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Correspondence again? Internal realism and truth

There are two philosophers whose writings on the issues of realism and truth have influenced my own position more than anyone else's. These two philosophers are Ilkka Niiniluoto and Hilary Putnam. While I do not completely endorse the views of either of them, I wish to explore the possibility of a synthesis (or at least of a diagnosis of the situation). Their conceptions of realism and truth might not be as far from each other as it first seems. Still, we must not overlook some crucial differences.¹

Ilkka Niiniluoto has, over the years, defended a form of "critical scientific realism" essentially based on realistic ontology and on the correspondence theory of truth. In his view, it is important to understand that truth is a central goal of science. Scientific theories not only describe what is phenomenally given, or what is expressible in an observational language, but they penetrate into the deep structures of reality itself, aiming to provide a more and more accurate picture of what the world is like. The advancement of science can be understood as a gradual approachment of "the truth," as a process of getting closer and closer to the truth. This broad account of the progressive nature of scientific inquiry is made more precise by means of the notion of truthlikeness (or verisimilitude), which Niiniluoto adopts from Popper.² Science, at its best, provides us with a true account of what the mind and language-independent world is like, and even though the final and absolute truth is forever beyond our reach (fallible beings as we are), the continuing and systematic use of the rational scientific method may lead to an increasing truthlikeness of our theories of reality.

From the point of view of Niiniluoto's scientific realism, it is important to avoid both of Putnam's alternatives, i.e., both "metaphysical" and "internal" realism.³

¹ I am grateful to both Professor Niiniluoto and Professor Putnam for their interest in my work and for helpful conversations. They have both provided me so far with some unpublished material.

² For philosophical accounts of scientific progress, see Niiniluoto (1984), (1991b), and (1995a). For a highly technical treatment of the notion of truthlikeness, see Niiniluoto (1987a). I shall ignore all technicalities here and stay on a general philosophical level. Niiniluoto's views on realism will be summed up in his forthcoming (1996).

³ For Putnam's different characterizations of this distinction, see his (1981), (1983), (1987) and (1990). See also Tuomela's (1985) treatment of the issue. For an extensive account of internal realism, see my (1996c).

One should not claim (with the metaphysical realist) that the world is ontologically pre-categorized or “ready-made,” and that there is, in principle, a unique true and complete theory or description of the way the world is. Nor should one claim (with the internal realist) that the objects that exist in the world is merely a theory or description-internal matter and that truth is an epistemic notion (in contrast to the metaphysical realist’s “radically non-epistemic” correspondence theory of truth). Niiniluoto thinks that we can combine the best parts of both internal and metaphysical realism and thus hold a “mixed,” intermediary position. The reasonable scientific realist should, we are told, agree with Putnam that there is no ready-made world and that there can be more than one true description of reality, but he/she should, nevertheless, think that truth is definable as a non-epistemic correspondence relation between sentences and the world.⁴ The key idea is that while we, language-using beings, can choose what kind of conceptual and linguistic systems we use in speaking and theorizing about reality (and thus we can, in a sense, “structure” reality), reality itself nevertheless “decides” whether what we say about it is true or not. This is based upon the contention that sentences of an interpreted language refer to pieces of the world itself *via* a “linguistic structure” which is a “fragment” of the actual world, and are, thereby, factually true or false not only in the relevant linguistic structure, but derivatively true or false of the world.⁵ By no means, then, does our conceptual activity contribute to “worldmaking,” as Nelson Goodman (1987) has tried to suggest. The realist must think that the world exists “out there” ontologically independently of our conceptual activities, while what we say about the world is, of course, inseparable from our language. We cannot say anything without using language.

Niiniluoto’s attacks on Putnam’s views usually rely on the latter’s early (1981, 1983) writings on internal realism. On the basis of these writings, Putnam can be conceived of as an anti-realist: the world and the objects in it do not, in his view, exist mind-independently or independently of conceptual schemes, but “the mind and the world jointly make up the mind and the world”;

⁴ Or propositions, theories, beliefs, etc.: these can all be taken to be truth-bearers in an inclusive sense of the term. Niiniluoto’s correspondence theory is, as we shall see, Tarskian, hence, it is most natural to speak about sentences as truth-bearers here.

