Putnam's Meaning-Based Version of Ontological Pluralism

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Abstract

Research Article

In the discussion of ontological pluralism, little attention has been paid to Putnam. However, he can be considered one of the leaders of this approach. The following article pursues Putnam's view on ontological pluralism, that is, pursuing the procedure that Putnam gradually moved away from metaphysical realism and eventually became an ontological pluralist. The discussion begins with Quine's ontological ideas and it is discussed how these ideas can be viewed, at least in Putnam's interpretation, as a monistic approach to ontology. Hence, ontological pluralism is, in a way, a rejection of such ideas. Then, I have dealt with Putnam's arguments against metaphysical realism, and of course its inherent monism. I have shown how his arguments presented in this article in opposition to metaphysical realism can be grouped into a single doctrine called semanticism. So this doctrine, and its relation to Putnam's pluralistic approach, is also discussed. To better understand Putnam's version of ontological pluralism, which I have called the Meaning-Based version, two other versions have been introduced: the Sorting Version, attributed to Aristotle, and the Language-Based Version, attributed to Carnap. Then, I listed one by one the differences between Putnam's version and the other two versions, especially Carnap's version. Finally, the basic components of the Meaning-Based version of ontological pluralism are discussed.

Keywords

Introductory remarks

The so-called 'ontological pluralism' is a nascent approach, although it is backed by extensive and olden literature. The first considerations and remarks in this regard seem to be (Eklund, 2006), (McDaniel, 2009), and (Turner, 2010 and 2012), although (Price, 1992) and (Lynch, 1998) can also be considered related. However, as is well known in the literature, this approach involves many philosophers from Aristotle to the most contemporary philosophers, such as Eli Hirsch. Nevertheless, the main absentee in the literature is Putnam. Except in a few cases, and those are because of his views are close to those of Carnap and Hirsch, he is not mentioned (for example in McDaniel's (2017) valuable book). Although there are few articles on this subject[1], it seems that there is no exclusive study that focuses only on and examines Putnam's ontological pluralism. The present article focuses on the process by which Putnam, step by step, abandons ontological monism and tends to pluralism.

Ontological pluralism can be considered as the recognition of different ways of being or different languages in describing the ontological state of the world. This can be seen, in a sense, as an opposition to Quine's ontological approach. This opposition has several reasons from several perspectives: (1) It is as if Quine revived ontology with his classic (1948), "On What There Is". That is why Putnam, focusing on this article, has spoken about "The Revival of Ontology by Quine" and written: "It was Quine who single-handedly made Ontology a respectable subject" (Putnam, 2004a, pp. 78-9). On the other hand, since *some* pluralists take an anti-ontological approach, they see Quine's revival as opposed to their own.

(2) *Many* pluralists tend to take a deflationary approach to ontology. On the contrary, Quine, at least in Putnam's interpretation, devoted part of the foregoing article to abstract entities in mathematics, such as numbers and sets, and called our attention to the fact of how we quantify over such entities in mathematics. It is not surprising then that Quine himself eventually, albeit reluctantly, appeared in a Platonist position (Putnam, 2004a, pp. 79-80).[2] This is also in a sense against the pluralists' view.

(3) More importantly, at the heart of Quine's aforementioned article, as

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1. The study that focuses only on *Putnam's ontological pluralism* seems to be (Eklund, 2008a); although his pluralistic positions are discussed in (Sosa, 1993) and (Case, 1997 and 2001), and in (Pihlström, 2006) and (Eklund, 2006 and 2008b) there are considerations about his ontological view.

2. See (Turner, 2016, pp. 5-6) and especially Thesis 6 of Quinean Theses, that is, we should take an inflationary attitude toward ontological inquiry. However, I use 'deflationary' not exactly in Turner's sense, but in the sense that Putnam himself (2004a, pp. 19-21) means.

Putnam understands it (Putnam, 2004a, p. 81), lies this theory that quantification truly represents our ontological commitments and, accordingly, when a person quantifies over some sort of thing, she believes that it *really* exists. Of course, Quine thinks and Putnam emphasizes that the criterion of ontological commitment requires us to speak within the bounds of first-order logic. In other words, the *only* language that is appropriate for our quantifications and our ontological commitments is first-order logic (Putnam, 2004a, p. 83). Suppose, as an example, we can entirely avoid quantifying over abstract entities (and the commitment to their existence) in mathematics by formalizing mathematics in a *modal logical language*. In such a situation, Quine, as Putnam points out, regards it as avoiding the only suitable language for our quantifications, "unless you formalize mathematics in precisely the kind of logic to which Quine's criterion of ontological commitment applies, then you are somehow cheating!" (Putnam, 2004a, p. 82). On the other hand, *most* pluralists do not agree with such an emphasis on the *unique* appropriate language for our ontological descriptions which rejects "the endless possibilities of extending our notions of 'existence'" (Putnam, 2004a, p. 85).

(4) Most importantly, Quine's approach to ontology, according to Putnam, and indeed his commitment to the existence of everything we quantify over, is radically misguided (Putnam, 1999, p. 7). Quine's criterion of ontological commitment is misguided, as Putnam understands it, "because it is assumed that existence 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" (Putnam, 1999, p. 179, n12). And this is what *all* pluralists seem to oppose.

