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HILARY PUTNAM AND IMMANUEL KANT: TWO 'INTERNAL REALISTS'?

ABSTRACT. Since 1976 Hilary Putnam has drawn parallels between his 'internal', 'pragmatic', 'natural' or 'common-sense' realism and Kant's transcendental idealism. Putnam reads Kant as rejecting the then current metaphysical picture with its in-built assumptions of a unique, mind-independent world, and truth understood as correspondence between the mind and that ready-made world. Putnam reads Kant as overcoming the false dichotomies inherent in that picture and even finds some glimmerings of conceptual relativity in Kant's proposed solution. Furthermore, Putnam reads Kant as overcoming the pernicious scientific realist distinction between primary and secondary qualities, between things that really exist and their projections, a distinction that haunts modern philosophy. Putnam's revitalisation of Kant is not just of historical interest, but challenges contemporary versions of scientific realism. Furthermore, Putnam has highlighted themes which have not received the attention they deserve in Kantian exegesis, namely, the problematic role of primary and secondary qualities in Kant's empirical realism, and the extent of Kant's commitment to conceptual pluralism. However, I argue that Putnam's qualified allegiance to Kant exposes him to some of the same metaphysical problems that affected Kant, namely, the familiar problem of postulating an absolute reality (*Ding an sich*), while at the same time disavowing the meaningfulness of so doing. In conclusion I suggest that Putnam might consider Hegel's attempts to solve this problem in Kant as a way of furthering his own natural realism.

1. INTRODUCTION: PUTNAM AND KANT

Putnam's central focus since 1976 has been an attempt to articulate a kind of realism which does not end up either falsifying the world, through a false extrapolation from the results of science, or losing it entirely in scepticism and relativism. Beginning with his APA address in December 1976, and continuing through the 1990s, Hilary Putnam has regularly explicated his pluralist and holist alternative (originally called 'internal realism') to metaphysical and scientific realism by invoking comparisons with Kant, and, in the process, has offered an original and provocative interpretation of Kant's critical project.¹ Putnam reads Kant as diagnosing certain central problems inherent in the metaphysical picture, which has oscillated, then as now, between untenable versions of idealism and realism (Putnam 1994a, 488). Both Kant and Putnam reject subjective idealism and metaphysical realism, and for much the same reasons. In this vein, Putnam sees Kant



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as rejecting a mind-independent world which acts as an anchor grounding our true beliefs, and also rejecting the notion of truth as a correspondence between our beliefs and this supposed mind-independent realm truth, in favour of seeing “truth and warranted assertibility as interdependent notions” (Putnam 1992a, 366). Putnam even claims that Kant has some glimmerings of conceptual relativity, as we shall see. Finally, and here he departs from the conventional reading of Kant, Putnam sees Kant as overcoming (or at least, as I shall argue, rendering harmless) the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, between things which really exist and their projections, a distinction which has haunted modern philosophy by opposing a ready-made world to our subjective apprehension of it. Putnam deliberately assimilates the primary/secondary quality debate with the scientific realism debate, because he sees the primary and secondary quality distinction as motivated by the attempt to specify what is genuinely objectively ‘real’ and what is not.

Putnam’s revitalisation of Kant is not just of historical interest. It is, in fact, deeply challenging to much contemporary philosophy, especially varieties of scientific realism. Putnam’s account of Kant, moreover, even helps us understand Putnam’s own motivations for moving away from his earlier scientific realism. In this paper, I shall defend the main aspects of Putnam’s interpretation of Kant. Putnam’s account of Kant’s critique of metaphysical realism is convincing. Kant does challenge, in an interesting way, the key metaphysical realist concepts of correspondence, independence and bivalence, at least for the world of appearances (but not uniqueness, as we shall see). I shall argue that Putnam is correct to read Kant as not engaged in hypostasising into a metaphysical divide, the usual contrast metaphysical realists invoke – between the world as it appears to us and as science reveals it to be. Rather, for Kant, as for Putnam, both common sense and science are on the same side – the explanation of the world of appearance; microscopes and telescopes simply extend this domain of appearance, they do not falsify it. Furthermore, in his reading of Kant’s understanding of realism, Putnam has highlighted some topics which have not received the attention they deserve in Kantian exegesis, e.g., the ambiguous and problematic role of primary and secondary qualities in Kant’s empirical realism (Wilson 1984, 166, recognises this lacuna in Kant scholarship), and his commitment, if any, to conceptual pluralism.

I shall end the paper, however, with some critical remarks suggesting that Putnam’s qualified allegiance to Kant leaves him caught in some of the same metaphysical problems that affected Kant. A central unreduced core of Kant philosophy – and not just the transcendental ideality of space and time – seems recalcitrant to Putnam’s benign reinterpretation. Fur-

thermore, Putnam's own 'soft' or 'internal' realism, with its flight from metaphysical explanation, I contend, replicates the problem that bedevils Kant's metaphysics, namely, the familiar problem of postulating an absolute reality (*Ding an sich*), while at the same time disavowing the meaningfulness of so doing. So, in elucidating Putnam's relationship with Kant, I shall be shedding light on some problematic elements in Putnam's own philosophical outlook. Putnam's Kant not only denies that we can have genuine knowledge of things in themselves, but claims that evoking things in themselves is meaningless. It is not just that we cannot *know* the thing in itself, and that the notion of *Ding an sich* is retained possessing some kind of formal meaning, rather the very notion of the thing in itself is *incoherent*. Putnam wants to advocate a reading of Kant as someone "not at all committed to a Noumenal World, or even, ... to the intelligibility of thoughts about noumena" (Putnam 1987, 41). There is only the human world of experience, whose true objectivity science can, in fact, discover. Talk about what things are like 'in themselves' may be well formed, but lacks "any real intelligibility" (ibid., 41). For Putnam, "internal realism says that we don't know what we are talking about when we talk about 'things in themselves'" (ibid., 36); "[t]he adoption of internal realism is the renunciation of the notion of the 'thing in itself'" (ibid.).

Though Putnam (1992, 80–107), employing Bernard Williams' phrase, rejects any attempt to give an "absolute conception of the world" (Williams 1978, 65), because "[c]raving absoluteness leads to monism, and monism is a bad outlook in every area of human life" (Putnam 1990, 131), nevertheless, it will be argued that Putnam has not, any more than Kant, overcome talking in absolute terms about things in themselves, though it must be conceded that Putnam's reading of Kant is in line with recent accounts (especially Henry Allison's) which seek to deflate Kant's dogmatism about things in themselves. Generally speaking, Kant allowed that talk of things in themselves was thinly meaningful, in the sense of being well formed and consistent, but it could not form the basis for metaphysical attributions. Putnam might be wise to admit the same in regard to his treatment of the unreduced logical core underlying his conceptual relativity, and allow for a more accommodating account of reason, such as is to be found in Hegel, one which seeks a way of negotiating between conceptual schemes.

In fairness, Putnam (1987, 41) concedes that his reading of Kant is not the only possible one; nevertheless, he proposes it as credible, defensible and true to the spirit of Kant's concerns for our human mode of living. Putnam recognises fundamental ambiguities in Kant. According to him, Kant has two different philosophies in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, or at least there are two theories of objectivity (Putnam 1987, 41); Kant kept "a

double set of books" (*ibid.*, 42). Putnam admits that Kant does not deny there is *some* reality outside us, however we cannot know it independently of our own concepts. Like McDowell (1994) and Strawson (1966), Putnam separates Kant's "dark transcendental story" (but for a persuasive critique of McDowell as repeating problems in Strawson, see Bird 1996) from the pragmatic Kant who sees understanding of the world as intimately tied with human values and norms.

Putnam concedes that Kant, by retaining the ideas of a noumenal reality (God, Freedom and Immortality), as a necessary ground for morality, remains partially committed to a traditional metaphysical realist position, at least about the intelligible world. According to Putnam, Kant was mistaken in thinking that moral philosophy needed a transcendental guarantee, which the noumenal realm is meant to provide (Putnam 1987, 42). Putnam is repelled by Kant's retention of dualism, but even here, he offers another possible reading, claiming that Kant is moving towards a different moral position, evident in the Second Critique, which drops the need for a transcendental guarantee for morality (*ibid.*, 44–52). Putnam is especially impressed by Kant's insight that seeing the world as a unified system of laws of nature does not come from theoretical reason but is a product of pure practical reason, since it involves the regulative idea of nature (Putnam 1995, 42). In other words, the moral vision of the world actually *underwrites* the scientific project for Kant. Unfortunately, for reasons of space, we cannot pursue Putnam's reading of Kant's second *Critique* here. We shall now examine the various components of Putnam's analysis.

2. INTERNAL REALISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF SCIENTIFIC REALISM

Putnam's growing realisation of entrenched problems with meaning and reference in contemporary versions of realism led him to distinguish between two kinds of realism, which he termed 'metaphysical' and 'internal' realism (Putnam 1983, vi; 1990, 114), roughly mirroring Kant's contrast between *transcendental* and *empirical* realism. Indeed, Putnam has emphasised that there is a "familial connection" (Putnam 1987, 56) between his position and Kant's, and has asserted variously that "Kant may properly be called the first 'internal realist'" (*ibid.*, 43), and again that

... Kant is best read as proposing for the first time what I have called the 'internalist' or 'internal realist' view of truth. (Putnam 1981, 60)

During the eighties, Putnam gradually became dissatisfied with the label 'internal realism' (in part because it retains connotations of commitment to an internalist account of the epistemological object),² and, in recent

writings, has tended to avoid it, offering various reformulations, first 'anti-realism' (soon abandoned), then 'pragmatic realism', 'realism with a small "r"' (Putnam 1990, 26), 'Aristotelian Realism without Aristotelian Metaphysics' (Putnam 1994a, 447), 'natural realism' (Putnam 1994a, 454), and 'common-sense realism' (Putnam 1994, 303). Although Putnam has moved steadily in the direction of the later Husserl, Austin, the American pragmatists, and the later Wittgenstein (whom he reads as both a pragmatist and a Neo-Kantian, see Putnam 1995, 27–56), nevertheless, I believe his recent position takings constitute modifications and refinements – not rejections – of the sense of the combination of realism and anti-realism that he earlier labelled 'internal' realism. Putnam's progress, then, despite his many public announcements of changes of mind, I read as actually a progressive sharpening of the problem he sees afflicting contemporary philosophy, and a progressive clarification of the kind of complex, many-faced realism which will answer that problem. For reasons of conciseness and in order to highlight this continuity, therefore, I shall retain the label 'internal realism' as the broad banner headline covering Putnam's various position statements and terminological adjustments since 1976 (in fact, Putnam himself confirms this terminological allegiance when he refers to his defence of 'internal realism' *over twenty years*, in Putnam 1994a, 456).