⁵ This critique of Putnam is spelled out in more detail in Niiniluoto (1984), pp. 89–90, 177–178, (1987a), pp. 141–142, (1991a), pp. 152–153, and especially in (1995b) and (1996), Chpt. 8. The Putnam vs. Niiniluoto dispute is asymmetrical in the sense that Niiniluoto has published many critical accounts of Putnam, but Putnam has never (as far as I know) answered these criticisms. For a general defense of realism against various anti-realistic alternatives, see Niiniluoto (1987b).

objects “arise out of discourse rather than being prior to discourse,” and they are “as much made as discovered,” since it is we who “cut up the world into objects.”⁶ These puzzling phrases have been quoted dozens of times, often in order to show that no sensible realist should follow Putnam into his wild, Goodmannesque anti-realism, which bears some resemblance to Kantian transcendental idealism. We will see, however, that this realistic criticism is not quite accurate, at least not against Putnam’s more reflected views on realism and truth.

It is illuminating to consider Putnam’s more recent ideas from two related standpoints. Firstly, Putnam has explicitly “repented” his unfortunate statements of the world’s (or objects’) being “mind-dependent” or “scheme-dependent.” Secondly, he now says that he no longer accepts the internal realist picture of truth. I shall briefly comment upon these changes of mind in turn.

(1) Despite his earlier (1983) sympathetic statements of Goodman, Putnam does not accept the idea of “worldmaking.” Here he actually comes quite close to Niiniluoto’s position. He has, for example, pointed out that, in describing the world through different conceptual schemes we, in each case, describe the same real world, the same “events,” “situations,” or “states of affairs.” We do not make the world: there is a real world not of our own making; we can refer to it and make true or false statements about it. We cannot, for example, create the stars in the sky simply by creating the corresponding “world version.” Still, we need not postulate any metaphysical world “in itself,” a world which would “dictate” its own absolutely right description in the “language of Nature.”⁷ We may, I suggest, read Putnam as saying with Niiniluoto, that while we can first choose the language we want to use in conceptualizing reality, reality (something external to our language) will then “decide” whether we have said the right things about it.

(2) Before his turn to internal realism, Putnam was, as he has admitted himself, crucially influenced by Michael Dummett’s anti-realistic philosophy of language.⁸ He later came more and more to criticize Dummett’s verificationist conception of truth (as well as some “minimalist” theories of truth also partly influenced by Dummett). It is, he argues, a “part of our form

⁶ The relevant passages can be found in Putnam (1981), pp. xi, 52, 54, and (1983), p. xvi.

⁷ This criticism of Goodman is given in Putnam (1992), chpt. 6. For other expressions of the way in which Putnam repents his idealistic, constructivistic, or anti-realistic formulations of internal realism, see e.g. his (1994a) work, p. 448, and (1994b), pp. 301–302.

⁸ See, e. g. Dummett’s essays on truth in his (1978) work.

of life” that many extremely controversial propositions are treated as having a truthvalue, even if they can never be conclusively verified or falsified. Such propositions include, e.g., the one which says that Caesar shaved the morning he crossed the Rubicon. There can, moreover, be completely recognition-transcendent truths, such as “There are no intelligent extraterrestrials.”⁹ Truth is (*pace* Dummett, Quine, and many others) something “distant” from the speakers of a language, not something merely “immanent” to a language.¹⁰ Again, there is no sharp opposition between Niiniluoto and Putnam.

What is more, Putnam has explicitly rejected the view that truth could be explicable or definable in terms of such epistemic concepts as “idealized warranted assertibility,” “idealized rational acceptability,” and “justification in sufficiently good epistemic circumstances,” etc. In speaking about sufficiently good epistemic circumstances, for example, we cannot help using a “word involving” notion (Putnam 1994a, p. 462). So, we cannot really hope to “define” truth in terms of other notions. Truth is a part of a complex language-game, in which many epistemic notions are involved. Still, truth coincides with idealized rational acceptability in the case of most of our everyday assertions (e. g., “There is a brown table in my room right now”), since we do not understand any language unless we understand such an everyday language, and since “it is built into our picture of the world itself” that such everyday statements can be verified, if the (epistemic) conditions are good enough (Putnam 1995b, p. 299). Putnam, then, admits that there are decisive exceptions to the identification of truth and rational acceptability and confines this epistemic conception of truth to one particular (highly important) language-game (or, perhaps, a group of language-games), i.e., that of our common everyday life.

