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Putnam, Wittgenstein, and the Intelligibility of Metaphysical Realism

The purpose of this paper is six fold. We will endeavor to show: 1) The exact nature of Putnam's views on conceptual relativity. 2) The way in which conceptual relativity is supposed to show *not the falsity but the unintelligibility* of metaphysical realism. 3) Why conceptual relativity shows neither the unintelligibility nor the falsity of metaphysical realism. 4) That on a reading of Wittgenstein's notion of the autonomy of language the representational realism/antirealism distinction is unintelligible (empty)—and it is this latter distinction which is at the heart of the metaphysical realism/antirealism distinction. 5) That the latter emptiness has important but limited ontological implications. And 6) the reading of the autonomy of language given here is importantly different from Carnap's views on linguistic frameworks and internal/external questions.

Let's begin by formulating a number of ontological positions. We will then formulate a number of questions about their relationships before moving on to a critique of Putnam's views on conceptual relativity and their relationship to what he calls *metaphysical realism*. The first set of positions are the pair that I will call *representational realism* and *antirealism*. The realism in question here does not concern the existence of this or that (God or universals), nor does it need to involve the question of truth as correspondence, nor does it concern idealism. As the name suggests, it concerns whether or not that which exists is *even in part constituted by our representations of it*. For example, one might think that snow is snow independently of anyone's representing it as such, i.e., independently of anyone's beliefs about it *being snow*.[1]

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[1] I am indebted to the discussion of realism and antirealism in Fumerton 2002, 6ff., and Alston 2001, 8ff. A key difference is that Fumerton emphasizes a connection between what I am calling "representational realism" and truth, and he therefore talks about *alethic realism*. And Alston talks about it as *metaphysical realism*. Where Fumerton holds that all that exists is representation-independent, Alston allows that some aspects of reality may be representation-dependent, namely, those concerning whether a statue is a different object than the stuff of which it consists and the issue of whether "enduring objects" have temporal as well as spatial parts, among others (Alston 2001, 41ff.). He also includes Putnam's mereological sums example of conceptual relativity.

Further, I take it that the claim that certain "parts" of reality are socially constructed (see, e.g., Searle1995 for his influential ideas on the "construction of social reality") does not go against representational realism. Searle, for example, distinguishes between language dependent and language independent thoughts. By "thoughts" he also means such things as beliefs, inclinations, and cognitions. He takes hunger and a dog's belief that a cat is up a tree to be language independent and the thought "'The water is a marvelous blue' is an English sentence" to be language dependent (61-62). In terms of facts, it is sufficient for a fact to be language dependent if two conditions are met: first, the fact is at least partially constituted by "mental representation," for example, thoughts, and, second, those mental representations are language dependent. (Searle 1995, 62). But while representations and intentional states may go into making money what it is, a token of money isn't partially constituted by a representation of it as "money" in the way that x, y, and z's amounting to seven objects is dependent upon being represented as such by choosing the mereological sums notion of object to represent them—more on this below.

Representational Realism (RR): No X is even in part constituted by a representation of X as "X."

Representational Antirealism (RA): At least some X are (at least) in part constituted by a representation of X as "X."

What sort of position is representational antirealism? A paradigmatic example would be what Putnam identifies as the phenomenon of conceptual relativity.[2] His primary example of the phenomenon concerns the number of objects given the existence of *n* simples. If there are three simples, *x*, *y*, and *z*, then there are at least two possible ways of counting truly. The character Putnam calls the Carnapian counts three, namely, *x*, *y*, and *z*. The character Putnam calls the Polish Logician and who countenances (unrestricted) mereological sums (i.e., universalism) counts seven, namely, *x*, *y*, *z*, *x+y*, *x+z*, *y+z*, and *x+y+z*. While the Carnapian and Polish Logician take themselves to be contradicting each other, they're not. According to Putnam, while "exists" (including the existential quantifier) and "object" have a kind of core meaning that remains the same, that meaning allows for different uses and thus different senses. These different senses amount to different "optional languages." In this way, Putnam claims the Carnapian and Polish Logician are neither talking past one another nor are they contradicting each other. Nevertheless, the two different descriptions (representations) cannot be simply conjoined into a single description of the "facts." The upshot is supposed to be that independently of a choice of optional language, there is no fact of the matter as to how many objects there are given *n* simples (or other non-simple objects). Let us formulate conceptual relativity as:

Conceptual Relativity (CR): There can be multiple true but non-conjoinable descriptions of the "same" state of affairs such that there is no fact of the matter as to the state of affairs independently of a choice of description.

Putnam sees conceptual relativity as showing at least three things. First, it undermines what he refers to as metaphysical realism.

Metaphysical Realism (MR): reality consists of a fixed totality of mind-independent [better: representation-independent] objects that admit of only one true and complete description, and truth is correspondence between language and representation-independent reality.[3]

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[2] See Putnam 2004, chapter 2, for a recent and representative description and defense of conceptual relativity. What follows on conceptual relativity can be found there.

[3] This formulation can be found in Putnam 1981, 49. In a recent attempt to clarify what exactly he has meant by "metaphysical realism" Putnam writes:

As I explained "metaphysical realism" (Putnam 1990a) what it came to was precisely the denial of conceptual relativity. My "metaphysical realist" believed that a given thing or system of things can be described in exactly one way, if the description is complete and correct, and that way is supposed to fix exactly one "ontology" and one "ideology" in Quine's sense of those words, that is, exactly one domain of individuals and one domain of predicates of those individuals. Thus it cannot be a matter of convention, as I have argued that it is, whether there are such individuals as mereological sums; either the "true" ontology includes mereological sums or it doesn't. And it

Putnam sees conceptual relativity as undermining metaphysical realism. But it is also undermines representational realism, which we can call the heart of MR, and is an example of representational antirealism. It is an example of the latter because x, y, and z, constitute three or seven objects depending on how they are represented, which optional language is chosen to describe them.

The second thing conceptual relativity is supposed to show is that existence is not univocal. The existential quantifier has not a single, fixed meaning or use.[4] Eli Hirsch holds a position that is similar to Putnam's conceptual relativity and which he calls "Quantifier Variance"[5] We will appropriate the label but use it to mean something simpler than Hirsch's more robust version.

> *Quantifier Variance* (QV): *Existence* is not univocal. Things do not exist in only "one way." The existential quantifier does not have a single, fixed meaning.[6]

Putnam makes clear that while conceptual relativity involves quantifier variance, he thinks the latter occurs independently of conceptual relativity.[7]

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cannot be a matter of convention, as I have argued that it is, whether spacetime points are individuals or mere limits, etc., etc. (Putnam 2012, 62).

[4] In a telling endnote, Putnam writes:

My objection to "Quine's criterion of ontological commitment," as this view is called, is that ontological commitment – "commitment to the existence of a kind of object" – only seems to be a determinate sort of "commitment" because it is assumed that *exist* is *univocal*: assumed, that is, that I am saying the same sort of thing when I say that the brick houses on Elm Street exist and when I say that prime numbers greater than a million exist, notwithstanding the enormous difference between the uses of words (in the case of this example, between the use of words in empirical description and in mathematics). Of course, it would be wrong to register that difference by saying, flat-footedly, that *exist* has several different meanings, in the sense of deserving several different dictionary entries. But the assumption that the meaning of words, in any conventional sense of that phrase, determines exactly what is *said* on each occasion of the use of the words reflects a picture of how language functions that I would argue is deeply misguided. (Quine would of course agree with this last remark – which makes it all the more puzzling that he is gripped by the picture of *exists* as univocal!) I think it is helpful to distinguish, in this context, between the "sense" of a word and its "meaning." (Putnam 1999, 179 endnote 12.)

[5] See, for example, Hirsch 2008.
[6] See McDaniel 2009, Van Inwagen 2009, Sider 2009, and Hirsch 2008 and 2009 for important discussions of different aspects of quantifier variance, not all of which will line up with our use of the term.
[7] Looking at some natural languages, we can see that they: "…sometimes quantify over 'objects' which are unique to those languages. In this way, they illustrate the possibility which we have seen to be demonstrated by conceptual relativity, the possibility of different *extensions* of our ordinary notions of *object* and *existence*." (Putnam 2004, 49.) Quantifying over objects "unique to those languages" is not an example of conceptual relativity. Others, e.g., McDaniel 2009 would agree that quantifier variance occurs outside of the context of conceptual relativity.

