PUTNAM AND RORTY ON THEIR PRAGMATIST HERITAGE: RE-READING JAMES AND DEWEY

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1. Introduction: Putnam and Rorty - rival neopragmatists

As soon as Richard Rorty started to wave the flag of pragmatism in the late 1970s and early 1980s and saw his own work as a continuation of William James's and John Dewey's philosophy (as well as Kierkegaard's, Heidegger's, and Wittgenstein's, not to mention his more recent heroes like Sellars, Quine, and especially Davidson), he began to receive critical comments from dedicated James and Dewey scholars who wanted to show that he had got these classics of pragmatism completely wrong. Admittedly, Rorty writes about the pragmatist tradition "in the way original thinkers write about the views of their predecessors."[1] Even so, his critics may be right in claiming that his readings of the classical pragmatists are problematic at best and seriously distorting at worst.

Arguably, neither James nor Dewey abandoned the traditional picture of philosophy as a systematic and normative enterprise as totally as Rorty wishes to see them having done. For example, James, despite his life-long effort to reconstruct philosophy in a pragmatic spirit avoiding ossified scholastic systems and technicalities, respected genuine philosophical - even metaphysical - problems related to knowledge, truth, and even "being." He would, presumably, never have regarded Rortyan "edifying" or "conversational" philosophy as a significant cultural achievement.[2] Nor would Dewey have rejected all normative questions concerning the relevance and legitimation of various social practices in the way Rorty seems to do; thus, Dewey would hardly have followed Rorty into his post-philosophical utopia in which there is nothing constructive for philosophy to do any longer.[3] It has also been suggested that in a truly Deweyan pragmatism science should be taken much more seriously than Rorty (for whom science is just one manner of talking among others, not distinguished or privileged in any way) is willing to take it.[4] Rorty has faced these criticisms by admitting that, instead of offering an historically faithful picture of the classical pragmatists, he attempts to construct an hypothetical Dewey - a kind of Rortyan Dewey, a picture of the philosopher that Dewey should have been, by Rorty's lights, in order to have proceeded all the way to the Rortyan position which was open to him but which he didn't quite reach.[5] The real historical Dewey was in several ways entangled with traditional metaphysical questions (e.g., questions related to the notion of experience); the thoroughly pragmatist, naturalist, historicist, post-metaphysical and post-epistemological Dewey that Rorty postulates is not. Rorty thus wishes to "adapt pragmatism to a changed intellectual environment by emphasizing the differences rather than the similarities with the philosophical tradition."[6]

Rorty's Deweyan or quasi-Deweyan position is by now so well known that it would be futile even to summarize it here. I shall, instead, focus on his debates with Hilary Putnam, another famous neopragmatist. Incidentally, it may be interesting to note that Putnam's readings of James and Dewey have not been met with such strong critiques as Rorty's, even though Putnam's way of situating his own work within the pragmatist tradition is no less explicitly pronounced than Rorty's.[7] Of course, Putnam's pragmatist position has been extensively attacked on other grounds, and these two philosophers have attacked each others' views perhaps more profoundly than
anyone else.[8] Thus, it is an interesting task to illuminate their similarities and differences by examining how they employ the pragmatist tradition in trying to explain, both to themselves and to each other, what those similarities and differences are.

For Putnam, James is clearly the central classical pragmatist (although Dewey is highly important for him, too, and Peirce should not be forgotten, either).[9] whereas for Rorty Dewey is clearly number one and Peirce is relatively unimportant, simply the one who gave the tradition its name and made the further developments of the tradition possible by stimulating James.[10] Now, one may of course have a purely historical interest in the development of the pragmatist tradition, but one may also try to assess James's and Dewey's relevance in the contemporary philosophical scene by taking a look at how major neopragmatists like Putnam and Rorty employ their ideas. The problem with which I am preoccupied in the present paper is this: as both Putnam and Rorty reject Peircean pragmatism (which, they seem to agree, amounts to metaphysical realism in the end)[11] and turn to James and Dewey instead, we may ask whether there is any stable middle position (such as, possibly, Putnam's own) between metaphysical realism and radical relativism or anti-realism, or whether we just have to choose between the (allegedly) Peircean strongly realistic pragmatism that leads to correspondence truth and to the idea that there is a way the world is independently of our perspectives on it, on the one hand, and Rortyan ethnocentrist conversationalism which carries no such implications but must give up objectivity and rationality altogether, on the other (as some recent critics and interpreters of pragmatism have argued). In short, we should try to answer the following question: are there just "two pragmatisms" (i.e., Peirce's original pragmatism and its distortions, beginning with James and ending with Rorty and his followers),[12] or is the pragmatist tradition more complex and heterogeneous?

Several critics of Putnam have argued that his pragmatism, unless supported by a more realistic account of the world with which we (in a Deweyan sense) are said to interact, and of the causal regularities enabling such interaction, becomes in the end practically indistinguishable from the Rortyan anti-realistic type of pragmatism that Putnam (rightly) opposes.[13] Yet, I am tempted to defend the idea that there are many different kinds of pragmatism, without any single defining, essentialistic feature combining them all, and that Putnam's conceptions of truth, reality, rationality (etc.) constitute one of the most promising candidates for a moderate, reasonably realistic but not dangerously metaphysical "middle path" position - even though his views do have their severe problems, too. I am, in any event, willing to classify both Putnam and Rorty as pragmatists, although some scholars may adopt a more exclusive policy in their use of the word "pragmatism." While a full defense of a Putnamean variety of neopragmatism is obviously impossible here, I shall try to say something about the resources Putnam might have in distinguishing his views from Rorty's. I am not saying that Putnam himself, or anyone else, has so far coherently employed those resources.