Hence, Quine's ontological positions, if we consider them in a harmonious way, seem to provide the elements of a kind of ontological monism. Consequently, it would not be surprising if some, many, most, or perhaps all of the ontological pluralists oppose it[1]. That is why Putnam, at the end of his philosophical activity, has acknowledged that Quine's (1948) "has had disastrous consequences for just about every part of analytic philosophy" (Putnam, 2004a, p. 2).

However, we do know that Putnam began his student days at a time when this Quine's ontological approach prevailed. So, it is not surprising that he

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1. Anyway, it is not fair if I do not use 'perhaps' for this opposition. Because, apart from the different interpretations of (1948), we do know that Quine has had different intellectual periods, and since the late 1960s, and specifically his (1969), "ontological relativity", he seems to be approaching a kind of pluralistic position. See Baghramian, 2004, pp. 171-6 and also for Quine's (metaphysical) pluralism see Lynch, 1998, pp. 114-5 and Price, 1992.

started his philosophical career with a Quinean view of the subject (Putnam, 2004a, pp. 79-81). This is of course the position he later called 'early Putnam' and emphasized that he had tried to refute it in the rest of his philosophical life[1] (2013, p. 20). It should be noted, however, that the rest of Putnam's philosophical life is itself divided into two periods: 'interim Putnam', in which he has advocated internal realism, and 'late Wittgensteinian Putnam' in which he has defended common sense realism. Putnam's philosophical career, then, as he himself points out (1999, p. 49), can be likened to a long journey from realism back to realism, but not back to the metaphysical version of realism with which he started.

However, from the perspective that Putnam's ideas are discussed here, the differences between these two Putnams, that is, between internal realism and common sense realism, will not matter. In contrast, the encounter of these two Putnams with the early Putnam will be useful for me. In other words, my concern is to illustrate the opposition of these two Putnams' periods of thought to scientific and metaphysical realism and, of course, to the monism that underlies them and so, to illustrate the construction of *The Many Faces of Realism*[2]. Hence, in this article, I will focus on both of these Putnams and integrate them in some places. It seems (I hope) this integration will not hinder my arguments.

In the present article, I have first focused on Putnam's opposition to metaphysical realism and ontology. In this way, the two ideas of conceptual relativity and conceptual pluralism have been used. I have also tried to show how Putnam's approach can be seen as the so-called *semanticism* and how the latter can be regarded as a *pluralistic turn*. Then, two other versions of ontological pluralism are briefly discussed: the Sorting Version which I have attributed to Aristotle, and the Language-Based Version which I have attributed to Carnap. Finally, the fourth section, which is the most important part of the article, focuses on Putnam's version of ontological pluralism, the

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1. I do not mean, however, that 'early Putnam' is entirely Quinean. Baghramian (2008, pp. 22-3), as an example, endorses the difference between early Putnam and Quine. See also (Putnam, 1975a, pp. xiii-xiv) which, although belonging to the early Putnam period, indicates his disagreement with Quine. It seems that against this famous saying of Quine (1953, p. 446) that "philosophy of science is enough philosophy", Putnam wrote: "Since the philosophy of science is, after all, not all of philosophy…" (1975a, p. xiii).

2. See the differences between Middle Putnam and Late Putnam, while emphasizing both in opposition to metaphysical realism, in (Putnam, 1994, p. V) and (Putnam, 2013, pp. 32-3). Baghramian (2008, pp. 28-31) has also highlighted these differences. However, she acknowledges (Baghramian, 2008, p. 31) that these two Putnams have common components in contrast to metaphysical realism.

Meaning-Based Version, and while defining and characterizing this version, I highlight its difference with the two aforementioned versions.

Semanticism as a pluralistic turn

Putnam's opposition to metaphysical realism can be considered a revolution in his thinking both because it is opposed to his earlier views and because it is opposed to the dominant approach in philosophy. But we do know that in this opposition, he has put forward various arguments, among which, two phenomena are more important to me: conceptual relativity and conceptual pluralism. Note that during the last 40 years of his philosophical career, Putnam always used these two phenomena (although sometimes only as conceptual relativity) in opposition to realism and ontology, and although his philosophical views have changed during this period, the two remain unchanged.

Conceptual relativity mainly indicates that the words we use to describe the world, specifically ontological keywords, do not have a fixed meaning and use. Instead, they can be considered in different meanings and can be used in different ways. Conceptual pluralism also refers to the fact that the world can be described in different ways based on different and non-equivalent conceptual schemes. In other words, each conceptual scheme has a specific vocabulary (which has no alternative in competing schemes) and based on that vocabulary the world can be described. For example, the contents of a room may be described once by the vocabulary of common sense, such as tables, chairs, books, etc., and again by the vocabulary of the fundamental physical theory, and there is no need (if possible) to reduce any of them to another.[1]

Suppose, as an example, a box with two spheres, a red sphere and a black sphere. Now consider the following two sentences:

(1) There is an object which is partly red and partly black.

(2) There is an object which is red and an object which is black.

