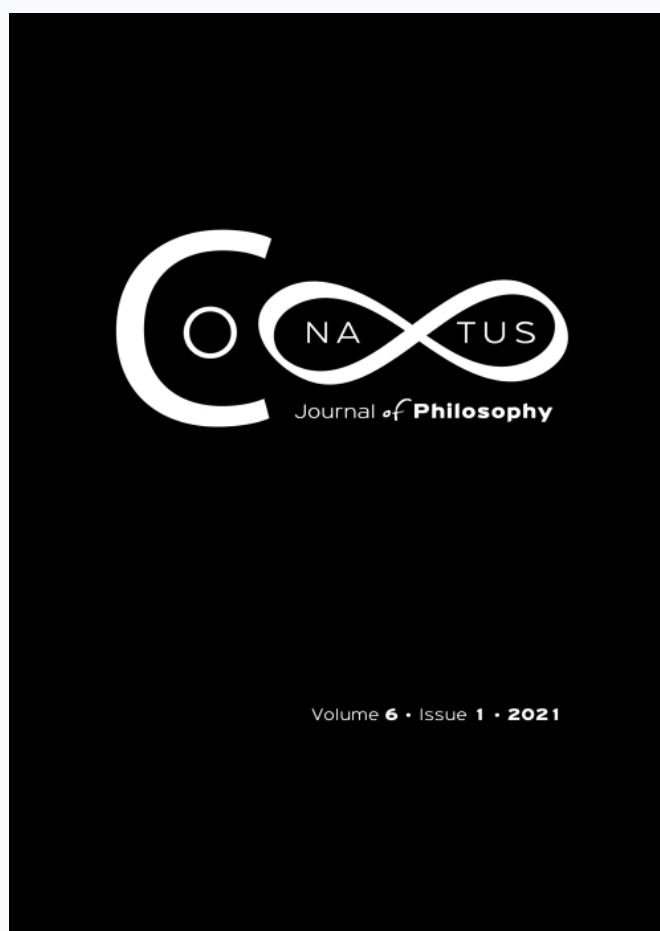


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# No God, no God's Eye: A Quasi-Putnamian Argument for Monotheism

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## Abstract

*In the first part of this paper, I present Hilary Putnam's famous BIV-argument against metaphysical realism and find that it relies on the rejection of a noetic-ray theory of reference (NTR). In the second part, I demonstrate two ways in which a metaphysical realist could save the NTR, and I develop Plantinga's claim that metaphysical realists can only rid of Putnam's concerns by adopting the thesis that the objects of our conceptual schemes roughly correspond to the furniture of reality. Thirdly, I argue that naturalism fails to explain such a metaphysically anthropocentric correspondence, and that monotheism is the only candidate that does so successfully. In the last part, I show that metaphysical realism in fact holds. The line of argumentation is two-fold: pragmatic and theoretical. If metaphysical realism does not hold, then normative considerations must guide theory-choice. But fundamental non-verbal normative disputes are not possible if metaphysical realism is false. Hence, there can be no non-equivocal counterarguments to the claim that metaphysical realism should be adopted if it is false. This amounts to a normative consideration in favour of metaphysical realism. Secondly, I employ a reversed Putnamian BIV-argument to show that metaphysical realism is true: if metaphysical realism is false, we cannot assert that it is false, as its denial is only possible from God's point of view. But we can assert that it is false. Hence, it is true. The conclusion, that God exists, is surely apt to generate the sort of incredulous stare that any metaphysically ambitious armchair argument is subject to. The fundamental point of the paper, however, is that no such stare has any epistemological status if God does not exist. No God, no God's eye.*

**Keywords:** antirealism; metaphysical realism; Plantinga; philosophical theism; Putnam

## I. The Issue with Metaphysical Realism

Metaphysical realism is the thesis that “the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects” such that “there is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is.’”<sup>1</sup> In *Reason, Truth and History*, Putnam characterises metaphysical realism as

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<sup>1</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 49.

committed to the following three theses<sup>2</sup>:

1. *Independence*: The world is (largely) made up of objects that are mind-, language-, and theory-independent.
2. *Correspondence*: Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things.
3. *The Cartesianism Principle*: Even an ideal theory might be radically false.

According to Putnam, these three principles presume a theory of reference in which “occult rays – call them ‘noetic rays’ – connect words and thought-signs to their referents.”<sup>3</sup> Without a noetic-ray theory of reference (NTR), Putnam argues, metaphysical realism would be impossible. As we shall see, this follows from a line of reasoning that now is a philosophical classic:

- P1. If I am a brain in vat (BIV), I cannot assert/form the thought that I am a BIV.
- P2. I *can* assert/form the thought that I am a BIV.
- C. Therefore, by philosophical necessity, I am not a BIV.
- P3. If metaphysical realism is true, then I could be a BIV.
- C2. Therefore, metaphysical realism is false.

