

Sample Philosophy Thesis: 32,000 Words

Contemporary Pragmatism

Conversation between Philosophy and Life



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Introduction: Philosophy after the Fall

What would be its [philosophy's] office if it ceased to deal with the problem of reality and knowledge at large?

—John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*¹

In his *Realism with a Human Face*, Hilary Putnam says that he is “often asked just where I disagree with Rorty.” I am often asked the converse question. We are asked these questions because we agree on a lot of points that a lot of other philosophers do not accept.

— Richard Rorty, “Putnam and the Relativist Menace”²

During the latter part of the twentieth century, Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty maintained a series of attacks upon some of the central tenants of traditional philosophy. In particular they attacked its foundationalist approach in which epistemology, theories of knowledge, were thought to ground all philosophical disciplines both moral and metaphysical. Emerging from the analytic tradition, Putnam and Rorty's chief concern was that traditional philosophy's foundationalist epistemology presupposed a particular picture of language's relationship to the world – respectively described as “Metaphysical Realism” or “representationalism” – by which our basic “Truths,” *qua* the most indubitable knowledge, somehow corresponded to reality “as it really is.” Rorty and Putnam joined forces in rejecting this thesis as either “impossible” or “unintelligible,” denying that language could have this type of relationship to the world. In so doing they began to untie the links which traditional philosophy assumed between truth and the world, and hence between philosophy's traditional enterprises and any possibility of discovering eternal and universal knowledge about that world.

¹ John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, Henry Holt, New York, 1938; cited in “Nature in Experience” by John Dewey himself in his “Nature in Experience,” within John Dewey, *On Experience, Nature and Freedom: Representative Selections*, ed. Richard J. Bernstein, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1960, 253.

² PRM, 443; Putnam quotation from RHF, 20.

The impact of this critique has not only been to bring traditional philosophical theories into question, but also to challenge the very status of the philosophical discipline itself as a social enterprise. If philosophy can neither explain how “the world really is” nor buttress the epistemological status of those disciplines which do, then we are drawn to ask what role it *can* play within our culture. Both Rorty and Putnam have come to call this questioning of traditional philosophy, a form of “pragmatism.”³ This label reflects both consonance with and a debt owed to fellow fringe-dwellers – the classical American pragmatists – particularly William James and John Dewey.⁴ Specifically, Rorty and Putnam adopt the classical pragmatists’ rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, and the challenges that Rorty and Putnam wage upon traditional philosophy draw upon the classical pragmatists’ calls to reorientate philosophy from its theoretical attempts to discover foundational truths to the practical tasks of solving contextual problems. In drawing upon the work of the classical pragmatists, Rorty and Putnam also see their work as a development upon it in two main ways. First their work incorporates, and as Rorty argues even culminates, analytic philosophy’s “Linguistic Turn,” leading to the replacement of the classical pragmatists’ discussion of “experience” with that of “language.” Secondly, in a post-Kuhnian framework Rorty and Putnam also reject the idea that an authoritative and distinct “scientific method” could be described and play a central normative role in the evaluation of philosophical claims.⁵

³ Despite recently claiming a large inheritance from classical pragmatism, and calling his own position “pragmatic realism” during the nineties, Putnam appears to have at least denied being a “pragmatist” in name. Ruth Anna Putnam, in discussing Hilary’s work in “Taking pragmatism seriously,” states: “But Hilary Putnam has said in recent lectures, ‘I am not a Pragmatist.’ He is not a pragmatist, he says, because he rejects the pragmatist theory of truth.” James Conant and Urszula M. Zeglen, eds, *Hilary Putnam: Pragmatism and Realism*, Routledge, London, 7.

⁴ James and Dewey are prominent within both Putnam and Rorty’s works, although Putnam favours James, and Rorty favours Dewey. Both philosophers are less enthusiastic about Charles Peirce, although Putnam holds him in some esteem: see, “Peirce the Logicism,” in RHF, 252-260. See also, Cheryl Misak in her edited *The Cambridge Companion to Peirce*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, 47. Rorty, however, has consistently dismissed the value of Peirce for contemporary pragmatist needs. See, PRI, 720: “[H]is contribution to pragmatism was merely to give it a name, and to have stimulated James” and held just the foundationalist Kantian assumption, “that epistemology or semantics could discover [such foundations], against which James and Dewey reacted.”

⁵ See PSH, 35. See also Barry Allen, “What Knowledge? What Hope? What New Pragmatism?” in William Eggington and Mike Sandbothe, eds, *The Pragmatic Turn in Philosophy*:

Broadly speaking, these might be seen as the points upon which Rorty and Putnam agree but which “a lot of other philosophers do not accept.”⁶ They reflect a mutual critical orientation towards traditional philosophy that both think has devastating and far-reaching consequences. The precise nature of this critique and the implications drawn, however, are a matter of complex debate *between* Rorty and Putnam. Rorty often cites Putnam as a close philosophical ally, proclaiming Putnam to be the leading contemporary pragmatist,⁷ whose conception of philosophy is “almost, but not quite, the same” as his own.⁸ Putnam, however, is uncomfortable with this association and has tried to distance himself from Rorty over a number of years. What Putnam has variously described as Rorty’s “relativism,” “irrationalism” and “deconstructionist” tendencies, undermine the “realistic spirit” which Putnam has attempted to retain.⁹

For many commentators, the debate between Putnam and Rorty crystallises many of the key issues plaguing analytic philosophy at the end of the twentieth century. It is of *prima facie* interest because both Putnam and Rorty not only have turned upon the analytic tradition from within but also attempt to transcend some of its diagnosed limitations. As a result on the one hand, their conflict is concerned with important moves *within* the analytic tradition such as the re-emergence of pragmatism and its relationship with contemporary naturalism,¹⁰ the distinctions between modern correspondence and deflationary/disquotational theories of truth, and more generally the cumulative ramifications of the internal critique of analytic philosophy which runs through Wittgenstein, Quine, Sellars and Davidson.¹¹ On the other hand, their debates reflect a

Contemporary Engagements between Analytic and Continental Thought, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2004, 151.

⁶ PRM, 443.

⁷ PSH, xxvii. Also in PAR Rorty states: “Putnam is one of the most important contributors to contemporary pragmatism” in the footnote on 2.

⁸ “Solidarity or Objectivity?” in ORT, 24.

⁹ Putnam adopts the term “realistic spirit” from Wittgenstein *via* Cora Diamond. See, Putnam’s use of Diamond throughout his later works, especially SNS and WL; Cora Diamond, *Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1995, 39-72; and, Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G. E. M. Anscombe, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961, 201-2.

¹⁰ This is the focus of Joseph Margolis in his work, *Reinventing Pragmatism: American Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2002.

¹¹ Rorty would highlight these figures more than Putnam.

growing concern with issues both beyond and questioning the traditional limits of analytic philosophy. Both philosophers attempt to escape the ongoing realism—antirealism controversy but disagree as to the value of the realist intuitions that remain, both philosophers challenge the status of the traditional metaphysical and epistemological projects which analytic philosophy presupposes but disagree as to how best deal with their ancient problems, and both philosophers envision some rapprochement between analytic and continental philosophy but disagree about its extent.¹² In short, both Putnam and Rorty are clearly distinguishable within the contemporary philosophical landscape for their rejection of the correspondence theory of truth and its concomitant forms of representationalism. Their debate, however, is of all the more interest in investigating some of the most important issues of twentieth century analytic philosophy *from* this distinct, (neo-)pragmatist position.¹³

This thesis attempts to look at the debate between Putnam and Rorty dynamically across its twenty-year expanse, from the points at which both Putnam and Rorty turned against traditional analytic philosophy in the mid-seventies until their latest references to one another within *Ethics without Ontology* and *Philosophy and Social Hope*. Such a study is important because Putnam and Rorty's views have changed distinctively over the years, often as a result of their debate, and although there is much written on the status of their debate within the early nineties, little has been written subsequent to important late developments in both philosophers' works.

In chapter I, I examine Putnam's perennial charge that Rorty is a "relativist." *Pace* most commentators, I argue that this battleground is a quagmire between Putnam and Rorty that should be avoided. Neither accepts the traditional philosophical framework in which the charge of relativism, traditionally construed, makes sense, and thus Rorty, in particular, cannot be labelled a "relativist" on his own terms. In chapter II, however, I argue that at the heart of Putnam's critique of Rorty is not a charge of relativism, but rather "methodological solipsism." Despite this reformulation of Putnam's argument, however, Rorty still evades this charge

¹² For example see Rorty's CIS, EHO and PSH; and Putnam, "Why Is a Philosopher?" in RHF.

¹³ Both philosophers generally aver the use of the term "neo-pragmatist," although it has been pressed upon them by a range of critics. See for example David L. Hildebrand, "The Neopragmatist Turn," *Southwest Philosophy Review*, 19(1), 2003, 79-88. Rorty does use the term sparingly in PSH, for example see 24.

because of a strict distinction that he makes between the discipline of “philosophy” and other usages of language within life.

Chapter III completes the chief task of this thesis – to find solid ground upon which Rorty and Putnam’s views can be evaluated against one another. I claim that this ground resides within their metaphilosophy, asking what philosophy’s relationship is or can be with the rest of culture. Perhaps, most important within this objective is the elucidation of two notions that have only developed later in Putnam and Rorty’s works but integral to their mature approaches. The first, developed in Chapter II, is Putnam’s notion of “unintelligibility” – a norm that Putnam develops out of both the early and later Wittgenstein, which he seeks to “pragmatise.” The second is Rorty’s notion of a “vocabulary,” developed in Chapters I and III, which is at the heart of Rorty’s articulation of philosophy as a distinct discipline, but is only defined within his own work as the inheritance of a multiplicity of sources. Utilising these notions on the metaphilosophical battleground, I argue that Rorty’s notion of philosophy as itself a vocabulary becomes unintelligible when explaining its relationship with other co-existing disciplines: such as science, religion, politics and ethics. For this reason, I ultimately follow Putnam in arguing that philosophy’s role after the Fall of correspondence, and traditional philosophy, is a therapeutic role examining the limits of disciplines from within their own practice.

Chapter I: Realism and Relativism

Introduction: Metaphilosophical Responsibility - The Value of Good Old Commonsense

Is there no middle way?

—Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*¹⁴

Amidst the regular and sometimes dramatic changes within his work, Putnam's dismissal of Rorty as a relativist has been, perhaps, his most consistent stance. In spite of Rorty's strenuous denials, Putnam has explicitly sought to distance his views upon truth and warrant from Rorty's throughout their exchange.¹⁵ In particular, despite acknowledging Rorty's more nuanced form of relativism, "ethnocentrism,"¹⁶ Putnam has persisted in arguing that Rorty's views remain "simultaneously a misdescription of the notions we actually have and a self-refuting attempt to both have and deny an 'absolute perspective.'"¹⁷ By this Putnam means that Rorty both fails to be responsible to our commonsense conceptions of truth and warrant, and also, unsuccessfully, attempts to justify this deviation by using the same strategy as the traditional Metaphysical Realist – by attempting to take a point of view both within and outside one's own language at the same time.¹⁸ The fervour with which Putnam has defended his distance from Rorty betrays the threat which Putnam believes Rorty, and his alleged relativism, present to his own "middle way." With both their positions being cast as alternatives to traditional Realism, through their mutual rejection of the "correspondence theory of truth," Rorty represents the excesses in which many non-Realists have indulged, bringing their own alternative frameworks into self-parody. Putnam believes that the excesses of such "irresponsible relativism" have undermined the important opportunity open to philosophy to offer a viable alternative to traditional metaphysics and

¹⁴ Putnam, RHF, 26.

¹⁵ From his first "internal realist" examination of truth within RTH, 216, until his latest instalment of "commonsense realism" within EWO, 121-122.

¹⁶ Rorty, as Putnam acknowledges, rejects the term "relativist" although in "Solidarity or Objectivity?" in ORT, he does describe ethnocentrism as a "form of relativism," but only to distinguish it from more traditional conceptions, 23.

¹⁷ Putnam, RHF, 26.

¹⁸ "Relativism, just as much as Realism, assumes that one can stand within one's language and outside it at the same time" RHF, 23.

epistemology, and have encouraged the “reactionary metaphysics” of many other contemporary analytic philosophers.¹⁹ For Putnam, both these approaches aver the path of commonsense and threaten the “possibility of a philosophical enterprise that men and women of good sense can take seriously.”²⁰

On this basis, Putnam has defended various forms of small “r” realism throughout the latter part of the twentieth century after abandoning his own initial big “R” scientific Realist position.²¹ Due to these changes, Putnam’s realism has frustrated definition in terms of a set of specific theses, but it does reflect a general orientation towards the task of philosophy.²² It reflects his general sense of philosophical *responsibility*.²³ Specifically, as a general approach to the “Question of Realism”²⁴ - i.e. the nature of language’s relationship to the world - Putnam’s

¹⁹ SNS 447. See also Putnam’s “Preface” to RHF, ix: “Rortian relativism cum pragmatism fails as an alternative to metaphysical realism. Rorty’s present ‘position’ is not so much a position as the illusion or mirage of a possible (if unbelievable) position from a distance, but which disappears into thin air when closely examined. Indeed, Rorty’s view is just solipsism with a ‘we’ instead of an ‘I.’” See also, “Why Reason Can’t be Naturalized” in RR, 236: “And if I react to Professor Rorty’s book with a certain sharpness, it is because one more ‘deflationary’ book, one more book telling us that the deep questions aren’t deep and the whole enterprise was a mistake, is just what we *don’t* need right now.”

²⁰ Here Putnam is specifically discussing positivism as a form of Metaphysical Realism and Rortian Relativism, in “Why Is a Philosopher?” RHF, 106.

²¹ Putnam advocated what he called “Scientific Realism” until his Presidential Address to the Eastern Division of the APA in 1976, “Realism and Reason” in MMS. In this paper he denounced his Scientific Realism as “incoherent” and “collaps[ing] into *unintelligibility*,” MMS, 126. Having renounced Metaphysical Realism, of which Scientific Realism is a version, Putnam has moved through *internal*, *pragmatic* and *commonsense* (or *direct* or *natural*) realism. Note in “Comment on Tadeusz Szubka’s paper” within James Conant and Urszula M. Zeglen, eds, *Hilary Putnam: Pragmatism and Realism*, Routledge, London, 2002, 125: Putnam states that he agrees with Austin that “direct realism,” as a term is unfortunate and prefers “commonsense realism.”

²² This orientation both recurs throughout his work and also helps to explain the constant development and re-development of his position(s). As James Conant says in his “Introduction” to WL, xiv: “Thus, if there is a single over-arching doctrine—a single teaching under which underlies every essay here—it would be that one’s ability to make progress in philosophy depends, above all, on one’s continuing willingness to reexamine the grounds of one’s philosophical convictions.”

²³ Burton Dreben makes the same point in terms of Putnam’s relationship with Quine – Putnam the “Girondist” and Quine the “revolutionary.” See, Burton Dreben, “Putnam, Quine – and the Facts,” in *Philosophical Topics*, 20 (1), 1992, 296.

²⁴ WL, 295.

realism reflects a responsibility to our “commonsense view” that we can talk both of and about the “world” around us without recourse either to either Metaphysical Realism or relativism.²⁵ As he states in his *Dewey Lectures* - the most official account of his current position:

If, as I believe, there is a way to do justice to our sense that knowledge claims are responsible to reality without recoiling into metaphysical fantasy, then it is important that we find a way. For there is, God knows, irresponsibility enough in the world, including irresponsibility masquerading as responsibility, and it belongs to the vocation of the thinker, now as always, to try to teach the difference between the two.²⁶

This idea of philosophical “responsibility,” appears ambiguous to Rorty. Insofar as we might ask *to whom* we must be responsible within a discourse, Rorty is quite willing to admit that we ought to be responsible to our given community through the practice of ethnocentric “solidarity.” Putnam’s rejection of such a position as “self-refuting relativism,” however, leaves Rorty asking to whom further we might be responsible other than ourselves, without appealing to the Metaphysical Realists’ “God’s-eye point of view.”²⁷ As such, Rorty sees Putnam’s resurgent commitment to “commonsense” as an unfortunate throwback “to pre-Hegelian attempts to find something ahistorical to which philosophers may plead allegiance.”²⁸ For Rorty, the

²⁵ SNS, 447. In “Question of Realism,” at WL 303, Putnam defines his “common sense realism” as “the realism that says that mountains and stars are not created by language and thought, and are not parts of language and thought, and yet can be described by language and thought.” He also relies heavily upon common sense in his last exchange with Rorty in RRRJ. In MFR, 70, Putnam states “What is wrong with relativist views (apart from their horrifying irresponsibility) is that they do not at all correspond to how we think and to how we shall continue to think.” Most importantly the return to a kind of “naïve realism” is not just of perception but also conception. See also, SNS, 489.

²⁶ SNS, 446. Putnam, therefore, characterises his own progression from his first non-Realist position, “internal realism” to his current “commonsense realist” position as the story of various attempts to resolve the problems emerging from holding onto this commonsense view.

²⁷ More broadly, the two types of responsibility here might be drawn between the “moral” responsibility that Rorty feels we owe to our own communities (not itself transcendent of that community but reflecting that communities values and beliefs) and some form of “epistemic” responsibility that appears to appeal to “getting things right,” beyond.

²⁸ Rorty, Response to RRRJ, 90.

commonsense “realist intuitions,” which Putnam is so eager to preserve, are just the type of intuitions that we should reject.²⁹

Rorty does not attempt to answer the traditional philosophical problems and questions over which Putnam’s commonsense presides, but rather to dismiss the very “vocabulary” in which they make sense. He dismisses this vocabulary on two fronts: first, he contends that it has never created “problems” for “commonsense” outside of the esoteric discipline of philosophy anyway, so Putnam’s reactionary alarm ought to abate;³⁰ and secondly, that like all vocabularies, the questions and problems of traditional philosophy are neither universal nor eternal, but rather are as contingent as our culture.³¹ Thus, the only norm tying us to one vocabulary as opposed to another is its usefulness to our equally contingent purposes. On this basis, Rorty thinks that since traditional philosophy has so obviously failed to either be useful or show hope of usefulness,³² we should be free to move on from these traditional issues to a more *useful* pursuit, a pursuit that tends to reject the value of old problems and their commonsense, in favour of new “vocabularies” which are creative, metaphorical, and imaginative. Rorty calls this new approach

²⁹ This interaction it most clearly brought out in Putnam and Rorty’s most recent printed exchange within Brandom, Robert B., ed, *Rorty and His Critics*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2000. In RRRJ, 83, Putnam discusses how the moral of Ayer and Quine’s failure to preserve “sense-data” is that “to preserve our commonsense realist convictions it is not enough to preserve some ‘realist’ sentences: the interpretations you give those sentences, or, more broadly, your account of what understanding them consists in, is also important. Rorty, however, has never *claimed* to be a realist.” As Putnam goes on to note, however, in the following footnote, 87: “In the course of discussion in June 1995, Rorty declares that ‘commonsense realism is just as bad as metaphysical realism – one leads to the other,’ and ‘That’s the part of common sense we have to get rid of.’” For the Rorty’s rejection of “realist intuitions” see the “Introduction” to CP. See also PAA.

³⁰ RRRJ, 88.

³¹ “There is nothing deep down inside us except what we have put there ourselves,” CP, xl. On this basis Rorty rejects the prevalence of Putnam’s common sense realism both horizontally and vertically. He rejects that people outside of the confines of traditional philosophical problems have convictions either “realist” or “phenomenalist,” and asserts that “Such convictions are opinions on specialised, recondite topics.” As he states in his Response to RRRJ, 88: “What Putnam calls ‘preserving our commonsense realist convictions’ seems to me merely a matter of not letting the fact that non-ordinary descriptions are available prevent us from using ordinary purposes.”