Which of these two sentences is true? Consider Smith, who thinks that *there are only two objects* in the box: one red and the other black. So he considers (2) to be true and (1) to be false. Now consider Jones, a logician who believes in the mereological sum and thinks that *for every two particulars, there is an object which is their sum*. So Jones thinks that *there are three objects* in the box: one red, the other black, and the third (which is the sum of the previous two) red and black. Hence, Jones considers both (2) and (1) to be true. Here the disagreement between Smith and Jones, for example about the truth value of sentences (1) and (2) and about the number of objects in the box, is due to

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1. For more on conceptual relativity and conceptual pluralism, see Putnam, 2004a, Lecture 2 of Part I.

the different meanings (uses) that the two have of "exist", "there is/are", "object", and other such words. Putnam, with this simple example (1990, pp. 96-9), wants to remind us how semantical considerations contribute to our description of the world, specifically ontological descriptions, and we can't talk about the objects of the world without specifying the language to be used.

In light of what has been said, and regardless of the differences between the two phenomena, they collectively contain the following theses (these theses are formulated in such a way that they have both a negative and a positive aspect):

1) Ontological vocabulary, such as "there is/are", "exist", "individual", "some", "object", "thing", "existential quantifier", etc. do not have a single, fixed, absolute, privileged and determinate meaning, but a whole family of (extendable) meanings (so the meanings we have of ontological vocabulary are a matter of convention and depend on our choice).

2) There isn't one privileged totality of intrinsic properties, but various properties that may be seen as "intrinsic" in different inquiries (see this case in Putnam, 1994, p. 305).

3) The world does not have a fixed and unique description, but can be described in different ways.

4) There is no God's-eye point of view or Archimedean point of view in describing the world, but the world can be described within a conceptual scheme.

5) There is no fixed, absolute, and determinate conceptual scheme, but there are chosen languages (to describe the world) that are equally good.

6) The question of the reality and fact of the world is a nonsense question, but instead, the world should be questioned within a conceptual scheme, which describes the world in a particular way and is employed by a particular community of users (so the question whether Fs "really exist" is a silly question).

The above theses contain common and related ideas. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this article, I would like to focus on the ontological aspect of these theses and express this aspect in a single doctrine: *semanticism*. Although it seems that Bennett has mentioned this doctrine for the first time, I redefine it in terms of Putnam's philosophy as follows[1]:

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1. See Bennett's definition of this doctrine in Bennett, 2009, p. 40. Compare with Turner's definition in Turner, 2016, p. 9. There are reasons to modify Bennett's definition of this doctrine to make it compatible with Putnam's pluralism. For example, although Eklund (2009, p. 143) points out that semanticism in Bennett's definition does not lead to pluralism, the above definition is free from this defect.

The dispute about whether there are *Fs* is reducible to a linguistic choice. The disputants assign different meanings that are not metaphysically privileged, to either the existential quantifier, the predicate '*F*', or other ontological vocabularies, and are consequently just talking past each other.

Putnam emphasizes that ontology should be seen as a choice about the language we use. Therefore, ontological questions are questions about the structure of our language, our formulations of concepts, and how to use ontological keywords. He writes: "Objects do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another form of description (1981, p. 52). As can be seen, there is room for ontological pluralism here, there are multiple ontological descriptions of the world depending on the meaning and application we have of ontological vocabulary, and also depending on the different conceptual mechanisms and instruments we have. So, there is no single, fixed, absolute, and determinate ontological description of the world, but each of the conceptual schemes we choose offers a different ontological perspective. Thus, according to Putnam, ontology, which seems to seek an *absolute* ontological picture of the world (for example, to provide a definitive list of things) on the basis of an *absolute* meaning of existence and by a *single* ontological criterion, is rejected and "doesn't *do* anything for us" (Putnam, 2004a, p. 70).

Other versions?

So far we have briefly seen Putnam's (anti) ontological approach. For this section, let's forget about Putnam and discuss other versions that can be considered for ontological pluralism. In other words, I think there are different versions of ontological pluralism. Therefore, in this section, I will briefly review these different versions and then, in the next section, I will focus on Putnam's own version. Accordingly, I will point out the differences between Putnam's version and these other versions, namely the version attributed to Aristotle and the version attributed to Carnap. Note that reviewing other versions may lead to a better understanding of Putnam's own version.

According to the first and, of course, the most obvious version I am reviewing, there are different ways, types, or modes of being; so every kind of being includes things that are categorically uncollectible with things of another kind. In other words, there are different ontological categories, so they are irreducible to each other. It is clear that at the background of this version are these basic ideas that things are categorically different, and that the universe has ontologically diverse and uncollectible categories. Suppose, for example, that the existential quantifier represents our ontology. According to this version,

it can be said that there are *different existential quantifiers* in such a way that each of them refers to a specific way of being, to a specific (ontological) category, or in other words, to a specific domain of interpretation. For example, ($\exists_1 x$) refers to the sort or domain of spatiotemporal objects and ($\exists_2 x$) refers to the sort or domain of abstract objects. Based on what has been said, let's call this version "the Sorting Version" and define it as follows:

> SV=^{df} there are distinct and irreducible sorts of entities, in such a way that each sort represents a way of being.