The third thing that conceptual relativity purportedly shows is that because it is a matter of convention whether we choose, e.g., to speak like the Carnapian or Polish Logician—we are not forced by reality or anything else to speak one way or the other—the question, "How many objects are there *really*?" is "silly" and is a pseudo-question. This is a deflationary position on ontology.

> *Ontological Deflationism* (OD): There is something non-genuine about (certain) ontological debates.[8]

An important question regarding conceptual relativity and ontological deflationism is: what is the scope of the deflationism associated with conceptual relativity? The two examples that Putnam gives of conceptual relativity concern the number and kind of objects and the nature of spacetime points. So, if Putnam is right that there is something non-genuine about debates concerning them, then that would presumably imply that other debates that hinge on those entities may well also be non-genuine.

Moving forward with our round up of the positions in the vicinity of representational realism, the Carnapian and Polish Logician can be seen as involved in a debate about the correct answer to what Van Inwagen has called the special composition question. Markosian formulates it as follows:

> *The Special Composition Question* (SCQ): "What necessary and jointly sufficient conditions must any xs satisfy in order for it to be the case that there is an object composed of those xs?"[9]

The three main responses to this question are:

> *Universalism* (U): There are no restrictions on mereological sums: any xs compose a further object y.[10]

> *Nihilism* (N): No xs compose a further object y. The only objects that exist are simples.

> *Restricted Composition* (RC): Only some xs compose a further object y.

There is a wide range of positions that restrict composition.[11]

The purpose of explicitly formulating all of these positions is threefold. First, to clarify their relationships with one another in order to bring out the problems that Putnam thinks hold for metaphysical realism. Second, to help clarify what is wrong with Putnam's understanding of conceptual relativity and its implications. Third, to be as clear as possible on what I will claim follows for metaphysical and representational realism/antirealism given an interpretation of what Wittgenstein calls the *autonomy of language*.

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[8] See, for example, Sider 2009, Bennett 2009, and Eklund 2008 for discussions of deflationist positions in ontology.
[9] Markosian 2008, 342.
[10] Principles of mereology such as *uniqueness* would preclude $x+y$ and $x+z$ forming a further object $(x+y)+(x+z)$; hence, the Polish Logician says there are seven objects and not an infinite number.
[11] See Markosian 2008 for a good discussion of them.

According to Putnam, conceptual relativity shows the unintelligibility of metaphysical realism. Does showing the latter is unintelligible suffice for showing the unintelligibility of representational realism, since representational realism is at the core of metaphysical realism? What is special about conceptual relativity that it is supposed to imply the unintelligibility of metaphysical realism in a way that universalism and quantifier variance by themselves or even together do not? In addressing these questions, it will be helpful to look at the relations of implication between conceptual relativity, universalism, quantifier variance, and representational and metaphysical realism. Quantifier variance neither implies nor is implied by universalism. There being various senses of existence does not imply that unrestricted mereological sums exist. However, conceptual relativity implies quantifier variance and that universalism is *one* legitimate means of describing the world. But neither quantifier variance nor universalism imply conceptual relativity, since the key to conceptual relativity is non-conjoinability of the descriptions into a single *and* complete description. But what is it about the denial of a single *and* complete description that is supposed to pose problems for metaphysical realism? Let's look at various possible ways of there failing to either be a single description or a complete description. Here are the main *possibilities*:

a) Non-conjoinable descriptions rule out there being a single true and complete description. This is what is supposed to be going on in conceptual relativity. The problem for metaphysical realism is that it is supposed to imply that there is no fact of the matter independent of a choice of descriptions, since there are multiple true descriptions of the "same" state of affairs neither of which leaves anything out. Hence, conceptual relativity being an example of representational antirealism.
b) A conjunction of infinite descriptions would not be completable. But this poses no problem for either representational or metaphysical realism.
c) Language and concepts are always extendable (another kind of infinite) and thus the description would not be completable. Again no problem for either representational or metaphysical realism.
d) The description would be finite but still too large to complete even in theoretical practice. Again no problem for either representational or metaphysical realism.
e) It is not possible to determinately count descriptions because the notion of synonymy required is not to be had or is not precise enough. Again no problem for either representational or metaphysical realism.
f) The descriptions contain *dialetheia*, true contradictions. Dialetheia do not count against there being either a single description or a complete description. But they are interesting to consider as a contrast case because they involve seemingly incompatible statements that are nevertheless conjoinable. But they pose no problem for either representational or metaphysical realism, and considering them thereby emphasize the importance of the non-conjoinability of the descriptions involved in purported cases of conceptual relativity.

We can see, then, that the completeness aspect of metaphysical and representational realism's implying a single true and complete description isn't the important part beyond the notion of a complete description indicating the point that nothing is left out. The non-conjoinability gives us the result that even if nothing is left out of true description A, then another possible true description B where nothing is left out implies that we have a choice of true ways of describing the world. And if A and B give us different ontologies, and if A and B are equally useful, etc.,

then it is in an important sense a matter of choice of description (representation) what exists. And we see, too, that the way conceptual relativity goes counter to metaphysical realism it does so by denying representational realism.

Before offering criticisms of Putnam's understanding of conceptual relativity that focus on the issue of non-conjoinable descriptions, let's look at how conceptual relativity is supposed to imply not the falsity of metaphysical realism, but its incoherence. For one might think that it simply implies its falsity, since at its heart is the denial that *everything* is representation-independent.

Putnam's Case for the Unintelligibility of Metaphysical Realism

Putnam claims that the problem with metaphysical realism is not that it is false, but that it is unintelligible.[12] It might be fair to say that we tend to have an impoverished idea of what it means for something to be unintelligible. We are tempted, I think, to understand the notion of unintelligibility in terms of either mere nonsense, "boo grrrr shwng" or something over someone's head, e.g., a ten year old's looking at quantum mechanics. In his recent work Putnam has spent a good deal of effort specifying how views can lack *full* intelligibility.[13] The lack is one of *full* intelligibility because it is not that we do not understand at all what is being said. In what follows, I will drop the "full" and just speak of intelligibility with the understanding that there is a range of ways and degrees that something can be unintelligible. Regarding whether metaphysical realism is supposed to be false or unintelligible, an important assumption seems to be: If P is to be true or false, then P must have a determinate content (determinate sense). Determinate content is a necessary condition for being evaluable as true or false, and, further, being evaluable as true or false is a necessary condition on being intelligible in the relevant sense of a theory/view's being intelligible. So what are the various ways something could fail to have determinate content? Here seem to be the main candidates:[14]

1) A string of words non-grammatically ordered: "crash blue forward grackle Tom."
2) An ambiguous sentence before it is disambiguated: "She refuses to go to the bank out of fear." Before it's disambiguated it is not intelligible in the sense of not being able to evaluate it as true or false.
3) A vague sentence: "This collection of rocks is a heap" said of a collection that is in the middle between collections that are clearly heaps and ones that are clearly not. The missing determinate content and truth value that results from vagueness doesn't seem to pose a problem for intelligibility.

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[12] Putnam 1999, endnote 41, p183. And at least as early as Putnam 1978, he writes, "I have come to the conclusion that [metaphysical realism] is incoherent" cited in Putnam 2012, 54. However, there may very well be important differences between lacking intelligibility and being incoherent. And, as Putnam has explicitly said (Putnam 1999, endnote 41, p183), his reasons for holding the metaphysical realists assumption unintelligible have changed.

[13] See, e.g., Putnam 1999, 98ff. and Putnam 2012, 482ff. He has been much influenced by Wittgenstein, Charles Travis, and Stanley Cavell.

[14] These candidate possibilities are not intended to be uncontentious or problem free.

4) A non-ambiguous, non-vague sentence that depends on a context to make its full content determinate: "There is a lot of coffee on the table."[15] In one context it might mean there are a lot of cups of coffee on the table; in others it could mean there's coffee spilt all over the table or bags of beans or…. Here one might say that there are "too many" possible senses (not meanings) of the sentence.[16] When read/heard out of context, the reader/listener might take it as intelligible by supplying one of the possible contexts in which it could be written/uttered. We thereby feel we understand it, though if the imagined context is the wrong one, then we don't fully understand it. And if one doesn't imagine one of the possible contexts, then it is not fully intelligible, i.e., understandable, what exactly is being said.