Mostly, Putnam explicates his kind of realism in terms of what stands counter to it, namely, metaphysical or scientific realism, on the one hand, and various forms of conceptual relativism which involve a loss of world, on the other. Putnam's emphasis is on safeguarding our common-sense intuitions about the world, while resisting any move towards absolute metaphysics, and while rejecting all forms of dualism, especially the dualism of the *world in itself* and the *world as it appears*, and the dualism of facts and values. That is, Putnam is still a realist in the common-sense sense, while advocating a kind of pluralist 'holism', which claims there are irreducibly many interests which pick out genuine things in the world, but without us being able to postulate *the way the world is* in an absolute sense. Putnam, then, in his endorsement of common-sense realism and his rejection of a sense of the world in itself entirely independent of all our concepts, sees himself as following Kant, and, although Putnam's recent progress (through the nineties) has involved mapping his insights in relation to Wittgenstein, to American pragmatism, to Aristotle, even to Thomas Aquinas, nevertheless, Kant continues to feature strongly. Thus, in his recent book, *Pragmatism*, Putnam approvingly portrays Kant as the first philosopher "to see that describing the world is not simply copying it" and that "whenever human beings describe anything in the world, our description is shaped by our own conceptual choices" (Putnam 1995, 28),

which, in turn, are shaped by our interests. As Putnam puts it, he is opting for a “soft Kantianism” (Putnam 1994, 510), separating what he sees as a useful criterion of significance from the larger transcendental story:

Like Peter Strawson, I believe that there is much insight in Kant’s critical philosophy, insight that we can inherit and restate; but Kant’s “transcendental idealism” is no part of that insight. (Putnam 1992a, 366)

Putnam sees similarities with Kant on various levels. He admires, and indeed emulates, Kant’s formal technique of exposing the same false metaphysical assumption driving two opposing philosophies, a technique of dispersing false dichotomies he also finds in Dewey. He believes that Kant successfully diagnosed a pressing metaphysical problem and pointed in the only direction for its possible solution. He reads Kant’s Copernican revolution approvingly as the view that what we experience “is never the thing in itself, but always the thing as represented” (Putnam 1990, 261), a position Putnam famously articulated in the – avowedly rather more Hegelian – formulation that “the mind and the world jointly make up mind and world” (Putnam 1981, xi); for recent reinterpretations of that phrase, see Putnam (1992a, 368), and Clark and Hale (1994, 265)). Kant, like Einstein, Putnam says, would never have agreed to an account which cut the observer from the system of nature (Putnam 1990, 18).

Putnam, however, has never fully endorsed all aspects of Kant’s critical philosophy. Indeed, he explicitly rejects central Kantian doctrines, e.g., the doctrine that space and time are somehow “inside us”. Putnam believes, however, that Kant was over ambitious in attempting to specify exactly the construction process whereby our experience comes to be conceptualised (Putnam 1983, 210). This leads Putnam to discard much of the baggage of Kant’s transcendental idealism, including the unrevisable synthetic a priori (here Putnam follows his own teacher, Hans Reichenbach (Putnam 1994, 103ff)), the *Ding an sich* (Putnam 1978, 6), and the distinction between “the transcendental and the empirical mind” (Putnam, 1994, 510). Putnam rejects Kant’s idea of a transcendent structure of reason which prescribes the categories once and for all, and fixes our conceptual choices in advance. For Putnam, on the contrary, our conceptual choices remain tied to our interests, but our interests are changing and evolving.

Despite his criticism of Kant’s inflexibility regarding our conceptual scheme, Putnam insists that we have no choice but to follow Kant and continue to assert irreducible dualities – and pluralities – in our experience: ‘as Kant saw, we are stuck with just the sort of dualism we never wanted – “dualities in our experience”, as opposed to experience of duals, distinct substances’ (Putnam 1994, 493–494). The only other possible road for philosophy would be to reinstate metaphysics and posit, as Saul

Kripke does, the existence of genuine intellectual intuition (*intellectuelle Anschauung*), and Putnam joins with Kant in rejecting this alternative (Putnam 1983, 209), and in accepting the fundamental role of *sensibility* (but not sense data) in our cognition.³ Putnam, then, like Kant, rules out any return to 'metaphysical fantasy' (Putnam 1994a, 446), while agreeing with Kant that human beings have an irrepressible yet unrealisable metaphysical desire:

I take it as a fact of life that there is a sense in which the task of philosophy is to overcome metaphysics and a sense in which its task is to continue metaphysical discussion. (Putnam 1990, 18)

Both agree that metaphysics as traditionally carried out is impossible, while acknowledging the irrepressible urge for just such a total explanation of reality. In particular, Putnam's interest in Kant is driven by the realisation that current orthodoxy in contemporary philosophy is an exact revival of the representationalism which Kant had earlier opposed, and that revisiting Kant's strategies may help break the hold of this powerful, yet false, metaphysical picture.

3. PUTNAM'S AIM: OVERCOMING DICHOTOMIES IN PHILOSOPHY

Putnam's overall and on-going philosophical strategy involves discovering 'antinomies', or paradoxes, at the heart of the current metaphysical picture, and seeking to break the stranglehold certain "traditional dichotomies" place on philosophy, e.g., dichotomies between "objective and subjective views of truth and reason" (Putnam 1981, ix), between an agreed realm of 'facts' and a realm of 'values', "where we are always in hopeless disagreement" (Putnam 1987, 71). In particular he wants to avoid the false opposition between – he does not differentiate between these terms – 'metaphysical' or 'scientific realism' (currently exemplified by Richard Boyd, Michael Devitt, David Papineau, Clark Glymour, and others), and, on the other hand, its extreme opposite, 'cultural relativism' (currently exemplified, most notably, by Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, and Jacques Derrida). Putnam understands his opposition to current false dichotomies as similar to the situation faced by Kant, namely: the opposition between Cartesian and Lockean indirect realism (the veil of ideas view, according to which we know only our own sensations and infer the objects which cause them) – which Kant labelled *problematic idealism* – and Berkeleyan subjective idealism (which denies the existence of external reality) which Kant labelled *dogmatic idealism* (Kant 1787, B274). Both positions turn

out to be two sides of the same coin (Putnam 1981, 60) and both must be rejected.

Putnam believes these dichotomies have had – and continue to have – “disastrous consequences”, not only for our scientific and epistemological understanding, but also for our practical attitudes and moral values, since, as he says, our metaphysical attitudes determine our values to a great extent (Putnam 1990, xi). The project of a scientific metaphysics is *disastrous* because it is a reductive *scientism*, “one of the most dangerous contemporary tendencies” (Putnam 1983, 211), leading ultimately to *scepticism* and the destruction of the human point of view. On the other hand, cultural relativism, too, leads to moral uncertainty and confusion, and also, in the long run, to *scepticism* (indeed, hidden in relativism is a kind of *scientism*, according to Putnam (1981, 126)). Both contemporary scientism and cultural relativism, paradoxically, produce the same disastrous result, namely, the undermining of genuinely human modes of living. Metaphysical realism “leaves us with no intelligible way to refute ontological relativity”, therefore, “metaphysical realism is wrong” (Putnam 1994, 280).

Against both metaphysical reductionism and relativism, Putnam holds (Putnam 1987, 28) that we should “take our intuitions seriously”, and endeavour to safeguard our commonsense, everyday attitudes as an entirely respectable way of viewing the world. Putnam has long wanted “to redress the balance by asserting the claims of that vast fund of unformalized and unformalizable knowledge of man upon which we depend and with which we live and breathe and have our being every day of our lives” (Putnam 1978, 76). He is *for* our “commonsense material object language” (Putnam 1990, ix), with its realism about trees, tables and chairs, and the other “furniture of the world” – a view he also calls “realism with a small ‘r’” (Putnam 1987, 17; 1990, 26). Indeed, Putnam holds with Husserl (whom he sometimes cites in this regard) that restoring the respectability of our everyday intuitions about things will, at the same time, safeguard the possibility of a genuine scientific outlook, by restoring that outlook to its proper domain and preventing it from leaking into and overturning our common-sense view. In a bold move, Putnam attributes a similar view to Kant.

Putnam (1983, 210) rejects one possible strategy for overcoming these dichotomies, namely, that of producing a new, absolute, over-arching metaphysical system. He endorses Kant’s thought that we should “sublimate the metaphysical impulse in the moral project of trying to make a more perfect world” (Putnam 1983, 210), however, he relativises Kant’s “monistic moral standpoint” (Putnam 1987, 61) by affirming the need to articulate different visions of “human flourishing”, “a more multifaceted moral

image of the world" (*ibid.*). Putnam, then, is seeking a more flexible, pluralistic, fallibilistic, approach, whereby it is recognized that "we have rich, irreducible, multi-faceted ideas of the good" (*ibid.*, 56), a view he sometimes refers to as 'Aristotelian'. There are better and worse ways of looking at the world (morally and epistemologically), better and worse 'ways of worldmaking', to invoke Nelson Goodman's phrase,⁴ but there is no unique best way. There are different – even incompatible – ideals of human flourishing, better and worse ways for our moral attitudes and also for our epistemology, and just these better and worse ways (without a best way) *constitute* true objectivity – 'objectivity-for-us' (*ibid.*, 77; see also Putnam (1990, viii–ix)). His (non-Rortian) pragmatism contends that we can preserve our best and most rational ways of viewing the world, rejecting those "bad" and "irrational" ways, without totalizing any one as *the* true or *the* rational way. This recognition of an irreducible plurality of moral standpoints departs from Kant's monism, but is not incompatible with it, in Putnam's view.

4. THE PRESSING PROBLEM FOR MODERN PHILOSOPHY

As Putnam frequently states, the most pressing problem of contemporary philosophy has been the question of reference: How do our concepts (words) refer to (hook on to) determinate objects in the world? This question is now cast in terms of language and semantics, but it is essentially a retake of the early modern preoccupation with the nature of representation. Frequently, Putnam himself (e.g., Putnam (1992, 21)) states this problem in terms Kant employs in his *Letter to Markus Herz* of 21 February 1772 (translated in Zweig (1967, 70–76)). Some years before the First Critique, Kant writes:

What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call "representation" [*Vorstellung*] to the object [*Gegenstand*]? If a representation is only a way in which the subject [*subject*] is affected by the object, then it is easy to see how the representation is in conformity with this object, namely, as an effect in accord with its cause, and it is easy to see how this modification of our mind can *represent* something, that is, have an object. ... In the same way, if that in us which we call "representation" were active with regard to the object [*des obiects*], that is, if the object itself were created by the representation (as when divine cognitions are conceived as the archetypes of all things), the conformity of these representations to their objects could be understood. ... However, our understanding, through its representations, is not the cause of the object (save in the case of moral ends) nor is the object [*Gegenstand*] the cause of the intellectual representations in the mind (*in sensu reali*). Therefore the pure concepts of the understanding must not be abstracted from sense perceptions, nor must they express the reception of representations through the senses; but though they must have their origin in the nature of the soul, they are neither caused by

the object [*vom Objekt*] nor bring the object [*das Objekt*] itself into being. (Zweig 1967, 71–72)⁵

This is a crucial passage for Putnam's reading of Kant. Putnam agrees with Kant that the problem of representation is “the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics” (Zweig 1967, 71). He further agrees with Kant that a causal account of representation in general is not viable. Nevertheless, despite Kant's critique of representation, recently a number of philosophers have sought to explain the relation between our words and the world precisely by invoking just such a notion of correspondence grounded in causation. For Putnam, this representationalist, metaphysical realist's answer to this problem assumes a “fantastic idea” (Putnam 1994a, 514) of correspondence:

The metaphysical realist insists that a mysterious relation of correspondence is what makes reference and truth possible. (Putnam 1990, 114)

Putnam believes that this correspondence notion is just too mysterious to have the explanatory force realists wish it to have. He simply thinks any search for a single account of reference misunderstands the problem. This insight into the plurality of modes of reference informs his overall outlook (see, Putnam 1997, 172).

