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# THE RETURN OF METAPHYSICS?
## Problems with Metaphysics as a Philosophical Discipline

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### 1. Introduction

Metaphysics, the science of "Being *qua* Being", is, traditionally, one of the central, if not *the* most central, sub-discipline of philosophical inquiry. Its origins can easily be traced back to the very beginning of Western philosophy, viz., to the pre-Socratics' concerns with the *arche* of all things. As is well known, various anti-metaphysical movements emerged especially in the early decades of the twentieth century, and a critical attitude toward metaphysics dominated much of twentieth-century philosophy, both linguistically oriented analytic philosophy and phenomenology preoccupied with the analysis of consciousness and experience. The historical roots of such movements critical of the very idea of metaphysics as a philosophical discipline go back to such classical figures as Kant and Nietzsche – not to forget the pragmatist tradition, which was originated in late nineteenth century in the United States.

However, metaphysics no longer seems dead, as it perhaps did in the mid-1900s. It has forcefully returned to the center of contemporary philosophical inquiry. While Heikki J. Koskinen's contribution to this volume takes a detailed look at the recent "return of metaphysics" in Anglo-American analytic philosophy, in particular, the purpose of the present

chapter is to identify some problems related to this interesting development. As the anti-metaphysical currents of thought just mentioned have emphasized, and as most philosophers have taken for granted since Kant, the project of metaphysical inquiry needs (meta)philosophical justification. It is not possible for a critical thinker to engage in metaphysics just as "business as usual". Increasingly, philosophers – particularly analytic ontologists, but also, say, metaphysicians working in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition – tend to ignore this requirement, however, seeking to delineate the ultimate categorial structure of Being itself, without caring about any Kantian-like epistemological or semantic restrictions and worries. As Koskinen's chapter shows, such analytic metaphysics has turned into an influential paradigm in contemporary philosophy. My purpose is to remind the community of metaphysicians (and philosophers more generally) that things are perhaps not so easy. What I will try to do in what follows is to blur, via a number of case studies focusing on such influential philosophers as D.M. Armstrong and Hilary Putnam, any principled dichotomies between metaphysics and epistemology. Insofar as metaphysical inquiry into being or existence is possible, in my view, it is to be conducted as, or in the spirit of, Kantian transcendental philosophy; then, however, it will no longer be an inquiry into the categorial structure of the mind- and language-independent (or, more generally, conceptualization-independent) reality "in itself" but an inquiry into the structure of our human – humanly categorized and conceptualized – world.[1]

## 2. Armstrongian metaphysics: a case study on metaphysical realism

Let me begin with a few comments on the metaphysical project defended for decades by D.M. Armstrong, a well-known champion in the development of contemporary materialism, naturalism, and realism.[2] As his relatively recent publications, in particular, demonstrate, Armstrong is, primarily, a *factualist* in his metaphysics, defending an ontology of facts, or states of affairs (Armstrong 1997, p. 5). Armstrong requires his factualism to be compatible with both *naturalism*, the ontological view that "the world, the totality of entities, is nothing more than the spacetime system", whose features are most reliably understood by means of natural science (*ibid.*), and *physicalism*, the thesis that "the only particulars that the spacetime system contains are physical entities governed by nothing more than the laws of physics", or, more precisely, of completed physics (*ibid.*, p. 6). He accepted a similar "world-hypothesis" already in his earlier work on universals, suggesting that the world (1) "contains nothing but

particulars having properties and related to each other", (2) "is nothing but a single spatio-temporal system", and (3) "is completely described in terms of (completed) physics" (Armstrong 1978, vol. I, p. 126). It must be noted that the Armstrongian physicalist is a realist about the theoretical (unobservable) entities postulated by physical theories (Armstrong 1995, p. 40).[3]

In terms of epistemic ranking, naturalism is, for Armstrong, the most plausible of his basic theses;[4] physicalism and factualism follow in order of plausibility (Armstrong 1997, pp. 7-10). Various doctrines are entailed by these theses. For instance, the naturalist in Armstrong's sense cannot accept merely possible states of affairs, since they would not belong to the all-encompassing spatiotemporal system of the world (see *ibid*., pp. 148 ff.). Hence, Armstrong holds a "deflationary" view of modality and wants to get rid of primitive modality, arguing that it is the merely contingent, actual states of affairs and their equally contingent constituents that are the truthmakers for modal truths (*ibid*., p. 172).[5]

While Armstrong's naturalism, the view that "reality consists of nothing but a single all-embracing spatio-temporal system" (Armstrong 1995, p. 35), is primarily a metaphysical doctrine, he also advances an epistemological naturalism (cf. Armstrong 1973). It may be troubling for some philosophers, contemporary epistemological naturalists in particular, that Armstrong speaks about his ontological theses as "hypotheses", thus comparing them to scientific beliefs. In some sense, as naturalism requires, natural science is, according to Armstrong, the measure of what there is in the world, of what the spacetime system is like, of what states of affairs actually obtain. But the more general philosophical views advanced by Armstrong, for example, the metaphysics of states of affairs itself, are also supposed to be fallible, perhaps even empirically debatable – or are they? While naturalism is number one in Armstrong's epistemic credit-rating, it remains somewhat unclear what the status of his entire metaphysical system is. Could future science show that the ontology of states of affairs is false? Could Armstrong's hypotheses be replaced by more plausible ones as science progresses? And could such a progress even affect his most plausible hypothesis, naturalism itself? I am not sure how Armstrong would answer these queries.[6]

More specifically, if the naturalist requirement of fallibility (or falsifiability) can be applied to all the doctrines advanced by Armstrong – for example, his theories of particulars, properties, dispositions, relations, the independence of states of affairs, modality, mathematical entities, causation, and natural laws – we may ask: What, in the last analysis, is the epistemic status of these ontological theories? Are Armstrong's reflections genuinely scientifically sensitive, or do they belong to "first philosophy" in the sense repudiated by

W.V. Quine and other strong naturalists? These questions obviously lead us to the metaphilosophical problems of the *disciplinary status* and *disciplinary identity* of metaphysics, as well as the related question of what kind of "philosophical knowledge", if any, metaphysics may yield.

In fact, Armstrong does believe in first philosophy, though not exactly in the sense feared by Quineans. An "*a posteriori* realism", which affirms the objective reality of particulars, properties, and relations, is his primary commitment even in comparison with naturalism and physicalism (materialism), as the latter doctrines are only specifications of such a realism (cf. Armstrong 1995, pp. 43-45). Would Armstrong then be prepared to say that nothing, not science at least, could prove realism to be false? If naturalism is subordinated to realism or understood as a specification of realism, then natural science can hardly falsify the basic realistic commitment. What is *a posteriori* in Armstrong's realism is, then, only the idea that what properties and relations there are will be discovered by natural science, in the end by fundamental physics. Is this aposteriority enough? Or does Armstrong end up with a metaphysical first philosophy (and, accordingly, "metaphysical realism")[7] in a rather traditional sense, laying down *a priori* the general philosophical grounds (e.g., realism itself) upon which the scientific system of knowledge – knowledge of the fundamental properties and relations that are instantiated in the natural world – can be built?[8]

Armstrong's fundamental argument for his metaphysics of states of affairs is the *truthmaker argument* (*ibid*., ch. 8; see also, especially, Armstrong 2004, ch. 3). If *a* is F (that is, universal F is instantiated by particular *a*), there must be "something about the world that makes it to be the case, that serves as an ontological ground, for this truth", something that necessitates the truth – something other than the mere pair of F and *a*, for both entities might exist and yet it might be the case that *a* is not F (Armstrong 1997, p. 115; cf. also p. 139). States of affairs are postulated as the truthmakers we need here: "We are asking what in the world will ensure, make true, underlie, serve as the ontological ground for, the truth that *a* is F. The obvious candidate seems to be the state of affairs of *a's being F*. In this state of affairs (fact, circumstance) *a* and F are brought together." (*Ibid*., p. 116.) The constituents of a state of affairs are held together in a "non-mereological form of composition", which allows that there might be different states of affairs having identical constituents (*ibid*., p. 118). Since (first-order) states of affairs lack the repeatability that characterizes universals, they are themselves particulars (*ibid*., p. 126).

The truthmaker argument might be interpreted as a *transcendental* one: what is assumed is the conditional fact that if *a* is F, then this truth, like any other truth, must have a

truthmaker in the world.[9] So, if there are truths, they must, according to Armstrong, be made true by something. The "given" conditional fact is *made possible* by the fact that it is the state of affairs of *a*'s being F that makes the truth that *a* is F true. Hence, Armstrong is investigating the necessary conditions for the possibility of there being truths about, say, the instantiation of properties and relations, or more generally any truths at all, arriving at the conclusion that such truths are possible *only* if we postulate states of affairs as their truthmakers. Since we must assume (some) such truths to be actual, their possibility is of course taken for granted; accordingly, the conclusion must be accepted as something resembling the transcendental *Bedingungen der Möglichkeit* of a given, indisputable phenomenon. Yet, though perhaps implicitly flirting with transcendental argumentation, in postulating universals (and states of affairs) Armstrong again tries to make it clear that his realism is an *a posteriori* position, and hence compatible with naturalism:[10]

> Universals are here postulated, in the main, in order to explain the resemblances and differences that we find among particulars, beginning with our perception of particulars in our environment. This perceptual acquaintance with the natures of particulars is extended, deepened, and in many ways corrected by the whole great enterprise of natural science (though under the ultimate epistemic control of perception). It is to natural science, then, that we should look for knowledge, or perhaps just more or less rational belief, of what universals there are. Hence the term '*a posteriori*' realism. The theory of universals may have to be developed in an *a priori* manner. But the theory of what universals there are must be an *a posteriori* matter. And even the theory of universals should be relatively *a priori* only. (*Ibid*., p. 25.)

Science will, Armstrong believes, eventually decide ontological issues – whether, for example, logical atomism is true (*ibid*., p. 263; cf. also p. 155). But will science really be the final arbiter in matters ontological in the sense suggested by thinkers like Quine or Wilfrid Sellars, for whom science is the "measure of what there is" – and of what there is not?[11] Moreover, what does it mean to say that the theory of universals is only "relatively *a priori*"? How much relativity is assumed here? Is this idea analogous to, say, Thomas Kuhn's (1970) account of scientific paradigms as relatively *a priori* in comparison to the theories formulated and observations made within them (cf. Pihlström & Siitonen 2005)? These issues are intimately connected with the disciplinary identity of metaphysics, because we once more

return to the question of where and when, exactly, natural science will intervene and tell us what the ultimate structure of the world is. Where, in short, does the difference between analytic ontology and "speculative cosmology" lie (cf. Armstrong 1978, vol. I, p. 127)?

One possible suggestion is that Armstrong develops the theory of universals and states of affairs *a priori* only relative to commonsense beliefs that virtually everyone holds. Science may, of course, correct those beliefs; hence, the foundations of our ontological theory are not sacrosanct or forever beyond revision. Nor is the structure of ordinary language an *a priori* basis of ontological theorization. In his reply to Bruce Aune, Armstrong (1984, p. 251) defines "*a priori* realism" about universals as the view that "wherever ordinary language speaks truly of things having the same property, or being the same kind or sort, it is the case that the particulars involved must all instantiate the very same universal". He makes it clear that he does not hold this view, even though he believes, as we have seen, that universals must be postulated as truthmakers of truths about property-instantiation.[12]

It is still not entirely clear how the *a priori* vs. *a posteriori* division, or the parallel division between philosophical and special-scientific knowledge, is to be drawn. For instance, one might ask, in a more reflexive manner, whether the requirement of *a posteriori* solutions to ontological problems such as realism is itself an *a priori* principle. Is it a necessary truth, or is it just contingent and falsifiable – or simply assumed to be true, as some kind of convention, a methodological starting point in ontological inquiry? What, in brief, is the force of "must" in the phrase, "the theory of what universals there are must be an *a posteriori* matter"? Is it a "must" knowable *a priori*? Could we be led to decide after philosophical reflection that realism cannot, after all, be developed in an *a posteriori* manner? Or could an *a posteriori* investigation convince us that it is powerless in matters ontological?

## 3. Armstrong vs. anti-(metaphysical-)realism

Throughout his truthmaking considerations, Armstrong (1997, 2004) seems to be saying that the world *really*, metaphysically, *is* the way his theory claims it to be (or, more modestly, that we have good reasons to believe it to be that way). If this is what he wants to argue, he can hardly escape metaphysical realism. Yet, it is not impossible for a metaphysician to try to avoid such a commitment. In this case, one's investigation would, perhaps, resemble the Strawsonian project of *descriptive* (instead of revisionary) *metaphysics* (cf. Strawson 1959). According to this proposal, what our realist would be doing is simply to describe the general

features of "our actual scheme" within which, or by means of which, we interpret the world. I doubt that any Armstrongian philosopher would be satisfied with this idea. It would, presumably, compromise her/his realistic aim of describing the world itself, instead of merely describing the nature of the ontological scheme that enables us to cope with the world and with our experiences (see section 6 below).

