



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

“On Putnam’s concept of practical rationality.
An examination of Putnam’s understanding of rationality in
view of an entanglement of fact and value.”

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2023 / Vienna 2023

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A 066 941

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Master Philosophie

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Hans Bernhard Schmid

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Introduction

The fact/value divide is discussed throughout the history of modern philosophy. Today the issue lies in between the areas of politics and conduct of social sciences that reaches into the realm of ethics. Even though a broad discussion of the topic has declined in the last years, the discourse today does culturally have a high significance.

The common dominant view today is that scientific and ethical statements are seen as diametral to each other. Science is descriptive, neutral, stating facts and is viewed either to be objectively true or false (cognitive). Ethical statements on the other hand are seen as evaluative, expressive (prescriptive) and incapable of being true or false (non-cognitive). In the common-sense meaning value judgments implicate merely an expression of opinion or subjective preference that cannot be debated rationally.

In the introduction of *The Collapse of the fact/value Dichotomy*¹ Putnam states that the view of these strict dichotomies is unattainable. The main goal of his book is to shed light on the problems these divides imply. Putnam touches upon the fact/value problem in other papers and publications² but promises an elaborate historical background on the dichotomy and to address the question whether ‘ends’ as in values can or cannot be rationally discussed.³ In the introduction Putnam states his main claim: “How a belief in the objectivity of ethical judgment is to be defended if one refuses (as I do) to postulate any special ‘Platonic’ realm of ‘ethical properties’.”⁴

For Putnam the fact/value dichotomy and analytic truth have spoiled to even think about ethical reasoning and the description of the world simultaneously and in turn prevent to see how evaluation and description are interdependent and interwoven.⁵

This describes the divide between fact and value that Putnam wants to overcome. For Putnam cognitive states such as ‘knowing that’ are valuable and that hypotheses about the good in action can be tested.⁶ Putnam’s main opponents are not only the logical positivists, which Putnam blames for the inflation of the dichotomy, but also relativism and metaphysicalism. With the collapse of the dichotomy of fact and value, there is need for a new conception of practical rationality. In view of current culture of debate and established ideas on rationality Putnam’s

¹ Hilary Putnam: *The Collapse of the fact value dichotomy and other essays*. Cambridge, MA 2004.

² See further: John R. Shook: “Bibliography of The Writings of Hilary Putnam”, in: *The Philosophy of Hilary Putnam*, Randall E. Auxier (Ed.), Chicago, IL 2015, 891-923.

³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 2.

⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 3.

⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 3.

⁶ Lance P. Hickey, *Hilary Putnam*, London 2009, 146-147.

view seems interesting. It involves several fields of philosophy that overlap in this discussion. Namely, epistemology, conceptions of rationality, but also reaches into sociopolitical dimensions.

The aim of the thesis is to examine Putnam's conception of practical rationality in view of the collapse of the dichotomy of fact and value and to further analyze how Putnam argues for objectivity in ethics and what this view implies.

Further questions related to the main research topic are: Is it reasonable that there is indeed a deep entanglement of fact and value as Putnam states? What are the consequences if we take this entanglement thesis seriously? Is the argument that rationality is sourced by value judgments an agreeable argument? Are Putnam's arguments of his practical rationality sound enough to infer objectivity in ethics from it?

The objective of the thesis is to sharpen Putnam's notion of rationality and to examine how this notion is related to the collapse of the fact/value dichotomy. A further aim of the thesis is to take a closer look at the implications of Putnam's idea of rationality. In his writings there is no stand-alone comprehensive statement towards his conception of rationality.

A short overview of Putnam's entire work can be found in Massimo Dell Utri's article.⁷ An extensive bibliography on all his writings is listed in *Putnam*⁸. In 2004 there was a Conference in Poznan dealing with Putnam, some articles touch upon the dichotomy but none really deal with the aspect of rationality. These papers are more summaries of Putnam's statements and did not really bring new insights.⁹

This thesis tries to shed light onto this mostly neglected area of Putnam's work. Putnam's *Collapse*¹⁰ was fairly discussed and referenced upon its release. Most reviewers take the same line in recognizing an insightful and agreeable read but nonetheless the common reception of the book is that central topics are left rather unclarified on his end. See for example Agassi's critique: "[...]: readable as every passage in it is, its point is often unclear—as is the point of the whole book."¹¹

⁷ Massimo Dell'Utri, "'Metaphysics Without Ethics is Blind': The Legacy of Hilary Putnam", in: *J Gen Philos Sci* 48, 2017, 501-515.

⁸ John R. Shook, *Bibliography*, 891-923.

⁹ Christopher Hookway, "Dichotomies: facts and epistemic values", in: *Following Putnam's Trail: On Realism and Other Issues*, M.U. Rivas Monroy; C. Cancela Silva; C. Martínez Vidal (Eds.), Amsterdam/New York, NY 2008, 55-69; Jaime Nubiola, "Dichotomies and Artefacts: A reply to professor Hookway", in: *Following Putnam's Trail: On Realism and Other Issues*, M.U. Rivas Monroy; C. Cancela Silva; C. Martínez Vidal (Eds.), Amsterdam/New York, NY 2008, 71-80.

¹⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*.

¹¹ Joseph Agassi, "What Collapse, Exactly?", in: *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 37 (1), 2007, 74; see also: "However, in the process Putnam overlooks a number of interesting motives underlying the positivist movement, [...]." (Alexei Angelides, "The Last Collapse? An Essay Review of Hilary Putnam's The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays", in: *Philosophy of Science* 71 (3), 2004, 402); Or: "What Putnam has already shown us is extremely illuminating, but it is still only an abstract sketch – one that

Agassi detects two theses of the book (1) entanglement thesis (fact and value) and (2) there is more to values than moral imperatives. He further asks, if there is any serious opposition to these claims? He argues that it is all commonplace and that Putnam fights for opponents.¹²

This critique does not hold up. While half of the critiques do dismiss Putnam's theses as nothing new and deem the entanglement thesis as established¹³, in contrast the other half strongly support the dichotomy¹⁴. So, there is some controversy in Putnam's claims. Another aspect that needs to be addressed is that Putnam did change his mind over time on some aspects that are related to his conception of rationality (and stood by this mind change). Therefore, it is important to note, that the writings spread over 20 years take on different positions.

A main source used in this thesis is Putnam's *The Collapse of the fact value dichotomy*¹⁵ and other of his writings where he touches upon the topic of rationality explicitly. *The Collapse of the fact value dichotomy* was published in 2004 but is not the first or last time that Putnam dealt with the topic, which are also considered and discussed.

Other important sources are the critiques and reviews on Putnam's writings as well as some papers on Putnam as a philosopher in general and papers relating to pragmatism.

The aim of the thesis therefore is a discussion of the relationship between rationality and the entanglement of fact and value as a discussion encompassing the entire backdrop of the fact/value collapse would be too extensive for this thesis.

When dealing with Putnam we face the following problems that we must keep in mind. He changed his mind over time, he poses questions that are not always answered, some details to certain concepts are dealt with in later chapters, only alluded or not dealt with at all. Especially in *Collapse* Putnam deals with completely different problems than initially announced and he circulates back to problems that were touched upon earlier and he does not elaborate certain concepts explicitly.¹⁶

requires the filling in of its concrete details." (Richard J. Bernstein, "The Pragmatic Turn: The Entanglement of Fact and Value", in: *Hilary Putnam*, Yemima Ben-Menahem (ed.), Cambridge, MA 2005, 264).

¹² For example: "Such an insight is a good one. But, it is by no means new." (Angelides, *Last Collapse?*, 105).

¹³ For example: "Such an insight is a good one. But, it is by no means new." (Angelides, *Last Collapse?*, 105).

¹⁴ See: Lars Bergström, "Putnam on the Fact-Value Dichotomy", in: *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* 2, 2002, 1-13; Agassi, *What Collapse?*, 74-84; John T. Goldthwait, "The Necessary Dichotomy of Fact and Value", in: *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 39, 2005, 105-113; Darlei Dall'Agnol, "Disentangling Facts and Values: An Analysis of Putnam's pragmatic ethics", in: *Principia* 17 (2), 2013, 265-274.

¹⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*.

¹⁶ "In almost every chapter, we find one thing announced and another discussed, a related one, for sure, yet raising the uneasy feeling that the relevance of the one thing to the other is obvious but not exactly how." (Agassi, *What Collapse?*, 74). See also: "[...], as usual in Putnam, he does not give a clear elaboration of the issue." (Ángeles Perona, "Soft Rationality and Reticulated Universality. Reflecting on the Debate between R. Rotry and H. Putnam", in: *Rationality and Decision Making. From Normative Rules to Heuristics*, Marek Hetmański, (Ed.), Leiden 2018, 105).

Thus, the employed methods in the thesis are mainly a close reading of Putnam's writings, followed by an analysis and critique of his writing. Additionally, the thesis tries to explicate his arguments and possible counterpoints to his claims.

The thesis is divided into four main chapters. The first chapter explains the collapse of the fact/value dichotomy and how this divide originated in Hume's distinction between is and ought. This distinction influenced logical positivism to infer a strict divide of fact and value. The second chapter deals with Putnam's understanding of language and its impact on his conception of rationality. A further aspect that is of interest here is Putnam's critique of relativism. The third Chapter is concerned with the main topic of the thesis, namely Putnam's conception of practical rationality. The chapter further elaborates how value and rationality are intertwined. The topic of the fourth and last Chapter is the scope of Putnam's conception of practical rationality. Considering Putnam's idea of practical rationality, other areas of philosophy are connected to his practical rationality. The scope therefore is not only comprised of Putnam's commitment towards pragmatism, but also relates to the political idea of democracy and affects ethical concerns. The conclusion reiterates the discussed topics and provides an outlook on further issues in relation to the main research question of Putnam's conception of practical rationality and its relation to the entanglement of fact and value.

I From is/ought to fact/value

To understand Putnam's conception of practical rationality, we need to look at the basic assumptions that Putnam wants to overcome. Therefore, the first chapter of the thesis explains firstly, how the distinction of is/ought was established and secondly, how it evolved into a dichotomy of fact/value. The distinction of is/ought was introduced by David Hume. In time this distinction turned into a strict divide of fact and value, which was promoted by logical positivism. The aforementioned divide is Putnam's main object of critique. He understands the terms of fact and value as entangled and further considers the divide now as collapsed.¹⁷ The entanglement thesis is the underlying base argument that calls for a different conception of (practical) rationality. Therefore, the historical development of the divide of fact and value is of interest, as Putnam takes this genealogy as steppingstones to argue for his entanglement thesis.

In the following two sections the main ideas in regard of the historical development – which starts with the separation of is/ought (Hume) and evolves into the divide of fact/value (logical positivists) – are assessed. The third section is concerned with Putnam's arguments for the collapse of the dichotomy of fact and value. He explains the collapse of the dichotomy by following Quine's arguments against the dichotomy of synthetic and analytic statements. The subchapters are respectively constructed in the same manner. Firstly, Putnam's arguments are presented and in the second stage the criticism of his position is examined.

Hume's Law

For Putnam Hume's Law is the starting point of the fact/value dichotomy. In the following section I will firstly elaborate Putnam's interpretation of Hume regarding the differentiation of is/ought and secondly will discuss how Putnam understands fact and value as distinct and not as a dichotomy. Thirdly, I will present how Putnam uses Quine's collapse of the synthetic and analytic for his entanglement thesis. Lastly, I will review the criticism brought forward against Putnam on his interpretation of Hume and the fact/value dichotomy.

Putnam's interpretation of Hume

What is Hume's Law exactly? Hume concludes in his *Treatise of Human Nature*¹⁸ figuratively that *no ought can follow from an is*.¹⁹ An 'is' judgment establishes a 'matter of fact' and from

¹⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 27.

¹⁸ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford 2007.

¹⁹ „In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes

there no 'ought' judgment can be derived. In turn the realms of fact and value are separated. In view of this logical gap, a correct differentiation between description and ascription is needed. This inference is commonly known as Hume's Law.

A statement of fact cannot lead to a normative conclusion of what ought to be done. The gap between is/ought statements makes ought statements of questionable validity. Thus, there can be no moral knowledge related to reason alone. Therefore, in the common view Hume is seen to deny practical reason all together.²⁰

There are two main aspects that feed into Hume's ethical anti-rationalism. Firstly, moral good or bad cannot be discovered by reason alone.²¹ Secondly, virtue is not understood as reasonableness and likewise vice does not oppose reason.²² There are two arguments for this. The first one follows from the Representation Argument (since passions cannot represent, they cannot oppose reason). Passions, volitions, and actions can be neither reasonable nor unreasonable, but actions *can* be laudable or blamable. These properties are not identical. The second is related to the conclusion that reason alone cannot be a motive for action.²³

In contrast moral sentiments are derived from sentiments specifically related to morality, such as feelings of approval (praise, esteem) and disapproval (blame). Actions however are driven or prevented by our opinions of obligation or injustice. Therefore, morals cannot be derived from reason alone.²⁴

From this we may conclude that Hume considered moral evaluations to not be beliefs of any kind and lack cognitive content. Moral judgments may be seen as meaningless utterings of emotion that are neither true nor false. Nonetheless, we should be cautious with this

observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason shou'd be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the reader; and am perswaded, that this small attention wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason." (Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 302 (SB 469-470)).

²⁰ "Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly im-potent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason." (Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 294 (SB 457)).

²¹ "[...] that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will; [...]." (Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 265 (SB 413)).

²² "Actions may be laudable or blamable; but they cannot be reasonable or unreasonable: Laudable or blamable, therefore, are not the same with reasonable or unreasonable." (Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 295 (SB 458)).

²³ Puntam, *Collaspe*, 20.

²⁴ Puntam, *Collaspe*, 20.

inference, because for Hume detaching something from reason does not necessarily imply that it is entirely free from truth acknowledgments or belief.²⁵

Putnam follows Millgram, who characterizes Hume as a sceptic and not a denier of practical reason. Millgram's main argument is that Hume's arguments are informed by a pictorial semantic theory that is no longer intelligible for contemporary readers. This causal resemblance theory has influence on how Hume sees 'ideas' and 'impressions'.²⁶

Putnam claims that Hume assumed a *metaphysical* dichotomy between 'matters of fact' and 'relations of ideas' instead of a simple logical inference.

“What Hume meant was when an ‘is’ judgment describes a ‘matter of fact’, then no ‘ought’ judgment can be derived from it. Hume’s metaphysics of ‘matters of fact’ constitutes the whole ground of the alleged underivability of ‘oughts’ from ‘ises’.”²⁷

Putnam seems to accept inferences of 'oughts' from 'ises' (see phrasing: 'alleged underivability'). This may be achieved by applying pragmatist methods, using objective value judgments and his idea of reasonableness (see also Chapter IV).²⁸

Hume's 'matters of fact' are also presupposed by this pictorial semantic theory with pictorial 'ideas'. Meaning that 'matters of fact' can only be represented by resemblance. 'Ideas' however have properties that are also non-pictorial, that involve or are associated with sentiments or emotions. So, Putnam argues, inferring an 'ought from an is' is more than just a logical inference. It is more so a claim that there is no 'matter of fact' about right and no 'matter of fact' about virtue. If there were 'matters of fact' about virtue and vice, then the property of virtue would be picturable considering his underlying semantic theory. Given this view, there are no matters of fact concerning morals. 'Passions' or 'sentiments' remain properties in the realm of 'ideas.' Putnam's interprets that:

“Hume thought he had at his disposal to explain why it so much seems to us that there are such matters of fact, it was quite reasonable for him to conclude that the components of our ‘ideas’ that correspond to judgments of virtue and vice are nothing more than ‘sentiments’ aroused in us by the ‘contemplation’ of the relevant actions owing to ‘the particular structure and fabric’ of our mind.”²⁹

Hume's Law thus features one side of a distinction that names a class of judgments that involve the 'idea' ought, bearing in mind the pictorial semantics. Putnam suggests to rectify this view. Putnam calls for a disinflation and argues to rather speak of the class of judgments that involve

²⁵ Rachel Cohon, “Hume's Moral Philosophy”, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta; Uri Nodelman, (Eds.): *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2018. [URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/hume-moral/>].

²⁶ Elijah Millgram, “Was Hume a Humean?”, in: *Hume Studies* 1, 1995, 75-93 and Elijah Millgram, “Hume on Practical Reasoning”, in: *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Quarterly* 46, 1997, 235-265.

²⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 14-15.

²⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 14-15.

²⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 15.

the word ‘ought’ in one of its ethical uses. This class is vague but in the same way as with ‘analytical truths’ we should not prematurely dismiss this class. Following Hume’s remarks Putnam then suggests to widen the class by considering judgments that not only contain the word ‘ought’ but also such as ‘right’, ‘wrong’, ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’ and other derivatives in their ethical use. These then would be paradigmatic value judgments, entailing most examples that appear in the writings of the proponents of the fact/value dichotomy. This vague class of ‘analytical’ truths do not solve philosophical problems per se but tell us what they have in common. This is similar to acknowledging that there is a class of judgments that contain ethical words. This likewise does not solve any philosophical problems or tells us what exactly an ethical word is.³⁰

Putnam further argues that Hume did not introduce any single term of what we now understand as a value judgment (he talked about ‘morals’). Instead, Hume discusses value terms (‘crime’, ‘ought’, ‘virtue’) always in the context and around examples of ethical judgments. However, there are many value judgments outside the ethical variety that are left out when discussing the relation between values and facts.³¹

Furthermore, Putnam states that Hume did not mean to rule out the possibility on writing about morals. Hume was able to combine non-cognitivist views in ethics with a faith in the existence of a thing such as ‘ethical wisdom’. As Putnam states, this was in accordance with Hume’s idea (the common 18th-century view), that knowledgeable persons, “[...] who mastered the art of thinking about human actions and problems impartially would feel the appropriate ‘sentiments’ of approval or disapproval under in the same circumstances unless there was something wrong with their personal constitution”.³² For Putnam it follows that this led to many misreading Hume and to claim that what ‘good’ means is ‘to cause impartial and well-informed people to approve’. However instead, by Putnam’s interpretation:

“Hume thinks that most impartial and well-informed people *will* approve of whatever is good but he *never* claims that this is the content of the ‘idea’ of good, if he did, he would not claim that there is no ‘fact’ that is the fact that something is virtue or a vice, and so on, and he does quite clearly make that claim.”³³

³⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 15-16.

³¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 18-19.

³² Putnam, *Collapse*, 20.

³³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 20. See also Hume on the crime of ingratitude (that he does not view as a particular fact): “Reason judges either of *matter of fact* or of *relations*. Enquire then, *first*, where is that matter of fact which we here call *crime*; point it out ; determine the time of its existence ; describe its essence or nature ; explain the sense or faculty to which it discovers itself. It resides in the mind of the person who is ungrateful. He must, therefore, feel it, and be con-scious of it. But nothing is there, except the passion of ill-will or absolute indifference. You cannot say that these, of them-selves, always, and in all circumstances, are crimes. No, they are only crimes when directed towards persons who have before expressed and displayed good-will towards us. Conse-quently, we may infer, that the crime of ingratitude is not any individual *fact*; but arises from a com-plication of circumstances, which, being presented to the spectator, excites the *sentiment* of

Hume's interest in the character of ethical concepts was part of a wider interest in ethics as such and was encompassed in an entirely self-standing branch of philosophy (morals), which further entails social and political implications.³⁴ Putnam views Hume's notion of 'fact' as simple as that there can be a sensible 'impression'.³⁵

Following Putnam's interpretation of Hume, the problem does not lie within the distinction of the different realms that have been introduced. Putnam rather sees the logical positivists as the main driving force of inflating the distinct realms into divided entities. Moreover, he argues they conflated all forms of value judgments into one realm and in turn dismissed the option of not only discussing ethical statements but all value statements altogether (which are not necessarily moral).³⁶

In time several interpretations of Hume's Law followed. The main interpretation is, that Hume called for a separation of fact and value. This view would – according to Putnam – turn into a dichotomy. The view of a dichotomy is especially supported in logical positivism (p. ex. Carnap, Popper), where there is no overlapping of facts and values. Values within this view are a subject that no longer needs to be discussed, as they were seen as purely subjective elements that are not rationally discussable. Putnam in contrast views the terms not as strictly divided but distinct.³⁷

Importance of distinction (Dewey I)

To understand Putnam's position, it is helpful to be concerned with some definitions. The concept that Putnam attacks is the dichotomy of fact and value, which describes the strict separation of fact and value into definite different epistemic spheres. A dichotomy between two terms describes a difference between two opposite ideas or things, that do not or cannot interact with each other. The two concerned terms therefore are completely cut off from each other. A divide occupies the same characteristics and describes an explicit difference or separation that cannot be overcome. The same can be said for the term of a dualism. These three terms can be used interchangeably to describe things that are divided in absolute terms and touch upon concepts that are very different from each other or even opposing.

A distinction on the other hand also describes a difference between two things but on a much weaker scale. The two concerned terms are of similar composition but can be differentiated in

blame, by the particular structure and fabric of his mind." (David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning The Principles Of Morals*, Oxford 1963, 287-288 (SB 237)).

³⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 19-20.

³⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 20.

³⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 17.

³⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 19.

certain aspects but not in an absolute way. Thus, a distinction has the properties of specifying related terms but does not isolate or detach them entirely from each other. The terms stay connected in their respective spheres or have overlapping properties. By establishing a distinction rather than a dichotomy Putnam can now relate between the formerly detached ideas of fact and value. The divide of fact and value therefore is no longer able to continue in this state of absolute separation. The distinction facilitates to relate the formerly divided terms to one another. They are no longer metaphysically divided and have ranges of application.³⁸

If we imagine various concepts as a Venn-diagram, the two sets of fact and value now have overlapping properties. Other parts of the set do not interact with each other. If we establish a distinction the relations between the overlapping and non-overlapping sets can be explicated.

A collapse is another important term in Putnam's set up. It describes the inability to continue in the previously established way. In turn, Putnam introduces the idea of an entanglement following the collapse of the dualism of fact and value. An Entanglement is the idea of terms that are wrapped, twisted, or intertwined with each other. Specifically, the terms cannot be separated as each of the terms are part of each other and operate in the same realm.

Putnam's insistence of relating to the terms rather as distinct than referring to a dichotomy results from Dewey's and Quine's arguments that lead to the collapse. Viewing facts and values distinct instead of divided entails certain implications. Namely, now not all forms of judgments are excluded from being discussed rationally and in turn are no longer dismissed as purely subjective.³⁹

Putnam stresses like Dewey that a dualism is not be understood in the same way as a distinction. It's not about not being able to differentiate between fact and value, it is rather about the terms being separated. A distinction is not a dichotomy.⁴⁰ For Putnam the following necessary disinflation is:

“[...] there is a distinction to be drawn (one that is useful in some contexts) between ethical judgments and other sorts of judgments. This is undoubtedly the case, just as it is undoubtedly the case that there is a distinction to be drawn (and one that is useful in some contexts) between *chemical* judgments and judgments that do not belong to the field of chemistry. *But nothing metaphysical follows from the existence of a fact/value distinction in this (modest) sense.*”⁴¹

³⁸ See: “[...] one difference between an ordinary distinction and a metaphysical dichotomy: ordinary distinctions have ranges of application, and we are not surprised if they do not always apply.” (Putnam, *Collapse*, 11).

³⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 9-13.

⁴⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 9. See also: “[...] the importance of respecting the distinction between a philosophical dualism and a philosophical distinction.” (Putnam, *Collapse*, 10).

⁴¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 19.

Thus, he postulates for ethical judgments and other judgments to be seen as distinct and to abandon the dichotomy. This means that (value) judgments can enter the realm of reason and can be rationally discussed. Putnam acknowledges the work that has already been done by Dewey concerning the dichotomy of fact and value and even calls the rejection of the absolute dichotomy between descriptive facts and value judgments perhaps the most important idea of Deweyan pragmatism.⁴²

This rejection includes that value judgments supposedly are only subjective; ethical propositions are only bona fide assertions according to logical positivism; and that the lack of truth-value within these judgments lie outside the sphere of rational argument.⁴³

With the rejection of the dichotomy the entanglement of fact and value is implied. Why is this important? A common view today is, that statements of fact are objectively true and only objectively warranted. In opposition to that are value judgments, which do not hold any truth values or objective warranty. In the extreme view the latter lie completely outside the realm of reason.⁴⁴ The latter is the strict interpretation of Hume's law (like the logical positivists did). While the dichotomy acts as a barrier to discuss value judgments in relation to rationality at all Putnam states that a distinction can be a helpful tool. Through the abandonment of the dichotomy Putnam's entanglement thesis can be applied. The entanglement thesis states that values and fact cannot be viewed entirely separate, they can have truth values, and are intertwined with facts.⁴⁵

Quine as reference

There are two important dichotomies that have been established in philosophy. The first is the dichotomy of fact and value and the second is the dichotomy of analytic and synthetic. The latter collapsed with Quine's analysis that describes an entanglement of convention and fact.⁴⁶ It is helpful to investigate the collapse of the distinction of analytic and synthetic because the argument for this collapse not only works in the same way as the collapse of the divide of fact and value but also informs the latter's collapse. Whereas the fact/value divide describes the logical gap between is and ought, the analytic/synthetic divide describes the divide of 'matters of facts' versus 'relations of ideas'.⁴⁷

⁴² Putnam, *Collapse*, 11.

⁴³ Hilary Putnam, "The Fact/Value Dichotomy and the Future of Philosophy", in: *Facts and Values. The Ethics and Metaphysics of Normativity*, Marchetti, Giancarlo; Marchetti, Sarin (Eds.), New York 2017, 27.

⁴⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 1.

⁴⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 11, 19, 44.

⁴⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 8.

⁴⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 9.

Putnam follows Quine's arguments. The logical positivists established a three-part classification of statements:

“[...] those that are ‘synthetic’ (and hence, according to the logical positivists, empirically verifiable or falsifiable), those that are ‘analytic’ (and hence, according to the logical positivist, ‘true [or false] on the basis of the [logical] rules alone’, and those—and this, notoriously, included all our ethical, metaphysical, and aesthetic judgments—that are ‘cognitively meaningless’ [...].”⁴⁸

Just as the fact/value divide the analytic/synthetic is omnipresent and applicable to every kind of meaningful judgment. If any statement is shown to be ambiguous the speaker is classified as confused or worse condemned of making no real judgment.⁴⁹

For Quine the idea of classifying every statement including mathematical ones as factual or conventional is a muddle. The clear notion of fact collapsed with the narrow empiricist picture of classifying. This influenced the fact/value divide which collapsed together with the no longer possible divide of synthetic and analytic statements.⁵⁰

Quine argues that analytic statements (can be true and false based only on the meanings of the words involved (for logical positivism i.e. mathematics)) and synthetic statements (can be true or false based on the relevant empirical facts (non-analytic truths)) cannot be sharply distinguished.⁵¹

Therefore, factual statements cannot be isolated in a satisfactory way. The factual and the conceptual become intertwined and the distinction of the empirical and conceptual is blurred. It thus, follows, that the category of the purely factual becomes questionable. This has impact on the fact/value dichotomy. While the divide between analytical and synthetic is muddled so is in turn the dualism of fact and value no longer attainable. Putnam uses this to argue for the collapse of the fact/value distinction.⁵²

While Putnam agrees with the collapse, he also accuses Quine of going too far. Quine was right for claiming that a large range cannot be separated into analytic truth and observable fact. Yet, Putnam stresses, there are cases that fall on either side (entanglement). Therefore, again a distinction is useful to differentiate between “[...]: statements of a language that are trivially true in virtue of the meanings of their words and statements that are not”.⁵³ This means, that the

⁴⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 10.

⁴⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 10-11.

⁵⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 30.

⁵¹ See for more explicit explanation and overview: W. V. O. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, in: *The Pragmatic Reader. Pierce through the Present*, Robert B. Telisse; Scott F. Aikin (Eds.), Princeton, 2011, 202-220., and: Georges Rey, “The Analytic/Synthetic Distinction”, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Zalta Edward N.; Nodelman, Uri (Eds.), 2023.[URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/analytic-synthetic/>].

⁵² Pietro Salis, “Putnam’s Alethic Pluralism and the Fact-Value Dichotomy”, in: *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 13 (2), 2021, 1.

⁵³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 13.

notion of an analytic statement can be modest and occasionally a useful notion but should not be used as a philosophical weapon.⁵⁴

Within the dichotomy all statements in the analytical category need to be true based on the rules of language but also all non-analytic statements are supposed to have the property of being descriptions of fact. For Putnam the possibility that there are many kinds of statements that are not analytic and yet are philosophically interesting statements is missing.⁵⁵

To promote the entanglement thesis the strict divides need to be overcome, as they prevent to see what lies behind a necessary collapse. The entanglement causes to view ethical reasoning and the description of the world to be seen in a different way. This necessary transformation and its consequences are one of the purposes of Putnam's philosophy.

The first chapter of *The Collapse of the fact/value Dichotomy* addresses the phenomenon of the inflation of the fact/value divide into absolute dichotomies. Nevertheless, Putnam does not really come to the point and stays shy of concrete in line argumentations, a point of critique that is regularly stated by book-reviewers and other authors dealing with Putnam.⁵⁶

As for Hume's Law, which is starting point for the strict fact/value divide for Putnam, a substantial argument against Hume is missing. Putnam merely refers to a singular and peculiar interpretation of Hume that refers to his pictorial semantic theory. Lastly, Putnam fails to take up a stringent position and uses unreliable 'facts' or evidence from memory, as Agassi elaborates:

"Putnam does not produce a refutation of Hume's law. [...] And so he cannot sustain his charge against Quine and against Reichenbach that he builds on his memory: we should declare irrelevant all the hearsay evidence against them that he marshals. Elsewhere (p.30), he ascribes Quine the view that science presupposes val-ues, which here (p.137) he seems to deny. This is very confusing."⁵⁷

Concerning Putnam and his connection to Dewey Lovibond explains how Dewey's stance on objectivity directly influences Putnam's arguments. Dewey understands science as well as ethics without metaphysical explanations. Both follow pragmatist methods, which ensure a certain form of objectivity.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 13.

⁵⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 13.

⁵⁶ For example: "Yet, something about it irritates, and this requires mention at once: readable as every passage in it is, its point is often unclear—as is the point of the whole book." (Agassi, *What Collapse?*, 74).

⁵⁷ Agassi, *What Collapse?*, 79.

⁵⁸ "[...] especially from Dewey's conviction that in ethics as in the sciences, objective validity is compatible in principle with the historically situated nature of enquiry. Objectivity in our thinking is to be arrived at through the co-operative, democratic and fallibilistic criticism of that thinking. No absolute demonstration of the possibility of ethical knowledge can be given, but this in itself does not show ethics to be in a worse predicament than other disciplines, and if science can dispense with metaphysical foundations then so can moral norms and values." (Sabina Lovibond: "Reviewed Work(s): *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* by Hilary Putnam: Ethics without Ontology by Hilary Putnam", in: *Mind* 115 (458), 2006, 459).

Dewey and Quine are important references for Putnam's entanglement thesis, that develops from rejecting the established dichotomies.

This section dealt with Hume's Law and Putnam's interpretation thereof. It further addressed Putnam's insistence to overcome the dichotomy by promoting to view fact and value as distinct (Dewey) in order to establish his entanglement thesis which is built on similar arguments as the collapse of the dichotomy of the analytic/synthetic (Quine). The establishment of the fact/value divide after Hume, its implications and Putnam's critique of logical positivism are the topics of the following section.

Inflation of the fact/value dichotomy through logical positivism

The dichotomy of fact and value has been heavily promoted by logical positivism and stems from the idea that fact and values occupy two entirely separate epistemic fields, one being the realm of factual statements and the other the one of value statements.⁵⁹

These separate epistemic fields do not interact with each other. In this view value statements do not contribute to generating knowledge, only factual statements do. Putnam wants to overcome this established dichotomy and devises its genealogy. He ascribes Kant a big role in the inflation of the fact/value dichotomy but omits any further explanation:

“The role of Kant in the further evolution of what was to be-come the contemporary fact/value dichotomy is too complex to go into here in any detail because his philosophy itself is too complex to admit of a brief discussion.”⁶⁰

This statement is very unsatisfying. It may be explained by the book being based on lectures and therefore would take away Putnam's main point. Anyhow, Putnam touches briefly upon Kant's ethics, where any value-judgment has the character of a maxim or rule which is indeed not a description of a fact, nor the expression of a sentiment. Yet, it can still be rationally justified within the realm of Kantian metaphysics which Putnam no longer deems acceptable neither for him nor any philosopher.⁶¹

Kant's 'synthetic a priori truth' was no longer acceptable for the positivists and so they turned back to Hume's idea that a judgment is either analytic (relations of ideas) or synthetic (matters of fact). According to Putnam they expanded the realm of analytic statements and inflated Hume's idea that ethical judgments are not statements of fact into a view that they either must be “[...] expressions of sentiment or disguised imperatives. [...], these imperatives *cannot* be

⁵⁹ Giancarlo Marchetti; Sarin Marchetti, “Behind and Beyond the Fact/Value Dichotomy”, in: *Facts and Values. The Ethics and Metaphysics of Normativity*, Giancarlo Marchetti; Sarin Marchetti (Eds.), New York 2017, 3.

⁶⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 16.

⁶¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 16-17.

rationaly justified, but simply reflect, at bottom, the ‘volitional’ state of the speaker.”⁶² Thus, the domain of rational discourse excludes moral assertions.

Putnam detects an influence of Kant onto logical positivism but again, stays shy of a clear explanation of his claims. He instead goes on to attack logical positivism (i.e. Carnap⁶³) and their interpretation of Hume. Thereby he especially focuses on logical positivism itself and their understanding of a fact. According to Putnam the positivists have distorted and inflated the view of the specific nature and domain of value judgments. Particularly sidelining the assessment that there are many kinds of value judgments that are not of the ethical variety when considering (so-called) values and (so-called) facts and in turn rejecting objectivity and rationality in ethics. They provided an account that also removed all other kinds of value judgments as well.⁶⁴

Putnam’s argument here is that Hume was misunderstood by logical positivism. It was never Hume’s intention to differentiate between fact and value in such a way. Putnam advocates an anti-logical positivist view against this established dichotomy. He tries to show how fact and value are entangled, even though many specifications stay uncommented and need clarification. Putnam’s main problem with the arguments of logical positivism lies within how the scope of ‘value judgments’ was widened. Putnam claims that the goal of the logical positivists was to discredit a supposed objectivity or rationality of ethics.⁶⁵

Putnam goes on to explain that for the logical positivists ethical sentences can only be part of the realm of knowledge if they are analytical or ‘factual’, which in their opinion they were not. This stems from their definition of fact. Facts need to be certified and ethical statements are not capable thereof. Hence, they were excluded to be seen as meaningful statements.⁶⁶

For the logical positivist a fact can only be certified by observation or a report. With the resurgence of modern science (p. ex. bacteria observable by microscope, discovery of atoms) the notion of a sensible ‘impression’ that Hume advocated cannot be upheld any longer. A fact now integrates into a new system of scientific statements which are understood as a whole and having ‘factual content’. Therefore, individual statements are no longer warranted. Facts from now on only account for sentences that really state empirical facts, specifically observational sentences.⁶⁷ With exact science Hume’s sensible ‘impression’ falls short of observable and measurable properties.

⁶² Putnam, *Collapse*, 17.

⁶³ Rudolf Carnap, *The Unity of Science*, New York, NY 2013.

⁶⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 19.

⁶⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 19.

⁶⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 21.

⁶⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 23-24.