I shall proceed by studying Putnam's and Rorty's use of James's and Dewey's pragmatism - not in any comprehensive manner (since there would be too much material to be discussed in a single paper), but focusing on how they refer to James and Dewey when they are criticizing each other's views. I hope this relatively selective method of reading the two great neopragmatists' readings of their two great predecessors teaches us something about their relation to each other with regard to their attitudes to the classics they find themselves to be following.[14]

My findings will perhaps be somewhat surprising. It turns out that Putnam does not usually refer to Rorty when he discusses classical pragmatism; his references to Rorty are almost exclusively situated within his discussions of recent post-analytical
philosophy of mind and language and the realism issue (e.g., the work of philosophers like Quine and Davidson).[15] And the same seems to be true *vice versa*: there is little in Rorty's critique of Putnam that directly questions his (Putnam's) readings of the classical pragmatists. This may be considered odd, given the importance of pragmatism for both thinkers, and given the importance (again, for both of them) of their mutual attacks on each other. Still, the few references that the two philosophers make to each others' views in relation to their discussions of the pragmatist tradition offer us a handy selection of material that can, hopefully, lead us to the heart of their disputes.

2. Truth and the problem of normativity

One of the central questions that has continuously been taken up in the Rorty vs. Putnam debate concerns the notion of *truth*. While both thinkers give up the kind of correspondence theory of truth associated with metaphysical realism, they disagree deeply over the correct interpretation of the notion - or, more precisely, over the question of whether truth should be philosophically interpreted at all. Since his rejection of the correspondence theory in *Reason, Truth and History*,[16] Putnam has argued that while we cannot make sense of a non-epistemic, metaphysically privileged correspondence relation between linguistic expressions and the items of the non-linguistic world that those expressions are supposed to be about, we nonetheless need standards and ideals of truth and rationality that transcend the limits of our own cultural or historical context(s) - even though, of course, this practical need is something that belongs to our life within this particular context or practice in which we live.

What this ineliminability of truth (and related notions, such as rationality and epistemic justification) means is that we cannot give up our commitment to normative standards of rational acceptability, standards that extend transculturally and transhistorically over particular forms of life and periods of time, even if they are never universally given for all forms of life and all periods of time. Putnam says he finds "shocking" the idea that "truth" is "an empty notion" - an idea shared by such diverse thinkers as Rorty and Quine.[17] Instead, we need a "substantial" conception of truth as a normative property of our statements and world-views. Even though we cannot even meaningfully speak about truth in a metaphysically heavy correspondence sense, there is no reason to deny the prephilosophical, commonsensical notion of truth as representation of non-linguistic (though not "ready-made" or pre-categorized) reality:

I agree with Rorty that we have no access to "unconceptualized reality." […] But it doesn't follow that language and thought do not describe something outside themselves, even if that something can only be described by describing it (that is by employing language and thought); and, as Rorty ought to have seen, the belief that they do plays an essential role *within* language and thought themselves and, more importantly, within our lives.[18]

A model of the kind of non-metaphysically realist concept of truth that we need is, according to Putnam, given to us in James's reflections on the "pragmatist theory of truth" (which, admittedly, is problematic in many ways).[19] James can teach us that truth is inextricably entangled with our practices of rational assessment of beliefs in the various problematic situations we encounter in our lives. Truth may outrun what is "warrantedly assertible" in any given situation, but it is not to be separated from the *practice* (or, to prefer a Peircean term, habit)[20] of evaluation in which the notion of warrant plays a crucial role.[21] This insight has sometimes led Putnam to characterize truth as an *idealization* of such epistemic, normative notions as warrant, assertibility,
acceptability, or justification, notions that we habitually employ in our practices of assessing the legitimacy of our statements about the world. Although Putnam has now given up the particular formulations of his epistemic "idealization" theory of truth he defended in the early 1980s, it is not entirely clear what kind of picture he has adopted instead. I believe it is still accurate to speak about Putnam as favoring an epistemic and normative construal of truth - or at least as opposing the metaphysical realist's non-epistemic one.[22]

In any case, we should be careful in our claim that correspondence truth is not to be had. The fact that metaphysical realism is unintelligible or incoherent (and not simply false) deprives, Putnam argues, intelligibility from the Rortyan view that we "cannot" describe the world as it is in itself, independently of our cultural or ethnocentric perspectives. There is, in a sense, nothing (not any queer "something") that we cannot do from our perspectival and practice-laden points of view; we do not "fail" in any meaningful sense by failing to describe the world as it is in itself, independently of our practices.[23] Rorty, in Putnam's view, has in effect embraced a "linguistic idealism" through his critique of metaphysical realism and correspondence truth.[24] The implicit suggestion seems to be that no such idealism is necessary if one follows the teachings of the classical pragmatists.

It is here that we ought to turn to Rorty's and Putnam's more specific references to James and Dewey in the context of their assessments of each others' views. As was already mentioned, such references are relatively few; yet, they sometimes occur in most illuminating contexts.

Occasionally, the two neopragmatists warmly express sympathy to each others' ways of employing the classics of their tradition. For example, when discussing James's theory of perception, Putnam notes that "Rorty is right" to the extent that "James is not going to give an answer to skepticism that is deeper than the perspective of shared human experience."[25] Accordingly, it is obvious that neither James, Dewey, Putnam nor Rorty attempts to offer a "traditional" answer to the skeptic in epistemological affairs; in pragmatism, skeptical doubts about the existence of the external world are simply non-starters, because all human (trans)actions, which pragmatists take for granted, always already take place in the world, a habitually interpreted practice-laden world whose existence must be assumed for any specific doubts to arise. Skepticism cannot be demonstratively refuted, of course, but it is pragmatically idle in our inquiries and, indeed, in practices of any kind (except perhaps the practice of philosophical sophistry, which is itself pragmatically idle). As Peirce already insisted in his well-known anti-Cartesian papers,[26] we should not pretend to doubt as philosophers what we do not doubt as human beings. And as Dewey reminded us, it is only the "quest for certainty," for absolute knowledge about "Being," a quest typical of our epistemological tradition, as well as the resulting "depreciation of practice," that makes skepticism seem philosophically interesting.[27]