One can, of course, reject Armstrongian metaphysics altogether and embrace, for instance, a form of Kantian transcendental philosophy or, as in Hilary Putnam's work (to which we will shortly turn to), a form of pragmatism.[13] A radical (Quinean) naturalist may also question Armstrong's way of regarding realism (however *a posteriori*) as a first philosophy, arguing that the realistic commitment to an independently existing physical world should be subordinated to (epistemological) naturalism, rather than *vice versa*, and thus be rendered genuinely fallible.

In his critical discussion of Armstrong's combinatorial theory of modality, William G. Lycan (1993) suggests that Armstrong, as a modal fictionalist, might simply endorse David Lewis's theory of modality (thus accepting a vast plurality of possible worlds) but treat this theory as fiction.[14] Similarly, a non-metaphysical realist might claim to endorse Armstrong's views on universals, truthmaking, states of affairs, etc., while subordinating them to a non-metaphysically-realist interpretation (at a transcendental level, as one might say) – for example, by holding that these views only apply to the-world-as-we-conceive-it-from-our-perspective, to a world conceptualized and structured by us. In this case, there would be no need for any genuine confrontation between Armstrong and the non-metaphysical realist. Armstrong's realism would, so to say, be rendered metaphysically harmless. His ontological system would be applicable only within a conception of the world that avoids metaphysical realism at the meta-level. (I will come back to the possibility of adopting such a transcendental meta-level perspective in due course.)

Yet, there appears to be a basic *metaontological* disagreement between the two parties to the debate. In order to clarify the situation, let us imagine a possible dialogue between the metaphysical realist, such as Armstrong, and his non-metaphysical-realist critic.[15] According to the critic, Armstrong's realism is a form of what Kant labeled "transcendental realism".[16] Armstrong does not distinguish between things in themselves and appearances, believing (mistakenly) that the world we empirically cognize and (fallibly) try to represent is the world as it is in itself. Armstrong may counter this charge by claiming that his Kantian or pragmatist critic illegitimately epistemologizes ontology, i.e., regards existence as something epistemic rather than purely ontological. What there is, he will assure us, is by no means

dependent on what we can represent, experience, or cognize; what our epistemic situations (however ideal) are like does not determine the way the world is. The opponent of metaphysical realism will now argue that the metaphysical realist uncritically absolutizes her/his own epistemic perspective, ontologizes something that should not be detached from epistemic considerations. What there is cannot, *from our human point of view*, be entirely torn apart from what we are justified in believing there is. And what we are justified in believing there is is based on the human practices we engage in, on the epistemic positions we occupy. Epistemology and ontology are, then, inextricably entangled.

Appeals to the idea that the natural world must be a closed causal system, obeying the same fundamental physical laws (cf., e.g., Armstrong 1995, p. 38), will not help, according to Armstrong's critic, for the notion of causation itself is, arguably, a fundamentally epistemic notion, applicable only within an ontological scheme structured for human purposes, instead of representing any absolutely independent structure of the world in itself.[17] A scientific description of the world as a material or physical whole, causally structured, is only one description among many; it is (*pace* not only Armstrong but also Sellars *et al*.) equally acceptable to view the world in its "manifest image", making ontological commitments to commonsense objects, persons, mental states and events, and so on. This "ontological tolerance" cannot be reconciled with Armstrong's strict materialism, and, as is often acknowledged, one philosopher's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens*.

What we ultimately have here is a confrontation between two profoundly different conceptions of what metaphysics – metaphysical problems, arguments, and theories – is all about: for Armstrong, it is a project of laying out the general structure of the mind-independent world (in close cooperation with empirical science, although, as we saw, it is not quite clear *how* close this cooperation is supposed to be); for his critic, it is an attempt to place human points of view in the world, to examine, transcendentally rather than scientifically, the ways in which the world is (or can be) viewed, experienced, and conceptually categorized by us humans.[18] Not only Kantians and pragmatists, but also existentialists (e.g., Heideggerians) might be interpreted as sharing this latter sense of ontology. More generally, the phenomenological tradition has found it impossible to think about existence on the "objectivist" and naturalist model of the existence of material objects and processes investigated by the natural sciences (which is what Armstrong and his followers are doing). Phenomenologists join Kantians and pragmatists in urging that objective existence requires a subject – an acting, cognizing subject endowed with conceptual capacities. Objectivity, in the phenomenological (or pragmatist) framework, is one of the ways in which we, subjects, take

the world to be significant to us.

The confrontation between the two fundamentally different philosophical positions I have distinguished is an example of the inconclusiveness of philosophical, especially metaphysical, debates.[19] The case of the dialogue between the metaphysical realist and the non-metaphysical realist demonstrates that we should be modest in our metaphysical views, regarding them as *our* perspectives on reality, not perspectives on a world described as it is in itself, independently of us and of the practical purposes at work in our viewing the world.[20] Even ethical considerations may, I am willing to argue, legitimately influence these perspectives and thus our ontology (cf. Pihlström 2006a) – but I shall not pursue this line of thought here.

We now seem to have arrived at a metaontological position opposed to metaphysical realism. If we take the above-described inconclusive dialogue seriously, concluding that human purposes (or even personal temperaments)[21] are at stake in our disputes over how to view the world and what metaphysics is all about, we will have to give up metaphysical realism and its imagined "God's-Eye View". The critic of metaphysical realism wins, then, at the meta-level. Philosophical arguments present us a world viewed *by us*, structured *by us*, not by an impersonal, neutral spectator occupying a view from nowhere. There is no uncommitted place to stand in the realism dispute; hence, metaphysical realism should, *pace* Armstrong, be abandoned in favor of a more human picture of ontologizing. But I would be very surprised if an Armstrongian realist were convinced by this argumentation.

Do we end up with a *skeptical* position in metaontology, declaring ontological disagreements to be simply a matter of personal taste, refusing to see any cognitive progress in them? I do not think so. By no means do I wish to claim that metaphysical disputes, such as the dialogue imagined above, are philosophically useless. They may have genuine pragmatic value, since they may enable metaphysicians to make their ideas clear and to critically test them. There may be no way of settling those disputes once and for all, and we may be unable to see "the final true metaphysics" as a meaningful philosophical goal, but we should, nevertheless, go on arguing about such highly abstract but yet vitally important matters as existence, predication, and truthmaking. Ontological investigations do, sometimes, make a practical difference.

I already suggested that non-metaphysical realists, perhaps even pragmatists, *can* (though of course need not) employ *a* concept of truthmaking (perhaps in several variations), although such a concept is, in pragmatist theories, employed within an overall metaphysics very different from the metaphysical realist's one – a more processual, dynamic,

practice-embedded metaphysics that refuses to draw any principled dichotomies between the world as it is in itself and the world as it is experienced by humans engaging in their unending diversity of practices and habits of action. Such a metaphysics can still be realist, though only pragmatically realist, insofar as it does not reject the claim that there is something "out there" that we never made up out of nothing. Pragmatists, emphasizing our need to struggle with the concrete facts of worldly existence, should be the first to note that truthmaking is not, naively, a "making up" of truths. An element of any pragmatically convincing metaphysics is that we live in a concrete, natural world, to some extent shaped by us but irreducible to our contingent and changing structurings of it, and that this world makes true whatever we claim to be true, insofar as our claims to truth are (pragmatically) justified or "right".[22]

We should perceive, further, that pragmatism is not only entitled to the vocabulary of truthmaking but can accommodate much of what Armstrong (2004) says, including the ontological commitments to universals[23] and states of affairs – though only in a reinterpreted sense. These are commitments to the need (a deeply human need) to postulate certain categories within a humanly categorized reality, a world which receives an ontological structure through human practice-embedded categorization (cf. Pihlström 1996, 1998, 2003, 2006a). What we cannot accept, however, is Armstrong's Russellian view that we need to postulate "totality states of affairs" – except for local totalities or wholes that are never meant to cover the totality of the world as such. There is no "totality" of the world itself, because such a totality is, very simply, never pragmatically structurable or categorizable by us humans.[24] At best, we may speak about the world as a totality or as a whole as an abstraction, not very different from Kant's "thing in itself", that we may pragmatically need as a reminder of the fallibility of our knowledge claims, which are always inevitably presented from local human perspectives.

Accordingly, while truthmaker-based metaphysical theories about universals, states of affairs, or even about the way in which possibilities can be constructed out of recombinations of the elements of the actual world (cf. also Armstrong 1997), can be rearticulated in a pragmatist setting, always making it explicit that we are talking about an empirical world whose ontological structuring is not ready-made or given in advance but results from a human practice-embedded categorization, the metaphysics of "allness", or totality, that Armstrong (2004, ch. 6) is committed to through his account of the truthmakers for negative and general truths cannot be thus rearticulated (or so it seems to me).[25] This metaphysics more directly presupposes not only that it makes sense to speak about the ontological structure of the world as it is in itself but also that there *is* such a thing as the

world as it is in itself, as the given contingent totality it is. This idea contrasts with the pragmatist view of the world(s) being humanly "malleable" and constantly "in the making" (see, e.g., James 1907, ch. 7). According to both classical pragmatists like William James and John Dewey and their followers, such as Putnam, there is no such thing as the totality of the world, *as* "ready-made"; moreover, the problem is not just that there, contingently, is no such thing but that we do not know what we are talking about when we make claims about there being such a thing. Our claims to know, or even meaningfully state, something about the totality of the world, about all the objects there are, or about all the states of affairs that obtain, have only the illusion of sense, if we take seriously the pragmatists' emphasis on the world's being in the making in and through human experience.[26]

The pragmatist, arguably, has a right to the truthmaking vocabulary and even to some specific doctrines one may arrive at through truthmaking considerations (though only in a heavily reinterpreted sense). It is important to distinguish the mere methodology of truthmaking considerations from metaphysical realism, thus saving this useful metaphysical concept from scientistic metaphysical realisms like Armstrong's. Such realists urge that we do *not* in any sense "make" or "create" the truthmakers that make our propositions true: "They are just there or not there, whatever our opinion about them is." (Armstrong 2004, p. 33.) Just so – at the empirical level, as we might say. But at the more metaphysically relevant level of the very categorizing of reality (at a *transcendental* level, again, if we are not afraid of such Kantian notions), things are not so straightforward. Can we simply claim that, e.g., universals instantiated in particulars (such instantiations thereby forming states of affairs) in the world in itself make our true predications true? For a pragmatically inclined thinker, such a claim would be a monstrous example of a commitment to an underlying, ready-made structure of reality as such, a structure in virtue of which, mysteriously, *our* statements would be true (or false). Inasmuch as pragmatists have found the traditional correspondence relation mysterious or unhelpful, the same charge should be directed against the truthmaking relation – if construed in a metaphysically realist fashion in Armstrong's manner. In order to be able to make any truth true, the world must first be pragmatically "made" (and "remade") by us, turned into a meaningfully categorized shape. Only as thus categorized can it make any truth true. The notion of making has no meaning here unless it is conceived as a relation obtaining between identifiable items; any identification, in turn, requires human conceptual categorization.[27]

Moreover, Armstrong's metaphysically realist theory of truthmaking can be subjected to a self-reflective critical analysis. Suppose his theory (and the metaphysical

realism that functions as its base) is true. What is the truthmaker for *this* truth (in the theory's own terms)? Perhaps the truthmaker is whatever makes true the modal truth that, necessarily, a truthmaking relation obtains between any truth and the piece of world in virtue of which it is true. Then a truthmaker for this modal truth could be provided in the way Armstrong (2004, ch. 8) proposes. But why should the truthmaking theory be necessarily true? Could we have any legitimate reasons for claiming that it lies in the necessary, unchanging structure of things that truths are made true by truthmakers? This position would hardly be preferable to a Platonic metaphysics of immutable forms. Rather, as a pervasive feature of the fully contingent natural world, the truthmaking theory should, one might claim, be a contingent truth, or a true generalization, perhaps comparable to laws of nature. Yet, this is hardly plausible, either. The truthmaking theory is, after all, a piece of analytic ontology, not a scientific theory. It is hard to see how it could be scientifically evaluated or tested; it has no clear empirical content. On the other hand, it is no mere convention; according to Armstrong, it is supposed to make a great difference what kind of metaphysical views a person holds.

Thus, we once again observe that the status of Armstrong's own views is unclear and problematic. It is not at all obvious how his metaphysical findings, including the truthmaking theory itself, are related to our advanced, fallible scientific theories (whose truths, he supposes, we should also provide truthmakers for). The same troubles haunt all those philosophers who, like Armstrong, seek to combine metaphysical theorizing about ultimate reality with a naturalistic respect for the advancement of science.[28] Could future science show, for instance, that the theory of truthmaking is false, or that metaphysical realism is false, or that a factualist ontology of states of affairs is false? Are these questions even meaningful, according to a metaphysician like Armstrong – and if not, what is the criterion for distinguishing meaningful questions from meaningless ones here?[29]

## 4. Conceptual relativity and pragmatic pluralism

We have seen that Armstrong's position is full of grave difficulties. It is hard to maintain both metaphysical realism and a naturalism rejecting "first philosophy" in a thoroughly fallibilist spirit – and this, of course, is a problem *additional* to the ones metaphysical realism may independently have (cf. Pihlström 1996, 1998, 2003). Moreover, it is possible for a pragmatist or Kantian opposing metaphysical realism to adopt, with some modifications, Armstrong's method of truthmaking consideration, while insisting that the metaphysical status of the

truthmakers to be postulated is not quite the same that the metaphysical realist ascribes to them. The disciplinary identity of metaphysics is thus left unclear, even after Armstrong's admirable contribution. We will now take a closer look at a recent formulation of a strictly anti-metaphysical realist position, the one defended by Hilary Putnam.