In turn ethical judgments are excluded as they do not fulfill these requirements. For Putnam the logical positivists misunderstood what ‘factual’ in the actual sense means. Their narrow picture of science and understanding of fact, relating back to their poor understanding of Hume, is essential for their denial of factual ethical sentences.⁶⁸ Putnam argues that “[...] *their* fact/value dichotomy was not based on any serious examination of the nature of values or valuation at all; what they examined—and that in a narrow empiricist spirit—was the nature of a ‘fact’”.⁶⁹

With the exclusion of ‘values’ from the realm of rational argument, they are no longer under the spot of examination of our convictions and additionally no longer need to be under the test of reflective examination.⁷⁰

Putnam’s understanding of fact in contrast is removed from strictly empirical observations. For him facts entail more than measurements because they incorporate evaluative aspects. These are implied in the warrantedness of the measurement itself. This is what the entanglement thesis entails. Within the seemingly strictly empirical measurement lies a value aspect. Through the acceptance of the method of measurement a value aspect is implied. Hence, more than a mere fact is involved, more so also a value judgment. This is the groundwork for the later introduced epistemic values, which serve as an example for Putnam’s thesis that facts are presupposed by values.⁷¹

Next to critiquing the logical positivists definition of facts and their exclusion of values to have meaningful content Putnam further reviews their poor conception of language. Hereby he mostly argues against Carnap⁷², who claims that there is a need to rationally deconstruct our language. Carnap’s aim is to distinguish between value terms and descriptive ones. Language should be as closely to the one of physics, which for Carnap is a scientific picture of ‘fact’. Yet, for Putnam descriptive language serves exactly as a counterexample to Carnap’s demand. Within the characteristics of language there is no notion of a fact without imposing any form of value on it.⁷³

⁶⁸ See also: “At bottom, the original logical positivist view was that a “fact” was something that could be certified by mere observation or even a mere report of a sensory experience. If *this* is the notion of fact, then it is hardly surprising that ethical judgments turn out not to be ‘factual’!” (Putnam, *Collapse*, 22) and “The logical positivist fact/value dichotomy was defended on the basis of a narrowly scientific picture of what a ‘fact’ might be, just as the Humean ancestor of that distinction was defended upon the basis of a narrow empiricist psychology of “ideas” and “impressions”.” (Putnam, *Collapse*, 26).

⁶⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 29.

⁷⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 44.

⁷¹ Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*. Cambridge, MA 1982, 4, 30, 132.

⁷² Carnap, *Unity of Science*.

⁷³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 26.

Therefore, the inherent use of language is a major argument that Putnam sets up against the dichotomy thesis. Factual and evaluative statements cannot be separated adequately in the use of language (see further Chapter II).

Putnam's critique and his conclusions from rejecting the dichotomy are not always well received. He often stays vague or does not fully convince with his arguments. Agassi for example assesses his view the following way:

“What in ‘the contemporary fact/value distinction/dichotomy’ (pp. 16, 18) does not appeal to Putnam is the idea that rational discourse within ethics must rest on tastes or on metaphysics (p. 96). He is quite right to reject this idea (p. 109), even though, he disarmingly admits, his arguments are not too convincing.”⁷⁴

Agassi further refers to Popper and his book *The Open Society*⁷⁵, which provides for him a better presentation of rational discourse than Putnam, as it neither relies on tastes nor metaphysics within ethics. Agassi argues for the adherence of the dichotomy and that ethics are and can be discussed within this framework at the same time.⁷⁶

To compensate for Putnam's unsatisfactory dismissal of explaining Kant and his influence on the inflation of the dichotomy, Gorski delivers an historical overview of the fact/value distinction in his article on Ethical Naturalism⁷⁷, where he also touches upon Kant. Gorski explains that there are two main interpretations of the fact/value distinction. The first is the strict divide by Hume through is and ought. The second one is related to Kant's idea of the natural sciences generating causal knowledge. How this occurs is dealt with in the *Critique of Pure Reason*⁷⁸, where through a priori perceptions of causality, moral duties can be rationally derived, and reason should rule the passions. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*⁷⁹, the following premise is devised: all human beings are autonomous rational agents. They are ends in themselves and therefore it is our moral duty to treat ourselves and others as ends and not as means. This is the character of the ‘Categorical Imperative’, where rational wills should never be the instrument of sensual desires. Gorski stresses that Kant's ethics are on the procedural side of things rather than substantial. They more so provide rules for moral reasoning than for moral action. Additionally, he finds the disparities between Kant's epistemology and ethics to be quite problematic. The natural world is governed by causal laws. Kant's ethics demand that human action be governed by moral laws, but humans are part of both worlds. Kant ‘solved’

⁷⁴ Agassi, *What Collapse, Exactly?*, 81.

⁷⁵ Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Princeton, NJ 1963, 301-302.

⁷⁶ Agassi, *What Collapse, Exactly?*.

⁷⁷ Philip S. Gorski, “Beyond the Fact/Value Distinction: Ethical Naturalism and the Social Sciences”, in: *Soc* 50, 2013, 543-553.

⁷⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge 1998.

⁷⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Cambridge 2015.

this by the introduction of a mysterious noumenal faculty of ‘the will’ that transcends and supervenes on nature.⁸⁰

Putnam seems to be mostly interested in furthering his entanglement thesis instead of dissecting in a clear way other opposing positions (p. ex. Popper), which Angelides calls out:

“Hence, because of Putnam’s desire to argue broadstrokes against the basic commitments of the positivist program, he ends up neglecting an important and burgeoning literature detailing the historical emergence of positivism [...]. Disregarding any concrete engagement with the structure of and developments within the positivist program, Putnam’s new collection engages only the basic commitment pushing the program along: the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements.”⁸¹

On this observation Putnam seems to be using logical positivism to further his thesis without deeply investigating the arguments and literature concerning logical positivism itself.

McGuire also critiques Putnam for narrative framing by using the logical positivist as a scapegoat and engaging in a not neutral reconstruction but an active intervention through which the history of philosophy is divided into two categories. Namely, theories that are capable of dealing with contemporary problems and those who are not. McGuire calls this a form of ideology critique by Putnam.⁸²

Logical positivism and their inflation of the dichotomy serve as Putnam’s main opponents, because in their argumentation there is no room for discussing value judgments rationally. These arguments stand in direct juxtaposition to Putnam’s thesis where in view of the entanglement value judgments and even ethics can be discussed objectively and rationally.⁸³

For Putnam it is not the point to acknowledge that objectivity is hard but to rather stress the acknowledgment that there is room for values when discussing facts and science. This also goes for the other way around, there must also be room for rationality in the sphere of value.

In the following section I will continue to deal with Putnam’s arguments against the dichotomy and the implications that the collapse of the dichotomy of fact and value has.

Reasons for the entanglement thesis and implications

The following chapter reiterates firstly Putnam’s arguments against the established dichotomy of fact and value. Secondly, the implications that follow from the collapse of fact and value that

⁸⁰ Gorski, *Beyond the Fact/Value Distinction: Ethical Naturalism*, 544.

⁸¹ Angelides, *Last Collapse?*, 403-404.

⁸² John McGuire, “From Positivismusstreit to Putnam. Facts and Values in the Shadow of Dichotomy, in: *Facts and Values. The Ethics and Metaphysics of Normativity*, Giancarlo Marchetti; Sarin Marchetti (Eds.), New York, Routledge 2017, 83.

⁸³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 3.

lead to Putnam's entanglement thesis are discussed. Lastly, the arguments brought forward against Putnam in his assessment are discussed.

In *The Collapse of the fact/value Dichotomy*⁸⁴ Putnam presents a genealogical account how logical positivism provided epistemological authority to exclude values in the name of science.⁸⁵ At the same instance Putnam provides a critique of the arguments brought forward by them.

Science is commonly viewed as neutral. This is a major remainder of what was provided by the methods and views of the logical positivists. Value is taken as a factor outside of the realm of science and is not the carrier of any form of truth or meaningful content. Instead, value is seen as the carrier of sentiment and subjectivity and is associated with a realm that does not partake in science and is rather related to moral statements and ideas that are not perceived as objective. For Putnam the peril he sees in the fact/value dichotomy affects everyone, as it reaches beyond the realm of academia unlike other metaphysical or epistemological debates.⁸⁶ It is ubiquitous and dealt with on a daily basis, considering modern discussions (i.e. political/ideological issues, climate change debates, social policies).

Putnam states: "The worst thing about the fact/value dichotomy is that in practice it functions as a discussion-stopper, and not just a discussion-stopper, but a thought stopper."⁸⁷ Through the removal of ethics in the rationally discussable realm the dualism has been reinforced. In Putnam's view morality can be rationally discussed. From this it follows, that ethics can be in the domain of knowledge in opposition to what logical positivism has advocated for.

Putnam brings forward several arguments against the dichotomy. He claims that the dichotomy of fact and value is fuzzy in the first place: "[...] because factual statements themselves, and the practices of scientific inquiry upon which we rely to decide what is and what is not a fact, presuppose values."⁸⁸ Thus, for us to accept certain statements as facts we already impose values beforehand onto the statements to assess if the method of establishing the facts is valid.

Putnam argues that factual statements presuppose values, and that the empirical world depends upon our criteria of rational acceptability. Criteria of rational acceptability is needed to have an empirical world. Most importantly we need a world that is connected to our beliefs, otherwise it would be meaningless towards our common practices. This aspect of the entanglement of fact

⁸⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*.

⁸⁵ Brendan Hogan; Lawrence Marcelle, "The Complementarity of Means and Ends. Putnam, Pragmatism, and the Critique of Economic Rationality", in: *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 38 (2), 2017, 404.

⁸⁶ See, John McGuire, *From Positivismusstreit to Putnam*, 83.

⁸⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 44.

⁸⁸ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 128.

and value is not only related to rationality but furthermore a rejection of metaphysical realism.⁸⁹ Thus, for Putnam most objects of the world do not exist independently of an assessment of the mind.

Epistemic values

For Putnam not everything scientifically significant is a statement of ‘fact’ due to the distinction of analytic and synthetic statements, which was – as already stated above – collapsed by Quine.⁹⁰ Following Quine’s arguments, the dichotomy can no longer be upheld. Rather, the conception of ‘fact’ should move away from merely being purely descriptive and embrace how factual description and valuation are entangled instead of forcing a divide. Putnam infers that facts and values are no longer separable. To define (scientific) facts values are needed, as facts presuppose and embed evaluative features and dynamics in themselves. He concludes that also “[...] science might presuppose values as well as experiences and conventions. Indeed, once we stop thinking of ‘value’ as synonymous with ‘ethics’, it is quite clear that it *does* presuppose values—it presupposes *epistemic* values.”⁹¹

Same as any factual statement, also scientific statements presuppose values, which Putnam calls epistemic values. Epistemic values are values that are necessary to take scientific statements as warranted, such as coherence, plausibility, reasonableness, or simplicity. These epistemic values guide reflections concerning past inquiries. This transpires by the criteria that is needed to have good reason to trust these criteria of ‘good reason’. This circular argument is reason enough for Putnam. Epistemic reasons enable to correctly describe the world, but this does not mean that these values admit ‘external’ justification.⁹²

Further, it is important to note that this form of description is not the same as objectivity (as it may seem). Putnam argues that if it were the same as objectivity, then ethical values wouldn’t be connected to different concerns than epistemic values. They would not be connected to objectivity at all.⁹³ For Putnam epistemic values are in the same boat as ethical values with respect to objectivity.⁹⁴ Thus, these distinct values serve different outcomes but in view of their objectivity they behave in the same way. Putnam applies again the concept of distinction. Values should not be equated with ethics as not all values operate in the same way. There are

⁸⁹ See also Hickey, *Hilary Putnam*, 151.

⁹⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 29.

⁹¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 30.

⁹² Putnam, *Collapse*, 33.

⁹³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 32.

⁹⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 4.

differences between ethical and epistemic values as there are also differences within different ethical values.⁹⁵ How these exactly manifest themselves is not specified by Putnam.

Putnam further argues for the collapse in regard of his view on truth. Truth has no teleological, absolute, or universal function concerning (practical) problem solving or relating to facts in general. We cannot know which standards of rational acceptability a person adheres to when talking about the truth, therefore the statement of knowing the truth tells us nothing.⁹⁶

With epistemic values in place, we can interpret what is warranted. In this view the definition of truth in science and truth in ethics are rendered equal because they abide the same standards. For Putnam teleological ‘truth’ seeking is not the object of science (see also Kuhn⁹⁷). Putnam is committed to pragmatism where likewise ‘truth’ is not absolute or teleological, it is however relative towards a certain culture, but always in reference and accordance with constant inquiry, evaluation, reproofing of concepts, fallibility, democracy, and practice.⁹⁸

The disinflation of the fact/value dichotomy and insistence on the entanglement theory are cornerstones in Putnam’s philosophy and related to his pragmatist views. Putnam needs the disinflation of the fact/value divide to argue for the entanglement of fact and value, his commitment to pragmatism and his view on rationality.

The entanglement thesis is defended from the acknowledgement of epistemic values, that establish the connection between fact and value. Putnam highlights the theoretical relevance within value judgments by presenting his view that facts presuppose values and the existence of epistemic values.⁹⁹

To explicate his thesis Putnam presents in his paper from 2011 *The Fact/Value Dichotomy and its Critics*¹⁰⁰ in a concise way his three arguments against logical positivism, that then lead to the arguments for the entanglement thesis. Putnam argues that the postulates of the logical positivists don’t abide the reality of factual statements. Their statements are (1) postulation of theory-free ‘facts’ (experience versus convention); (2) denial that fact and their evaluation are entangled, and; (3) science proceeds by a syntactically describable method (induction). This trifecta of arguments is characterized by Putnam as a three-legged stool. He uses this stool analogy to show how all three presented points are intertwined. If one aspect of the three is

⁹⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 31.

⁹⁶ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and, History*, 129. See also: “[...], is that *truth is not the bottom line*: truth itself gets its life from our criteria of rational acceptability, and these are what we must look at if we wish to discover the values which are really implicit in science.” (Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and, History*, 130).

⁹⁷ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago 2012.

⁹⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 45.

⁹⁹ Marchetti; Marchetti, *Behind and Beyond the Fact/Value Dichotomy*, 3-4.

¹⁰⁰ Hilary Putnam: “The Fact/Value Dichotomy and its Critics” in: *Philosophy in an Age of Science: Physics, Mathematics and Skepticism*, Putnam Hilary, 283-298.

broken, the others follow. The unstable stool is bound to fall, and the dichotomy thesis cannot be upheld considering the entanglement thesis.¹⁰¹ Therefore, Putnam advocates for a shift in the understanding of facts and values, as he views the arguments for the strict divide of fact and value as poor. The phenomenon of an entanglement of fact and value subverts that dichotomy everywhere.¹⁰²

It can be stated that the entanglement of fact and value unfolds for Putnam in a twofold manner. On the one hand through the existence of epistemic values (judgments like coherence or simplicity are indeed values), which are presupposed within science. There no longer is a strictly separated subjective realm versus an objective one, as they are intertwined. On the other hand, the entanglement is inherent in logical and grammatical use of language (see further Chapter II).¹⁰³ Putnam argues that there is entanglement by defining norms or standards, but also at the same time the entanglement is apparent linguistically.

Critique of Putnam's views

Several papers argue for the divide of fact and value beyond the logical positivist movement, centering on different aspects of Putnam's claims.¹⁰⁴ In the following the critique by Bergström¹⁰⁵ is given more attention. He attacks Putnam's views in favor of the dichotomy and brings his arguments against Putnam forward in a detailed way. Bergström discusses three arguments that Putnam raises against the dichotomy and in turn refutes them.

(1) Bergström argues for the two-components theory, wherein factual and evaluative elements can be separated despite the intrinsic aspects of language through 'thick' ethical concepts (see Chapter II). The entanglement caused by 'thick' ethical concepts does not pose a serious threat

¹⁰¹ Putnam, *Fact/Value Dichotomy and its Critics*, 297.

¹⁰² Putnam, *Collapse*, 45.

¹⁰³ Putnam, *Fact/Value Dichotomy and its Critics*, 291-292.

¹⁰⁴ Goldthwait argues linguistically for the distinction and connects the dichotomy of facts and values to the dichotomy between the past and the future. (Goldthwait, *The Necessary Dichotomy of Fact and Value*, 105-113). Dall'Agnol calls for the dichotomy in reference to Wittgenstein and pragmatic pluralism and sees values as the ontological counterpoint of knowing-how and facts to distinguish different kind of entities by the means of grammar. (Dall'Agnol, *Disentangling Facts and Values*, 265-274). Agassi argues against the collapse in reference to the importance of truth, which informs justice and value; and calls for the importance of game theory or rational choice theory which is rejected by Putnam. (Agassi, *What Collapse, Exactly?*, 74-84). Salis charges Putnam with arguing ambiguously towards how he sees it fitting: description and valuation entangled when attacking the dichotomy but at the same time distinguishing the two when arguing for alethic pluralism in regard of differentiated discourse areas. The truth predicate plays a different functional role for different discourse areas: "[...] truth is a 'correspondence' in the case of empirical statements but is a 'warranted assertibility' in the case of ethical or aesthetic judgments." (Salis, Pietro: "Putnam's Alethic Pluralism and the Fact-Value Dichotomy", in: *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 13 (2), 2021, 2). This form of argumentation by Putnam is contradictory for Salis. Thus, he argues that in turn the collapse is no longer effective. (Salis, *Putnam's Alethic Pluralism*, 1-16).

¹⁰⁵ Lars, Bergström, "Putnam on the Fact-Value Dichotomy", in: *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* 2, 2002, 1-13.

towards the dichotomy.¹⁰⁶ Bergström equates dichotomy with distinction, which Putnam is opposed to.