So, anti-skepticism is a common point of departure which unites Putnam's and Rorty's and virtually all other pragmatists' views. Another point of agreement is related to the pragmatist theory of truth, as opposed to the traditional correspondence theory: Putnam classifies Rorty as one of the philosophers who (rightly) "take very seriously just the point that James insisted on, that our grasp of the notion of truth must not be represented as simply a mystery mental act by which we relate ourselves to a relation called 'correspondence' totally independent of the practices by which we decide what is and is not true."[28] Similarly, Rorty says approvingly that "Dewey and Putnam agree that the aim of inquiry is what Putnam calls 'human flourishing'" (instead of truth as accurate representation of a mind- and inquiry-independent world).[29] Both thus seem
to respect each others' admiration of the Jamesian and Deweyan idea that truth and value are fundamentally tied to each other in human affairs - that truth is, in a Jamesian slogan, a species of the good, closely related to our normative, value-laden practices of evaluation (and thus to the epistemic vocabulary in which our notions of warrant, assertibility, etc., are operative). Rorty also explicitly gives credit to Putnam's (and Davidson's) Jamesian refusal to assume any contrast between the world itself and the world as known by us.[30] It is, as is well known, this contrast between reality and appearance that makes the problem of skepticism seem inevitable; it is by giving up the metaphysically realistic background assumption of skeptical puzzles that Putnam and Rorty join in the classical pragmatists' anti-skeptical camp. Both seem to subscribe to the Deweyan maxim that the reality we seek to know through our inquiries, "reality-to-be-known," is a reality possessing a "practical character," a "reality-of-use-and-in-use."[31] Any humanly possible truth about such a reality is something much weaker than the correspondence theorist's non-epistemic truth.

Nevertheless, while Rorty and Putnam agree, among other things, on the artificiality of Cartesian skeptical scenarios, and agree that the classical pragmatists considered skepticism equally artificial, Putnam (unlike Rorty) finds a philosophical use both for what James called "truth" and for what Dewey called "warranted assertibility." Thus, he does not seem to share Rorty's purely negative conviction that epistemology is over as soon as we have realized that the problem of skepticism and the foundationalist project that grounds it (a project itself based on the notion of truth as correspondence or accurate representation of a mind- and language-independent reality) should be given up. Putnam's theses concerning warrant - which he develops with an explicit (albeit unspecified) reference to Dewey - are genuinely epistemological theses, very far from the Rortyan "now philosophy is over" tone of voice. Against Rorty, Putnam argues (1) that "[i]n ordinary circumstances, there is usually a fact of the matter as to whether the statements people make are warranted or not;" (2) that whether or not a statement is warranted "is independent of whether the majority of one's cultural peers would say it is warranted or unwarranted;" (3) that our norms governing warrant are "historical products" and evolve in time; (4) that those norms and standards "always reflect our interests and values" in the sense that our "picture of intellectual flourishing is part of, and only makes sense as part of, our picture of human flourishing in general;" and (5) that any norm or standard is capable of reform, for there are "better and worse" norms and standards.[32] He adds that these principles have, since Peirce's earliest writings, been endorsed by pragmatists.[33] Thus, he at least implicitly challenges Rorty's - who, Putnam claims, rejects these principles or is bound to reject them because of his other pronouncements - entitlement to the term "pragmatism." In Rorty's so-called pragmatism, there is room only for the historicist conception of norms as evolving products rooted in particular circumstances or vocabularies; there is no room for the idea that norms, either epistemic or ethical ones, could be genuinely better or worse, or capable of reform (or deterioration) as distinguished from mere change.

Another interesting passage is the following, in which Putnam attacks Rorty's entitlement to Deweyanism in particular:

[Rorty] does retain strong traces of his physicalist past. Certain passages in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* seem to assume that mind talk can just be replaced by brain talk when science becomes sufficiently advanced. And in spite of Rorty's frequently expressed admiration for Dewey, he seems not to have noticed Dewey's wonderful remark that the old soul/body or mind/body dualism still survives in a scientific age as a dualism between "the brain and the rest of the body."[34] In any case,
Rorty's response[35] to the statement I just made (the statement that our mental abilities cannot be described in language which does not avail itself of intentional and normative notions) is to say that while it is true, understood simply as a claim about the non-reducibility of one "vocabulary" to another, nothing about reality follows from non-reducibility - an odd move indeed for some one who claims the very vocabulary/reality distinction has to be given up.[36]

Thus, Putnam appears to be accusing Rorty of a highly unpragmatic reliance on certain dichotomies that pragmatists ought to give up, dichotomies like the one between our "vocabularies" and the reality those vocabularies are about. Elsewhere, Putnam tells us that, even though Rorty likes to call himself a pragmatist, "his habit of dichotomizing human thought into speech within 'criterion governed language games' and speech 'outside' language games" is unpragmatistic (and equally un-Wittgensteinian, Rorty's adherence to Wittgenstein notwithstanding).[37]

The final charge comes, towards the end of Putnam's Pragmatism.[38] in the claim that Rorty, because of his view (in which he claims to follow James and Dewey) that our talk of "truth" is "merely emotive," a "compliment" that we sometimes pay to some beliefs or statements, assumes that "we are connected to the world 'causally but not semantically'" and is thus "in the grip of the picture that the Eliminative Materialism is true of the Noumenal World." No such picture, according to Putnam, was assumed in classical pragmatism. In Peirce, James and Dewey, there is equally little room for "postmodern anti-metaphysics" as there is for traditional metaphysics (or its more recent scientistic and physicalistic variants).[39] What is needed, instead of fruitless metaphysical speculations and their equally fruitless negations, is democratic, self-correcting inquiry into how we humans conceptualize the world we live in, an on-going inquiry that critically revises its own standards of rationality. If Putnam's account of pragmatism and his reading of Rorty are on the right track, the possibility of such normative revision which is so central in the pragmatist tradition is given up in Rorty's neopragmatism.