Putnam's repudiation of what he calls "Ontology" (with a capital "O") is based on his strong *anti-reductionism*. Mathematics, ethics, and many other human practices, he argues, are autonomous in the sense that their objectivity, or the truths of statements formulated within them, should not be metaphysically explained by appealing to peculiar entities transcending those practices (Putnam 2004a, p. 3). Mathematicians and ethical thinkers are committed to their distinctive truths from their practice-internal perspectives. Nothing *non*-ethical, for instance, can be said to "make true" our moral truths, if there are such truths (cf. also Pihlström 2005a). This anti-reductionism has devastating consequences for the status of metaphysics in general.

Ontology, or what Heidegger called the "onto-theological" tradition, takes, according to Putnam (2004a, p. 16), basically two different forms: *inflationary* and *deflationary*. The former kind of metaphysicians[30] postulate, like Plato, mysterious transcendent entities in order to explain worldly facts or properties (e.g., goodness); thus, they appeal to "*non-natural* objects" as the truthmakers of the truths we believe to be true (*ibid*., pp. 17-19, 52).[31] The latter, deflationary kind of ontology, comes in two versions: *reductionist* and *eliminationist*. Both try to get rid of some things we ordinarily speak about, such as properties, goodness, or numbers – eliminationists by denying their existence altogether and reductionists by claiming such things to be "nothing but" something else (*ibid*., pp. 19-21). Putnam notes that it is, perhaps surprisingly, in analytic philosophy in particular that Ontology (in both of its main forms) flourishes, largely thanks to Quine's rehabilitation of the term "ontology" in his 1948 paper, "On What There Is" (Quine 1953, ch. 1).[32]

Having described these unfortunate tendencies, Putnam proposes his alternative:

> In place of Ontology (note the capital "O"), I shall be defending what one might call *pragmatic pluralism*, the recognition that it is no accident that in everyday language we employ many different kinds of discourses, discourses subject to different standards and possessing different sorts of applications, with different logical and grammatical features – different "language games" in Wittgenstein's sense – no accident because it is an illusion that there could be just one sort of language game which could be sufficient for the description of all of reality. (Putnam 2004a, pp. 21-

22.)

As he puts it in his "obituary" for Ontology, "once we assume that there is, somehow fixed in advance, a single 'real,' a single 'literal' sense of 'exist' – and [...] a single 'literal' sense of 'identity' – one which is cast in marble, and cannot be either contracted or expanded without defiling the statue of the god, we are already wandering in Cloud Cuckoo Land" (*ibid*., pp. 84-85). Metaphysical realists like Armstrong would undoubtedly be Putnam's prime candidates of thinkers worshipping such a false deity.[33]

A major issue is what kind of "illusion" the monistic assumption of a single privileged language game or discourse is. Putnam's diagnosis of this illusion and his proposed method of recovery are largely derived from pragmatism. A rejection of the idea that "the *world* dictates a unique 'true' way of dividing the world into objects, situations, properties, etc." (*ibid*., p. 51) is, obviously, something we may expect from a pragmatist or an "internal realist". Doubting the very intelligibility of metaphysical realism – roughly, the combination of three theses: first, that there is a way the world is in itself, mind- and language-independently; secondly, that this independent world can be described in a complete, unique, absolutely true representation (presumably an ideal scientific theory); and thirdly, that truth is a non-epistemic notion, viz., correspondence between linguistic items (statements, beliefs, or theories) and objects and/or states of affairs existing in the mind- and language-independent world – Putnam has, for decades, argued that the world can be correctly described from a number of different perspectives, reflecting our interests and purposes. Thus, he still sticks to the pragmatic (internal) realism he defended earlier, while rejecting the epistemic theory of truth at work in its original formulations (see Putnam 1999). This is a version of the pluralism one finds in pragmatists like James and Dewey (Putnam 1994, 1995). The Putnamian, just like the Jamesian-Deweyan, pragmatic pluralist maintains that no description of the world, not even the most advanced scientific one, is the world's or Nature's own. Descriptions available to us are grounded in human purposes and practices, and it is in terms of their overall success in the satisfaction of our purposes that the rational acceptability (or, ideally, truth) of those descriptions is to be assessed.

Ontology, truth, and reference are in this sense "internal" to conceptual schemes serving different purposes. The upshot of Putnam's *conceptual relativity* is that we live in a human world: there is no "ready-made" world whose structure would be absolutely independent of our practice-embedded perspectives. It is dangerously scientistic and culturally harmful to regard, with Armstrong, Quine, and many others, natural science as

being more intimately in touch with the true structure of reality than other language games. In his recent book, *Ethics without Ontology*, Putnam simply notes that Quine has not given sufficient grounds for the distinction between "first-class" and "second-grade" conceptual systems (that is, between science and everything else) and that there is "something *mad*" about the scientistic conclusion that normatively described entities, such as "passages which are difficult to interpret", do not really exist (Putnam 2004a, pp. 82-84; see Putnam 2004b).

In order to defend his views on conceptual relativity, Putnam (2004a, p. 37) provides a rehearsal of an example he has employed on earlier occasions:[34] it is, he argues, a *conventional* matter whether mereological sums exist. Once again, Putnam invites us to consider a world of three individuals, which can be described in different ways, depending on whether one uses the language of a "Carnapian" logician or a mereologist. The answer to the question about the number of objects in this world varies: for a Carnapian, there are three objects, whereas for the mereologist there are seven (or eight, if one includes the "null object"). This relativity of objecthood shows that existential expressions ("there are", "there exist", "there exists a", and "some", as well as their logical codification, the existential quantifier) "*do not have a single absolutely precise use but a whole family of uses*" (*ibid*., original emphasis). The logic of quantification does not settle the question of the existence of mereological sums. We can "create divergent uses of the existential quantifier itself" (*ibid*., p. 38). This is something that Quine, given his strictly univocal criterion of ontological commitment, "to be is to be the value of a [bound] variable", simply failed to acknowledge (*ibid*., pp. 78-84). We may add that, though Armstrong (2004, ch. 2) rejects Quine's criterion, preferring his own methodology of truthmaker postulation, his view of what it is to exist is no less univocal and monistic than Quine's.

I find Putnam's case against Ontology plausible, although he may not be able to argue non-question-beggingly against critics who do not share his pragmatism (Gross 2004). Both parties to the debate may end up arguing in a circle, as already suggested in relation to Armstrong (see section 3 above). Nevertheless, although Putnam's defense of pragmatic pluralism is promising, and he is right to remind us that we need not postulate practice-transcendent objects to account for the truths we find ourselves committed to in our practices, I am puzzled by his wholesale rejection of Ontology.

The following question, among others, arises. Are Putnam's worries about Ontology, or metaphysics, based on (1) *skepticism* regarding our ability to solve ontological problems;[35] or (2) the idea that such problems are *meaningless pseudo-issues* – though perhaps not exactly in the sense in which the logical positivists declared them to be

meaningless;[36] or, finally, (3) the view that metaphysics, especially when used to "ground" ethics, is not only intellectually confused but downright *immoral*, or, to continue the analogy to mathematics, alien to our mathematical practices? All three readings are possible, and all aspects may be present in Putnam's views, but (3) seems to be the strongest among them in Putnam's most recent works (see Pihlström 2005a, chs. 1-2). He seems to care less and less about the kind of metaphysical debates people like Armstrong, Lewis, and others have engaged in for decades. For him, such debates are, indeed, like medieval disputes over the nature of angels – or perhaps even worse, because ethically suspicious, given the commitment of contemporary metaphysics to the centuries-old Western metaphysics of totality and domination. The question is how *we*, prepared to learn from Putnam as well as, say, Armstrong, should view metaphysical issues and metaphysics as a discipline.

We might read Putnam as challenging the standard order of priority among philosophical subdisciplines, especially metaphysics and ethics. As classical pragmatists (particularly James) argued, our ethical needs may legitimately influence our metaphysical commitments. If we really pragmatically *need to* commit ourselves to a certain worldview, then that view may, because of such a genuine human need, be held as (*prima facie*) true for us. In a Jamesian spirit, Putnam has urged that we need to develop "moral images of the world" in which metaphysical and ethical elements are profoundly entangled (Putnam 1987). He now claims, with Emmanuel Levinas, that there is something wrong with the ontological pursuit as such, especially with the attempt to ground ethics in "being" (Putnam 2004a, pp. 23-24), because of the "totalizing" nature of such attempts. He is certainly not the first one to charge Western metaphysics as a whole of such totalizing – or even, potentially, of paving the way for destruction of entire groups of people considered "other" than us (the "same"). Kant, after all, charged "transcendental realists" of giving up to the metaphysical errors produced by reason's natural transcendental illusions, the endeavor to "think the whole" (Allison 2004, p. 322) – an endeavor to be met with in contemporary realistic metaphysics, too. Yet, it is also possible to suggest, *contra* Putnam's "ethics without ontology", that ontology *can* be retained within a more inclusive, and more fundamental, ethical framework, that is, that metaphysics can be pragmatically reoriented in a manner that turns it less totalizing, or not totalizing at all. This would only require – instead of a complete rejection of metaphysics, which is itself totalizing – a reinterpretation according to which metaphysics and ethics are inseparably entangled with each other. Pragmatism might offer such a reconstructed metaphysics.

Even Putnam's pragmatism might. Although Putnam has partly rejected internal realism, he continues to believe that the metaphysical realist's search for a privileged

scientific standpoint for describing the world as it is in itself, independently of practice-laden human perspectives, has only the illusion of sense. His attacks on strong forms of realism have increasingly turned into ethically motivated attacks on the reductively naturalist dream of representing ultimate reality in terms of natural-scientific theories, although he does not reject "naturalism"[37] as such but only a certain scientistic temptation associated with it, the temptation to treat everything non-scientifc with ontological suspicion (Putnam 2004b) – to abandon the ontology of familiar objects in favor of a mere "ontology of *physics*" (*ibid*., p. 69).

This is all to the good, given Putnam's admirable ethical motivation in saying "no" to the scientistic temptations of current metaphysics. It remains undecided, however, whether Putnam's rejection of metaphysical realism can be combined with a pragmatic commonsense realism affirming the objectivity and independence of the world, or whether it leads to a conception of the world as ontologically *dependent* on human practices. Putnam has often been interpreted as a relativist or even an idealist, but he has constantly reminded his critics that he never regarded the facts or the world as dependent on how we use language in any normal sense of the word "dependent" (Putnam 1992, 1994). Still, there is no "absolute" perspective available for any "first-class" description of those facts. No things, properties, or states of affairs are simply "out there", in the absence of human conceptualizations, which, in turn, depend on pragmatic interests – and may change through the historical development of our practices.

We have seen how Putnam rejects – indeed, destroys – *O*ntology, the kind of metaphysical realism assumed by thinkers like Armstrong. The question (inseparable from the realism issue) remains whether he could still accommodate something like *o*ntology in his project. More precisely, the question remains whether he could accept what I propose to call a "transcendental-cum-pragmatist" view of ontology as an examination of the basic features of a *humanly categorized reality*, of practice-embedded conditions necessary for us to inhabit an objective, structured world – and, thus, whether he could admit that pragmatism is, or can be reinterpreted as, an ontologically relevant philosophical framework (Pihlström 1996, 2003). Here, *o*ntology would amount to a Kantian investigation of what we need to commit ourselves to in our experience and thinking about the world (see sections 6-7 below), whereas *O*ntology, rightly criticized by Putnam, is closer to an Aristotelian picture of metaphysics as a "first philosophy", largely presupposed by contemporary metaphysicians (e.g., Armstrong 2004). One possibility, then, would be to interpret Putnam's position as an "empirical realism" in a Kantian sense. The world would, according to such a (re)interpretation of metaphysics, still be

(transcendentally, non-empirically, non-causally) constituted by our purpose-oriented practices, pretty much as the empirical world is – at the transcendental level – a human construction, without being illusory or fictitious, in Kant's transcendental idealism (cf. Allison 2004). Practices, in such a transcendental pragmatism, would be the dynamic, historically transformable substitute for the atemporal transcendental ego that constitutes objective reality.

Putnam is ambiguous between rejecting ontology altogether (that is, not only *O*ntology but *o*ntology as well) and rejecting only Ontology and preserving less metaphysically-realist, less hubristic ontological inquiry into the pragmatically constituted human world. This ambiguity may have something to do with what might be regarded as his more fundamental ambiguity, the tension between, on the one side, constructive philosophical theorizing, including ontological theorizing (which, in Putnam's case, results in pragmatic realism and pluralism, views opposed not only metaphysical realism but also to Rorty's much more deflationist and deconstructive pragmatism, which certainly deserves to be attacked above all because it entirely loses touch with the realism issue),[38] and, on the other side, the wish to write an obituary not only for Ontology but for constructive, systematic philosophy in general, with a therapeutic appeal to the "ordinary" along the lines of Wittgenstein, Stanley Cavell, and John McDowell. It is not clear that such appeals to the ordinary are philosophically neutral or "ordinary" (everyday) matters; they may, even ontologically, amount to something quite extraordinary. The metaphysical commitments of our ordinariness itself would, therefore, deserve further scrutiny.