The justification for P1 goes as follows. Presumably, if we are BIVs, we have never interacted with actual brains – only the *brain-looking* things composed of electrical signals, created by the evil scientist. So how on earth are we to refer to *real* brains – something we have never interacted with? It seems that the BIV, in that case, would need an ability to ‘magically’ think about objects it neither constructs nor interacts with. If we reject the NTR, however, then no BIV could assert/form the thought that it is a brain in a vat, and P1 is true.

P2 is to be grasped by examining our own conceptual scheme. “‘Objects’ do not exist independently of conceptual schemes,” Putnam writes, rather, “we cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description. Since the objects and the signs are alike internal to the scheme of description, it is possible to say what matches what.”<sup>4</sup> Only if we believe in the NTR could we be radically wrong about what our words

<sup>2</sup> Tim Button, *The Limits of Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7-10.

<sup>3</sup> Putnam, 51.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

and thoughts refer to. Hence, if we reject the NTR, then we can be absolutely certain that we *can* form the thought that we are brains in vats.

The truth of P3 is less controversial. The *Cartesianism Principle* states that we could be radically wrong about nearly everything, and the BIV-case is just an instance of this larger scheme.

We hence see that the soundness of the argument (P1 and P2) turns on the NTR. If one postulates a noetic-ray reference relation, then a BIV *could* refer to things in “metaphysical reality,” and neither being a BIV nor metaphysical realism would be a philosophical impossibility. That’s great, you say, but why would you believe in the NTR? Apart from the seeming queerness of a noetic-ray, we have the *semantic worry* that the ray, granted that it exists, might refer uncontrollably. If metaphysical realism is true, how is it that we can talk about any one thing rather than any other? Without a proper theory of reference-fixation, metaphysical realists, in a very literal way, have absolutely no clue what they are talking about.

## II. Fixing Reference

If we examine our own behaviour and mental content in isolation, reference is underdetermined. This follows from Quine’s observation that a fully competent field linguist cannot determine, given a certain set of linguistic evidence, whether natives talk about rabbits when they say ‘gavagai,’ pointing to rabbits on grass, or, say, rabbits-on-grass.<sup>5</sup> Kripke’s famous arguments in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* further establish that I cannot determine whether I have previously meant *quus*<sup>6</sup> or *plus* by ‘plus’ based on my own dispositions and mental states.<sup>7</sup> These indeterminacy problems fundamentally rest in the interplay between human finitude and the infinite nature of semantic content. “Rabbit” or “plus” have an *infinite* number of possible applications, whereas human beings only have a *finite* number of behaviours or mental dispositions. Hence, there are simply too few behavioural and mental facts about us to decide what we refer to.

So, if facts about *us* do not fix reference, perhaps there is something in the interplay between us and the world that does? Perhaps our non-linguistic *interaction* with rabbits precludes us from referring to gavagais (or similar

<sup>5</sup> See Willard Van Orman Quine, *The Pursuit of Truth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Revised Edition 1992), 31-37.

<sup>6</sup> The function *quus* (a,b) outputs *plus* (a,b) if a and b are both smaller than or equal to the largest number n previously used by S in an arithmetical computation. If a or b is larger than n, *quus* (a,b) outputs 5. Thus, there is no way, based on the previous behaviours of S, to tell which one S has used.

<sup>7</sup> Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

permutations). For abstract entities like plus, we would have to postulate an *intellectual* interaction of the sort that Plato imagined; an immediate grasp of the form of plus instead of quus. If that were the case, we wouldn't have to rely on facts about dispositions or behaviours to fix reference; simple interaction would do.

The first problem for the metaphysical realist here is that we seem to interact with gavagais (and countless other permutations) every time we interact with rabbits that happen to be on grass, making it impossible to decide whether we interact with gavagais or rabbits when we interact with rabbits on grass. If that is the case, reference is not fixed. A second, more pertinent issue, is that it looks like metaphysical realism has to go if interaction fixes reference. For then sceptical BIV-cases are impossible, as Putnam saw, and the Cartesianism Principle is false. Without further assumptions, non-linguistic interaction cannot do the job of fixing reference for the metaphysical realist. Here, we need to get our metaphysical hands dirty. Perhaps the world helps us a great deal in referring correctly?

This would be the case if the actual world is cut up in pre-existing objects that roughly match those of our conceptual schemes. Such a world would be inhabited only by rabbits, and literally no gavagais (or any similar permutations of similar objects); pluses, but no quuses. Let us call this the few-objects-solution. If the world is cut up in such a way, any *interaction* (causal or ostensive) with rabbits *would* fix reference, as I have literally not, at the same time, interacted with a gavagai (or any similar permutation). This theory can use interaction to fix reference without giving up the Cartesianism Principle. Radical skeptical scenarios are possible in worlds mostly consisting of objects that do *not* match those of our conceptual schemes, but we are (plausibly) not *actually* located in one of them.