(2) The second argument is connected to Putnam's understanding of truth, which Bergström describes as an idealization of rational acceptability that relates to satisfying certain epistemic values. This understanding has consequences for truth ascription, namely that evaluative statements have truth values. For Bergström this can only be justified under epistemically ideal conditions. Putnam's view opens a gap between truth and falsity ascriptions and would alter the established dichotomy. Bergström gives no explanation to why this is worrisome, but states beforehand that proponents of the dichotomy would never accept evaluative truth ascriptions in the first place.¹⁰⁷

Bergström further argues that Putnam has not shown satisfyingly it to be false that "[...] evaluative statements are neither true or false"¹⁰⁸.

(3) The main argument that Bergström attributes to Putnam against the fact/value dichotomy is that facts presuppose values, and that without epistemic values there would be no world and no facts. Thus, scientific inquiry presupposes values. For Bergström this is not necessarily true, as he doubts that epistemic decisions really are relevant and rather attributes these to psychological and sociological factors. But for the sake of the argument, he accepts Putnam's claim. However, from this a collapse of the dichotomy does not follow for Bergström.

Bergström emphasizes three points in defense of the dichotomy: a) many factual statements are independent of scientific inquiry (like observational statements). b) Only because scientific inquiry involves evaluations this does not mean that a distinction is fuzzy, and in turn the distinction can be upheld.¹⁰⁹ c) There is ambiguity in Putnam's claim. Even if scientific beliefs about the world depend on our rational acceptability, the empirical world does not, even if Putnam claims so.¹¹⁰

A main point of Bergström's critique is further Putnam's unclear accusations towards the dichotomy (it is not explicit which claims are really attacked). For Bergström the consequences of the proclaimed collapse (like language aspect, truth values) do not seem serious enough to discard the dichotomy.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Bergström, *Putnam on the Fact-Value Dichotomy*, 5-6.

¹⁰⁷ Bergström, *Putnam on the Fact-Value Dichotomy*, 7-9.

¹⁰⁸ Bergström, *Putnam on the Fact-Value Dichotomy*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ See: "[...] we can distinguish between facts and values even if scientists make value judgments." (Bergström, *Putnam on the Fact-Value Dichotomy*, 12).

¹¹⁰ Bergström, *Putnam on the Fact-Value Dichotomy*, 12.

¹¹¹ Bergström, *Putnam on the Fact-Value Dichotomy*, 12.

Hickey likewise criticizes Putnam's idea of epistemic values. He states that beliefs and theories indeed do presuppose values but not facts per se.¹¹²

Angelides critiques Putnam to solely promote his entanglement thesis and to not consider other 'recent' overviews on epistemic values, that could weaken his point.¹¹³

Walden sees a weakness not only in the chosen examples by Putnam but further argues that there is a lack of explanation or deep reasons of why there is this deep entanglement of fact and value.¹¹⁴

Putnam's deeper reasons would be not only his commitment to pragmatism (see further Chapter IV), but also his reliance on linguistic explanations that may be not a significant reason for Walden. This critique towards Putnam makes his emphasis on language salient, which will be the topic of the following chapter (Chapter II).

To dissect Putnam's idea of (practical) rationality his initial position needs to be understood. Putnam calls for the disinflation of the fact/value dichotomy and formulates the entanglement thesis. The latter claims that values and facts are interdependent and interwoven, allowing values to be discussed rationally and facts not being purely descriptive.¹¹⁵

This chapter examined several points in regard of Putnam's position. Namely, Putnam's assessment of Hume's Law as nucleus of the inflation of the fact/value dichotomy through logical positivism and Putnam's critique towards logical positivism.

Hume's 'no ought from is' inference is the initial setting stone for the fact/value divide. From that point the validity of ought judgments in the realm of reason and rational assessment are questioned or even excluded. Putnam interprets Hume not as a negator but as a skeptic of practical reason. The logical positivists on the other hand read Hume to exclude moral and subjective judgments as not being matters of fact and not cognitively meaningful. This idea of judgments established the dichotomy of fact and value.¹¹⁶

Putnam needs to disintegrate the dichotomy to argue for the entanglement theory where value statements become part of and for rational assessment and vice versa facts and objectivity integrate into the ethical realm. To establish the entanglement theory Putnam emphasizes on the importance of distinctions as they do not strictly and metaphysically exclude value judgments from the realm of the factual/rational. Further the collapse of the dichotomy of

¹¹² Hickey, *Hilary Putnam*, 151.

¹¹³ Specifically on epistemic values: Steven Fuller, *Social Epistemology*. Bloomington 1990.

¹¹⁴ Kenneth Walden, "Holism about fact and value", in: *Inquiry*, 2022, 7.

¹¹⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 19.

¹¹⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 14-19.

synthetic and analytic statements by Quine relates to Putnam's arguments as it establishes the groundwork of arguments to also collapse the fact/value dichotomy.¹¹⁷

Putnam's three main points for the entanglement thesis thus are: (1) all facts presuppose values, which relates to (2) the existence of epistemic values and (3) the inherent use of language. The linguistic aspect is formative for the justification of the entanglement thesis and additionally influences Putnam's view on rationality. The application and use of language is subject of the following chapter (Chapter II).

¹¹⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 12-13.

II Putnam's underlying language theory

The second chapter of the thesis is concerned with Putnam's understanding of language. Putnam does not explicitly establish a structured language theory, but it is apparent that his emphasis on the inherent use of language is essential towards how the entanglement of fact and value is justified. The main points of Putnam's underlying language theory are his reasoning and inferences concerning 'thick' ethical concepts. In the following section I will explicate the idea of 'thick' ethical concepts. Other authors also refer to the idea of 'thick' ethical concepts. Hare, Mackie, and Williams serve as adversaries of Putnam. Putnam brings several points forward against these authors to further his point. These will be clarified and analyzed. Then I will show not only how Putnam uses 'thick' ethical concepts for his entanglement thesis but also will address other aspects in respect to language that Putnam relates to. Additionally, the chapter deals with criticism towards Putnam's use, interpretation, and the implications of his underlying language theory. The last section of the chapter deals with Putnam's arguments against relativism that partly stem from his views on the use of language.

'Thick' ethical concepts

What are 'thick' ethical concepts? In our language words can be differentiated into realms that are connected to meaning in different ways. Namely, words with 'thick' ethical meaning and words with 'thin' ethical meaning. These aspects of meaning are inherent in our use of language. Opposed to 'thick' ethical concepts are 'thin' ethical concepts. The latter are words with no multilayered or intertwined meaning. They are words with general evaluative meaning and don't have substantial descriptive qualities (such as ought, right, wrong etc.). Certain words do not have a strict layer of a certain meaning as they integrate value statements towards their meaning. Said meaning cannot be removed from the statement of a word. Words with such properties can be understood as words underlying with 'thick' ethical concepts. The idea of 'thick' ethical concepts shows that there is an entanglement of fact and value inherent in the use of language.¹¹⁸

An example for a word with an underlying 'thick' ethical concept is the word *cruel*. This word has simultaneously ethical as well as normative uses. It serves on the one hand as a descriptive term but also has normative purpose. Therefore, it defies the supposed divide of fact and value. For example, by describing a teacher as *cruel*, he is simultaneously criticized as a teacher but also as a person. However, *cruel* can also be used purely descriptively. E.g. an historian

¹¹⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 35.

describing a certain monarch as *cruel*. According to Putnam the dichotomy of fact and value cannot be applied for the word *cruel*. The term can be used sometimes normatively and sometimes descriptively or simultaneously apply both meanings.¹¹⁹

Other multilayered words in the realm of ‘thick’ ethical concepts are such as *crime*, *deceit*, *gratitude* etc. For Putnam the existence of ‘thick’ ethical concepts serves as proof and argument for his entanglement thesis.¹²⁰

The analysis of multiple meanings, their descriptive and normative elements and whether they are intertwined lead to a big philosophical discussion. Foot, Murdoch, McDowell, Wiggins¹²¹ argued in favor of the entanglement thesis and Mackie, Hare¹²² against this dual meaning inherent in certain words. For the context of this thesis there is no need to go into expansive detail of this ethical/metaethical discussion.¹²³

It is rather more helpful to highlight important interpretations of the different linguistical aspects thereof, i.e. Putnam’s critique of Mackie’s, Hare’s and lastly Williams’s positions. The insights of this critique are discussed in the following section. This helps to better grasp Putnam’s understanding of language in support of the entanglement thesis and in turn his stance towards practical rationality.

Putnam’s adversaries

Putnam addresses three positions in more detail and criticizes their arguments for the dichotomy in favor of his entanglement thesis in relation to the inherent use of language.

By Putnam’s interpretation Hume meant with the term *crime* a “grievous wrong”¹²⁴. In consequence the word can no longer be taken as a ‘matter of fact’ by Hume and his successors. All ‘thick’ concepts would be dismissed into the same realm of emotive or ‘thin’¹²⁵ concepts. As many words¹²⁶ are affected by this dismissal, it is hard to follow through on its consequence,

¹¹⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 34-35.

¹²⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 34-35.

¹²¹ See: Philippa Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”, in: *Virtues and vices and other essays in moral philosophy*, Philippa Foot, Oxford 2002, 158-173; Iris Murdoch, *The sovereignty of good*, London: 2001; John McDowell, *Mind, value, and reality*, Cambridge, MA: 1998; David Wiggins, “Truth, Invention and the Meaning of Life”, in: *Needs, values, truth: essays in the philosophy of value*, David Wiggins, Oxford 1998, 87-138.

¹²² See John L. Mackie: *Ethics: inventing right and wrong*, London 1977; R.M. Hare, *Moral thinking: its levels, method, and point*. Oxford 1981.

¹²³ For an overview on the topic of ‘thick’- ethical concepts: Väyrynen, Pekka, “Thick Ethical Concepts”, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta; Uri Nodelman, (Eds.), Spring 2021. [URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/thick-ethical-concepts/>].

¹²⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 35.

¹²⁵ e.g. ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘ought’, ‘must-not’, ‘right’, ‘wrong’, virtue’, ‘vice’, ‘obligation’ etc.

¹²⁶ Such as: generous, elegant, skillful, strong, gauche, weak, vulgar etc.

because many of these words indeed have ‘fact’ correspondence. There are two responses of non-cognitivism to this dilemma.

- a) ‘Thick’ ethical concepts are plain factual concepts and not ethical or normative at all.
- b) The ‘two-components’ theory: Ethical concepts are ‘factorable’ into purely ‘descriptive’ (matter of fact that the predicament responds to) and ‘attitudinal’ (expression of emotion or volition) components.¹²⁷

Putnam argues against both arguments of non-cognitivism. The critique is exemplified by referring to the positions of Hare and Mackie respectively. For Putnam there is an evaluative point of view inscribed in the meanings of words with ‘thick’ ethical concepts (rejecting a). Additionally, terms with ‘thick’ ethical content cannot be separated without losing certain meanings of the word (rejecting b).¹²⁸

In *Moral thinking*¹²⁹ Hare argues for the dichotomy and attests that certain words with ‘thick’ ethical properties have no normative meaning (argument a). As an example, he refers to the word *rude*. The example is taken from Lawrence Kohlberg¹³⁰: A schoolboy spits in the face of another in the classroom. The victim quietly hits the spitter back, which the teacher notices. The victim then explains the situation, whereas the teacher replies to the initial victim: ‘That was rude’. To which the hitter/initial victim replies: ‘I will grant you that was rude.’¹³¹

Hare interprets the situation as follows: “[...] it is possible to accept that an act satisfied the descriptive conditions for being called ‘rude’ without being committed to evaluating it adversely, even though ‘rude’ is normally an adjective of adverse evaluation.”¹³²

Hare argues for an evaluative statement to be considered as authentic, the speaker needs to approve of the statement sincerely and inherently. Thus, the motivational state and the following evaluative judgments of the speaker must not only be in line with their actions but also with their desires.¹³³

Anderson claims that Hare’s constraint on motivation is not sound:

“For something to count as an authentic value judgment or reason, it must be reflectively endorsable. But actual motivational states are not always reflectively endorsable. One of the functions of value judgments is to note when one’s

¹²⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 35-36.

¹²⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 35-36.

¹²⁹ R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking: its levels, method, and point*, Oxford 1981.

¹³⁰ Lawrence Kohlberg, “Education for Justice: A modern Statement of the Platonic view”, in: *Moral Education: Five Lectures*, Sizer, T. (Ed.), Cambridge, MA 1973, 61.

¹³¹ See also: Putnam, Hare, *Moral thinking*. 74; *Collapse*, 36.

¹³² Hare, *Moral thinking*, 75.

¹³³ Hare, *Moral thinking*, 21-22. See: “The mere fact that what we say could be given as a reason for acting in some way does not make it prescriptive.” The agent “[...] must have been saying something that he did not really think. For if, in assenting, he assented sincerely to something prescriptive, he must think it is better, and thus prefer it, and thus, in the appropriate situation and other things being equal, choose it.” (Hare, *Moral thinking*, 21-22).

motivational states are deficient because they fail to track what one judges to be good. Boredom, weariness, apathy, self-contempt, despair, and other motivational states can make a person fail to desire what she judges to be good or desire what she judges to be bad (Stocker 1979). This prevents the identification of value judgments with expressions of actual desires and preferences, as Hare insists.”¹³⁴

Putnam uses Anderson’s critique to strengthen his view and adds towards the point of critique that one can say that something has value, but that value can be outweighed by something else in some cases. In this case the word *rude* has evaluative force. This implies that it is sometimes right to be rude.¹³⁵

Putnam uses this example to show that ‘thick’ ethical concepts have inscribed ethical concepts that cannot be reduced to only having a factual concept (argument a).

Concerning words with ‘thick’ ethical meaning different responses need to be applied to deal with the fact of inscribed normative meanings. For Hare the two inscribed meanings of the word are not entangled with each other. Hare devises a separation, whereas the word has a distinct prescriptive and a descriptive meaning, which Putnam calls the ‘two-components’ thesis.¹³⁶

Putnam sees Hare’s description of the proponents of entanglement theory as distorted through a projection of Hare’s own views onto his opponents. Putnam claims, that the proponents of the entanglement thesis do not maintain that evaluative words need to satisfy Hare’s motivational requirement. However, what they do

“[...] maintain is that if one did not at any point share the relevant ethical point of view one would never be able to acquire a thick ethical concept, and that sophisticated use of such a concept requires a continuing ability to identify (at least in imagination) with that point of view. This is not to deny that someone may know that something is cruel and not be motivated to refrain from it; [...]”¹³⁷

Hare describes that a *cruel* action is inherently motivational and in turn there are properties which in themselves are evil and moral words that are inseparably descriptive and prescriptive: “But the fact that *if* we use this word we are almost committed to the evaluation does not entail that we have got to use the word at all in order to describe the action fully.”¹³⁸

Putnam infers that Hare ascribes as descriptive component of *cruel* the element *to suffer deeply* and the evaluative ‘almost’ implication is that the other is classified as *action that is wrong*. For Putnam the attempted application of the two-components theory stems from the impossibility of saying what the actual descriptive meaning of *cruel* is without saying the word or to refer to a synonym. Putnam further argues that it is not the case that the extension of *cruel*¹³⁹ is simply

¹³⁴ Anderson, Elizabeth, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, Cambridge, MA 1995, 102.

¹³⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 37.

¹³⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 37.

¹³⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 37-38.

¹³⁸ Hare, *Moral thinking*, 74-75.

¹³⁹ Putnam refers here to an example: a surgeon before the emergence of anesthesia cannot be described as *cruel*. See: Putnam, *Collapse*, 38.

causing deep suffering nor is *causing deep suffering* free of evaluative force, because *suffering* means more than pain and *deep* means more than *a lot of*. For Hare the two-components thesis entails the idea of factorability of words, which is critiqued not only by Putnam but also by McDowell and Murdoch.¹⁴⁰

The two-components theory is not acceptable for Putnam for two main reasons. Firstly, because of the previously mentioned unacceptable motivational requirement and secondly, the implications of a separation into prescriptive and descriptive do not follow for him. The components cannot be explicitly separated in any clear fashion due to the entanglement thesis.¹⁴¹

Hare introduces in *Language of Morals*¹⁴² his idea of ‘universal prescriptivism’. For Hare the logical (analytical) truth is that ethical judgments are universalizable, they all imply imperatives and therefore are inherently motivational. Putnam characterizes this non-cognitivist position as follows: “[...] value judgments are merely a way of ex-pressing our endorsement of certain imperatives with the claim that it is possible to give *reasons* for and against ethical judgments.”¹⁴³

Referring to Anderson¹⁴⁴ again, Putnam argues against Hare. For Putnam assessing value judgments as ways to imperatives is implausible. Another point of critique that Putnam brings forward is closely related to Anderson’s point. Only because I agree with a *should* utterance, it does not imply that I go along in the imperative.¹⁴⁵

The arguments show that Hare’s unreasonable motivational requirement is the core of his prescriptivism that Putnam does not accept. This critique feeds into the justification and structure of the entanglement thesis in connection to the inherent use of language.¹⁴⁶

The second adversary Putnam addresses is Mackie, who is also concerned with the multilayered properties of the term *cruel*. Mackie attests that words like *cruel* reveal a “*queerness*”¹⁴⁷. In turn, he deems it incorrect to assume that such words can have inherent evaluative meanings:

“Another way of bringing out this queerness is to ask, about anything that is supposed to have some objective moral quality, how this is linked with its natural features. What is the con-nection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty - say, causing pain just for fun - and the moral fact that it is

¹⁴⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 38.

¹⁴¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 37, 62.

¹⁴² R. M. Hare, *Language of Morals*, Oxford 1963.

¹⁴³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 67.

¹⁴⁴ Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, 102.

¹⁴⁵ The example used here is capital punishment and the question does ‘Capital punishment should be abolished.’ imply the imperative: ‘Let us abolish capital punishment.’ See: Putnam, *Collapse*, 70-71.

¹⁴⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 36-37.