My intermediary proposal at this point is that Putnam might combine his constructive and therapeutic insights by explicitly endorsing a transcendental rearticulation of pragmatism (cf. Pihlström 2003), though I certainly do not expect him to embrace the transcendental vocabulary – even if the pluralism he defends may ultimately sound like a reconstruction of transcendental idealism. In any case, although I have examined Putnam's views on O/ontology much more sympathetically than Armstrong's, I find them wanting because of his insufficient attention to the metaphilosophical issue of the disciplinary status of metaphysics, in relation to other fields of philosophy (including ethics). There is still more work to be done.

## 5. The quest for an "absolute" reality and the mind-(in)dependence of ontology

I will try to clarify the Putnamian position by continuing to explore the debate between metaphysical realism and its opponents, now understanding the former primarily as a quest for the "absolute truth" about an "absolute reality". Barry Stroud's project in *The Quest for Reality* (2000) is, from this perspective, a most relevant critical examination of the idea that the "absolute" conception of the world makes no reference to *colors* (or other secondary qualities, or properties that do not seem to fit the physical world-view, such as values or modalities). Stroud endorses the metaphysically realistic view that there is an absolute, independent way the world is, and this leads him to present his criticism in a manner that philosophers more sympathetic to Putnamian pluralism and conceptual relativity will hardly find appealing.

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

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

He also remarks: "The thought that *a thing* cannot both be and not be yellow is precisely what forces the question of which of the things said from those two different standpoints [i.e., science and everyday experience] is correct" (*ibid*., p. 185; emphasis added). If we say, "of the same thing", that it is red and that it is colorless, we arrive at a conflict (*ibid*., p. 188). Now, this is where the mistake of the metaphysical realist's approach lies, according to philosophers like Strawson or Putnam. It was one of Putnam's main points, when

he formulated his conceptual relativity arguments against metaphysical realists (e.g., in Putnam 1990), that we cannot just ask whether *objects* are colored or whether *a thing* – some particular thing common to, say, both the scientific and the everyday standpoint – is colored; we have to specify the discourse or scheme whose objects we are speaking about (see the previous section). Different discourses, descriptions, or conceptual schemes, serving different pragmatic purposes, individuate different things, different objects. There *are* different things within different contexts of conceptualization. This is the point of the Strawsonian relativizing move, too, which urges, with Putnam, that the very notions of object, existence, or reality are relative to a conceptual framework. Stroud assumes a metaphysically primitive notion of a "thing", which is something that Putnam's conceptual relativity argument should lead us to call into question.

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

In a word, Stroud is a philosopher who believes, to cite the title of his earlier book, in the "significance of philosophical scepticism" (cf. Stroud 1984). He is a rather straightforward metaphysical realist when he states – sounding like Armstrong – that "[w]e are interested in how things are, not only in how certain standpoints or sets of beliefs say things are" (Stroud 2000, p. 187), overlooking the significance of the idea that there is no way things are independently of our various practice- or discourse-involving standpoints within which only is it meaningful for us to speak about how things are, even about how things are independently of particular standpoints. As skeptics recognize, things might not be the way they seem to be. This metaphysical realism, presupposed by any standard form of skepticism,

at least in the Cartesian tradition, is manifested not only in Stroud's earlier entanglement with skeptical problems but also in his eschewing of transcendental idealism as an attempt to draw nonpsychological conclusions (e.g., about objects being really colored) from psychological premises (e.g., our color experiences) (*ibid*., ch. 9).[39]

When rejecting Stroud's approach, we should, however, be careful in our claim that the way the world is is dependent on our conceptual schemes or perspectives. Putnam himself has been rather careless in some of his pronouncements, thereby inviting partly justified criticism. Fortunately, Putnam has in some recent publications attempted to clarify the points about conceptual relativity he made in the 1980s, as we just saw by examining his 2004 book. Some of his responses to recent commentators also turn out to be helpful here.

One of those commentators, Jennifer Case (2001, p. 420n15), suggests that "what Putnam refers to as 'conceptual schemes' are not really schemes of distinct concepts but, rather, linguistic schemes distinguished primarily by their divergent ways of extending shared concepts", i.e., something that can be called "optional languages" (see also *ibid*., p. 429). Optional languages are schemes that we may employ for some purposes but that we may as well refuse to employ. Putnam (2001b, p. 433) approves of Case's suggestion, admitting that he should have spoken of optional languages all along in his discussions of conceptual relativity. This would have helped him to avoid his critics' misunderstandings that "any body of thought and talk" could be a conceptual scheme and that every conceptual scheme (in such a misleading sense) has an incompatible alternative, so that conceptual relativity would extend to each and every statement (*ibid*., pp. 431-432). Optional languages include, e.g., mereology, which we can decide not to employ, but as Putnam explains, we are not genuinely free to abandon, say, the familiar scheme of tables and chairs (*ibid*., p. 434). Conceptual relativity concerns different "scientific images" and hence optional languages, leaving our everyday language intact (*ibid*., p. 435). Furthermore, Putnam agrees with Case that conceptual relativity should be seen as a special case of the wider phenomenon of pluralism (cf. section 4 above), which says that we can use, e.g., both the optional language of scientific physics and the natural language of everyday life "without being required to reduce one or both of them to some single fundamental and universal ontology" (*ibid*., p. 437).[40]

In many of his recent writings, Putnam (1999, 2001c, 2001d, 2001e, 2002, 2004a) has expressed a fundamental agreement with Wittgenstein's views on various issues. What he often describes as the *context-sensitivity* of Wittgenstein's later philosophy can be seen as an expression of the pluralistic attitude that perhaps ought to be regarded as more fundamental in his work than the doctrine of conceptual relativity. This philosophical strategy

of *contextualization* is particularly pertinent if one tries to understand Wittgenstein's struggle with the problems of language he investigated. Regarding Wittgenstein's notion of a perspicuous representation, Putnam (2001c, p. 466) remarks that "the perspicuity that Wittgenstein talks about is itself always *contextual*" and that, hence, "*there is no sense in speaking of THE grammar of the word 'know', or of any word, in Wittgenstein's sense, apart from a particular philosophical problem*".

Although this discussion is not explicitly about metaphysics but primarily about language and semantics, it can easily be transformed into a metaphysical shape. Context-sensitivity is needed also in the case of notions such as being, existence, or reality. In a pluralistic manner, we should be willing to endorse many different kinds of contextualization – not only linguistic (which is primary in Wittgensteinian cases) but also metaphysical. We may see Putnam as accepting the pragmatist view, perhaps most effectively developed by Dewey, that metaphysical views should be contextualized into the "problematic situations" within which they actually arise in the course of our lives (cf. Pihlström 1996). Now, such metaphysically relevant problematic situations do occur in real life. The pragmatist metaphysician should therefore explore the prospects of pluralism and conceptual relativity in such humanly important affairs (see also Pihlström 2002).

But how can Putnam think his position could have any argumentative resources against the metaphysical realist who goes on to claim that it is irrelevant to argue for the mind- or practice-dependence of things and properties by relying on the context-dependence of their identification by us? Such a realist might argue that it is one thing to *identify* things or properties (however context-sensitively) and quite another thing for those things or properties, whether correctly identified or not, to *exist* in the human-independent world. So, how *could* Putnam's position, as it stands, even be thought of as an argument against forms of metaphysical realism such as Armstrong's (1997, 2004)? Metaphysical realism, as should be clear by now, urges that the existence or reality of objects or properties (or whatever there is) is totally independent of our being able to identify or describe them, however context-dependent the latter ability might be.

It would again be helpful, in this argumentative *impassé*, if Putnam explicitly admitted that the kind of mind-dependence he endorses amounts to something like Kantian transcendental idealism, while the kind of commonsense realism which is compatible with it is reinterpretable as Kantian empirical realism. This, for some reason, is a move that Putnam has not wanted to make, even though it is not at all odd to interpret pragmatism in a Kantian manner (cf. Pihlström 2003). How such an interpretation would transform Putnam's position

must remain a topic for some other discussion; in any case, Putnam is (but should not be) guilty of the typical way of thinking among most twentieth-century analytic philosophers, according to which Kant's transcendental idealism somehow must be wrong or cannot even be understood (cf. Hanna 2001, Allison 2004). There is much more sense in such an idealism than those realists can perceive who believe idealism to be just a naive acceptance of the mind-dependence of pretty much everything. As Charles Travis (2001, pp. 516, 522–524) also argues, subscribing to what Putnam (1981, p. 55) once called "objectivity humanly speaking", objectivity (or the lack of it) is a real feature of *our* representations of the ways things are; it is just that there is no purely "worldly" contribution upon which such objectivity solely depends. Similarly, the Kantian – at least on Henry Allison's (2004) reading, to be commented upon in section 8 below – examines the epistemic conditions of objective cognition, thus preserving (and trying to make sense of), instead of criticizing, objectivity.

Furthermore, if the realist believes real objects and properties ought to have some sort of identity criteria,[41] the pragmatic transcendental idealist can argue that such criteria can eventually only be provided by our (linguistic) practices. There is no identification, and hence no acceptable ontological status, of properties (or anything else) in the absence of *our* being engaged in practices – contexts – within which we actually count something as real, or commit ourselves ontologically. Our very commitments are in this sense *prior* to the identities of the things they are commitments *to*. Here, in the end, we reach the point of agreement between pragmatist (or Wittgensteinian) and transcendentally idealist approaches in (meta)ontology, an inextricable entanglement of the conceptual (our commitments, or practices of making commitments) and the factual, i.e., the worldly objects themselves (the content of our ontological commitments).

A crucial point here is that the pragmatic pluralist who embraces transcendental idealism and defends conceptual relativity need *not*, *pace* Putnam, give up metaphysics altogether. I will next try to show why.

## 6. Two conceptions of ontology

We have seen how metaphysicians like Armstrong are entangled with the difficulties of metaphysical realism (especially if also committed to fallibilist naturalism). We have seen how philosophers in the other extreme, such as Putnam, in addition to providing a promising critique of metaphysical realism, go too far in rejecting the whole pursuit of metaphysical

issues. Are we doomed to this oscillation between two rival metaphilosophical views on the status and possibilities of metaphysics? Isn't there any plausible *via media* available?

Here, in attempting to steer the middle course between Scylla and Charybdis, between metaphysical realism and a total rejection of metaphysics, we finally return to where this chapter started out. There are, as has often been observed (cf. also Koskinen's contribution to this volume), two chief rival views of general metaphysics (ontology) to be found in the history of recent philosophy: the "Aristotelian" and the "Kantian" view. The Aristotelian metaphysician, starting from Aristotle's famous conception of "first philosophy" as a science of "Being *qua* Being", an inquiry into "first principles", believes that the ontological categories s/he tries to discern are (intended to be) categories of Being itself, of the world as it is ontologically independently of human conceptual categorization. In contrast, the Kantian transcendental philosopher rejects such a claim, urging that we cannot know anything about Being as such, or about the things in themselves. The world's or Being's "own" categorial structure is forever beyond our cognitive reach. Thus, when studying ontological categories, we study the forms of our thought about reality, our conceptual schemes, the basic features of our experiencing and talking about the world. Here we have the Armstrong vs. Putnam opposition all over again.

Characterizations of the two rival conceptions can easily be found in recent literature. Michael J. Loux (2002, p. 7) sets *transcendent metaphysics* and (Kantian) *critical metaphysics* against each other, describing the latter as an attempt to delineate "the most general features of our thought and knowledge" and to identify "the most general concepts at work in our representation of the world, the relationships that obtain among those concepts, and the presuppositions of their objective employment". Thus, according to the Kantian conception, metaphysics seeks to characterize our conceptual scheme or framework rather than the world itself (*ibid*., p. 8). E.J. Lowe (1998, pp. 3-8) includes the "neo-Kantian" view among the *anti-metaphysical* positions he criticizes. Peter Loptson (2001, p. x), in turn, suggests that "[o]ne of the very deepest and most important divisions in post-Kantian philosophy" lies between "those who regard as viable, at least in principle, an essentially unitary project of theorizing about the world and its diverse constituents (including middlesized physical objects, such things as quarks and fields, abstract entities, and free rational conscious agency), and those who think otherwise", labeling these positions "unitarianism" and "anti-unitarianism", respectively. There is no relation of logical entailment between what Loux calls transcendent metaphysics and what Loptson calls unitarianism, or between critical (transcendental) metaphysics and anti-unitarianism, but there is certainly a

close relation of association between the members of the two pairs. If the world is not ontologically pre-structured, it is easier to think that it is not uniquely structured, either, that is, that its (perhaps numerous) "structures" arise out of our pragmatic engagements with the world and that these categorizing engagements cannot be accounted for within any unitarian metaphysical scheme.