³² In PSH Rorty is more circumspect, xxii: “[I]t would be better for pragmatists to say simply that the vocabulary in which the traditional problems of Western philosophy were formulated were useful at one time, but are no longer useful.”

to philosophy (and its new vocabulary) “anti-representationalism,” in contrast to the old vocabulary of philosophy that he calls “representationalism.” This terminology arises from Rorty’s fundamental claim that the chief error of traditional philosophy is that its vocabulary presupposed that our claims to “Truth” and our descriptions of “Reality” must, somehow, derive from language representing the world. For Rorty, therefore, Putnam’s philosophical “responsibility” to the commonsense of realism reflects not good philosophy but rather old philosophy: an enterprise which he thinks has “run its course.”³³

The conflict between Putnam’s persistent realism and Rorty’s alleged relativism, therefore, forms the nucleus of their twenty-five year debate. Ostensibly, at stake is the status of truth and warrant within a *post*-correspondence context. More fundamentally, however, as this thesis will go on to examine, at issue is the very possibility of philosophical practice that cannot itself appeal to being universal Truth, and the relationship that such an activity ought to have with the rest of culture *qua* “commonsense.” In this chapter, I address Putnam’s charge of relativism in order to orientate this debate within the general context of contemporary analytic philosophy. Section 1 demonstrates that Putnam’s charge of relativism is parasitic upon his archetype of contemporary philosophy – Metaphysical Realism. By contrast, section 2 argues that Rorty’s proposed “pragmatism” and “anti-representationalism” attempt to shift the grounds of debate away from this traditional philosophical framework. And, sections 3 and 4 elucidate how this new framework generates an “ethnocentric” account of truth and justification that consistently avoids regressing into the old framework of Realism and relativism. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is neither to vindicate Rorty nor reject Putnam outright, but rather to demonstrate that Rorty avoids the immediate charge of relativism formulated in the traditional vocabulary that he rejects. Any philosopher that hopes to meet Rorty on his own terms must shift the grounds of debate; and, as I will argue in Chapter II, this is what Putnam (to his almost *unique* credit) does.

§1 Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth

³³ See Paul D. Forster, “What Is at Stake Between Putnam and Rorty?” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 52 (1992) 585-603.

As an account of truth and warrant, relativism is traditionally formulated as the main alternative to Realism's "correspondence theory of truth." Arguments for forms of relativism are generally borne out of polemical arguments against traditional Realism, and arguments against traditional Realism are most often derided by Realists as "relativistic." Putnam and Rorty, however, frustrate this traditional characterisation of the philosophical landscape in that, on the one hand, both reject Realism's "correspondence theory of truth" but, on the other hand, strenuously deny being relativists. Both philosophers therefore, can be seen as arguing for two ways in which this position might be viable, but they also reject elements of each other's position as regressing back into the traditional Realist/Relativist dichotomy. The focus of this chapter is Putnam's persistent charge that Rorty is committed to a form of relativism that is, like all forms of relativism according to Putnam, inescapably "self-refuting." Before moving onto looking at this charge specifically, however, because the charge of relativism is formulated within a traditional philosophical framework it might be useful to briefly sketch how terms such as "Realism," "Relativism" and the "correspondence theory of truth" are being used within *this* debate.

"Realism," with a big "R," is generally used by both Putnam and Rorty to reflect the philosophical position which Putnam calls "Metaphysical Realism."³⁴ At heart, this position incorporates two main *metaphysical* theses about the world or "Reality." First that "there is—in a philosophically privileged sense of 'object'—a definite Totality of All Real Objects;" and secondly, that there is "a fact of the matter as to which properties of those objects are the intrinsic properties and which are, in some sense, perspectival."³⁵ According to Putnam, in

³⁴ Orientating Putnam and Rorty's debate between the two horns of Realism and Relativism is much more Putnam's way of picturing the philosophical terrain than Rorty's. Rorty prefers to establish the debate as between the vocabularies of representationalism and anti-representationalism. I will discuss this and the impact these different orientations have below. For the time being, however, it is useful to start with Putnam's orientation because it is the point of view from which *he* characterises and criticises Rorty, and it is vital to understanding these criticisms on his own terms. Rorty also, unlike Putnam, is a little more willing to accept the terms of Putnam's language (especially in explicitly co-opting Putnam's arguments against Metaphysical Realism for his own).

³⁵ "That nature of the machinery varies from metaphysician to metaphysician (from Plato's forms to Aristotle's substances, to Descartes vortices in a substantial space plus minds, to Hume's ideas, to modern materialists's points in a four-dimensional space-time plus sets; but what is common to all versions of this more metaphysical realism is the notion that there is—in a philosophically privileged sense of 'object'—a definite Totality of All Real Objects and a fact of

various forms, these two theses underlie metaphysics from Plato to the modern materialists. They characterise what Putnam calls the “metaphysical fantasy” of a “totality of ‘forms’ or ‘universals’ or ‘properties’ fixed once and for all.”³⁶ As Rorty emphasises, they also characterise the idea of a “mind-independent reality.”³⁷ Within the work of these metaphysicians, however, these *metaphysical* theses stand in complement with an *epistemological* thesis as two sides of the traditional Realist’s coin. This accompanying epistemological thesis, the “correspondence theory of truth,” is that true “philosophical” knowledge is knowledge of this metaphysical world, and thus that the truth of such beliefs or statements is a result of some sort of “correspondence” with this reality.³⁸ As Michael Devitt and Marian David have stated, strictly speaking Metaphysical Realism and the correspondence theory of truth are independent claims. In practice, however, for any Realist who wishes to claim that our beliefs can be about this mind-independent reality, Realism and correspondence are inextricably linked.³⁹

Drawing these metaphysical and epistemological theses together, the *metaphilosophical* task of the traditional philosopher, is to attain the appropriate perspective from which he can relate the one true nature of reality – in essence an absolute, or divine “view from Nowhere.”⁴⁰ Central to

the matter as to which properties of those objects are the intrinsic properties and which are, in some sense, perspectival.” “The Question of Realism,” WL, 303. See also SNS 466 – “The metaphysics of realism traditionally included the idea that there is a definite totality of all objects (in a sense of ‘object’ that was imagined to have been fixed, at least in philosophy, once and for all) and a definite totality of all ‘properties.’” SNS also addresses these two theses in turn as arguments *for* sense-data in SNS.

³⁶ SNS, 448.

³⁷ Putnam has come to aver discussing “mind independent” reality because it is “unintelligible” for reasons discussed in Chapter II. See, “Question of Realism,” in WL.

³⁸ As a semantic thesis, this means that every possible meaning of a word corresponds to one of the “forms” or “universals” or “properties,” above: SNS, 448.

³⁹ Gary Gutting has an excellent short discussion of Devitt and David’s point within “Rorty’s Critique of Epistemology,” in Charles Guignon and David R. Hiley, *Richard Rorty*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, 59.

⁴⁰ “[The] whole content of Realism lies in the claim that it makes sense of a God’s-Eye View (or, better, of a ‘View from Nowhere’)” Putnam, RHF, 23. See also, SNS 460. Note also the phrase “View from Nowhere in particular” is from Nagel’s. Putnam states in RAR, 109: “The important thing, it seems to me, is to find a picture that enables us to make sense of the phenomena from within our world and practice, rather than to seek a God’s-eye view.” See also, Conant in WL, xxiv. The important point to draw from this picture is that, within the traditional framework, “reality” as a metaphysical concept and “truth” as an epistemological concept are inter-defined –

this task is to outline the precise process of reasoning by which we might reach such knowledge by defining our methods of “rational justification” as given by “something like a list or canon.”⁴¹ This traditional conception of justification (or “warrant” as Putnam prefers to call it)⁴² seeks to explain how we might first understand or hold one set of basic premises to correspond to reality and then move to other true conclusions, which also correspond to reality. In this way, traditional Metaphysical Realism lends itself to traditional epistemological foundationalism.⁴³

The paramount task, implied by Epistemology and Metaphysics, of searching for a basic set of foundational premises has led within analytic philosophy to the hypostatisation of science as the paradigm of knowledge. Most Realists take science as the discipline which is most likely to exemplify the canons of justification, through the application of logic, and carve the World at its joints,⁴⁴ explaining how things *really* are. Insofar, as other areas of human “knowledge” – particularly moral and aesthetic – appear to resist the possibility of “commensuration,” which traditional epistemology demands, most contemporary “Scientific Realist” theories also rely on sharply dividing scientific discourse from these other “soft” disciplines. These other disciplines are also taken to reflect our contingent needs, beliefs and practices, which must be purged from

reality is conceived in a fashion capable of “true” objective description, and “true” objective description is characterised as corresponding to this reality. Putnam characterises this overall picture of traditional philosophy – its metaphysical, epistemological and metaphilosophical aspects – as “metaphysical realism.”

⁴¹ RTH, 105. For Rorty on the connection between epistemology and metaphysics, see PMN, 334-5.

⁴² See RHF, 21, with respect to Dewey’s distinction.

⁴³ See RTH and RHF. Within PMN, 315-7, Rorty gives a clear account of the centrality epistemological foundationalism and its presumption of commensurability, i.e. that all objects and rules of a given inquiry are “able to be brought under a set of rules which will tell us how rational agreement can be reached on what would settle the issue on every point where statements seem to conflict.” Epistemology, as opposed to hermeneutics, therefore assumes a *logos*, the discovery of a method of commensuration: PMN, 319-20. This critique of foundationalism is targeted at both rationalist and empiricist strands of philosophy.

⁴⁴ David Lewis, “Putnam’s Paradox” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 1983, 227-8: “Among all the countless things and classes that there are, most are miscellaneous, gerrymandered, ill-demarcated. Only an elite minority are carved at the joints, so that their boundaries are established by objective sameness and difference in nature. ... Physics discovers which things and classes are the most elite of all; but others are elite also, though to a lesser degree.”

the neutral and ahistorical scientific account of how things “actually are.”⁴⁵ In this way, the metaphilosophy of Metaphysical Realism has a double premise: it must not only establish the possibility of correspondence through science, but also explain the possibility of separating science from other discourses.⁴⁶

Metaphysical Realism – as a metaphysical, epistemological and metaphilosophical thesis – represents for both Putnam and Rorty the apotheosis of traditional analytic philosophy. As Ian Hacking wonders, however, it is uncertain whether any actual philosopher has held all these theses together at the one time.⁴⁷ Rather than characterise Metaphysical Realism as one end upon the “spectrum” of philosophical positions, as it is often pictured, I would present Metaphysical Realism as the constellation of many different positions that have defined themselves in a variety of congruent ways. As a result Metaphysical Realism does not contrast with one alternative but many positions on different issues, including anti-realism, idealism, pragmatism, and relativism. In turn, each of these alternatives to Metaphysical Realism contrast against or complement each

⁴⁵ See, Bernard Williams as a contemporary example, whose belief in a “God’s-Eye point of view” (Putnam’s term) is the hope to “represent the world in a way to the maximum degree independent of our perspective and its peculiarities.” Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1985, 138-9. See Rorty’s discussion in PAR at 2.

⁴⁶ Putnam and Rorty reject both these premises: the coherence of correspondence, and the possibility of separating science from our contingent practices as defined by other discourses. Rorty in PMN, 332-3: “To sum up the line I am taking up about Kuhn and his critics: the controversy between them is about whether science, as the discovery of what is really out there in the world, differs in its patterns of argumentation from discourses for which the notion of ‘correspondence to reality’ seems less apposite (eg. politics and literary criticism). Logical-empiricist philosophy of science, and the whole epistemological tradition since Descartes, has wanted to say that the procedure for attaining accurate representations in the Mirror of Nature differs in certain deep ways from the procedure for attaining agreement about ‘practical’ or ‘aesthetic’ matters.” As Rorty states in PAR at 2: “Anti-pragmatist writers such as Williams believe that ‘there is clearly such a thing as practical reasoning or deliberation, which is not the same as thinking about how things actually are. It is *obviously* not the same. ...’” Williams, *Ethics*, 135. See also Rorty, “Is Natural Science a Natural Kind?” in ORT 46.

⁴⁷ But as Barry Allen notes, many of Putnam’s contemporaries, including Richard Boyd, Michael Devitt, Hartry Field, Jerry Fodor, Saul Kripke, David Lewis, Thomas Nagel, John Searle and Bernard Williams are “amazingly close.” See, Barry Allen, “Critical Notice of Hilary Putnam: *Realism With a Human Face and Renewing Philosophy*” in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 24(4), 1994, 667.

other by what parts of the Realist picture they accept or reject.⁴⁸ Within the context of this thesis the traditional alternative of “relativism” is important because it is the part of this landscape that Putnam most often uses to define himself in opposition to Rorty. In order to evaluate this criticism, however, it is important to first orientate Rorty’s position on truth and warrant within the context of the other “alternative” terms that he uses to define himself against the traditional picture of philosophy: pragmatism and anti-representationalism.

§2 Pragmatism and Anti-representationalism

Rorty’s most general term of self-description is “pragmatist.” He does not usually associate “pragmatism” with a particular set of theses, but rather uses it as a family-resemblance term to group himself with other *analytic* philosophers who oppose the mainstream tradition of “epistemology-centred” philosophy.⁴⁹ For Rorty, the term “pragmatism” plays the dual role of crediting the classical American pragmatists James and Dewey as originators of this critique, and also of characterising the progress and development of this critique through philosophers such as Kuhn, Quine, Davidson, Wittgenstein, Sellars and Putnam.⁵⁰ This is not to say that any of these later philosophers would necessarily identify themselves as “pragmatists.” “Pragmatist” in this second sense really demarcates Rorty’s own teleology: retelling the contributions of these philosophers within a narrative that culminates in his own, self-proclaimed “pragmatist” position.

Insofar as Rorty does attempt to attribute a common position to these philosophers he terms them “anti-representationalists.”⁵¹ Just as “pragmatism” is defined in opposition to the epistemological tradition, “anti-representationalism” is the mutual rejection, by the pragmatists, of the “representationalist” vocabulary that Rorty thinks has underpinned traditional philosophy from

⁴⁸ It also means that philosophers, such as Putnam and Rorty who openly hope to reject traditional philosophy itself appear to invite all such “alternative” labels.

⁴⁹ PRI, 719.

⁵⁰ In “Introduction: Pragmatism and post-Nietzschean philosophy,” in EHO, 3, Rorty refers to Quine, Putnam and Davidson *qua* “linguistified pragmatists.”

⁵¹ I use the technical term that Rorty develops from PAR through to TP. In his latest, more populist work, PSH, Rorty uses the term “Anti-Platonist.” In elucidating the notion technically within the footnotes he still uses “anti-representationalist.”

Plato onwards. Its critique also provides the link between the pragmatists and other “anti-Platonists” within the *continental* tradition such as Heidegger, Sartre, Gadamer, Derrida and Foucault.⁵² Despite the evident centrality of anti-representationalism to Rorty’s views, however, it has not received much attention within the critical literature. Instead Rorty’s views on “pragmatism,” “ethnocentrism” and “solidarity” have been much more central to contemporary debate. A possible reason for this state of affairs is the ease with which these ideas have been construed as (negative) positions upon traditional philosophical issues: respectively upon epistemology, truth and warrant, and objectivity.⁵³

Rorty’s anti-representationalism, on the other hand, is more difficult to orientate. Putnam, at best, has addressed anti-representationalism as Rorty’s position upon the traditional analytic issue of intentionality *qua* the possibility of language “representing” the world.⁵⁴ This is to orientate Rorty with respect to “the Question of Realism” and the traditional debate between realists and their opponents. And indeed, Rorty has described anti-representationalism somewhat in these terms, as “the attempt to eschew discussion of realism by denying that the notion of ‘representation’ or that of ‘fact of the matter,’ has any useful role in philosophy.”⁵⁵ Such a characterisation lends Rorty’s anti-representationalism the image of being an *alternative* to Metaphysical Realism. As Rorty continues, however:

Representationalists typically think that controversies between idealists and realists were, and controversies between skeptics and antiskeptics are, fruitful and interesting. Antirepresentationalists typically think both sets of controversies pointless. They diagnose both as the results of being held captive by a picture, a picture from which we should by now have wriggled free.⁵⁶

⁵² PSH, xix.

⁵³ Even if this is not Rorty’s intention.

⁵⁴ Putnam, within “Question of Realism,” in WL.

⁵⁵ ORT, 2.

⁵⁶ ORT, 2-3. As Rorty elaborates within PSH, xxii, “Pragmatists hope to break with the picture which, in Wittgenstein’s words, ‘holds us captive’ – the Cartesian-Lockean picture of a mind seeking to get in touch with a reality outside of itself.” In describing Davidson’s anti-representationalism, PSH, fn 24, 43: “what is involved is not a positive thesis, but simply the abjuration of a particular picture which has held us captive – the picture I have called (in the

Anti-representationalism is not a position on the “Question of Realism,” rather it is a rejection of the vocabulary within which such traditional “questions” and “problems” are formulated. This vocabulary is the “representationalist” vocabulary sustained by traditional Platonic distinctions between appearance and reality, matter and mind, made and found, sensible and intellectual, etc.: what Dewey called “a brood and nest of dualisms.”⁵⁷ These distinctions sustain the problems about which realism and its alternatives equivocate, and Rorty argues that insofar as the vocabulary of these problems is contingent, so are its problems.⁵⁸ As a consequence, anti-representationalism is not best described as an alternative (among many) to Metaphysical Realism, but rather as an alternative to the vocabulary in which the traditional oppositions between Realism and, anti-realism, idealism and relativism make sense.

Rorty’s bold claim to leave all these traditional oppositions behind has generally invited other analytic philosophers to uncharitably re-define him back within these oppositions against his will.⁵⁹ The title of “relativist” has been the most important label to refix upon Rorty because its title would undermine any of Rorty’s attempts to argue for the rest of his philosophy. Rorty’s opponents have hoped that by undermining his account of truth and justification, they might cut short Rorty’s justificatory flight from the other traditional epithets, and hence the norms of traditional philosophical debate. As I argue below, however, Rorty’s account of truth and justification – “ethnocentrism” – does not so much as support the rest of his philosophy, but

introduction to my *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*) ‘representationalism,’ and which Michael Williams (whose work I discuss below) calls ‘epistemological realism.’”

⁵⁷ Dewey’s term cited by Rorty, in PSH, xii.

⁵⁸ “[T]he question of the nature of the problems which the Greeks, Descartes, Kant and Hegel have bequeathed to us, lead us back around to the distinction between finding and making. The philosophical tradition has insisted that these problems are *found*, in the sense that they are inevitably encountered by any reflective mind. The pragmatist tradition has insisted that they are *made* – are artificial rather than natural – and can be *unmade* by using a different vocabulary than that which the philosophical tradition has used. But such distinctions between the found and the made, the natural and the artificial are, as I have already said, not distinctions with which pragmatists are comfortable. So it would be better for pragmatists to say simply that the vocabulary in which the traditional problems of Western philosophy were formulated were useful at one time, but are no longer useful.” PSH, xxii.

⁵⁹ Critics consistently attempt to reframe Rorty as an “antirealist,” using a “pragmatist theory on truth,” as a “Kuhnian idealist,” or as a “post-modernist,” all of which Rorty has explicitly rejected.

rather stands in a relation of mutual interdependence. In short, if, as I claim, Rorty's ethnocentrism is consistent with the rest of his anti-representationalism, the emphasis of our debate must shift away from the issues of truth, justification and relativism, and onto areas where Rorty might create internal inconsistency – within his account of language and his explication of the term “vocabulary.” In this way, I attempt not to beg what Rorty has called the “central question,” i.e. “the utility of the vocabulary which we inherited from Plato and Aristotle,”⁶⁰ but rather to shift the exegetical emphasis on to the issues of what Rorty could even mean by this “vocabulary.”

§3 Ethnocentrism and Vocabularies

Ethnocentrism is Rorty's anti-representationalist response to the traditional pressure to provide a theory of truth and warrant.⁶¹ It is the claim that “there is nothing to be said about truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society – *ours* – uses in one or another area of inquiry.”⁶² As Paul Forster notes, it is easy to read “ours” as an endorsement of radical relativism.⁶³ This would be to interpret ethnocentrism as a positive theory about the meaning of truth and warrant as relative to (our) cultural norms of justification. As Rorty himself remarks, however, “a theory according to which truth is simply the contemporary opinion of a chosen individual or group ... would of course be self-refuting.”⁶⁴ Rorty's anti-representationalist, on the other hand, “does not have a theory of truth, much less a relativistic one.” Instead, the anti-representationalist is:

⁶⁰ PSH, xviii.

⁶¹ This distinguishes Rorty from previous anti-metaphysicians such as Quine, who sought to provide successor disciplines, and the logical positivists who simply narrowed the discipline.

⁶² Rorty, ORT, 23. See also CP, xl, “there is nothing deep down inside us except what we have put there ourselves.”

⁶³ Forster, “What Is at Stake Between Putnam and Rorty?” 588.

⁶⁴ PRM, 24.

[M]aking the purely *negative* point that we should drop the traditional distinction between knowledge and opinion, construed as the distinction between truth as correspondence to reality and truth as a commendatory term for well-justified beliefs.⁶⁵

This distinction between a negative position and a positive theory is at the heart of understanding how Rorty hopes to justify his own anti-representationalist vocabulary without appealing to the very traditional picture of truth and warrant that he is attacking.⁶⁶ In this section, I argue that Rorty's picture of language as a set of evolving vocabularies allows him to make the distinction between positive theses given within a vocabulary and a negative thesis proffered as the internal critique of an old vocabulary in favour of a new one. In this way, Rorty can distinguish his negative ethnocentric position from the positive relativist thesis.