Rorty, of course, refuses to take seriously such appeals to normativity and rationality. Reminding Putnam and others that there is no reason to give up "normative stories" about truth in the disquotationalist and behaviorist setting which he favors (and reads James and Dewey as favoring, too), he remarks:

Putnam, I think, still takes a 'philosophical account of X' to be a synoptic vision which will somehow synthesize every other possible view, will somehow bring the outside and the inside points of view together.

It seems to me precisely the virtue of James and of Dewey to insist that we cannot have such a synoptic vision - that we cannot back up our norms by 'grounding' them in a metaphysical or scientific account of the world.[40]

Rorty sees Putnam (and Davidson) as continuing Dewey's effort to liberate us from "representationalism," and thus judges "Putnam's continuing insistence on using the term 'representation'" as a mistake that in a way betrays his otherwise healthy Deweyan pragmatism.[41] There are, Rorty tells us, two principal strategies that the pragmatist can adopt with respect to the notion of truth. Faced with the choice between these strategies, Putnam and Rorty himself stand in opposite camps:

Some [pragmatists], like Peirce, James and Putnam, have said that we can retain an absolute sense of 'true' by identifying it with 'justification in the ideal situation' - the
situation which Peirce called 'the end of inquiry'. Others, like Dewey (and, I have argued, Davidson), have suggested that there is little to be said about truth, and that philosophers should explicitly and self-consciously confine themselves to justification, to what Dewey called 'warranted assertibility'.

I prefer the latter strategy. Despite the efforts of Putnam and Habermas to clarify the notion of 'ideal epistemic situation', that notion seems to me no more useful than that of 'correspondence to reality', or any of the other notions which philosophers have used to provide an interesting gloss on the word 'true'.[42]

On the basis of the material I have cited, we seem to arrive at the following general picture. Putnam revives the classical pragmatists', as well as Wittgenstein's, emphasis on irreducible normativity, on our need to critically investigate the practices, vocabularies, or language-games we find ourselves engaging in (a need inherent in those practices themselves), without forgetting the importance of a moderately realistically interpreted concept of truth, which cannot be entirely disentangled from the idea of representation - even though the metaphysical realist's conception of representation is to be given up.[43] Rorty, however, simply emphasizes our Darwinistically describable need to "cope" with our natural, causally explainable environment by inventing new ways of speaking and by freeing ourselves from unnecessary philosophical problems concerning our relation to that environment, such as the problem of realism vs. idealism the mind-body problem, or the problem of how to answer to the skeptic. In a way, from Putnam's point of view, Rorty, by recognizing only practice-internal, "conversational" criteria for the justification of statements and beliefs and by restricting the audience of justification to a culturally and historically particularized ethnos, just gives up the task of normative reflection which has always been part and parcel of the pragmatist tradition and which Dewey, Rorty's greatest hero, also respected, despite his historicism and thoroughgoing naturalism. From Rorty's point of view, on the other hand, Putnam, like so many other critics, seeks some mysterious, practice-transcendent connection between human beings and the world. His appeal to normativity, to an irreducibly normative and "substantial" notion of truth, and to other such notions is pragmatically empty, Rorty seems to be saying - as empty as the skeptical challenges which traditional philosophers' substantial (correspondence) notions of truth were meant to meet in the first place.

The argumentation between the two neopragmatists appears to end up with a blind alley precisely at this point. Rorty refuses to find anything meaningful in Putnam's defense of truth, rationality, and normativity. He says he is with James and Dewey (or the hypothetical James and Dewey he has invented for his own pragmatic purposes); Putnam denies this and claims that his, not Rorty's, picture of pragmatism is more faithful to the classics.

The following diagnosis of this dialectical situation suggests itself. Putnam never forgets, while Rorty deliberately does, the Kantian heritage of pragmatism.[44] James was, arguably, in certain ways more Kantian than Dewey, but one can perhaps find something like transcendental arguments even in Dewey: the Deweyan naturalist, defining philosophy as "the critical method for developing methods of criticism,"[45] engages in a critical self-reflection of the experimental methods of inquiry she or he already employs, in a manner resembling the Kantian self-reflection of human reason.[46] In developing his pragmatism, Putnam has taken seriously - much more seriously than Dewey - what we may describe as the crucial Kantian issue of modern philosophy, viz., the problem of realism vs. idealism. Indeed, his "internal" or "pragmatic" realism can quite naturally be construed as a modern variant of Kantian
empirical realism. Rorty, on the contrary, has tried to trivialize this issue by his (in Putnam's view) one-sided reading of pragmatism and of figures like Wittgenstein and Heidegger. On the other hand, we should not fail to note that there are some Kantian assumptions at work even in Rorty's own project: the rejection of the picture of human knowledge (or the mind, or language) as a "mirror of nature" is, of course, a most Kantian theme, since Kant surely abandoned what Dewey called the "spectator theory of knowledge," insisting that the world about which we can know something is in a sense our own construction, a product of human practices rather than anything ready-made that we could merely spectate. Indeed, Kant can and perhaps should be treated as an ally rather than an enemy in Deweyan pragmatism.[47]

Presumably, both James and Putnam, and perhaps even Dewey, can be interpreted not only as empirical realists in a Kantian sense, but also as transcendental idealists (contra their own statements that they do not subscribe to this Kantian doctrine). A full defense of this suggestion is beyond the scope of this paper. Let me just re-emphasize the fact that both James, Dewey and Putnam in their various ways treat the empirical world as a construction based on human activities, on our practices of inquiry, of moral deliberation, of social engagement, etc., through which we shape the world into a meaningful pattern enabling future transactions and interactions. On the most general level, our human practice or form of life itself, the very engagement we cannot disentangle ourselves from, is analogous to the Kantian transcendental subject of knowledge, although the notion of "practice" is of course a notion of something that is more dynamic and processual, historically contingent and developing than Kant's "I."