If one browses recent metaphysical literature, including not only research papers and monographs, such as Armstrong's above-cited works, but also textbooks and anthologies (e.g., Kim & Sosa 1999, Loux 2002), one finds an almost unanimous commitment to the Aristotelian picture, as contrasted to the Kantian one. Accordingly, most contemporary metaphysicians tend to be metaphysical realists; Armstrong, whose views we have discussed in some detail, is only one illustrative example. As leading analytic metaphysicians theorize about the basic ontological categories they find necessary to postulate – whether these are universals and states of affairs, as in Armstrong's (1997, 2004) theory, or concretely existing possible worlds, as in Lewis's (1986) – they see themselves as "limning the true and ultimate structure of reality" (to use Quine's apt phrase). In Putnamian terms, they attempt to adopt a "God's-Eye View" on the world, seeking to formulate an "absolute conception" of reality, a non-perspectival conception given from a perspective which is no genuine perspective at all.[42] The ontological categories such thinkers postulate are, clearly, intended as the world's or Nature's own, although any reasonable metaphysician of course admits that our attempts to categorize reality in terms of its own categories are as fallible as any other human cognitive projects. We can only more or less reasonably hope to be able to represent the ontological structure of the world, never claim to be sure of having succeeded in our effort.

The metaphilosophical problem of the nature of metaphysics – of its goals, purposes, and methods – and the genuinely philosophical problem of realism – the question of whether there is a world "out there" that we never made up but that exists and has the characteristics it has largely independently of (our) mental and/or conceptual contribution – are inseparably entangled. This should be clear by now, after our case studies on two opposing meta-ontological positions, Armstrong's and Putnam's. Neither of these issues can be settled without taking due notice of the other. "Solutions" to the problem of realism hardly entail any particular conceptions of the nature of metaphysics, but if one holds a certain view about one of these problems one is likely to hold certain kinds of views about the other one as well. In any case, it is clear that if one rejects metaphysical realism, denying that there is a (or, better, *the*) way the world is independently of human conceptualization, then one is forced to reject at least the strongest versions of the view of metaphysics as an inquiry into the

categorial structure of Reality or Being as such. Metaphysics will no longer enjoy the disciplinary glamour it perhaps once did, if one gives up metaphysical realism.

Instead of simply assuming (like Armstrong more or less seems to do) the truth of metaphysical realism and the Aristotelian conception of metaphysics, some contemporary metaphysicians repeatedly argue that metaphysics is a meaningful enterprise, that it is more basic than any other examination or research we can engage in, and that various forms of anti-metaphysics (whether Kantian, relativist, "semanticist", or scientistic) can be rejected.[43] Loux states his case for Aristotelian realist metaphysics, and against the Kantian view of metaphysics as being merely about our conceptual scheme(s), as follows:

> The central premise in the [conceptual] schemer's argument against traditional metaphysics is the claim that the application of conceptual structures in the representation of things bars us from genuine access to those things; but the defender of traditional metaphysics will point out that we need to employ concepts in our characterization of what the schemer calls a conceptual framework, and they will conclude that, by the schemer's own principles, that entails that there can be no such thing as characterizing the nature and structure of a conceptual scheme. So traditional metaphysicians will argue that if their conception of metaphysics is problematic, so is the schemer's. […] If the conceptual schemer is correct in claiming that the activity of conceptual representation bars us from an apprehension of anything we seek to represent, then why should we take seriously the schemer's claims about conceptual representations? Those claims, after all, are just further conceptual representations [precluding] our getting a hold on what those claims are supposed to be about – the activity of conceptual representation. (Loux 2002, p. 10.)

Lowe raises related points. According to him, the neo-Kantian position "is fatally flawed, if its intention is to render 'metaphysical' claims legitimate by construing them as not venturing to speak of how things really are, as opposed to how we must *think* of them as being." This is because "*we*, if we are anything, are part of reality ourselves, as are our thoughts, so that to purport to make claims about allegedly necessary features of *our thoughts* while simultaneously denying that anything is being claimed about the nature of 'reality' is to contradict oneself." Metaphysical inquiry, then, "cannot rest content to describe or analyse the

concepts that we happen to have, but should, rather, seek to revise and refine these concepts when necessary. But the point of such revision, if it has a point, can only be to render our concepts truer to reality." (Lowe 1998, p. 6.) Again, we notice here a straightforward acceptance of a metaphysically realist conception of reality as independent of the mind, language, and conceptual categorization – a reality whose "own" categorial structure ought to be discovered by means of metaphysical inquiry, an inquiry which is (according to Lowe) more fundamental than any empirical scientific inquiry. Still, this world is something that "we" ourselves are supposed to belong to as well.[44]

The kind of metaphysical inquiry engaged in by (say) Armstrong obviously falls into this category, even though Lowe's account of the disciplinary autonomy of metaphysics is stronger then Armstrong's, who would not join Lowe in claiming that metaphysical inquiry is more basic or fundamental than science. Lowe's view is, then, even a better example of metaphysical realism than Armstrong's, and stands, thus, in stark contrast to Putnam's. We have already encountered the issue of whether those (like Putnam and other pragmatists) who reject metaphysical realism could, however, still leave room for metaphysics in some – Kantian rather than Aristotelian – sense. I will substantiate this discussion before turning to my final conclusions.

## 7. Transcendental metaphysics: articulating the ontology of the "human world"

Even though they correctly note that a certain kind of anti-metaphysical view leads to self-reflective difficulties, the metaphysicians cited in the previous section fail to pay due attention to the deliberate *epistemologization of ontology* in the transcendental tradition. While the "Kantian" does indeed reject the idea that we could cut the world at its own joints, to describe things as they are in themselves, etc., this does not mean that s/he would entirely reject the project of categorizing being, or the philosophical problems relevant to this project (e.g., the problem of universals).[45] For a transcendental philosopher, and for a pragmatist, metaphysics should remain genuinely metaphysical, and ontology should not be simply turned into epistemology, but what ought to be developed as a replacement of Aristotelian metaphysically realist metaphysics is a transcendental-cum-pragmatist *metaphysics of the human world* – an inquiry into the historically transformable categories of a humanly experienceable (always already categorized and conceptualized) reality, which is something quite different from the metaphysical realist's imagined categorization of Being *qua* Being. Thus, even if we claim,

against Van Inwagen and Zimmerman (1998), among others, that describing "Reality" itself is an impossible task (if the notion of "Reality" is understood along the lines of metaphysical realism), we are not committed to the skeptical view that reality – the empirical objects of possible cognitive experience – is out of our reach altogether.

Against Loux's above-cited views, specifically, it may be pointed out that the Kantian conception of "critical metaphysics" by no means precludes our taking seriously conceptual representation itself. We can still study the structure of human conceptualization, or the nature of ourselves as conceptualizers, even if we argue that no representation of Reality itself is possible. The critic of metaphysical realism will also claim that a metaphysical description of the true and ultimate nature of conceptualization itself (or of "us") is as impossible as the description of the true and ultimate nature of the mind-independent world is. The picture of conceptual schemes as "screens or barriers between us and things" (Loux 2002, p. 11) is a mere caricature of Kantianism. Contrary to what Loux supposes, the Kantian metaphysician is self-conscious about her/his own project of categorization – much more self-conscious than the traditional metaphysician who regards concepts and conceptualization as a polished mirror through which the categorial structure of the concept-independent world itself can (ideally) be viewed. Realizing that it is, at any given moment, impossible to entirely step outside one's (contextually) inescapable, though perhaps gradually changing, conceptual commitments – one's language-game(s) or paradigm(s) – the Kantian philosopher denies that things in themselves can be represented by humanly possible means. But this is not to deny that the world – the world of ordinary or scientific objects and the reality (the activity) of conceptual representation itself – can be represented. We humans are of course real, and we do conceptualize the world we live in, a world which is equally real; indeed, we are really here (in the natural and social world) to say this. When pursuing metaphysics, we seek to describe the basic categorial features of such a humanly inhabited world.

While I am as critical of Lowe's (1998) criticism of the "Kantian" view as I am of Loux's, I do find Lowe's (*ibid*., p. 9 ff.) discussion of metaphysics as a discipline dealing with possibilities rather than with actualities helpful. Such a view can, I believe, be accommodated by a more Kantian-oriented metaphysician. If construed in a pragmatic, non-metaphysically-realist manner, Lowe's statement that metaphysical necessities (and, correspondingly, possibilities) are ontologically rather than (merely) formally or conceptually grounded – i.e., grounded "in the nature of things" – may be accepted, together with his claim that the epistemological status of metaphysical claims is both *a posteriori* and modal. (*Ibid*.,

pp. 14, 23.) Lowe himself says (*ibid*., p. 10) that metaphysical notions (e.g., necessity) are "transcendental" in the sense of being "not derivative from experience", to be "invoked in construing what experience reveals of reality". But he ignores Kant's specific transcendental approach to metaphysics and himself arrives at a conception of metaphysics broad enough to accommodate at least a weakly interpreted transcendental project.

The project of transcendental metaphysics would be worthy of exploring in some more detail (see Pihlström 2007). In particular, the conception of transcendental philosophy as an ontology of the categorial structure of the human world might be illuminated through critical interpretations and rearticulations of, for instance, (i) Kant's (1781/1787) own critical philosophy, in which transcendental philosophy, especially the "Transcendental Analytic", is defended as a replacement for traditional ontology; (ii) Strawson's (1959) reappropriation of the Kantian position in his "descriptive metaphysics"; (iii) Wittgenstein's (1953) later philosophy, interpreted as a transcendental investigation of the basic features of human form of life;[46] and (iv) pragmatism, interpreted as an ontologically relevant study of the world-constitutive role played by human practices or habits of action (cf. Pihlström 1996, 1998, 2003). The tension between realism and idealism, in one form or another, is a unifying feature of these philosophical frameworks, none of which simply assumes either a metaphysically realist understanding of reality or a full-blown idealist or anti-realist conception of the world as a human construction. These examples should, in any case, warrant the conclusion that transcendental philosophy *can* be both ontological and epistemological, especially if it is developed in a pragmatist spirit, and that there is no good reason to be *entirely* opposed to metaphysics, if one takes a "transcendental turn".

All of these philosophical orientations may be said to end up with a conception of the mind-dependence, or better, conceptualization-dependence, of ontological categories (cf. Pihlström 1996, 2002). This means, to repeat, that ontology is, for Kantians, Wittgensteinians, and pragmatists (though in somewhat different ways), first and foremost a human project of categorizing the world, *not* (as in the traditional Aristotelian metaphysician's understanding) a project of discovering the categories that are already there, embedded in the structure of the world, independently of human categorization. The Wittgensteinian and the pragmatist novelty in this discussion is to add that this categorization or conceptualization contains an irreducibly *practical* dimension: it is in and through our practices of coping with the world that the world gets structured by us. It is the task of (general) metaphysics to examine the transcendental conditions for the possibility of the various structures it does (or can) receive through our categorizing activities. This is

something that we may see a pragmatist like Putnam doing, his own anti-metaphysical elaborations notwithstanding.

It is in these terms that I would like to reinterpret the conception of metaphysics as a philosophical discipline striving for a category theory, and – correspondingly – of transcendental philosophy as an ontologically relevant inquiry into the structure of the humanly categorized world. Metaphysics, according to this view, is not *merely* an investigation of our thought or conceptual schemes; it does inquire into the categorial structure of the world. But it starts from the "humanist" thesis that *we* provide that (or any) structure to the world through our conceptualizations, which, however, are themselves based on materialized practices in the world. This, moreover, is how Putnam's above-discussed anti-metaphysically-realist views ought to be reinterpreted, partly in contrast to his own self-understanding as a thinker opposed to Ontology *in toto*, at least *if* we wish to read him charitably as a thinker deeply anchored both in the Kantian and the pragmatist traditions.

## 8. Metaphysics and (transcendental) "norms of being"

Metaphysicians of various stripes have offered normative principles for the conduct of metaphysical inquiry. These principles are partly intended to determine the disciplinary status and boundaries of metaphysics. For instance, Quine's (1953) concern with bound variables or Armstrong's (2004) proposal to characterize metaphysics as a search for truthmakers are splendid examples of normative metaphysical, or "meta-ontological", principles that aim at defining the proper methodology of metaphysics.[47] It might, however, be suggested more strongly that the purpose of metaphysics is to identify and legitimate norms for being or reality itself, requirements that anything that exists ought to fulfil. For example, the principle of non-contradiction, deriving from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, has been mentioned as a candidate for such a norm (Koskinen 2006). The realist Aristotelian metaphysician obviously argues that such norms, in order to be genuine norms of being, should have a metaphysical instead of a "merely transcendental" status (*ibid*.). It is, however, hard to see how being (or, better, Being) itself, entirely independently of human conceptualization and categorization, could be the subject of any genuine norms. That is, it is hard to see how the metaphysical realist's talk about the "norms of being" could be anything more than metaphorical.

Of course, the metaphysical realist need not engage in such talk at all. If we want to keep talking in such a way, and to ensure that our way of speaking has genuinely

normative force, it will, however, be more promising to construe the "norms of being" transcendentally, as norms constitutive of, and constraining, the way(s) in which *we* structure and conceptualize reality. In particular, Kant's categories can be seen as normative requirements that objects will have to meet in order to *be* (possible) objects of cognition for us, i.e., normative principles constitutive of what it is for anything to be an object (of cognition or possible experience). Because categories, as analyzed in Kant's (1781/1787) "Transcendental Analytic", are pure concepts of the understanding, they are unproblematically within the normative sphere – unlike the Aristotelian metaphysician's "categories of being". They, like all concepts, are after all rules, and thus obviously normative. It should be no surprise at this point that, in my view, the normativity of metaphysical inquiry requires a Kantian transcendental-cum-pragmatist conception of the very idea and disciplinary identity of metaphysics. Kant himself thought that the analytic of the understanding replaces traditional ontology (see *ibid*., A247/B303), but the relation between the two can be seen as a reinterpretation or rearticulation instead of replacement.