This version can be traced back to the works of Aristotle, where he speaks about the categories and thinks of them as the ontologically fundamental structure of the world. Aristotle considers the categories in such a way that "by which being is determined" (1029a) and as they are "categories of being" (200b, 1024b, and 1065b). Although he speaks of other senses of "being" in his works, but indeed, "being in the sense of the figures of the categories" indicates the pluralistic ontological structure that Aristotle accepted. He writes:

> The kinds of essential being are precisely those that are indicated by the figures of predication; for the senses of 'being' are just as many as these figures. Since, then, some predicates indicate what the subject is, others its quality, others quantity, others relation, others activity or passivity, others its 'where', others its 'when', 'being' has a meaning answering to each of these (1017b).[1]

Another version that can be considered for ontological pluralism is Carnap's version. Needless to say, this version is different from Aristotle's accepted version; because these two philosophers advocate pluralism with different motives. Aristotle is a proponent of ontology and, in fact, the father of this science. Carnap, however, opposes ontology, calling it a metaphysical extremism. So Aristotle and Carnap radically differ in their support for ontological pluralism.[2]

In Carnap's view, speaking of a new kind of entity, or in other words, to regard something as existent requires the introduction of a linguistic

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1. See the detailed discussion about Aristotle's pluralism in (Esfandiari et al. 2021).
2. To clarify this difference, let's consider the difference that Chalmers (2009, p. 77) makes between an ontological realist and an ontological anti-realist: "The basic question of ontology is 'what exists?' The basic question of meta ontology is: are there objective answers to the basic question of ontology? Here ontological realists say yes, and ontological anti-realists say no". He goes on to say (Chalmers, 2009, p. 78) that Carnap is the leader of ontological anti-realism and, of course, he sees Putnam in this category. Although Chalmers has not mentioned Aristotle, it is clear that he should be included in the first category.

framework in advance: "If someone wishes to speak in his language about a new kind of entities, he has to introduce a system of new ways of speaking, subject to new rules; we shall call this procedure the construction of a linguistic *framework* for the new entities in question" (Carnap, 1950, p. 206).

Therefore, according to the version that can be attributed to Carnap, there are different languages (or linguistic frameworks) in describing the world, so although ontological words have a 'single meaning' in all of these languages, their extensions are different in each language. In other words, the syntactic and semantic rules of each language are formatted in such a way that in each, a specific set of things is considered to exist. That is, each framework recognizes a specific set of things and therefore, considers them to exist. Metaphysical considerations do not interfere with the choice of any of these languages (that is, the choice of any of the ontologies), but this choice depends only on our pragmatical considerations. I call this version of ontological pluralism the "Language-Based Version"[1] and define it as follows:

> LBV=df There actually are different linguistic frameworks so constructing each of them requires specific syntactical and semantical rules. According to these rules, which depend on pragmatic considerations for science, each of these frameworks recognizes a particular kind of entity as existent.

Let us end the discussion about other versions of ontological pluralism here. In the next section, while explaining the differences between Putnam's version and these two versions, I will offer more comments about them.

Putnam's version of ontological pluralism: meaning-based version

We reviewed Putnam's approach to ontology and the ground he provides for pluralism. We also reviewed other versions of ontological pluralism. But in this section, I will first provide a definition of Putnam's own version based on the second section, and then, while mentioning the differences between his version and the two previous versions, I will present additional explanations about it.

Putnam's version of ontological pluralism can be called "the Meaning-Based Version". I will explain the reason for this naming. Now, the definition

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1. Eli Hirsch summarizes Carnap's ontological approach as follows: "Rudolph Carnap said that issues of ontology amount to nothing more than choosing one language or another" (2009, p. 231). This summary makes my naming more justified.

of this version:

> MBV=^{df} There actually are different conceptual schemes, in each of which ontological vocabulary has a particular meaning (use). Moreover, each of them uses particular conceptual tools to describe the world ontologically. Thus, there isa plurality of ontologies, each of which regards ontological vocabulary with a different meaning and reference.

Before continuing the discussion, let me point out why I have used the adverb "actually" in the definition of this version, and also in that of Carnap's version. There has been no mention of this before. In discussing conceptual schemes, Lynch (1998, p. 47) distinguishes between two kinds of pluralism. This adverb is due to that distinction:

> Actual pluralism: There is more than one conceptual scheme.
> Modal pluralism: It is possible for there to be more than one conceptual scheme.

Note that although these two theses "are consistent, modal pluralism is a weaker thesis, for it is also consistent with the denial of actual pluralism, that is, it is compatible with the idea that there is only one actual conceptual scheme" (Lynch, 1998, p. 47). So, when I use the adverb "actually" in the definition of Putnam's version, and also of Carnap's version, I consider them as proponents of a stronger thesis of pluralism about conceptual schemes, as well as, a stronger thesis of ontological pluralism. Note that by referring to this distinction, Amie Thomasson, without mentioning Lynch, considers Putnam to be a believer in *actual quantifier variance*; that is "the idea that there is no single absolute meaning for the quantifier and allied notions" (Thomasson, 2016, p. 133). Thomasson also considers Eli Hirsch to be a believer in possible quantifier variance. She regards this as evidence that Hirsch's idea does not lead to opposition to realism[1]. So, by using the adverb "actuality" in addition to referring to a stronger version of pluralism, I also endorse the anti-realistic aspect of Putnam's version and of Carnap's version.[2]

Given the above definition, it is clear that Putnam's version of ontological

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1. See Hirsch's advocacy of possible quantifier variance and his critiques of Putnam and actual quantifier variance in his (2002, pp. 80-2).