Rorty's account of truth and warrant relies upon a picture of language that is largely inspired by three sources: Thomas Kuhn's discussion of scientific rationality, Wittgenstein's account of "language-game," and the internal thread of the analytic tradition running from Quine and Sellars through to Davidson.⁶⁷ Within *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty proposes the distinction between "normal" and "abnormal" discourse as a generalisation of Kuhn's distinction between "normal" and "revolutionary" science. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* characterises "normal" science by the possibility of commensuration.⁶⁸ It is the practice of solving problems within an agreed-upon "paradigm" or "disciplinary matrix," where this is understood to include a framework of justificatory conventions established by the relevant

⁶⁵ ORT, 23-4. As such, Rorty claims, the realist critic should not interpret ethnocentrism as simply "one more positive theory about the nature of truth," which would be self-refuting. Rather ethnocentrism does not offer a theory of truth, much less a relativistic one.

⁶⁶ For Rorty anti-representationalism is a "purely negative position," PSH 43.

⁶⁷ This chapter downplays the influence of the classical pragmatists on Rorty's account of truth and justification because the issue at hand is the relationship that Rorty sees between truth, justification and *language*. i.e. *post*-linguistic turn. Further, it is part of Rorty's own revisionist pragmatism that he should re-read the classical pragmatists with the benefits of the linguistic turn.

⁶⁸ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of the Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd enlarged ed., University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970. The influence of Kuhn upon his work is explicit within PMN, discussed within "Is Natural Science a Natural Kind" within McMullin, *Construction and Constraint*, and, although references to Kuhn have dropped out of his work, are re-affirmed in "Thomas Kuhn, Rocks and the Laws of Physics" within PSH.

community.⁶⁹ Rorty extends this conception of “normal” science to all forms of discourse, and within his later works comes to use the term “vocabulary” or “language-game” to describe the agreed upon justificatory frameworks used within various areas of culture, ranging from poetry to morality, religion to pop culture.⁷⁰ This expansion of Kuhn’s concept draws upon Wittgenstein’s likening of language to a set of games rather than a process of representation. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein seeks to wrest us free from the representationalist picture of language, by presenting the multiplicity and irreducibility of “language-games.”⁷¹ Most importantly, for Rorty, Wittgenstein treats our use of alternative “language-games” or “vocabularies” (Rorty’s term) like the use of alternative tools, manipulated for our own aims and purposes.⁷²

Utilising the picture of language as a multiplicity of different “normal discourses,” “language-games” or “vocabularies,” the anti-representationalist can quite easily give a sociological account of truth and warrant by recounting the conventions of truth and warrant within each discourse. For example, true statements within mathematics might be given by a small number of axioms; the truth of physical hypotheses might be given by a select number of fundamental principles; and, theological commitments might be derived from sets of canonical beliefs. Each vocabulary has its own rules of commensuration which provide an account of truth and warrant within its operation.⁷³ Such an account of truth and warrant does not require any theory about the notions

⁶⁹ Within Kuhn’s description of a “normal science” such conventions include: “standardised and widely accepted texts and formulations; a tacitly agreed-upon sense of what is real; agreement about what questions are worth asking, what answers make sense, and what criteria of assessment are to be used; and a background of shared practices and skills that have become second nature for a particular group.” Charles Guignon and David R. Hiley, “Introduction: Richard Rorty and Contemporary Philosophy,” in Guignon, *Richard Rorty*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, 14-5. See fn 9.

⁷⁰ See, “The contingency of language,” in CIS, 3-22.

⁷¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. by G. E. M. Anscombe, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, 2001, §7: “I shall also call the whole, consistency of language and the actions into which it is woven, a ‘language-game’” See also, §23.

⁷² Rorty, CIS, 11-13. See Rorty, EHO, 3: Wittgenstein’s idea of “Sentences and tools” also separates the “pragmatism” of the post-Nietzschean philosophers and himself.

⁷³ By “commensurable,” Rorty means that all statements within a given linguistic framework can be subsumed under rules which would tell us how to reach rational agreement upon every point where such statements appear to conflict. The possibility of commensuration does not dictate that everyone must ultimately agree, but rather that everyone would apply the same rationality in

themselves, but simply their use within a given context. Following Quine and Davidson's application of Tarski, this is a purely sociological exercise, the arena of the "field linguist."⁷⁴ Contemporary "minimalist" theories of truth such as Davidson's hold that this is all there is to say about truth. As Davidson states, "A theory of truth is an empirical theory about the truth conditions of every sentence in some corpus of sentences."⁷⁵ As a consequence the philosopher's job is done when they have explained how to detect a certain pattern of behaviour, i.e. the pattern of behaviour exhibited in the truth theory for a certain language.⁷⁶

The sociological account of truth and warrant within "normal" discourse appears to be incomplete, however, because it does not explain the change and reform of vocabularies themselves. Within *Structures*, Kuhn describes the introduction of a new "paradigm" of scientific explanation as "revolutionary science."⁷⁷ In contrast to the stability of normal science, revolutionary science proposes a new set of justificatory conventions upon which most people do not agree. Generalised beyond science by Rorty as "abnormal" discourse, such discourse proposes not a new set of results within the old vocabulary, but rather a new vocabulary. This picture prompts two inter-related questions: on what basis do we choose between vocabularies and which vocabulary, if any, is true?

order to reach agreement. Epistemology, therefore, can be conceived as the discipline by which we attempt to define these rules of universal commensuration – to delimit the very structures of our "universal" rationality. See PMN 316 and PSH, xvi.

⁷⁴ Davidson, Quine, Rorty and Brandom all follow Tarski in their own ways. Tarski's work is of course to do with truth. When I talk about a sociological account of justification I mean simply a complementary account of sentences taken to be justified, and the patterns of inference they appear to make with other sentences taken to be justified. The tension between Rorty's attempts to give a sociological account of truth and justification and Davidson's attempts derive from a shift in Rorty position. As Rorty states within his "Response" to Brandom in *Rorty and his Critics*, 184: "Brandom says that I 'strenuously resist the possibility of decoupling truth from practices of justification'. I used to resist this, until Davidson showed me how to render the decoupling harmless by making 'true' unanalysable." Putnam explicitly criticises the disquotational approach in "Does the Disquotational Theory Solve All Problems?" in WL, 264-278.

⁷⁵ Rorty's citation of Davidson within TP, 23-24. See also Donald Davidson, *Truth and Predication*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, 2005, 49. See also Rorty in "Response" to Brandom in Brandom, *Rorty and his Critics*, where he states that now accepts that we can have a theory of truth, contrary to his previous positions: 184.

⁷⁶ Rorty on Davidson, TP, 24.

⁷⁷ PMN, 320.

Casting this picture of language within the traditional framework of Philosophy, these questions shape a second aspect to an account of truth and warrant. This is the task, usually given to epistemology, of delimiting the bases upon which we might decide *between* vocabularies.⁷⁸ This includes both the decision to adopt changes vertically within disciplines (eg. the move from Aristotelian to Newtonian to Einsteinian physics), and the decision made horizontally to prioritise the vocabulary of one discipline (eg. science) over another (eg. theology). These vocabularies, in turn, create the relevant sociological truth conditions above. Within traditional Philosophy, epistemology hopes to achieve this aim by delimiting the very structures of our “universal” rationality.⁷⁹ On this basis, epistemology not only allows us to *choose* between vocabularies, but also hopes to explain *why* they are true or justified by providing a *theory* of truth and warrant: i.e. statements are true *in virtue* of their Correspondence to Reality, or justified because of their compliance to the Canons of Justification. Metaphysical Realism is the most prominent contemporary attempt to achieve this aim, and it takes the development of the sciences as its paradigm of rationality.

Within *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty rejects this project of epistemology.⁸⁰ Rorty generalises the argument that Kuhn makes against the possibility of providing such a neutral justificatory framework for theory change within the sciences. Kuhn’s “incommensurability thesis” claims that we cannot provide the neutral vocabulary necessary to facilitate commensuration between paradigms such as those of Aristotle and Newton. As a consequence, it is impossible to assess two such vocabularies against one another utilising the norms of truth and

⁷⁸ Traditional epistemologists would not necessarily adopt Kuhn and Wittgenstein’s picture of language, however, this second aspect still characterises their primary account of the norms.

⁷⁹ PSH, xvi. Epistemology is the hope of uncovering “permanent neutral frameworks,” PMN 315. As Rorty states, “the dominating notion of epistemology is that to be rational, to be fully human, to do what we ought, we need to be able to find agreement with other human beings,” PMN 316.

⁸⁰ Rorty’s target is not simply the Metaphysical Realist but the whole tradition of “epistemology-centred” philosophy that he identifies as going back to Descartes. Within his later work, Rorty stresses that the fundamental representationalist belief in the reality-appearance distinction, which lies behind epistemology, goes back to the Greeks, and forms the framework of Descartes’ thought: PSH, xvi, xx.

warrant.⁸¹ By questioning commensuration between *scientific* vocabularies, Kuhn strikes at the very heart of the Metaphysical Realist's paradigm of rationality. Rorty expands this critique to the rest of culture, rejecting epistemology and its language of metaphysics as an attempt to provide such a neutral vocabulary. He also draws upon the work of Quine, Gadamer and Davidson, in order to both buttress and repair elements of Kuhn's argument with respect to possible idealist and relativistic consequences.⁸²

Without universal commensuration between vocabularies, Kuhn and Rorty reject the possibility of a neutral standpoint from which we might evaluate reform (as the changing of vocabularies). As a consequence, Rorty's objective is not to offer an alternative account of inter-vocabulary rationality but rather to show how we might do without any such account at all. Although we might render our reforms "rational" by Whiggish descriptions of our changes from the standpoint of a particular vocabulary,⁸³ he describes this reform itself in terms of two inter-related metaphors. On the one hand, following Wittgenstein vocabularies are not theses to be evaluated,

⁸¹ Rorty did seek to distance himself from Kuhn's idealism. Kuhn thought there was no way of giving a mutually acceptable description, Rorty doesn't necessarily hold this, only that justificatory practices would be incommensurable. See Gary Gutting, "Rorty's Critique of Epistemology," in Guignon, *Richard Rorty*, 47-8.

⁸² With respect to idealism, see PMN, 324-5, and with respect to relativism, Donald Davidson "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 17, 1973-4, 5-20, reprinted in the collection of Davidson's essays, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984. Rorty also refers to Davidson in defence of Kuhn, ORT 24-5. Rorty also hopes to demonstrate the value of utilising analytic philosophy to "retrofit" classical pragmatism. See, CSE, 42: "The idea that brilliant innovators reshape the object rather than merely predicating different attributes of it is a theme common to Dewey and Kuhn, but the problem for both has been to put this idea in a non-idealistic way, one which admits that the objects are there before the minds come along, and remain what they were while being known."

⁸³ Rorty initially thought we could study this process in "hermeneutics": "[H]ermeneutics is the study of an abnormal discourse from the point of view of some normal discourse—the attempt to make some sense of what is going on at a stage where we are still too unsure about it to describe it, and thereby to begin an epistemological account of it. The fact that hermeneutics inevitably takes some norm for granted makes it, so far forth, 'Whiggish.' But insofar as it proceeds nonreductively and in the hope of picking up a new angle on things, it can transcend its own Whiggishness," PMN 320-1. Hermeneutics has dropped out of Rorty's works by the mid-eighties, however. For example in ORT, 27 he simply states: "To say *we* think we're heading in the right direction is just to say, with Kuhn, that we can, by hindsight, tell the story of the past as a story of progress."

but *tools* to be used for specific purposes.⁸⁴ On the other hand, our purposes and tools do not stay constant, but develop parasitically in a way best described as evolutionary in character:

[I]n the process of playing vocabularies and cultures off each other, we produce new and better ways of talking and acting—not better by reference to a previously known standard, but just better in the sense of that they come to *seem* clearly better than their predecessors.⁸⁵

§4 Positive Relativism and Negative Ethnocentrism

Within the Kuhnian-Wittgensteinian framework, to adopt Rorty's terminology, a *positive* thesis is a position within a given vocabulary. It uses the distinctions and justificatory conventions bequeathed by the vocabulary to put forward a theory. Such a theory might claim to be warranted or true given the vocabulary, and competing positive theses proffered within the same vocabulary can be evaluated against one another on the basis of being commensurate. A *negative* thesis challenges a particular vocabulary in favour of a new one. We might delineate two aspects to such a challenge. First, a negative thesis demonstrates problems internally within an old vocabulary in hope of making such a vocabulary unattractive through features such as self-contradiction, absurdity or uselessness.⁸⁶ Secondly, a negative thesis offers a new vocabulary which proffers itself on its own new terms, and may Whiggishly explain away the problems of the old vocabulary by its own standards. The picture of vocabulary change offered by a negative thesis, therefore, purposely bucks against the claim of being "rational" in a traditional sense – the sense in which rationality demands commensuration between competing theories. As Rorty states, however:

We pragmatists reply [to the Platonic critic] that if that were what rationality was, then no doubt we are, indeed irrationalists. But of course we go on to add that being irrationalist

⁸⁴ See Robert Brandom on this point, "Vocabularies of Pragmatism," within Brandom, *Rorty and his Critics*, 159.

⁸⁵ CP, xxxvii.

⁸⁶ Skepticism, for example, might be seen as a method of drawing Cartesian epistemological foundationalism into absurdity.

in *that* sense is not to be incapable of argument. We irrationalists do not foam at the mouth and behave like animals. We simply refuse to talk in a certain way, the Platonic way. The views we hope to persuade people to accept cannot be stated in Platonic terminology. So our efforts at persuasion must take the form of gradual inculcation of new ways of speaking, rather than straightforward argument within old ways of speaking.⁸⁷

In this way a negative thesis does not aim to argue that a new vocabulary is true, but rather that it is a more useful way of *speaking*, a more useful *tool*. This distinction between positive and negative theses can be applied to relativism and ethnocentrism, divorcing the latter from the former's self-refuting status. Relativism is a positive thesis about truth and warrant within the vocabulary of traditional epistemology.⁸⁸ It distinguishes itself from the positive Metaphysical Realist position by claiming: first, that the Realist search for universal and set forms of justification is frustrated by the fact that our reasons are relative to our own "conceptual schemes" which can vary either between individuals or communities; and secondly, that truth is also relative and thus cannot amount to "correspondence" to a single "mind-independent" reality.⁸⁹ Truth (and warrant), therefore, can only be identified *relative* to someone or something. For example, the statement "'Snow is white' is true" is equivalent to "'Snow is white' is true-for-X," where X is the relevant person (or community) holding the belief.

⁸⁷ PSH, xix.

⁸⁸ Basic relativism, as Putnam and Rorty both agree, can be defined as "the view that every belief is as good as every other." (ORT, 23; PRI 727.) They also agree that this position is self-refuting, for it appears to be "obviously" contradictory to simultaneously both hold a point of view and hold that *no* point of view is better or worse than any other. See, RTH, 119: "That (total) relativism is inconsistent is a truism among philosophers. After all, is it not *obviously* contradictory to *hold* a point of view while at the same time holding that *no* point of view is more justified or right than any other?" Joseph Margolis, however, claims to be rebutting this point in *Reinventing Pragmatism*. More sophisticated versions of relativism, however, are generally presented as accounts of the meaning of the norms which we typically use to hold that some views are better or worse than others. As Putnam notes in EWO 121, relativists do not necessarily have to be relativists about both "truth" or "justification," nor be relativists and truth and justification in all areas of discourse. Bernard Williams is a good example according to Putnam with his strong distinction between science and ethics.

⁸⁹ The idea of conceptual schemes is of course common also to Realist doctrines, it is the idea of differing schemes which is central to relativism.

Relativism may offer a positive alternative to Realism, but it fails because it utilises the same representationalist vocabulary. This is the traditional epistemological vocabulary of big “P” Philosophy, which attempts to explain the Reality of things (universally) “as they are.” This vocabulary provides Relativism with the standpoint from which it may claim that all true beliefs are relative.⁹⁰ However, as Putnam states within *Reason, Truth and History*, and as Rorty concurs, it is left vulnerable to the self-referential arguments of the kind Socrates made long ago against Protagoras.⁹¹ Just as Relativism and Realism are formulated within the traditional representationalist vocabulary, however, so are these self-referential arguments. It is Rorty’s claim, therefore, that in rejecting this vocabulary he avoids not only Relativism and Realism, but also such self-referential arguments:

In short, my strategy for escaping the self-referential difficulties into which “the Relativist” keeps getting himself is to move everything over from epistemology and metaphysics to cultural politics, from claims to knowledge and appeals to self-evidence to suggestions about what we should try.⁹²

Ethnocentrism as a *negative* thesis utilises the internal critique of Kuhn, Wittgenstein, and Davidson to criticise representationalism from within showing its unattractive inconsistencies and contradictions,⁹³ and puts forward anti-representationalism from without to both Whiggishly explain the problems of representationalism and to present itself as an alternative on its *own* terms: as more useful, rather than true. The possibility of (and Rorty’s reliance upon) such a sharp division between vocabularies is the subject of the next two chapters. This chapter,

⁹⁰ In as much as relativism utilises this same “God’s Eye point of view” as the realist, “Relativism, just as much as Realism, assumes that one can stand within one’s language and outside it at the same time,” RHF 23. Cited with approval by Rorty, “I entirely agree with, and fervently applaud, his [Putnam’s] relativist-bashing remark.... But I do not see how this remark is relevant to my own, explicitly ethnocentric position,” PRM, 450.

⁹¹ RTH 120-1, and PRI, 728.

⁹² PRM, 457.

⁹³ “Dewey’s Metaphysics” in CP, 76: “Dewey’s inquiry into ‘the genuine conflicts which lay at the bottom of fruitless verbal disputes’ had the vices of its virtues: it distracted attention from the way in which, *in their own terms*, the Cartesian-Humean-Kantian assumptions were self-refuting. The positivists and later the ‘Oxford philosophers’ brought these internal contradictions to much sharper focus than had Dewey and his followers, just because their vision was so much narrower.”

however, has demonstrated that it is Rorty's talk of "vocabularies" that means he has neither the obligation to share his opponents' traditional theories of truth and justification, nor any onus to give an alternative positive theory about them. Indeed, Rorty's critics may still claim that Rorty is a relativist but only on the basis that one cannot have no positive theory of truth. Since Rorty rejects this very claim, I propose that we must shift the emphasis of debate onto the broader anti-representationalist framework in which he thinks this possible. This is exactly what Putnam has attempted to do within his later works in contrast with the majority of Rorty's other opponents.

Chapter II: Commonsense, Philosophy and Life

Introduction

Hume confessed that he left his scepticism about the material world behind as soon as he left his study; and I observe that no matter how sceptical or how relativistic philosophers may be in their conversation, they leave their scepticism or their relativism behind the minute they engage in serious discussion about almost any subject other than philosophy.

—Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*⁹⁴

Putnam only came to term his position “commonsense realism” in the mid-nineties, but the principle of commonsense has been ever present within his philosophy since his scientific Realist days.⁹⁵ As Putnam states in *Renewing Philosophy*, the fundamental reason why he sticks to the idea that there are right and wrong judgments is not a metaphysical one, but rather “that that is the way that we—and I include myself in this ‘we’—talk and think and also the way that we are going to go on talking and thinking.”⁹⁶ This appeal to our commonsense everyday practices has been interpreted by many critics as a return to bald intuitionism. Rorty in particular has criticised Putnam’s appeal to the Ordinary as an attempt to reinstate something ahistorical. This would be something beyond the contingency of our vocabularies to which we might attribute a “deep,” “universal” or “fundamentally human” character.⁹⁷ Indeed in the hands of other intuitive realists, such as Thomas Nagel, commonsense does play this role.⁹⁸ In this chapter, however, I argue that “commonsense realism,” is for Putnam the paramount expression of the lessons that he has learnt from Wittgenstein and the pragmatists. It is to understand philosophy as a practice within the

⁹⁴ Hilary Putnam, “Wittgenstein on Religious Belief” in RP, 135.

⁹⁵ Putnam often describes the motivation behind Scientific Realism as the desire to buttress commonsense against the sceptic, see MFR, 3-4.

⁹⁶ RP, 135. Putnam’s argument is not that we ought to have a substantial account of truth because it is true (i.e. a metaphysical justification) but rather because it is inherent within our way of life. To use phraseology that will gain currency throughout this chapter, our life would be “unintelligible” without it.

⁹⁷ RRRJ, 88-90, and CP, xxix.