However, the normativity of the Kantian approach also plays a major role in thoroughly non- or anti-metaphysical, merely "methodological" or epistemological, treatments of transcendental philosophy (and of transcendental idealism, in particular). Specifically, before drawing this discussion to a close, I want to comment briefly on Henry Allison's views, without engaging in Kant scholarship in any historical sense. Allison (rather than Kant himself) will here be referred to as one more example, somewhat analogous to Putnam's case (see sections 4-5 above), of how an important anti-metaphysically-realist insight – here the key idea of transcendental idealism, or in Putnam's case pragmatism and pluralism – is sometimes carried too far into a total rejection of metaphysics.

A pivotal point in Allison's reading of Kant's transcendental idealism, both in the first edition of his famous book (1983) and in the revised one (2004), is that Kantian idealism must be interpreted *not* as a "substantive metaphysical doctrine" but as a metaphilosophical "methodology or standpoint" (Allison 2004, p. xv), an epistemological or "metaepistemological" rather than metaphysical or ontological idealism (*ibid*., p. 4; see also pp. 35, 57, 70). Instead of any rearticulation of metaphysics, we should find a "general critique of ontology" in the First Critique, including the "Analytic" (*ibid*., p. 324). I agree with much of what Allison says about Kant – indeed, I find his interpretation one of the best available[48] – and especially with his "one world" ("double aspect") theory of the transcendental distinction between things in themselves and appearances,[49] as well as his articulation of transcendental idealism as a standpoint based on an "anthropocentric", in

contrast to transcendental realism's "theocentric", conception of human cognition (*ibid*., especially ch. 2).[50] Nevertheless, I find his way of restricting Kant's project to the analysis of the epistemic conditions of human cognition too narrow.

Epistemic conditions must, Allison argues, be clearly distinguished from both psychological and ontological conditions (*ibid*., p. 11); to fail to distinguish these different types of condition is to fail to understand the properly transcendental nature of Kant's enterprise. Epistemic conditions are *not* conditions of "the possibility of the existence of things" *but* of "the possibility of representing objects", conditions "without which our representations would not relate to objects or, equivalently, possess objective reality" (*ibid*.). For example, space and time, Kant's *Anschauungsformen* examined in the "Transcendental Aesthetic", are, when properly understood "in terms of their epistemic function", not ontological concepts referring to some sort of "realities", but Kant's theory of them may be seen as an "*alternative to ontology*" (*ibid*., p. 98, original emphasis). Hence, epistemic conditions are constitutive of our ways of representing reality, not of reality itself.

Allison distinguishes between ontological and epistemic matters as sharply as metaphysical realists do. This, I think, he should not have done, because he may, by so doing, lose the ontological relevance of transcendental idealism (and transcendental philosophy) – even though it is, clearly, important to separate Kant's transcendental project from the "transcendentally realist" projects of his predecessors (and of later philosophers, such as Armstrong and other contemporary "pre-Kantian" metaphysicians).[51] Some hope for maintaining the ontological relevance, if not the substantive metaphysical status, of Kantian transcendental idealism may, however, be gained from the idea that epistemic conditions, for Allison (and for Kant), are "objectivating conditions". Serving an "objectivating function", they share with ontological conditions the feature of being "objective" or "objectivating", though this objectivity is related to our representations of things rather than to the existence of those things (and is thus something "subjective"). (*Ibid*., p. 11.) The most important thing to note here is, moreover, the normative character of epistemic conditions, and of the objectivating function they serve:

> In fact, the concept of an epistemic condition brings with it an idealistic commitment […], because it involves the relativization of the *concept* of an object to human cognition, and the conditions of its representation of objects. In other words, the claim is not that *things* transcending the conditions of human cognition cannot exist (this would make the conditions ontological rather than

> epistemic) but merely that such things cannot count as *objects* for us. This also appears to be the sense of Kant's famous "Copernican hypothesis" that objects must "conform to our cognition" (*sich nach unserem Erkenntnis richten*) [Kant 1781/1787, Bxvi]. [T]his means that objects must conform to the conditions of their representation; not that they exist in the mind in the manner of Berkeleian ideas or the sense data of phenomenalists. (Allison 2004, p. 12.)

In further discussing this passage, early at Bxvi of the second edition of the First Critique, Allison reminds us that it is vital to understand the idea of the "anthropocentric model" Kant is invoking "in a normative sense" (*ibid*., pp. 37-38). This is "to consider the human mind as the source of the rules or conditions through which and under which it can alone represent to itself an objective world", to acknowledge that understanding (as conditioned by sensibility) "provides the 'legislation [*Gesetzgebung*] for nature'" Kant refers to at A126 (*ibid*., p. 38). A more socially and pragmatically oriented Kantian, e.g., a Putnamian (neo)pragmatist, might modify this point by arguing that our human practices of representation and cognition play the normative, legislative role of providing (historically transformable) conditions to which anything that can be an object for us must conform.[52] The issue here is not, however, the possibility of developing a naturalized and historicized version of Kantian transcendental philosophy – a possibility I take for granted, because I have defended it at length (see Pihlström 2003) – but the ontological relevance of the normative model Allison proposes.

My worry is that Allison too strongly "deontologizes" Kant's transcendental idealism (cf. Allison 2004, pp. 46-47), and transcendental philosophy generally, by restricting it to an investigation of epistemic conditions (as sharply distinguished from ontological ones). The purpose of the kind of transcendental-cum-pragmatist corrective the traditional accounts of metaphysics is to conjoin (i) ontological seriousness with (ii) the possibility of preserving normativity in ontology and (iii) the crucial insights of transcendental idealism (vigorously defended by Allison), as opposed to metaphysical realism. The Kant Allison pictures is too close to the thoroughly anti-metaphysical thinker that Putnam describes as the pragmatist who has given up Ontology. Neither Kant nor pragmatists should be rendered *so* anti-metaphysical. Both should be allowed to engage in ontological inquiry, roughly in the sense sketched in the previous section.

Perhaps the transcendental distinction between things in themselves and appearances can, and should, be "deontologized" in Allison's manner, while preserving the

ontological relevance of transcendental idealism. We can even admit that the transcendental distinction is not a "first-order" metaphysical doctrine (*ibid*., p. 395); it is obviously a "second-order" or meta-level topic, though not for that reason non-metaphysical. Transcendental idealism can be ontologically significant without privileging things in themselves metaphysically, or without invoking the distinction between reality (as such) and ("mere") appearance in the way in which transcendental realists tend to invoke it (cf. *ibid*., pp. 43 ff.). Allison's account of Kant is beautifully connected with pragmatism and the kind of conceptual relativity discussed in my sections on Putnam above, e.g., in the following attempt to resolve the transcendentally realist problem about freedom vs. determinism:

> [T]he heart of the problem is the underlying assumption that there is a "fact of the matter" that needs to be adjudicated. On this assumption, the freedom, which, according to Kant's moral theory, we are required to assume, must be viewed either as a real property of a separate noumenal self or as a property of our single self as it really is in its inner constitution. It is, however, just the assumption that there must be some standpoint-independent fact of the matter, which is implicit in any ontological reading of transcendental idealism, that is called into question by the interpretation advocated here. In fact […] such an understanding of transcendental idealism […] is itself a form of transcendental realism. (*Ibid*., p. 47.)

Here I could hardly agree more wholeheartedly. As there need not be any "standpoint-independent fact of the matter" regarding freedom and its opposite (causal determinism), there is no ultimate metaphysical truth about this matter any more than about the medieval disputes regarding angels. But this does not mean that the concept of freedom, or other purportedly metaphysical concepts, is without ontological relevance altogether. The fact that we, as human beings, must view ourselves from various standpoints – particularly, in this case, from the only apparently rival standpoints of both freedom (and thereby moral responsibility) and determinism (as objects in the scientifically explainable world) – is an ontologically relevant fact about the kind of beings we are. It is, if you like, a philosophical-anthropological transcendental fact about us, and our forms of life (see, again, Pihlström 2003).

For these reasons, though Allison's Kantianism can, especially because of his successful critique of transcendental realism, well be reconciled with pragmatism, I dislike his

treatment of the standpoints or contexts within which either freedom or determinism are acceptable in terms of "warranted assertibility" (Allison 2004, pp. 48-49). Here he deontologizes too strongly and arrives at a view resembling Dummettian semantic anti-realism. When he says that from a practical point of view, or in a practical context, we are rationally authorized or warranted to assume that we are free, or that freedom is "assertible" from such a point of view or within such a context (*ibid*., p. 48), he stops short of saying, more ontologically (yet pragmatically and transcendentally), that freedom *is real*, for us as the kind of beings we are, from such a point of view or within such a context. This he should be able to say, if he is a properly transcendental idealist. Or, conversely, a metaphysician willing to endorse the Kantian strategy of discussing objects and reality in terms of the conditions they depend on should be able to say this. It is not only the warranted assertibility of freedom (or something else) that can be "relativized to a point of view" (*ibid*.), but reality itself, humanly structured. There is no "context-independent truth or fact of the matter" (*ibid*.), but rejecting context-independence here does not entail the anti-realist replacement of truth by warranted assertibility, especially because there are ontologically relevant interpretations of (Jamesian) pragmatist truth available. Both truth and reality are context-dependent, as we have also seen Putnam argue, but this does not make them anything less than truth and reality (for us), because (again for us) there is no other truth or reality.

Again, epistemic conditions, for instance categories or space and time, are applicable only "from the 'human standpoint'", and from this standpoint space (say) is "deontologized" to the extent that it should not be regarded as possessing "an *an sich* reality of *any* sort", but as Allison himself admits, this does *not* mean that things only "*seem* to be spatial"; instead, "things *really are* spatial in the only meaningful sense in which this may be claimed, namely, considered as objects of possible experience" (*ibid*., p. 121; see also p. 132). Now, this does seem to come at least closer to an ontologically committed account of epistemic conditions than some of Allison's other formulations; it is only a small step to admit that "our human standpoint" yields an ontology for us. Kant is, to be sure, repudiating traditional ontology, but it hardly follows that his transcendental philosophy is "a whole new game" (*ibid*., p. 120). What the transcendental philosopher is doing is not ontology in the pre-Kantian sense, of course, but it may still be something bearing at least a family-resemblance relation to what more traditional metaphysicians were attempting to do but ultimately failed to do.

Accordingly, when Allison says that, in Wittgensteinian terms, "Kant [in his theory of things in themselves and the transcendental affection] was not trying to say what is

unsayable, but merely to define the boundaries of what can be said or asked", thereby introducing the "'metalanguage' of transcendental philosophy", to which expressions such as "things as they are in themselves", "noumena", or "transcendental object" belong, instead of referring to "transcendentally real entities" *à la* two worlds interpretations (*ibid*., p. 73), it is easy to agree with him again, but it must be added that the necessity of adopting such a transcendental metalanguage for the analysis of human cognition is not ontologically or metaphysically neutral at all. Allison is right to separate such transcendental analysis and the transcendental idealism it yields from metaphysical accounts of a supersensible reality, but he is overhasty in discarding metaphysics in general. I have tried to suggest above that transcendental philosophy does, or at least legitimately may, commit us to an ontological inquiry into the categorial structure of the human world, while requiring us to reinterpret that inquiry in a most fundamental way.

If Allison does not approve of such ontological legitimacy, he turns out to be as dogmatic as the dogmatic empiricist Kant criticized as the "putative anti-metaphysician" who nevertheless falls into the metaphysical illusions reason produces (*ibid*., p. 332). Allison, after all, perceives that it is a kind of meta-level illusion to claim to be totally liberated from the transcendental illusions reason is naturally entangled with (*ibid*., ch. 11 and p. 430). Allison's own illusion to be free from metaphysics is, like Putnam's, located at a yet higher meta-level.

These are as vital points for the Kantian idealist as it is for the Wittgensteinian, more linguistically oriented, transcendental philosopher – or for the pragmatist. Only the ontologically committed transcendental philosopher can fully appreciate the objectivating function of epistemic conditions (which, therefore, are not *merely* epistemic, after all, but partly ontological) and their capability of providing us with "norms of being". Again, this amounts to a blurring of the disciplinary boundary between ontology and epistemology, which I believe Kant effectively did, and in which he was successfully followed by both classical and more recent pragmatists.[53]

## 9. Conclusion

We may conclude that neither metaphysically realist metaphysicians like Armstrong nor anti-metaphysically-realist anti-metaphysicians like Putnam (or Allison, or Allison's Kant) leave sufficient space for a *critical* conception of metaphysics as a philosophical discipline. Pragmatism and transcendental philosophy, properly conceived, do, however, leave more

space for such a conception. There can, of course, be no denying of the fact that transcendental philosophy is often dismissive of metaphysics (cf., again, Carr 1999, Allison 2004). So is pragmatism, both classical (e.g., James 1907) and recent (e.g., Putnam 2004a) – as our discussion of Putnam's project clearly demonstrates. The object of the critical attitude toward metaphysics adopted in pragmatism and transcendental philosophy is, however, directed at a traditional, pre-Kantian, pre-critical form of metaphysics – a form of metaphysics that is not transcendental, but instead aspires to discover truths about the *transcendent*. It is entirely compatible with this critical attitude to claim (*contra* Putnam and *contra* purely epistemological or methodological interpretations of Kant) that transcendental philosophy, like pragmatism, is also a form of human metaphysics, or a human form of metaphysics, aspiring to find out some basic categorial features of the world-as-a-world-for-human-beings-to-live-in.