5) No context of use for an utterance can be imagined: a) "These people don't have any mental properties, but all their physical properties are the same as if they did and their environments are the same, too."[17] Another example: b) "There is a triangle both of whose base angles are right angles" said in 1700, and said of a triangle with all positive angles and one that is on a plane, not a sphere.[18]

Regarding 5) a), Putnam thinks that it lacks full intelligibility, not that it is completely unintelligible or nonsense. Part of the reason is that he says he understands the *function* that such a sentence might play in a philosophical argument—i.e., trying to argue that either our mental properties are really physical properties or that epiphenomenalism is true.[19] Nevertheless, given the point of saying it in the context of a philosophical argument does not mean that there is an imaginable context in which it would be uttered. There may, however, be some other context in which a similar sentence is uttered. Following an example from Wittgenstein, Putnam says we can imagine the government saying of a people that they have no souls (no mental life—they are mere automata) and thus can be enslaved without compunction.[20] But now the function of the sentence is different. Putnam takes it to be one of propaganda (compare the Nazis claiming the Jews were less than human: vermin). Further, in this propaganda context, it is presumably meant metaphorically or if not, then we must, Putnam would presumably say, invoke a kind of magic to make sense of it.[21] So, the "cannot" here is not a logical or conceptual one, it would seem, but rather, there is no plausible context that can be imagined. Issues here will connect up with 6) and 7) below.

With 5) b), things are similar but importantly different. First, one might think that to claim there is such a triangle is akin to claiming there is a round square. And, indeed, in 1700 that might have been the case. But Putnam's point is that later on a determinate context can be

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[15] One of Putnam's favorite examples of context dependence. Regarding the latter notion: "What [context semantics] denies is that meaning (or the knowledge in question) completely determines what is being said (what is supposed to be true or false, or if anything *is* being said that is true or false) when a sentence is used to make an assertion." (Putnam 1999, 87.) Whether this really is a non-ambiguous sentence could be questioned.

[16] Cf. Wittgenstein 2009, §47. I take it this is a possible reason why the question, "Is the visual image of this tree composite, and what are its component parts?" is rejected. I owe this suggestion to David G. Stern.

[17] Putnam 1999, 73ff.

[18] Putnam 2012, 409ff.

[19] Putnam 1999, 82.

[20] Putnam 1999, 89f.

[21] Cf. Wittgenstein's remark, "But couldn't we imagine God's suddenly giving a parrot reason, and its now saying things to itself?—But here it is important that, in order to arrive at this idea, I had recourse to the notion of a deity" (Wittgenstein 2009, §346).

provided when we bring in non-Euclidean geometry. But without that latter context, it is unintelligible. It seems that prior to the introduction of non-Euclidean geometry, the issue of intelligibility with the triangle example is one of inconsistency. And because the "triangle" in question cannot exist under Euclidean assumptions, there is no way to assign determinate sense to it. This is presumably not what is at issue in the scenario with the automata in 5) a).

However, while determinate content might be a necessary condition for being evaluable as true or false in 1)-5), it is not a sufficient condition for being intelligible. How might this be? Here are two possibilities:

6) The Pope says to Richard Dawkins, "Judgment Day will be glorious." Along Wittgensteinian lines as interpreted by Putnam, Dawkins may well understand the meaning of the words; however, because Dawkins doesn't have such "thoughts or anything that hangs together with them" as the Pope has, the scenario described isn't fully intelligible to Dawkins.[22] Presumably this means that given Dawkins's other beliefs, his worldview, he cannot *fully* make sense of what the world would be like if that statement were true.

7) The point or function of an utterance is unknown *or* lacking, and therefore what is *really* being said is not intelligible. An example of an *unknown* point might be: "There is no time left for the unicorns." On the one hand, the sentence is perfectly intelligible, i.e., understandable. On the other hand one might think that it isn't fully intelligible unless one knows that the children's soccer team named, "The Unicorns," is now out of time to make another goal. An example of there being no point or function to an utterance can be found in Wittgenstein's example: "Imagine someone saying, 'But I know how tall I am!' and laying his hand on top of his head to indicate it!"[23] Importantly, in this latter example, there fails to be a point to the gesture of the hand on the head because such a gesture is empty. It doesn't do anything; it can't begin to do what it is intended to do. Something could achieve the intended point, e.g., measuring the person's marked height on the wall with measuring tape, but the placing of the hand on the head is *pointless* to this end. This is different from the pointlessness of someone saying to a fellow swimmer, "We're swimming." This latter is true but pointless. But both these latter examples might be thought to be unintelligible in the sense of, "I don't know what you possibly could mean to be telling me."[24] In both cases we understand the words but we don't understand what it supposed to be said by them.

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[22] Putnam writes:

> I believe that if Wittgenstein had had the same respect for metaphysics and, more broadly, for other kinds of philosophy than his own, he would have seen that we may find philosophical utterances that have nothing wrong about them *linguistically* less than fully intelligible, precisely because, to use his own words, we "haven't got these thoughts or anything that hangs together with them," and let it go at that without trying to show that those utterances are literally nonsense. (Putnam 2012, 490.)

[23] Wittgenstein 2009, §279.

[24] This follows closely what I take Cavell to mean when he writes:

> What I am suggesting is that "Because it is true" is not a *reason* or basis for saying anything, it does not constitute the point of your saying something; and I am suggesting that there must, in grammar, be reasons for what you say, or be a point in your saying of something, if what you say is to be comprehensible. We can understand what the words mean apart from understanding why

Taking stock, assuming for now the legitimacy of 1-7 above, if the claims of metaphysical realism either fail to have determinate content along the lines of 1-5 or have content but are examples of 6 or 7, then Putnam would be right to say that it is not straightforwardly false but rather not *fully* intelligible. So let us look at metaphysical realism under the lights of conceptual relativity and 1)-7).

Putnam seems to hold that as a denial of conceptual relativity, metaphysical realism is committed to there being a single determinate sense of "object" and "existence" such that we can only describe *x*, *y*, and *z*, in one true and complete way. Counter to this, we are supposed to see in Putnam's way of framing conceptual relativity that the statement, "There are n objects" is like "There is a lot of coffee on the table." It doesn't have a determinate sense outside of particular contexts of use that specify what sense of "are" and "objects" is in play. In this way, part of the unintelligibility of metaphysical realism is that of 4) above. The other part is that metaphysical realism implies that there is a single true and complete description so that the "facts" are what they are independent of a choice of optional languages. Conceptual relativity purportedly shows that this is not the case. Hence the metaphysically realist's claim that there is only one correct way of using, "There are *n* objects," and there is a single true and complete description of the "same" state of affairs is not *fully* intelligible.

There are two main problems with the above line of reasoning to the conclusion that metaphysical realism lacks full intelligibility. The first is that, as we saw earlier, metaphysical realism is not incompatible with quantifier variance. Thus, the realist doesn't have to assume that there is a single, absolute sense of "object" or exist." So, the realist need not ask the question, "How many objects are there?" intending to use some single, absolute sense of "object." And if that was what the unintelligibility depended on, then it is not unintelligible, after all. Is there some other way it could be unintelligible?

Perhaps we might challenge metaphysical realism's intelligibility along the lines of 5): No context of use for the utterance can be imagined. However, "How many objects are there?" and its various possible answers, seem to easily find contexts of use, at least if we are not wrongly intending "object" in some single, fixed sense. For example, "How many objects are there on your desk?" And we can even imagine a context for, "How many objects does the world contain in total?" For example, two people wanting something to bet on conceive of betting on whether there are more or fewer than *n* number of objects in the world. The answer will depend, in part, on what one means by object, of course. What about the question, "How many objects are there in every possible sense of 'object'?" Given what we saw earlier, the metaphysical realist can admit that "object" and "exist" don't have a fixed sense. But all the possible senses must in some way be "implicitly contained" in the world if metaphysical realism is to hold. So, if this notion of "implicitly contained" is viable, then the metaphysical realist can ask, "How many objects are there in every possible sense of 'object'?" There may be no way to answer it, however. But such an inability would presumably undermine neither metaphysical realism, nor representational realism.

As far as I can see, metaphysical realism wouldn't meet any of the other possible senses of unintelligible that we considered above. And it is important that the key kinds of unintelligibility elucidated above were drawn from Putnam's works. Thus, it doesn't appear that Putnam has shown that metaphysical realism is unintelligible. But if he is still correct that there

you say them; but apart from understanding the point of your saying them we cannot understand what *you* mean. (Cavell 1979, 206.)

are non-conjoinable descriptions of the "same" state of affairs, then perhaps he has shown that it is false. So, let us now look at what distinguishes Putnam's conceptual relativity from mere quantifier variance.