5. THE ENEMY: METAPHYSICAL (OR SCIENTIFIC) REALISM

To understand Putnam's diagnosis of the problems besetting contemporary metaphysics, it is important to keep in mind that for him the only current serious contender as metaphysics today is a materialist, scientific realism, a doctrine he formerly developed and defended (Putnam 1983, vii). Putnam paints with a broad brush-stroke, refusing to draw fine distinctions between metaphysical realism, physicalism, materialism, naturalism (Putnam 1983, 155–69; 1990, 83; 1992, 60; 1995, 39) and even scientific realism. They all add up to the same thing (see his, “Three Kinds of Scientific Realism”, Putnam, 1994, 492–498). Physicalism is materialism and materialism is “the only *metaphysical* picture that has contemporary clout” (Putnam 1983, 208), ‘*metaphysical*’ because it is still informed by the traditional metaphysical desire to set out the “furniture of the world”. Putnam's mission since 1975 has been to show that this metaphysical realism (“Realism with a capital ‘R’”, or, in Kant's phraseology, *transcendental realism*) is simply incoherent (Putnam 1978, 124), nonsense (Putnam 1995, 39) – not in the sense of being logically contradictory (Putnam 1994, 303), but in the sense (just like Kantian antinomies) of entailing positions which undermine it.

In his first formulations, Putnam characterised metaphysical realism as “a bundle of intimately associated philosophical ideas about truth” (Putnam 1988, 107), “what truth comes to” (Putnam, “Comments and Replies”, in Clark and Hale, 1994, 242) rather than as a strict *theory* of truth (Putnam denies that we can have a *theory* of truth since it is too multifaceted and diverse a set of notions). He diagnoses the governing or ‘regulative ideas’ of metaphysical realism as: Correspondence, Independence, Bivalence and Uniqueness. In *Reason, Truth and History* (1981) Putnam presents metaphysical realism as combining at least three elements, which, when taken together, add up to an important and widely held doctrine (Putnam 1990, 31). These elements are:

- (a) *The Independence Thesis*: There exists “a fixed totality of mind-independent objects” *independent* of us (Field 1982, terms this ‘realism₁’);
- (b) *The Correspondence Thesis*: There exists a relation of correspondence between this world and our beliefs (Field: ‘realism₃’); and
- (c) *The Uniqueness Thesis*: “There is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is’”, a description to be yielded by empirical science (Putnam 1981, 49) – (Field: ‘realism₂’)

In other formulations, Putnam includes a fourth and important claim:

- (d) *The Bivalence Thesis*: The thesis that every (non-vague, non-ambiguous) sentence is determinately either true or false (“strict bivalence”), or determinately true or not (“generalised bivalence”, see Wright 1987, 342). This thesis is specifically associated with Michael Dummett’s definition of realism (“Realism, I characterise as the belief that statements . . . possess an objective truth-value, independently of our means of knowing it: they are true or false in virtue of a reality existing independently of us”, Dummett 1992, 146) which strongly influenced Putnam in the mid-seventies when he was formulating his ‘internal realism’, which bears a qualified relation to Dummett’s own “global antirealism” (Putnam 1994a, 461–462). According to this version of bivalence, every statement is either true or false, *whether we know this or not*, and statements are made true by a reality independent of us. Putnam understands this thesis to be present in early modern philosophy in the form that objects have determinate properties, independent of our knowledge of them. In order to keep the discussion focused on Kant, we shall restrict discussion of bivalence to this version (and shall not address the issue as to whether bivalence in this form is a version of the independence thesis). For Putnam, bivalence amounts

to the claim that there are, independently of our knowledge, real objects out there possessing determinate, real properties, properties which may be quite distinct from the properties we commonly believe these objects to have. In fact, several claims are entangled here which Putnam does not distinguish (the terminology is mine):

(d₁) *The Real Property Thesis*: The claim that objects or parts either have or do not have determinate real properties (Horgan 1991, 297 characterises this as ‘strong bivalence’), which is a close relative of the independence thesis;

(d₂) *The Conceptual Nominalism Thesis*: The claim that our concepts of properties need not mirror those properties-in-themselves, and hence that we can be radically mistaken. Perhaps, this, in turn, disguises another claim to which some scientific realists would adhere, namely, what I shall call

(d₃) *The Ideal Description Thesis*: The claim that *some* version of our concepts (say in a scientifically ‘purified’ language) might reflect the real properties of objects as they actually are.

Of course, some realists (e.g., Field 1982; Devitt 1991; Horgan 1991) contest the claim that scientific realism need be committed to all these theses – independence, bivalence, uniqueness – at once.⁶ Thus, Horgan rejects Putnam’s cluster of theses as a generic “package deal metaphysical realism” (Horgan 1991, 298) and Putnam himself acknowledges he is describing a ‘portmanteau’ position. In Wittgensteinian mode, he is sketching a *picture*. These theses may be grouped together in a certain way in this picture; indeed, there are good historical and conceptual reasons for so doing, though perhaps no one theorist holds all theses. Cutting a long story short, I believe Putnam’s characterisation is correct; these views are frequently found interwoven and together they do add up to a common contemporary metaphysical approach. Let us briefly consider in turn the Independence, Uniqueness, and Correspondence theses.

6. INDEPENDENCE AND UNIQUENESS: ONE WORLD, ONE TRUE THEORY

The Independence and Uniqueness theses are usually found together in the scientific realist picture (Putnam 1983, 211). The Uniqueness claim (as stated in Putnam 1990, 30–31) is that the world consists of a definite

set of individuals (e.g., the space-time points) and a definite set of all the properties and relations of each type that hold between the individuals.⁷ The claim might be that there is an exact number of, say, elementary particles with specific attributes; or, that, say, the amount of energy in the universe is constant. What is at stake here? Clearly scientists are aiming to get as complete as possible a true description of this unique world. Part of this involves having an attitude about the world itself (there exists one mind-independent world), partly about the status of theories in themselves.⁸ Scientific realists in the main cannot believe that theories can go on competing forever (Papineau 1987, even thinks there is a transcendental argument against divergences between beliefs). Two or more different theories claiming to explain the same set of phenomena would have in the end to be treated as merely "notational variants" of each other. Realists must hold to the ideal (at least *as* an ideal) of the convergence of different theories (Putnam 1992a, 368; Putnam 1994, 496–497).

Putnam argues that the one-theory view cannot be consistently maintained even within scientific realism itself, because it conflicts with a branch of contemporary science: quantum physics. Putnam thinks that materialists talk like old-fashioned atomists and are unable to absorb quantum theory into their story (Putnam 1983, 211; for his critique of Ian Hacking's realism, see Putnam 1995, 59–60). Contemporary quantum mechanics, especially in the Bohr and the Copenhagen interpretations, makes such a single-theory view scientifically untenable (Putnam 1990, 86). Quantum physics "has no realist interpretation at all". *In principle*, and not just empirically, there can be no quantum mechanical theory of the *whole* universe (*ibid.*, 4). Now, without having to argue whether Putnam's view of quantum physics is correct (for his recent view on quantum logic, see Putnam, "Comments and Replies", in Clark and Hale 1994, 265–280), Putnam's invocation of quantum interpretations demonstrates that scientists themselves are not necessarily realists, although metaphysical realists often think that scientists must be, since metaphysical realists assume that science is progressing *precisely because* its realist assumption is true. More recently, Putnam has suggested that science could allow a plurality of theories, each internally consistent and successful in its own domain, and simply bar the conjunction of these theories as illicit (Putnam 1995, 14).

7. THE CORRESPONDENCE THESIS AND CAUSAL REALISM

For Putnam, the second distinguishing feature of metaphysical realism, the correspondence thesis, is the claim that the relation between the world

and our mental states is one of correspondence, a relation which itself is independent of our minds:

What the metaphysical realist holds is that we can think and talk about things as they are, independently of our minds, and that we can do this by virtue of a ‘correspondence’ relation between the terms in our language and some sorts of mind-independent entities. (Putnam 1983, 205)

On this account, correspondence presupposes mind-independence,⁹ and to be an effective theory, uniqueness must also be presupposed: one real relation of correspondence yields one true account. Putnam argues that metaphysical realists are neither able to explain this correspondence relation nor guarantee its uniqueness. Adapting and extending Quine’s indeterminacy of translation, Putnam (1981, 33) claims that there is no *fact of the matter* which determines reference. The term ‘cat’ can refer to cats or to the whole world minus cats, or again, that use of the term ‘cat’ may be causally connected to cats, but also to the behaviour of Anglo-Saxon tribes (Putnam 1992, 23). But, Putnam draws a conclusion diametrically opposite to Quine’s. Whereas Quine remains a scientific and ‘robust realist’ (Putnam 1994, 342), maintaining that the formal laws of quantification are sufficient to yield a determinate concept of the object, Putnam, on the contrary, draws the conclusion that Quine’s ‘ontological relativity’ effectively refutes metaphysical realism.

Putnam runs together two arguments against the metaphysical realist’s invocation of correspondence. First, there are too many correspondences suggested by the world (Putnam 1981, 73), so we cannot tell which is the right one. It is not as if a particular correspondence is obvious. One cannot simply designate one particular relation as *the* correspondence relation, because one would have to be able to know that relation in the same way as one would have to be able to know what external things are (*ibid.*, 207). Putnam says “there are many different ways of putting the signs of a language and the things in a set S in correspondence with one another, in fact infinitely many if the set S is infinite (and a very large finite number if S is a large finite number)” (Putnam 1983, 206).

Secondly, identifying causation as the right relation assumes we have an *independent* access to causation. This is to treat causation as a bit of the non-linguistic external world, rather than as a part of theoretical explanation. Unless one knew external objects directly, one could never pick out *the* correspondence relation which is supposed to hold between those objects and our mental states. Metaphysical realists assume that when they use the word ‘cause’, it actually means *real* causation. But this, for Putnam, is precisely to assume what must be proven. Metaphysical realists claim that correspondence *requires* that there be a *causal* link between things

and our concepts, terms or representations (this causal link is defended by Jerry Fodor, 1983; Richard Boyd, Simon Blackburn, Michael Devitt, et al.). As David Papineau puts it, "realism requires that beliefs should be caused by the facts they are about" (Papineau 1987, xiv). The assumption is that the world must have a real, 'built-in' causal structure (Putnam 1983, 211). But, and here Putnam is correct, neither causation nor reference can be explained totally in material terms (Putnam 1994a, 476). Materialism, in particular, is unable to explain the causal relation; it is unable to *explain* explanation. For instance, causation is thought of in contemporary philosophy as a relation between *events* not between objects and minds, and events are notoriously hard to individuate.¹⁰ Different events may produce the same effect; there is, therefore, no one-to-one connection between a particular event and an observable effect. Causation, moreover, is not itself a *physical* relation *tout court*. One cannot say that materialism is *almost* true: "the world is describable in the language of physics plus one little added notion that some events intrinsically explain other events" (Putnam 1983, 215). Rather causation is, Putnam says, a part of *explanation* (Putnam 1983, 215), and there are kinds of causal explanation which are interest relative and not reducible to the primitive notions of physics (Putnam 1994, 493). Causation, for Putnam, is relative to our interests and not something uniquely fixed by the world, it is "context bound and interest dependent" (Putnam 1992, 47; 1995, 65). Or, to put it another way, causation is a *normative* notion, and the rules governing its application are context bound in such a way that there can be no single *theory* of causation.