2. Of course, from Putnam's own works, one can provide evidence for his inclination towards the actual version of pluralism. Take, for example, these two phrases that, of course, are related: "…'exist' is a concept that can be and *is* continually being extended in various ways" (2004a, p. 3). And also "We can, in short, create divergent uses of the existential quantifier itself, and, to some extent… *we have always invented* new, and in some cases, divergent, uses of existential quantification (Putnam, 2004a, p. 38, all italics are mine).

pluralism has nothing to do with Aristotle's version. Note, first, that Putnam's advocacy of pluralism stems from his anti-ontological approach. Remember that he has even presented an obituary on ontology that ended as follows: "Even if ontology has become a stinking corpse, in Plato and Aristotle it represented the vehicle for conveying many genuine philosophical insights. The insights still preoccupy all of us in philosophy who have any historical sense at all. But the vehicle has long since outlived its usefulness" (2004a, p. 85).[1] In this sense, his approach cannot be considered similar to that of Aristotle, the founder of ontology[2].

Second, Putnam clearly advances his pluralistic theory by emphasizing the diversity of equivalent languages to describe the world. That is, he looks at the issue from a linguistic-semantical point of view. For Aristotle, however, language and meaning seem insignificant in ontology and it is the *structure* of being that preoccupies him. Aristotle's pluralism, then, stems from the plurality of the structure of being (what categories does being have?). On the other hand, Putnam is not at all concerned with the structure of the world (he considers this concern as a piece of philosophical parochialism: 2004a, p. 51) and emphasizes that the world can be described ontologically by different languages.

From these brief considerations, it cannot be concluded that Putnam's pluralistic theory is similar to that proposed by Carnap. They may seem similar because both emphasize the plurality of ontological languages in describing the world. But here are at least five differences between the two versions:

1) Putnam's pluralism stems from a commonsensical approach to ontology. But Carnap never considered himself a proponent of commonsensical ontology and he never was willing to abandon his scientific view on philosophical issues. About his purpose in (1950), the article that is at the heart

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1. It is clear that when Putnam speaks of "inflationary ontology" in the same book, without mentioning Aristotle, he considers Aristotle to be a proponent of this approach: "The most famous philosophers who pursued ontology in this traditional sense might be called "inflationary" ontologists" (2004a, p. 17). Interestingly, he does not consider himself as opposed to this ontological approach, and, in fact, as a defender of what he calls "deflationary ontology". Putnam writes: "When in the last of these four lectures I present an obituary on the project of ontology, it will be an obituary on all of these versions, the deflationary as well as the inflationary" (Putnam, 2004a, p. 21). In fact, Putnam's advocacy of ontological pluralism has led him to oppose both of these rival, but monistic approaches.

2. In Pihlström, 2006, pp. 7-9 see how Putnam's approach can be interpreted in such a way that he believes in a particular kind of ontology, such as the Kantian kind. However, Pihlström, (2006, p. 8) confirms that in this interpretation, Putnam is still opposed to the Aristotelian kind of ontology.

of his pluralistic ideas, Carnap writes: in this article, it will be shown that using a language referring to abstract entities is perfectly compatible with *strictly scientific thinking* (1950, p. 206, italics are mine). Although Carnap should not be considered a naturalist like Quine, and his scientific approach should not be regarded as naturalism, in this particular case, ontological naturalism, his ontological pluralism stems from the view that science can assume different and conflicting categories of entities to describe the world and the decision about the existence of any of these categories is not based on philosophical intuition, but on practical considerations. Putnam, on the other hand, describes his view as follows:

> I do indeed deny that the world can be completely described in the language game of theoretical physics; not because there are regions in which physics is false, but because, to use Aristotelian language, the world has many levels of form, and there is no realistic possibility of reducing them all to the level of fundamental physics (Putnam, 2013, p. 29).

So the motives of the two philosophers are different and even opposite. Putnam supports pluralism with the motive of defending commonsense, but Carnap is concerned with science and its multiple languages. Therefore, it is expected that they offer different versions of pluralism.

2) Carnap's pluralistic approach is, in fact, an opposition to the nominalists; those who, in this case, oppose referring to abstract entities in science[1]. A nominalist thinks that these entities do not exist for philosophical reasons. In contrast, Carnap emphasizes that referring to an entity should not be taken as a metaphysical confirmation of its existence. In his view, since the (philosophical) ontology of a theory is (scientifically) insignificant, it deserves to leave *scientists* free to refer (to many things). So, philosophical insights

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1. Carnap's pluralistic theory of ontology is explicitly presented in "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" (1950); the purpose of which is to overcome nominalistic scruples in accepting abstract entities in various branches of science (Carnap, 1950, p. 206). See also Carnap's letter to Quine dated July 21, 1949, in which he emphasizes that the aforementioned article will be written with the aim of discussing the positions of Quine, Nagel, and Ryle, whom he calls nominalists (Quine and Carnap, 1990, pp. 415-416). Of course, as we know, Quine and Goodman, together, had just written the famous article "Steps toward a Constructive Nominalism" (Goodman and Quine, 1947) with the aim of rejecting ontological commitment to abstract entities, even in mathematics. Quine's earlier article, "On Universals" (1947), was also devoted to presenting a nominalistic system for mathematics free from any ontological commitment to abstract entities.