¹⁴⁷ Mackie, *Ethics*, 41.

wrong? [...] It is not even sufficient to postulate a faculty which 'sees' the wrongness: something must be postulated which can see at once the natural features that constitute the cruelty, and the wrongness, and the mysterious consequential link between the two."¹⁴⁸

Mackie does not acknowledge the problem that words with 'thick' ethical concepts pose and states that the word *cruel* simply describes natural facts.¹⁴⁹

Putnam attests the opposite, namely that it lies in the characteristic of words with 'thick' ethical concepts. Thus, "[...] to use them with any discrimination one has to be able to identify imaginatively with an *evaluative point of view*".¹⁵⁰

Mackie engages with the problem in a physicalist way, where ethical judgments cannot be made. For him all words revert to purely factual meaning (argument a). Therefore, a sincere ethical judgment can only be made if a person has an actual sincere desire or preference. Putnam sees the root of this inference in the emotivism established by positivism. However, for Mackie a fact cannot express said desire, so in turn ethical judgments are not descriptions of fact and the issue is thus concluded for him.¹⁵¹

Again, Putnam refers to Anderson's counterargument and uses it in the same way as with his critique towards Hare. The required motivational requirement is unreasonable.¹⁵² There are many reasons to believe something is good and at the same time to not be motivated to desire or choose it.¹⁵³

For Mackie ethical judgments are not expressions of desires. He applies his not widely accepted error theory for ethical judgments, which Putnam describes as follows:

"[...] 'good' *means* a property that is supposed to be such that the knowledge that something has it *necessarily* motivates the person who has that knowledge to desire or prefer it. Since there cannot be such a property (according to Mackie), every time we say that something is 'good' we are making an *error* (a metaphysical error in fact: attributing to something a *metaphysically absurd prop-erty*)."¹⁵⁴

Putnam concludes that Mackie's argument for the metaphysical absurdity of goodness rests on description which is heavily influenced by emotivism.¹⁵⁵

The last adversary Putnam discusses in relation to 'thick' ethical concepts is Williams. Unlike Mackie and Hare, Williams does accept and also uses the idea of 'thick' ethical concepts.

¹⁴⁸ Mackie, *Ethics*, 41.

¹⁴⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 39-40.

¹⁵⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 39.

¹⁵¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 42.

¹⁵² Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, 102.

¹⁵³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 43; (see also Aristotle's *akrasia* (weakness of will)).

¹⁵⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 43.

¹⁵⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 43.

However, he comes to a different conclusion regarding the implications of ‘thick’ ethical concepts than Putnam.¹⁵⁶

As a metaphysical realist Williams advocates for an ‘objective perspective’. This means subsequently that science reveals how things are in themselves, independent of human perspective (see *Ethics*¹⁵⁷). By using scientific terms, the world can be described in terms of primary qualities alone. In this setting a fact can be termed in the ‘absolute sense’ in the language of physics. Thus, factual statements in natural language do not possess the highest kind of truth. For example, the sentence ‘The grass is green.’ is not an absolute truth. Peter is *cruel* can be true in the same sense as ‘The grass is green’ while still being an ethical utterance. For Williams factual statements in natural language are not treated to possess the highest truth.¹⁵⁸

Williams therefore follows a minimalist account regarding truth. This means, that the idea of truth is inherent in propositions but that does not give significant information on the nature of truth. Ethical truths (expressed via ‘thick ethical’ concepts) can be true (in accordance with local language and rules) without having universal implications.¹⁵⁹

Williams’s concept of truth thus differentiates between absolute and relative truth values. This implies that all meaning is relative to a group and that there is no universal or absolute truth. The latter is a conclusion that Putnam accepts, but not respective to a specific group.¹⁶⁰

In his article *Truth in Ethics*¹⁶¹ Williams explicitly deals with the idea of truth and the implications that come from ‘thick’ ethical concepts concerning ethical utterances.¹⁶²

‘Thick’ ethical concepts involve the application of the concept of knowledge and are more so connected to truth and its value than ‘thin’ ethical concepts. Value is further attached to the notion of truth finding and is tied in with the general point of the concept of knowledge.¹⁶³

‘Thick’ ethical concepts are in a realm of ethics where they could deliver “[...] more than minimal truth, more than simply the surface facts. They provide examples of ethical statements that not only can be true but also be pointfully be said to be known by people.”¹⁶⁴ However, not all disagreement is removed because of this conceptual heterogenicity. Hence, for Williams practical judgments which stem from ‘thick’ conceptions are different in one’s own moral

¹⁵⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 44-45.

¹⁵⁷ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Cambridge 1985.

¹⁵⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 41-42.

¹⁵⁹ Hilary Putnam, “Pragmatism and Relativism: Universal Values and Traditional Ways of Life”, in: *Words and Life*, Hilary Putnam, Cambridge, MA 1994, 190.

¹⁶⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 41.

¹⁶¹ Bernard Williams, “Truth in Ethics”, in: *Ratio (New Series)* 8 (3), 227-242.

¹⁶² Bernard Williams, *Truth in Ethics*.

¹⁶³ Bernard Williams, *Truth in Ethics*, 235.

¹⁶⁴ Bernard Williams, *Truth in Ethics*, 239.

language or society than those which follow from the use of other ‘thick’ or ‘thin’ concepts in other moral languages. Thus, ‘thick’ ethical concepts are not homogenous in a pluralistic society and over different cultures.¹⁶⁵

Further, there is an ethical difference between those who use and those who don’t use certain concepts. The repertoire of ‘thick’ ethical concepts reveals one’s society’s ethical attitude. It can also manifest itself in a diachronic difference (e.g. the evolution of the concept of chastity, that has different meanings or implications over time).¹⁶⁶

Williams further states that reflection in ethics can destroy knowledge. If people no longer have the concept with which people used to express a certain class of beliefs or a ‘thick’ concept, it can be lost and in turn cease to have a disposition that expresses itself in categorizing the world in those terms.¹⁶⁷

In all three of these examples (non-homogenous concepts in pluralism, loss of concept, diachronic difference in use of a concept) Williams concludes that these issues are accounts for relativism.¹⁶⁸ Additionally he states: “Since the application of thick ethical concepts typically gives reasons for courses of action, we get, as a result, univocal disagreements at the level of practical reason that can be expressed in thin concepts.”¹⁶⁹

When discussing truth in ethics people normally refer to objectivity that goes beyond the idea of minimal truth and ‘thick’ ethical concepts. This expresses the desire for a canonical homogenous ethical language. To achieve this there are two strategies according to Williams.¹⁷⁰ Firstly, Kant and the utilitarian approach to focus on ‘thin’ concepts and let them do all the ethical conceptual work. However, this homogeneity leaves us with disagreements. Secondly, the Neo-Aristotelian approach, where the focus lies on ‘thick’ ethical concepts. There is a high order of convergence and knowledge which promises additions to mere minimalism. Here the problem lies again in the issue that ‘thick’ ethical concepts are not conceptually homogenous. At this crossroad there are again two options to proceed. Either to ignore that not everyone shares the same ‘thick’ ethical concepts (unhelpful to Williams) or to assume that there is an underlying theory of virtues that has cultural variation and can be relative to circumstances. Which again accounts for relativism. Alternatively, we may be given a deep structured account together with a non-trivial error theory. However, for Williams that is hard to honor.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Bernard Williams, *Truth in Ethics*, 236-240.

¹⁶⁶ Bernard Williams, *Truth in Ethics*, 237.

¹⁶⁷ Bernard Williams, *Truth in Ethics*, 238.

¹⁶⁸ Bernard Williams, *Truth in Ethics*, 237-239.

¹⁶⁹ Bernard Williams, *Truth in Ethics*, 240.

¹⁷⁰ Bernard Williams, *Truth in Ethics*, 240.

¹⁷¹ Bernard Williams, *Truth in Ethics*, 240-241.

The aim therefore is to go beyond the minimal truth account and to uncover a canonical homogenous set of ‘thick’ concepts. Nevertheless, facts of historical and social variation are undeniable (again relativism) and that needs to be accepted. There are minimal truth and surface facts that may expand these with ‘thick’ ethical concepts to converge and to gain some knowledge, but some issues of objectivity go beyond the described and are not going to be able to be resolved by investigating ethical truth. For Williams this is not a semantic issue but rather a blend of ethical, anthropological, and hermeneutical issues.¹⁷²

Williams acknowledges that ‘thick’ ethical concepts pose a problem. For him the two components theory is not acceptable because all the statements in use have no absolute validity. Therefore, statements can be properly called ‘true’ in two ways. Namely, relative, or absolute. For him concepts are formed from a certain perspective. Thereby ‘thin’ concepts like ‘good’ or ‘right’ may be universal but have no content. Substantial ‘thick’ concepts then again have content, but they are relative to culture and partake in a historical standpoint, which leads to cultural relativism. This view applies also to maxims because they have ‘thick’ concepts inscribed to them. For Williams it is problematic to formulate ‘universal laws’ because the extensions of these ethical concepts cannot be answered as universally intelligible. So again here, relativism in respect to values needs to be applied when ‘norms’ are concerned.¹⁷³

Putnam criticizes Williams as he supposedly falls into a dualism by presenting a false

“[...] dichotomy between what is ‘absolutely’ the case, true independently of the perspective of any observer, and what is only true relative to one or another ‘perspective’. Williams for example, does not deny that ethical sentences can be true or false; what he denies is that they can be true or false nonperspectively.”¹⁷⁴

Williams’s reason for relativism according to Putnam is that he does not see how to provide a metaphysical explanation for the possibility of ethical knowledge. However, the very idea to explain ethical knowledge in ‘absolute terms’ seems ridiculous for Putnam (he sees a general senselessness of metaphysics).¹⁷⁵

In his essay *Pragmatism and Relativism*¹⁷⁶ Putnam deals more extensively with William’s relativism and his inferences concerning ‘thick’ ethical concepts. Putnam emphasizes that there are circumstances where something is considered wrong, but one is morally required to do it. The ‘wrong’ word like *sordid* does not automatically entail morally wrong and can further be more ‘universally’ understood not only perspectival in a certain group.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Bernard Williams, *Truth in Ethics*, 241-242.

¹⁷³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 120.

¹⁷⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 41.

¹⁷⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 44.

¹⁷⁶ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Relativism*, 182-197.

¹⁷⁷ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Relativism*, 189.

Putnam further stresses in reply to Williams that there is no culture that only has ‘thick’ and no ‘thin’ ethical concepts. This poses the problem that traditional societies don’t just have ‘thick’ ethical concepts. They also have philosophical conceptions that inherently have ‘ought’ in them, and these conceptions have great importance. Moral debates are only possible if one refers to the value system of a certain society. Otherwise, one must assume that there is no relevant conception of ‘universal’ existential issues. However, for Putnam this assumption is unreasonable, because for him it is obvious that people “[...] believe deep down that there are universal human problems”.¹⁷⁸

Putnam establishes that we may

“[...] fear that the alternative to cultural relativism is cultural imperialism. But recognizing that our judgments claim objective validity and recognizing that they are shaped by a particular culture and by a particular problematic situation are not incompatible. And this is true of scientific questions as well as ethical ones.”¹⁷⁹

Putnam’s therefore insists to pursue rational discussion or to search an Archimedean point but in reference again to Dewey to apply pragmatist methods (investigate, discuss, cooperation, try things and democratically and fallibilistically).¹⁸⁰

Putnam’s use of ‘thick’ ethical concepts and understanding of language

The existence of ‘thick’ ethical concepts is one of Putnam’s central arguments for the entanglement thesis and the main idea of Putnam’s underlying ‘language theory’. In this section Putnam’s ideas and further considerations in relation to the inherent language structure, use, and its connection to rationality are explicated.

The fact of ‘thick’ ethical concepts serves as a counter example to a view of an absolute separation between fact and value, as it was previously established with the fact/value dichotomy. Thus, it serves as an argument to strengthen Putnam’s entanglement thesis.

An evaluative point of view is already inscribed in the meaning of words that have ‘thick’ ethical concepts. For Putnam the fact of ‘thick’ ethical concepts like *cruel* or *kind* is only available through the lens of value concepts.¹⁸¹ These concepts have evaluative force. Specifically, this indicates that the meaning of words stems from the value inscribed in them. Putnam follows Murdoch’s and McDowell’s arguments and calls for the ability to make nuanced and sophisticated use of the terms with ‘thick’ meaning, as these concepts can acquire

¹⁷⁸ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Relativism*, 191.

¹⁷⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 45.

¹⁸⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 45.

¹⁸¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 118-119.

a particular evaluative point of view. Thereby valuation and description are interdependent, which was overlooked by the positivists.¹⁸²

For Putnam the logical positivists considered only terms that suffice a certain definition of usable language to be meaningful for the description of facts. Putnam in opposition looks at language and the vocabulary thereof as a whole. By considering all aspects of language a deeper entanglement of fact and value can be found, even at the level of individual predicates.¹⁸³

The picture of our language in which nothing can be both a fact and value-laden is therefore wholly inadequate for Putnam. For him an enormous amount of descriptive vocabulary is and must be entangled.¹⁸⁴ These entangled concepts always entail evaluation. People's motivations are influenced by their ethical reasoning. Therefore, of a variety of 'thick' ethical concepts in the description of our motivations and actions need to be accounted for.¹⁸⁵

Further value terms are both conceptually indispensable and irreducible to merely descriptive terms. Which leads Putnam to the conclusion:

"Ethics does not *conflict with* physics, as the term 'unscientific' suggests; it is simply that 'just' and 'good' and 'sense of justice' are concepts in a discourse which is not *reduc-ible* to physical discourse. [...], *other* kinds of essential discourse are not reducible to physical discourse and are not for that reason illegitimate."¹⁸⁶

Putnam additionally infers that applying the language of physics with 'thin' ethical concepts (like ought, good, right, wrong) is insufficient to describe the ethical aspects of life.¹⁸⁷ What should be considered is the entire range language offers. This is achievable by embracing and using 'thick' concepts and their possibilities.

In *Reason, Truth, and History*¹⁸⁸ Putnam shows how especially 'thick' ethical concepts make a differentiation between fact and value hardly possible as there is value inscribed in statements:

"The independence of value from fact is harder to maintain when the facts themselves are of the order 'inconsiderate', 'thinks only about himself', 'would do anything for money'."¹⁸⁹

Further, Putnam's attitude towards language claims that evaluative concepts cannot get their meaning from a speaker's subjective motivation and preferences (like Hare, has an anti-internalist view). Ethical concepts are not reducible or separable into a descriptive and an attitudinal component respectively (Hare), because otherwise meaning would be lost.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸² Putnam, *Collapse*, 62.

¹⁸³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 34.

¹⁸⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 61-62.

¹⁸⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 64.

¹⁸⁶ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 145.

¹⁸⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 119.

¹⁸⁸ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*.

¹⁸⁹ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 139.

¹⁹⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 36.

Additionally, Putnam is concerned with the concept of objectivity in relation to the use of language. Specifically, the idea that objectivity and description are the same rests on the supposition that ‘objectivity’ means correspondence to objects. Normative truth statements such as ‘Murder is wrong.’ are connected to the idea of such an objectivity. Mathematical and logical truth statements are further examples of ‘objectivity without objects’ and fall into this setting. For Putnam such statements serve as counter examples to this wrong perception of objectivity. For Putnam logical truths with ontological accounts face difficulties as they are connected to the central logical notion of ‘validity’.¹⁹¹

Putnam uses the structure of language to establish his ‘ontology of things’ which is more like a rejection of ontology itself. Putnam further stresses that statements such as

“[...] bona fide statements, ones amenable to such terms as ‘correct,’ ‘incorrect,’ ‘true,’ ‘false,’ ‘warranted,’ and ‘unwarranted’—that are not descriptions, but that are under rational control, governed by standards appropriate to their context and particular functions and contexts.”¹⁹²

These behave like epistemic values and therefore have inherent value statements in them. This specifically means that in Putnam’s understanding agency and control governed by the agent are part of rationality. For him there is an inherent element of subjective evaluation that interacts with rationality. This means that rationality and objective valuations are interconnected with subjectivity.

Putnam gives language a broader meaning that is not only directed towards description, due to the fact of ‘thick’ ethical concepts. Certain words stand under rational control to define their value. Here again reason/rationality interacts with the inherent features of language and their respective connection to value.¹⁹³

The ability to make nuanced and sophisticated use of ‘thick’ evaluative terms – (example: distinguish courageous, rash, or foolish behavior) depends precisely on being able to acquire a particular evaluative point of view, where valuation and description are interdependent.¹⁹⁴

Putnam uses this inherent structure of language to exemplify and to also give evidence for the entanglement thesis. He does this by showing how words with ‘thick’ ethical concepts have normative and descriptive features that cannot be separated and additionally have evaluative force. The evaluative force of words not only influences reason but also serves as a corrective that is removed from emotivism as the internal motivator for desires and beliefs an agent may have.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 33.

¹⁹² Putnam, *Collapse*, 33.

¹⁹³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 33.

¹⁹⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 62.

¹⁹⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 37.

Critique on Putnam's language theory

Putnam's underlying 'language theory' is not explicitly explained by him. His arguments are on the one hand purely linguistic and on the other hand offer no further linguistic explanation. There are several views that critique Putnam's arguments concerning the explanation and implications concluded from his assessment of 'thick' ethical concepts and on language in general. However, the existence of 'thick' ethical concepts and the following inherent entanglement of fact and value is widely accepted by philosophers concerned with Putnam (even those defending the dichotomy and therefore applying for example the two-components theory).