A closely related alternative would be a Lewisian eliteness theory, on which the world *itself* connects our words and thought-signs with its objects.<sup>8</sup> The idea is that objects have more or less *elite* properties, and that it is easier to refer to an object the more elite properties it has. Elite properties are the most fundamental properties in reality; they are 'joint-carving,' as Lewis puts it. And we intuitively think that *rabbitness* carves reality at its joints to a higher degree than *gavagainess*; rabbits form a natural kind, we think, whereas gavagais make up an artificial kind, fabricated for use in thought experiments. So the solution to the first problem is that we refer to rabbits instead of gavagais because rabbitness is an elite property. The solution to the second problem is that elite objects are so easy to refer to that even a BIV could do it: the 'magnetic' pull from the elite objects outside the vat manages to

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<sup>8</sup> David Lewis, "New Work for a Theory of Universals," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 4 (1983): 343-377.

draw the noetic-ray to them in such a way that BIV's comes to be radically deceived. Thus, the Cartesianism Principle remains intact.

I will neither develop these theories in any more detail nor take a stance on which one is correct, but I suspect that the metaphysical realist must accept one of them or a combination of both. For either we fix reference in isolation, or the interplay between *us* and the *world* fixes reference, or the *world* fixes reference for us. The first alternative is implausible, the second needs the few-objects-solution in order to avoid indeterminacy, and the third needs to postulate elite properties. Indeed, Putnam introduces these very theories as metaphysically realist solutions to the problems he presents. The few-objects-solution should correspond to what he (pejoratively) calls "Medieval Essentialism," and eliteness theory would be what he (pejoratively) calls a theory of "Self-Identifying Objects."

If we nevertheless accept one of these theories, we would have to uphold a distinction between what we might call primary and secondary concepts. On the few-objects-solution,  $\langle \text{rabbit} \rangle$  and  $\langle \text{plus} \rangle$  are primary, because they correspond to actual objects in reality, and  $\langle \text{gavagai} \rangle$  and  $\langle \text{quus} \rangle$  would be secondary, as they are fictional linguistic constructions. On eliteness-theory, the primary  $\langle \text{rabbit} \rangle$  and  $\langle \text{plus} \rangle$  correspond to objects with many elite properties, whilst the secondary  $\langle \text{gavagai} \rangle$  and  $\langle \text{quus} \rangle$  refer to objects with very few elite properties. But can we uphold such a distinction? As Putnam notes, there would be an eerie symmetry between them;<sup>9</sup> we could define 'gavagai' relying on the primary concept  $\langle \text{rabbit} \rangle$ , but we could also define 'rabbit' using secondary concepts. Assuming that the Oxford Dictionary gets the necessary and sufficient conditions of rabbits right, we define 'Gavagai' and 'Havagai' as follows:

Gavagai = df. a gregarious burrowing plant-eating mammal, with long ears, long hind legs, and a short tail only existing *on* grass.  
 Havagai = df. a gregarious burrowing plant-eating mammal, with long ears, long hind legs, and a short tail only existing *outside* of grass.

Thus, we are in a position to define rabbit:

Rabbit = df. a gavagai or a havagai

Thus, given that we could define 'gavagai' and 'havagai' relying on the concept  $\langle \text{rabbit} \rangle$ , but 'rabbit' relying on the concepts  $\langle \text{gavagai} \rangle$  and  $\langle \text{havagai} \rangle$ , how are we to determine which are primary? What if rabbits are secondary

<sup>9</sup> Putnam, 36-37.

linguistic constructions/less elite objects, and gavagai and havagai real/elite? If that were the case, the few-objects-solution or eliteness theory needs to explain why we do not quickly find ourselves in variants of the BIV-cases that Putnam wants to get rid of. Pose that I (for some reason) have only interacted with rabbits on grass. If gavagais and havagais are primary, then, 'rabbit' would refer to gavagais. But then all my current beliefs of the form 'rabbits *could* locate themselves on space-coordinate x' would be false when x is not on grass. Obviously, this is but one instance of a larger problem that could render nearly all of our beliefs false. Thus, the few-objects-theorist and the eliteness-theorist would need to answer the question:

(i) Why is the world such that its primary objects roughly are those we think are primary?

The only answer to (i), as I can see it, would be to posit *metaphysical anthropocentrism*; the thesis that reality itself is carved out roughly along the lines that human beings carve it. If metaphysical anthropocentrism is true, then most of the objects we deem to be primary would be primary, and most objects we deem to be secondary would be secondary. (Note that metaphysical anthropocentrism does not entail that human beings are metaphysically *privileged* in any way; it could be that the order of the world just *happens* to coincide with the way we order things, or that the furniture of the world has been adapted to fit our schemes by a being vastly more metaphysically privileged than us. We will investigate these two possibilities in the coming part).

Another way to phrase this view, close to Putnam's formulation, is that metaphysical realism requires that human beings potentially enjoy a God's eye point of view. Obviously, we *are* not omniscient, and we could in fact be radically wrong about everything, but we are *actually* set in a position so as to know a great deal about the objects of reality. This is why Putnam proclaims that the God's Eye point of view is the favourite point of view for the metaphysical realist. Otherwise, there is simply no way of fixing the "noetic ray" without at the same time allowing for extreme skepticism.