Again, it is the purported non-conjoinability of the descriptions involved in the examples of conceptual relativity that is supposed to imply that there is no representation-independent fact of the matter as to how many objects there are. To better see what is at issue here, let us look at Michael Lynch's description of what he calls the consistency dilemma:

> The real problem for pluralism [conceptual relativity] is not the *inconsistency* but the *consistency of schemes*. In other words, given the consistency [between two optional languages/descriptions] A and B that the relativization of fact apparently implies, the pluralist must explain how it is legitimate to talk about *incompatible* but equally true schemes in the first place. Specifically, if A and B are consistent, then either (1) A and B are expressing the same truths in different languages (they are "notational variants") or (2) A and B are simply concerned with different subject matters altogether.[25]

Conceptual relativity is supposed to avoid this dilemma because on Putnam's account "object" does not straightforwardly mean different things such that the Carnapian and the Polish Logician are talking past each other, but neither are they saying the same thing, since the different uses of object are supposed to provide competing but equally true ontologies. But that they are competing ontologies requires that the descriptions be non-conjoinable. Let's look at why they fail to be non-conjoinable in the way that Putnam requires.

Putnam claims that it is not the descriptions themselves that are incompatible, but the conventions constituting their respective optional languages that are incompatible.[26] We should ask, then, in what sense the conventions, or optional languages, can be incompatible with each other. Taking the example concerning the existence of mereological sums, the Carnapian optional language has, "Mereological sums are not objects" as a conventional truth and the Polish Logician has, "Mereological sums are objects" as a conventional truth. These conventional "truths" are certainly inconsistent, since the one denies and the other affirms that mereological sums are objects. This is presumably the way in which Putnam means that the conventions, and thus the *optional languages*, are incompatible. However, if that is right, then the most it restricts us from doing is using the same token of "object" in both senses. That is, you cannot use the same token of the word "object" as the Carnapian uses it and as the Polish Logician uses it. Thus, when presented with x, y, and z, one cannot say, "There are seven objects and I am using 'object' as both the Carnapian and Polish Logician use it," for the way the Carnapian uses "object" there are three objects, not seven.

To fully see the implications of this let's look at an instance of a Carnapian and a Polish Logician arguing about how many objects there are when presented with x, y, and z. According to Putnam, when the Carnapian says, "There are three objects," and the Polish Logician says, "There are seven objects," we cannot simply conjoin the statements. Again, it is not clear at all why not. The most charitable way to interpret their claims is in one of the following two ways:

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[25] Lynch 1998, 29. Lynch spells out the consistency dilemma in process of offering a defense of a view similar to Putnam's own on conceptual relativity. He attempts to give an answer to the dilemma. I do not examine Lynch's views in detail, in part, because I believe they fail for reasons similar to why Putnam's attempt to respond to the consistency dilemma fails.

[26] Again, see Putnam 2004, 40ff.

A) Each intends to be employing *a* legitimate sense of "object" in that context.
Or
B) Each intends to be employing *the only* legitimate sense of "object" in that context.

Putnam takes it that the metaphysical realist can only say B) and that conceptual relativity allows for A) together with the claim that neither sense of "object" is necessary, one could use either or both to correctly describe the state of affairs consisting of x, y, and z. However, the metaphysical realist could easily interpret the example along the lines of A) together with the claim that while they both intend to be employing a legitimate sense of "object," *it is a further question as to whether either or both of them speak the truth*. Importantly, they could both be speaking the truth, and the statements could be conjoined, since "object" has a different sense in each statement. If it is unclear that there are two different uses of "object," then it may sound odd, even downright contradictory, but there is no real logical or "metaphysical" problem in saying, "The Carnapian truthfully described x, y, and z as three objects and the Polish Logician truthfully described x, y, and z as seven objects." There is no problem as long as what is meant by the latter is "The Carnapian truthfully described x, y, and z as three objects$_{non\text{-}merological\ use}$ and the Polish Logician truthfully described x, y, and z as seven objects$_{mereological\ use}$." If this line of criticism is correct, then we are back to the question of *whether it is true* that there are mereological sums of the kind that *any* three individuals would truly be seven objects. A question Putnam has failed to give (good) reasons to answer affirmatively.[27]

Putnam could reply that it is one thing to conjoin their statements as we have done—"There are three objects$_{non\text{-}merological\ use}$ and there are seven objects$_{mereological\ use}$"—but it is something else to add their counts together, which we should be able to do if we can truly conjoin them into a *single* description of *how many objects there are*. And herein lies the problem with conjoining the descriptions. That is, three of the seven objects that the Polish Logician counts are the "same" objects that the Carnapian counts. Thus, if you conjoined their descriptions *and* added their object counts, and thereby came up with ten objects, you'd be over counting by three. Thus, the Polish Logician would be correct in saying there are seven objects. Thus, you can't truly conjoin the descriptions into an answer to *the* question, "How many objects are there?" and maintain that there are different senses of "object."

The question, "How many objects are there?" seems to operate with only one sense of "object" at a time, so to speak. Even if you specify, "How many objects are there in every sense of 'object'?", when you try to answer it by adding the different counts, it might seem you can't give an answer with only one token of "object." None of the three possibilities—"There are three objects"; "There are seven objects"; "There are ten objects"—seems to get it right. So, is Putnam right after all? Can we not conjoin these different descriptions into a single description?

Let's look at his other example of conceptual relativity concerning spacetime points. Here the divergent descriptions are "Spacetime points are individuals" and "Spacetime points are

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[27] Putnam might be thought to argue indirectly for it insofar as he gestures at the idea that any principled way of restricting mereological composition is going to admit of counterexamples. See, for example, Putnam 1988, 111-12. But given the depth of discussion in the recent debates on composition, his gestures might reasonably be thought to be inadequate. For example, see Van Cleve 2008, Sider 2008, and Koslicki 2003 for examples of detailed argumentation about restricted and unrestricted mereological composition that demonstrate the inadequacy of Putnam's treatment of the topic of restricting composition.

mere limits." Here the question presumably is, "What are spacetime points?" If for the sake of argument we are to say that there are different legitimate uses/senses of "spacetime points," then it seems we can't frame the question at issue as, "What are spacetime points?" since that seems to employ a single use/sense of "spacetime points." But perhaps we could do the same as we did with "objects" and ask, "What are spacetime points in every sense of 'spacetime points'?" We can then answer that question in the way we handled the original question of conjoining descriptions of the number of objects, namely, by saying, "There are spacetime points that are individuals and there are spacetime points that are mere limits." Since we don't have to add any numbers, there doesn't seem to be the problem that occurred in trying to conjoin (i.e., add) the different object counts.

What does this difference in the two purported examples of conceptual relativity tell us? One possibility would be that the spacetime points case isn't an example of conceptual relativity after all, but the objects example is. Another possibility is that neither are true examples of conceptual relativity, but the objects example isn't as straightforward as the spacetime points case. Going with the latter possibility, we could explain the difference in the cases as follows. The problem before was the assumption that we should be able to *straightforwardly* add the counts together if we can truly conjoin the different descriptions into a single description of *how many objects there are*. It's the *straightforwardly* part that's the problem. To the question, "How many objects are there in every sense of 'object'?" it seems we could correctly answer, "There are three objects$_{\text{non-merological use}}$ and there are seven objects$_{\text{mereological use}}$." But given that answer, if we want to say the total number of objects in every sense of "object," then the answer should be seven, not because the Polish Logician's sense of "object" is *the* correct one, but because the different senses of "object" in play here are not so completely different. The objects case is not like the following. "There are three Hondas and there are seven Toyotas; therefore, there are ten cars." "Hondas" and "Toyotas" are not different senses of "car." And the car case is not trying to describe the "same" state of affairs using different senses of a term. Moreover, the Polish Logician's sense of "object" is essentially parasitic on the Carnapian's sense of "object." It is, after all, according to Putnam, an extension of the concept of an object. The Polish Logician countenances mereological sums. However, the individuals, x, y, and z, are not sums. Thus, we should not expect to straightforwardly move from "There are three objects$_{\text{non-merological use}}$ and there are seven objects$_{\text{mereological use}}$" to, "There are ten objects total" in the way we can move from, "There are three Hondas and seven Toyotas" to, "There are ten cars total."