Putnam concludes that this composite metaphysical realist story is actually an incoherent account (on this incoherence, see Johnson, 1991, 325). Metaphysical realism does not so much contain internal contradictions as leads to untenable results, e.g., becoming compatible with its opposite, anti-realism (Putnam 1994, 303). But, in addition to offering *reductio ad absurdum* arguments for the incoherence of metaphysical realism, Putnam also supplies an account of its historical genesis in the seventeenth-century "Cartesian *cum* materialist" picture (Putnam 1994a, 458, 464), and this is where Kant comes in.

8. THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ORIGINS OF METAPHYSICAL REALISM

For Putnam, "the task of overcoming the seventeenth-century world picture is only begun" (Putnam 1987, 17). Descartes, Locke, and even their materialist opponents (Hobbes), all held versions of metaphysical realism and were committed to its basic assumptions, notably, the independence

thesis (even Berkeley held that God and other spirits exist external to my mind); the correspondence thesis; and the uniqueness thesis. But, in this period, for the first time, according to Putnam,¹¹ an important version of bivalence was formulated, *the Real Property Thesis*, whereby a real distinction was drawn between properties real things have *in themselves* and the experiences they produce *in us*, “the ways in which they affect the human sensorium” (Putnam 1994a, 485). This is one way of understanding the distinction between primary and secondary properties (Robert Boyle is responsible for this terminology, later adopted by Locke, see Stewart (1979, xiv); Wilson (1992, 220)).

9. KANT AND THE REAL PROPERTY THESIS

According to Putnam (1987, 5), here following Husserl’s account in *The Crisis of European Sciences*, seventeenth-century science actually set out to give a rigorous explanation of the nature of the world in terms having their origin in our ordinary understanding, but, rather quickly, with the project of the mathematicisation of nature in Galileo and Descartes, a split emerged between, on the one hand, what were thought to be the “real” properties (Galileo’s ‘*primi e reali accidenti*’) of an external thing, expressible in mathematical terms, such as size, shape, number, motion, etc., which the object always possesses, and, on the other hand, properties, such as colour and taste, which the external object somehow produced *in us*, but which did not belong intrinsically to the thing (“secondary qualities”) and were “not treated as real properties in the same sense” (Putnam 1987, 5). A physical object, on this account, is not actually coloured, but is extended and heavy, and also, based on the possession of these and certain other “primary” properties, has ‘Powers’ or ‘dispositions’ to produce *ideas* of colour, taste, touch, etc., in me (see, for example, Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, II(viii), 19–21). On Locke’s view, our ideas of primary qualities exactly resemble those mechanical properties in the object, giving us “an *Idea* of the thing, as it is in it self” (*Essay*, II(viii), 23, 140), whereas our *ideas* of secondary qualities do not mirror properties of objects, according to Locke, but rather are caused by properties supervening on the primary properties in the object, that is by conjunctions of primary qualities (Locke *Essay*, II(viii), 15, for a discussion of Locke’s senses of secondary quality, see Curley (1972), Van Cleve (1995).¹² In other words, primary qualities resemble and reveal their causal ground, whereas secondary qualities, being imputed by us, do not.

The ‘dispositions’ of the seventeenth century turn out not to be real properties of things but rather *projections* of our thinking about things.

Gradually, seventeenth-century realism evolved into an idealism (Putnam agrees with Allison's reading of Berkeley's idealism as "a direct offshoot of the Newtonian version of absolute realism" (Allison 1983, 18)). After all, it was Berkeley who, in the *Three Dialogues*, first argued that all properties including the primary properties, such as motion and solidity were in fact mind-dependent, sensations in the mind which Berkeley calls 'secondary qualities'. For Berkeley, qualities like solidity turn out to be as secondary as colour. In fact, Locke had already classified heat as a secondary quality. Gradually, the scientific view has estranged or 'alienated' (Putnam 1987, 1) us from the ordinary world science had sought to explain. Putnam understands the main effect of this distinction to be that the reality of much of what was commonly taken to belong to the world was called into question. Our traditional realist intuitions are threatened and this bifurcation of properties has resulted in a divorce between our pre-scientific language of objects and the scientific account.

Despite the notorious difficulties inherent in this primary/secondary quality distinction – Putnam does not discuss the tertiary qualities – it has re-emerged in contemporary philosophy (Sellars 1968; Smart 1963; McGinn 1983; Mackie 1974), associated with the view that mental representations are causally related to things. For Putnam, this modern version is just as untenable as the seventeenth-century version; neither causal account can explain how visual perception is actually achieved, e.g., how do objects *cause* the nerve impulses, which in turn cause the transmissions between neurons, which in their turn produce the 'raw feel'? (Putnam 1987, 8). We are left – Putnam here invokes Herbert Feigl's felicitous phrase – with a series of 'nomological danglers' (*ibid.*).

Putnam sees the whole causal account as resting on a myth of givenness which, following John McDowell, he takes Kant to be rejecting. In empirical realist theory, the function of impressions, sense data, and the like, was precisely to provide a non-theoretical given, entities independent of scientific theory, ensuring our connection to the world. But, Putnam argues, the very concept of a sense datum is itself a piece of theory (Putnam 1990, 243) and is a symptom of a deeper *malaise*, namely, the problematic insistence that there really exist mind-independent properties of objects (Putnam 1987, 8). Realists were driven to construct increasingly idealist and subjectivist theories of the nature of these properties in order to account for them, whereas Putnam's internal realist solution rejects the premise of mind-independent properties of objects and has no problem seeing a property like *solubility* as being just as mind-dependent (theory-dependent) as *redness* was for seventeenth-century philosophers. Both sets of properties are relational properties. Thus, the fact that the property of

colour is relational does not necessarily mean that it is ‘in the mind’. It has been the mistaken assumption of both modern philosophy and forms of contemporary scientific realism that mind-dependent relational properties are thought of as purely mental and private, and, hence, somehow less than real (Putnam 1994a 486).

Putnam believes Kant diagnosed a similar unsatisfactory situation in the philosophy of his time. Although Kant labelled Berkeley a “dogmatic idealist” (B 274) who “degraded bodies to mere illusions” (B71), and regarded “the things in space as merely imaginary entities” (B 274), nevertheless, Kant followed Berkeley in challenging the notion that primary properties were actually ‘in’ the things (Putnam 1981, 60). Kant agreed with Berkeley in seeing spatial properties as mind-dependent. In support of his reading of Kant, Putnam (1981, 61) cites the *Prolegomena*, as treating primary qualities as being as mind-dependent as secondary qualities:

Long before Locke’s time, but assuredly since him, it has been generally assumed and granted without detriment to the actual existence of external things that many of the predicates may be said to belong, not to the things in themselves, but to their appearances, and to have no proper existence outside our representation. Heat, colour, and taste, for instance, are of this kind. Now, if I go farther and, for weighty reasons, rank as mere appearances the remaining qualities of bodies also, which are called primary – such as extension, place, and, in general, space, with all that belongs to it (impenetrability or materiality, shape, etc.) – no one in the least can adduce the reason of its being inadmissible. (Kant 1783, 36–37)

Furthermore, in the Appendix to the *Prolegomena*, Kant agrees with Berkeley in seeing space as *ideal*, belonging to appearances and not things in themselves (Kant 1783, 123–124). Putnam reads Kant here as rejecting altogether the traditional modern distinction between the thing in itself and its intrinsic properties and the properties projected onto it by our experience (Putnam 1987, 43). He sees Kant as holding that there is no account of knowledge of the world which is not an account of how the world relates to a knower with the kind of apparatus we have, and hence there can be no single, total theory of the world as it is in itself independent of us. Everything we say about an object is really a statement about how that object affects us. That means we know nothing at all about the object in itself “independently of its effect on us” (Putnam, 1981, 61). For Putnam, Kant is thus rejecting a major plank of metaphysical realism – bivalence – in its classic formulation, namely, the *Real Property Thesis*.

10. KANT AND THE UNIQUENESS THESIS

While Putnam believes Kant to be the first person correctly to diagnose the internal incoherence of traditional realist metaphysics and the first to

reject a central plank of that realism, namely the correspondence theory of truth (Putnam allows that Berkeley may also be read as rejecting correspondence), he sees Kant as remaining committed to at least one aspect of metaphysical realism, namely, the Uniqueness Thesis, the claim that there is "exactly one scientific version of the world" (Putnam 1987, 43), a view that Putnam himself initially espoused in line with his commitment to the positivist dream of unified science (Putnam 1992, 2). It seems clear that Kant was optimistic about the progress of science of a generally Newtonian kind (while rejecting specific Newtonian commitments, e.g., to atomism, absolute space and time, and so on) and believed there was a single true account of the nature of the world (of appearances, at any rate). Still, Putnam sees some glimmerings of 'conceptual relativity' and 'pluralism' in Kant, in those passages where Kant recognized the possibility of more than one kind of reason (*ibid.*, 43), and in the general recognition that there are scientific, moral, religious images of the world, which when interacting produce further images, e.g., legal and aesthetic (Putnam 1995, 30–31).

In support of Putnam's reading of Kant as an incipient pluralist, we might cite passages in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (e.g., Transcendental Aesthetic, in a section added in B text only), dealing with the peculiarly human mode of intuiting spatially and temporally, which appear to leave open the possibility of another non-human kind of sensible intuiting. Thus Kant says:

Our mode of intuition is dependent upon the existence of the object, and is therefore possible only if the subject's faculty of representation is affected by that object.