⁹⁸ CP, xxiii.

broader context of our own lives, and to insist that what has “weight in [those] lives should also have weight in philosophy.”⁹⁹ In Rorty’s own terms, it is to deny his basic proposal of a clear distinction between the vocabularies of ordinary life, and the vocabulary of philosophy.

Putnam’s commonsense realism rejects the Humean division between the philosophical world within the study, where scepticism and relativism might seem possible, and the ordinary world of robust practice, beliefs and commitments outside. At first glance, such a position might appear vulnerable to the very misgivings upon which Hume originally rejected the value of commonsense: our commonsense “knowledge” has little claim to being necessarily right, true or even useful. Time and again, supposed “commonsense” accounts of the universe, morality, science *et al.*, have been proved wrong. Such an interpretation of Putnam’s position, however, incorrectly reorientates his commonsense realism within the framework of traditional epistemology playing the role of a foundation for our system of valid beliefs. Instead, Putnam’s commonsense realism is a way of holding philosophy *accountable*, not through epistemic authority, but rather through practical relevance. If we construe Putnam’s account of belief in pragmatic terms, not as the claim of correspondence to reality, but rather as a set of practical commitments, then commonsense realism is the claim that we ought not to be satisfied with philosophical beliefs within the study that we cannot viably hold outside it.¹⁰⁰ Unlike Rorty’s other opponents, therefore, Putnam does not utilise old representationalist norms in order to evaluate his position. Rather, Putnam proposes the norm that he takes to be the true inheritance of the classical pragmatists – practice.

⁹⁹ SNS, 517: “No matter which of these causes is responsible for any given case of the tendency – and usually they operate in tandem – the surest symptom of their presence is an inability to see that giving up on the funny metaphysical somethings does not require us to give up on concepts that, whatever our philosophical convictions, we employ and must employ when we live our lives. Until now, I have not mentioned the word ‘pragmatism’ in these Dewey lectures. But if there was one great insight in pragmatism, it was the insistence that what has weight in our lives should also have weight in philosophy.”

¹⁰⁰ See James Conant’s discussion of Putnam’s return to a “philosophical naivete” in “Introduction” to WL, xiv: “Putnam is here describing a philosophical move which he finds in Wittgenstein and which he himself wishes to emulate. It is, he says, a move which seeks to head off our tendency, when philosophising, to repudiate our ordinary ways of talking and thinking (‘we can’t actually *see* physical objects, all we really see are appearances’), and to restore our conviction in such ways of thinking and talking.”

This chapter orientates Putnam's commonsense realism in relation to Rorty's anti-representationalism. I argue that although both Putnam and Rorty attest to rejecting Metaphysical Realism and Relativism upon the common assumption of a "God's-eye point of view," their critiques are not congruent. Insofar as Rorty's argument is the rejection of the vocabulary of representationalism, Putnam's understanding of "vocabulary," and hence "representation," derives from his orientation with respect to the "Question of Realism." In this Putnam and Rorty draw different morals from the Wittgensteinian picture of language. Drawing upon the recent work of Cora Diamond, Putnam claims that Wittgenstein avers the Rortian "anti-realist" picture of language games. This is to interpret Rorty's account of normal discourse as a set of algorithms where language is reduced to mere "marks and noises" developed for the sole purpose of allowing us to cope. Within this chapter, I argue that this is Putnam's strongest argument against Rorty, and runs from his very first exchange within *Reason, Truth and History* until *Ethics without Ontology*. In contrast to Putnam himself, however, I do not claim that Rorty should be charged exactly with traditional "relativism" but rather a kind of "methodological solipsism."¹⁰¹ In this way, Putnam (at his best) does not rely upon the traditional metaphysical riposte to relativism, but rather on the claim that Rorty's views about language, truth and warrant are inconsistent with the ways we can lead our lives.

Section 1 outlines Rorty's interpretation of Putnam. In particular, I emphasise Rorty's use of Putnam's notion of a "God's-Eye Point of View" and adaptation of Putnam's arguments to support his anti-representationalist position. Section 2 explains Putnam's reinterpretation of his own arguments as arguments for the "unintelligibility" of metaphysical realism. Section 3 explains Putnam's "solipsistic" criticism of Rorty's anti-representationalism through his *misappropriation* of Putnam's own arguments. In Section 4, I flag Rorty's response to this criticism in order to bring out the current stalemate within Rorty and Putnam's debate. This

¹⁰¹ See Putnam's use of these terms across his works: in RTH, 103-126, Putnam describes methodological solipsism as a form of relativism. Putnam's use of the term "relativism" is almost as broad as Rorty's use of "pragmatism." If we construe relativism sharply, as I think Rorty successfully does, then he avoids the charge. Methodological solipsism is a different matter and should be construed as such. Putnam, however, construes methodological solipsism as an outcome of relativism. My approach in this chapter demonstrates how we might bring the charge of methodological solipsism upon Rorty directly, and thus without needing to pin him down to a "theory" of truth.

stalemate reflects a deeper distinction between the two philosophers, which I argue hinges upon the very relationship between philosophy and the rest of life: the subject of Chapter III.

§1 The Vocabulary of God's Eye: Rorty's interpretation of Putnam

“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.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*¹⁰²

Putnam and Rorty's most common *mutual* criticism of traditional philosophy is its presumption of a “God's-Eye Point of View.”¹⁰³ According to both philosophers this presumption underlies

¹⁰² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1966, 71-2. Cited by Putnam in “Wittgenstein on Religious Belief” within RP, 134-157; and, referred to within “Does the Disquotational Theory of Truth Solve All Philosophical Problems?” in WL, 277.

¹⁰³ The use of “God's Eye Point of View” to describe the presumption behind both Metaphysical Realism and Relativism is originally Putnam's formulated within the context of model-theoretic arguments, see RHF, 27. See also, “Quantum mechanics and the observer,” in RR, 268-270; RAR, 109; and SNS, 460. It has been picked up by Rorty as a means of identifying himself with Putnam's “internal realism” and proclaiming him to be a latter day pragmatist: see PAR, 2 and

both Metaphysical Realism *and* Relativism. The term “God’s-Eye Point of View” was coined by Putnam and has been co-opted by Rorty as a means both of identifying himself closely with “internal realism” and proclaiming Putnam to be a fellow latter day pragmatist.¹⁰⁴ Within Rorty’s hands, the rejection of the God’s-Eye Point of View is the claim that it is an *unintelligible* notion within traditional philosophy’s own representationalist “vocabulary.” His negative arguments, internally critiquing traditional philosophy from within, demonstrate that it has both failed to make sense of “standing back” from language and comparing it to the world from some “non-linguistic” God’s Eye-Point of View; and also consequently, that it is *impossible* to find any one language (as universal commensuration under one set of justificatory conventions) which might act as “nature’s own” (and hence instantiate a “appearance-reality” distinction).¹⁰⁵

As James Conant argues within his “Introduction” to Putnam’s opus *Words and Life*, the sense which Rorty often draws out of this position is one of incapability. The internal rejection of the God’s Eye Point of View as “unintelligible” entails an *impossibility* claim, a claim that we *cannot do* something.¹⁰⁶ This is an interpretation which is fostered by Putnam’s earlier internal realist formulations. Indeed, as Rorty cites Putnam on several points with which he “wholeheartedly agrees”:

- (1) Like Relativism, but in a different way, Realism is an *impossible attempt* to view the world from Nowhere.¹⁰⁷
- (2) [We should] accept the position we are fated to occupy in any case, the position of beings who *cannot have a view of the world* that does not reflect our interests and

ORT, 6, 24. Putnam has replied that Rorty, *qua* relativist is really seeking to say “that *from a God’s-Eye View there is not God’s-Eye View*,” RHF, 25.

¹⁰⁴ PAR, 2. Here Rorty interprets Putnam’s “God’s Eye Point of View” as an account of Dewey’s rejection of the appearance-reality distinction.

¹⁰⁵ Rorty’s adoption of Kuhn’s incommensurability thesis in PMN, 315-356.

¹⁰⁶ Conant’s “Introduction,” in WL, xxiv-xxxiii.

¹⁰⁷ RHF, 28. Cited by Rorty at PRM, 443; in turn cited by Conant with Conant’s emphasis, WL xxv.

values, but who are, for all that committed to regarding some views of the world—and, for that matter, some interests and values—as better than others.¹⁰⁸

Within the last chapter, I argued that Rorty's rejection of the "God's Eye Point of View," construed as anti-representationalism, was the rejection not of a positive position but rather the very vocabulary of traditional philosophy. As a consequence I claimed that Rorty's ethnocentrism averted the more commonplace charges levelled against Relativism, but in doing so relied upon the picture of language and rationality adapted from Kuhn and Wittgenstein. I also flagged Rorty's use of arguments from Davidson, Quine and Gadamer to buttress this picture. Additionally, throughout his works Rorty has adapted many of Putnam's own arguments to support this picture of language and its rejection of the God's-Eye Point of View. As Putnam himself notes, Rorty has adapted his "model-theoretic" and "conceptual relativity" arguments "as strong support for his view that the whole idea of 'representing' a reality external to language has collapsed."¹⁰⁹

Although Rorty has used Putnam's arguments in an attempt to demonstrate the "impossibility" of representationalism because of the unintelligibility of the God's Eye Point of View, in his later works (moving from his internal to commonsense realist position) Putnam has now gone out of his way to renounce this interpretation of his own arguments. As with many of Putnam's changes he may still agree with his own words, but he would say them "in rather a different spirit now."¹¹⁰ For Putnam, his arguments that demonstrate the unintelligibility of the God's-Eye Point of View cannot entail the "impossibility" of anything, including the impossibility of representation.¹¹¹ And insofar as Rorty's entire anti-representationalist argument (Putnam

¹⁰⁸ RHF, 178. Cited by Rorty at PRM, 443; in turn cited by Conant with Conant's emphasis, WL xxv.

¹⁰⁹ WL, 302. See, WL 302-306 for Putnam's discussion of "Rorty's Putnam and My Putnam" with respect to his three main arguments against Metaphysical Realism (i.e. including the now debunked "functionalism."

¹¹⁰ SNS, 457.

¹¹¹ WL, 299: "But if we agree that it is *unintelligible* to say, 'We sometimes succeed in comparing our language and thought with reality as it is in itself,' then we should realise that it is also unintelligible to say, 'It is *impossible* to stand outside and compare our thought and language with the world.'"

claims) rests upon this latter interpretation, it partakes in the same unintelligibility as Metaphysical Realism in the first place.¹¹²

§2 Putnam's Interpretation of Putnam

It is my view that reviving and revitalizing the realistic spirit is the important task for a philosopher at this time.

—Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*¹¹³

Putnam's distinction between "unintelligibility" and "impossibility" is a product of two distinct philosophical threads. On the one hand, the structure of the relationship that he sees between "unintelligibility" and "impossibility" is one that traces its way from Kant, through Frege to the early Wittgenstein. On the other hand, the interpretation that he gives to unintelligibility's "lack of sense" draws from his more recent association with Stanley Cavell, James Conant and Cora Diamond, and his re-reading of the later Wittgenstein.¹¹⁴

According to Putnam, "unintelligibility" denotes that a statement is empty of sense, or *sinnlos* (which is not equivalent to "nonsense").¹¹⁵ In the same vein in which the early Wittgenstein claimed that logical truths are *sinnlos*, unintelligible statements lack sense in breaching their very conditions of meaning. "Impossibility," however, relies upon a sentence making sense in order to negate its possibility. As a consequence, an "unintelligible" sentence cannot entail either "possibility" or "impossibility."¹¹⁶ For example, in discussing Quine's "revisability" thesis, Putnam argues that the claim that the theorems of classical logic are "revisable" lacks sense.¹¹⁷ Consequently, the statement that they are "unrevisable" is also unintelligible, in that it relies

¹¹² WL, 300.

¹¹³ "A Defense of Internal Realism," in RHF, 42.

¹¹⁴ WL, 299; and, SNS, 488-517.

¹¹⁵ WL, 246. See, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, Routledge, London, 2004, 4.46- 4.4611, 4.1271-4.1274, 5.473-5.4733, 5.5351-5422, 6.124-, 6.53-7.

¹¹⁶ For Putnam "statements of which we cannot (currently) conceive the possibility, are for us, now, unintelligible": "Rethinking Mathematical Necessity" in WL, 246-248 and 254-256.

¹¹⁷ i.e. Is a possibility of which we cannot currently conceive

upon its (unintelligible) negation in order to make sense.¹¹⁸ It is in this way, that Putnam seeks to understand the later Wittgenstein's claim that the rejection of pseudo-proposition is a pseudo-proposition.¹¹⁹

Whilst the relationship Putnam describes between “unintelligibility” and “impossibility” is akin to arguments given by Kant, Frege and the early Wittgenstein, the way in which Putnam today understands “lack of sense” is very different. Unlike the earlier philosophers' interpretation of “unintelligibility” as the breaching of some form of transcendental “preconditions of thought,” Putnam attempts to detranscendentalise this story within his later works. According to Putnam, we must replace the “metaphysical spirit” driving such traditional philosophical arguments, with “the realistic spirit” bequeathed to us by the later Wittgenstein.¹²⁰ This sense – in which being “realistic” is opposed to being “metaphysical” – is a call for philosophy to prioritise looking at “what we actually think and do” instead of attempting to lay down “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.”¹²¹

Unintelligible positions, therefore, draw us into inconsistent commitments. *Pace* the metaphysicians, however, such positions are not inconsistent with some set of transcendental preconditions or requirements, but rather with the way we actually lead our lives, or as

¹¹⁸ See, “Rethinking Mathematical Necessity” in WL, 255-256: “My suggestion is not ... that we retain ... [the] idea of a nature of thought (or judgment, or the ideal language) which metaphysically guarantees the unrevisability of logic. But what I *am* inclined to keep from this story is the idea that logical truths do not have negations that we (presently) understand. It is not, on this less metaphysically inflated story, that we can say that theorems of logic are ‘unrevisable’; it is that the question ‘Are they revisable?’ is one which we have not yet succeeded in giving a sense.”

¹¹⁹ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 5.534, 5.535.

¹²⁰ Putnam draws this distinction between “the metaphysical spirit” and “the realistic spirit” from Cora Diamond's work on Wittgenstein – her attempt to understand the way in which Wittgenstein can see empiricism as a form of realism. See, Cora Diamond, “Realism and the Realistic Spirit,” in her *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1995, 39-72.

¹²¹ Conant within WL, 1.

Wittgenstein calls it, our “form of life.”¹²² In this way, I argue that Putnam’s use of the “realistic spirit” (within his commonsense realism) is ultimately an attempt to abolish the Humean distinction advanced at the beginning of this chapter between philosophical commitments held within the study and the ordinary world of practice outside. On this account it is “unintelligible” (in the sense of inconsistent) for us to hold *within philosophy* metaphysical theses that people are just sense-data, that we have no reason to believe that the sun might rise tomorrow, or that moral statements are simply emotive sounds, because we would not act or think accordingly *within our ordinary lives*.¹²³ The cultural alienation of philosophical commitments has been acceptable to philosophers since Hume’s own scepticism on the basis that they are at least reflecting the “Truth,” even if they are untenable in practice. In contrast, Putnam takes it as the chief claim of classical pragmatism that this alienation is no longer acceptable: it makes such commitments “unintelligible.”

Drawing the two threads of this distinction between “unintelligibility” and “impossibility” together, Putnam now sees his early arguments against Metaphysical Realism as arguments for its unintelligibility. However, he also sees it as equally unintelligible to state that Metaphysical Realism (or its theses) is *impossible*. Further in demonstrating that Rorty’s anti-representationalism does deny the possibility of representation and hence partakes in this unintelligibility, he fleshes this unintelligibility out as “methodological solipsism.”

Methodological solipsism, as I discuss below in Section 2, is *unintelligible* just like the postulated “revisability” of the laws of logic, in that it draws the philosopher into commitments that he cannot hold within the practices of ordinary life.¹²⁴

¹²²As Wittgenstein states, within *The Big Typescript*, trans, A Kenny, New version trans. Grant C. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, Blackwell, Oxford, 2005: “As I have often said, philosophy does not call on me for any sacrifice, because I am not denying myself the saying of anything but simply giving up a certain combination of words as senseless. What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their normal use in language.” §§ 406-35.

¹²³ Philosophers such as the early Wittgenstein, and Dummett see things the other way round. It is commonsense that should not be given *weight* within philosophy. See SNS, 506.

¹²⁴ This rejection of Humean scepticism alone does not distinguish Putnam from many other contemporary analytic philosophers (including Rorty). Putnam’s most distinct claim, however, is that most contemporary attempts to reject scepticism themselves partake in its unintelligibility. This is because the traditional sceptic’s move from the unintelligibility of a phenomenon to the impossibility of knowledge, is often replaced by the move from the unintelligibility of scepticism

This overall argument, let us call it the “solipsistic argument,” is different from Putnam’s long-standing charge of relativism. It is levelled against Rorty’s anti-representationalism, which as I have argued in Chapter I, underpins Rorty’s ethnocentric escape from relativism. As a consequence, the solipsistic argument comes closer to attacking Rorty’s actual position rather than that of his self-proclaimed “evil twin” – the Relativist.¹²⁵ Putnam, of course, sees both arguments as inter-related and Rorty’s “methodological solipsism” to be a *consequence* of his relativism. In fact both strands have been present within his work since his initial dismissal of Rorty within *Reason, Truth and History*.¹²⁶ Within his later works, however, Putnam has, at least in practice, begun to separate these two strands – construing the solipsistic argument as addressing Rorty’s views on “Reality” and the relativist argument as addressing Rorty’s views on “Justification.”¹²⁷ Although there is no doubt that both issues inform the other, in order to address Rorty on his own terms it is important to address his anti-representationalism without necessarily assuming that his views on justification have been shown to be “relativistic.” On this basis, I argue that Putnam’s “solipsistic argument” deserves far more attention than it has received within contemporary critical commentary, which so far has focussed heavily upon the charge of relativism.

§3 Anti-Representationalism and the Question of Realism: Putnam’s interpretation of Rorty

or of metaphysics itself, to the impossibility of philosophy. Traditional philosophy is rife with conclusions of “impossibility” (about our knowledge of the world, other minds, causation, to name a few) which are inconsistent with how we live. The very unintelligibility of traditional metaphysics, therefore, is that it draws us into such inconsistency through impossibility. As Stanley Cavell states in “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” cited by Conant, WL, xxxviii:

For Wittgenstein, philosophy comes to grief not in denying what we all know to be true, but in its effort to escape those human forms of life which alone provide coherence of our expression. He wishes an acknowledgement of human limitation which does not leave us chafed by our own skin, by a sense of powerlessness to penetrate beyond the human conditions of knowledge.

¹²⁵ PRM, 451.

¹²⁶ RTH, 216.

¹²⁷ RRRJ, 81-87.

Within his essay entitled “The Question of Realism” Putnam summarises his position upon Rorty’s anti-representationalism:

While I agree with Rorty that metaphysical realism is unintelligible, to stop with that point without going on to recover our ordinary notion of representation (and of a world of things to be represented) is to fail to complete that journey ‘from the familiar to the familiar’ that is the true task of philosophy.”¹²⁸

Putnam interprets Rorty’s anti-representationalism as “skepticism about the possibility of representation *tout court*.”¹²⁹ This is to give up on “the idea that language can represent something which is itself outside of language,”¹³⁰ and by “language,” Rorty allegedly rejects the claim that either true thoughts or sentences could be “representations” of reality.¹³¹ This interpretation orientates Rorty’s anti-representationalism with respect to what Putnam has called the “Question of Realism” – “How does mind or language hook on to the world?”¹³² This question has been fundamental to Putnam’s own work for over thirty years. In particular, within his later works, Putnam has attempted to show the relationship between this question, the traditional mind/body problem and philosophy of perception in an effort to demonstrate that the presumptions of all three debates rely on a shift from Aristotelian realism to modern metaphysics begun by Descartes, Berkeley and Hume.¹³³ Such a shift has established an unbridgeable gap

¹²⁸ WL, 300. See also “Are Values made or Discovered?” in FVD, 101: “The true task of philosophy here is to illuminater the ordinary notion of representaion (and of a world ofthings to be represented), not to rest frozen in a gesture of repudiation that is as empty as what it repudiates.”

¹²⁹ WL, 300.

¹³⁰ WL, 300.

¹³¹ WL, 306: “Up to now I have followed Rorty in not distinguishing between the claims that garden-variety true thoughts are ‘representations’ of reality (or representations of the ‘antics’ of familiar objects) and the claim that sentences are.”