Angelides finds fault on Putnam twice in his review by critiquing the limited extend of Putnam's language analysis and the lack of deep arguments for his theses.¹⁹⁶ Despite his overall conceptual critique of Putnam's 'language theory' Angelides nonetheless confirms the undeniable existence of the entanglement thesis in relation to language.¹⁹⁷

Philström likewise finds Putnam's approach to be primarily conceptual and linguistic in regard of the fact/value dichotomy. He traces this back to Putnam's Carnapian empiricist background, that focuses on the relation between factual and evaluative judgments rather than in reference to metaphysical items.¹⁹⁸

Salis in contrast to Philström and Angelides argues for the entanglement thesis. Describing and evaluating is part of everyday life. They should not be conceived as separate boxes. He states that:

“Description and evaluation are distinct in terms of function enacted by our thoughts and speech acts, but the presence of a description never automatically rules out some evaluative aspect in it and vice versa. [...] The upshot is an image of ordinary practices where there is a constitutive intertwining of descriptions, evaluations, and conventions, and in which this ensemble hinders any unilateral metaphysical untangling.”¹⁹⁹

Concerning Putnam's approach towards language and its connection to the entanglement thesis Bergström argues for the two-components theory (also used by Hare), where factual and

¹⁹⁶ “Hence, his attempt, towards the end of the collection, to construct a viable philosophy of language that can support the dichotomy's collapse and an ethical theory that can support his discussion of the dichotomy's collapse appears somewhat weak.” (Angelides, *The Last Collapse?*, 402) and “[...] he [Putnam] needs to show how the philosophy of language he develops may be extended to wider domains and related issues. [...], that promise is not delivered, for much of the collection focuses exclusively on questions of language, to the detriment of recent developments in the philosophy of science.” (Angelides, *The Last Collapse?*, 410).

¹⁹⁷ “It is only by failing to recognize that the total body of language—normative, descriptive, evaluative, and otherwise—interlaces at crucial points that can submit to a disentanglement thesis.” (Angelides, *The Last Collapse?*, 407).

¹⁹⁸ Sami Philström, “Toward a Pragmatically Naturalist Metaphysics of the Fact-Value Entanglement”, in: *Journal of Philosophical Research* 35, 2010, 324.

¹⁹⁹ Salis, *Putnam's Alethic Pluralism*, 4.

evaluative elements can be separated despite the intrinsic aspects of language through ‘thick’ ethical concepts. Bergström argues that words can anyhow be differentiated in relation to use and the given occasion. Thus, the entanglement caused by ‘thick’ ethical concepts does not pose a threat towards the dichotomy. Even if certain words are not part of a strict physical theory, they can nonetheless be expressed in a factual way.²⁰⁰

Agassi also critiques Putnam regarding the descriptive and prescriptive properties of language. He thereby supports a form of a two-components theory:

“This is why logic only works for formal systems. And when we reason in natural languages, we formalize small portions of them as the discussion requires, says Popper. Similarly, we have description-valuation mixtures. [...] Combinations are always present, even after the successful separation of concepts. This is why, as everybody knows, with no truth, there can be no justice and no value. Nevertheless, we may try to separate the components. What for? To render values as fact-independent as we can. What for? To be as free to decide our values as possible. This freedom is valuable, and Putnam wrongly runs it down.”²⁰¹

Agassi further claims, that separating the terms is helpful to form judgment, even if an absolute separation may not be possible, it should not be dismissed the way Putnam does. This is a very sensible objection towards Putnam, because the separation allows to freely choose the values ascription rather than exposing them to subjective value orderings.²⁰²

Another point against Putnam that Agassi puts forward is, that Putnam does not provide good examples against the logical positivists. He only refers to imperatives without clarifying his arguments: “But he offers hardly any example; he only marshals evidence that many of his predecessors, especially the logical positivists, limit their discourse on value to simple imperatives.”²⁰³

Agassi goes on to defend the logical positivists by following Wittgenstein²⁰⁴, who claims that all assertions that cannot be decided are not proper assertions. He therefore infers that values cannot be decided upon and therefore are not assertions. Their articulations are meaningless (not themselves). But Putnam however does not refer to this aspect and instead moves on to critique Carnap.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Bergström, *Putnam on the Fact-Value Dichotomy*, 5-6.

²⁰¹ Agassi, *What Collapse, Exactly?*, 81.

²⁰² Agassi, *What Collapse, Exactly?*, 81.

²⁰³ Agassi, *What Collapse, Exactly?*, 77.

²⁰⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Tractatus logico-philosophicus. Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*, Frankfurt am Main 2014, §642-6423.

²⁰⁵ Agassi, *What Collapse, Exactly?*, 77-78.

However, later in *Collapse*²⁰⁶ Putnam returns to Wittgenstein's later works²⁰⁷, but distorts him according to Agassi. Putnam leaves an asked question on decidability of factual statements open and moves on to an analogy between disputes concerning facts and values.²⁰⁸

Hickey's arguments against the entanglement of fact and value in relation to the use of language by Putnam are Putnam's inconsistent claims that all statements are evaluative (distinction versus dichotomy (Chapter I)) and that the two-components theory to separate fact and value is indeed helpful.²⁰⁹ However, in spite of these criticisms Putnam's main argument stays intact for Hickey: "A close analysis of such concepts reveals that it is impossible to disentangle their factual and evaluative components. [...] There is no way to restate 'cruel' in purely factual idioms, and this is Putnam's main point."²¹⁰ This leads Hickey the conclusion that 'thick' ethical terms are universally unintelligible, as Chakraborty agrees.²¹¹

De Anna criticizes Putnam's approach concerning 'thick' concepts and states that only because "[...] we accept the legitimacy of value-language does not imply, though, that we need to admit the existence of referents of value-terms akin to referents of empirical or factual terms."²¹²

For Putnam the conclusion that having a referent is not identical to having meaning. Therefore, there are value-terms and statements that have meanings, even if we do not commit ourselves to an ontology of values. For De Anna one weakness of Putnam's language theory is therefore that even if we accept that there is no ontology of values it is legitimate to ask: "[...] what features the world (or even 'man-in-the-world') should have in order for evaluative language to have the meaning it has, and thus what the assertibility conditions of evaluative statements and terms."²¹³

Putnam's conclusions from the existence and the characteristics of 'thick' ethical concepts remain simple. They serve mainly as a justification of the entanglement of fact and value without an intricate reference towards other linguistic aspects. A deeper explanation of the implications of 'thick' ethical concepts is absent.

²⁰⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 126.

²⁰⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford 1958, II, 207.

²⁰⁸ Agassi, *What Collapse, Exactly?*, 77-78.

²⁰⁹ Hickey, *Hilary Putnam*, 151-152.

²¹⁰ Hickey, *Hilary Putnam*, 151-152.

²¹¹ Sanjit Chakraborty, "The Fact/Value Dichotomy: Revisiting Putnam and Habermas", in: *Philosophia* 47, 2019, 375.

²¹² Gabriele De Anna, "Putnam on the Fact/Value Dichotomy and the scientific conception of the world", in: *Humana. Mente Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21, 2012, 208-209.

²¹³ De Anna, *Putnam and the scientific conception of the world*, 209.

Anti-relativism resulting from use of language

The last section of the second chapter is concerned with Putnam's rejection of relativism. It is necessary to analyze his dismissal because it ultimately relates to how Putnam understands reason and rationality.

As we have seen in the section on Putnam's adversaries Williams concludes from the fact of 'thick' ethical concepts that relativism is the only acceptable view concerning ethical knowledge and 'values'.²¹⁴

In *The Collapse of the fact/value Dichotomy*²¹⁵ Putnam criticizes Williams's metaphysical arguments concerning truth, values, and reason and uses his objections to solidify his arguments concerning the entanglement theory, externalism, and pragmatism. Putnam thereby not only strengthens his views on the issue of 'thick' ethical concepts as a contributing fact towards the entanglement theory but also touches upon the consequences of this understanding. The objects of this critique are not only metaphysics, physicalism but also the resulting relativism to which Williams concludes to.²¹⁶

As stated earlier, Williams argues that from 'thick' concepts there are absolute and relative truths, whereas absolute truths are not attainable, only relative ones. Therefore, his relativism can be argued from a linguistic aspect, namely from the fact of 'thick' ethical concepts.²¹⁷

Putnam rejects this inference because for him absolute truths are absurd. The aspect of accepting different point of views is valid for Putnam. However, this acknowledgement of a different point of view does not imply relativism, as it dismisses pluralism, which Putnam deems as necessary.²¹⁸

Putnam states that what follows from Williams's metaphysics is not per se a fact/value dichotomy but rather another dichotomy, one between absolute (true independently of the perspective of any observer) and relative truth (relative to another 'perspective'). Ethical sentences can be true or false not in an absolute sense, but they can be true or false perspectival, relative to some social world or another. Because of this dichotomy between relative and absolute truths that Williams establishes, he cannot provide a metaphysical explanation of the possibility of 'values', and ethical knowledge. This view of values in absolute terms has consequences for Williams's view on ethics. Thus, in the realm of ethics there are no normative statements, only relative ones. This goes hand in hand with the dichotomy view on the

²¹⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 40-42, 44.

²¹⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*.

²¹⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 40-42.

²¹⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 41.

²¹⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 44.

entanglement of fact and value in respect of how ethical statements are removed from a neutral or rational point of discussion. The exclusion of ‘values’ from rationality makes it impossible for Putnam to understand relativism as a valid position.²¹⁹

Williams further claims that reflection destroys ethical knowledge.²²⁰ This conclusion stands in opposition to Putnam’s view, where truth and rationality can be objective while simultaneously maintaining pluralism, that is not grounded in relativism. Putnam sees the problem of the dichotomy between an absolute and relative view of ethics as absurd because he has no need or even interest to explain ethical judgments or ‘values’ in absolute terms. Putnam’s approach towards ethical knowledge is rooted in pragmatism. Therefore, he relies on non-metaphysical sorts of arguments which can also relate to (liberal) convictions.²²¹

For Putnam relativism is a further implementation and manifestation of the fact/value divide, that he wants to overcome. He therefore argues that value-judgments are very much in the objective and rational sphere and do have explanatory power also (or especially) in the realm of ethics. Due to the entanglement thesis relativism must be objected against.²²²

Another point of critique against relativism for Putnam is its metaphysical explanation. For him ‘thick’ concepts can be explained without engaging in a relativist position and without universal laws. He views relativism as a form of metaethics that is corrosive of all ethical positions and views. Putnam rather argues that the focus should lie on how judgments claim objective validity (practical form of rationality, see Chapters III and IV). In his view we can simultaneously recognize that our judgments are in fact shaped by a particular culture or situations, but not turn into relativism by this acknowledgment and focus on the pragmatist path of constant inquiry.²²³

There is an underlying language theory that Putnam applies to strengthen his entanglement thesis. This becomes apparent by looking at the inherent structure of language itself. It shows how value judgments and facts are inseparable and intertwined. Putnam’s focus in this language theory are words with ‘thick’ ethical concepts that simultaneously have descriptive (‘factual-side’), and normative (‘value-side’) meanings inscribed. For Putnam the entanglement thesis is substantiated by this structure of language. He uses examples for his reasoning (see use of the word *cruel* etc.) to highlight his stance on ‘thick’ ethical concepts. Putnam argues against the non-cognitivist positions of Mackie and Hare that are defenders of the dichotomy. They argue that words with ‘thick’ concepts only have factual content. Hare further tries to separate

²¹⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 44-45.

²²⁰ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Relativism*, 188.

²²¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 44.

²²² Putnam, *Collapse*, 44-45.

²²³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 45.

descriptive and evaluative elements into two components. Putnam argues against both claims in favor of the entanglement thesis.²²⁴

Further Putnam argues against the metaphysical arguments brought forward by Williams. The latter argues that the only way to get hold of the issues concerning ‘thick’ ethical concepts is through relativism. Williams therefore distinguishes between ‘absolute’ and ‘perspectival’ truths, whereas the latter are applicable to words with ‘thick’ ethical concepts. Putnam finds ‘absolute’ truths absurd and not helpful in describing the world. He rather argues for the importance of ‘thick’ ethical concepts as proof of the entanglement thesis and calls for the use of pragmatist methods (e.g. constant inquiry) to accommodate the consequences that ‘thick’ ethical concepts cause. The existence of ‘thick’ ethical concepts expresses that everything has inherently value inscribed. They therefore support the entanglement thesis. Consequently, rationality must be thought of within this entangled value realm. Thus, for Putnam value-judgments can be objective and rationally discussed and they have explanatory power in ethics. Thus, reason and rationality are connected to certain forms of value judgments and are simultaneously concerned with facts, as they cannot be separated from each other. Likewise, promoters of the dichotomy may not explain away the inherent ‘thick’ aspect of language.²²⁵

The main point of critique against Putnam’s language theory is that it is not widely applicable and poorly explained. His underlying language theory can be characterized as a form of semantic externalism, where meanings of words are related to factors outside of the individual’s mind and are closely related to linguistic aspects. While Putnam agrees with Williams that social and linguistic practices influence speakers, this aspect does not lead Putnam towards accepting relativism, as he rejects all metaphysical explanations. Judgments can simultaneously claim objective validity and be influenced by a certain society. This is the case for moral as well as scientific questions. For Putnam this idea is incompatible with relativism. He postulates to always search for rational discussion and to engage with objective ‘truths’ or ‘absolute’ ideas always within a contexts and lastly to continuously investigate and discuss issues fallibilistically – in short apply pragmatist methods (see Chapter IV).²²⁶

Before Putnam’s concept of practical rationality is considered explicitly, his view on having reasons is important. Further his view on the relationship between value and rationality is examined. These subjects are considered in the following chapter (Chapter III).

²²⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 34-35.

²²⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 41-43.

²²⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 45.

III Entanglement of value and rationality?

In this chapter the main question of interest is if value and rationality are connected in Putnam's view. If this is the case, former approaches towards questions of practical rationality like classic rational choice theory become obsolete in this setup and new ways of dealing with practical rationality are called for. Putnam explicates the entanglement of value and rationality in *Collapse*²²⁷ with an example concerning existential choices (repellant coin-flip).²²⁸ Putnam's position of rationality unfolds through his entanglement thesis. To understand Putnam's view on (practical) rationality an investigation of having reasons is necessary. Further how motivations to act are related to Putnam's explanation of rationality is examined. For Putnam rationality is not an operational algorithmic exercise removed from value judgments, rather the latter are again part of an entanglement that informs motivations and reasons.²²⁹

The subject of this chapter is to conceptualize Putnam's view on rationality and how the entanglement of value and rationality comes from an entanglement of fact and value. Further, rationality in this understanding does not rely on purely subjective ranking systems as classic rational choice theorizes. His view is therefore a rejection of said decision theory.

Firstly, I will explicate Putnam's example of the repellant coin-flip that makes the entanglement of value and rationality explicit. Secondly, I will explain internal and external reasons and their implications. Bernard Williams internalist view stands (yet again) in opposition to Putnam's position. Thirdly, I will assemble the notions that Putnam presents for his view on rationality. Lastly, I will show how Putnam relates the entanglement of value and rationality to that of fact and value. Putnam's views are complemented and contrasted with comments towards his arguments.

The repellant coin-flip: the choice of values is rational

Putnam elaborates in an example which I call 'the repellant coin-flip' how the choice of values is rational and not arbitrary. Putnam rejects the traditional economic interpretation of preferences, the so-called classical rational choice theory²³⁰. The main thesis of the example is that it is valuable to know what ends to choose.²³¹

²²⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*.

²²⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 79-95.

²²⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 104.

²³⁰ An Introduction and overview on classical rational choice theory can be found in (especially Chapters 3-5): Hal R. Varian, *Intermediate Microeconomics. A Modern Approach*, New York 1999.

²³¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 85.

In *Collapse*²³² Putnam uses the example of Theresa to characterize human rationality.²³³ Putnam expands his arguments against orthodox preference theory which he already worked on in *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*²³⁴. The main expansion of his argument is, that it now includes not only that one's explanations run out but also that by actively choosing certain values (like autonomy) motivations beyond a pre-fixed internal motivational set are considered.²³⁵ Specifically concerning transformative choices people's motivations are significantly influenced by their ethical reasoning.²³⁶

Classical rational choice theory works with intrinsic preferences. There are four defined logic axioms (completeness, transitivity, continuity, independence), which do not include rational evaluation when considering preferences.²³⁷

One preference can only be trumped by other preferences, needs, desires, or passions but they are not subject to any further demands of reason.²³⁸

Therefore, in economic preference theory it is not reasonable to consider someone perfectly rational who sees certain goods as incomparable. For Putnam this interpretation is counterintuitive.²³⁹ As the intuitive meaning of options being indifferent is unlike incomparable ones. By his interpretation indifference is to not care which option to choose, incomparability rather suggests having not decided which option to choose.²⁴⁰

Putnam critiques the axioms of preference ordering in the orthodox economic approach. In his opinion the capacity to describe a situation that calls for a decision is entangled with our capacity to consider the normatively significant features of that description (ethical standpoint). Thus, the axiomatic system of preference theory produces a distorted account of the actual situation. It further disguises the practical ability to ask for and to be able to deliver reasons concerning ends or provisional final ends.²⁴¹

To show that it is valuable to choose one's own reasons Putnam presents the case of Theresa. She is torn between two existential choices, either to follow an ascetic religious way of life (z) or a sensual one with either a lover a (x) or b (y), where she prefers lover a (x). She sees the choice between the two options as incomparable. To act rationally in the sense of rational choice

²³² Putnam, *Collapse*.

²³³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 79-95.

²³⁴ Hilary Putnam, "Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics", in: *Rationality in Question. On Eastern and Western Views of Rationality*, Schlomo Biderman, Ben-Ami Scharfstein (Ed.): Leiden 1989, 19-28.

²³⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 86-88.

²³⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 64.

²³⁷ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 19-23.

²³⁸ Hogan; Marcelle, *The Complementarity of Means and Ends*, 407.

²³⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 80.

²⁴⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 80-83.