### III. Metaphysical Realism with a Human Face?

Metaphysical realists must therefore be metaphysical anthropocentrists. In what follows, I argue that it is impossible to square metaphysical anthropocentrism with naturalism<sup>10</sup> and very easy to square it with some kind of monotheism. Therefore, unless a better alternative can be presented, which is doubtful, the metaphysical realist must ontologically commit to God.

<sup>10</sup> I will define *naturalism* as the thesis that there are no supernatural entities.

If our best scientific theories are correct, human beings have existed for about 200.000 years in a universe that came about 13.8 billion years ago. Further, human beings inhabit an extremely small slice of the universe, and could very well be but one member of a large set of intelligent species. Therefore, a naturalistic explanation of metaphysical anthropocentrism could not posit that the universe *itself* is carved in a way that fits human conceptual schemes; that would simply be absurd.

Instead, the naturalistic account must be that human beings have *evolved* to carve their conception of reality in line with reality itself, thereby answering (i). The problem here, however, is that human beings primarily have evolved to survive and reproduce. Thus, it simply does *not* matter whether one derives nourishment from a gavagai or a havagai or a rabbit, for as Quine has shown, these hypotheses are empirically indistinguishable (and thus, physically indistinguishable). For the same reason, we could not postulate a multiverse, where human beings, due to the anthropic principle, come to exist in a universe fine-tuned to our conceptual schemes. *Ceteris Paribus*, a universe inhabited by gavagais and havagais and a universe inhabited by rabbits are empirically indistinguishable. Therefore, human observers have the exact same observation-conditions in both, but only in one world would they carve reality as it is (assuming that they carve reality either along rabbit-lines or gavagai and havagai-lines). Hence, we lack evolutionary reason to think that our conceptual schemes match reality.

Moreover, we have positive reasons to think that they should *not* match reality on evolutionary grounds. In his recent work *The Case Against Reality*, MIT cognitive scientist Donald Hoffman presents and describes the *Fitness-Beats-Truth* theorem (FTB Theorem) in evolutionary game theory, according to which evolutionary strategies maximising fitness at the expense of correct representation always beat strategies accurately depicting reality. The conclusion is that any given perception almost certainly is non-veridical:

Darwin's idea of natural selection entails the FBT Theorem, which in turn entails that the lexicon of our perceptions – including space, time, shape, hue, saturation, brightness, texture, taste, sound, smell, and motion – cannot describe reality as it is when no one looks. It's not simply that this or that perception is wrong. It's that none of our perceptions, being couched in this language, could possibly be right.<sup>11</sup>

Hoffman's conclusions are by no means uncontroversial, and evolutionary game theory is a young and emerging field. But I suspect that the FBT theo-

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<sup>11</sup> Donald D. Hoffman, *The Case Against Reality: How Evolution Hid the Truth from our Eyes* (London: Allen Lane, 2019), 125.



rem points us in the right direction when constructing an evolutionary epistemology for metaphysics. If we have evolved primarily for survival, we have reason to believe that our faculties do *not* mirror how reality carves at the joints, as the cost of getting metaphysics correct outweighs any benefit associated with it.

Hence, naturalism seems like a no-go for an explanation of metaphysical anthropocentrism. Instead, it looks like the metaphysical realist needs something along the lines of the Christian view, on which God creates the world in an orderly fashion so that human beings, by virtue of their reason, can come to know this order. As *John* 1:1 states: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" – and *Genesis* 1:27: "God created mankind in his own image." St. Augustine interprets these passages as God taking unformed matter (nothing), molding it into determinate objects (almost nothing) subordinated the Forms, so that human beings can interact with them:

For thou, O Lord, hadst made the world out of unformed matter, and this thou didst make out of nothing and didst make it into almost nothing. From it thou hast then made these great things which we, the sons of men, marvel at.<sup>12</sup>

If something like St. Augustine's picture is right, metaphysical anthropocentrism has an explanation. The answer to (i) is that God carved out the world in a way that roughly corresponds to how human beings come to carve it, because God has a special relationship with us. This does not mean that we know absolutely everything about the nature of reality, for we are limited beings prone to epistemic error, and we can only get a grasp of The Good and other privileged universals through their instantiations in discrete particulars we meet in our sensory world. Nevertheless, it suffices to preclude BIV-cases from holding in the actual world. And fortunately so, for such cases would reduce metaphysical realism to ultimate absurdity, as Putnam rightly pointed out.