This mode of intuiting in space and time need not be limited to human sensibility. It may be that all finite, thinking beings necessarily agree with man in this respect, although we are not in a position to judge whether this is actually so. But however universal this mode of sensibility may be, it does not therefore cease to be sensibility. (Kant 1787, B72)

Other passages in the B-text (e.g., B148) speak of 'intuition in general' (*Anschauung überhaupt*, "be the intuition like or unlike ours, if only it be sensible and not intellectual"), thereby allowing that there may be sensible forms of intuiting different from ours. At B310, Kant goes further and acknowledges, "we cannot assert of sensibility that it is the sole possible kind of intuition". Kant then appears to be entertaining two different possibilities: first, allowing for the possibility of different kinds of sensible intuition (possibly held by other rational beings with different kinds of embodiment); and, secondly, allowing for the possibility of *intellectual* intuition (even one which humans contingently do not possess). Indeed, Kant is not consistent in his treatment of the possibility of intellectual intuition. At times (e.g., Kant 1787, A252) he is sceptical even about the possibility of another mode of intuition:

We have not indeed been able to prove that sensible intuition is the only possible intuition, but only that it is so for us. But neither have we been able to prove that another kind of intuition is possible. Consequently although our thought can abstract from all sensibility, it is still an open question whether the notion of the noumenon be not a mere form of a concept, and whether, when this separation has been made, any object whatsoever is left. (Kant 1787, A252)

And, at A255, he states categorically that we cannot even form the concept of a possible intuition of non-sensible objects. If intellectual intuition and differing sensibilities were allowed, they would serve to relativise Kant's epistemological framework. However, even if he allows different kinds of intuition and sensibility, it is still doubtful that Kant is implicitly recognizing more than one possible form of *rationality*, and hence more than one conceptual scheme, thereby offering the glimmerings of conceptual relativity Putnam is seeking. The faculties of reason and sensibility, not sensibility alone, determine rationality, for Kant. It is undoubtedly true, however, that some of Kant's followers interpreted him in an anthropological manner, as specifying the conditions of knowledge for *human* knowledge rather than the conditions of knowledge in general. So Putnam is not alone in finding glimmerings of conceptual relativity in Kant.

Putnam may be correct to assert that Kant was beginning to question tentatively the one-world, one-theory theses (Independence and Uniqueness), but it is not entirely clear that Kant thought the postulation of non-human modes of intuiting has any content at all, and so we can conclude that Kant remains committed to the uniqueness thesis with only a hint of wavering. But since, on Putnam's account, Kant certainly rejects the first two theses of metaphysical realism, independence and correspondence (about which we will have more to say), even his retention of the uniqueness thesis would be relatively harmless.

11. KANT AND THE MIND-INDEPENDENCE THESIS

For Putnam, as we have seen, Kant holds that there is no such thing as a mind-independent 'object'; to be an object is precisely to be an object of someone's experience. As Kant says, objects are always constituted *within* our experience (Kant 1787, A104). Putnam agrees with Kant: the contents of our experiences "are as much caught within the web of belief and conceptualization as are external objects" (Putnam 1987, 43). Furthermore, against empiricists of a phenomenal kind, our knowledge is knowledge of objects, and not experiences of sensations, a point which the pragmatists also emphasised.

Sensations for Kant – the ‘objects of inner sense’ – are on a level with so called ‘external objects’. They are as much caught within the web of belief and contextualization as are external objects. They do not represent an uncorrupted given that somehow anchors our knowledge. (Putnam 1987, 43)

Putnam reads Kant as holding that we experience already formed *objects* and explicitly rejecting an empiricist, sense-data account of experience, whereby all we know are our own sense-data, impressions or ideas (*ibid.*). Putnam claims that Kant’s genius was his ability to see that the restriction of our knowledge to items in our own subjectivity – be they impressions, sensations, ideas, or whatever – merely shifted the problem of objectivity back to *within* our impressions or ideas: how do these impressions possess objectivity? The traditional way of ideas account simply *relocated* the problem of objectivity without *resolving* it.

Putnam’s interpretation of Kant here is undoubtedly correct. To be true to the spirit of transcendental idealism as an empirical realism, one must read Kant as holding that the objects of our experiences – the appearances (*Erscheinungen*) – are ordinary objects in the usual sense, trees, mountains, tables, chairs, and so on. There has been a tendency among commentators to treat Kant as a representational realist at the level of sensory experience, and to see him as postulating a complex cognitive apparatus to process this raw, sensory input. But this is to miss the radicality of Kant’s achievement, Kant is something of a ‘holist’ in his account of the interplay of intuition and conceptuality; we need an a priori apparatus determining objectivity in order to be able to have sensible experiences of objects at all.

Furthermore, Kant explicitly says in the First Critique that sensations on their own are not intuitions and, on their own, yield no thought of an object, e.g., A166/B208: “sensation is not in itself an objective representation”, and B309, “through mere intuition nothing at all is thought, and the fact that this affection of sensibility is in me does not [by itself] amount to a relation of such representation to any object”. Sensations, for Kant, are the non-intentional *matter* of intuitions, and intuitions are given to us only as already *formed* by space and time, and conceptualised by our mental apparatus (which involves unifying and objectifying structures). In a sense, we can only talk of intuition and sensation after the fact, when already combined conceptually to yield an object, a point well made by John McDowell (1994), whom Putnam follows here. Furthermore, Kant’s sophisticated account in the Transcendental Deduction (B-version, §§18–19) regarding the manner in which judgements acquire an objectively valid status beyond the mere subjective synthesis of representations, is meant to show how objectivity is a matter, not of sensations flowing into us, but of a meeting of mind and reality to produce mind and reality, as Putnam says.

Kant's complicated arguments in the Refutation of Idealism that the very notion of myself as having experiences presupposes an object outside me persisting over time, and, in the Transcendental Deduction that the notion of an object requires a conception of unity which can only come from the subject, help cement the view of the holistic interplay between subject and object in Kant's system.

Granted, then, that objects as a whole are conceptualised by us, and that all an object's properties are relational properties, related to our faculties of intuiting and conceiving, what remains of the real property thesis in Kant? If all properties are relational, should not Kant have dispensed entirely with the primary/secondary quality distinction? Some critics (e.g., Strawson 1966, 40; Sellars 1968, 57; Wilson 1984, 160) argue that Kant did not reject the Lockean distinction between primary and secondary qualities, but, in fact, employed it unquestioningly (for a more differentiated view but still reading Kant as a Lockean, see Langton (1998, 162–185)). Thus, Margaret Wilson interprets Kant's empirical realism as precisely a kind of *scientific realism*, not a defence of common sense as in Berkeley, the very view from which Putnam is distancing Kant. Wilson (*ibid.*, 166–167) believes Kant is committed to the traditional scientific realist account: a causal theory whereby sensations are caused by empirical objects in our experience, and also to the view that the empirical objects in our experience have primary qualities which cause the non-real secondary qualities (such as tastes and colours). Wilson (1984, 166–167) cites passages in the Transcendental Aesthetic, such as A28-9, which seem to embrace a very traditional account of secondary qualities while arguing that space is ideal in a different way to colours:

The taste of a wine does not belong to the objective determinations of the wine, not even if by the wine as an object we mean the wine as appearance, but to the special constitution of sense in the subject that tastes it. Colours are not properties of the bodies to the intuition of which they are attached, but only modifications of the sense of sight, which is affected in a certain manner by light. (Kant 1787, A28–29)

She also cites the B-version of the same passage, where Kant says colours are not properties of things but only “changes in the subject, changes which may, indeed, be different for different men” (B44–5). Wilson, while acknowledging passages in the Fourth Paralogism which seem to challenge this view, further interprets Kant's remarks in the Anticipations of Perception (A373–7) that perception affords us “something real in space” (*etwas Wirkliches im Raume*) to mean that there is some real, non-coloured existent causing our sensations. Wilson concludes, *contra* Putnam, that Kant accepted the usual seventeenth-century story about real properties and projections:

But like Descartes, and unlike Berkeley, Kant construes the world of science and not the world of sensation, as empirically real. (Wilson 1984, 169)

Admittedly, Wilson recognises that Kant makes use of the primary-secondary distinction only with regard to empirical objects, which are themselves transcendently ideal, because space is an a priori form of sensibility:

The secondary qualities are assimilated by Kant to sensations. According to this complicated theory, then, bodies in space are transcendently ideal because space is only the form of our sensibility, but their primary qualities are empirically real. Their perceived colors, odors, tastes, and so forth are not even *empirically* real. (Wilson 1984, 165)

But Putnam's interpretation of Kant can be partially defended – as I have already suggested – by interpreting Kant's account of sensations in the Aesthetic as only part of a larger story, elements abstracted from the composite of concepts and intuitions. As is well known, Kant's use of terms like 'sensation', 'appearance', 'perception', and 'causation', is highly ambiguous between an *empirical* and a *transcendental* meaning, and often also between their transcendental meaning and transcendent meaninglessness (causation is a case in point here). While it certainly must be admitted that Kant does not entirely abolish the empirical distinction between primary and secondary qualities, his more reflective formulations put it out of service; no serious philosophical claim (i.e., one leading to scepticism) is involved when the distinction is invoked (Potter 1984, 175, makes a similar point). In the above passages from the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant is arguing against drawing an idealist conclusion from the supposed subjectivity of our sensory experiences, but these passages must be measured against the *Prolegomena* passages Putnam quotes. Space is a necessary condition for the appearance of objects as belonging to the outer world, in a way in which an object's colour and taste are not. Colour and taste merely relate to a subject's empirical make-up, whereas space is a necessary condition of outer experience. But, by that, Kant is *not* implying that spatial properties are primary, and colours, etc., are secondary.

There are, in fact, other passages in the First Critique (e.g., B69–71) where, against Wilson's reading, Kant does allow that sensory qualities may properly be ascribed to empirical objects. He is also aware (e.g., A45–46/B63–4) that the *empirical* distinction between aspects of the appearance which hold for all perceivers, and those aspects which depend on a relationship to a "particular standpoint or to a particularity of structure in this or that sense", is not the same as the *transcendental* distinction between thing in itself and appearance. To cite Kant's own example, the rainbow in a sunny shower can be called mere appearance and the rain the thing in itself, in the empirical manner of speaking, but *transcendentally* viewed,

we realise that the raindrops, too, are appearance and “their round shape, nay even the space in which they fall, are nothing in themselves, but merely modifications or fundamental forms of our sensible intuition and that the transcendental object remains unknown to us” (Kant 1787, A46/B63). It is clear from this passage that being a modification of sensible intuition belongs to *all* qualities, or, as Putnam puts it, all properties are like secondary qualities (Putnam 1981, 61; for a discussion of Putnam’s claim, see Van Cleve, 1995)¹³, though this has different degrees of import depending on our interests.

Let us try to get clearer about the exact nature of the dispute. Putnam can agree with Wilson that Kant does reject the *transcendental realist* assumption that the primary qualities belong to things in themselves. Putnam can also agree with Wilson that primary qualities are both *transcendentally* ideal and empirically real. For Kant, occupying space is *subjective* in the transcendental idealist sense – spatiality is dependent on the constitution of human sensibility. The passage quoted above (A46/B63) shows that Kant does not make a *transcendental* distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and regards the empirical distinction as a legitimate manner of speaking within its bounds, one which has no serious consequences. The consequence would be serious if adopting the distinction in its empirical form led to *scepticism*. But Wilson agrees that Kant, unlike Descartes, was untroubled by the “discrepancy between the subjective world of ‘sensation’ … and the world of bare matter (or forces) portrayed in scientific theory” (Wilson, 1984, 169). The area of disagreement, then, is purely the status of some secondary qualities (understood as the sensations in us rather than as the powers of objects to create these sensations in us) – whether they are empirically real. Where Wilson is wrong and Putnam right is that Kant does not “construe the world of science, and not the world of sensation, as empirically real”. *Both* are empirically real (as the passage at A46/B63 makes clear), and the scientific is, for Kant, as Putnam says, simply an extension of the common-sense world given through the senses.