Putnam’s lack of respect for truth-definitions also concerns Tarskian definitions. In Putnam’s view, Tarski’s semantic conception of truth does not – despite its undisputed technical correctness – actually provide us with any philosophical concept of *truth*. This, Putnam argues, results from the fact that

⁹ See, e.g., Putnam (1992), pp. 75 - 77, (1994a), pp. 494 ff., 503 - 504, (1995a), pp. 12, 34-35, (1995b), pp. 293 ff. I have no space to discuss Dummett’s views here. I’ll just point out that Putnam, in his lectures on epistemology at Harvard University (spring term 1995), argued that we have to take our ability to understand verification-transcendent statements as a *natural ability*. Unless we do so, we will have “either Dummett’s anti-realism or magic.” We do not, according to Putnam, even really know what it would mean, if such statements did not have a truth-value.

¹⁰ For Putnam’s polemics against such disquotationalists as Quine, Rorty, Horwich, and Williams, see his (1994b) work, chpts. 13, 16, and 17.

the famous T-sentences (i. e., sentences of the type “x is true if p,” such as “‘Snow is white’ is true if snow is white”), which are supposed to provide the condition of the “material adequacy” of the truth definition, are mere tautologies. We need not agree with Putnam’s interpretation of Tarski,¹¹ but we must see that his own remarks on truth have moved closer to realism. He emphasizes (*contra* minimalism and redundancy theories) that there is more to the notion of truth than the T-sentences express, but he does not think, any more than Tarski or his followers have thought, that any epistemic concept could replace the concept of truth.

Niiniluoto’s (and many others’) criticisms of internal realism seem to lose much of their force as soon as we recognize this. To say that truth may always outrun what is justified or warranted at present or at any given moment is to make a commonsensical point, which Putnam of course acknowledges.

Putnam connects the notion of truth intimately with our human practices of arriving at truth. Here he says that he follows William James and American pragmatism more generally.¹² I assume we are entitled to label his conception of truth *pragmatic*, but not, for that reason, *anti-realistic*. Rather, on a Jamesian basis, he favors what he now calls “natural realism.” One of the basic overall convictions of his philosophy is that a pragmatist can, in a sense, be a realist. This is a conviction I share, although I find “natural realism” problematic (see section 6 below).

The Putnamean pragmatic or, natural realist, conceives of truth not as an essentialistically definable “substantial” property, but as a multifarious feature exhibiting many different kinds of “agreeing” with reality, inextricably entangled with the diversity of our human practices.¹³ There certainly is nothing like “the whole truth” of everything. In a metaphysically harmless sense, this “theory” of truth might even be called a correspondence theory. The reality to which a true sentence corresponds can, however, only be described by using

¹¹ This interpretation has been criticized by, e. g., Moreno (1992) and Niiniluoto (1994). No detailed discussion of Tarski is, of course, possible here, but I shall briefly return to the topic in a moment. For the philosophical relevance of Tarski’s result, see Tarski (1994) and, among many commentaries, Kirkham (1992), chpts. 5 and 6.

¹² For Putnam’s most recent appraisals of James, see his (1995a), chpt. 1, and (1996). James’s classical ideas of truth are discussed in James (1978). It should be noted, however, that Putnam does not completely accept James’s theory, which (he argues) implies anti-realism about the past.

¹³ Even though Putnam earlier criticized minimalistic and “disquotational” accounts of truth by saying that truth must be understood as a normative, “substantial” property, he now regards this way of speaking as too metaphysical (see Putnam 1994a, pp. 501–502).

this sentence itself, as Wittgenstein has pointed out (Putnam 1994a, pp. 503, 512 – 513). The idea that there is one unique, metaphysically privileged correspondence “out there,” somewhere between our language and the non-linguistic world, is mysterious; rather, the Wittgensteinian “plurality of uses” of such terms as ‘statement,’ ‘true,’ ‘refers,’ ‘belief,’ ‘assertion,’ ‘thought,’ and ‘language’ indicates that there can be “an unpredictable variety of ways of ‘corresponding to reality’” (*ibid.*, pp. 514 - 515).¹⁴ Putnam’s present conception of truth can, I would like to suggest, be interpreted as an application of Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resemblance” to the property of being true. The ways in which features of reality can “make” our truth-bearers true bear only family resemblances to one another.¹⁵ Those ways are not reducible to any one definition.