should not prevent the development of *the language of science*[1]. Nominalism, then, is rejected because it looks at science from a philosophical and ontological point of view. Whereas, from Carnap's view, science should be free from these considerations and instead, pursue practical considerations. But Putnam, on the other hand, welcomes pluralism from a commonsensical point of view and considers a variety of ontological formulations about the world, including non-scientific formulations too. In other words, Putnam is opposed to scientism, which takes the language of science too seriously in describing the world.[2] From this perspective, his opposition can also be considered an opposition to Carnap. Carnap advocates pluralism in opposition to the nominalistic (and even its rival, the realistic) approach to the language of science, but Putnam advocates it in opposition to scientism (the adequacy of the language of science in describing the world).

3) Putnam considers the diversity of these languages to be due to the various meanings of ontological vocabulary and their logical counterparts (and the objects in question). He emphasizes that in different contexts, these words have different meanings and in fact, there is a family of meanings for them. But Carnap's view does not at all involve dealing with the various meanings of ontological vocabulary. His project focuses on the different languages that can be introduced for describing the world, not on the different meanings conceivable from ontological vocabulary. Carnap emphasizes that a variety of linguistic systems (such as the system of observable things, the system of numbers, the system of propositions, etc.), each with its own rules, can be selected and used to describe the world. Suppose that there is no such thing as "numbers" in the conceptual scheme (or in Carnap's term, in the linguistic framework) that a person has chosen based on practical considerations. In other words, there are no rules for introducing and applying them. In such a situation, Carnap thinks that person cannot quantify over numbers, and, accordingly, she has not accepted the existence of numbers. However, in such a situation where the numerical linguistic form is not accepted, Carnap does

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1. Carnap Writes: "The acceptance or rejection of abstract linguistic forms, just as the acceptance or rejection of any other linguistic forms in any branch of science, will finally be decided by their efficiency as instruments, the ratio of the results achieved to the amount, and complexity of the efforts required" (1950, p. 221). Then, he continues: "Let us learn from the lessons of history. Let us grant to those who work in any special field of investigation the freedom to use any form of expression which seems useful to them" (Carnap, 1950, p. 221).

2. In this case, see Putnam, 2004a, pp. 83-84 for his opposition to Quine, Bernard Williams, Simon Blackburn, Paul Churchland, and indeed, to the sufficiency of the language of science in the ontological description of the world in their views. Compare with: Putnam, 1995, pp. 30-32. See similar opposition, but to naturalism, in Putnam, 2004b, pp. 61-66.

not say that "numbers do not exist", but says that the sentence "numbers exist/do not exist" cannot be formulated at all. In contrast, when we accept and use the linguistic form of numbers, the sentence that "numbers exist" is the analytical and trivial result of accepting such a form.

From another perspective, it can be said that according to Carnap, there exist plural ontologies that are extensionally different and even contradictory. But from Putnam's point of view, pluralism also extends to the realm of meaning, and, accordingly, our ontologies are intensionally different. That's why Carnap's version was called "Language-Based" and Putnam's version is called "Meaning-Based". Note that this important difference, which also seems controversial, is related to the difference that has already been mentioned: Carnap's concern is not ontology at all, but language planning in the general sense, and in particular, semantics and reference. His concern is how to adopt a language that refers to abstract entities, such as numbers, propositions, classes, etc., and what the practical consequences of this adoption are. Because these issues traditionally lead to ontological considerations, Carnap implicitly and critically discusses the existence of such entities. Thomasson has a similar view of this difference between Carnap and Putnam. She points out that Putnam's position leads to quantifier variance in different schemes and then, describes Carnap's position as follows:

> His diagnosis is quite different: the difference between the Platonist and the nominalist doesn't lie in the truth conditions they associate with quantified sentences, but rather in what *material* terms the disputants have introduced and accept (with what rules of use). The nominalist must be understood as implicitly refusing to admit noun terms for numbers (and refusing to quantify over numbers), or refusing to accept or make use of the general predicate *number*… or for properties….
>
> As a result, the nominalist employs a different framework from the Platonist about numbers or properties, and will not accept sentences such as 'numbers exist' or 'properties exist'. But the point is not that 'exists' is being used in a different sense by the nominalist and Platonist, but rather that the second accepts while the first rejects the linguistic framework that includes the relevant material concepts of property or number (Thomasson, 2016, p. 136).