The contours of this theistic answer to Putnam's critique of metaphysical realism were already sketched by Plantinga in 1988:

You might be inclined to accept (1) the Putnamian proposition that we do know that we are not brains in a vat, (2) the anti-Putnamian claim that metaphysical realism is true and antirealism a mere Kantian galimatias, and (3) the quasi-Putnamian proposi-

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<sup>12</sup> Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, trans. Albert C. Outler (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 12:6; 209-10.

tion that if metaphysical realism is true and there is no such person God who has created us and our world, adapting the former to the latter, then we would not know that we are not brains in a vat; if so, then you have a theistic argument.<sup>13</sup>

To my knowledge, no one has developed Plantinga's argument in any detail except Daniel Bonevac,<sup>14</sup> who renders it deeply implausible. Because meaning needs to be grounded in a "supernatural, infinite, eternal, necessary, objective, normative, and independent causal power," and only God has these properties, we need to be ontologically committed to God; "if there were no God, there would be no meaning," Bonevac concludes.<sup>15</sup> This is an interesting argument, but the present issue is not whether there are meanings, but *which* meanings our expressions carry. Even if we grant that God grounds meanings, how does He know which one to assign a given expression? If there is some fact in reality to settle it, which only God knows, then He is clearly not needed. If there is *no* such fact, and God does guesswork, then the account clearly relies on magic. Here, Bonevac<sup>16</sup> bites the bullet: "Any account of semantic capacities must at some point resort to magic. And the best explanation we have for that magic involves God." It confounds me how any magical phenomena could have a *best explanation*. Does it then not seize to be magical? I think we ought to reject magic and Bonevac's argument with it. An anthropocentric world is to be postulated precisely because it is the only world in which a metaphysically realist theory of reference does *not* need to rely on it.

Might there be non-monotheistic rivals that explain metaphysical anthropocentrism? I doubt it. Atheistic explanations within a naturalistic framework would fail for the reasons outlined above. Hence, they might postulate 'non-theistic' *supernatural* forces/entities that carve reality and/or set human beings in a relation to know it. But this is obviously at the expense of moving too close to the God-idea; the account becomes one of theology rather than atheology, thus undercutting itself. Hence, we are left with monotheism or polytheism. However, the dilemma for polytheisms is that we either must postulate alternate realities carved by different gods, in which case we have an unacceptable relativism, or find ourselves governed by a plethora of ex-

<sup>13</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "Appendix: Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments," in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. Deane-Peter Baker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 203-228.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Bonevac, "(N) The Putnamian Argument, (O) The Argument from Reference, and (P) The Kripke-Wittgenstein Argument from Plus and Quus," in *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God*, eds. Jerry L. Walls, and Trent Dougherty, 214-234 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

planatorily superfluous demi-gods that do not carve reality at its joints.<sup>17</sup> In neither case are we able to explain the comprehensibility of reality – indeed, that very notion finds its genealogical roots in monotheism:

Modern science, from the time of Newton, and the founding of the Royal Society in London in 1660, assumes the existence of one world that reason could investigate. That stemmed from a theistic belief in the one God who had created it. Their belief that one mind permeated the universe gave early scientists in the modern age the confidence to assume that there was one rational structure built into the nature of things, and that one Reason had produced it. The fact they believed that humans were made in the image of the one God also gave them assurance that human rationality had the capability of unlocking, at least in part, the secrets of the physical universe. This gave answers to the question of why the physical world should behave a uniform way and why should it be accessible to human rationality.<sup>18</sup>

We conclude that metaphysical anthropocentrism relies on monotheism. Whether this monotheism conforms to any one of the multitudinous interpretations of Islam, Judaism, Deism or Christianity, however, is by no means settled. Such a fact, if we will ever come to know it, could only be established by work in philosophy and theology.

To summarise the argumentation thus forth. Part I stated that metaphysical realism needs a noetic-ray theory of reference, and that a noetic-ray theory of reference needs a theory of reference-fixation. Part II argued that the noetic-ray can be fixed only if the world has elite objects or contains few objects, and that both the eliteness-theory and the few-objects-solution require metaphysical anthropocentrism in order to avoid extreme scepticism. In this part, we stated that monotheism is the best, and probably the only, explanation for metaphysical anthropocentrism. Thus, the metaphysical realist must ontologically commit to God. No God, no God's eye.

#### IV. Interlude

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<sup>17</sup> For example, pose that there is a set of gods who carve the world in different ways. If all gods are correct in their carvings, the world will fundamentally be in many different, contradictory ways, and an incoherent sort of relativism holds. So we might then privilege one scheme of description imposed on 'prime matter' by one god (or several gods who agree in their carving of it). But then it is unclear why we, equipped with Ockham's Razor, should believe in more than one God.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Trigg, *Monotheism and Religious Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 15.

Before we move on, however, we must attend to Putnam's *Just-More-Theory manouvre* against metaphysically realist theories of reference-fixation. Model Theory shows that there are indefinite ways to make a theory true (and false). For example, the Löwenheim-Skolem Theorem can be used to show that one can make true all sentences in a physical theory by interpreting them as propositions about the natural numbers. Putnam has an informal proof in the Appendix of *Reason, Truth and History* showing that in all possible worlds "the cherry is in the tree" has the same truth conditions as "the cherry\* is in the tree\*," where 'cherry\*' sometimes refers to cherries and sometimes to cats, and 'tree\*' sometimes refers to trees and sometimes to mats. Thus, reference seems inscrutable, at least in relation to mere alethic considerations.