Of course, Kant may be allowed to hold that empirical intuition may have some aspects that are more subjective (in one sense of ‘subjective’ – in this sense less relevant to current scientific explanation because caught up in less universalisable relations to a subject) than other aspects, thus the taste of wine may be more ‘subjective’ empirically than its occupying space (Kotzin and Baumgärtner, 1990, argue in this manner). Sensations are the *a posteriori*, ‘unanticipated’ element in our experience, and though a necessary requirement for actual experience, they are not objective in the sense of possessing the necessity and universality that can only come from the *a priori* side. Thought on their own (and, of course, they never

are on their own), they are indeed ‘subjective’ and may, without philosophical danger, be thought of as caused by objects in our experience, but in fact, sensation is, as Kotzin and Baumgärtner (1990, 403) put it, the “undetermined remainder” in the critical-transcendental account of experience. Thus, in the *Anticipations of Perception*, Kant does acknowledge that sensation encounters “the real” or “reality”: “what corresponds in empirical intuition to sensation is reality (*realitas phaenomenon*)” (B209). What Kant means by phenomenal reality here surely includes, contra Wilson, *both* our everyday experiences of colours and sounds and other intensive magnitudes *and* our scientific understanding of forces and so on. Our experience is not just framed spatially and temporally, but possesses a content which, *in relation to us*, possesses a degree of intensity, intensive magnitude. At A168–169/B210–211, Kant says, “every reality in the [field of] appearance has therefore intensive magnitude or degree. If this reality is viewed as cause, either of the sensation or of some other reality in the [field of] appearance, such as change, the degree of reality as cause is then entitled a moment, the moment of gravity”. It is true that Kant tended to think of the ‘real’ as a kind of field of Newtonian forces, as Wilfrid Sellars has pointed out (Sellars, 1968, 45). Sellars argues that Kant was simply accepting a certain scientific account; he could, and should, have realised that colour was as much a part of the objects of outer intuition as shape (ibid., 58). Reading Kant more consistently with his own transcendental idealism, his position is the direct realist position – our outer experience just is of coloured objects, because that is the way things are for us (the Refutation of Idealism makes this clear). As Putnam puts it:

Saying that something is red, or warm, or furry, is saying that it is so-and-so *in relation to us*, not how it is from a God’s Eye point of view. (Putnam 1981, 60)

Putnam, then, reads Kant correctly as rejecting the empiricist view that the bottom layer of our knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) consists of sheer sensations, raw sense data causally provoked by the world. Kant’s transcendental idealism (though I concede that Kant’s language is not always true to his insights) thinks of sensations only in so far as they can be *retrospectively* grasped as such, distilled out by thought experiment from the already spatially and temporally formed (stamped with the time/place stamp, as it were) whole. To follow the strict spirit of Kant’s philosophy (even if sometimes wavers on this subject), we must hold that sensations as such don’t exist as actual individual separable atoms of our experience. Concepts (*Begriffe*) and intuitions (*Anschauungen*) are already combined inextricably in our *conscious* experience. As McDowell puts it:

We should understand what Kant calls “intuition” – experiential intake – not as a bare getting of an extra-conceptual Given, but as a kind of occurrence or state that already has

conceptual content. In experience one takes in, for instances, sees, *that things are thus and so.* (McDowell 1994, 9)

Furthermore, Kant himself has to recognise that there must be some affinity at the level of the sensory manifold, or else we would not be looking there for regularities in experience.

In support of this ‘holistic’ reading of Kantian experience, we might also refer briefly to the distinction between judgments of perception (*Wahrnehmungsurteile*) and judgments of experience (*Erfahrungsurteile*) in *Prolegomena* §18, a distinction that does not appear as such in the First Critique, but finds echoes in the other two Critiques (see Stevenson, 1983, 133). Kant is ostensibly describing a two-step process whereby humans objectify their internal “subjective” judgments. In actuality, I would argue, there is only a single process which may be *retrospectively analysed* into two stages. In general terms, we objectify by employing categories (notably substance and cause-effect) in our judgments. To put it crudely, adding a category, invoking certain rules, onto a hitherto merely “subjectively-valid” judgment produces an objective, universal claim. In the *Prolegomena*, Kant distinguishes between subjectively valid *judgments of perception*, such as “sugar is sweet” or “the room is warm”, which are true for me now, and objectively valid *judgments of experience*, which make universal claims according to rules (Kant, 1783, 45–50). Kant’s not unambiguous example of a subjective judgment of perception is:

when the sun shines on the stone, it grows warm

where we apprehend two events as following one another, whereas:

the sun warms the stone

is an objective *judgment of experience*, because the category of causation has been applied and we now have a universal synthetic judgment which admits of truth or falsity (Kant 1783, 49, n.3). According to Kant, all our judgments are at first only judgments of perception. Of course, even these so-called subjective judgments (Kant thinks all acts of mental synthesis involve judgment) are parasitic on other objective judgments such as “this is a stone”, “there is the sun”, “the sun causes heat”, etc., which already assume the application of the categories of substance, causation, quality and modality (which account for actuality). Kant thinks that subjective judgments require only “the logical connection of perception in a thinking subject” (Kant, 1783, 41). But even allowing that new subjective judgments can be made on the basis of previous objective judgments of experience, there is a question how such a subjective judgment actually asserts anything which is publicly testable. In fact, there is no judgment

of perception as a separate actual judgment, strictly speaking; it is only ever encountered after the categories have been applied. By ‘subjective’ here, Kant does not mean private in the sense of exclusive and incorrigible; he means founded only on my own experience (Husserl’s term is “subjective-relative”) and not yet guaranteed with objective validity.

Kant talks as if empirical things formed in intuition actually are also the *cause of our* sensuous intuitions, whereby our sensitivity is entirely passive. If Putnam is right, Kant should have dropped the notion of objects *causing* intuitions and spoken instead of the empirical object as *presented* intuitively and *constructed* conceptually (i.e., already within our conceptual scheme – McDowell struggles to say something similar, see Putnam 1995, 66). Kant’s point is that our perceptions must have a feature which is independent of ourselves, which is received. Imagination is not sufficient for perception, we need an outer element. If anything, Kant generates confusion by his merging of two accounts – his recognition of passive receptivity in experience (which still involves some degree of synthesis) becomes merged unsuccessfully with a causal realist story.

What we must not do is superimpose the Lockean scientific realist distinction of unknown (“something I know not what”) things in themselves and their subjective effects in us on top of the Kantian transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves. Admittedly, Kant does often talk like a Lockean indirect realist. Rejecting Berkeleyan idealism, Kant asserts:

I, on the contrary, say that things as objects of our senses existing outside us are given, but we know nothing of what they may be in themselves, knowing only their appearances, that is, the representations which they cause in us by affecting our senses. Consequently I grant by all means that there are bodies without us, that is, things which, though quite unknown to us as to what they are in themselves, we yet know by the representations which their influence on our sensibility procures us. These representations we call “bodies”, a term signifying merely the appearance of the thing which is unknown to us, but not therefore less actual. Can this be termed idealism? It is the very contrary. *Prolegomena* Part I §13, Remark II (Kant, 1783, 36)

But Putnam’s invocation of the *Letter to Herz* is meant to bolster the reading of Kant as struggling to get away from *both* noumenal causation and representation construed causally.¹⁴

Kant wants to retain the scientific account without pitting it against our ordinary experience as the only true account of things, as the metaphysical realist does. He thinks he can do this by postulating an empirical and a transcendental way of talking (Kant 1787, Bxxvii: “the object is to be taken *in a two-fold sense*, namely as appearance and as thing in itself”), whereby the absolutely true way of talking of things in themselves is ruled out of court. In Kantian terms, there is no single transcendentally real

account, but there are many accounts which are empirically confirmed, since confirmation here is interest dependent. Kant's appreciation of these different and valid ways of talking means that he can side with science against our senses in the issue of the sun's motion (Bxxii note a), without thereby awakening scepticism with regard to sense-knowledge in general. Putnam's approach to Kant combines Allison's "methodological" (Allison 1983, 25) reading of transcendental idealism with the later Wittgenstein's view that there are alternative right ways of talking, each appropriate in its own context (e.g., religious or mathematical ways of talking) to read Kant in a more pluralist way.

12. KANT AND THE CORRESPONDENCE THESIS

Connected with his rejection of the independence thesis, Putnam interprets Kant as criticising, and even rejecting, the correspondence theory of truth, and instead gravitating towards a view of truth akin to Putnam's own warranted assertibility (Putnam 1992a, 366). Correspondence is rejected because knowledge is not a mirror of the world, for Kant or for Putnam. As Putnam says: "It is not that the thinking mind *makes up* the world on Kant's view; but it doesn't just mirror it either" (1978, 1). Of course, Putnam knows that Kant both accepts a role for correspondence as trivially true and philosophically uninteresting (Kant's "nominal definition"):

The nominal definition of truth, that it is the agreement of knowledge with its object, is assumed as granted; the question asked is as to what is the general and sure criterion of the truth of any and every knowledge. (Kant 1787, A58/B82) For Putnam, it would be a mistake to equate this innocent correspondence with the metaphysical realist's requirement of correspondence (Putnam 1981, 63). Kant has given up the metaphysical realist claim that there must be a strict isomorphism between our ideas and things in themselves (Putnam calls this "abstract isomorphism" (Putnam 1981, 64)), while retaining a more complex isomorphism between our ideas and appearances. A straightforward correspondence theory would hold that there were things in themselves corresponding to the objects we experience. Kant explicitly denies that there could be one noumenal object causing one object for us. There are not, according to Putnam, "noumenal chairs and noumenal horses and noumenal sensations", which correspond to our concepts of chairs, horses and sensations (Putnam 1981, 63). There is not even a unique correspondence between the noumenal world and our thoughts.

It is not as if we can rescue the metaphysically realist picture by having the *whole* unknown thing in itself ground each of our statements. Rather

Putnam (though he does not invoke this passage) would be in sympathy with Kant's claim, in the First Critique A59/B83, that there can be no "sufficient and at the same time general criterion" of truth, since truth involves relation to a content, and a content in general cannot be specified (since this would be the form of a content not the content itself and as such would contradict the very definition of truth, A59/B83). There can be a general criterion of the *form* of truth – the purely logical criteria of thought in general. But, for Kant, this is a merely *negative* requirement, it specifies what form of correspondence thinking should have with the laws of thought, this is a *sine qua non* for truth and not truth itself (A59/B84). No single criterion can account for the multiple correspondence relations that exist, relations made visible by our interests. Truth, for Kant, is, Putnam says, "*ultimate goodness of fit*" (Putnam 1981, 64)).

