one on the nature of properties), the question of conceptual relativity should be evaluated in close relation with Putnam's pragmatist and Wittgensteinian influences, i. e., not just in neutral ontological, semantic, and logical terms but in terms related to moral philosophy, aesthetics, and the philosophy of religion. Such a more localized approach would give some pragmatic content to the conceptual relativity issue. This contextualization of philosophical debates is part and parcel of pragmatism—of Putnam's and classical pragmatists' such as James's alike (as well as Wittgenstein's, at least on Putnam's reading). The abstract issue of conceptual relativity I have considered receives pragmatic significance when, and perhaps only when, it is treated in connection with the various problems through which it is actualized in our lives, problems such as the religion vs. science opposition and the question of moral or interpretive objectivity. In this manner, we should contextualize the pluralistic requirement of acknowledging the context-sensitivity of philosophical (especially ontological) problems and commitments that we have seen Putnam, pragmatistically, embrace.

Finally, in any such treatment, it ought to be kept in mind that there is no way to escape the need for contextualization, not even in meta-level, contextualizing discussions of contextualization itself (such as the present paper). Pragmatists should, reflexively, be willing to contextualize their own pragmatic contextualism. Here Putnam's words serve as a useful reminder, in which the reference to Wittgenstein might be reinterpreted as a reference to Putnam himself:

> Wittgenstein does not aspire to introduce a supposedly context-independent vocabulary with which to talk about such phenomena as context-sensitivity, open texture, family resemblances, etc. *No* language is exempt from context-sensitivity, least of all Wittgenstein's own (Putnam 2001c, 460–461).

This insight should be applied with full force to Putnam's own discussions of conceptual relativity, pluralism, optional languages, context-sensitivity, etc. A full-fledged pragmatism is constantly prepared to investigate its own contexts and conditions of meaningfulness and rationality.[27]

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