¹³² WL, 295 and SNS, 456. In “On Truth,” WL, 315, he describes the Question of Realism as the “major problem of philosophy,”

¹³³ SNS, 467; and “Aristotle after Wittgenstein,” WL, 62-81. Putnam also stresses the importance of the interrelatedness of these problems within SNS. See SNS, 456; and, SNS 516: “But it should be clear by now that a nice allocation of philosophical problems to different philosophical ‘fields’ makes no real sense. To suppose that philosophy divides into separate

between the mental and the physical, or as Putnam prefers to call it the “intentional and the nonintentional,” which continues to set the task of contemporary analytic philosophers to overcome this gulf.¹³⁴ Like Rorty, therefore, Putnam sees the vocabulary and articulation of these problems as the product of the historical development of the philosophical discipline. Unlike Rorty, however, Putnam does not conclude from the intractable and irresolvable nature of these problems that these problems can, therefore, be dismissed as merely “contingent.” Rather that such problems must be therapeutically dissolved: we must “bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.”¹³⁵

Within this framework, talk of “representations” relates to debates between contemporary reductionists and eliminationists within philosophy of mind and cognitive science. In particular, with respect to the debate to which Putnam himself contributed much, whether “representations” within the “mind” might be reduced to “brain-states,” or as Putnam proposed whether the mind ought to be analysed from within a “functionalist” framework.¹³⁶ Putnam’s subsequent rejection of this position and the debate as a whole comprises part of his rejection of all forms of reductionism not only within philosophy of mind but also language. For the moment, however, it is important to see that the rejection of “representation” implicit within this change is the rejection of the idea of reductionist “representations” within the mind and *not* of the human capability of “representing.” Putnam rejects “the assumption that thinking is manipulating items [supposed referential mental symbols] with no intrinsic relation to what is outside the head.”¹³⁷

compartments labelled ‘philosophy of mind,’ ‘philosophy of language,’ ‘epistemology,’ ‘value theory,’ and ‘metaphysics’ is a sure way to lose all sense of how the problems are connected, and that means to lose all understanding of the sources of our puzzlement.”

¹³⁴ See Conant, in WL, xxii. For Putnam this is a shift that still underpins the persistence of such problems today, and is the basis upon which he advocates the return to “Aristotelean Realism without Aristotelean Metaphysics,” in WL. See also, Putnam, SNS, 447.

¹³⁵ Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, §124.

¹³⁶ Putnam has subsequently retracted this position, and has consistently broadened his criticisms of all theories within philosophy of mind and language that involve some form of reductionism whether it be brain states, use, sense-data or surface irritations Putnam. See, “Realism without Absolutes” in WL, 281; and, “Question of Realism” WL, 305.

¹³⁷ WL, 307.

On this point, Putnam has recently drawn upon the work of John McDowell who himself is drawing upon Putnam's earlier "externalist" arguments.¹³⁸ As Putnam states:

The deep point that McDowell is making is that if we think of our thoughts as *symbols*, then indeed nothing except magic could constitute their referential directedness at the world, and this, I believe, is precisely the line of thinking that leads Rorty to conclude that a healthy refusal to invoke magic in philosophy requires that we renounce the whole idea that our thoughts *possess* referential directness at the world; but there is a possibility that Rorty misses, the possibility (to borrow a phrase of McDowell's) of "representation without representations."¹³⁹

In contrast to Putnam, therefore, Rorty's rejection of representation "*tout court*" involves two things: both the rejection of the Cartesian *cum* materialist belief in mental "representations" within philosophy (which he and McDowell support) *and* the commonsensical capability of talking about the "world" in ordinary life (to which Putnam is firmly opposed).¹⁴⁰ Set within the framework of his unintelligibility/impossibility distinction, Putnam's own rejection of representation is the view that the former metaphysical beliefs in "representations" is *unintelligible*, but the latter commonsense *practice* of representing cannot, therefore, be rejected as *impossible*.

¹³⁸ WL, 306-7.

¹³⁹ WL, 307. Putnam also cites McDowell from, "Putnam on Mind and Meaning" *Philosophical Topics*, 20(1), 1992, 43: "from the fact that thinking, say, that one hears the sound of water dripping is representing that one hears the sound of water dripping, it does not follow that thinking that one hears the sound of water dripping in itself must consist in the presence in the mind of a mental symbol; something into which the significance that one hears the sound of water dripping can be read, as it can be read in to the sign-design "I hear the sound of water dripping," although in both cases the symbol's bearing that significance is extraneous to its intrinsic nature. Putnam's solid point [McDowell means the upshot of my Twin Earth argument] cannot dislodge the possibility that thinking that one hears the sound of water dripping is a mental representation, in the sense of a mental representing that intrinsically represents what it represents." Note: Putnam's addition. This is reasserted in SNS, 505.

¹⁴⁰ WL, 303. Putnam's definition of commonsense realism is "the realism that says that mountains and stars are not created by language and thought, and are not parts of language and thought, and yet can be described by language and thought."

It is in negating this latter claim that Putnam believes Rorty committed to “an extreme linguistic idealism which teeters on the edge of solipsism.”¹⁴¹ According to Putnam, without representation (as the idea of having language which is *about* the world in the sense that *things* can make sentences true)¹⁴² Rorty loses the intentional, and without the intentional Rorty is committed in ordinary life to reducing language to mere “marks and noises.” This conclusion is based upon Putnam’s interpretation of how Rorty (mis)understands Wittgenstein’s notion of “language-games” (or Rorty’s successor notion of “vocabularies”). According to Putnam, Rorty’s anti-representationalism is a picture of language *without* representation. As such language appears to be simply a more complicated version of animalistic communication. We make certain marks or noises to move other human beings to create other marks or noises or actions in what could nominally be called a “game.” This interpretation is supported by passages in which Rorty asserts his fervent “Darwinism.” For example, in “Putnam and the Relativist Menace,” Rorty notes:

What I retain is the conviction that Darwinism provides a useful vocabulary in which to formulate the pragmatist position summarised in (I)-(V) above.¹⁴³ By “Darwinism” I mean a story about humans as animals with special organs and abilities: about how certain features of the human throat, hand, and brain enabled humans to start developing increasingly complex social practices, by batting increasingly complex noises back and forth. According to this story, these organs and abilities, and the practices they made possible, have a lot to do with who we are and what we want, but they no more put us in a *representational* relation to an intrinsic nature of things than do the anteater’s snout or the bower bird’s skill at weaving.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ WL, 306.

¹⁴² WL, 300: “Rorty reads Donald Davidson’s celebrated rejection of ‘the scheme-content distinction’ as a rejection of the very idea that *things* make our sentences true, and thus as support for his rejection of the whole idea of representation.”

¹⁴³ The points upon which Rorty “wholeheartedly agrees” with Putnam, two of which are mentioned above.

¹⁴⁴ Rorty is marking his retention of a certain physicalism as the key difference between himself and Putnam. As Rorty continues, PRM, 447-8: “I see Dewey as having used this story to start freeing us from representationslist notions, and I see Putnam and Donald Davidson as continuing this initiative.” See also, EHO, 4: “Introduction: Pragmatism and post-Nietzschean philosophy.”

Within this picture, according to Putnam, we don't "describe reality" at all, but rather simply utter vocables that allow us to "cope."¹⁴⁵ It is this picture which is reminiscent of the "methodological solipsism" of the logical positivists and other verificationists. In the same way Carnap was left with phenomenalist sense-data, Quine with stimulus conditions, Dummett with verification conditions, and other neo-Wittgensteinians with "uses" of a word, Rorty is simply left with "marks and noises."¹⁴⁶ Although all such theories can allow us to continue to use sentences in the same way as we do now, they reduce their meaning to such conditions. As Putnam states within "Richard Rorty on Reality and Justification" the moral of such a story is:

[T]o preserve our commonsense realist convictions it is not enough to preserve some set of "realist" sentences: the interpretation you give those sentences, or, more broadly, your account of what understanding them consists in, is also important.¹⁴⁷

Despite the fact that Rorty has never claimed to be a realist and hence has no intention of preserving "commonsense realist intuitions," Putnam's response in the words of his original essay on this topic is that, as a consequence, the methodological solipsist sees:

[N]o difference between *asserting* or *thinking*, on the one hand, and *making noises* (or *producing mental images*) on the other. But this means (on this conception) I am not a *thinker* at all but a *mere* animal. To hold such a view is to commit a sort of mental suicide.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ RRRJ, 83.

¹⁴⁶ Putnam has criticised all these forms of reduction at one point or another in his nineties work, see WL and SNS.

¹⁴⁷ RRRJ, 83. This is also the metaphysical realists' criticism of Dummettian anti-realism and deflationary theorists of truth, SNS 498-9.

¹⁴⁸ RTH, 122. Also in RR, 246, Putnam states: "Let us recognise that one of our fundamental self-conceptualisations... is that we are *thinkers*, and that *as* thinkers we are committed to there being *some* kind of truth, some kind of correctness which is substantial and not merely 'disquotational.' That means that there is no eliminating the normative." As Rorty states within RRRJ, 89: "Although he [Putnam] earlier shared my own doubts about representationalism, in the final paragraph of his contribution to this volume he seems to think that substituting coping for representing is a gesture of despair, a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* of what I am saying."

It is this “mental suicide” which Putnam claims demonstrates the “unintelligibility” of Rorty’s anti-representationalism. Within Putnam’s earlier works, including *Reason, Truth and History*, this argument appears to have a slightly transcendental edge. This is because methodological solipsism appears to deny “thought in itself.”¹⁴⁹ If we adopt the more pragmatic interpretation of “unintelligibility” developed in Putnam’s later works, as discussed in Section 1, this transcendental edge dissipates. Methodological solipsism is “unintelligible” not because it runs against some metaphysically preconceived idea of thought “in itself,” but rather because it draws us into a practical commitment which is inconsistent and unviable in the context of our everyday lives. Believing that language is just “marks and noises” is as unintelligible – *sinnlos* – as believing that other people are just logical constructions of one’s sense-data: both commitments “would make an enormous difference to [our lives].”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Assuming that any solipsist must be a thinker, then he appears committed to denying his own precondition for argument, i.e. a capacity for thought. Putnam develops this type of conclusion within RTH, 124: “In short, what the relativist fails to see is that it is a presupposition of thought itself that some kind of objective ‘rightness’ exists.” See also Putnam’s claim in “Why Reason Can’t be Naturalised,” in RR that “one of fundamental self-conceptualisations” as humans “is that we are *thinkers*, and that *as* thinkers we are committed to there being *some* kind of truth.”

¹⁵⁰ There is very interesting equivocation here. Putnam doesn’t actually claim that Rorty’s philosophy is *prima facie* unpragmatic (i.e. wouldn’t make any difference) rather that it would make *huge*, undesirable, unviable consequences. For Putnam, however, this contravenes a more Wittgensteinian notion of sense, i.e. Rorty’s proposals run against our form of life. However, because the flip-side of Rorty’s untenability is a lack of any commitment, it in fact boils down to also being unpragmatic – Rorty’s methodological solipsism make no difference. As Putnam states in relation to the latter, “The whole question of *hurting* other people would be ‘displaced’; and so would the whole question of companionship.” in “Does the Disquotational Theory of Truth Solve all Philosophical problems?” WL 277. In a similar criticism of Dummett within SNS, 510, Putnam states: “Thus, the problem with Dummett’s account is that it fails to describe properly who we are, and the sense that our practices have for *us*. It fails to capture the way in which we ‘see the face’ of the activity...” Putnam believes that this is exactly the point that Wittgenstein seeks to make within the *Investigations*, § 420: “But can’t I imagine that the people around me are automata, lack consciousness, even though they behave in the same way as usual?—If I imagine it now—alone in my room—I see people with fixed looks (as in a trance) going about their business—the idea is perhaps a little uncanny. But just try to keep hold of this idea in the midst of your ordinary intercourse with others, in the street, say! Say to yourself, for example: ‘The children over there are mere automata; all their liveliness is mere automatism.’ And you will either find these words becoming quite meaningless; or you will produce in yourself some kind of uncanny feeling, or something of the sort.”

Within a broader scope, this “solipsistic argument” serves two purposes for Putnam: it impresses the importance of his own realist ambition of retaining our commonsense capability of representation *without* the use of “representations”; and secondly, it reveals the cost attributed to Rorty in attempting to avoid relativism.¹⁵¹

§4 Rorty’s Response: Representations and the Vocabulary of Representationalism

In response to Putnam, Rorty replies within the “Relativist Menace”:

Putnam, however, does not feel comfortable with this picture of humans-as-slightly-more-complicated-animals. It strikes him, as does physicalism, as scientific and reductionist. But these latter epithets would only apply to someone who argued, “Because Darwin tells us how things really and truly are, it behoves us to adjust our self-image to suit.” I do not wish to argue in this way. Rather, I am suggesting, in the spirit of Deweyan experimentalism, that it behooves us to give the self-image Darwin suggested to us a try, in the hope of having fewer philosophical problems on our hands.¹⁵²

According to Rorty, Putnam’s charge of methodological solipsism presumes that his Darwinian self-image is put forward within the very representationalist vocabulary he seeks to reject. Putnam presumes that Rorty is attempting to explain “how things really are”: that in “reality” language is “just marks and noises” and that when conversing with others we are “*just* uttering vocables which let me cope.”¹⁵³ It is this appeal to “reality” which commits the solipsist to reject other alternative accounts of language in all situations in favour of one privileged *true* account of what we are *really* doing. Rorty argues, however, that this universal, all-encompassing, commitment to a “reality” is only the result of using a contingent vocabulary – the vocabulary of representationalism. It is only within this vocabulary that it makes sense to assert something as “reality” as opposed to “appearance,” and hence to universally privilege a particular solipsistic understanding of language above another. Once we understand Rorty to be rejecting this specific

¹⁵¹ In fact this is how I would read Putnam’s argument in “Two conceptions of rationality,” RTH, 103-126.

¹⁵² PRM, 448.

¹⁵³ RRRJ. See also, SNS, 491.

vocabulary – the philosophical vocabulary of representationalism – and not the ordinary ways in which we think, act and talk about representation, then we can assess anti-representationalism on its own terms: as an argument about a contingent vocabulary within a specific discipline, rather than all language in all disciplines.¹⁵⁴

The premise of Putnam's solipsistic argument against Rorty is that he moves from the unintelligibility of our traditional philosophical understanding of representation, to a commitment to the impossibility of representation *tout court*. For Putnam, the rejection of representation *tout court* is the rejection all our ordinary ways of speaking, thinking and acting that utilise the notion of representation. It is a call either to change our ordinary practices by removing reference to "representation,"¹⁵⁵ or to comprehensively reinterpret our "representational" practices in a solipsistic fashion.¹⁵⁶ This conclusion is based on the force of an "impossibility" – the *impossibility* of representation.¹⁵⁷

Rorty, however, seeks not to reject our ordinary use of the term representation or some metaphysically loaded "phenomenon" of representation, but rather a *vocabulary* – the vocabulary he has named "representationalism." Rorty rarely describes "representationalism" in terms of "representations." Most often, "representationalism" is described as the product of a philosophical distinction, the "appearance-reality" distinction. When Rorty does use the word "representation," it is as a relational term that describes a relation between an "appearance" and

¹⁵⁴ This also distinguishes Rorty from the post-Nietzscheans, EHO, 4: "Nor is it the case that language *really* is *just* strings of marks and noises which organisms use as tools for getting what they want. That Nietzschean-Deweyan description of language is no more the real truth about language than Heidegger's description of it as the 'the house of Being' or Derrida's as 'the play of signifying reference.' Each of these is only one more useful truth about language – one more of what Wittgenstein called 'reminders for a particular purpose.' The particular purpose served by the reminder that language can be described in Darwinian terms is to help us to get away from what, in the Introduction to Volume I, I called 'representationalism' and thus from the reality-appearance distinction."

¹⁵⁵ cf. RHF. 19-20

¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁷ Two methods of interpretation here: we might consider representation as a phenomenon – a way of bridging the Realist gap between mind and world – and *anti*-representationalism as an argument that this phenomenon is impossible – that we *cannot* bridge the gap between mind and world. Or representation as a form of life. Same goes.

“reality.”¹⁵⁸ These terms make little sense outside of their vocabulary, which Rorty claims is the vocabulary of traditional philosophy.¹⁵⁹ The key rejoinder to Putnam, therefore, is that the vocabulary of traditional philosophy is not the vocabulary of our ordinary ways of speaking. Most specifically, it is not the vocabulary in which a cartographer “represents” a landmass,¹⁶⁰ or an artist “represents” a subject.¹⁶¹ As a consequence, Rorty’s anti-representationalism has little impact upon our ordinary ways of speaking about “representations” but rejects “*tout court*” the vocabulary of representationalism within philosophy.¹⁶² On this account of anti-representationalism, Putnam cannot bring Rorty into inconsistency with the practices of our ordinary lives because Rorty makes no claim about them.¹⁶³ Further, this distinction between the

¹⁵⁸ Insert here a more extended discussion about Rorty use of dualisms and distinctions and the relationship he sees between them and vocabularies. Cf. PSH, and EHO – “The advantage of insisting on these points is that any dualism one comes across, any divide which one finds a philosopher trying to bridge or fill in, can be made to look like a mere difference between two sets of descriptions of the same batch of things.” “Can be made to look like,” in this context, does not contrast with “really is.” RR’s latest work, particularly PSH has to do with posing new dualisms, new contrasts as the foundation stones of new vocabularies.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Intro to EHO, “Abandoning the notion of representation means getting rid of the cluster of problems about realism and antirealism...” 3

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Davidson.

¹⁶¹ There is an interesting parallel here, as even Rorty notices in RRRJ, between this particular strategy of avoiding solipsism and Carnap’s. Carnap also thought his *Aufbau* language was simply useful for a particular purpose.

¹⁶² In fact, Rorty openly rejects interpretations, such as Putnam’s, which purport to discover the “‘nonreferential character of language,’ as if Saussure, or Wittgenstein, or Derrida, or somebody had shown that reference and representations were *illusions* (as opposed to being notions which, in certain contexts, might usefully be dispensed with).” In turn, Rorty only uses these terms within ethnocentric argument: both to demonstrate the uselessness of the old vocabulary from within, and to Whiggishly reassert anti-representationalism as a new vocabulary.

¹⁶³ His view is one on a very specialist, recondite topic. Putnam’s criticism is articulated within RHF, 19-20: “For Rorty, as for the French thinkers whom he admires, ... the failure of our philosophical ‘foundations’ is a failure of the whole culture, and accepting that we were wrong in wanting or thinking we could have a foundation requires us to be *philosophical revisionists*. By this I mean that, for Rorty or Foucault or Derrida, the failure of foundationalism makes a difference to how we are allowed to talk in ordinary life—a difference as to whether and when we are allowed to use words like ‘know,’ ‘objective,’ ‘fact,’ and ‘reason.’ The picture of philosophy was not a reflection *on* the culture, a reflection some of whose ambitious projects failed, but a *basis*, a sort of pedestal yanked out. Under the pretense that philosophy is no longer ‘serious’ there lies a hidden a gigantic seriousness. If am right, Rorty hopes to be a doctor to the modern soul.”

“philosophical” and “ordinary” (or “vulgar,” as Rorty prefers to say) ways of speaking is not an “appearance-reality distinction” but rather a distinction between two different contexts, *qua* vocabularies, in which these words are used.¹⁶⁴

Rorty does not negate Putnam’s account of “unintelligibility,” nor the pragmatist claim that any intelligible difference must make a difference. In fact, Rorty does not even negate Putnam’s claim that when discussing one’s wife and kids in ordinary conversation we can’t think that we are just uttering “marks and noises.” Rather, Rorty simply argues that he can fulfil the pragmatist criterion in a different way by limiting the consequent commitments of his anti-representationalist vocabulary to the social arena in which they are used: the philosophical discipline. Insofar as philosophy *qua* academic discipline makes an impact on life, so will his commitments – but no further. As will be investigated in the next chapter, however, this saving manoeuvre comes at an intolerable cost for Rorty. In order to sustain this limitation of philosophical commitments he must find some way of “horizontally” carving up modern thought into distinct disciplines *qua* purposes – philosophical, religious, public, private, scientific, political, moral, “ordinary life” *et al.* – with a separate vocabulary, and a set of commitments, for each. Rorty’s use of Davidson, however, prevents him from staking such distinctions on content, or on truth, only on “purpose.” But Rorty has no way of articulating the worth of another discipline’s purpose in the vocabulary of another. Thus, when the commitments of two vocabularies commit, Rorty can only take one side. The only solution is for Rorty to turn to a Wittgensteinian account of the value of language games within life that tears apart the causal/justification distinction that is at the heart of his position.