In support of Putnam's reading, we can also point to the passage where Kant says that in order to have truth we must first obtain, independently of logic, well-founded, "reliable information" (*gegründete Erkundigung*, A60/B85). What does "founded" or "reliable" mean in this context? Information is received in intuition. Things are true, for Kant, on Putnam's view, if we can gain sufficient information about them on the basis of sufficient experiences for our rational purposes (Putnam 1981, 64). On Putnam's account of Kant; truth consists, not in agreement with some kind of absolute given, but rather in *coherence* with one's beliefs and practices in the best sense. Our confirmations are not confined to those of the scientific kind. Putnam is not alone in reading Kant as a coherentist.¹⁵ Ralph Walker (Walker 1983, 159), for example, agrees that Kant holds a coherence theory of truth. Walker cites in evidence a passage from the *Reflexionen*: "For truth consists simply in the thorough-going connection of representations in accordance with the laws of understanding" (*Reflexion* 5642). There are, in short, some grounds for agreeing with Putnam on Kant's rejection of correspondence. Certainly, we cannot conceive of truth as correspondence between our judgments and things in themselves, as scientific realists tend to do.

13. PUTNAM'S SOLUTION: CONCEPTUAL RELATIVITY

So far we have been supporting Putnam's reading of Kant as successfully diagnosing a persistent philosophical problem, and portraying sympathetically Putnam's analysis of Kant's proposed solution, involving the rejection of mind-independence, correspondence and bivalence, in their metaphysically realist forms. Now it is time to examine those aspects of Putnam's internal realism which put pressure on any Kantian parallel. One

such aspect is Putnam's stress on conceptual relativity. In earlier formulations, Putnam's internal realism was advanced primarily as an account of truth; more recently, however, he has explicated it in terms of 'conceptual relativity', which, in fact, involves several theses I shall now briefly explicate in terms of his alternatives to the metaphysical realist's theses. *The Interdependence Thesis* is what I shall call Putnam's alternative to the independence thesis. Putnam himself refers to the "the holistic interdependence of fact, value and theory" (Putnam 1995, 57).

(P1) *The Interdependence Thesis* holds that "'Objects' do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. We cut the world up into objects when we introduce one or other scheme of description" (Putnam 1981, 52). There are no mind-independent objects. "Objects are as much made as discovered, as much products of our conceptual invention as of the objective factor in experience" (Putnam 1981, 54). As Putnam puts it, "Tables and chairs (and yes, pink ice cubes) exist just as much as quarks and gravitational fields" (Putnam 1987, 37), though we may focus on one or the other depending on our interests.

In place of the metaphysical realist's uniqueness thesis, Putnam holds instead (P2) *The Pluralist Thesis*, that there is more than one true description of the world. There is no aperspectival, "God's-eye view" of the world, and science does not provide such an account. There can be different schemes, each true even if their conjunction is false. This in turn leads to the (P3) *Conceptual Relativity Thesis*, whereby each scheme has its own ontology of things or metaphysics internal to it, but outside these schemes, the questions "what is real?", "what really exists?", "what is a fact?", etc., have no meaning (Putnam, 1987, 36). Conceptual schemes relate to viewpoints, which in turn relate to various interests. Furthermore, not all conceptual schemes are of equal value, but there is no algorithm for determining which is a better scheme. How good they are depends on "coherence" and "fit". Our concepts define what Putnam terms "objectivity-for-us". Putnam insists that this conceptual relativity does not imply *relativism*. Conceptual schemes are accepted or rejected on the basis of needs or interests, and Putnam agrees with Dewey that "humanity is constantly redesigning itself, and that we create needs" (Putnam 1987, 79). There is no such thing as a description "that reflects no particular interest at all" (Putnam 1994a, 447) and our description of the world must include a description of those interests which we have.

As we have seen, Putnam criticizes the correspondence thesis and wishes to replace it with an account of truth as (P4) *Idealized Warrant*.

ted Assertibility. We cannot here discuss Putnam's developing account of truth in detail (see especially Putnam 1992a, 1994, 1994a) and his recent changes of mind on warranted assertibility. We can simply summarise his main views. For Putnam, as for Kant, there is no "universal and unitary notion of truth" (Putnam 1990, 13). Truth is "as plural, vague, open-ended as we are" (Putnam 1994, 495). He is also unconvinced by the scientific realist invocation of disquotationalist and Tarskian semantic conceptions of truth as a way of solving the problem of truth (Putnam 1994, 315–329). Nor is truth simply to be identified with rational acceptability, in the manner of Richard Rorty, where truth is what can be established to the satisfaction of one's cultural peers. Things may be accepted by a community but may not be true, for Putnam, since we consider truth to be independent of whether the majority of the members of the culture believe to be true (Putnam 1988, 109). Nevertheless, Putnam retains an anti-realist commitment that truth must not outrun *any* possibility of justification. Truth involves justification, but, unlike positivism, the kinds of justification which may be adopted as appropriate by particular communities is not restricted in advance. A statement is true, for Putnam, if a fully competent speaker of the language would utter it, provided the epistemic conditions were good enough. I see a table in this room, if the light conditions are normal, my eyes are all right, I am not mad, and so on. Relative to the conceptual scheme of ordinary reality, my statement is true. Science might tell a different story within its conceptual scheme which would also be true. Truth, then, is relative to a conceptual scheme, but is not to be understood as *internal to* our conceptual schemes, if by that is meant that truth is established by convention. Truth involves coherence between my beliefs and my experience, and forms a whole outlook (Putnam 1995, 14–15).

14. A CRITIQUE OF PUTNAM – AND KANT

How many of these theses can already be found in Kant? I have agreed with Putnam that Kant does hold the Interdependence Thesis, even if he does not fully reach either to conceptual relativity or its attendant notion of truth. My problem with Putnam's account is that his version of Kantian 'interdependence' is still couched in the dualistic language of metaphysical realism. There is a sense in which Putnam, like Kant, is still postulating a subjective and an objective sphere in a rather outmoded language and has not overcome these dichotomies. In this sense, neither Kant nor Putnam have, despite their best efforts, overcome the legacy of Cartesianism. In fact, Putnam has recently admitted as much, conceding that his earlier efforts in 1981 were still too caught up in the representationalist picture

(Putnam 1994a, 462). His well-known, quasi-Hegelian formulation, that mind and world jointly make up mind and world, leaves desperately unclear what is meant by ‘mind’ and ‘world’, especially as Putnam rejects crucial tenets of Kant’s transcendental idealism. In recent works, Putnam has offered a revised way of reading his own formulation. As he has acknowledged, his earlier account, from the mid-seventies until the late eighties, ‘still retained the basic premise of an interface between the knower and everything “outside”’ (Putnam 1994a, 462). Questions such as “is the sky an external object?” are based on a use of ‘external’ which is still indebted to the old representationalist picture; in talking about objects like the sky we should refer to them as ‘common’ rather than ‘external’ (1994a, 454, n. 22). Putnam even regrets his use of ‘mind-dependent’ in *Reason, Truth and History*. Mount Everest and the colour of the sky are not merely products of the human mind; they are there independently of us in a perfectly respectable sense, though in another sense, the truth about these things is dependent on human observers. How are we now to understand Putnam’s contrast of mind-dependence and mind-independence? Putnam, like Kant, distinguishes between a viable concept of mind-independence *relative to us* (e.g., Mount Everest is there whether anyone thinks of it or not) – a *common* world – and an *absolute* concept of mind-independence Putnam believes to be incoherent. He wants to retain a concept of *mind-dependence* understood not as the claim that reality is dependent on the way we talk (Putnam 1994a, 448) or as synonymous with ‘subjective’.

Objectivity is *mind-dependent* to the extent that we may be able to know or find out what objects there are in any particular practice, but objectivity may be *mind-independent* in the sense that being an object does not require any of us right now to know in what sense it is mind-dependent (and in most cases, entities like Mount Everest are mind-independent in normal discourse). Putnam clarifies his own anti-realist notion of objectivity as follows: to say that something is objective is not to say it is “independent of what human beings know or could find out” (Putnam 1988, 109), a stance he sees as purely Kantian. What Putnam rules out is thinking that we can adopt the God’s-eye view, the aperspectival view from nowhere, in talking about things in themselves. Putnam believes that Kant does not doubt that there is some mind-independent reality (1981, 61), but it is not mind-independent in some unattainable, absolute sense.

It is certainly true that Kant would agree with much of what Putnam has to say about mind-dependence and about the commonality of our experience. Indeed, Graham Bird has expressed Kant’s problematic in the Transcendental Deduction in language very close to the recent Putnam, when he writes:

Kant wishes to account for the fact that our experience is a common publicly shareable one, that we are able to think and talk about commonly identifiable phenomena. (Bird 1962, 81)

As Putnam himself has put it, thinking is not the sort of thing only one person could do (Putnam 1994a, 492). But, in attempting to retain this commonality in experience, hasn't Putnam too quickly foresworn the possibility of a metaphysics of this common world, that is, a metaphysics that specifies the ways of relating and the relations between them? Hasn't he dissipated Kant's commitment to the thing in itself too quickly, without putting anything in its place to check pure idealism? Putnam is wrong to claim bluntly that Kant says we cannot even *think* about the thing in itself. After all, the whole of the Transcendental Dialectic aims to deal precisely with the illusions thrown up by this very kind of thinking. Putnam's reading of the thing in itself goes too far in its excision of what he sees as the unpalatable side of Kant's philosophy, namely the positing of the noumenal. If Kant acknowledges that we can at least postulate or entertain a God's-eye kind of knowledge, then human knowledge is at least capable of projecting a non-perspectival kind of knowing (an argument which Hegel makes central to his discussion of Absolute Knowledge). Although human knowing does not know what it is actually like, it knows it as a non-contradictory possibility attributed to God. Kant is elusive on this point, but presumably his claim (and here I depart from Putnam's reading) is that we can at least *formally conceptualise* the God's-eye perspective, although we cannot have genuine objective cognition of this perspective (Putnam himself entertains this possibility, Putnam 1981, 61–62). There is something about our concepts which allow them to outrun our sensibility, and this has the benefit of allowing us to theorise about what the God's-eye perspective is like, even though we can neither actually fill it in nor know if it is even a real possibility (as opposed to a logical possibility). To know one thinks from a perspective is to recognise the possibility of other perspectives and, indeed, allows us to raise the possibility of no perspective at all. There seems to be an unconceptualised remainder in both Kant and Putnam, one which seems to demand a move to metaphysical explanation, a move which both resist.

Of course, treating the thing in itself as a mere boundary to knowledge is not without its supporters (e.g., Bird 1962; Allison 1983). But another line of criticism is available. Even before the second edition of the First Critique was published, Kant's earliest critics (e.g., Jacobi, see Guyer 1987, 335) had claimed that Kant was inconsistent in postulating that there are such entities. Indeed, Paul Guyer claims that Kant asserts *dogmatically* that things in themselves are not in space and time (Guyer 1987, 333–334). In fact, Kant employs different formulations of things in themselves, some

with a greater degree of ontological commitment than others. On Kant's own account, they are 'limit-concepts' (*Grenzbegriffe*) specifying what our knowledge cannot reach, rather than objects of a possible knowledge, being outside of space and time and outside the application of categories. The formulation *transcendental object* (*Objekt, Gegenstand*) need not detain us. It is "the completely indeterminate thought of something in general" (A253) and is relatively unproblematic. It simply is the a priori structure which enables, or makes possible, thinking of an object, "the idea of certain objective features of our knowledge and experience", as Bird puts it (Bird, 1962, 80). The transcendental object belongs to the a priori structure of the understanding; it is the pure thought of an object in general and as such does not refer, since it can only refer when combined with a category. Transcendental object then is a formal part of the objectifying structure of a category thought separately from the intuition which completes the objectifying act. It is what Descartes and the scholastics call the 'objective reality' (*realitas objectiva, objektive Realität*) of an idea. It possesses no 'formal' reality in itself, i.e., no causal power.