However, we know that Putnam considers Carnap to be a conceptual relativist: "Carnap was a conceptual relativist (that is, in part, what his famous Principle of Tolerance is all about)…" (Putnam, 1990, p. 99). Nevertheless, although Carnap himself introduces the principle of tolerance as the "principle of the conventionality of language forms" (1963, p. 55), and sees his own ontological pluralism, outlined in his (1950), in accord with this principle

(Carnap, 1963, p. 66), he, as discussed above, cannot be considered a conceptual relativist. Indeed, in Putnam's terms, Carnap believed in conceptual pluralism, not conceptual relativity, and Putnam misinterprets him when he says Carnap was a conceptual relativist. According to Carnap, the principle of tolerance and the conventionality of language forms should not be considered as conceptual relativity. Rather, it indicates the choice of different conceptual mechanisms in describing the world and this is the very phenomenon of conceptual pluralism.[1]

4) The fourth difference is closely related to the first two differences and may not be considered as an independent case. This difference arises from the distinction that Price (1992, pp. 389-391) makes between horizontal pluralism and vertical pluralism. Horizontal pluralism is an approach that recognizes a variety of scientific worldviews so that none of them have the privilege of describing the world. In other words, there are various scientific theories, but none provide a 'truer' description of the world. On the other hand, vertical pluralism, or discourse pluralism, is the view that philosophy should recognize an irreducible plurality of kinds of discourse, the scientific as well as the moral, the artistic, and so on. Price emphasizes that discourse pluralism can be seen as the plurality of language games and this is clearly derived from the late Wittgenstein. This kind of pluralism seems to be supported later by American pragmatists such as Goodman and Rorty. Horizontal pluralism, in contrast, is reminiscent of a Quinean view that only (plural versions of) the language of science can be right in describing the world. Although Price has not mentioned either Carnap or Putnam in his article, these considerations can easily be regarded as related to the pluralistic ideas of these two philosophers. It is worth mentioning that Quine and Carnap have a similar view in this particular debate and Putnam's view is more similar to that of the late Wittgenstein and other American pragmatist philosophers. What is evident in Carnap's pluralistic approach, as stated, is his concern about the language of science and about the consequences of referring to abstract entities in this language. Anyway, it seems unreasonable to try to reconcile vertical pluralism with the views of Carnap, who advocated the idea of the unity of science and believed

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1. It should be noted, however, that until 2001 Putnam confused the two phenomena of conceptual relativity and conceptual pluralism, and considered them in a single idea of conceptual relativity. Following Jennifer Case's (1997 and 2001) remarks to Putnam about this confusion, he made the present distinction. This can be understood from his (2001), "Reply to Jennifer Case" (see also Putnam's acknowledgment of this confusion in 2004a, p. 48 and 2013, p. 29). Putnam's above quote about Carnap is from his (1990) and the period when Putnam considered the two ideas to be the same. So, perhaps if he interpreted Carnap with this latter distinction, he would have considered him a conceptual pluralist, not a conceptual relativist.

that the different branches of empirical science are separated only for the practical reason of division of labor (see Carnap 1963, pp. 50-3). Consider, for example, what Carnap said in his *Intellectual Autobiography* about the difference between logical empiricists (including himself) and pragmatist philosophers in their perception of value statements:

> The thesis of the non-cognitive character of value statements is accepted by most of those who regard themselves as belonging to the movement of logical empiricism, but it is rejected by most of those empiricists who regard themselves as pragmatists or who are at least strongly influenced by Dewey's philosophy (1963, p. 82).

In contrast, Putnam's thought can be related to both of these kinds of pluralism. For example, he (1995, pp. 30-31) points out that it is a fascinating aspect of Kant's thought that there is not just one image of the world but two images, a scientific image and a moral image. Putnam calls this kind of worldview 'incipient pluralism' and continues that Kant then added a religious image, an aesthetic image, and a legal image to the two aforementioned images of the world. And it is surprising that Putnam, so relevant to the subject we are discussing, acknowledges that Kant, like Quine in our day, has insisted that only the scientific image of the world contains what can properly be called 'knowledge'. But this is the feature of Kant's thought that was later criticized by William James and the late Wittgenstein. Putnam then, with a Wittgensteinian voice, rejects this unique conception of knowledge: "Human beings are self-surprising creatures; we have always created new language games, and we shall continue to create new language games; we have always extended and modified the use of the word "know" and we shall continue to extend and modify the use of the word 'know'" (Putnam, 1995, p. 32)[1].

Therefore, based on what has been said above and in the light of the considerations of the first two differences, a fourth difference can be made between Putnam's version and Carnap's version in ontological pluralism: Putnam believes in both horizontal and vertical pluralism, but Carnap believes only in horizontal pluralism[2].

Here, I would like to reinforce all these considerations and differences by referring again to the analytic and neo-Carnapian philosopher, Amie Thomasson, who herself has made a significant contribution to contemporary

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1. Compare with (Putnam, 2004b, p. 61).
2. See the relation between these two kinds of pluralism with conceptual pluralism in Baghramian, 2004, p. 233. See also: Goodman, 2013, p. 207, which defends the idea that Putnam believed in both kinds of pluralism in question.

ontology. In her (2016), while she refers to Carnap's ontological approach as 'deflationism', she begins the third section, that is "Putnam Takes Deflationism on an Unfortunate Turn, " as follows: "The full story about why Carnapian deflationism about ontology virtually fell off the map for the next several decades may have as much to do with the friends as enemies of deflationism" (2016, p. 131). Then, referring to Putnam's ontological approach and that it is considered similar to Carnap's approach, Thomasson writes: "But there are two ways in which Putnam's deflationism takes importantly different turns than Carnap's, both of which have had unfortunate consequences" (Thomasson, 2016, p. 131). She lists two differences as follows:

> First, Putnam ties the idea of conceptual relativity to the idea that certain core terms used in metaphysical debates—'exists' and 'object'—have different meanings in different 'versions'…

> Second, Putnam uses this observation in the service of a general denial of 'realism', for from the fact that a question like 'how many objects are there' can only be answered within a version, Putnam concludes that we must reject the idea that there are objects that exist independently of our conceptual scheme (Thomasson, 2016, p. 132).