Rorty replies in PRM, 444: “I do not think that I have ever written anything that suggests that I wish to alter ordinary ways of using ‘know,’ ‘objective,’ ‘fact,’ and ‘reason.’ Like Bishop Berkeley, William James, Putnam, and most other paradox-mongering philosophers (except maybe Alfred Korzyński; see RHF 120), I have urged that we continue to speak with the vulgar while offering a different philosophical gloss on this speech than that offered by the realist tradition. I have written at tedious length *against* the idea that philosophy has been a pedestal on which our culture rested. In particular, I have complained over and over again about Martin Heidegger’s and Jacques Derrida’s overestimation of the cultural importance of philosophy. So on this point I think Putnam is just wrong about what I say.”

¹⁶⁴ PRM, 444 fn 4.

Chapter III: Metaphilosophy, Metaphysics and Metavocabularies

[P]hilosophy is a mere idea of a possible science, which is nowhere given *in concreto*, but which one seeks to approach in different ways until the only footpath, much overgrown by sensibility, is discovered, and the hitherto unsuccessful ectype, so far as it has been granted to humans, is made equal to the archetype. Until then we cannot learn philosophy; for where is it, who is in possession of it, and how shall we recognise it? We can only learn to philosophise, that is, to exercise the talent of reason, in accordance with its universal principles, on certain actually existing attempts at philosophy, always, however, reserving the right of reason to investigate, to confirm, or to reject these principles in their very sources.

—Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*¹⁶⁵

Within the penultimate chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Rorty's apotheosis of traditional attempts to lay down everlasting *a priori* foundations, Kant acknowledges the contingency of his own philosophy.¹⁶⁶ Kant surmises that his works are just one more exercise of human reason in the continuing practice of philosophy, one more attempted pathway *en route* to a mere idea of a possible science. The "possible science" which Kant envisions is "the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason."¹⁶⁷ In Rorty's language, it is the dream of a universal commensurating vocabulary, or in Putnam's, a "God's-Eye Point of View." At the self-proclaimed end of the epistemological era, however, the work of Putnam and Rorty seeks to

¹⁶⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, B866. Translation drawn from both Guyer and John Rawls, "Burton Dreben: A Reminiscence," in Juliet Floyd and Sanford Shieh, eds, *Future Pasts: Perspectives on the Place of the Analytic Tradition in Twentieth-Century Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000.

¹⁶⁶ Kant's interesting relationship with Putnam and Rorty. For Rorty, Kant is the apotheosis of all that is wrong with traditional philosophy. For Putnam, on the other hand, there is a lot of value in Kant's writings, specifically in the thread that can be drawn from Kant through pragmatism and Wittgenstein. See POP.

¹⁶⁷ As Kant continues, B867: "and the philosopher is not an artist of reason but the legislator of human reason. It would be very boastful to call oneself a philosopher in this sense and to pretend to have equalled the archetype, which lies only in the idea."

embrace the contingency of Kant's footpaths but repudiate their destination.¹⁶⁸ As Putnam makes clear, they do not seek to challenge the *possibility* of Kant's "science," but rather its very *intelligibility*.

Rejecting the intelligibility of Kant's "possible science," might not entail an impossibility but it does entail a certain loss. That loss is the role envisioned for philosophy within culture, within our ordinary lives, by the traditional philosophical foundationalists.¹⁶⁹ Within Western culture, traditional philosophy's claim of the congruence between the True and the Good, like Christian Theology, has legitimised both its value and its role within culture.¹⁷⁰ On this basis, not only has philosophy's understanding of the True nature of Reality been an end in itself, but also it has given philosophers authority to position themselves as adjudicators upon the role and value of other parts of culture, such as science, art, religion and politics. As Kant states:

That as mere speculation [philosophy] serves more to prevent errors than to amplify cognition does no damage to its value, but rather gives it all the more dignity and authority through its office as censor, which secures the general order and unity, indeed

¹⁶⁸ One might say that the very meaning of "contingency" has changed – from relation of accident to substance, to type of historicism which Hegel began, but not the possible world semantics of Kripke.

¹⁶⁹ Kant, *Critique*, B879: "[M]etaphysics is also the culmination of all culture of human reason, which is indispensable even if one sets aside its influence as a science for certain determinate ends. For it considers reason according to its elements and highest maxims, which must ground even the possibility of some sciences and the use of all of them. That as mere speculation it serves more to prevent errors than to amplify cognition does no damage to its value, but rather gives it all the more dignity and authority through its office as censor, which secures the general order and unity, indeed the well-being of the scientific community, and prevents its cheerful and fruitful efforts from straying from the chief end, that of the general happiness."

¹⁷⁰ As Rorty states within PSH, xiii, concerning one of his latest published works, the title "Hope in Place of Knowledge" is "a way of suggesting that Plato and Aristotle were wrong in thinking that humankind's most distinctive and praiseworthy capacity is to know things as they really are – to penetrate behind appearance to reality. That claim saddles us with the unfortunate appearance—reality distinction and with metaphysics: a distinction, and a discipline, which pragmatism shows how to do without. I want to demote the quest for knowledge from the status of end-in-itself to that of one more means towards greater human happiness."

the well-being of the scientific community, and prevents its cheerful and fruitful efforts from straying from the chief end, that of the general happiness.¹⁷¹

Irrespective of whether philosophy has ever actually played this foundational role within culture or not, the promise and legitimacy of such a role has guided and given meaning to philosophy's continual development since Plato. Putnam and Rorty's critiques of Metaphysics and Epistemology, however, demonstrate the unintelligibility of any discipline giving us an understanding of the "True nature of Reality," and as a consequence they de-legitimise any such role for philosophy. The rejection of this foundationalist relationship, however, leaves us asking what alternative relationship between philosophy and life we might suggest in its place. As I have argued in the previous chapter, elucidating this relationship is vital for pragmatist positions because it determines the differences that we might expect philosophy to make. As William James states:

There can *be* no difference anywhere that doesn't *make* a difference elsewhere – no difference in abstract truth that doesn't express itself in a difference in concrete fact and in conduct consequent upon that fact, imposed on somebody, somehow, somewhere, and somewhen. The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one.¹⁷²

Therefore, in order for either Putnam or Rorty to think that their own efforts at philosophy have any meaning, any value, any "truth" in the way in which James uses the term,¹⁷³ they must

¹⁷¹ Kant, *Critique*, B879.

¹⁷² William James, "Chapter 2: What Pragmatism Means," in *Pragmatism*, Dover Publications, New York, 1995, 20. Dewey explicitly utilises this idea metaphilosophically in John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, Dover Publications, New York, 1958, 7: "Thus there is here supplied, I think, a first-rate test of the value of any philosophy which is offered us: Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful?"

¹⁷³ i.e. Putnam and Rorty do not seek to evaluate their positions against the true Platonic archetype of Philosophy, but rather, like the pragmatists, by the differences which they make.

expect their philosophical work to lead to a commitment that makes a difference in our actual lives.

The fundamental difference between Putnam and Rorty is the way in which they attempt to resolve this tension within their own pragmatism: the tension between the wholesale rejection of a foundationalist role for Philosophy within culture; and the claim that philosophy must still have *some* role, *some* authority to make a difference, in order for philosophy to have any cultural value at all.¹⁷⁴ In Dewey's terms it is the question: "What would be its [philosophy's] office if it ceased to deal with the problem of reality and knowledge at large?"¹⁷⁵

This question concerns not simply the task of current philosophy in relation to past philosophical works, but also the role of philosophy in relation to other concurrent disciplines. In this chapter, I argue that this distinction become important and introduce some new terminology – "vertical" and "horizontal" contexts – in order to articulate the difference. A "vertical" context refers to the change of beliefs *within* a discipline, such as the movement from Aristotlean, to Newtonian and Einstenian physics. Without begging a scheme-content distinction, the link between each new set of beliefs (or in Rorty's terms "vocabulary") is that they progressively replace the practices and purposes of their predecessors. A "horizontal" context refers to different sets of beliefs (or "vocabularies") that are held or used simultaneously within *different* disciplines. This is the claim that we can hold commitments within several different incommensurable vocabularies all at the same time, including religious, scientific, historical, philosophical, commonsense commitments.

My argument is that Rorty resolves the Dewey's question above by defining philosophy, and specifically his own "anti-representationalism," as a separate discipline within the horizontal context. As such our current vocabulary within philosophy makes a Jamesian difference because it replaces past philosophical vocabularies, and hence is meaningful. However, such a philosophical vocabulary doesn't force us to utilise its language, its commitments, outside of the

¹⁷⁴ Both philosophers have gestured towards the importance of this question, but they haven't yet successfully resolved the matter one way or another.

¹⁷⁵ Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, New York, 1938, 36-57. Cited in "Nature in Experience" by Dewey himself, in "Nature in Experience," in *On Experience*, 253.

discipline. In short, the commitments of philosophy are restricted within its own horizontal context.

In contrast, Putnam rejects the intelligibility of restricting philosophy within a horizontal context. Putnam, following the later Wittgenstein, does not want to define philosophy as a narrow discipline, but rather as a capacity for therapy. Philosophical reflection is a practice (not a discipline) that can take place within all disciplines, within all language games – moral, political, economic, scientific, religious – in order to reflect upon its presuppositions and limits by the limits of its own language. Hence philosophy is neither foundational, nor culturally isolated but rather inheres the Wittgensteinian maxim that one can't understand a language game, unless one plays it. In contrast Rorty's picture appears, at best, to define a rather ephemeral discipline, at worst an elitist, self-indulgent one that has no responsibility to the other vocabularies in our ordinary lives. Rorty's riposte, however, "Sure. What more did you *think* you were going to get out of contemporary philosophy?"¹⁷⁶ appears to simply stop conversation.

I argue that Putnam and Wittgenstein can argue for their picture against Rorty's fatalism, only by challenging Rorty's notion of a "vocabulary" within the horizontal context. I claim that the inconsistency within Rorty's metaphilosophy is that he relies upon the individual worth of each different discipline with a horizontal context, but does not have the resources within his notion of a "vocabulary" to sustain such worth once we inevitably accept that we are always talking in a particular vocabulary. Rorty's "anti-representationalism" is not specifically an argument for methodological solipsism, but rather imperialism.¹⁷⁷

Section 1 of this chapter elucidates the propositional inheritance which Rorty gathers from Quine, Sellars and Davidson within his term "vocabulary." In particular, I highlight his use of Davidson's critique of the "scheme-content" distinction. Section 2 demonstrates that this inheritance forces Rorty to develop two metavocabularies in order discuss the place of philosophy within culture. In Section 3, however, I argue that Rorty's inheritance of the scheme-

¹⁷⁶ EHO, 6.

¹⁷⁷ For on what basis is it worth preserving other commonsense ways of talking from the *perspective* of his own solipsistic vocabulary?

content distinction is irreconcilable with his metaphilosophical ambitions within the horizontal context. Section 4 sketches how Putnam and Wittgenstein's alternative picture evades these problems, but at great cost to Rorty's conception of language.

§1 Rorty's notion of a vocabulary

A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside of it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.

When philosophers use a word—"knowledge," "being," "object," "I," "proposition," "name"—and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language which is its original home?—

What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*¹⁷⁸

For Rorty, the picture described by Wittgenstein, that holds traditional philosophy captive, "is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations—some accurate, some not."¹⁷⁹ Within his later works, Rorty comes to explain this captivation by a "*picture*" in terms of our captivation by a particular "*vocabulary*," the vocabulary of representationalism. The description of philosophy (or at least traditional philosophy) as itself a "*vocabulary*," or collection of related vocabularies, is a self-reflexive use of the term which Rorty has developed throughout his works and used to explain the structure of language more generally. The term itself, however, is a patchwork quilt that interweaves Rorty's various inheritances. Within Chapters I and II, I have emphasised the term's epistemic lineage which chiefly derives from the work of the later Wittgenstein and Kuhn. In this section, I relate this lineage to Rorty's other inheritances from the line of Quine, Sellars and Davidson.

¹⁷⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. by G. E. M. Anscombe, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, 2001, §115-116. For Putnam's use of Wittgenstein's notion of a "picture" see Conant, WL, xlvi. See also, PMN 12.

¹⁷⁹ PMN, 12.

As investigated in Chapter I, within “vocabulary” Rorty seeks to inherit Wittgenstein’s notion of “language-games.” Specifically, he hopes to hold onto their rejection of the “correspondence” theory of truth, their irreducibility and the sense in which the justificatory structures of language games can *drive us, force us, or captivate our thinking*. In the case of the “vocabulary” of representationalism, according to Rorty, it drives us into metaphysics, locking us into an endless search for the “essence” or “reality” of things, including the practice of philosophy itself.¹⁸⁰ Wittgenstein’s “flair for deconstructing captivating pictures” must be supplemented, however, according to Rorty by a historical and social perspective.¹⁸¹ Rorty has drawn upon Heidegger and Dewey to provide these outlooks, but I have emphasised his use of Kuhn in order to demonstrate, through the example of science, how we might move *between* vocabularies. By generalising Kuhn’s notions of “general” and “revolutionary” science, Rorty has offered a greater hope than Wittgenstein of escaping from our traditional philosophical vocabulary – just as science escaped from Aristotelean physics. In short, in order to escape the picture of representation, of a mind mirroring reality, we only have to change the vocabulary in which we discuss philosophy. This, in a nutshell, is the promise of anti-representationalism.

Within Rorty’s notion of a “vocabulary,” however, there is a third thread. This is the thread that runs from Quine and Sellars, through to Davidson – three philosophers internal to the analytic tradition and its modes of argumentation,¹⁸² who nevertheless built the case *against* representationalism from within.¹⁸³ The value of this thread is that it explains how we might understand the meaning of sentences within vocabularies *propositionally* (as having truth and false values), without a commitment to traditional referential semantics, and hence

¹⁸⁰ Note here that it is the captivation, and not the picture itself which forces us into essentialism.

¹⁸¹ PMN, 12.

¹⁸² This is why they are distinct from the later Wittgenstein.

¹⁸³ See, “Introduction,” to ORT, 1: “The antirepresentationalism I advocate here harks back to my 1979 book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Although the figures looming in the background were Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey, my most proximate intellectual debts at the same time I was writing it were Wilfrid Sellars and Willard van Orman Quine. In the subsequent ten years, I have come to think of Donald Davidson’s work as deepening and extending the lines of thought traced by Sellars and Quine.” See also, PMN, 10. Richard Bernstein argues in “Resurgence of Pragmatism,” *Social Research*, 59(4), 1992, 819, about how Rorty uses these philosophers to break down the core Kantian distinctions, but still leaves the causal/justificatory distinction.

representation.¹⁸⁴ Quine and Sellars form the basis for this understanding.¹⁸⁵ On the one hand, as Robert Brandom has argued, Rorty's development of the term "vocabulary" is largely an attempt to carry on the Quinean legacy. It offers a way of talking about our linguistic practices that does not entail the positivist distinction between languages, *qua* structures of meaning, and theories, *qua* structures of belief.¹⁸⁶ In this way we might aver the traditional analytic ontology of "propositions" or "meanings" in favour of sentences that are simply taken to be true or false.¹⁸⁷ In turn, Quine's holism contends that our disposition to assent to the truth and falsity of a sentence is generally set by the vocabulary (or "theory") as a whole.¹⁸⁸ On the other hand, against Quine's predatory naturalism (and hence setting the framework in which Rorty attempts to meet Putnam's charge of methodological solipsism), Rorty preserves talk of meaning and belief by following Davidson and adopting the strict Sellarsian distinction, inherited from Kant,

¹⁸⁴ He may discuss vocabularies alternatively in terms of their constituent "statements," "sentences," "descriptions" (RRRJ) or "beliefs," but insofar as any of these pieces of language have meaning, they have meaning in virtue of being "truth-value candidates." The latter terms is Ian Hacking's as adopted by Rorty in CIS, 18. See also, Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in Ernest LePore, ed, *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Basil Blackwell, 1986, 313, on his interpretation of Quine. At heart, this project is carrying out the idea that sentences are the "primary unit of meaning" in a Quinean acceptable sense, see W. V. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1990, 56-7. This does not to against Quine's holism, of course. The use of these analytic philosophers also mark Rorty's break with classical pragmatism as he seeks to read experience as language: "for all my doubts about analytic philosophy, I think that the linguistic turn was an instance of genuine philosophical progress." In "Response to Lavine," 53, in Herman J. Saatkamp, ed, *Rorty & Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to His Critics*, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 1995.

¹⁸⁵ PMN, 171-2: "It is as if Quine, having renounced the conceptual-empirical, analytic-synthetic, and language-fact distinctions, were still not able to renounce that between the given and the postulated. Conversely, Sellars, having triumphed over the latter distinction, cannot quite renounce the former cluster. ... Each of these two men tends to make continual, unofficial, tacit, heuristic use of the distinction which the other has transcended. It as if analytic philosophy could not be written without at least *one* of the two great Kantian distinctions and as if neither Quine nor Sellars were willing to cut the last links which behind them to Russell, Carnap and "logic as the essence of philosophy."

¹⁸⁶ Brandom, "Vocabularies of Pragmatism," in *Rorty and his Critics*, 157. See Davidson in "On Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" in Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2nd edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2001, 199: "to give up the analytic-synthetic distinction is to give up the idea that we can clearly distinguish between theory and language."

¹⁸⁷ W. V. Quine, *From Stimulus to Science*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1995, 77.

¹⁸⁸ W. V. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," 20-46 in his *From a Logical Point of View: 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays*, 2nd edition, Harper and Row, New York, 1963.

between *causal* and *justificatory* considerations.¹⁸⁹ On this account, “only a belief can justify another belief.”¹⁹⁰ As such, although we might adopt the naturalistic idea that our sensory stimulations may *cause* us to utter sentences, *pace* Quine, this does not give us bedrock reasons to justify the truth or falsity of such sentences.¹⁹¹

In order to maintain such Sellarsian inferentialism, however, Rorty adopts Davidson’s critique of the so-called “third dogma of empiricism” – the scheme-content distinction. At heart, this critique is an attempt to steer Davidson’s own re-introduction of justification, within a Quinean framework, away from idealist and relativist possibilities (and thus into conflict with naturalism), and hence also withdraw the impetus for reactionary epistemological scepticism (of the likes of Quine). *Prima facie*, such positions appear viable with the reintroduction of the Kantian

¹⁸⁹ See Brandom, “Introduction,” to his *Rorty and his Critics*, “principal tool” xv. In “Dewey between Hegel and Darwin” in TP, Rorty states that we should construe thinking “merely as use of sentences.” This allow us to escape the naturalistic behaviourism that some, like Quine, have taken to be implied in Wittgenstein. The distinction between causation and justification is a principal tool in addressing Kant’s marriage of Empirical Realism and Transcendental Idealism, seeing both as two different levels of inquiry. Quine obviously held, against “Neo-Kantian” logical positivists etc, that such a distinction is untenable, in that no set of assumptions within the so called transcendental realm (eg. Euclidean geometry) can be held unrevisable (cf. Modern challenges to Euclidean geometry). Quine’s metaphilosophical task, therefore, is to bring philosophy within science (reciprocal containment). Putnam makes the specific claim, that although not all naturalised epistemologists neglect normative tasks, Quine does. See, “Why Reason Can’t be Naturalised,” in RR, 244-5. See also, Quine’s reply in *Theories and Things*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1981, 181. Putnam therefore, as a good Kantian, also seeks to retain the causal and normative, *but* not in the way that Rorty and Davidson do, see below.

¹⁹⁰ See, Brandom, “Vocabularies of Pragmatism,” 160. See also, ORT 125, for Rorty on Davidson.