A further point in support of this way of handling the problem of adding the different object counts is remember that "object," like "thing," is what is known as a dummy sortal. They do not by themselves provide criteria of identity or principles of individuation as a true sortal concept, e.g., "a marble" does. While there may even be problems counting with true sortals—go to a junkyard and count the cars[28]—such problems need not pose a problem for metaphysical/representational realism in particular. We may, e.g., have to legislate what counts as a car and we may run into difficulties concerning when a fetus is a person. But this does not entail that there are not fetuses, people, and cars with determinate properties standing in determinate relations that are representation-independent objects.

Let us look at the mereological sums example with this in mind. If "object" is to function as a true sortal, then the different optional languages concerning "object" will need to supply principles of individuation for what counts as an object. According to the Polish Logician's optional language, *any* two objects themselves count as a further object. But this principle of

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[28] Griffin 1977, 40-41.

individuation contains the dummy sortal "object." We could replace "object" with "thing" or "entity" but these are also dummy sortals. The point is that Putnam's examples rely on there being some predetermined "individuals" such as three marbles or x, y, and z. And it makes sense to ask how many marbles there are—three—and it would make sense to ask how many individual variables there are—three, again. In order for the mereological sums example to make sense, we have to specify independently of them what is to count as an individual, thing, or entity. The optional languages themselves are not sufficient for specifying what to count as an object. Thus, the mereological sums example requires that there be a world of determinate individuals that can be counted—counting them as "objects" is problematic because "object" is a dummy sortal, but counting them as marbles or chairs, etc., is not problematic, at least not in sense unique to metaphysical realism.

We thus reach the conclusion that the different descriptions of objects are conjoinable after all. And, therefore, the mereological sums case does not show that there is no representation-independent fact of the matter as to how many objects there are when there are three individuals, x, y, an z. And thus, it seems that Putnam's examples of conceptual relativity show neither the unintelligibility nor the falseness of metaphysical realism.

Metaphysical Realism: A Reevaluation Along Wittgensteinian Lines

We turn now to what I take to be a better way of showing the unintelligibility of metaphysical realism, one that shows the unintelligibility of the very distinction between representational realism and antirealism. What follows will be to an extent programmatic and in need of further development and defense. That said, let us being by noting, again, that the heart of metaphysical realism is representational realism, which stands opposed to representational antirealism. Those views, again, are:

> *Representational Realism* (RR): No X is even in part constituted by a representation of X as "X."

> *Representational Antirealism* (RA): At least some X are (at least) in part constituted by a representation of X as "X."

Representational realism is at the heart of metaphysical realism since conceptual relativity is the denial of metaphysical realism and representational antirealism is at the core of conceptual relativity.

To see what is at issue with representational realism, the question that we need to consider is whether representational realism implies that there are some sort of natural kinds that the world comes divided into *such that it would be possible to miscategorize the world regarding the kinds of things that exist*.[29] For our purposes a natural kind is defined as follows: *X* is a natural kind if and only if *X* exists independently of being represented as "*X*".[30] "Kinds" here is

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[29] Putnam seems to attribute this view to metaphysical realism when he says that the metaphysical realist will want to say that either the Carnapian is right or the Polish Logician is right. Saying that the Polish Logician's is wrong to count mereological sums as objects is to say that the concept of a mereological sum miscategorizes what exists.

[30] This definition of natural kinds is both standard and non-standard. Alexander Bird and Emma Tobin write:

meant as widely as possible so as to include not only objects, but properties and relations, as well. Saying that there are natural kinds does not in and of itself imply the possibility of miscategorizing the kinds that exist. To see this, consider that there are the concepts that we employ and which we take to refer to natural kinds. But there are other possible concepts of kinds. For example, there are *x*s that fall under the concept of a tree, and we most likely consider them to be natural kinds, i.e., trees. But there are also *x*s that fall under the concept of a tree*, which is a tree with enough soil, water, and sunlight to live. Trees are made of plant cells, water, etc. Trees* are made of trees, soil, water, and sunlight. Are trees* natural kinds in the way that trees are? Or does the concept of a tree* miscategorize the world? It might be strange, but there could turn out to be as many natural kinds as there are possible concepts. If that were to be the case, then representational realism would not imply that we could miscategorize the world into kinds.

Consider universalism, the view of unrestricted mereology. It would seem to imply that there as many kinds of objects as there are possible concepts, since for any combination of objects, say my phone and my dog, we can stipulate a concept. Universalism as it is usually elucidated is a representational realist position. It doesn't require that we represent my phone and dog as a *K* in order for it to exist as an object, i.e., a *K*. Thus, representational realism need not imply that it is possible to miscategorize the world. Let's call the view that there are as many natural kinds as there are possible objects the *view of unlimited natural kinds*.

What is the connection between representational antirealism and natural kinds? It would seem straightforwardly to deny that there are any, since according to representational antirealism kinds come from representing the world as consisting of *this* and *that*. But then we are left facing the problem that Davidson elucidated when considering the possibility of language structuring the world. If language is to structure the world into kinds, then the world must not be simple (otherwise it couldn't be structured). But if it is not simple, then it must have some structure or parts independently of the language structuring it into kinds. And then it would seem that it is those language (representation) independent parts that are the true kinds.[31] This is the problem that Putnam talks about in terms of the cookie cutter metaphor. We'll call this problem for representational antirealism the *cookie cutter objection*.[32] The representational antirealist could try to solve this problem so that everything really is representation-dependent, or she could defend a hybrid position that says what we might call the *ur*-kinds are natural but all else is representation-dependent. Thus, it is only with this latter hybrid view and the *ur*-kinds that

> Scientific disciplines divide the particulars they study into *kinds* and theorize about those kinds. To say that a kind is *natural* is to say that it corresponds to a grouping or ordering that does not depend on humans. We tend to assume that science is successful in revealing these kinds; it is a corollary of scientific realism that when all goes well the classifications and taxonomies employed by science correspond to the real kinds in nature. The existence of these real and independent kinds of things is held to justify our scientific inferences and practices. (Bird and Tobin 2012)

Our use of natural kinds fits with the idea that, "To say that a kind is *natural* is to say that it corresponds to a grouping or ordering that does not depend on humans." However, given the view that we will call "the view of unlimited natural kinds," our natural kinds may not always go along with the idea of natural kinds justifying "our scientific inferences and practices."

[31] Davidson 2001, 192.

[32] See, e.g., 1988, 113-14.

representational antirealism would allow for the possibility of miscategorizing the world. If everything else that exists does so dependently on representations, then there would not be the possibility of miscategorizing those kinds determined by our representations.

Since both representational realism and antirealism either may or may not imply that we can miscategorize the world into kinds, the issue of miscategorization may not seem of central importance. Nevertheless, it is. To see why, let us now turn to an argument for the conclusion that the representational realism/antirealism distinction is empty, unintelligible in some sense, because the idea of natural kinds is empty. The argument will center on the issue of miscategorization.

The argument is based on a reading of Wittgenstein's views on what he called the *autonomy of language*. His writings on the autonomy of language are primarily found in what is known as the *Big Typescript*.[33] There are places where Wittgenstein discusses the idea in terms of the "arbitrariness of grammar" in the *Philosophical Investigations*[34] but it no longer seems to play the role for him in the latter work that it did in the former. Nevertheless, the central aspect of the autonomy of language that we will appeal to can still be found in the *Philosophical Investigations*.[35] And that is the idea that ostensive definitions/explanations cannot provide the foundation for language/meaning (or language learning)[36] because it is a necessary condition for an ostensive definition to be meaningful that there is a preestablished normative (conceptual) context. At this point, I want to specify that there are two deep, difficult philosophical issues that we will bracket.[37] The first is the correctness of the idea that determinate reference to the world presupposes a normative (conceptual) context. David G. Stern calls this the *paradox of ostensive definition*.[38] It is the denial, as Stern puts it, of the idea that, "'the mind' has the peculiar, quasi-magical ability to disambiguate, to guarantee that words and things are rigidly attached to each other, in the way that the paradox of ostension can lead us to wish for."[39]

The second issue that we will bracket concerns the morass that is the debate about the analytic-synthetic distinction. In what follows, we will assume that some kind of distinction can be drawn between conceptual (e.g., analytically definitional) statements and empirical statements. Wittgenstein often discussed meaning not in terms of analytic definitions but what he called *grammar*.[40] The finer points of difference between grammar and statements that determine the boarders of concepts need not concern us here. We will understand grammar here as that which determines or explains the meaning of terms, words, sentences, etc., and which is not straightforwardly empirical.