²⁴¹ Hogan; Marcelle, *The Complementarity of Means and Ends*, 413.

theory is that (x) must not rank at least as high as (y). By doing so in the Von Neumann-Morgenstern (VNM) ordering of preferences²⁴² this would constitute a violation of the axiom of transitivity because the negation of the weak preference relation is transitive (not her lack of intransitivity). Thus, by setting the two options as incomparable Theresa is considered as irrational.²⁴³

Putnam defends Theresa's position of incomparability to be rational. He does this by following the intuitive meaning of incomparability which is the crux of the matter.²⁴⁴ Theresa does not care in the sense of a coin deciding but in the sense that she has not decided. Therefore, there are no good grounds for Putnam to label Theresa as irrational.²⁴⁵

Putnam's argues against the transitivity of choices in preference theory. For him an essential part of existential choices is that the choice is selected by the agent. It is important to act on the account of free will and the choice to not be decided by a preference theorist or arbitrarily by a coin-flip. What Theresa wants is to choose a life after reflection, chosen on her free will. At this point Putnam introduces value (value of autonomy) into the account of preferences.²⁴⁶

Putnam's critique is directed towards the idea that being indifferent assumes that all choices are considered to be commodities (where the own choice is not an issue). However, considering existential choices, this element of preference theory deprives Theresa of what is most important to her, namely her autonomy.²⁴⁷ Putnam concludes: "Thinking of everything as a 'commodity' will necessarily blind one to the most elementary facts about the moral life."²⁴⁸

Hogan interprets from this that for Putnam the violation of the logical axiom seems intuitively acceptable when commodity bundles are concerned, because they capture a way of talking about comparable things. Further Putnam takes the axioms of preference to be about internal consistency of choice for which the term 'rational' is used as a synonym. The abstract and technical character of these formal requirements for consistency lead to the mistake to erase the distinct characteristics of those objects over which choice functions operate (because not everything is a commodity).²⁴⁹

Putnam goes on to introduce a Challenger – who follows the Von Neumann-Morgenstern preference theory – to specify his arguments. The Challenger sees two options for Theresa.

²⁴² See the explanations in: Varian, *Intermediate Microeconomics*, 35.

²⁴³ For the entire elaboration of the example see: Putnam, *Collapse*, 79-95.

²⁴⁴ "[...], and there seems to be all the difference in the world between these two cases." (Putnam, *Collapse*, 81).

²⁴⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 81.

²⁴⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 84.

²⁴⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 83.

²⁴⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 83.

²⁴⁹ Hogan; Marcelle, *The Complementarity of Means and Ends*, 413-415.

Either she already has an internal choice in her which she was not aware of, or the outcome is objectively indeterminate, in which case internal factors do not decide the outcome but some external (arbitrary/accidental) factors. For Putnam feeling strongly about theorists or nameless environmental factors causing the decision is to have a feeling with no rational basis, in turn declaring autonomy as humbug. The challengers' inferences stem from the idea that economics is supposed to be value-neutral and to show that a particular value is 'irrational' (Theresa's autonomy). Putnam goes on to argue that even if actions are causally determined in advance (in reference to Davidson²⁵⁰), one can still meaningfully distinguish between what we 'do of our own free will' and what we suffer or undergo, so what is important to Theresa is that the action comes from her own will.²⁵¹

The Challenger then can grant within his argument to not let a theorist decide her fate or to wait for a decision to form internally (that she is indeed indifferent (does not care)) and to rather let a coin decide.²⁵²

Is it rational for Theresa to let arbitrary influences govern her transformative choice when the outcome could be determined by a coin? It also could be satisfying for her to let the coin decide and that she then will abide to the outcome. This then would be something she would do out of her own will, if that's the relevant imperative. However, Theresa's requirement is that she not only decides from her own will but (stipulation now added) that she also must give satisfactory reasons for her decision.²⁵³

“Theresa must be able to give satisfactory reasons for her decision—not metaphysical reasons, but just the sort of reasons that actually have weight in human lives. It is not relevant to Theresa what the merely causal determinants of her action will be, but it is relevant (relevant to her) what *reasons* she will, in the end, be able to give.”²⁵⁴

To give the issue better understanding Putnam switches up the example. Theresa now rather must choose between two very different careers. Either to be a wealthy specialized physician or to help a poor community. As in the former case she has not made the decision on 'who to be'. In this case flipping a coin however is utterly repellant. Is she irrational for this sentiment? For Putnam the answer is no.²⁵⁵

The reasons Theresa will offer for either pathway will be very different. To this the Challenger might respond that all her offered reasons are mere 'rationalizations' or respond “[...] that while

²⁵⁰ Reasons are a species of causes, not all the causes of our decisions are reasons. See: Davidson, *Actions, Reasons, and Causes*, 685-700.

²⁵¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 84-85.

²⁵² Putnam, *Collapse*, 85.

²⁵³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 85.

²⁵⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 85.

²⁵⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 85-86.

it may be a value to have reasons to offer for one's decision, his original argument is one he can repeat at the level of reasons. Either the reasons Theresa will offer in the end [...] are already in place, or they are not."²⁵⁶

What about Theresa's future reasons? It is stipulated that Theresa really is indeterminate and the choices in her state of mind are genuinely incomparable. Putnam's conclusion at this point is to refer to Wittgenstein²⁵⁷ that reasons have to come to an end at some point. Theresa is objectively indeterminate, here is where her reasons come to an end. The Challengers' argument at the level of reasons is unsatisfactory.²⁵⁸

In this case the Challenger can only respond paradoxically. Now he is questioning whether it is rational to want to be able to give reasons for one's actions.²⁵⁹

He then must reply that Theresa's explanations as well as her existential decision are governed by arbitrary influences. How can it be rational for her that these influences determine which reasons she will accept as binding, when she could flip a coin instead?²⁶⁰

“But the argument falters because one cannot simply choose to acknowledge the force of a reason. [...] If the desire to act from reasons whose binding force is sincerely acknowledged by herself is itself a legitimate value for Theresa, then Theresa has excellent reason (relative to her ‘preferences’) for rejecting the suggestion that she simply flip a coin. For she were to flip a coin, she would end up choosing whichever way of life the coin toss pointed to on grounds other than possession of *reasons for that way of life that appear to be valid*. Once again, we can argue that it is internal to the action that she wants to take that, no matter which of the alternatives it may be, it should include the possession of reasons that should be seen from within that very life having force, and that constitute the way of life as the way of life it is. [...] It may be that without the possession of a whole internal value system, including the possession of reasons, one would not have the strength to go through with either way.”²⁶¹

The desire to act from reasons becomes a legitimate value if the binding force of reasons is sincerely acknowledged by oneself. This desire makes it repellant to flip a coin, because if Theresa does let a coin decide she chooses a way of life on other grounds than having reasons. Thus, having reasons is internal to the action and stems from the life that has force and also constitutes the way of life as the way of life it is. To be able to form decisions a whole internal value system – including having reasons – is needed.²⁶²

²⁵⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 86.

²⁵⁷ “Well, how do I know?—If that means ‘Have I reasons?’ the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons.” (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §211, (84e)). And „If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do.’” (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §217, (85e)).

²⁵⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 86-87.

²⁵⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 86.

²⁶⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 87-88.

²⁶¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 88.

²⁶² Putnam, *Collapse*, 88.

Following this set of arguments presented by Putnam, it follows that the concern for autonomy is rational because there is a differentiation between ‘free will’ and what we undergo. Therefore, one does not want decisions to be determined by arbitrary environmental factors. One wants to be able to give satisfactory reasons for the decisions that one makes. The desire to act from reason in turn has a binding force that is internally acknowledged. This acknowledgment to act from reason is a legitimate value that feeds into decision making, where reason and value are entangled as they inform and complement each other.²⁶³

Having reasons

How reasons are explained leads to two opposing forms of understanding rationality. Either it is understood through an externalist or an internalist view. On this topic Putnam and Williams are widely in disagreement (again). Putnam calls Williams’ view a “metaphysical ‘dichotomy’”.²⁶⁴ Contrasting Williams’ internalist view with Putnam’s complementary one makes the different explanations and approaches towards understanding rationality more explicit. In turn Putnam’s position can be clarified.

The debate of whether we have internal or external reasons is the set up for interpreting motivations for action in different ways. Having distinctive views on how reason develops shifts the meaning that ends and means have for forming reason, rationality, and motivations to act. Therefore, how ends and means are viewed have consequences for ethical reasoning. The following sections I will analyze Williams’ interpretation of having reasons and its relation to ends and means (through internalism), and Putnam’s take on these issues (complementary/external position).

Williams’ internalism and Putnam’s critique

Williams’ influential paper *Internal and external reasons*²⁶⁵ states that in internalism reasons for actions are grounded in the agent’s prior motivations that are found in their ‘subjective motivational set’. The agent has reason to act only if that action is in their motivational set. The subjective motivations need to be rationally connected to the action, otherwise the claim that the agent has reason to do so must be rejected either as false or incoherent. Generating new intentions can only make sense through reasoning that is prepared by the motivational resources that are already present. Practical reason in internalism therefore is to analyze the

²⁶³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 85.

²⁶⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 3.

²⁶⁵ Bernard Williams, “Internal and External Reasons”, in: *Moral Luck. Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, Bernard Williams, Cambridge 1981, 101-113.

implications of the commitments inherent of the already existing subjective motivational set. Motivation comes before practical reason and restricts it.²⁶⁶

In opposition to internalism stands externalism. Externalism provides that one can have reasons for action independent of one's prior formulated motivations. By applying practical reasoning new motivations and actions can be generated. If an agent has reason to act, it is possible for them to obtain the motivation to act through deliberation on significant reasons. Reasoning is not restricted by prior subjective motivations. In externalism practical reason is not only related to the implications of existing desires and commitments but an agent additionally can reason on the objectively good thing to do. To act accordingly an agent incorporates that evaluative reflection. Externalism therefore involves normative reflection outside of the agent's prior motivations and includes new motivational possibilities.

Williams has skepticism towards external reasons because for him they are not part of the agent's motivational set and therefore incoherent. Putnam critiques this exclusion of external reasons: "[...] Williams cannot see how a decision can be rational if it is left undetermined by all the elements in what he refers to as the agent's 'motivational set.'"²⁶⁷

Further, Williams' rejection of external reasons seems to be a revisionist stance towards our actual moral life for Putnam, that takes away any approach towards truth in ethics: "But if to dismiss talk of external reasons as 'false or incoherent' isn't to dismiss talk of *knowing*, *discovering*, *realizing*, and indeed talk of *truth* in ethics, then it is hard to see what is being recommended."²⁶⁸

The confusion on Putnam's end regarding Williams's approach towards truth in ethics is reinforced because Williams as a non-cognitivist does accept the ordinary sense of true and false, which can also be applied to ethical judgments. Putnam however concludes that Williams inference stems from his view of the sharp distinction of 'thick' and 'thin' ethical concepts. In this understanding 'thin' ethical concepts cannot allot for a 'right' answer. In the case of 'thick' ethical concepts one can know that an act is X given the right social world (relativism). Putnam detects therein an untenable dichotomy between being involved in a particular language or speaking outside of it. In this dichotomy the truth-valuedness of ethical language is only attached to the objectivity within a specific language and it amounts to no more than consensus in a particular culture.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Williams, *Internal and External Reasons*, 101-113.

²⁶⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 93.

²⁶⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 91.

²⁶⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 91.

Putnam further criticizes Williams for his choice of examples (e.g. Owen Wingrave)²⁷⁰ because all their attention is focused on whether lacking certain values or lacking good will is a form of irrationality. For Putnam these terms are historically messed up and lead to an empty question.²⁷¹

To refute Williams, Putnam chooses a different example to argue for external reasons: A good person does not want to perform a selfish action, but they disagree with others that the action in question is selfish. The person has no internal reason to accept the view that the action is selfish. So, there is “[...] a gulf between the ethical perspective on the moral disagreement in question and Bernard Williams’s metaphysical perspective.”²⁷² If this “ethical perspective”²⁷³ (agent view) were to classify the action as being selfish then it would count as a reason to not perform the action. However, the reason the agent is not moved is not unreasonable, rather the external agent simply does not agree with the view that the action is selfish. Williams’ metaphysical perspective sees the issue as follows: The agent is wrong because they are mistaken about the action not being a selfish one. Putnam calls this inference a high-minded rhetoric against external reasons that are ‘false’.²⁷⁴

“In short, once one has accepted that existence of a gulf between internal and external reasons, and the doctrine that ap-peals to external reasons are ‘false or incoherent,’ it is difficult to see how one can stop short of a Rortian relativism with respect to ethics.”²⁷⁵

Putnam therefore concludes that the rejection of external reasons leads to relativism, which he finds unacceptable.²⁷⁶

Putnam puts another point forward against internal reasons in general that uses again the previously introduced Challenger in the example of Theresa: “[...] one cannot reject an end as ‘irrational’ unless one already assumes that there are rational and irrational ends.”²⁷⁷ In Theresa’s case making up her own mind to be labelled as irrational, invokes no value in Theresa’s ‘motivational set’. Thereby the Challenger assumes his own values and treats them as ones Theresa was unreasonable to reject. In turn the Challenger (ironically) must reject Williams’s view on the falsity of external reasons to make his argument at all. For Putnam the

²⁷⁰ Owen Wingrave doesn’t want to join the army, see: Williams, *Internal and External Reasons*, 101-113.

²⁷¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 91-92.

²⁷² Putnam, *Collapse*, 92.

²⁷³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 92.

²⁷⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 92.

²⁷⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 92.

²⁷⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 90.

²⁷⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 93.

talk of ‘motivational sets’ as if they were a hard scientific fact obscures the actual issue that is real life.²⁷⁸

“If we think that speaking of rational connections as things we can be right or wrong about is simply mystery-mongering, then this will be rejected as, at best, rhetoric. But Theresa is not doing *metaphysics*; she is living her life with the aid of an ethical standpoint. The language of *coming to see* what that standpoint requires of one is internal to that standpoint and not a piece of transcendental machinery that is required to provide a foundation for it. It is possible to do science without supposing that one needs a metaphysical foundation for the enterprise, it is equally possible to live an ethical life without supposing that one needs a metaphysical foundation.”²⁷⁹

For Putnam coming to terms with ethical decisions is not related to a metaphysical internal foundation in the form of an abstract ‘motivational’ set. Decisions come around through internal reflection which is backed by an ethical standpoint. That ethical standpoint calls for external reasons to be valid and is connected to real life.²⁸⁰

Putnam’s postulate for externalism

For Putnam the idea that something is present inside the agent that will eventually cause them to choose one way or another and describe it as an already existent preference is highly problematic. Therefore, Putnam has an external explanation of reasons.²⁸¹ Especially, “[...] it should include the possession of reasons that should be seen from within that very life as having force, and that constitute the way of life as the way of life it is.”²⁸²

Reasons have a force that stem from that very life that is constituted, so reasons are not inherently internal for Putnam. Through external reasons values expand into ethics and in turn an ethical standpoint and values become a part of reasons and rational discussion:

“[...] that talk of external reasons is not simply meta-physical talk, it is ethical talk, talk that we engage in from within the ethical life itself. People of good will regularly include in their descriptions of their ‘values’ or ‘preferences’ or ‘desires’ a value or preference or desire to *do what is right*. To be a person of good will is precisely to care about *doing the right thing*.”²⁸³

There is a rationality within the idea that the agent is allowed to make their own existential choices (and be able to give reasons for them). For Putnam this stays in place even if the reasons are not available prior to the existential choice as an internalist view would suggest.²⁸⁴

Putnam assumes a complementarity of ends and means. The example of Theresa shows that there is an entanglement of rationality and values, granted through external reasons. Putnam

²⁷⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 93.

²⁷⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 93-94.

²⁸⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 93-94.

²⁸¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 83.

²⁸² Putnam, *Collapse*, 88.

²⁸³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 90.

²⁸⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 89.

argues that an agent has an internal value system, that includes the possession of reasons to go through with existential life decisions.²⁸⁵ However, these reasons and the internal value system do not stem from a prior formed and fixed internal motivational set. With the postulate for external reasons Putnam not only dismisses metaphysics in the realm of choices but also allows for variability within choices that are justified by having reasons that are directed by an internal value system (which can be informed through external reasons).²⁸⁶

Hogan and Marcelle interpret Putnam's externalism to also apply in non-prosaic cases. We cannot let ourselves be moved by an intrinsic desire – a given end – nor be simply responsive to our evaluative norms. It is important to consider the common-sense world and the fact, that we must make a decision and in the best case try to give reasons for our choices. In the case of Theresa autonomy is valued, finally it's her decision. It is not relevant what the casual determinants are, but rather what reasons she will in the end be able to give.²⁸⁷

They further draw from Putnam's inferences on the value of autonomy is the introduction of value into decision theory and in turn expands how means and end operate, namely complementary.²⁸⁸

“The relevance of autonomy to Putnam's argument is that it is not correctly described merely as a means for an end (for then it would not matter what reasons in the end one is able to give) nor as simply an end in itself. It is not as if the capacity to make one's own decisions is itself intelligible regardless of matters-to-decide one's transaction with the environment makes present. Rather, the value of autonomy exhibits the complementarity of means and ends.”²⁸⁹

Angelides assesses Putnam's position regarding internal and external reasons as follows:

“Moreover, such concepts have values that may be ‘objectively’ outweighed by other factors. The way to gauge when one action or object should be valued more than another is not to point to an agent's subjective desires (internal reasons) or to point to the contingent factors for a decision (external reasons). For Putnam, talk of internal, as well as external, reasons are modes of discourse that require rational justification.”²⁹⁰

For Putnam it is central that whatever the reasons are, they need a rational justification. Meaning is related to factors outside the individual's mind. Additionally, norms, and social practices have influence on how opinions are formed. Further there is a linguistic aspect that plays a role for motivational states/agency.²⁹¹

²⁸⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 88.

²⁸⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 94-95.

²⁸⁷ Hogan; Marcelle, *The Complementarity of Means and Ends*, 418.

²⁸⁸ Hogan; Marcelle, *The Complementarity of Means and Ends*, 418.

²⁸⁹ Hogan; Marcelle, *The Complementarity of Means and Ends*, 418.

²⁹⁰ Angelides, *The Last Collapse?*, 407.

²⁹¹ Angelides, *The Last Collapse?*, 407.