At this point, we might say (as we already have) that these problems are solved in a reality ordered by God, where queer entities like trees\* and cherries\* either aren't elite or do not exist, and interaction and/or magnetism fixes reference. The problem that Putnam raises, however, is that "Interaction and/or magnetism fixes reference in a reality ordered by God" is itself formulated in a language subject to permutation. Perhaps that very sentence is just stating a truth about natural numbers or cherries: there would be no empirically available way to know. And of course, we cannot stipulate that it refers to what we think it does, since this would just be to add *just more theory*, which in turn can be permuted.

Here, Button distinguishes two sorts of epistemic worries: Cartesian angst and Kantian angst.<sup>19</sup> Cartesian angst is the worry that we might have radically false beliefs about the things our statements refer to. Kantian angst is the worry that we might have radically false beliefs about *what* our statements refer to. But Kantian angst is literally an impossible situation to be in. If the worry is legitimate, one couldn't even describe it, as 'Kantian angst' might well refer to cherries or natural numbers. As there is no way of knowing whether one's theory of reference is right on metaphysical realism, and this warrants Kantian angst, which is incoherent, Button concludes that metaphysical realism itself is epistemically incoherent and ought to be discarded.

The way out of this is simple. The metaphysical realist should agree that we ought not believe in a philosophical position warranting Kantian Angst, because that would be epistemically incoherent. But she should affirm, in a Moorean fashion, that we ought to believe in Metaphysical Realism, because it is true. Therefore, Metaphysical Realism does not warrant Kantian angst – we could not be wholly deluded about the meaning and reference of our words, for that would make it impossible to rationally hold our position. This response, however, will require us to demonstrate the truth of metaphysical realism, and to that we attend in the following part.

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<sup>19</sup> Button, 60.

## V. Metaphysical Realism is True

I sense an incredulous stare. If we agree that God is what it takes to save metaphysical realism, why espouse it at all? It is sometimes said that one person's *modus ponens* is another person's *modus tollens*, so why not run with the following argument:

1. If metaphysical realism is true, then God exists.
2. God does not exist / 'God exists' is meaningless and thus not true.
3. Therefore, metaphysical realism is not true.

However, is such a *modus tollens* argument possible here? Recall the three theses of metaphysical realism. Independence states that the world is (largely) made up of objects that are mind-, language-, and theory-independent. Correspondence reads that truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things, and the Cartesianism Principle is that even an ideal theory might be radically false. If we give up metaphysical realism, these theses would have to go,<sup>20</sup> and without them, what Putnam calls the *internalist perspective* would reign.<sup>21</sup> But I shall argue that this perspective is a philosophical impossibility. Therefore, metaphysical realism is true.

According to the internalist perspective,

there is no God's Eye point of view that we can know or usefully imagine; there are only the various points of view of ac-

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<sup>20</sup> Citing De Morgan, the anti-metaphysical realist could jettison only one of these principles. But any such position would be absurd. Consider *correspondence* and *independence*. Either one is left with a determinate set of mind-independent objects one cannot talk about (reject independence, keep correspondence), or one has to talk about a determinate set of mind-independent objects that do not exist (keep correspondence, reject independence). Consequently, one has to get rid of both if one is to get rid of one. Further, the Cartesianism Principle is equivalent to independence and correspondence. If one rejects correspondence and independence, then truth must be identified with some kind of coherence theory/ideal rational acceptability, in which case the Cartesianism Principle is false, and if one affirms correspondence and independence, then our statements and beliefs correspond to mind-independent reality and could be radically false.

<sup>21</sup> Like Putnam, I will assume a dichotomy between metaphysical realism and the internalist perspective. Button argues for a third position in between, but it is unclear what it exactly amounts to (see Button, 221). Further, his main reason for rejecting metaphysical realism is his disdain for magical theories of reference, but there is no reason to think that a metaphysically realist theory of reference needs magic if God exists. Hence, I will not entertain this third position in the current context.

tual persons reflecting various interests and purposes that their descriptions and theories subserve ('Coherence theory of truth;' 'Non-realism;' 'Verificationism;' 'Pluralism;' 'Pragmatism;' are all terms that have been applied to the internalist perspective...').<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the internalist rejects Independence, as the structure of the world is not something "out there" for us to discover, Correspondence, as truth must be identified with some kind of ideal rational acceptability/coherence, and the Cartesianism Principle, as we cannot be deluded about everything.

However, if we jettison these principles, it clearly seems impossible to *assert* that the internalist perspective is true. In doing so, the internalist is either stating a truth immanent to her own conceptual scheme, in which case she is making no more than a testimony of her own ideology, or talking about ultimate reality, in which case she is taking on God's point of view. In the first case, one seems to lack any reason to listen, and in the second case, one is no longer talking to an internalist.