What about the noumenon, the noumenal world, formulations? Clearly the noumenal is also amenable to the Putnamian benign interpretation. At A253, Kant (1787) distinguishes "noumenon" from "transcendental object", and, at A255/B310–1, says, "the concept of noumenon is thus a merely limiting concept, the function of which is to curb the pretensions of sensibility". For Kant, noumenon is technically a "problematic concept", that is, one whose "objective reality" (B310), i.e., its *content*, cannot be known, and yet which is connected with other concepts and involves no contradiction. Noumenon means a thing in so far as we try to think of it as not an object of the senses (B310). For Kant we cannot understand how it is possible and hence the domain of noumena is "empty" (A255/B310). In the A version it may be that noumenon is the mere "form of a concept" (A253). Noumenon is our way of referring to the thing in itself; it is the object of knowledge not thought under the guise of a sensible intuition. If we characterised the transcendental object as enabling thought of an object, the noumenon precisely sets boundaries to the thought on an object. It reminds us of the limitations of human knowledge. Putnam reads Kant as asserting that the noumenal world has no meaning in itself.

It is the formulation 'thing in itself' which gives most trouble. If we completely dissolve this, don't we genuinely lapse into some kind of idealism, a dizzying plurality of schemes without foundation? A similar problem haunts Putnam's talk of plural conceptual schemes which cannot be transcended into a single scheme. Putnam rejects reviving absolute metaphysics on the grounds that ontological schemes are arbitrary, there is

nothing that constrains us to take up one account of objects over another (which includes mereological sums, for example). There are no facts of the matter determining things, no Archimedean point from which to observe the world and its contents (Putnam 1990, 98). Our ontology, then, becomes largely a matter of choice. Precisely these kinds of over-arching, God's-eye theories or models must be given up (Putnam 1978, 123). Following Wittgenstein, he believes we should attempt explanation solely from *within* our points of view, from "within our world and practice" (Putnam 1988, 109).

However, Putnam's very example of a Carnapian versus a Lesniewskian world of objects (repeated in his response to Simon Blackburn; Clark and Hale 1994, 245) ignores that there are objects (and logical operators) *common* to both worlds and hence that the conceptual schemes overlap and indeed share a common, minimal logic. Now, one might be led to conclude that grounding conceptual schemes involves having a concept of the thing in itself, even if the existence, nature, or number of instances, of that thing in itself cannot be specified. This is Kant's actual move, although Putnam strongly resists it. Nevertheless, I don't see how Putnam's argument rules it out. Rather, he generally assumes – a legacy of his own positivist past – that we are no longer able to do metaphysics, we live in a post-metaphysical world. He even denies that his approach is to be considered a metaphysical theory or even a *theory* at all. Nevertheless, postulating some kind of ultimate reality, even if unknowable, is consistent with a long established and still vital tradition of Kantian interpretation, which recognises that Kant in many passages gives to the thing in itself more than merely limiting status.

Putnam's response is that he is sketching a picture in the Wittgensteinian sense, that is, in order to release us from the grip of that picture. But can we be satisfied with mere pictures? Don't we need conceptualisations and grounds? For Putnam, the way to choose between philosophical schemes is *pragmatic*, whatever one works best, or, perhaps, whatever integrates best with the other moral values we hold at a particular time in a particular society. This spirit of dissolution of philosophical problems owes more to the later Wittgenstein, James and Dewey, as well as, of course, to Quine, than to Kant. But Kant recognised our irrepressible metaphysical urge, and Hegel sought to overcome Kant's dualities by developing a system which could take into account a moving point of view, while still expressing rationality in different concrete forms, each laying claim to knowledge, though none providing it totally. Putnam's attempt to preserve *both* common sense *and* various other conceptual schemes could be interpreted as requiring a kind of Hegelian dialectical mediation, thus leading away

from Kant. Indeed, Putnam's recent invocations of holism could be seen in Hegelian terms, whereby the older dualisms are overcome.

To conclude, I believe Putnam's sketch of scientific realism as requiring independence, uniqueness, correspondence, and bivalence, is substantially correct and important, not just for understanding recent versions, but also for earlier seventeenth-century versions of scientific realism. I further agree with Putnam that this picture is incoherent, and that our philosophical impasse results from retaining aspects of this incoherent seventeenth-century world picture. But, when Putnam invokes Kant as someone who did not even consider the meaningfulness of talk of things in themselves, and when he argues that we must relativise our notions of object, existence, and so on, *within* a particular conceptual scheme, I think Putnam is moving beyond Kant. It would be interesting if Putnam were to take the next step, as McDowell and Robert Brandom have, towards Hegel.

NOTES

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were read at the conference on 'Realism' held by the National Committee for Philosophy, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, May 28th 1992, the Philosophy Seminar of Dartmouth College, the University of South Carolina at Columbia, and at the conference "Kant Our Contemporary", University of St. Andrews, Scotland, 2nd September 1996. I am grateful to Hilary Putnam, Allen Wood, Graham Bird, Michael Friedman, Robert Hanna, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, R. I. G. Hughes, Jim Levine and Jim O'Shea, for their critical comments. I would also like to thank the three anonymous referees of this journal for their constructive criticisms and suggestions.

² Putnam (1992a, 353; 1994a, 461, n. 36) explains that when he first used the phrase 'internal realism' in his 1976 APA address "Realism and Reason" (first published in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 50, No. 6 (August 1977), pp. 483–498, reprinted in Putnam, 1978, 123–140) to refer to his own earlier functionalist and 'meaning of meaning' phase, but that gradually his commentators employed the term to refer to his new position, and, by "Two Philosophical Perspectives" (Putnam 1981, 49–74), Putnam himself had capitulated to this fashion and employed the term for his new position.

³ Strictly speaking, while rejecting intellectual intuition, Kant accepts a notion of clear and distinct rational intuition (*Einsicht*), see Hanna 1998, 115–145.

⁴ Putnam (1987, 78) praises Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978) as a "deep little book". Goodman, however, characterises his own view as a radical relativism.

⁵ The German text is printed as Brief 70, in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, herausgegeben von der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1922), Band X, Zweite Abteilung: Briefwechsel Bd. 1 (1747–1788), pp. 129–135, see esp. p. 130. Kant refers variously to the object as *Gegenstand*, *object* and *Obiect* in this letter.

⁶ Hartry Field, for instance, believes realists could reject the correspondence thesis and accept instead a disquotational view of truth. Field says Dorothy Grover, Joseph L. Camp and Nuel Belnap (1975) do this. Putnam, however, in "A Defence of Internal Realism" (Putnam 1990, 30–42) denies Tarski's account of truth can be utilised in this semantic

manner. Both Field (1982, 554) and Michael Devitt (1991, 229) explicitly deny part of the uniqueness thesis, namely, that a realist is required to hold that there is only one true *description* of the world. Field finds the notion of a unique total theory problematic, even if we qualify it and say a unique theory using our concepts, because our concepts are not the only inevitable concepts, nor are they unambiguous. Field acknowledges, however, that realists are committed to another part of the uniqueness thesis, namely, the belief that there is exactly one, true world and of course this includes the independence thesis, the claim that this world is independent of us. Terence Horgan argues that some versions of metaphysical realism posit a discourse-independent world while denying that it may be broken up into mind-independent objects and properties, hence rejecting a version of bivalence; while others leave open the question as to whether this independent world has objects or parts [denying (d₁)]. Horgan himself is committed to a "psychologistic semantics" which denies direct links between terms of our statements and objects or properties in the world and a "Parmenidean materialism" which denies the world has real, mind-independent parts (Horgan 1991, 305).

⁷ This is close to Horgan's formulation of Putnam's version of a metaphysical realist's requirements that things possess definite discourse-independent properties. In "Aristotle After Wittgenstein" (Putnam 1994, 63), Putnam ascribes to the early Wittgenstein such a theory. The form of an object is determined by the totality of its possible properties and possible relations with other objects.

⁸ Richard Boyd (in Boolos 1991, 171) believes scientific realism is committed to the ineliminability of theoretical commitments: "the characteristic product of successful scientific research involves knowledge of the adoption of the theories and conceptual frameworks that describe them".

⁹ Actually this issue is more complicated. Correspondence presupposes only isomorphism with an actual worldly truth-maker, whether this truth-maker is mind-independent or not. But Putnam is certainly right in portraying metaphysical realists as tending to assume that the truth-makers are mind-independent.

¹⁰ Logically equivalent sentences may not be descriptions of the same event. Putnam gives the example of two sentences: "someone gave me a pair of apples" and "some one gave me an even prime number of apples". We don't think these describe the same event, even though they are analytically equivalent formulations (Putnam 1994, 66).

¹¹ Putnam has extended his story regarding the origins of the real property thesis back to the Scholastics. Thus, he has written that the Scholastics held that there are "a totality of 'forms' or 'universals' or 'properties' fixed once and for all" (Putnam 1994a, 448), and to that extent, were, like their modern successors, in the grip of the absolute conception of the world.

¹² In the traditional debate the term 'secondary qualities' is ambiguous, sometimes applying to the *powers* of objects (Locke), sometimes to the *sensations* in us (Berkeley), and Putnam himself tends to slide between referring to these secondary qualities as 'dispositions' and as 'projections', see Van Cleve (1995). For Locke, the 'secondary' qualities were definitely properties of the object, but ones which produced ideas in us which did not resemble them. Berkeley uses the term to refer only to the ideas in us – not their causes, which are combinations of primary qualities. Putnam does not talk about the so called 'tertiary qualities', the power of one object to affect another, which Locke sees as part of the secondary qualities of an object, but which, in general, are assimilated with primary qualities as 'real' properties of the thing, not projections.

¹³ Van Cleve argues, against Putnam, that Kant did not hold all properties to be relational. To exist a thing must have properties, some things would have existed even if we didn't, and therefore not all properties are relational. Van Cleve, however, would seem to be making Kant a believer in properties of things in themselves, whereas in fact he is agnostic about such putative entities. Putnam is closer to the spirit of Kant's transcendental idealism, where properties only appear within experience and hence are relational.

¹⁴ Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, translators of the new Cambridge edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, 1787a, 48), want to distinguish between empirical concepts which, they think, are connected causally to the world, and pure concepts whose connection to the world needs a more formal explanation (provided by the deduction). However, Putnam's point is to argue that all conceptuality is interest driven in a way which makes the notion of brute causation incoherent. *Justification not causation* is the issue.

¹⁵ Putnam tends to treat Kant as the first coherentist. But there are grounds for considering Descartes and Spinoza as anticipating Kant in this respect.

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