The practices we engage in can be regarded as the necessary presuppositions of the possibility of cognition, and (in a Kantian style) of the objects of cognition. None of these pragmatists claims that we humans create the world ex nihilo; but nor did Kant himself claim that. What they claim is something much more modest, i.e., that the world as a world for us inevitably reflects our practice-embedded interests, habits, and purposes. Even Rorty, despite his avowed anti-transcendentalism, seems to ascribe a quasi-transcendental role to human "vocabularies" as constitutive of reality.[48] Natural objects like atoms appear to be, for him, socio-linguistic, conversational constructions, and there is no discourse-independent truth "out there" about them - unless we read some of his statements as expressions of austere scientific physicalism, according to which the world just is fundamentally physical and all non-physical ways of talking about it are simply that, ways of talking, moves within fictitious language-games.

The kind of transcendental idealism we may see Putnam and even Rorty as holding is, it should be clear by now, a view close to James's, for whom pragmatism (or humanism, as he also called it, following F.C.S. Schiller) was, in addition to being a theory of meaning and truth, a form of ontological constructivism.[49] It is also close to Dewey's position, since Dewey also held that knowing alters its object, thus embracing a form of idealism.[50] Putnam and Rorty may have offered some good reasons for not classifying their views as idealistic, but certainly neither of them has taken us beyond the realism vs. idealism dispute. Putnam has not claimed to take us beyond it, but Rorty has. In this sense, Putnam's self-understanding of his place in the pragmatist tradition is more nuanced than Rorty's. It is even more nuanced than James's or Dewey's, but this results from the fact that Putnam has had the privilege of standing on these giants' shoulders. He can see their pragmatism, as well as his own, as a continuation of Kant's transcendental philosophy more clearly than they themselves did. Even so, Putnam himself may need help from other pragmatists in situating his thought more firmly in the Kantian tradition than he has been able to do so far.
3. Different naturalisms, different (post)modernisms

Another, perhaps related difference between Rorty and most other major figures of the pragmatist tradition, including Putnam, is this. Pragmatists are usually naturalists but highly anti-reductionist ones: Dewey's, and perhaps also Putnam's, basic position might plausibly be described as a form of emergent naturalism; even James can be seen as a non-reductive naturalist insisting on "novelty" in experience and on the need to take seriously whatever belongs to our "human nature." Rorty, however, appears to be a non-reductionist only nominally. His bottom-line metaphysics, as some of Putnam's above-cited criticisms lucidly bring to the fore, is an eliminative physicalism which reduces the experienceable world to a blind causal interaction of microphysically describable particles - while reminding us, astonishingly, that scientific descriptions are not privileged in relation to other descriptions of the world, since all descriptions are, in the end, just manners of speaking. It is, in fact, not easy to decide whether Rorty is, ultimately, a physicalist or an idealist for whom the physical world is a human construction based on our ways of speaking. Both interpretations can be supported by textual evidence. Both of these extremes may, however, be resisted in a more sophisticated - Jamesian and/or Deweyan - pragmatism which maintains an empirical realism and naturalism within a more comprehensive, meta-level transcendental commitment to the constitutive role of human practices in the determination of the reality our vocabularies are about.

Several pragmatists' somewhat anti-Kantian prejudices notwithstanding, we may be able to find, from James, Dewey, and Putnam, a fruitful route to what might be called naturalistic (though not reductively naturalized) Kantianism, in which universal, immutable transcendental conditions for the possibility of cognitive experience are replaced by dynamically evolving conditions rooted in our historically situated habitual actions and practices themselves. Rorty, however, tries to block this particular road of inquiry, offering us a flat and reductive picture of the historical contingency of any concept or vocabulary we may find useful to work on. There is no consistent way to read Rorty as a transcendental pragmatist. In Putnam's case such a reading may be possible, although I am sure that Putnam himself would resist this terminology as fiercely as James and Dewey would have done.

As related to the tension between transcendentalism and naturalism, a short note on two different construals of pragmatistic moral philosophy is in order. Putnam's pragmatic (Jamesian and Deweyan) moral realism can, it seems to me, be reinterpreted as a "Wittgensteinian" insistence on the personal seriousness of moral problems, to be compared to the work of such important ethical thinkers as Iris Murdoch, Peter Winch, and Raimond Gaita, whereas Rorty's Deweyan conception of ethics and politics is, unsurprisingly, much more naturalized and down-to-earth. Morality, for Rorty, is simply a matter of redescribing human life through the invention of new interesting vocabularies, each of which is equally contingent, ethnocentric and "optional" as any other. There is nothing over and above the ways in which we happen to talk to each other about human life and its problems. If we all suddenly started to think and talk like the Nazis did, then, presumably, Rorty would have to say that there would be nothing wrong in Nazism. Even though it is natural for a pragmatist to emphasize our linguistic practices in relation to metaethics, such a conclusion need not be drawn on any pragmatist principles. The idea that we cannot simply make bad things good by beginning to speak about them differently is, again, built into the very practices we engage in. One may ask, then, whether there is any room left in Rorty's position for the kind of moral seriousness we find in James, Putnam, and the
"Wittgensteinians."[55] Rorty may, in brief, be unable to account for the fact that we do - within our practice of moral deliberation - experience moral problems as genuine problems, not to be settled by mere redescriptions or insightful new uses of words. He has, then, nothing to say about our genuine need to do the right thing in our lives, or about the practices based upon this need.