She goes on to point out that these two features have nothing to do with Carnap's approach:

> These two features of Putnam's view have been very influential. The first, the idea that 'exists' and 'object' vary in meaning, turned metaontological debates to focus heavily on the idea of 'quantifier variance' for the next twenty years or more. The second, the association between ontological deflationism and anti-realism, led many philosophers to reject deflationism, keeping it very much a minority position until quite recently (Thomasson, 2016, p. 132).

Of course, Thomasson does not find Carnap's approach anti-realistic, and this is questionable[1]. In addition, she considers Putnam's approach to be reminiscent of anti-realism, and this is also questionable[2]. Moreover, she looks

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1. For example, see Hirsch (2009, p. 231), which while endorsing that he has a Carnapian position to ontology, emphasizes that one of their differences is that Carnap has an anti-realist perspective and he does not. See also Chalmers (2009, p. 78) who introduces Carnap as the leader of ontological anti-realism.

2. The author of *The Many Faces of Realism* strictly insists that his position should not be taken as a kind of anti-realism. In response to Russell Goodman, who cites Nelson Goodman as one of the sources of Putnam's pluralism, Putnam writes that he himself disagrees with Goodman's irrealism. See, Putnam, 2013, pp. 222-223.

at the issue from a Carnapian point of view, that is, with a kind of bias. Therefore, she considers Putnam's ideas as a kind of deviation (not improvement) and takes a critical approach to them. But my purpose in quoting these was not to judge Thomasson's reading of Carnap and Putnam. Rather, I wanted to find support for the differences I mentioned between Carnap and Putnam.

5) However, there are further differences due to Putnam's historical approach to rationality, methodological principles, and knowledge in general. We know that Putnam's intellectual development led him to think that our methodological principles would change with time and that "there is no fixed, ahistorical *organon* which defines what it is to be rational" (1981, p. x)[1]. Rejecting the neutral concept of rationality, he argued that our methodological criteria, such as coherence and simplicity are historically conditioned (1990, pp. 138-139). Moreover, he acknowledged that the reference of terms, and even the truth, which for him is the justification conditions for sentences, "change as our total body of knowledge changes, and cannot be taken as fixed once and for all" (1983, p. 85). But in his later period of thought we see that this historicity extends even to concepts. So, he advocates archeology, in Foucault's sense, because it takes the idea of conceptual structure seriously and looks for systems of concepts. Putnam then writes:

> Although "analytic" philosophers still often write as if concepts were a-historic entities (which is exactly how they were conceived of by the fathers of analytic philosophy, Moore and Russell), there is no reason for their latter-day successors to deny that concepts have a history, and that conceptual analysis and historical analysis can fruitfully enrich each other… (2004a, p. 113).

What we mean here mainly by historicity is that ontological terms have histories. This can be known from Putnam's discussion of conceptual relativity. It is worth mentioning that in his view "…'exist' is a concept that can be and *is* continually being extended in various ways (2004a, p. 3). Accordingly, "We can… create divergent uses of the existential quantifier itself, and, to some extent… *we have always invented* new, and in some cases, divergent, uses of existential quantification (Putnam, 2004a, p. 38, all italics are mine). In contrast, Carnap's pluralistic approach does not at all involve this historical view, specifically of ontology and linguistic forms. Of course, as noted in the third difference, the fact that Carnap's pluralistic view does not involve conceptual considerations and variations on ontological vocabulary indicates

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1. See similar considerations in Putnam, 1987, p. 72.

that his approach cannot be reconciled with some kind of archeological view.

In the end, note that my purpose in recounting these differences was to clarify various aspects of Putnam's pluralistic approach to ontology. Some of these differences may seem trivial; however, I have tried to make clear that opposition to ontology and realism (as a metaphysical approach), before and after defending and reviving them by Quine, has different faces. Such a clarification might also lead to a better understanding of Quine's conception of them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to mention once again, distinctly from the other versions, the basic components of Putnam's ontological pluralism. Before that, let me acknowledge again that Putnam's views have changed through his different intellectual periods. However, the version I have now attributed to Putnam as Meaning-Based is tied to these features: First, Putnam defends pluralism with a critical view to ontology. Second, his pluralism implies that ontological words have semantic variance in different schemes and indeed, they do not have a single absolutely precise meaning (as used) but a whole family of meanings. Third, his ontological pluralism recognizes the variety of formulations, scientific, commonsensical, artistic, moral, etc., along with the appropriate conceptual mechanisms of each, to describe the world. Therefore, emphasizing any single formulation in describing the world (for example, scientific formulation), even if we recognize multiple versions and theories based on that single formulation, is not acceptable to Putnam. Fourth, his pluralism not only confirms the possibility of different ontological versions of the world but also confirms that there *actually* are different versions. Fifth, his pluralism is tied to the historicity of justification conditions (truth), our knowledge of the world, and then, our ontological descriptions of the world.

Ethics declarations

Conflict of interests

The author has no competing interests.

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