It is, then, always already a humanly conceptualized reality that the transcendental-cum-pragmatist metaphysician examines. This is *very* far from the transcendent pre-critical metaphysician's attempt to discover truths about the things in themselves, or about Being *qua* Being, and thus amounts to a radical reinterpretation of the discipline of metaphysics, and of the kind of "philosophical knowledge" possibly to be attained within this discipline.

We may, then, note that neither pragmatism nor transcendental philosophy, while critical of metaphysics in the sense just outlined, needs to be committed to the claim that "metaphysics is dead", a thesis defended in different ways by *both* empiricists – not only old-fashioned logical positivists but also more recent philosophers like Van Fraassen (2002) – *and* postmodernists or deconstructionists of various stripes. Perhaps both pragmatism and transcendental philosophy, or their synthesis (cf. Pihlström 2003), in contrast to these trends of modern thought trying to get rid of metaphysics, yield a metaphysics *aufgehoben*, overcome yet preserved (in a reinterpreted form which has learned something from post-Kantian criticisms of metaphysics).

In any case, the fate of metaphysics in the contemporary philosophical scene still remains undecided. The "business as usual" attitude to metaphysical inquiry should definitely not be adopted – this is one of the results of my investigation. Nor, however, should we conclude that metaphysics is over and that the critics of metaphysics – from the Greek sophists to Nietzsche and the Vienna Circle – were right after all. There are several tasks for metaphysicians to undertake, and there is no need to question the true ontological relevance of those tasks. What must be questioned, however, is the metaphysicians' claim for disciplinary

independence. Metaphysics, for any Kantian or pragmatist thinker, is irreducibly epistemologized, just as epistemology – in its transcendental form – is always ontologically oriented. Neither should disappear as a philosophical discipline, but both should be rearticulated as disciplinarily entangled.

The purpose of my transcendental-cum-pragmatist reconceptualization of the very idea of metaphysical inquiry (i.e., my attempt to liberate metaphysics from the traditional assumptions of metaphysical realism that continue to burden its practitioners) is *not only* to soften the disciplinary boundary between metaphysics and epistemology *but also* to question the one between metaphysics and ethics. If metaphysics is not about the metaphysical realist's privileged structure of the world "in itself", if it is not about the Kantian *Ding an sich* (conceived as a mind- and discourse-independent realm of being), and if it is, when pragmatically reconstructed, about a humanly categorized reality, a "human world", then the crucial question about the ethical standards we employ, explicitly or implicitly, in such categorizations inevitably arises. Nothing we do, not even the most abstract and theoretical metaphysical categorization of reality we might engage in, takes place in a moral vacuum, in an ethically neutral state. The world, if really "human", is always already a moral construction.

This is particularly obvious in the ontology of such humanly important entities as selves or socio-cultural entities, which can hardly be understood (either individually or socially) in purely metaphysical terms but always require ethical articulation as well.[54] Indeed, we already noticed that Putnam (2004a) is opposed to the very project of Ontology to a large extent for ethical reasons, though we also noted that this ethically unwelcome project could be avoided while maintaining a more human transcendental ontology (see also Pihlström 2005a).

A more detailed treatment of the disciplinary relations between metaphysics and ethics must wait for another time, though.[55] The main objectives of the present chapter have been achieved: I hope to have been able to question the metaphysical realist's conception of the disciplinary autonomy of metaphysics, conceived as an inquiry into the structure of Being itself, and to critically defend a less strongly realist (though not anti-realist) account of metaphysics as a pragmatically and transcendentally conducted inquiry always inextricably entangled with the epistemological and ethical concerns constitutive of any human perspective on the world.[56]

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## Notes

[1] This chapter has grown out of some other relatively recent writings of mine, discussing similar and to some extent overlapping issues: see Pihlström (2002), (2005b), (2006a), (2006b), and (2007). I have also worked on these issues, partly on the basis of the same material, in two as of yet unpublished papers: "William James and the Prospects of Pragmatist Metaphysics" (submitted in 2006) and "The Transcendental Method in Metaphysics" (to be presented at a conference on the transcendental method and its history in London, September 2006). Ultimately, my plan is to put all this (and other) material together, in order to be able to publish a monograph with the tentative title, *The Return of Metaphysics? A Pragmatist and Transcendental Rearticulation of the Methodology of Ontology*. This, however, is still very much work in progress, and the papers just mentioned, as well as the present chapter, are relatively early steps toward the realization of the book project.

[2] A brief summarizing account of Armstrong's philosophy is given by Jackson (1998). See also the anthologies edited by Bogdan (1984) and Bacon *et al*. (1993).

[3] On scientific realism and its alternatives, see, e.g., Niiniluoto (1999); cf. the discussion in Pihlström (1996) and (1998).

[4] As Lycan (1993, p. 9) points out, naturalism is not, for Armstrong, "a regulative ideal, or a distant goal to be achieved (if ever) only by overcoming terrible obstacles, requiring ingenuity, great skill, and the grace of one's

muse. For him Naturalism is a presumed fact – if not accompli, but for some details."

[5] I will not pay any further attention to Armstrong's much disputed metaphysics of modalities. See further Armstrong (2004), chs. 6-8. For a recent critique of Armstrong's fictionalist attempt to develop a theory of modality without any primitive modal notions, see Hiipakka *et al*. (1999). Cf. here also Lycan's (1993), Daly's (1998), and MacBride's (1999) worries.

[6] The same questions could be directed to any conception of ontology that claims to be empirically criticizable and fallible (see, e.g., Johansson 1989, pp. 328–333). Armstrong's naturalism might also here be compared with Quine's, which is more self-consciously fallibilist. For a critical examination of Quinean naturalism, cf. Koskinen (2004).

[7] I will be freely speaking about "metaphysical realism" and its rivals ("internal realism", "pragmatic realism", etc.) in this essay. However, we are not here concerned with the twists and turns in Hilary Putnam's famous treatments of metaphysical realism and its alternatives. See, e.g., Putnam (1981) and (1994), as well as Pihlström (1996), (1998), (2002), and (2006a). Putnam's recent views will be examined in sections 4-5 below.

[8] Armstrong once remarked, in conversation in 1999, that it was probably a mistake to use the expression "first philosophy" in the title of Armstrong (1995). He now strongly insists that there is no first philosophy (in Quine's sense): scientific results may affect any philosophical doctrine, including factualism in ontology and even realism itself. His scientific, *a posteriori* realism thus comes close to Devitt's (1991) insistence on the empirical character of realism, which Devitt construes as a purely metaphysical doctrine (though Devitt is a nominalist and Armstrong isn't); at least Trigg's (1989) view of realism as an *a priori* truth is very far from Armstrong's (and Devitt's). I critically discuss both Devitt's and Trigg's in my view misleading characterizations of realism in Pihlström (1996), ch. 4.7.

[9] Armstrong (2004, especially ch. 2) is a "truthmaker maximalist": every truth has a truthmaker. All truthmaker theorists are not maximalists, however (see, e.g., Smith 1999, pp. 284-285). Nor need all truthmaker theorists be Armstrongian realists about universals: Parsons (1999) claims that if one distinguishes "the truthmaker principle" (which says that "every truth has a truthmaker, in virtue of which that truth is true") and "truthmaker essentialism" (which says that "every truth has a truthmaker, which is essentially that truth's truthmaker"), one can endorse both nominalism and the idea of truthmaking (i.e., the truthmaker principle). Furthermore, the basic truthmaking argument Armstrong employs in defending his ontology of states of affairs has been vigorously attacked: according to Dodd (1999, p. 154), there is simply no reason to make an ontological commitment to an additional entity (the state of affairs *a*'s being F) when accepting the instantiation of universal F in particular *a*. The very idea of truthmaking is, then, unmotivated, and there is, in particular, no need for states of affairs in our ontological furniture – which does not mean, Dodd reminds us, that a realistic conception of a mind-independent reality would have to be sacrificed (*ibid*., pp. 157-158). (It seems, however, to be possible to turn this upside down: a non-metaphysical realist can endorse the idea of truthmaking while interpreting it in terms of a much weaker realism than Armstrong's.)

[10] As a matter of fact, I do *not* think that naturalism and transcendental argumentation are incompatible (cf. Pihlström 2003). This option is hardly open to Armstrong, however. He might reject the transcendental reading of his argument and insist on its merely *abductive* nature: states of affairs are postulated simply as the best explanation of the fact that there are truths about the instantiation of properties and relations (cf. Armstrong 1984, p. 252; on the strategy of "inference to the best explanation" in ontology, see also Forrest 1993, p. 47).

[11] See, e.g., Quine's (1960) and Sellars's (1963) well-known formulations of such ontological "scientism" (if such a word is allowed); for criticism, cf. Pihlström (1996) and (1998).

[12] On the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* realism, applied to the case of postulating determinable universals, see Armstrong (1984), p. 258. Armstrong (1993b, p. 66) draws the distinction between analytic ontology and speculative cosmology by saying that the former "takes up the deepest and most abstract questions of all" (e.g., whether to postulate universals or not), while the latter "deals with (relatively!) less abstract issues" (e.g., space-time and the mind).

[13] Some philosophers inspired both by Kant's transcendental approach and by pragmatism seem, perhaps surprisingly, to arrive at a realist view almost as strong as Armstrong's. See, e.g., McDowell (1996) and Will (1997).

[14] I shall not discuss this specific problem here; cf. also Armstrong's (1993a) reply to Lycan, as well as his account of the truthmakers for modal truths in Armstrong (2004). For Lewis's best-known formulation of his possible worlds realism, see Lewis (1986).

[15] Cf. here also my worries concerning Peircean realism in Pihlström (2003), ch. 3. See, however, Haack (1992) and (1998). It should be noted that also nominalists and not only Armstrongian realists can be metaphysical realists and oppose, e.g., Putnam's internal realism or other views they see as threats to realism (see, e.g., Devitt 1991).

[16] This is to be distinguished from what Armstrong (1978) labels "transcendent realism", i.e., the theory of Platonic universals. On transcendental realism and transcendental idealism as mutually exclusive and exhaustive

metaphilosophical standpoints in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, see Allison (2004), especially chs. 1-2 (I will return to Allison's views in section 8 below).

[17] In attacking metaphysical realism, Putnam has defended the view that causation is an epistemic and interest-relative, rather than metaphysical and interest-independent, notion; see, e.g., Putnam (1990).

[18] Were Armstrong more willing to adopt a transcendental perspective in his ontological inquiries, he might also give up his strict actualism and sympathize with, say, Duns Scotus's theory, in which the possible plays a transcendental role as a precondition of all being and thought. What is merely possible does not "exist" in the way actual entities do but has, according to Scotus, a weaker kind of being in this transcendental sense (cf. Knuuttila 1993, ch. 4). Analogously, according to Kant, modalities constitute a group of categories of understanding and are hence applicable to objects of experience, instead of themselves somehow "existing" in the world. For both Scotus and Kant, modalities structure our experience of reality in a transcendental way. Since Armstrong is, in an important sense, a pre-Kantian philosopher (see also Bacon *et al*. 1993, p. x), he might find the Scotist approach more congenial to his philosophical temperament than Kantian transcendental philosophy proper.

[19] It is not clear that we have any epistemically justified metaphysical beliefs (let alone metaphysical knowledge) at all, if justification is construed contextually and socially, rather than individually or subjectively. In fact, the pragmatist approach I sympathize with easily leads to a highly ambivalent attitude to metaphysics: on the one hand, the pragmatist should, in my view, take metaphysical issues seriously, for we make genuine ontological commitments within our human practices all the time (cf. Pihlström 1996); on the other hand, systematic disputes in ontology (e.g., tropes vs. universals, actualism vs. possibilism, and so on) often resemble, because of their abstract nature, disputes in systematic theology over God's existence, the incarnation of Christ, the nature of sin, and so on – both ontological and theological issues are endlessly debatable, with extreme intellectual sophistication, yet presumably never to be settled and thus sometimes hard to be taken with all philosophical seriousness. Since I am not a metaphysical realist, I see no hope at all in "solving", in some analytic or theoretical way, the ontological problems Armstrong and his rival metaphysicians engage in.

[20] An important part of this modesty is the hope of finding a *via media* between realism and idealism (or relativism). Thus, I am prepared to argue that one can, in a Kantian (transcendental) way, or in a pragmatist way, admit that an ideal transcendental structure – human practices or, if one prefers Wittgensteinian terminology, forms of life – serves as the grounding of all, including scientific, ways of representing reality, while maintaining a moderate, non-reductive scientific realism about the ontological commitments of scientific theories, i.e., commitments made within such a structure. Cf., again, Pihlström (1996), ch. 5, (1998), ch. 3, and (2003), ch. 5.