Here, we could argue that it is fully intelligible to assert internalism without having to take on God's point of view, deflating the strong requirements for assertion assumed above. Richard Rorty offers Wittgenstein and Heidegger as examples of good role models here:

This is an awkward, but not impossible, position. Wittgenstein and Heidegger manage it fairly well. One reason they manage it as well as they do is that they do not think that when we say something we must necessarily be expressing a view about a subject. We might just be saying something – participating in a conversation rather than contributing to an inquiry. Perhaps saying things is not always saying how things are. Perhaps saying that is itself not a case of saying how things are. Both men suggest we see people as saying things, better or worse things, without seeing them as externalizing inner representations of reality.<sup>23</sup>

As I can see it, however, Rorty's proposal is genuinely unintelligible. In order to say something of philosophical value, one *must* say how things are: I cannot say that "reality is nothing but a linguistic construction, but not *actually*." You cannot even criticise the content of this paragraph unless you think that it *actually* fails to capture something about the nature of assertion. "Just saying something," in the Rortyan sense, is incoherent. The internalist *must*

<sup>22</sup> Putnam, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 385.

take on God's point of view in order to assert or even think that internalism is true.

But perhaps the internalist does not *need* to do so; perhaps she could just start phrasing herself in new, interesting and fruitful replacements of earlier, metaphysically realist frameworks without explicitly stating that internalism is true. This is the general strategy of internalist philosophers like Carnap, Wittgenstein, Quine, Rorty, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida. Philosophy, conceived as a *Mirror of Nature*, is simply set aside, and internalistic languages that promote theoretical and/or practical aims are adopted.

This project, however, must rely on some kind of normative framework. It forces us to ask the question why we *ought* to choose any one language over any other – in particular, why we *ought* to choose an internalist language over a metaphysically realist one (say, Sider's *ontologese*). Here, Putnam seeks to ground the answer to such value questions in an account of human cognitive flourishing:

Bereft of the old realist idea of truth as 'correspondence' and of the positivist idea of justification as fixed by public 'criteria,' we are left with the necessity of seeing our search for better conceptions of rationality as an intentional human activity, which, like every activity that rises above habit and the mere following of inclination or obsession, is guided by our idea of the good.<sup>24</sup>

We *ought* to reject metaphysically realist languages, then, because pluralism and diversity – sought to be reduced/removed by the metaphysical realist – "is part of the ideal" of human cognitive flourishing.<sup>25</sup>

The problem for this strategy, however, is that there is significant disagreement as to what the ideal of human flourishing is and how it relates to the idea of the good. Plato would disagree that conceptual pluralism or diversity is good, yet part of the idea of human flourishing, and so would other metaphysical realists in his footnotes. However, it is hard to see how there could be non-verbal, fundamental disputes about these issues if metaphysical realism is false. Arguing which definition of 'good' or 'human flourishing' is right would be like arguing with a BIV about the definition of 'brain;' in the best scenario, we would mutually give true analyses of 'brain,' 'human flourishing' or 'good,' in our respective languages, but we would not disagree.

This incommensurability of normative ideals is explored in Eklund's *Choosing Normative Concepts*, which lets us imagine a *Moral Twin Earth*, where *bad guys* use a concept <ought\*>, such that bad things, according to

<sup>24</sup> Putnam, 137.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 148.

our moral concepts, ought\* to be done (and we use a concept <ought>, such that bad\* things, according to the *bad guys*' concepts, ought to be done).<sup>26</sup> If there is no *privileged* concept corresponding to 'ought,' and thus no privileged concept of the good, both parties can state seemingly incompatible truths using different nearby concepts, and there could be no real dispute. And of course, we could not spell out the disagreement with a notion of conceptual privilege or correctness relying on normative concepts (say, by the view that the fundamental dispute concerns what concepts we *ought* to use), since that would be to rely on the very concepts we are trying to choose. It seems that it is only if there is a joint-carving, *elite* concept of the good – such as a platonic form of the good – that we could even hope to account for non-verbal debates about matters of the good. In that case, we would utter incompatible statements about *one* form of the good instead of uttering compatible statements true internally to our various normative concepts. But to posit that the world itself privileges certain normative concepts over others, say, through a platonic realm of forms that we can collectively describe, necessitates the truth of metaphysical realism and the rejection of the internalist perspective, and is thus not an admissible option for the internalist.

To get around platonism (or any other metaphysics on which there is a privileged notion related to 'good' or 'human flourishing'), the only way out for the internalist seems to be to concede that disputes about theory-choice will ultimately be merely verbal, but to deny the importance of this fact. This line is taken by Thomasson, who argues that philosophical disputes are really forms of "meta-linguistic negotiation." This sort of negotiation is to be understood in the realm of "pragmatics – the ways in which speakers use these utterances to reinforce or alter the norms for using the terms in question,"<sup>27</sup> rather than the realm of semantics, evading the necessity of some privileged platonic form supplying diverging concepts with a common referent. In linguistic negotiation, participants have the goal of influencing each other to adopt certain ontological vocabularies, rather than stating truths using privileged concepts. And there is something very plausible with Thomasson's proposal: it is not as if we would lay down flat if *bad guys* came to earth to declare that they ought\* to eat us, just because 'earthlings ought\* to be eaten' comes out true. A dispute about whether we ought (or ought\*) to be eaten seems to persist even if the referents of these concepts do not coincide: therefore, a correct account of disagreement does not need to suppose that they do.