¹⁹¹ Rorty follows Davidson’s critique of Quine on this point. Davidson sees Quine’s distinction between observation sentences and the rest as a verificationist leftover from the analytic synthetic distinction which is an “anathema” to the coherentist “as the distinction between beliefs justified by sensations and beliefs justified only by appeal to further beliefs.” “A Coherence Theory,” 313-4. Davidson sees Quine, in this respect, as an epistemological sceptic. See Rorty, ORT 133. As Rorty says in “Hesse and Davidson on Metaphor,” in ORT, 169: “This confusion (exposed most thoroughly in Sellars’ classic ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’) was between the claim that overhearing, e.g., an unfamiliar noise *caused* you to acquire the beliefs that there was a quetzal in the forest and the claim that it ‘conveyed the information’ that there was a quetzal there. The empiricist slogan ‘Nothing in the intellect was not previously in the senses’ traded on his confusion, on the ambiguity in ‘source of knowledge’ between ‘cause of belief’ and ‘justification of belief.’”

distinction between causation and justification if such a distinction manifests itself in the picture of two “disparate ontological realms, one containing beliefs and the other non-beliefs.”¹⁹² In Davidson’s terminology, this picture of language implies a series of different conceptual schemes that stand in representational relation to a content as a “common something, ... something neutral and common that lies outside all schemes.”¹⁹³ Davidson’s critique, however, urges us to drop that very picture and hence the philosophical resources for relativism, idealism, or scepticism.¹⁹⁴ These aspirations, in complement with retaining a justification/causation distinction, are almost entirely congruent with Rorty’s own, and hence each philosopher’s mutual term of self-description “anti-representationalist.”¹⁹⁵

In the specific context of elucidating the notion of “vocabulary,” Rorty generally uses Davidson’s scheme-content critique in explaining the non-representationalist, causal relationship that he sees between language (*qua* vocabulary) and the world. On Rorty’s interpretation, there is no sense in discussing the world *qua* content in a scheme-content framework.¹⁹⁶ In adopting Davidson’s argument in support of his own position, however, it is important to understand that Rorty is also committed *with* Davidson to re-writing the relationship between one vocabulary and another vocabulary. In short, not only does the relation between scheme and content disappear, but also that between “scheme and scheme.” Specifically, this aspect of Davidson’s

¹⁹² Within his “Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth,” *ORT*, 129, Rorty makes an interesting comparison to Dewey’s critique of the dualism between Subject and Object. As Rorty goes on to say, “The picture of such realms permits us to imagine truth as a relation between particular beliefs and particular non-beliefs which (a) is non-causal in nature, and (b) must be ‘correctly analysed’ before one can rebut (or concede victory to) the epistemological sceptic.”

¹⁹³ Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” 72.

¹⁹⁴ As Rorty states, we must drop the picture which makes them seem “interesting and arguable”: *ORT*, 129.

¹⁹⁵ See Davidson’s “The Myth of the Subjective” in *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*, ed. Michael Krausz, Notre Dame University, Notre Dame, 1989, 165-6. “Beliefs are true or false, but they represent nothing. It is good to be rid of representations, and with them the correspondence theory of truth, for it is thinking that there are representations that engenders thoughts of relativism.” See also, *ORT*, 3, PAR 2, PRM 448. Davidson speaks of he and Rorty’s mutual rejection of the “representational picture of language” in Donald Davidson, *Truth and Predication*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, 2005, 10.

¹⁹⁶ Of course, as I go on to explain this does not mean everything is reduced to schemes, but rather Rorty and Davidson are rejecting the very language in which “schemes” and “content” make sense.

critique informs the Kuhnian relation of “incommensurability” between vocabularies, which Rorty has so readily utilised in his arguments against representationalism. Prior to Davidson’s critique of the scheme-content distinction, it would appear to make sense (amalgamating Quine and Sellars) to see two incommensurable vocabularies as two alternative sets of holistically defined sentences with conflicting truth values. Such a formulation has led philosophers such as Kuhn himself into the idealistic excess of describing two cultures, living under two incommensurable vocabularies (or “paradigms”), as living within two different “worlds.”¹⁹⁷

Applying Davidson’s framework, if we assume that Rorty’s use of the term “vocabulary” is (relevantly) equivalent to Davidson’s use of a “language,” then “incommensurable” means in Davidson’s terms that two languages are not intertranslatable.¹⁹⁸ For Davidson, however, if two vocabularies are not intertranslatable, we cannot conceive of both, simultaneously, *as* languages.¹⁹⁹ The reason for this is that if we assume that the attempt at translation must occur between one language that we do currently understand and use, and another that we don’t (as in the case of the field linguist translating a native language into his own) *then* upon failing to achieve translation we cannot attribute the foreign language’s “sentences” any truth values.²⁰⁰ Further, if we cannot attribute truth-values then the apparent “language” it is not linguistic at all – its marks and noises are not “propositional.” In other words, if a sentence can only be perceived as marks and noises, its influence upon the translator is reduced purely to the *causal* side of the Kantian *causation-justification* divide.

¹⁹⁷ PMN, 315-356.

¹⁹⁸ As Davidson says in “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” in Donald Davidson, *The Essential Davidson*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2006, 202: “‘Incommensurable’ is, of course, Kuhn and Feyerabend’s word for ‘not intertranslatable.’” Rorty does not clearly make this translation between his own vocabulary and Davidson’s, but this is the interpretation of his long time acolyte, Brandom, within “Vocabularies of Pragmatism” 179, and tacitly accepted by Rorty within his “Reply.”

¹⁹⁹ Translatability, for Davidson, is a “criterion of languagehood.” See, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” *Essential Davidson*, 198.

²⁰⁰ i.e. Failure to create a workable translation manual.

Of course, for Davidson, the chief implication of this argument is that it negates the profusion of (Kuhnian-like) talk of different languages (*qua* conceptual schemes)²⁰¹ that are not intertranslatable. Davidson's exegetical emphasis is upon maximising translation. Insofar as philosophers such as Rorty, however, wish to place much exegetical weight on the empirical claim that some languages are *not* intertranslatable (i.e. vocabularies that are incommensurable), a possibility which Davidson does not deny, he must follow Davidson in holding that such alternative languages (or vocabularies) are not meaningful.²⁰²

On this basis, unlike traditional analytic philosophy, which draws the distinction between meaningful linguistic items and the world, as that between language and non-language, Rorty and Davidson are committed to drawing the line between our current vocabulary and everything else.²⁰³ Thus for example a metaphor, which is the inappropriate use of a sentence that is not

²⁰¹ This identification is made by Davidson within "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Essential Davidson*, 197.

²⁰² Rorty claims that he is following Wittgenstein on this point. Rorty is claiming, following Barry Allen, that anti-essentialist description is relative to the contingent set of *justificatory* propositions that is in use at a particular time, which are *in turn* made "determinate" by *causal* practice. In the passage cited above (PSH, 56) Rorty explicitly footnotes Barry Allen for his interpretation of Wittgenstein on this point: Barry Allen, *Truth in Philosophy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1993. In *Truth in Philosophy*, Barry Allen provides a largely propositional account, 125: "[Wittgenstein's] term *language-game* 'is meant to bring into prominence the fact that speaking a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life' (PI. 23). I take the point that what is said—the 'meaning' or 'content' of the occasional use of language—has an identity no more determinate than what it derives from the habits and practice that sustain a language-game, whose thorough-going contingency Wittgenstein underlined." It is this intermediate notion of "determinacy" that misinterprets Wittgenstein – meaning comes *through* practice, not made determinate *by* practice.

²⁰² Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, §66.

²⁰³ That Davidson is committed to denying language (or linguistic ability) with the failure of understanding is made evident in "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," *Essential Davidson*, 264-5: "a person's ability to interpret or speak to another person consists [in] ... the ability that permits him to construct a correct, that is convergent, passing theory for speech transactions with that person. ... This characterisation of linguistic ability is so nearly circular that it cannot be wrong: it comes to saying that the ability to communicate by speech consists in the ability to make oneself understood, and to understand. ... We may say that linguistic ability is the ability to converge on a passing theory from time to time." For Davidson, language becomes our current passing theory, or the ability to construct a passing theory. Designating language by rules, conventions, grammar etc falls short. We must "give up the Principles". See also, Davidson in

from our current vocabulary,²⁰⁴ is the equivalent of a non-propositional, meaningless, non-linguistic gesture:

In [Davidson's] view, tossing a metaphor into a conversation is like suddenly breaking off the conversation long enough to make a face, or pulling a photograph out of your pocket and displaying it, or pointing at a feature of the surroundings, or slapping your interlocutor's face, or kissing him. Tossing a metaphor into a text is like using italics, or illustrations, or odd punctuation or formats.²⁰⁵

Metaphors, and other ill-placed sentences, however, are not *useless*. Rather, like our body gestures, they simply lack propositional meaning. In other words, they are reduced to mere "marks and noises."²⁰⁶ However, unlike our body gestures, metaphors can *become* meaningful by gradually acquiring an habitual use, "a familiar place in the language game."²⁰⁷ Consequently, the meaning of a sentence, and hence its truth-value is always dependent upon the game which is currently being played. In turn, we choose a new vocabulary, or to change a vocabulary (i.e. by adopting a metaphor) *not* on the basis of the truth-values within a vocabulary (because on Davidson's view meaning and truth-values do not reach beyond the current vocabulary in use) but rather on the *usefulness* of such a change.²⁰⁸ Thus we do not have to conceive the adoption of

Truth and Predication, 3, "Truth, whether of sentences or of utterances, is relative to a language and never know exactly what the language is."

²⁰⁴ Rorty's point is that when used outside of our current vocabulary, a proposition-looking construction (for example a metaphor) does not have meaning. Why? Because "uttering a sentence without a fixed place in a language game is, as the positivists rightly have said, to utter something which is neither true nor false." CIS, 18.

²⁰⁵ CIS, 18

²⁰⁶ Rorty, "Hesse and Davidson on Metaphor", ORT 163: *Pace* Hesse and Black, "Davidson lets us see metaphors on the model of unfamiliar events in the natural world – *causes* of changing beliefs and desires – rather than on the model of *representations* of unfamiliar worlds, worlds which are 'symbolic' rather than 'natural.'" Specifically Rorty and Davidson are arguing against Hesse and Black that we need another type of "meaning," eg. "symbolic meaning." We only need propositional, truth functional meaning.

²⁰⁷ CIS, 18. Once again, see Davidson in "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" for how we understand metaphors, etc, by generating a "passing theory."

²⁰⁸ CIS, 18-19. Justification is internal to a vocabulary. If a sentence is outside a vocabulary, then it is has just as much without justificatory potential as a rock. This, however, does not leave us unable to say nothing about the relationship of that sentence to our vocabularies, just as much as

a new metaphor or vocabulary as the adoption of a new “Truth,” a new conceptual scheme, but rather as change in the pragmatic way in which our vocabularies, *qua* tools, meet our purposes.²⁰⁹ These purposes, of course, might also change, affecting the contingent usefulness of one vocabulary, and provoking our change to another.

On this basis, Rorty helps himself to talk of “familiar” and “unfamiliar” marks and noises, as the distinction between our current vocabulary and a potential one. In doing so, however, as I will argue below, Rorty shifts the philosophical weight of his position on to making coherent sense of discussing the “usefulness of vocabularies relative to particular purposes,” because it is only by relating vocabularies intimately to separate, distinct, purposes, that he can sustain discussion of multiple vocabularies, without regressing into talk of multiple conceptual schemes.

§2 Metavocabularies

Rorty discusses multiple vocabularies at once in two different contexts. The first, and the most prominent when defending his ethnocentric account of truth and justification, is in elucidating the movement between different vocabularies contained within a single discipline. Modern analytic philosophy’s most pressing example is the movement between different vocabularies of science, as addressed by the likes of Kuhn. It has been Rorty’s innovation (as explained within Chapter I), however, to expand this analysis to all other disciplines. Most importantly, as discussed within Chapter II, Rorty has hoped to expand this analysis self-reflexively to philosophy itself, describing his own proposed “anti-representationalism” as a new vocabulary evolving beyond the old philosophical vocabulary of “representationalism.” Further, in all these applications Rorty has sought to gain purchase out of the claim that the older vocabularies are in some ways “incommensurable” with the new, and hence that we should not attempt to translate new proposals, like his own anti-representationalism, into the old vocabulary of the discipline. In this way, ethnocentrism should not be adjudged by its incapability to express a positive theory of

we can talk about the rock’s relationship – we can talk in terms of causation. Causation allows us the Darwinian account of vocabulary change.

²⁰⁹ The tool analogy is Wittgenstein’s. See, Brandom, “Vocabularies of Pragmatism.”

truth, and anti-representationalism should not be expected to give an account of how things, including philosophy and language, “really are.”

There is, however, a second context in which Rorty *must* discuss multiple vocabularies at once. This is in discussing the relationship between two co-existing vocabularies each within different disciplines. As illustrated in Chapter II, I take the main force of Putnam’s charge of methodological solipsism not to demonstrate the unintelligibility of Rorty’s anti-representationalist vocabulary, but rather its (alleged) limits. That is to say, Putnam forces Rorty to clearly distinguish anti-representationalism as a vocabulary for use exclusively within philosophy, and not within other areas of life, i.e. within other disciplines, for other purposes. It is only in this way that Rorty’s commitment to seeing language as “marks and noises” within anti-representationalism can be restricted to “philosophy of language purposes.”²¹⁰

Rorty does not explicitly distinguish between these two contexts, but to ease explanation I would suggest terming the first context in terms of “vertical” relationships between vocabularies, within a discipline; and the second, “horizontal” relationships between vocabularies between disciplines. Indeed, these two contexts often blur, particularly within the history of philosophy as it has attempted to order not just vocabularies, but disciplines – hypostatizing science or theology or metaphysics for example. This, however, replaces the Rortian model of co-existing disciplines running parallel to one another, with a hierarchical model that places one discipline (and its vocabulary) at the top. This is the traditional philosophical dream of universal commensuration not just *vertically* between vocabularies (within a single discipline) but also *horizontally* between all disciplines (*qua* vocabularies).²¹¹

²¹⁰ RRRJ, 88.

²¹¹ Indeed, insofar as I go onto show that the notion of “discipline” equates to “purpose,” Rorty demonstrates that traditional philosophy is committed to their being one purpose to all disciplines, all vocabularies, all life. The usual candidate, of course, is “Truth.” Brandom also makes this point, “Vocabularies of Pragmatism,” 168. Even upon Rorty’s model, the vocabulary of one discipline might be useful in another, such as that of science within philosophy (as with Darwinian naturalism), but it enters as a metaphor into the alternative discipline, not as a commensurating force between the disciplines. Similarly, just as a vocabulary may become extinct, so may a discipline.

In both vertical and horizontal contexts, however, Rorty has a *prima facie* onus to explain how he discusses so freely the relationships between (incommensurable) vocabularies, without a commitment to talking in terms of alternative conceptual schemes. As Robert Brandom has put it, Rorty must make sense of using a “metavocabulary” to discuss vocabularies, without a commitment to *metaphysics*, *qua* a commensurating metavocabulary.²¹² Brandom’s suggestion is that Rorty largely uses not one, but *two* metavocabularies – a “causal metavocabulary” and a “vocabulary metavocabulary.”²¹³ The former, *causal* metavocabulary has been the most prominent within Rorty’s work. On this account, Rorty explains the relationships between all vocabularies purely in terms of the *causal* aspect of the Kantian divide. It is, famously, in this metavocabulary, the metavocabulary of Darwinism, that Rorty describes the development of vocabularies simply as the “batting of increasingly complex noises back and forth.”²¹⁴

In the vertical context, the causal metavocabulary usually suffices for Rorty. As such he is not forced into describing competing incommensurable vocabularies of philosophy (within philosophy) or science (within science) as strictly speaking “linguistic” (in the sense discussed above, they do not have current truth values) because he can describe them merely as marks and noises. However, Rorty can illustrate their *causal* affect upon our present beliefs/vocabulary by utilising causal historical narratives. In fact, this is exactly the methodology that Rorty generally uses to explain the relationship between representationalism and our current philosophical vocabularies. Rorty utilises a descriptive, causal vocabulary (without normative commitments) to describe how representationalism gained force, and held philosophy *captive* for so long. Similarly, on this account, Rorty need make no distinction between the apparent contingent “appeal” of such arguments and so-called “extraneous” factors, such as education and institutionalisation in explaining the perpetuation of the representationalist vocabulary amongst

²¹² Brandom, “Vocabularies of Pragmatism,” 179-181.

²¹³ Brandom, “Vocabularies of Pragmatism,” 167.

²¹⁴ PRM, 448. As Brandom suggests, we might expand this to discussion of the “role of reliable differential responsive dispositions in empirical vocabularies, the practical capacities they enable and so on”), “Vocabularies of Pragmatism,” 167.

philosophers.²¹⁵ Wittgenstein's representationalist "picture" and its dominance can be explained in naturalistic, *causal* terms.

Rorty's use of this causal metavocabulary, however, obviously draws the rebuff, such as Putnam's, that he is a reductionist, physicalist and hence a methodological solipsist.²¹⁶ Rorty's method of escape, however, is a *double* move. On the one hand he replies to the Putnamite critic, that the causal metavocabulary is itself still only a *vocabulary*. This move in itself would not reassure the critic, as she would reply, "Yes, but haven't you have just demonstrated that your own 'causal metavocabulary' is also simply 'marks and noises,' completing the solipsistic exercise?" Rorty evades this riposte, however, by making his second move. Rorty claims that in describing the causal metavocabulary *qua* vocabulary, he is shifting purposes – he is moving from giving a naturalistic account of language, to giving a normative account. As a consequence, Rorty may change the tool appropriate to the purpose. In short, Rorty invokes another *different* metavocabulary – what Brandom has termed the *vocabulary* metavocabulary.

Within this alternative metavocabulary, Rorty is no longer committed to insisting that vocabularies are simply marks and noises, because he is no longer committed to the naturalistic purpose of the causal metavocabulary. The naturalistic purpose of the causal metavocabulary was to describe how we have moved from one vocabulary to another; the purpose of the vocabulary metavocabulary is to explain the relationship between vocabularies and their specific purposes.²¹⁷ The vocabulary metavocabulary shifts to the *other* side of the Kantian causation-justification distinction. Within the vocabulary metavocabulary, however, multiple vocabularies

²¹⁵ Rorty has long brought "extraneous" factors in to light. See his accounts of the institutional nature of analytic philosophy in "Professionalised Philosophy and Transcendentalist Culture" and "Philosophy in America Today," CP, 37-59, 211-232; and "A Pragmatist View of Contemporary Analytic Philosophy," in Eggington, William and Sandbothe, Mike, eds, *The Pragmatic Turn in Philosophy: Contemporary Engagements between Analytic and Continental Thought*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2004, 131-144.

²¹⁶ Why? Well because one is forced into describing ones own language as just marks and noises, affected causally by the marks and noises of other vocabs.

²¹⁷ Of course, the whole point of anti-representationalism is that descriptions (and hence vocabularies) are relative to purpose. Hence, insofar as we may have *multiple* purposes, Rorty does not have any further obligation to privilege one metavocabulary as an account of "how things really are."

can be described as “implicitly normative practices” without fear of invoking multiple “conceptual schemes.”²¹⁸ This is because the notion of “conceptual schemes” depends upon a common content. However, by dividing up unique purposes to each vocabulary, there is no conflict. Further, the positing of “purposes” need not entail a neutral thing or phenomenon that a vocabulary must serve, but rather only the vocabulary’s own purpose under its own self-justifying description.²¹⁹ It is within this metavocabulary, that we hear Rorty in a more Continental tone throughout his works, claiming that every object and every purpose comes under description, and that it is “vocabularies all the way down.”²²⁰

As Brandom notes, Rorty has used this vocabulary metavocabulary consistently in tandem with the causal metavocabulary so that both may mutually explain one another: the vocabulary metavocabulary validates and delimits the specific purpose of the causal metavocabulary, and hence the limits of its commitments; and the causal metavocabulary explains how we have historically developed the vocabulary metavocabulary as our contingent purposes have changed and developed.

Rorty’s interchangeable use of these two metavocabularies, throughout his works, has chiefly been within the vertical context.²²¹ Within this context, Rorty can first use the vocabulary metavocabulary to delimit the different contingent purposes of each vocabulary within a specific discipline. Thus Aristotelean physics served classical Greek purposes, just as Newtonian physics serves contemporary purposes.²²² And self-reflexively, the vocabulary of representationalism has served contingent philosophical purposes, which might now be dropped in favour the new

²¹⁸ See Brandom’s interpretation of the “vocab vocabulary,” “Vocabularies of Pragmatism,” 167. Rorty, of course, doesn’t himself actually analyse his work to this depth.

²¹⁹ This vocabulary generates right and wrong. To put this another way, the vocabulary metavocabulary gives us the point of view, the distinctly *non* God’s Eye Point of View, whereby we are always normative in description, because we are always utilising a vocabulary. Thus even when using the causal metavocabulary, although it cannot self-reflexively isolate its own normativity, it is *normative* in utilising the norms of science etc: norms we take as valuable, as useful, within that context, within that vocabulary.

²²⁰ ORT, 69.

²²¹ Chiefly because he has been fighting charges of relativism, a vertical challenge.

²²² Note: Brandom makes a friendly amendment relating to common and novel purposes, in “Vocabularies of Pragmatism,” 171.

purposes of anti-representationalism. By restricting the purposes of each vocabulary *contingently*, Rorty avoids any need to evaluate vocabularies by any one universal norm. We might now deride Aristotelian physics as “wrong,” but only in the sense that it is unuseful to our new purposes.²²³ In turn, as stated above, Rorty uses the causal metavocabulary to describe naturalistically how our purposes and vocabulary use have changed *together*. The causal and vocabulary metavocabularies complement each other very well within this context, and Rorty is at no point committed to talking of multiple conceptual schemes.