In short, why should we not admit that all “classical” theories of truth – correspondence, coherence, and pragmatist theories – contain important insights and, thus, partly characterize what we normally mean by “truth” in those language-games in which we find it an important and indispensable notion (i. e., practically everywhere in human affairs)? Even minimalist theories might be accepted as such partial characterizations of truth, since in some limited sense Tarski’s equivalence *of course* gives us a key to understanding the truth-predicate. Our notion of truth must be such that “Snow is white” is true if, and only if, snow is white, but we should not accord any overall hegemony in our conception of truth to this limited account (nor to any account), which only tells us the absolute minimum.

Putnam’s (1992, 1994a, b) Wittgensteinian and Jamesian discussions of truth and reference, which I have briefly commented upon, can be seen as supporting this liberal view. Citing Wittgenstein, Putnam has argued that there is no essence of reference (*pace* such naturalistic theorists of reference as Hartry Field, Jerry Fodor, and Michael Devitt).¹⁶ An extension of this anti-essentialism about reference to an anti-essentialism about truth is, of course,

¹⁴ In addition to his published writings, this theme was discussed by Putnam in his lectures at Harvard which were already referred to. For an interpretation of Wittgenstein from the point of view of pragmatism, see Putnam (1995a), chpt. 2.

¹⁵ Putnam can also be taken to be a pluralist with respect to truth-bearers (cf. note 4 above). Not only propositions or sentences but also statements, assertions, beliefs, theories, descriptions, or even world-pictures and world-views can be true or false. Kirkham (1992, pp. 59–63) also defends a tolerant attitude to truth-bearers.

¹⁶ For Putnam’s long dispute with causal theories of reference, see his (1983), (1990), (1992), and (1994b) works.

natural.¹⁷ Even in the context of philosophy of science, this type of position has been defended: Dudley Shapere has argued that correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic theories are complementary rather than competing.¹⁸ What I wish to offer here, with reference to Wittgenstein, Putnam, and Shapere, is a *pragmatic defense of realistic, objective truth*, but not truth as traditional correspondence. We can say, with both realists and pragmatists, that truth is agreement with reality, but we must avoid thinking (as Niiniluoto, unfortunately, appears to think) that there *must* be an essence of truth – a language-relative essence *à la* Tarski, to be sure – but still an essence to be captured in our semantic truth-definition.¹⁹ This essentialism is precisely the picture from which pragmatists, especially James and Dewey, have tried to liberate us.

There may be good reasons for preferring Niiniluoto's (1994) reading and defense of Tarski to Putnam's: T-sentences are not (*pace* Putnam) trivial tautologies, but they express genuine semantic facts, untrivial language-world

¹⁷ Wittgenstein (1980, p. 75) also discusses the idea that all classical theories of truth might tell us something about the meaning of *true*. Putnam himself does not express his anti-essentialism in these terms.

¹⁸ See Shapere (1984), pp. xxxix - xli. Shapere, like Putnam, is suspicious of the metaphysical realist's notion of truth which might outrun all justification. He writes (p. 228): "But what is the *point* in saying that the truth may be other than what we believe, no matter how compelling the evidence? Does that point in any way require us to suppose that there is a 'meaning' of 'true' in the esoteric and irrelevant sense alleged? [Assume] we have a very highly successful claim (or set of claims) about the world, and we have no (specific) reason to doubt that claim. To say that the truth may nevertheless lie elsewhere than in that claim is *simply* to say that doubt may arise even about that highly justified claim. Recognition of that possibility exhausts the content of the idea that 'truth' may be something other than what is justifiably believed." The key idea seems to be that truth, insofar as that notion is relevant in our (scientific) practices, must not be frozen into the metaphysical realist's abstract and eternal correspondence, pretending that that's what truth "really means." According to both Putnam and Shapere (as different as their views otherwise may be), we have no use for that kind of a notion of truth.