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[33] Wittgenstein 2005, 128ff. and 183ff.

[34] E.g., Wittgenstein 2009, §§371-73 and 497.

[35] However, the argument that I will present is not meant to be one that Wittgenstein made or would endorse. It is simply inspired by my reading of his work.

[36] See, e.g., Stern 2004, 90ff. for a good discussion of these issues.

[37] They are addressed in Wrisley manuscript.

[38] See Stern 2004, 90ff.

[39] Stern 2004, 97.

[40] An illustration of the connection Wittgenstein saw between grammar and meaning can be found in Wittgenstein 2009, §339:

> One might say "Thinking is an incorporeal process", however, if one were using this to distinguish the grammar of the word "think" from that of, say, the word "eat". Only that makes the difference between the meanings look *too slight*.

There are three main aspects of the autonomy of grammar that come out of Wittgenstein's views on grammar and the role of ostensive definitions in connecting language and world. 1) Grammar determines meaning and is thus not accountable to reality. The idea being that grammar determines the meaning of words and the sense of propositions, and it is only when grammar is in place that a proposition can be compared to reality. 2) Grammar is unverifiable, i.e., any attempt to justify a choice of grammar by verification will be circular or lead to a regress. The basic assumption at work here is that any attempt to justify grammar will involve a pointing to or a description of the part of the world that is to justify the grammar in question. If the pointing/description is to have a sense, then some grammar will be employed in the description or to give the pointing determinate reference. If the grammar employed is that which is to be justified, then the verification is circular. If the grammar employed is different, then the verification leads to an infinite regress because every different grammar appealed to for justification would itself stand in need of justification. 3) Like a choice of measurement, grammar is neither right nor wrong, correct nor incorrect, though there may be practical requirements that may *influence* which grammar is employed, as there may be ones that influence a choice of measurement.[41]

With this background in place, recall that representational realism implies that there are natural kinds. Representational antirealism denies that there are natural kinds (though this denial is problematic as we have seen given the cookie cutter objection). The view of unlimited natural kinds, which says that there are as many natural kinds as there are possible concepts, complicates things because if it is true, then it implies that while there are natural kinds, there is no possibility of miscategorizing the world into kinds, as we saw above. If the view of unlimited natural kinds is false, then representational realism would entail the possibility of miscategorizing the world into kinds. On the other side, representational antirealism would seem to imply that there is no possibility of miscategorizing the world into kinds, since kinds will depend on our conceptual categories. However, representational antirealism faces the cookie cutter objection. And so if the representational antirealist cannot sufficiently respond to that objection, then at least some kinds would be natural, i.e., representational realism would be true of some aspects of the world, i.e., the *ur*-kinds. We can see from this discussion that the possibility or impossibility of miscategorizing the world into kinds is a central aspect of the representational realism/antirealism debate. Whether there is the possibility of miscategorizing the world into kinds seems to depend on the truth of the view of unlimited natural kinds. But there is a general problem with the very notion of miscategorizing the world into kinds. This is the heart of my case against the representational realism/antirealism distinction. What is the problem?

The central problem with the notion of miscategorizing the world into kinds is the unintelligibility of the idea of justifying a concept of a kind of object, property, or relation given the autonomy of language. What sort of unintelligibility is this supposed to be? Is it an instance of one the earlier 1-7? Imagine an example of such an attempt at justification. Wittgenstein considers a people who have color-shape concepts instead of separate concepts for colors and shapes.[42] We can imagine someone speaking English who says, while pointing at a red brick, "Look. There's the color. There's the shape. You can see that they *really* are different things." In a sense, she is, of course, correct. A brick's shape is different from its color. And there really are colors and there really are shapes. But two observations. First, if language is autonomous, then the purported pointing to justify the distinction in kinds as correct/true kinds is circular. Second,

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[41] For a detailed discussion of the autonomy of language, see Arrington 1993 and Forster 2004.
[42] Wittgenstein 1977, III §130 and §155.

what does the "*really*" mean here? It can either be intended in the sense of *there are* shapes and colors in the way that *there are not* unicorns in the world,[43] or it can be intended in the sense that our talking of colors and shapes as separate kinds is the correct way of categorizing the world into kinds and talking of color-shapes instead is incorrect.

In our imagined context, she presumably intends it in the second way. The problem is that such a use of "they *really* are different things" is circular and is in that sense an empty gesture. It does nothing; it is pointless. And thus it is an instance of the unintelligibility we covered in 7) above. Imagine someone saying to another person, "There *really* are colors and shapes." In what sort of context might we find such a statement? Perhaps one in which a strangely skeptical blind person voices doubts about what colors might be: "I know there are shapes, but these colors you keep talking about. I can't fathom it. I think you're messing with me." While this attempt to provide a context for it is contorted, the "*really*" here is in the sense of *they exist as opposed to not existing*. And saying "There really are colors and shapes" is meant to reassure the other. It has a point. We might say that there are no "ordinary" contexts in which someone would use, "There really are colors and shapes" in the way the philosopher wants to use that statement to justify the concepts. But the philosopher will likely say that it has a context of use *within philosophy*. I don't want to challenge that, though we could.[44] Rather, the would-be kind-justifier thinks she is doing something of significance, but does nothing. It is rather akin to what is going on in Wittgenstein's remark, "Imagine someone saying, 'But I know how tall I am!' and laying his hand on top of his head to indicate it!"[45] It is unintelligible in the sense of, "I understand your words, but I can't really wrap my mind around what you think you're thereby showing."

Given this understanding of the unintelligibility of justifying our kind terms, let's approach the problem with the representational realism/antirealism distinction from two different directions. The first assumes the falsity of the view of unlimited natural kinds, the second the truth of it. So, assuming that the view of unlimited natural kinds is false, then representational realism implies that there is a possibility of miscategorizing the world into kinds. Representational antirealism implies that it is not possible to do so unless no good answer can be found to the cookie cutter objection, in which case there would be the possibility of miscategorizing the *ur*-elements of the world. Here, finally, is the key problem with representational realism/antirealism under the assumption that the view of unlimited natural kinds is false: The purported possibility of our conceptual categorizing being incorrect, implies that there is some intelligible difference between what it means for them to be correct or incorrect. And such an intelligible difference hinges on the intelligibility of their being correct or incorrect *in relation to the world*. But given the autonomy of language it is unintelligible to speak of our concepts as correct or incorrect in relation to the world.[46] Representational realism was supposed to entail the possibility of miscategorizing the world into kinds. But it is not that we can't miscategorize the world, it is that the idea doesn't make sense, it's unintelligible what that could come to. We'll thus refer to the idea of miscategorizing the world into kinds as *empty*. And, therefore, so is the idea of something existing representational-dependently or independently. One way to restate this is that the representational realist wants to be able to say that *there really are x*s and *y*s and *z*s. But this "really are" is the idea that a) we've got the right

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[43] Though the statement in question would be a strange way of phrasing this point.
[44] As Cavell, e.g., does in Cavell 1979, 199ff.
[45] Wittgenstein 2009, §279.
[46] We will address the exact way in which it doesn't make sense below.

categories and b) they exist independently of us (our language/beliefs/etc.). But a) is empty, and, therefore, so is the view which is the conjunction of a) and b), namely, representational realism. Representational antirealism is also empty because it is supposed to be the view that everything is representational-dependent, which would imply that it is false that there is something that is representational-independent. But the latter notion is empty and therefore so is representation dependence, since you don't get an intelligible view by putting a "It's not the case that…" in front of a sentence expressing an unintelligible view.

The second direction of approach assumes the truth of the view of unlimited natural kinds. So, assuming that the view of unlimited natural kinds is true, then representational realism implies that it is impossible to miscategorize the world into kinds. Representational antirealism, again, also implies that it is not possible to do so unless no good answer can be found to the cookie cutter objection, in which case there would be the possibility of miscategorizing what we might call the *ur*-elements of the world. However, saying it is impossible to miscategorize the world into kinds implies that it is false that is possible to miscategorize the world into kinds. But the possibility of miscategorizing the world into kinds is empty. Thus, it is neither true nor false that it is possible to miscategorize the world into kinds. Thus, it is not the case that it is impossible to miscategorize the world into kinds. And, as before, the representational realist wants to be able to say that *there really are x*s and *y*s and *z*s. But this "really are" is the idea that a) we've got the right categories and b) they exist independently of us (our language/beliefs/etc.). Again, a) is empty, and, therefore, so is the view which is the conjunction of a) and b), namely, representational realism. Representational antirealism is also empty because it is supposed to be the view that everything is representational-dependent, which would imply that it is false that there is something that is representational-independent. Again, the latter notion is empty and therefore so is representation dependence, since you don't get an intelligible view by putting a "It's not the case that…" in front of a sentence expressing an unintelligible view.