The ultimate trouble for Rorty, however, is not in using the two metavocabularies within the vertical context, but rather within the horizontal context. Within this context, Rorty need not describe the relationship between different vocabularies and different purposes we no longer have, but rather between different vocabularies and different purposes we *currently* hold. As I have argued, this is the very issue between himself and Putnam. Putnam’s charge is that Rorty is committed to using the Darwinian vocabulary across all of our current purposes. For example, if we are committed to seeing the utterances of friends and family simply as “marks and noises” for philosophy of language purposes, we are also committed to do so for moral purposes, or within ordinary life.²²⁴ Rorty’s Humean claim, in response, is that we are not – we can sharply distinguish between using the Darwinian vocabulary within philosophy, and other vocabularies within life. Rorty, therefore, must demonstrate how we can make such a sharp divide between our *current* purposes, in order to sharply divide the propriety of using one of our current vocabularies over another.²²⁵ In Rortian terms, this *purpose* demands a useful vocabulary – a useful *metavocabulary*. Rorty cannot rely upon the *causal* metavocabulary in achieving this task, however, because the causal vocabulary only *causally* explains how we have come to have different vocabularies for different purposes. It is therefore not useful in giving us reasons for

²²³ CP, 84: “[I]n the process of playing vocabularies and cultures off against one another, we produce new and better ways of talking and acting – not better by reference to a previously known standard, but just better in the sense that they come to *seem* clearly better than their predecessors.”

²²⁴ RRRJ, 83.

²²⁵ It is this very sharp division that Rorty appeals to in establishing the Humean divide, the divide between the purposes of philosophy and the purposes of life; and, it is also this very division that Rorty appeals to in order to separate our purposes in using the vocabulary metavocabulary and the causal metavocabulary.

why *normatively* we should maintain such a distinction. Why should we restrict our philosophical vocabularies to philosophy? Why should we restrict our scientific vocabulary to science? Why should we prevent vocabulary “imperialism” across disciplines? The naturalistic answer that we “just do” is useless to this purpose.

In fact, *prima facie*, many “advances” in our thought have been the product of disregarding such distinctions. Rorty himself is ever ready to emphasise the value of Newtonian and Darwinian vocabularies in challenging the vocabularies of both religion and philosophy.²²⁶ Further, insofar as Rorty often details the relationship between two concurrent vocabularies, such as the different moral and political vocabularies of cultures, he *urges* integration, engagement, and “playing off against one another,” in search of *shared* purposes. A traditional relativist answer to Rorty’s problem might be that each purpose is valuable according to its truth, referring to the normativity of each vocabulary separately. But such an answer is an anathema to both Davidson and Rorty. It commits Rorty to a multiplicity of conceptual schemes. In sum, the ultimate task for Rorty is to make sense of his vocabulary metavocabulary within a *horizontal* context, without regressing into Davidson’s “conceptual schemes.”²²⁷

§3 What urge may keep our purposes apart?

The argument above, that Rorty has a *prima facie* onus to explain *why* we should not use our vocabularies beyond the scope of their usual discipline, appears itself to rely upon a debatable premise: that Rorty is committed to articulating some form of normative relationship between vocabularies, between purposes. i.e. that he is actually committed to using the vocabulary

²²⁶ In turn, one might posit such sharp distinctions between vocabulary use, as the force that buttresses such social anathemas as the separation of ethics from business. One might turn against Rorty, and ask whether the distinctions of purposes allows authoritarianism rather counters it.

²²⁷ Illustrating the difficulties of the “vocabulary metavocabulary,” I think it is important to see its parallels with the Tarskian theory of truth – i.e. that a meta-language only describes the pattern of truth, and does not give it meaning. Hence, from Tarski we do not know that theory of truth for a language is correct. Similarly, Rorty’s meta-vocabulary gives a vocabulary pattern of norms, but not their meaning. Hence we do not if the norms are “correct.” They are stuck in the descriptive realm. Rorty (can only) be committed to one set of norms at one time – i.e. our current vocabulary. See also, Davidson, in *Truth and Predication*, 26-7.

metavocabulary horizontally. It might be argued that the only normative relationship that Rorty must admit between vocabularies is vertical.²²⁸ In order to make this claim, however, Rorty would have to hold that the horizontal and vertical contexts are disanalogous. This might be achieved by arguing that, unlike in the vertical context, in the horizontal context vocabularies do not have to justify themselves in relation to other vocabularies (from other disciplines) but simply continue to work within their own realms. On this account, the only normative “horizontal” relationship between vocabularies is actually vertical: i.e. a specific vocabulary (say “science”) would only declare that alternative vocabularies (say philosophy of language, or ethics etc) are unuseful for with respect to its own specific purpose.

The problem with this position is that it does not give us a metavocabulary to articulate the *worth* of alternative purposes. It only gives us a metavocabulary in which we can discuss the usefulness of vocabularies in relation to one purpose at one time. This, of course, is not a problem within the vertical context. Aristotlean purposes are made defunct by the Einsteinian purposes: there is no need to hold onto the worth of the old purposes. Within the horizontal context, however, Rorty appears to be committed to the individual worth of the separate disciplines *qua* separate purposes: on what other basis could he possibly be so willing to avoid methodological solipsism and preserve our “ordinary ways of speaking,” in their ordinary context? Even on Rorty’s own admission, the worth of a vocabulary’s purpose can only be articulated in its own vocabulary.

Perhaps Rorty’s implicit response is that although this might be the case, there just is no reason to fear. Once we reject representationalism, we reject the “metaphysical urge”: we will no longer have any desire to take our own vocabularies out of context. As Rorty states in his latest “Response” to Hilary Putnam:

By confining my Brandomesque account of what understanding ordinary descriptions consists of to its proper sphere, I am doing something like what Berkeley famously suggested: I am describing with the learned when in their company, and with ordinary

²²⁸ On this basis, one might say each vocabulary need have no respect for the other’s purpose or hence existence: an alternative vocabulary can either be dismissed as *non-linguistic* because it does not commensurate, or it can be Whiggishly commensurated (dismissing its contingent purposes) and held to be wrong.

people when in theirs. Philosophers have trouble only when this ambidexterity breaks down: only when, succumbing to the *metaphysical urge*, they start saying that learned purposes have some sort of privilege that ordinary ones do not (because they describe what you “really” see, for example, or because they do not quantify over more things than there are in heaven and earth). Only a metaphysical urge would lead one to say, as Putnam does, that on the view I advocate, “even if I speak of my wife or my children or my friend, I am just uttering vocables which help me cope.” It is the “just” which betrays the urge. “Just,” like “really,” suggests a purpose-transcendent privilege.²²⁹

This claim, however, is not normative (i.e. that we *should* not use the vocabulary of philosophy in ordinary life) but rather it is *empirical*. As such, it is at best wrong; at worst, inconsistent with Rorty’s own work. Rorty’s assumption is that the “metaphysical urge,” the urge to “purpose-transcendence” is inextricably linked to the old (meta-vocabulary of representationalism.²³⁰ Once this vocabulary is no longer spoken, we will no longer have the “metaphysical urge.” Hence there would be no desire to justify, deride or dismiss the purposes of other vocabularies in the context of another (specifically metaphysical) vocabulary. We would simply be motivated to evaluate vocabularies in accordance with the purposes that they attempt to satisfy. Rorty’s own work, however, consistently evaluates vocabularies in relation to purposes that they were not meant to serve. He embraces the Whiggish dismissals of old vocabularies by a new vocabulary within a specific discipline; irregardless of whether the purposes of Aristotle were distinct from those of Einstein. This is fine within the vertical context, because the new purposes replace the old purposes, but on what basis does Rorty expect to prevent such imperialism within the horizontal context?²³¹ In short, within the vocabulary of science, what value does the purpose of ethics, or religion, or political philosophy have? Why should we even bother to change to alternative vocabularies in specific situations? Rorty cannot claim that we lose the important “moral aspect” to our interpersonal communications if we were to use his Darwinian “marks and noises” vocabulary in ordinary situations, because the whole idea of a “moral aspect” has no cash value within his Darwinian vocabulary.

²²⁹ RRRJ, 89.

²³⁰ RRRJ, 89.

²³¹ “Cultural imperialism” is Putnam’s term. See, EWO, 121.

As a last resort, Rorty might admit that from the perspective of a specific discipline, the purposes of other disciplines have no commensurate value, but that this does not lead to any practical inconsistency. This is because commitments within one discipline do not impinge upon commitments in others. Such a claim, however, would either rely on a sharp distinction between the resultant practical actions of science, morality, religion, politics (as if an action could only ever be under *one* privileged description and that we had some viable basis to make such delimitations), or Rorty would have to lose the pragmatist link between belief and action altogether, claiming that vocabularies *merely* describe action.²³²

At this point, I do not think that Rorty has a current response – although I have argued that he is committed to providing one in order to aver methodological solipsism. In brief, his problem might be formulated this way: how might we hold onto the worth of our multiplicity of purposes and their complementary vocabularies, without privileging a single commensurating normative vocabulary to explain their place within a broader scheme? Rorty’s philosophy does not have the resources for a solution because it does not have the resources to utilise the concept of “worth” or “value” independent of propositional assertion within a given vocabulary. For Rorty, any normativity is given within a contingent, historically identifiable vocabulary. And hence, the normative worth of a vocabulary must itself be articulated somehow in a vocabulary (“meta-” or otherwise). I would propose, however, that perhaps the source of Rorty’s original inspiration for the very concept of a “vocabulary,” the later Wittgenstein, has a reply.

§4 A Solution?

As discussed above, Rorty’s most important move in defending himself against methodological solipsism is to intertwine the work of Quine, Sellars and Davidson into the later Wittgenstein’s notion of a language-game. Along with his Kuhnian account of change, these elements broadly constitute his concept of a “vocabulary.” In utilising the “third thread,” however, Rorty implicitly

²³² In fact, Rorty may have well lost the practical side of pragmatism, but I have little time to investigate this claim here. I would argue, however, that the very issue is the basis upon which we might use one vocabulary, over another, to dictate our practical commitments in a specific situation.

loses an aspect of Wittgenstein's account of language-games in the very process of their inheritance. Quine, Sellars and Davidson are arch-Fregeans in a singular sense: they all equate meaningfulness with the use of sentences.²³³ This is not to say that they are committed to "meaning" or "propositions," but they are committed to truth values (or assent conditions) of sentences as a necessary condition to language being *meaningful*. Wittgenstein, however, did not hold that truth-values for sentences were a necessary condition for language-games. In perhaps Wittgenstein's most famous example of a "language" game, his language consists of the words "block," "pillar," "slab," and "beam" and the corresponding actions of moving these items around. Within this simple "primitive" language, there are no truth-conditions, not even one-word sentences on a level with Quine's "Gavagai." On the above argument of Davidson, therefore, the marks and noises of this game would have no meaning. In fact it would not be "language" at all. In contrast, for Wittgenstein the very "philosophical concept of meaning has its place in [this] primitive idea of the way language functions."²³⁴

For Wittgenstein, the use of propositions (construed in a Quinean acceptable sense) is not a necessary condition for meaningful language-games, but rather they belong to a subset of language games.²³⁵ Wittgenstein's general notion of a "language game," therefore, is incongruent with Rorty's general notion of a "vocabulary" on two levels: first, it presupposes a notion of "meaning" prior to propositionality; secondly, inasmuch as this notion of meaning inheres within the primitive "language game," it is inseparable from both the words and *actions* involved in the language game.²³⁶ These crucial differences, however, are enough to source a solution to Rorty's problem.

²³³ They are all propositionalists, in a non-Platonic sense of the term.

²³⁴ Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, § 2. Wittgenstein's rejection of the Fregean "assumption" is developed more specifically at §22.

²³⁵ Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, § 135-137. For this reason, as Putnam points out Wittgenstein is not a disquotationalist. Further, as Wittgenstein goes on to show, these propositions themselves do not gain meaning (perhaps a special "propositional meaning"?) out of simply having truth or false values, but rather by being used within a meaningful language game. See. Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, §43.

²³⁶ "I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the action into which it is woven, a 'language-game.'" Wittgenstein, *Investigations*, §7.

As Putnam has noted, like Frege (and Kant, Sellars, Davidson and Rorty), Wittgenstein accepted that any purely “naturalistic” account of language would leave it as simply “marks and noises,” without normative resources.²³⁷ *Pace* Frege, however, the later Wittgenstein (according to Putnam) replaces the normative value of “the fundamental nature of the laws of logic” with talk of “sharing a form of life.” As Conant states:

Thus Putnam is able to take Wittgenstein’s famous remark that “to imagine a language-game means to imagine a form of life” to be directed against the very conception of what a language-game is (a game of making noises in certain observable circumstances), which serves as the point of departure for the standard (Dummett/Kripke) interpretation of the *Investigations*. What belongs to a language-game, for Wittgenstein, is not simply the sounds we utter in certain isolated circumstances; rather “what belongs to a language-game is a whole culture.”²³⁸

Following Wittgenstein, whilst we might accept Rorty’s point that justification and reasons might only be formulated from within a vocabulary (*qua* a highly sophisticated form of “propositional” language game), and these reasons may also be used to Whiggishly self-justify the vocabulary, the value of the vocabulary (*qua* language game *simpliciter* – propositional or not) lies in its “weight” within our lives. This concept of “weight” is peculiar to Wittgenstein, and a full explication is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is enough, however, to remark that Wittgenstein identified the value or worth of a language game *qua* language game with its weight and, *pace* Rorty, not with its own self-justifying normative resources.²³⁹ Thus although the primitive language game of “slab,” “pillar” etc., may not have its own propositional resources for self-justification, members of a culture may play the game nevertheless because it

²³⁷ Conant in WL, xlv.

²³⁸ Conant in WL, xlv-xlvi. The quotations from Wittgenstein come from *Investigations*, §19 and *Lectures on Religious Belief*, 8.

²³⁹ In fact, I have made a very fast elision of “language game” with “picture,” that is only of limited value. Wittgenstein does not in fact speak of the weight of language games, specifically, but rather of “pictures” from language-games. Importantly, however, they are still non-propositional. Davidson gets close to my analysis when he says “the language must have a life independent of the definition” in *Truth and Predication*, 37. Davidson, however, simply concludes that we must have different types of propositional games: eg. intentional, etc.

has value in their lives. Further, although an alternative language game might superimpose a justificatory framework onto the primitive language game (i.e. holding that the game has worth because it allows members to work together to build useful infrastructure), this move is simply to propose a new language game, and not to explicate the original.

Wittgenstein's concept of "weight," allows those philosophers, like Rorty, who wish to see language as a motley collection of irreducible practices, to avoid naturalistic reduction – reduction of language to mere "marks and noises." Rorty, and members of the "third thread" (except perhaps Quine) might reject Wittgenstein's concept on the basis that it blurs the original Kantian distinction between causation and justification. For, what realm or metavocabulary does the concept of "weight" belong in? Neither Wittgenstein, nor Putnam specifically answer this question, but to conclude this thesis I might sketch an answer. The answer might be that just as Quine and Davidson have looked to move beyond dichotomies, analytic-synthetic and scheme-content, which have sustained philosophy for centuries, Wittgenstein's concept of "weight" may flag a move to dissolve the distinction between the causal and normative realms. To draw this conclusion, is to follow Putnam, in drawing a new thread – a thread that moves from Kant's *Second Critique*, through the classical pragmatists (James and Dewey) and onto the later Wittgenstein.²⁴⁰ It is to shift philosophy's emphasis from the descriptive language of science, to the value of practice. It is to aver reducing linguistic practice either naturalistically (*qua* marks and noises) or normatively (*qua* justificatory practices) or both concurrently (*qua* Rorty's metavocabularies), but instead to understand our most primitive conception of language as "the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven." On this basis, to understand and evaluate a language game is not necessarily to place it within a justificatory framework because this would eliminate its action. We must instead enter into the language game within a form of life – our own form of life. We must practice what a language game preaches within our own lives.²⁴¹ It is only within this framework that we can fully re-articulate Putnam's notion of "unintelligibility," as the claim that a set of commitments is unintelligible if we could not follow them within our own lives. Finally, if philosophy is to be understood as a therapeutic account of this process, we can follow Putnam in stating:

²⁴⁰See, POP on the inheritance of Kant's notion of the primacy of practical reason.

²⁴¹ This opens up a large role for the imagination within philosophy, in order to simulate practice.

But if there was one great insight in pragmatism, it was the insistence that what has weight in our lives should also have weight in philosophy.²⁴²

²⁴² SNS, 517.

Conclusion

Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men.

—John Dewey, *Middle Works*²⁴³

But aren't you a pragmatist? No. For I am not saying that a proposition is true if it is useful.

The usefulness, i.e. the use, gives the proposition its special sense, the language-game gives it ...

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*²⁴⁴

In their later works, Putnam and Rorty, like Wittgenstein before them, both avoid giving a semantic account of the meaning of “truth.” Insofar as such an account is implicit within the projects of traditional philosophy, they follow Wittgenstein in rejecting traditional Metaphysics and Epistemology. Further, insofar as the classical pragmatists also attempted such an account, they also follow Wittgenstein in distancing themselves from classical pragmatism.²⁴⁵ Putnam and Rorty's philosophy, therefore, might be seen as two different attempts to practice philosophy without such an account of truth: without the traditional philosophical task of delimiting “Truth,” “Reality” and the “Canons of Justification.” Regardless, this much is certain, however, the charge of relativism has little role to play within their debate once this move is made. An argument that a philosopher cannot avoid giving an account of truth might be warranted, but it is not the issue at stake between Putnam and Rorty.

²⁴³ John Dewey, *The Middle Works: 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1976-83, Vol 20, 42.

²⁴⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol I, ed. G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman, tr. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, §266.

²⁴⁵ Rorty, although a self-anointed “pragmatist,” in a similar vein rejects the need to provide *any* positive theory of truth, broadly interpreted as either the Deweyan identification of truth with ideal warranted assertibility or the Jamesian identification with notion of getting into a “satisfactory relation with experience.” See “Dewey between Hegel and Darwin,” in TP, 294-5.

Unlike Wittgenstein, however, both Putnam and Rorty, have been keen to utilise the works of James and Dewey to inform this move. According to both philosophers, the pragmatist notion of “practice” allows us to re-orientate Wittgenstein’s insights within a more socio-historical framework – we can present “language games” more clearly as the products of our Western culture. The debate between Putnam and Rorty, therefore, is at heart the issue of how best to marry these two inheritances – classical pragmatism and the later Wittgenstein. Rorty’s approach is to expand Wittgenstein’s notion of a “language games” into socio-historical propositional “vocabularies” inspired by the work of Kuhn, Quine, Sellars and Davidson. For Rorty, his inheritance from classical pragmatism supervenes upon this picture to explain how vocabularies relate to one another as different “practices” for different “purposes.” The normative worth of a vocabulary, however, is firmly caught within in its own processes of self-justification, and rational progress is just like evolution.

Putnam’s approach, on the other hand, is not to start with Wittgenstein’s notion of “language games,” but rather with his concept of “weight.” For Putnam, commonsense realism does not accord epistemological weight to commonsense intuitions, but rather value and meaning to our form of life. The fundamental engine of meaning for Putnam, like Wittgenstein, is the value of our own practices within our own lives. Putnam, therefore, marries pragmatism with Wittgenstein at this fundamental level – with a mutual insistence that what practices have weight in our lives, must have meaning within philosophy. Philosophy, therefore, is built upon the loose or tangled ends of life, where language has entered the metaphysical and ceased to have value within our ordinary practices. This happens not just in accounts of truth and justification, but within religion, science, economics, ethics and politics.²⁴⁶ Philosophy is therapy within these disciplines. For Putnam, it is unintelligible to distinguish philosophy from ordinary life because its problems and complexities are the philosopher’s subject matter. It is on this basis, that Putnam cannot follow Rorty’s dismissal of old philosophical problems, nor separate their vocabulary from our other practices, because through such alienation philosophy loses meaning.

²⁴⁶ See Putnam’s later works including WL, FVD and EWO.

Neither Rorty nor Putnam attempt to foretell the future of philosophy beyond an imperative to reject its old metaphysical approach. This thesis has argued, however, that once we follow Rorty and diagnose traditional philosophy's disease as merely a contingent "vocabulary" that we can surgically remove, we run the risk of ignoring the dangerous metaphysics that continues to emerge in the language of ordinary life. Philosophy ought to stand close by, not in isolation, ever ready to "bring words back from their metaphysical to their every day use."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. by G. E. M. Anscombe, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, 2001, §124.

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