¹⁹ Recently, the prospects of defining truth without Tarskian restrictions have been discussed by Jaakko Hintikka (1991, 1995), who argues that in his "independence friendly" languages (i. e., languages which recognize independent quantifiers), it is possible to define the truth predicate within the language itself, without ascending to a metalanguage. The relevance of this approach to the pragmatist picture of truth is somewhat unclear to me. I am slightly skeptical about the possibility that Hintikka's technical results could "solve" the issue of truth any more than Tarski's own. Here it suffices to note that the pragmatic, Wittgensteinian insistence on the plurality of ways of being true is, in my view, closer to Hintikka's conception of language as a "calculus" rather than to the picture of language as a "universal medium," which Hintikka severely criticizes.

relations. To admit this, however, is not to admit that Tarski told us the whole story or to imply that he gave us a correspondence theory of truth, since, as with any reasonable theory of truth, true statements are in “agreement” with the piece of reality they speak about (whatever that is). In Tarskian modifications of the correspondence theory, it seems to be simply assumed that our language-use can refer to a nonlinguistic reality (trees, cats, electrons, etc.) and to linguistic entities which are parts of reality (‘tree,’ ‘cat,’ ‘electron,’ etc.). But the crucial Putnamean point, to use one of his favorite phrases, is that our ability to use language in order to refer to reality is not a “free-standing” ability.²⁰ There are no magical word-world connections. Rather, successful reference presupposes (in addition to certain causal constraints) intentional, purposive human action. This is not to say that reference would be reducible to referential intentions, or to anything else. It is only to remind one that the entities referred to by means of human language-usage inevitably belong to a complex *human reality* whose structure is (partly) constituted by language and purposive practice. The Tarskian project of fixing the extension of the truth-predicate (of a given language) does not yet say anything about the intensional problem of truth. To take this problem seriously is to see the notion of truth as intertwined with our various normatively guided ways of acting in the world.

In a way, of course, this picture of truth amounts to a deliberate mixing of the semantic, epistemological, and methodological questions concerning truth, questions which realists like Niiniluoto usually want to keep apart. Such a mixing, however, is very different from the idea of an epistemic “surrogate” for truth (an unfortunate idea suggested, to be sure, by Putnam’s earlier writings on internal realism). There can be no such surrogate.

The key to a synthesis of Niiniluoto’s and Putnam’s conceptions of truth begins to emerge, however, once we realize that Niiniluoto’s Tarskian correspondence theory is, in an important sense, also metaphysically harmless. It is possible to read Niiniluoto’s defenses of realistic truth without making any strong commitment to an essentialistic account of correspondence. Accordingly, his position differs from that of the metaphysical realist, who would like to provide us with a (usually naturalistically acceptable) or physicalistically metaphysical nature of truth (and reference). We can at least say that Niiniluoto’s notion of correspondence is much more harmless in

²⁰ This is a key element of Putnam’s pragmatic philosophy of language. Most of our linguistic abilities are not “free standing”; this concerns, among other things, our ability to understand unverifiable statements (see Putnam 1995a, p. 12).

metaphysics than the same notion as used by physicalistically orientated correspondence theorists (e. g., Devitt). The reference of our language is, after all, based on social conventions of language-usage; causal theories, for example, cannot entirely describe the relation between language and reality, in Niiniluoto's view. Moreover, Niiniluoto does not think or even imply that correspondence is an "occult" relation or that we could only grasp such a notion of truth by means of a "mystery mental act" (cf. Putnam 1995a, pp. 10–12).²¹ He can, I hope, even agree with the pragmatist in saying that the meaning of truth must be sought for by investigating the practices (in this case, science) in which we find the truth-predicate necessary. Surely he could also admit that, in the case of "everyday language," truth and idealized rational acceptability usually coincide. He might further admit, with pragmatists, that we have to act in the world in order to learn such a language (or any language). Generally speaking, this concurrence of Niiniluoto's and Putnam's opinions results from the fact that neither of them wants to "reduce away" genuinely normative notions. The paradigm of irreducibly normative notion in Niiniluoto's writings is, needless to say, scientific progress, whereas for Putnam truth and reference are more explicitly normative.