This failure to recognize moral seriousness is, apparently, parallel to Rorty's above-discussed inability to account for the pursuit of objective truth, or for our need to commit ourselves to a normative framework in which such a pursuit is seen as a valuable thing. An analogue can also be found in the philosophy of religion: Putnam is prepared to reflect on religious themes in a Wittgensteinian manner, attacking scientistic critiques of religion which misconstrue people's expressions of religious faith as hypotheses requiring "evidence," but Rorty's attitude to religion is almost completely hostile. Here, again, Putnam seems to be more faithful to the spirit of classical pragmatism than Rorty, who resembles a scientistic physicalist more than a pragmatist when it comes to religious issues. For Rorty, the human importance of religion seems to have disappeared through the secularization of culture - that is, through the invention of new, non-religious, ways of speaking about the world and about human life in the world. But one of the defining characteristics of contemporary debates in the philosophy of religion seems to be the persistence of religious problems, or ways of experiencing life problematic in a religious sense, even within a secularized culture. Putnam, unlike Rorty, has been able to contribute to this debate - although, again, his contributions must be considered far from unproblematic.[56]

This brings me to my final point. I want to conclude with a few words on Putnam's and Rorty's (and, by extension, James's and Dewey's) relation to modernism and postmodernism. We should not, I think, use the notions of modernism and postmodernism as easy catch-words; rather, we should try to specify what we mean by them in relevant contexts. We may, in any case, end up with an interpretation of Putnam's and Rorty's versions of neopragmatism that can be expressed in this vocabulary. The preceding discussion of their differences regarding truth, naturalism and normativity is a necessary background for such an interpretation.[57]

Rorty's neopragmatism is, we might say, self-consciously postmodernistic. Putnam, while also being a "post-analytic" philosopher, is much closer to the modernist heritage of the Enlightenment, which the pragmatist tradition largely shares, too. As a modernist thinker, Putnam, as we have seen, is not willing to give up the normative task of the rational legitimation of human practices (including practices of scientific inquiry and practices of moral deliberation) in the way Rorty is, even though Putnam, too, insists that such a legitimation cannot be handed to us from any imaginary point of view lying outside those practices themselves. Thus, Putnam still has some use for the modernist notions of reason, truth, reality, and self, not only in science but especially in relation to ethical and religious concerns,[58] while for Rorty these notions have become almost entirely obsolete - perhaps primarily because Rorty is more prepared than Putnam to follow, with the Dewey he constructs, the naturalistic spirit of pragmatism. Putnam, unlike Rorty, is precisely for this reason able to resist certain excessive tendencies of modernism, such as scientistic naturalism.

Even so, Putnam's own position is constantly in a danger to slide into Rortyan antirepresentationalism because of his increasing insistence on our ordinary, "naive" and "prephilosophical" notions of perception, conception, truth, reality, and representation. Putnam, it seems to me, can hardly save philosophical innocence by this allegedly Wittgensteinian manoeuvre.[59] Nor can he step outside powerful philosophical critique by subscribing to religious mysticism at the end of the day, as he
appears to do in some of his recent writings on the philosophy of religion. Our pragmatic commitments to a quite ordinary world, to quite ordinary truth about it, to what James and Putnam call "natural realism," or to the view that there is still something to be found in the premodern notion of God that is significant for us moderns or postmoderns, are philosophical commitments - not simply commitments that are made by the man on the street entirely independently of philosophical traditions and worries. This has, I am convinced, never really been denied in the pragmatist movement, even though the pragmatists have always, with good reason, resisted philosophers' typical over-intellectualizations and artificial theorizations of the notions of world, truth, reason, or God.

In philosophy, whether modernist or postmodernist, naturalist or antinaturalist, there can, then, be no overcoming of the "philosophical." Nor can we philosophers escape our duty to examine philosophically what we take to be "philosophical" in the views we formulate, interpret, or criticize. While my description of Putnam's pragmatism in the preceding pages has been largely sympathetic, I am afraid that Putnam has not taken up this task as seriously as he should have done. Originally, I did not plan to give the final word to Rorty, because (as should be obvious by now) I find, with Putnam, many of his ethnocentric, post-philosophical statements anti-realistic, too radically pragmatistic and irresponsibly relativistic to be incorporated in a solid pragmatism, but I do think that his most recent criticism of Putnam is on the right track:

Putnam's recent alliance with Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, and James Conant - his emphasis on the Ordinary and on the need to avoid putting forward theses in philosophy - seems to me an unfortunate throwback to pre-Hegelian attempts to find something ahistorical to which philosophers may pledge allegiance. The Ordinary strikes me as just the latest disguise of the ontos on.[60]

This statement by Rorty is, indeed, a striking example of the use of the pragmatic method which, as Peirce and James insisted in their various ways, encourages us to seek the meaning of our conceptions in the practical outcome that their use brings into our future actions. Putnam's use of the word "ordinary" can and ought to be subjected to such an examination. We cannot, I think, avoid our ordinary linguistic practices - or, to put it in more Rortyan terms, the vocabularies we naturally use in our attempts to cope with our natural environment - being conceptualized and interpreted, when we begin to philosophize about them, in a philosophical manner, either premodern, modern, or postmodern (whatever these words are taken to mean in specific cases). The philosophical practice of using the word "ordinary" is itself something quite unordinary and in need of further philosophical scrutiny, preferably on a pragmatist basis.