[21] On William James's (1907, ch. 1) notion of a "philosophical temperament", see Pihlström (1998), ch. 10.

[22] Goodman (1978, 1984), among others, finds rightness a more fundamental concept than truth. More generally, pragmatists from James onwards have conceptualized truth as a species of the good, thus linking epistemic and ethical considerations. For a discussion of pragmatic moral realism touching these themes, see Pihlström (2005a).

[23] Just think about Peirce's defense of real generals in his scholastic realism (cf. Haack 1992; Pihlström 2003, ch. 3).

[24] Kant (1781/1787), in his famous Antinomies, attacked precisely the rationalist metaphysicians' claims to know something about the world as conceived as a totality, e.g., whether the world has spatio-temporal boundaries or not. For Putnam's rejection of "a definite Totality of All Real Objects", see, e.g., his (1994), p. 303, and see sections 4-5 below.

[25] The need to account for totality states of affairs in truthmaking theory has been emphasized by Cox (1997). Armstrong's (2004, pp. 78-79) discussion is meant to face the problems raised by Cox: while there may be an infinite regress of truths about totality, no increase in being is required (see also Armstrong 1997, pp. 198-199). Niiniluoto (2004, p. 68) believes the problem of totality is merely epistemic; Armstrong would surely disagree.

[26] We may here safely rely on Putnam's (1981, 1990, 1994, 2004a) arguments for conceptual relativity, until we will take a look at Putnam in sections 4-5; for further discussion and engagement with secondary literature, see again Pihlström (1996, 1998, 2002, 2006a) and Alston (2002).

[27] We should note that there are "truthmaker realists" (who would hardly wish to commit themselves to anything like transcendental philosophy) such as Barry Smith (1999, pp. 289-290), who argues that truthmakers should be regarded as "cognition-dependent entities" existing "as a result of certain sorts of cognitively effected demarcations of reality", that is, as "gerrymandered" "human constructions" in the sense that they "come to be delineated in reality only in virtue of corresponding cognitive practices on the part of human beings", while being (despite their practice- or cognition-dependence) genuinely "chunks of reality".

[28] At the most general level, the critic may ask what (according to metaphysical realists) makes metaphysical realism itself true. Is it the world itself, or whatever is the case? This answer can hardly be non-question-beggingly defended against the critic of metaphysical realism.

[29] Pihlström (2006b), an article to which sections 2 and 3 of the present essay are to some extent indebted,

examines the consistency of Armstrong's position along these lines in some more detail. See also Pihlström (2005b).

[30] Although Putnam (2004a) prefers to speak about "Ontology", I will go on using both "metaphysics" and "ontology", basically sticking to the traditional Wolffian usage according to which ontology is "general metaphysics", the general doctrine of being or existence, investigating "things in general", as distinguished from such more specialized areas of metaphysics as the philosophy of mind, philosophical cosmology, or philosophical theology. See, e.g., Allison (2004), p. 120; see also Pihlström (2007).

[31] Let us pay attention to the fact that Putnam is not entirely opposed to the concept of a truthmaker, though he would undoubtedly oppose its employment by strongly realist metaphysicians, such as Armstrong.

[32] Nowadays, the term "metaphysics" has become more generally used, though (cf. sections 6-7 below). It is worth noting that Putnam's classification of the two main varieties of Ontology as inflationist and deflationist is readily comparable to the way in which Henry Allison (2004, p. 445) characterizes the main varieties of the transcendental realism Kant criticized when defending his transcendental idealism: this idealism "functions positively by creating conceptual space necessary for an understanding of the ideas [of reason] as at once merely regulative and indispensable. Since it cannot recognize any such space, transcendental realism is forced either to *deflate* this regulative function into a purely heuristic one, which may be adopted or discarded as the occasion warrants, or to *inflate* the ideas of reason into fully objective principles, having a status equivalent (or even superior) to that of the categories." (Emphasis added.) We will see in section 8 that Allison's attitude to metaphysics is no less hostile than Putnam's – and that these philosophers provide us with resources for a more balanced synthesis of metaphysics with pragmatism-cum-Kantianism.

[33] Although Putnam rejects many of Richard Rorty's more radical pragmatist ideas, this critical attitude can be compared to Rorty's (1998, 1999) complaint that a certain conception of reality as it is in itself, or of the way things are, has replaced traditional deities as an object of worship. In this sense, for both Putnam and Rorty, scientific and metaphysical realisms continue the old theological tradition of demanding human beings' responsibility to something non- or superhuman.

[34] See Putnam (1987), ch. 2, and (1990), ch. 6; cf. Sosa (1993), Pihlström (1996), ch. 4.3, Case (1997) and (2001), and Raatikainen (2001), as well as several contributions to Alston (2002).

[35] Such as the choice between Quine's, Lewis's, and Kripke's views on identity and modality, i.e., whether, say, a chair is identical with the spacetime region it occupies, preserves its identity over time and across possible worlds, etc.; cf. Putnam (1990), ch. 1.

[36] For an insightful criticism of Putnam emphasizing his similarities to Carnap, see Westphal (2003).

[37] On the various problems related to "naturalism" in recent philosophy, see the joint chapter by Heikki J. Koskinen and myself in this volume. Cf. Koskinen (2004).

[38] See, again, Rorty (1998) and (1999); on the metaphilosophical disputes between Rorty and Putnam, especially as regards their readings of the classical pragmatists, see Pihlström (1996), (1998), and (2004a).

[39] Stroud's criticism of Strawson in the 1960s largely set the tone for later disputes over transcendental arguments in many ways highly misleadingly, particularly because of the assumed close link between transcendental argumentation and the issue of skepticism (cf. Pihlström 2003, 2004b).

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

[41] This, of course, is a complex issue endlessly debated among contemporary metaphysicians. Cf., e.g., Lowe (1998).

[42] These metaphorical notions have been widely used in recent philosophy. On the "absolute conception of the world", see Williams (1985); on the possibility of a "view from nowhere", see Nagel (1986). The notion of a "non-perspectival", absolute representation has been criticized by Putnam in a series of works in the 1980s and 1990s (and by many others); cf. Pihlström (1996) and (2003), ch. 5.

[43] See, e.g., Lowe (1998), ch. 1; Van Inwagen and Zimmerman (1998), "Introduction"; Kim and Sosa (1999), "Preface"; Loux (2002), "Introduction".

[44] Similarly, Peter Van Inwagen and D.W. Zimmerman, defending the traditional idea of metaphysics as an attempt to describe things as they are, or "Reality", specifically consider the objection (familiar from logical positivism, for instance) that such a project is meaningless: "Alfred the anti-metaphysician argues that any proposition that does not pass some test he specifies is in some sense defective (it is, say, self-contradictory or meaningless). And he argues that any metaphysical proposition must fail this test. But it invariably turns out that some proposition that is essential to Alfred's anti-metaphysical argument itself fails to pass his test." (Van Inwagen & Zimmerman 1998, "Introduction", p. 6.) This is a generalization of the well-known charge against the logical positivists' verifiability criterion of meaning, according to which such a criterion fails to be meaningful in the positivists' own terms, because it is neither an analytic truth nor an empirically verifiable statement. To provide one more example, let us note that Loptson (2001, p. 4) also prefers the conception of

metaphysics as "the study of the nature of reality" to the rival conception of it as "a study of our most basic concepts of reality" (i.e., "a study of us"). He argues: "This seems to accord better with what we say about other kinds of inquiry. Botany, for example, is the study of plants, not of our concepts of plants. Entomology is the study of insects, not of our concepts of them, and so on. [...] At any rate, if there were a difference between investigating reality itself and a bunch of our ideas or concepts (of anything), and we could choose which inquiry to explore, I think the first would be the more interesting and philosophical." (*Ibid*.) Of course, according to the critics of this realist ("unitarian") view of metaphysics, we cannot really "choose which inquiry to explore", because there is no reality-in-itself to be meaningfully examined. Loptson provides several familiar arguments to combat the view of metaphysics as a "necessarily-consciousness-involving" inquiry (cf. *ibid*., p. 5) and finds the Kantian (and other idealist) versions of "anti-metaphysical" arguments unconvincing (*ibid*., ch. 2). Moreover, he points out that contemporary anti-metaphysicians are not consistently anti-metaphysical (*ibid*., pp. 24-25): they often "limit their opposition to what has historically and traditionally been only a part of metaphysics" (*ibid*., p. 25), holding metaphysical views in other areas (e.g., by embracing atheism, defending the reality of freedom, etc.). This may be true, but *tu quoque* arguments are not sufficient to refute a view.

[45] A non-metaphysically-realist metaphysician may even defend the postulation of universals (or perhaps "real generals", such as habits, dispositions, laws, etc., along the lines of Peirce's "scholastic realism"), within a transcendental philosophical framework disentangled from the metaphysical realism standardly assumed in ontological theories of universals (see, e.g., Pihlström 2003, ch. 3).

[46] I of course recognize that there is a plethora of rival readings around. On the dispute between Kantian and non-Kantian interpretations of Wittgenstein, see, e.g., Pihlström (2003), ch. 2.

[47] It is controversial to claim that Quine, given his fierce criticism of "first philosophy", is doing metaphysics at all. See, however, Koskinen (2004) for an interpretation of his work as essentially engaged with metaphysics.

[48] Although it must be noted that he neglects, even in his 2004 book, the criticisms presented in various papers by Kenneth Westphal, one of those who find Kant more deeply involved in metaphysics than Allison can accept (see Westphal 2004). I would, nevertheless, agree with Allison, not Westphal, that the defense of realism (viz., empirical realism) and the attack on idealism (the famous "refutation of [empirical] idealism") we find in Kant are not only compatible with transcendental idealism but require it (Allison 2004, p. 300, and ch. 10 *passim*).

[49] According to this interpretation, the distinction between *Dinge an sich* and *Erscheinungen* is not a metaphysical distinction between two different classes or realms of entities but an epistemological or methodological distinction between two ways of *considering* the same things, as things in themselves (viz., independently of the conditions of representing them) or as appearances (viz., as conditioned by such epistemic conditions). See Allison (2004), chs. 1 and 3, in particular. This, of course, is not the right place to engage in the fundamental Kantian issue of which interpretation is correct. For a criticism of Allison in this respect (and others), see again Westphal (2004).

[50] This is quite explicitly connected with Putnam's contrast between internal and metaphysical realism – and thus we can easily see that the roots of the current issue of metaphysical realism vs. its alternatives (including pragmatism) lie in the Kantian contrast between transcendental realism and transcendental idealism. See also Pihlström (1996), (2003), and (2004b) on the Kantian background of the pragmatists' engagement with the realism issue.

[51] Indeed, Allison's (2004, chs. 2-3) criticism of transcendental realism as engaging in unwarranted metaphysical speculations striving for a theocentric perspective is a crucial background of the kind of transcendental-cum-pragmatist criticism of metaphysical realism I have undertaken in this essay, with the help of Putnam and others. Although Allison does not connect Kant with pragmatism, I have employed his interpretation of Kant for my own pragmatist purposes in Pihlström (1996) and (2003). Another related reading of Kant, and transcendental philosophy more generally, which I have found fruitful (but which suffers from the same lack of attention to the possibilities of preserving metaphysics in a reinterpreted form), is Carr's (1999).

[52] It is not implausible to propose that Hacking's (2002) "historical ontology", crucially indebted to Michel Foucault, might be seen as a variant of this view. In order to avoid further complications, I leave this proposal aside, however.

[53] Even a closer link between Kant (as pictured by Allison) and the pragmatist can be seen, if one only cares to look. One of the crucial considerations in favor of transcendental idealism is pragmatic: this form of idealism enjoys a kind of "therapeutic indispensability" as a "critical tool" (Allison 2004, p. 394), and it is "necessary" to adopt it as an alternative to the transcendental realism that produces metaphysical illusions (*ibid*., p. 395); indeed, transcendental idealism is, according to Kant, the only way to get out of the dialectical illusions of the "Antinomies". Insofar as the transcendental idealist is prepared to subscribe to pragmatic indispensability arguments, thus pragmatically justifying her/his form of idealism, the distance to pragmatism is not too great. On Kant as a proto-pragmatist, see also Pihlström (1998). Again, however, it must be noted that the pragmatic necessity of adopting transcendental idealism by no means makes it ontologically neutral, if we are prepared to admit the ontological relevance of pragmatism, too. That some view or argument is pragmatically compelling or

therapeutically indispensable does not entail that its significance is *merely* pragmatic or therapeutic.

[54] For example, any ontological treatment of the category of "group" is potentially ethically relevant, as groups of people, variously characterizable, are potential victims of genocide. Some thinkers working on genocide have gone as far as to charge the entire Western tradition of metaphysics – and especially its tendency to reduce all otherness to the "same" – of helping to legitimate genocide (see several essays in Roth 2005). I would not go that far, because I believe in the possibility of an ethically engaged neo-Kantian and pragmatist metaphysics. But I do think that metaphysical realism is ethically problematic, partly for these reasons.

[55] See also Marika Enwald's contribution to this volume for a discussion of postmodern ethics and otherness.

[56] I am grateful to the other contributors to this volume, especially Leila Haaparanta and Heikki J. Koskinen, for valuable critical comments at various stages.