Could the critical scientific realist, then, follow the pragmatist and recognize the fact that there is, in our practices, a wide variety of ways of agreeing with, or corresponding to, reality? Could he/she come to realize that truth, once we give up the picture offered by the metaphysical realist, need not be "defined"? Would Niiniluoto be able to drop the remnants of metaphysical realism from his scientific realism?

The reason why he might not want to follow the pragmatist all the way is precisely his insistence on *scientific* realism; roughly, on the Sellarsian idea that, ontologically speaking, science provides us with a deeper and truer image of the world than ordinary experience does. The "scientific image" is ontologically prior to the "manifest image."²² While Putnam has arrived closer to realism in his latest writings, he would never endorse such an account of the ontological privilege of science. We might say, then, that there is an important difference between Niiniluoto's and Putnam's ways of *applying* the truth-predicate (even if there is no great difference between their non-essentialist conceptions of truth). For Putnam, all human practices (ethics

²¹ Therefore, one might argue that Putnam has not considered serious versions of the correspondence theory in his critique of that theory. Cf. my (1996b) work.

²² This kind of strong scientific realism is defended by Sellars (1963) and further developed by Tuomela (1985).

included) are in the same boat. Facts and values are deeply entangled, and there are completely (for us) no non-conceptualized, non-normative “pure facts”. Truth is an interesting philosophical notion only within the sphere of human life and action; to ask whether there might be truths out there infinitely remote from anything we could ever even understand is not to ask any pragmatically valuable question. Language-usage is inseparable from other human ways of acting. For Niiniluoto, on the contrary, science is, in principle, capable of describing a purely factual, practice-independent reality (even though the choices of languages we use in describing that reality are, again, guided by our valuational decisions). Science is able to achieve a more and more truthlike picture of that reality.

One might now suggest rather provocatively that if the realist (e. g., critical scientific realist) is not with Putnam and other pragmatists here, he is with Sellars. From Putnam’s standpoint, the realist’s insistence on the need to maintain the idea of “defining” truth as “correspondence” might just appear irrelevant. Moreover, from the pragmatic point of view, to say that science will get closer to the truth than our most reflective commonsensical practices (or other non-scientific practices) is to illegitimately raise one particular practice to a privileged position with respect to our contact with reality.²³

What is more, it seems to me that Putnam’s recent turn back to realism does *not* result from his having realized that the realistic critics had been right the whole time.²⁴ They have not been right, he will (I suppose) still go on to say, since they have relied on metaphysical realism and on the suspect notion of the world’s ontological “(mind-)independence.” Putnam has not actually said that in his view, metaphysical realism is false. It is, much more seriously, incoherent or unintelligible. If internal realism is construed as an *alternative* metaphysical picture, as replacing metaphysical realism, it is equally unintelligible. The failure of the metaphysical realist does not result from any inability of ours.²⁵

Consequently, we cannot say that the metaphysical realist’s world, i. e., THE WORLD (“reality in itself”), does not exist, but we must recognize that

²³ It should be noted that this problem is much worse in Sellars’s and Tuomela’s scientific realism than in Niiniluoto’s, which is at least intended to be more liberal and tolerant.

²⁴ For example, Devitt (1991), one of the most influential contemporary realists, has not, in my view, been able to produce one single interesting and serious argument against Putnam’s internal realism. All he has to say is that Putnam’s early model-theoretic arguments are suspicious (and I agree with this statement).