Continuing philosophy is, then, something that neither Putnam nor Rorty can successfully avoid. Had they learned their pragmatistic lessons well enough, they would neither ascribe any "overcoming philosophy" tendency to any of the classical pragmatists nor manifest such a tendency in their own work. "Philosophy always buries its undertakers."[61]

Notes


According to Ben-Menahem, James (unlike Rorty) leaves our ordinary practices of speaking about truth and falsity untouched.


[8] Extensive references to Putnam's and Rorty's controversy and to their discussions of earlier pragmatists can be found, e.g., in my two books on pragmatism, Structuring the World: The Issue of Realism and the Nature of Ontological Problems in Classical and Contemporary Pragmatism (Helsinki: Acta Philosophica Fennica 59, 1996) and Pragmatism and Philosophical Anthropology: Understanding Our Human Life in a Human World (New York: Peter Lang, 1998). This essay is partly an attempt to continue the critique of Rorty's pragmatism already presented in these works of mine. Important new material by and on Rorty can be found in Robert B. Brandom (ed.), Rorty and His Critics (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), to be referred to below.


[10] See the notorious remark to this effect in Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism" (1980), reprinted in Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 161. One sometimes gets the feeling that the adjective "Peircean" is almost a pejorative term not only for Rorty but even (at least accidentally) for Putnam, referring to the questionable ideas of truth as the final opinion of the scientific community, the limit of inquiry, the absolute (scientific) conception of the world, etc. On the other hand, even Rorty once in a while makes rhetorical appeals to Peirce: he says, for instance, that "we pragmatists" are "impressed by Peirce's criticisms of Descartes" and reject both skepticism and foundationalism in epistemology. See Richard Rorty, "Universality and Truth," in Brandom (ed.), Rorty and His Critics, p. 5. For a reconsideration of Putnam's relation to Peirce, arguing among other things that
it is not necessary to read Peirce as being committed to the "absolute conception of the world" that Putnam repudiates, see Christopher Hookway, "Truth and Reality: Putnam and the Pragmatist Conception of Truth," forthcoming in the proceedings of the Münster conference on Putnam's philosophy (June, 2000), also to be found in the internet: http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/academic/N-Q/phil/department/staff/hookway/truth_and_reality.htm.


[12] This picture of the "two pragmatisms" has been defended in different ways at least in the following recent studies: H.O. Mounce, The Two Pragmatisms: From Peirce to Rorty (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Susan Haack, Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Nicholas Rescher, Realistic Pragmatism: An Introduction to Pragmatic Philosophy (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000). Haack, in particular, has been concerned with showing how Rorty thoroughly misrepresents Peirce and thus hides the scientifically responsible and realistic origin of the pragmatist tradition.

[13] For a relatively recent review making this basic point, see Frank B. Farrell, "Review of Hilary Putnam, Pragmatism: An Open Question," Style (Spring 1998), http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m2342/1_32/54019330/print.jhtml. (This paper, like many others on Putnam and other pragmatists, can also be found through the website www.pragmatism.org.) See also the works cited in the previous note.

[14] I am omitting Peirce both because James and Dewey are more important classics than Peirce for both Putnam and Rorty and because Peirce's inclusion in this brief essay would complicate matters enormously. This does not mean that Peirce would be unimportant in the assessment of neopragmatism. On the contrary, the differences between Putnam and Rorty might be usefully compared to the differences between Peirce and James, as Richard J. Bernstein suggests (see his "American Pragmatism: The Conflict of Narratives," in Saatkamp (ed.), Rorty & Pragmatism, p. 58). For a comparison, inspired by James, of Putnam's and Rorty's different "philosophical temperaments," see also Russell B. Goodman, "Introduction," in Goodman (ed.), Pragmatism: A Contemporary Reader (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 10.

[15] An exception to this is Putnam's book Pragmatism: An Open Question (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), to which we will return. Putnam does discuss his dissatisfaction with Rorty's reading of Wittgenstein, but that would be a topic for another paper. (Sometimes Wittgensteinian and pragmatist issues converge, of course.)

[16] See especially ch. 3 of that book (op.cit.).


[22] See my discussion of Putnam's conception(s) of truth, as compared to the correspondence theory, in *Pragmatism and Philosophical Anthropology*, ch. 3.


[24] Putnam notes that while he has himself become an "increasingly realist" philosopher, Rorty has "moved from his physicalism to an extreme linguistic idealism that teeters on the edge of solipsism" ("The Question of Realism," p. 306). From the accusation that Rorty's position becomes indistinguishable from solipsism (or from a solipsism "with a 'we' instead of an 'I'"), see also Putnam's contribution, "Richard Rorty on Reality and Justification," to Bandom (ed.), *Rorty and His Critics*, pp. 81-86.


[30] Richard Rorty, "Introduction," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 12. In fact, Rorty quite often refers to Putnam as a pragmatist (see, e.g., p. 86n7 in the same volume). He mentions Putnam and Davidson as the philosophers who "linguistify" Deweyan pragmatism ("Feminism and Pragmatism" [1994], reprinted in *Truth and Progress*, p. 211) and even describes Putnam as "the most important contemporary philosopher to call himself a pragmatist" (ibid., p. 213) and as "the leading contemporary pragmatist" ("Introduction: Relativism: Finding and Making [1996], in Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1999, p. xxvii; see also the essay "Truth without Correspondence to Reality" [1994] in the same volume, pp. 24-25). In Rorty's *Routledge Encyclopedia* article (op.cit.) on pragmatism (a piece which is problematic as an encyclopedia article because it describes Rorty's own interpretation of pragmatism as Darwinian antirepresentationalism rather than offering any neutral survey of the pragmatist tradition), Putnam is again referred to as "the best-known contemporary philosopher to identify himself as a pragmatist."

[32] Hilary Putnam, "Realism with a Human Face" (1988), in *Realism with a Human Face*, p. 21. We may note in passing that a pragmatist theory of norms, perhaps more fully developed than Putnam's, can be found in Frederick L. Will, *Pragmatism and Realism* (ed. by Kenneth R. Westphal, Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).