<sup>26</sup> Matti Eklund, *Choosing Normative Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 26.

<sup>27</sup> Amie Thomasson, "Metaphysical Disputes and Metalinguistic Negotiation," *Analytic Philosophy* 58, no. 1 (2017): 13.



However, the consequences of this account of disagreement for the pursuit of philosophy ought not be underestimated. On this picture, there cannot be any meaningful distinction between persuasion and argumentation, since arguments exist to reinforce or alter behaviour rather than guide us towards the truth. Taken to its logical conclusion, Thomasson's pragmatic theory of disagreement means that discursive (or non-discursive) *violence* is the only arbiter in questions of ontology, since one's success in meta-linguistic negotiation is directly proportional to the effectiveness of one's methods of rhetorical manipulation. It might be the case that the most *instrumental* way for me to get someone to stop using the concept C is to speak kindly to them (because people are more amenable to act or speak differently if they do not feel forced to do so), but there is no *principled* distinction between (what on the surface looks like) peaceful discussion and outright violence. This violent element latent in pragmatism was effectively brought to light by Russell in his infamous criticism of James' theory of truth, but his observations apply equally well here:

If there is a non-human truth, which one man may know, while another does not, there is a standard outside the disputants, to which, we may urge, the dispute ought to be submitted. If, on the contrary, the only way of discovering which of the disputants is in the right is to wait and see which of them is successful, there is no longer any principle except force by which the issue can be decided.<sup>28</sup>

Let us then negotiate. I do not think that it is useful or good to adopt this concept of disagreement, because I think the violence it entails should be rejected on moral grounds. Thus, I wish to influence the reader to let go of the pragmatic account of disagreement that Thomasson is proposing, and I hope that some of the considerations lifted above help in doing so. Since a non-pragmatic account of disagreement could not even begin to account for normative disputes on internal realism (given Eklund's Moral Twin Earth-considerations), and since Putnam is correct in viewing normative disputes as fundamental to ontology once both metaphysical realism and positivism is given up, we thus stand without a good theory of what it would even mean for the internalist to disagree with the metaphysical realist if we accept internalism. They cannot say that internalism is true of the world *as such*, because then they would no longer be internalists. Neither can they say that internalism *ought* to be adopted without either begging the question against metaphysically realist normative concepts (understood semantically), or practicing a sort of linguistic violence

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<sup>28</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Philosophical Essays* (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1910), 126.

(understood pragmatically) that we ought to reject. In neither case do we have reason to listen to what the internalists are saying.

Thus, I think we *ought* to reject internalism even *if* it is true (whatever that would mean), because it is an impracticable doctrine that is not even assertible: and I can further see no non-equivocal counterargument to this normative thesis that does not assume the truth of metaphysical realism, because of its assuming there to be a common idea of the good that we are attempting to analyse, or some normative fact of the matter that we are trying to mirror. As pragmatic considerations really are the only standards by which to adjudicate disputes about theory-choice if we get rid of metaphysical realism, metaphysical realism is to be accepted even if it turns out to be factually incorrect (whatever that would mean). Thus, internalism is incoherent, and metaphysical realism is true.

I admit that this will hardly be convincing to someone not impressed by pragmatic modes of reasoning in metaphysics; indeed, it probably only clarifies the absurdity inherent in the whole pragmatist project. Thankfully, however, metaphysical realism is not ultimately to be adopted on practical grounds – surprisingly, it is true by the very argumentative scheme Putnam used against it. We have seen that internalists cannot coherently *assert* or externalise their “inner representations of reality” without ceasing to be internalists – indeed, that there is no coherent way they can formulate their position. Hence, we note that their situation is identical to that of a brain-in-a-vat: as the BIV, bereft a noetic ray, cannot be located in a vat if it understands it is in one, so the philosopher cannot be located in a sort of internal reality if she can form the belief that she is. *Internal realism takes possible brains out of vats only by putting philosophers’ brains back in them.* But we have a sound argument against being a BIV if internalism is true, formulated by Putnam himself. We proceed to use it to prove metaphysical realism and the falsity of the internalist perspective:

P1\*. If the internalist perspective holds, I cannot assert/form the thought that it is true.

P2\*. I *can* assert/form the thought that the internalist perspective is true.

C1\*. Therefore, the internalist perspective is false.

P3\*. If the internalist perspective is false, then metaphysical realism is true.

C\*. Therefore, metaphysical realism is true.

We conclude that metaphysical realism is true. But as we have seen, metaphysical realism is an intelligible position only if some kind of monotheism holds. Therefore, God exists.

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