²⁵ See Putnam (1994b) and especially James Conant’s introduction to that volume.

we have no idea of what THE WORLD could ever even refer to. The world cannot be pictured as a noumenal dough which we cut up into pieces (objects, processes, or whatever) by means of our conceptual “cookie cutters.”²⁶ Arguably, Niiniluoto (1995b) tries to say something which he cannot coherently say when he claims that “THE WORLD” has a physical spatio-temporal structure and obeys natural causal laws and that it is “a lawlike flux of causal processes.” Isn’t he speaking about a pre-structured, pre-categorized, metaphysically independent reality, after all?²⁷ On the other hand, his earlier, less naturalistic talk about THE WORLD as “a collection of *potential facts* which become actual when we impose some concepts upon it” (Niiniluoto 1984, p. 177) introduces a curious metaphysics of potential facts existing mind-independently out there in THE WORLD. Moreover, the assumption that human language can, through social conventions, represent fragments of THE WORLD is extremely problematic but, as far as I can see, left unproblematic by Niiniluoto (see *ibid.*, pp. 178, 188). This kind of talk, together with the scientific idea that science can, in principle, describe fragments of THE WORLD, should be given up if one wishes to avoid the obscurities of metaphysical realism.

In a metaphysically harmless sense, we can and should say that our ways of describing the world agree – or fail to agree – with the ways the world is. For example, our present statement (in the language we now have in use), which says that there were dinosaurs on the earth before man or any other language-using being appeared, certainly agrees with the way things are (or were), but we are unable to postulate any absolutely mind or description-independent WORLD as the object of *all* our various conceivable ways of agreeing with the ways things are.²⁸ That postulation does not *work*.

My remarks should not be misunderstood: I am not suggesting that we should simply accept Putnam’s views. On the contrary, I find his recent (1994a, b)

²⁶ This “Cookie Cutter” metaphor, which I take to be at work in Niiniluoto’s position, is extensively criticized in Putnam, (1987) and (1990).

²⁷ In conversation, Niiniluoto has admitted that he subscribes to a minimal version of the metaphysical realist’s thesis of a “ready-made” world by giving such an account of the mind-independent WORLD. He still opposes (as he, of course, should) the stronger thesis that THE WORLD has some more specific ready-made ontological structure (e. g., that it consists of a fixed set of mind-independent objects), as well as the thesis that there is some privileged language for describing that structure.

²⁸ Some realists, e. g., Devitt and Niiniluoto, sometimes talk as if these kinds of historical (or perhaps paleontological) truths were relevant in the realism vs. pragmatism (or internal realism) dispute. They are not.

“natural” or “direct” realism very suspicious. Moving from the anti-realistic-sounding internal realism to a more and more realistic (but not metaphysically realistic) position, he has also moved to what seems to me to be a rather non-philosophical (or perhaps pre-philosophical) commonsensical realism. This view roughly says that there are many different things in the world, that we can quite “naturally” speak about them, refer to them, and know something about them, and that it is a mistake to require any (reductive) explanation of how this is possible. There are, according to Putnam, neither perceptual nor conceptual “interfaces” between ourselves and the world. Sometimes, at least, Putnam seems to be dangerously close to Richard Rorty’s “anti-representationalist” and “post-Philosophical” project. That is to say, he is at least sometimes close to saying that language does not represent reality (in any philosophical sense of “represent”) and that there is nothing philosophically interesting in our plain, commonsensical notions of reference and truth.²⁹ This is something that the true pragmatist should, in my view, avoid saying, even if he/she is attracted by the possibility of finding something valuable in all classical theories of truth (see section 4 above).

One might also ask whether Putnam has, in the end, come to accept Arthur Fine’s “natural ontological attitude” (NOA). This view, developed by Fine in his (1984) writing and subsequent writings, urges us to stop worrying about essentialistic, ahistoricist questions concerning science, truth, etc.³⁰ The idea is simply to accept the ontological commitments of science and common sense “naturally,” without further philosophical problematization. This would be quite acceptable to a Putnamean pragmatist, if Fine did not insist on NOA’s non-philosophical and “non-realistic” nature (and on the claim that “realism is dead”). From Putnam’s point of view, one might endorse the NOAist’s

²⁹ He insists, however, that giving up the “interface” conception of perception and conception does not amount to giving up the idea of representation (or representing) *tout court* (see Putnam 1994a, p. 505, and 1994b, ch. 15). Nor does his direct realism require any sort of unrevisability or incorrigibility of observational statements. Rorty’s most recent statement of why truth is not, in his radically pragmatist and anti-representationalist view, a “goal” of inquiry can be found in his (1995) writing. I see no reason why a scientific realist (e. g., Niiniluoto) would have to quarrel with his view that all our goals are contextual and practice-specific. Still, truth or, rather, truthlikeness, might perfectly well be a goal. Rorty’s view is not, in effect, good pragmatism at all. Since he thinks that we can give up notions which we, from the point of view of our vital practices, find indispensable (e. g., the notion of objective truth instead of mere cultural conversation).