To sum up, the problem for the representational realism/antirealism distinction is the following. Assuming the falsity of the view of unlimited natural kinds, representational realism implies that *x*s really exist and *y*s don't really exist. Representational antirealism implies that no *x*s really exist (independently of representations), or, if it cannot respond to the cookie cutter objection, then it implies that *x*s really exist and *y*s don't really exist. Assuming the truth of the view of unlimited natural kinds, representational realism implies that all possible *x*s *really* exist. Representational antirealism then, again, implies that no *x*s *really* exist, or, if it cannot respond to the cookie cutter objection, then it implies that *x*s really exist and *y*s don't really exist. But the very notion of "*x*s really exist" or "*x*s don't really exist" in the sense of "we are correct in relation to reality to talk of *x*s" is unintelligible in the sense of pointless. And, therefore, the distinction between representational realism/antirealism is unintelligible in the sense of pointless. An important upshot is that we can speak of different languages dividing reality differently without that meaning we must worry about what the *ur*-elements are that allow for such divisions and without that meaning that all is thereby representation-dependent. Interestingly, we have reached a conclusion that is in some ways very similar to the one Davidson reaches at the end of his seminal, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," namely, "In giving up the dualism of scheme and world, we do not give up the world, but re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false."[47] We have given up the dualism of scheme and world in a very different way, by giving up the purported intelligible distinction between representational realism and representational antirealism, by giving up the

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[47] Davidson 2001, 198.

purportedly intelligibly distinction between that which exists independently of and dependently on our representations. One way of framing the scheme content distinction is that there are representations on the one hand and the world on the other. The debate about representation realism/antirealism was supposed to concern the relationship between the two. By showing the latter distinction to be empty, we have removed the question of whether the scheme correctly or incorrectly represents the content (the world)—not in terms of empirical statements but in terms of conceptual categories. We might still talk of language (scheme) on the one hand and world (content) on the other, but the point of doing so is largely gone, given the emptiness of the representation realism/antirealism distinction.

Implications and Limitations of the Emptiness of the Representational Realism/Antirealism Distinction

Certain ontological deflationist positions, e.g., Hirsch's, seem to apply fairly broadly, since they are supposed to apply to debates such as whether mereological sums should be restricted or not, whether two objects can be composed of the same matter, and the question of temporal parts. An important question is what are the implications of the emptiness of the representational realism/antirealism distinction? Does it have these broad deflationist implications? In order to help answer this question, let's look at another question that has been in the background of much of the above considerations. For any concept C, if some x falls under it, are there thereby xs? In other words, does meeting the conditions of a concept suffice for being a kind?[48] Call this the **Question of Kinds**. A negative answer to the question implies that one could be mistaken about the kinds that exist. Concepts seem fairly easy to specify, e.g., the concept of an incar discussed by Eklund.[49] Cars indoors fall under the concept of an incar. If something more is needed other than falling under the concept such that an indoor car could lack it and thereby not be a kind, then it would be possible to be mistaken about incars being a kind. But the idea of being mistaken about kinds, per our argument, is empty. Thus, if that argument is correct, then the Question of Kinds should receive an affirmative answer. This would imply that there are such things as mereological sums. But it doesn't imply that being a mereological sum is a necessary conditions for being an object. For example, our earlier concept of a tree*, which is a tree plus enough soil, sunlight, and water for it to live, is not merely a mereological sum because the soil, water, and sunlight have to be in a certain relationship with the tree. Thus, the debate about universalism is empty, as well.

The emptiness of the debate about universalism is obviously related to Putnam's mereological sums example of conceptual relativity. An implication that Putnam sees following from conceptual relativity is that the question, "Do mereological sums really exist?" is silly. It's silly because we can say either that they do or that they don't. We have reached a similar conclusion though in such a way that undermines conceptual relativity, since the latter implies that some things exist dependently on our representations of them. And if we are right, then the

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[48] We should, of course, recognize that concepts, concept possession, falling under a concept, etc., are difficult notions to specify clearly. I am ignoring for the sake of the current discussion all of these complexities. One of them that we should perhaps point out here is that if falling under a concept means meeting the conditions of the concept, this needn't imply that concepts are determined by sets of necessary and sufficient conditions.

[49] Eklund 2008, 387-88.

autonomy of language implies that the representational realism/antirealism distinction at play in the debate between conceptual relativity and metaphysical realism is unintelligible.

What about the question of cohabitation? Following Earnest Sosa's discussion of snowdiscalls, it seems and implication would be that there is cohabitation, unless temporal parts theory is able to provide a way out.[50] A snowball is a ball of snow and a snowdiscall is a quantity of snow that is shaped anywhere between a ball and a disc. So a snowball is also a snowdiscall. They are made of the same quantity of snow but different because the snowdiscall would survive being compressed into a disc but the snowball wouldn't. Whether the autonomy of language deflates the issue of cohabitation would seem to depend on whether there are temporal parts and whether temporal parts have implications for cohabitation.

What about temporal parts? Take one of Theodore Sider's examples involving an object which is a dinosaur and clay statue.[51] On Sider's account the dinosaurs temporal parts are just a subset of the total parts of the object consisting of the sum of all the temporal parts of the dinosaur and the statue. Let's call the object that is composed of the dinosaur and the statue a Dino-Statue. Given our answer to the Question of Kinds, there are such things. But does this imply that there are temporal parts? It's not clear that it does. For the concept of a Dino-Statue could simply be that of the whole dinosaur and the whole Statue, and that in and of itself doesn't imply temporal parts.[52] What about the concept of temporal part? Does anything meet the conditions of that concept? What are they? Perhaps a temporal slice at time t_n of an x such that x does not wholly exist at t_n? If that is right, then whether something falls under it will depend on whether there are temporal slices that are of things not wholly existing at time t_n. The emptiness of representational realism/antirealism doesn't seem to imply an answer to that question.

The fact that the existence of temporal parts is not implied by our considerations is important as it highlights that the world has an important part to play in what exists. That is, the mere formulation of a concept doesn't bring something into existence.[53] The world determines whether and what falls under a concept.

We thus see that the autonomy of language and the way it implies the emptiness of the representational realism/antirealism debate has significant but limited ontological implications. It does not deflate all ontological questions.

A Couple of Objections and Replies

A possible objection might concern concepts and concept possession. Given how easily it seems to be to formulate a new concept, e.g., trees*, incars, and Dino-Statue, it might seem to deflate the idea of what a concept is in the stream of life.[54] Kathrin Koslicki voices a similar

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[50] Sosa 1999. See Sider 2008 for an argument to this effect. And see Hawthorne 2008 for an argument to the effect that temporal parts theory is unable to solve the purported problem of cohabitation.
[51] Sider 2008, 259.
[52] Further, there is the question of whether the dinosaur and the clay statue falling under the concept of a Dino-Statue would require that both the dinosaur and the clay statue exist as they would if the B-theory of time were true.
[53] Putnam is at pains to make a similar point, e.g., in Putnam 1992, 114-115, where he writes, "One perfectly good answer to Goodman's rhetorical question 'Can you tell me something that we didn't make?' is that we didn't make Sirius a star."
[54] See Putnam 1999, 87ff., e.g., on the notion of words having meaning in the stream of life. Taken from Wittgenstein 1990, §913.

concern against Sider's endorsement of universalism. She finds that it undermines any deep ontological distinction between the things we care about, e.g., houses, trees, people, and "things" such as the fusion of a mite and the moon.[55] But nothing said above entails such a frivolous view of concepts and objects. To see this, consider this remark from Wittgenstein:

> But I am not saying: if the facts of nature were different we should have different concepts. That is an hypothesis. I have no use for it and it does not interest me.
> I am only saying if you believe that our concepts are the right ones, the ones suited to intelligent human beings; that anyone with different ones would not realize something that we realize, then imagine certain general facts of nature different from the way they are, and conceptual structures different from our own will appear natural to you.[56]

One of the points that comes out of this remark is the connection between concepts and "facts of nature." Those facts of nature presumably could concern both facts of our physiology and our environment. The point being that the concepts we actually do employ are pragmatically connected to our concerns, which are in turn a product of our physiology and environment. This point was made earlier when outlining the third aspect of the autonomy of language: 3) Like a choice of measurement, grammar is neither right nor wrong, correct nor incorrect, though there may be practical requirements that may *influence* which grammar is employed, as there may be ones that influence a choice of measurement.