[38] See p. 74.

[39] One might argue, though, that Putnam has not drawn due attention to the ways in which certain traditional metaphysical (e.g., Kantian and Hegelian) themes continue to dominate the classical pragmatists' thought.

[40] This remark occurs in one of Rorty's most important papers on truth, "Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth" (1986), reprinted in his *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (see p. 141).


[43] Putnam's recent use of late-Wittgensteinian ideas, as well as his endorsement of John McDowell's defense of objectivity, would also be relevant in this respect but must be neglected here (see especially his *Words and Life*, chs. 12-15). For McDowell's view, essentially accepted by Putnam, see McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1994; 2nd ed. 1996); for some critical reflections and comparisons, see my paper, "How Minds Understand Their World: Remarks on John McDowell's Naturalism, Kantianism, and Pragmatism," *Facta Philosophica* 1 (1999), 227-243. For the ways in which Putnam's critique of Rorty is connected with his Wittgensteinianism and his indebtedness to McDowell, see James Conant's most illuminating "Introduction" to *Words and Life*.

[44] The question of how both James and Wittgenstein are "Kantians" is a major topic in Putnam's *Pragmatism: An Open Question*.


[47] See John McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," in Brandom (ed.), *Rorty and His Critics*, 109-123. McDowell perceptively argues that Rorty's "phobia of objectivity" and his refusal to acknowledge any non-human, external authority over our thought in relation to the world are unpragmatic and "unDeweyan" (p. 120).

[49] I discuss the constructivist dimension of pragmatism in *Structuring the World*, chs. 3.3. and 4.4, and *Pragmatism and Philosophical Anthropology*, ch. 1.


[51] Such a non-reductive naturalism is important even when we are discussing topics where a kind of supernaturalism may, according to James, in the end be desirable, as in the philosophy of religion; cf. again my *Pragmatism and Philosophical Anthropology*, ch. 6. Pragmatism is, unfortunately, seldom even mentioned in contemporary discussions of the concept of emergence. See, e.g., Achim Stephan, *Emergenz: Von der Unvorhersagbarkeit zur Selbstorganisation* (Dresden and München: Dresden University Press, 1999).

[52] Cf. here Joseph Margolis's recent discussions of the pragmatist tradition (e.g., in his paper, "Reconstruction in Pragmatism," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 13 [1999], 221-239): Rorty should be seen as one of the recent "naturalizers" of philosophy (along with Quine, Davidson, and physicalist philosophers of mind), but such a project of "naturalizing" is incompatible with the non-reductive form of naturalism we find in the pragmatist tradition (pp. 225 ff.) - indeed, according to Margolis, "pragmatism's true center of gravity lies […] in the dialectical contest with naturalizing" (p. 228). Putnam (whose view does have its difficulties) is closer to the original project of pragmatism, which is a form of "naturalism" but never forgets normative and legitimative ("second-order") questions. Thus, Putnam is in many ways closer to both James and Dewey (and to Margolis himself) than Rorty is. Margolis admits that we would not have a "revival" of pragmatism at all, had Rorty and Putnam not identified themselves as pragmatists (p. 222), but remarks that "Putnam and Rorty are bound to fade" and that they "have nearly completed their appointed roles" (p. 223). For example, "Putnam has hardly settled on a viable realism of his own" (p. 235). We should agree with Margolis when he reminds us that pragmatism will have to accommodate a "second-order epistemological explanations or legitimations that are not expressible in (that is, not restricted to) causal terms" (p. 236). We should also follow him to the rejection of traditional dualisms between, say, subject and object, epistemology and metaphysics, and idealism and realism (p. 237). But I am not sure whether we should follow him to the rejection of the position he finds in Putnam. On the contrary, Margolis appears to agree with Putnam on many things, including the possibility of developing a moderate form of realism within a pragmatist framework.

[53] I have tried to develop this idea in several papers, most recently in "Investigating the Transcendental Tradition" (*Philosophy Today* 44 [2000], 426-441) and in "Pragmatic Realism and Ethics: A Transcendental Meditation on the Possibility of an Ethical Argument for Moral Realism," forthcoming in John R. Shook (ed.), *The Future of Realism in the American Tradition of Pragmatic Naturalism* (proceedings of the conference in honor of Peter H. Hare, Buffalo, October 2000).

[54] For Putnam's defense of the objectivity (or "objectivity humanly speaking") of ethics and of the fact-value entanglement, see *Reason, Truth and History*, chs. 6 and 9; *Realism with a Human Face*, chs. 11-12; and *Pragmatism: An Open Question*, passim. See also my treatment of Putnam's argument in "Pragmatic Realism and Ethics" (see previous note).


(1999), 39-60.


[58] We may say that Putnam also maintains an important premodern source of insight, religion, which he believes can still illuminate the problems people face in their lives. Even such a modernist thinker as Dewey did not entirely reject religious attitudes and experiences: see John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1962; first published in 1934). Putnam's philosophy of religion is, in any event, much more crucially indebted to James (and to Wittgenstein) than to Dewey, whose conception of "the religious" is thoroughly naturalized, as distinguished from the supernaturalist assumptions inherent in all actual religions.

[59] I have criticized Putnam's approach in *Structuring the World*, chs. 5.3 and 6. For a brief comparison between Putnam's commonsense philosophy and Peirce's "critical commonsensism," see Hookway, "Truth and Reality" (op.cit.).


[61] I wish to thank Erkki Kilpinen, Mats Bergman, and many other participants of the meeting of the "Metaphysical Club" at the University of Helsinki on February 20, 2001. For exchanges of ideas related to Putnam's and Rorty's work, I am also grateful to Thomas Wallgren and Ken Westphal.