³⁰ For Niiniluoto’s criticism of Fine. see his (1987b) work.

ontological, semantic, and methodological anti-essentialism and simply call it, e. g., “pragmatic realism.” This would, then, be a philosophical (though anti-essentialist) interpretation of science –*pace* Fine. In fact, Putnam seems to be closer to Fine than to Rorty, since Fine is not an anti-representationalist. At least in his (1984) work he accepts the commonplace idea of “referential” truth, even though he, like Putnam, refuses to define truth in any way.

I cannot deal with the complicated relation between Putnam’s, Rorty’s, and Fine’s varieties of pragmatism in this essay.³¹ In any event, the challenging task of the pragmatist is to make the often too vague discussion about “correspondence in a metaphysically harmless sense” or the distinction between THE WORLD and the mere “world” or “reality” more precise. How the notion of reference (or, more generally, the idea that language can represent reality) can, in the last analysis, fit together with the view that there is no essence – neither physical nor magical – to this representational function should also be shown. I have not tried to suggest that the pragmatist could easily avoid all the grave problems to which the realist is hopelessly committed. Despite all its difficulties, Niiniluoto’s critical scientific realism certainly accommodates the idea that science can *correct* our commonsensical pictures of the world better than Putnam’s commonsensical realism does.³²

Fortunately, both Niiniluoto and Putnam have shown us how to seriously philosophize about truth. If the views defended by both of them are inadequate and problematic, that is to their merit. We should not expect any easy resolution of the confrontation between realism and pragmatism, even if we are interested, as I am, in the prospects of “pragmatic realism.” The problems we are facing on this highly general (meta)philosophical level will probably never go away, as long as there will always be philosophers reflecting upon them. Without fruitful disagreements about these problems we can, however, never find any truth about truth; on the other hand, our continuous disagreements demonstrate the futility of the idea of ever hoping to arrive at the whole truth of this intriguing philosophical subject.

³¹ I criticize Rorty’s views in some detail in my (1996a) writing. See also my (1996c) work, chpt. 4.5.

³² One should note, however, that Putnam has never favored instrumentalistic (or, in general, empiricist) interpretations of scientific theories. Rather, scientific realism and commonsensical realism are, for him, equals. See, e. g., Putnam (1994b), chpt. 27.

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Rezumė**Sami Pihlström****DAR KARTĄ ATTIKIMO TEORIJA? VIDINIS REALIZMAS IR TIESA**

Straipsnyje aptariamas realizmo ir neopragmatizmo santykis šiuolaikinėje mokslo filosofijoje, lyginant dvi priešingas pozicijas: Ilkka Niiniluoto „kritinį mokslinį realizmą“ su Hilary Putnamo „vidiniu realizmu“. Pagrindinis šių dviejų filosofinių koncepcijų skirtumas glūdi jų tiesos sampratoje. Analizuojant vėlyvuosius Putnamo raštus, paaiškėjo, kad jis vis tik priartėjo prie mokslinio realizmo, kurį anksčiau buvo atmetęs kaip „metafizinį realizmą“, ir todėl didžioji dalis jo koncepcijos kritikos prarado pagrindą. Putnamo pragmatinis realizmo variantas gali būti vertinamas kaip neprieštaraujantis tradicinės korespondencinės (atitikimo) tiesos teorijos sampratai, darant prielaidą, kad sąvoka „korespondencinė tiesos teorija“ neturi jokio esencializmo atspalvio. Putnamas pragmatikas, priešingai Niiniluoto ir kitiems realistams, jokia būdu nebando apibrėžti tiesos. Kas iš tikrųjų vėlyvuosiuose jo darbuose kelia painiavą, tai jo pastangos sugrįžti prie iki- arba ne-filosofinio mąstymo būdo apie pasaulio ir kalbos santykį, todėl Putnamo pragmatizmas kartais atrodo pernelyg artimas Rorty antireprezentacionalizmui.