So, while it doesn't make sense to say that incars do really exist or do not in the sense at issue in our considerations (i.e., not in the sense of whether there are unicorns), the fact that there may be incars doesn't hook up with any of our concerns, and thus, the mere possibility of the concept doesn't mean that incars show up in our lives.

Another, perhaps more pressing, objection that I fear might come to readers' minds is that the position developed here based on a reading of Wittgenstein's notion of the autonomy of language is that it is essentially Carnap's position regarding linguistic frameworks and his distinction between internal and external question. In particular, our claiming that the representational realism/antirealism distinction is empty because it is empty to ask whether *x*s really exist is the same claim that Carnap makes when he writes, "An alleged statement of the reality of the framework of entities is a pseudo-question without cognitive content."[57] Part of that conclusion comes from Carnap's understanding of linguistic frameworks and rationality. According to Carnap's understanding of linguistic frameworks, what seemed to be sensible ontological questions about, e.g., whether numbers really exist, are in fact questions without sense. Why did Carnap hold this?

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[55] Koslicki 2003, 124.

[56] Wittgenstein 1980, §48. Later in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology Volume I*, Wittgenstein is again discussing the possibility of different concepts in relation to different facts of nature and he writes:

> Can I say, however, that if these were the facts, men would have these concepts? Certainly not. But one can say this: don't think that our concepts are the only possible or reasonable ones: if you imagine quite different facts from those with which we are continually surrounded, then concepts different from ours will appear natural to you. (Wittgenstein 1980, §643)

[57] Carnap 1950, 13.

Susan Haack nicely summarizes Carnap's notion of a linguistic framework as found in his "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology':

> By a 'linguistic framework' Carnap seems to mean a language, or perhaps one should say, a language fragment, which introduces a sortal predicate and variables ranging over, and constants designating, entities of that sort (p30). The sortal predicate, the extension of which is to be the range of the framework's variable, apparently characterizes the framework, in the sense that the framework of numbers is the language fragment with number variables and the sortal '…is a number', the framework of physical objects the fragment with physical object variables and the sortal '…is a physical object', and so forth (p.24). […] *And it seems…that linguistic frameworks may also have 'rules of evaluation', rules governing the acceptance or rejection of statements made within the framework.*[58]

Much more could, of course, be said about Carnap's notion of a linguistic framework, but this will suffice for our purposes. As Haack points out, included in the framework are rules of evaluation. This is supposed to have important philosophical implications for rationality and what it makes sense to ask.

Gary Ebbs glosses Carnap's notion of rationality by saying that for Carnap if two investigators are going to be able to understand one another, agree or disagree, they must share:

> criteria for determining whether their judgments are correct or incorrect. If they do not share such criteria, then they cannot be genuinely agreeing or disagreeing, even if they appear to be. On Carnap's view the controversies and questions in traditional metaphysics fail to be genuine because there are no criteria for deciding them.[59]

It is the sharing of a linguistic framework that provides the shared criteria. A key idea here is Carnap's distinction between internal and external questions; a distinction that is supposed to help us resolve questions concerning the existence of entities. Carnap writes that internal questions concern the existence of some entity queried from within the framework for talking about such entities. So, internal questions are legitimate, for they ask questions of things specified by the framework. By contrast, external questions are problematic, for they ask about the frameworks themselves: given the concept of phlogiston, is there any such thing? Such questions are answered by empirical investigation. An external question would be one that inquires about the reality of the spatio-temporal world itself. It is a question asked "…only by philosophers. Realists give an affirmative answer, subjective idealists a negative one, and the controversy goes on for centuries without ever being solved."[60]

For Carnap, insofar as statements such as, "There are things," or "There are properties," or "There are numbers," are external statements, then they are either meaningless or imperatives to adopt certain linguistic frameworks for talking about things, properties, numbers, respectively. As imperatives, they are neither true nor false; "they can be justified only by their effectiveness

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[58] Haack 1976, 458. Emphasis mine.
[59] Ebbs 1992, 3.
[60] Carnap 1950, 22.

as a policy."[61] However, if they are taken as internal statements, then they turn out to be analytically true: "Their truth merely reflects our decision to adopt the linguistic framework in question."[62] The existence of numbers, for example, is, then, a matter of choosing or not choosing to adopt the linguistic framework of numbers.[63]

The above helps us to see that while, according to Carnap, different linguistic frameworks are possible, the frameworks themselves cannot be rationally evaluated: rational evaluation can only occur according the rules specified by a framework. Put differently, the framework itself cannot be evaluated, since its rules must be assumed if one is to talk about, say numbers, in the first place. Thus we are in a sense free to adopt whatever framework we need, though the choice may be influenced by pragmatic considerations.

From this brief discussion of Carnap's views, we can see some affinities with the understanding of the autonomy of language and its implications given above. In particular the idea that the frameworks cannot be evaluated themselves because rational evaluation of the framework presupposes the rules of the framework. This sounds very much like the idea that we cannot justify our kind concepts because appealing to the world to do so presupposes them. Moreover, Carnap's distinction between external and internal questions seems very close to the distinction made above between different ways of saying, "There *really* are trees." On one interpretation, the legitimate one, all that means is that there are trees in the world, unlike unicorns. Another interpretation, the problematic one given the autonomy of language, would intend it to say that we are have correctly identified a true kind of thing by talking about trees, unlike trees*, one might say, which aren't a true kind. The former seems close to Carnap's internal questions and the latter to the illegitimate external questions. Still further, we have said above that concepts may be pragmatically "justified," which is akin to Carnap's saying that linguistic frameworks can be chosen for pragmatic reasons.

But here is how the position argued for here and Carnap's are different. First, the focus here has been on concepts alone and not linguistic frameworks that include criteria for evaluating disputes. Second, the view is not that statements like "There are trees" is either an internal one, an "external" imperative to adopt an ontology, or meaningless. Third, and most importantly, Carnap understands the internal/external distinction to show the problem with a broad range of ontological issues, e.g., realism/idealism, universals/nominalism, numbers, etc. As we saw in the last section, the scope of the implications of the autonomy of language is much narrower. Part of this is that the autonomy of language and the implications we've drawn from it do not concern the adoption of different frameworks with radically different ontologies. Instead, the central idea is that as language users, there are a variety of concepts we might employ to talk of what exists but there is neither a meaningful way to distinguish between correct and incorrect ways of categorizing the world into kinds, nor sense to be had of things existing dependently or independently of representations. Thus, while there are affinities between Carnap's views on linguistic frameworks and external/internal questions, and the autonomy of language and the implications we've drawn from it, they are still very different and deserving of separate attention. An interesting question, and one we won't address for reasons of space, is whether the two sets of views or consistent.

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[61] Orenstein 2002, 64.
[62] Orenstein 2002, 65. However, Eklund denies that Carnap's distinction between internal and external questions requires the analytic-synthetic distinction. See Eklund 2009, 135.
[63] This should make us think of Putnam's claims about it being a matter of convention regarding whether mereological sums exist or spacetime points are mere limits.

Concluding Remarks

      To sum up, the purpose of this paper has been six fold. We have endeavored to show: 1) The exact nature of Putnam's views on conceptual relativity. 2) The way in which conceptual relativity is supposed to show not the falsity but the unintelligibility of metaphysical realism. 3) Why conceptual relativity show neither the unintelligibility nor the falsity of metaphysical realism. 4) That on a reading of Wittgenstein's notion of the autonomy of language the representational realism/antirealism distinction is unintelligible (empty). 5) That the latter emptiness has important but limited ontological implications. And 6) the autonomy of language is importantly different from Carnap's views on linguistic frameworks and internal/external questions.

      4) and 5) admittedly depend upon two important bracketed considerations, namely, the truth of the paradox of ostension—a normative (conceptual) context is needed for reference to reality to be determinate/meaningful—and that there is some kind of viable analytic-synthetic distinction that allows us to distinguish the conceptual from the empirical. To the extent to which 4) and 5) depend on such contentious issues, they are, of course, conditionally asserted.

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