Angelides analyses Putnam's approach in relation to language in connection to action the following way:

“Putnam obviously recognizes that we need to be able to see how the very use of basic linguistic items is already a social phenomenon oriented towards the good life. But for Putnam, considerations of the good life enter at the level of an actor's agency and autonomy.”²⁹²

The idea of the good life is connected to ‘thick’ ethical value concepts and has likewise value inscribed and further informs the actions of an agent. Thus, for Putnam there is no gap between external and internal reasons as the one Williams supposedly established.²⁹³

Putnam's idea of reasons can therefore be characterized as a rejection of metaphysics, transcendental arguments. He sets an emphasis on the real life, the incorporation of an ethical standpoint and the acceptance of non-final and changing ends. Further having reasons is always connected to justification. This is possible through external reasons and shows the entanglement of value and rationality, making them involved with each other in (ethical) life.

Rationality in terms of Putnam

Putnam examined the notion of rationality not only in view of preference theory but also from other perspectives. His discussion of the topic sets out in critique of known interpretations and definitions of rationality. Putnam's conception of rationality can be pieced together by examining his writings on the topic, that mainly consist of Putnam's formulation of what rationality is not for him.

In *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*²⁹⁴ Putnam formulates a critique of the conception of rationality. Rhetorically this paper Putnam works with the question ‘Why is it good to be rational?’ Putnam conjures also here the adversaries he treats in *Collapse*²⁹⁵, namely the fact/value divide²⁹⁶, logical positivism²⁹⁷ and metaphysics²⁹⁸.

Putnam critiques that rationality always means scientific rationality (defined from ‘positive science’; based on the demonstration of instrumental connections to the satisfaction of the majority). Through this definition value judgments have no cognitive status or meaning because

²⁹² Angelides, *The Last Collapse?*, 410.

²⁹³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 92.

²⁹⁴ Hilary Putnam, “The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality”, in: *Synthese* 46 (3), 1981, 359-382.

²⁹⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*.

²⁹⁶ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 365.

²⁹⁷ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 367.

²⁹⁸ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 368.

they are non-verifiable through science. Putnam sees this as a narrow conception of rationality, that only consist of methods that are vague and purely procedural.²⁹⁹

Putnam formulates instead another understanding of rationality that does not center on the consensus of the majority and relies on the capacity of critical thinking:

“And it is plausible that one of the highest manifestations of rationality should be the ability to judge correctly in precisely those cases where one cannot hope to ‘prove’ things to the satisfaction of the majority.”³⁰⁰

As stated, Putnam tries to find an answer to ‘Why is it good to be rational?’ and rejects the for him unsatisfactory commonly understood explanations. Therefore, for him the answers to the question cannot be the discovery of means and ends, practical goals attainment, or finding a method for truth/false analysis (Bayes, scientific method, formal procedures).³⁰¹

The established form of scientism has eliminated the view that there is a possibility of knowledge and reason outside of what is called ‘science’ and leaves no room for debate. Putnam attempts to broaden the description of ‘the aim of science’ which he deems to have simplified over time into the analysis of what can be falsified or verified. Within this conception a statement only becomes meaningful through its verification status in order to become the aim of reason. However, for Putnam there is no exact epistemological explanation why only these types of statements are capable of rational verification and therefore they are for him a mere hypothesis about the limits of rational inquiry.³⁰²

Putnam further sees this established methodism as faulty, as this form of formal rationality is full of irrationalities and does not guarantee real and actual rationality.³⁰³

Putnam further argues, that the Popperian method in its vagueness and informality not only exhausts the notion of scientific rationality but even more so cognitive rationality. Putnam attests that Popper’s theory of falsification was too narrow even for science and needs to be supplemented by a more intuitive method. Putnam states that this method is not formalizable at the present time.³⁰⁴

Putnam analyzes that Popper’s falsification theory was replaced by Darwin’s method of the best explanation. With this step the scientific method however becomes even vaguer. Even with this now established vagueness through Darwinism no link to moral predicates is made possible, with the argument that science only works with a value-neutral language. Putnam

²⁹⁹ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 363.

³⁰⁰ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 363.

³⁰¹ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 365, 371, 375.

³⁰² Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 368-371.

³⁰³ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 375.

³⁰⁴ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 378-380.

tentatively claims that ‘value judgments’ could be ‘scientifically verified’ in the same manner, through this established vagueness.³⁰⁵

Lastly, Putnam touches upon ‘thick’ ethical concepts in (descriptive) language (without explaining or referring to them explicitly) to characterize how every statement inherently holds a value statement. From there the following problem unfolds for Putnam, namely if rationality is identified with scientific rationality and at the same time considers ‘thick’ ethical concepts, what is then the cognitive status of value judgments? In the sense of scientific rationality, they are not rationally confirmable because of their value status. Thus, rationality was defined to only consist of natural and neutral observations and conclusions from value neutral premises. A view that Putnam sees as problematic.³⁰⁶

“[...] to identify *rationality* with scientific rationality so described would be to beg the question of the cognitive status of value judgments; it would be say these judgments are not rationally confirmable because *they are* value judgments, and rationality has been *defined* as consisting exclusively of raw and neutral observation and the drawing of inferences from *value-neutral* premises. But why should one accept such a definition?”³⁰⁷

Putnam gives some insights on his view of (scientific) rationality. He already states (same as the example of Theresa), that it is valuable to know which ends to choose³⁰⁸ and mentions a not at present formalizable scientific method that presupposes prior notions of rationality. He therefore proposes an informal rationality that consists of intelligence and common-sense.³⁰⁹ Putnam again does not answer the questions he initially posed, and he does not elaborate satisfyingly an alternative conception other than his critique and rejection of ‘scientific rationality’ that excludes value judgments. Putnam appears to be in search of a new definition of rationality that includes value-judgments or at least defines their cognitive status. How this definition supposed to look like and how it works is not explained by him in this paper.³¹⁰

In *Reason, Truth, and History*³¹¹ Putnam also analyses several conceptions of rationality that are wrong in his understanding. For him the normative/natural explanation of rationality faces the problem that there are no powerful generalizations about all rational beliefs. The explanation of rationality through verification is unacceptable for Putnam as it leads to logical positivism and further to relativism. Putnam critiques specifically the positions of Carnap and Popper.³¹²

³⁰⁵ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 381.

³⁰⁶ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 382.

³⁰⁷ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 382.

³⁰⁸ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 362.

³⁰⁹ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 378.

³¹⁰ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*.

³¹¹ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, Chapter 5, 103-126.

³¹² Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 106, 125.

Putnam goes on to critique anarchism, where the incommensurability thesis³¹³ leads to relativism, making it self-refuting. For Putnam this approach of rationality is wrong because he argues that we do share and can interpret reasonable assumptions and beliefs:

“However different our images of knowledge and conceptions of rationality, we share a huge fund of assumptions and beliefs about what is reasonable with even the most bizarre culture we can succeed in interpreting at all.”³¹⁴

This makes relativism not only inconsistent but also the resulting scientism responsible for the wrong conception of rationality we may have (same argument as 1981): “Both sorts of scientism are attempts to evade the issue of giving a sane and human description of the scope of reason.”³¹⁵

After his critiques Putnam describes what the scope of reason should entail. It should be sane and human but again he provides no further elaboration on how this description would look like (apart from his critique towards logical positivism, anarchism, and relativism).

In 1989 Putnam addresses the topic of rationality again. In *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*³¹⁶ Putnam discusses the culturally accepted distinction between ‘science’ and ‘ethics’ and ‘absolute’ and ‘instrumental’ values, which he detects as a distinction between valuing and engineering. However, he also concedes that “[...] rationality is as difficult a thing to ‘explain’ in both cases”.³¹⁷

Firstly, he explains the formal assumptions of ‘decision theory’, which Putnam finds dubious. Putnam refers to Von-Neumann, where choices need to be *rational* and are defined by the axioms for rational preference, which is utility theory. What Putnam criticizes in this paper the notion of ‘rational preference’ itself.³¹⁸

As already explained in the section with the example of Theresa, Putnam defends the intuitive sense of indifference. Putnam’s problem is not transitivity itself but rather the equivalence relation between reflexivity, symmetry, and transitivity. These follow from VNM axioms and the assumption of the irreflexivity of preference. Putnam elaborates his argument (which is the same as the Theresa example) by introducing the value of autonomy (value of making the choice for myself). This value is not just a mere commodity, because the choices between x, y,

³¹³ “The incommensurability thesis is the thesis that terms used in another culture, say, the term ‘temperature’ as used by a seventeenth-century scientist, cannot be equated in meaning or reference with any terms or expressions we possess.” (Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 114).

³¹⁴ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 119.

³¹⁵ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 126.

³¹⁶ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 19-28.

³¹⁷ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 19.

³¹⁸ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 20.

z are different from deciding which kind of life to lead. And “[...], that I view them as choices to be made by *me* in the process of *deciding who I am to be*”.³¹⁹

Putnam further stresses that not all choices are choices of external goods. The importance of one’s own decision should be acknowledged. Existential choices are ever ongoing and moving and not internally preset decisions already made (as rational preference theory assumes). For Putnam this indicates that the agent stops growing and turns out to be utterly rigid as a human being. To add this attribute into ‘rationality’ is hardly believable for Putnam.³²⁰

Putnam’s objection to the standard economic conception of human action is that ends and means are set up not as functional distinctions that mutually influence each other but as rigid philosophical dichotomies. The model fails to take the way how people actually follow their lives. Which is by making decisions, revising, and revaluing preferences in light of experience and taking this seriously because the scientific framework excludes values as merely subjective.³²¹

Hogan and Marcelle attest to Putnam to present a genealogical account of how logical positivism provided the epistemological authority to exclude values in the name of science.³²²

Putnam further discusses the example of Peirce’s Puzzle. It deals with the question why a person should do what is most *likely* to work?³²³

Pierces problem is set up probabilistically, where a designated card out of 20 decides between eternal felicity or everlasting woe. The result of the example is that probability is just a relative frequency in the long run. Why should we expect what is probable? To be reasonable means here just probable in the sense of logical probability. Thus, the expectations are adjusted to logical probability. Further “[...], any beliefs we may have about how this will lead us to fare in the long run are seen to be irrelevant to the problem. That there is such a thing as the ‘logical probability’, that is corresponds to the frequency in a long series (if there *were* a long series), [...]”.³²⁴ A reasonable person would adjust their expectations to the logical probability, which in turn becomes an ultimate logical ‘metaphysical’ fact.³²⁵

³¹⁹ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 22.

³²⁰ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 23.

³²¹ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 23.

³²² Hogan; Marcelle, *The Complementarity of Means and Ends*, 404.

³²³ Charles S. Peirce, “The Doctrine of Chances”, in: *Chance, Love, and Logic: Philosophical Essays*, Morris R. Cohen; John Dewey (Eds.), Lincoln 1998, 127-145.

³²⁴ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 25.

³²⁵ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 24-25. Putnam also refers to this example in Pragmatism and Hilary Putnam, “Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity”, in: Martha C. Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (Eds.): *Women, Culture and Development: A study of Human Capabilities.*, Oxford 1995: Oxford University Press, (Section 3, p. 208-216).

Peirce says that we can only be rational if we identify ourselves with an ongoing of infinitive investigators. It is only because I care what might happen in a similar situation to other people, that I do what has the best chance in my own opinion. My belief in the one unrepeatable situation is just a fictitious transfer. Does this make oneself altruistic? Peirce's argument states, that we ought to choose a rule that will benefit mankind in the long run (rule utilitarian). But given my immediate choice situation they are not on my mind. I cannot give a satisfying reason, because the only reasons allowed are in terms of what will happen in the long run. Thus, I will always fall back on to intuitions that I am powerless to explain.³²⁶

From this it follows for Putnam that there is a kind of underived, primitive obligation to be reasonable, which is not an ethical or a moral obligation but a real obligation to be reasonable that is not reducible to my expectations about the long run and the welfare of others. The approach Putnam employs here is the same reference to Wittgenstein as in Theresa's case. At some point my reasons run out: "This is where my spade is turned. This is what I do, this is what I say."³²⁷

The described case deals with reasonableness about 'means and ends' rather than with ethics, but the epistemic situation is the same. One ought to do the rational thing, in this case acting on probabilities, even in unpredictable situations.³²⁸ The same applies to ethics:

"[...] I don't *know how I know* these things. [...] Our moral images are in a process of development and reform. But it is to say that, at each stage in that development and reform, there will be places, many places, at which we have to say, 'This is where my spade is turned'."³²⁹

Recognizing that there are situations where our explanations run out is however not a permanent situation, it is for now. Any values or moral pictures that lie behind are not final or are exhaustively correct.³³⁰

"A moral vision may contradict, for example, what we know or think it rational to believe on other grounds, be they logical, metaphysical, or empirical. But we cannot any longer hope that these kinds of criticism will leave just *one* moral vision intact. Ultimately, there is still a point at which one has to say, 'This is where my spade is turned'."³³¹

Putnam formulates an idea that rational criticism of moral vision is still possible (via external reasons) but that there is always a point where reasons run out. Putnam rejects rational choice theory because of the unintuitive transitivity clause and utilitarianism because the primitive

³²⁶ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 25-26.

³²⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §211, §217, (84e, 85e).

³²⁸ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 27.

³²⁹ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 27-28.

³³⁰ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 27.

³³¹ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 28.

obligation to be rational does not consider the welfare of others as one falls back to intuitions that don't provide satisfying reasons.³³²

Through the assessment of Putnam's writings, we know now what rationality is not for Putnam and why he finds these positions unacceptable. What then is rationality for him? He wishes for

“[...] a less scientific account of rationality, an account that enables us to see how reasoning, far from being impossible in normative areas, is in fact indispensable to them, and conversely, understanding how normative judgments are presupposed in all reasoning, is important not only in economics, but – as Aristotle saw – all of life”.³³³

It can therefore be stated that, rationality for Putnam is not a scientific notion that is connected to neutrality and value-free predicates, but rather a human one where values are included and considered (argued through the linguistic argument of 'thick' ethical concepts). Putnam wants to widen the concept of rationality (removed from scientific rationality) and is seeking for a “sane and human description”³³⁴. Further, reasons can run out (at some point, momentarily), but they are also not final. Which directly aligns with the pragmatist ideas of constant moving towards improvement and participation in ongoing inquiry.³³⁵

The entanglement of rationality and value and its relation to the entanglement of fact/value are the subject of the following chapter.

Entanglement of value and rationality comes from an entanglement of fact and value

The following section examines how the entanglement of value and rationality stems from the entanglement of fact and value. Putnam characterizes the practice of science not as neutral but as driven by values and virtues. We only think this is value-neutral because it deploys formal methods. Therefore, through the entanglement of fact and value a fact that may be used for a reason is never removed from an inherent value statement.

Further Putnam critiques the issue of 'neutrality' in economics, that for him cannot be justified. Economics is in many parts concerned with well-being. The actual sense of welfare-economics essentially is a moral concern, and to take this seriously, there is need for reasoned moral

³³² Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 26.

³³³ Putnam, *Collapse*, viii.

³³⁴ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 126.

³³⁵ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 27.

argument.³³⁶ Thinking about welfare economics implies substantial ethical questions. Especially Sen's capabilities account³³⁷ depicts the ethical dimension of economics.³³⁸

Pressman shows how the traditional (economical) view on rationality can be criticized. He employs an example of game theory to show the social dimension of decision making. This critique adds towards Putnam's critique of the dichotomy of fact and value. The dichotomy as well as the economical tradition trivializes values (gains can be also found through cooperation, see also Prisoners Dilemma).³³⁹

Pressman further analyses that a social surplus occurs. It is the result of the social and moral decisions people make and this sphere occupies "[...] the murky middle ground, where facts, logical reasoning, and values intermingle and are interdependent".³⁴⁰

Thus, Pressman sees in Putnam's assessment "[...] that rationality has a social dimension to it; what is rational in a situation depends not just on what I do or choose, but also on how others react to me and my choice. It is here that values intrude in the notion of rationality".³⁴¹ In short values become a part on the notion of rationality and more so people care about values.³⁴²

Chakraborty on the other hand characterizes how the collapse of fact and value is connected to reason:

"Putnam's denial of the fact/value dichotomy eventually articulates a solid human concern or a concern about the world/objectivity where values cannot be considered as mere expressions of agent's emotions but as a package of the real world. The Collapse of fact/value enhancement is a celebrated plea that underlines humanistic vision of flourishing human reasoning with some significant content that tends toward the world of facts. The exact description of epistemic values intends us to 'closer to truth about the world'."³⁴³

Through the collapse of the dichotomy of fact and value, values become integrated into a concern of objectivity and are no longer sidelined as subjective emotions, that cannot contribute to reasoning. Hogan and Marcelle likewise touch upon the importance of value aspects in reason and discuss Putnam's view on how to 'weigh' these values:

"[...] we require a conception of 'deciding' how to weigh values (say the value of making the decision myself) that is itself responsive to rational norms, without having to assume an a priori notion of 'comparability'. What we are suggesting is

³³⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 57.

³³⁷ Sen's capabilities approach introduces ethical concerns and concepts into economic discourse without abandoning classical economics. He argues that we have different motives than self-interest and pleasure (as classical rational choice argues) like loyalties, ideas, groups etc. Sen serves as example of finding a place for reasons in connection with value judgments and brings together economics and ethics, see for example: Amartya Sen, *On Ethics and Economics*, Oxford 1999.

³³⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 56.

³³⁹ Steven Pressman, "The Two Dogmas of Neoclassical economics", in: *Science & Society*, 68 (4), 2004/2005, 483-493.

³⁴⁰ Pressman, *The Two Dogmas of Neoclassical economics*, 491.

³⁴¹ Pressman, *The Two Dogmas of Neoclassical economics*, 490.

³⁴² Pressman, *The Two Dogmas of Neoclassical economics*, 490.

³⁴³ Chakraborty, *The Fact/Value Dichotomy: Revisiting Putnam and Habermas*, 380.

that Putnam's conception of rationality accounts for a multiplicity of ways of comparing and ranking goods (including preferences over commodity bundles) and thus for a multiplicity of ways of reasoning about the goods and values as they are presented to us in tandem with our environment (including how internal consistency of choice may be a valuable way of ranking bundles of commodities. However, the transactional nature of ourselves as rational choosers and the environment in which we act is such that the objective conditions of our action, what rational choice theorists call 'information' or the means by which we are to realize our aims, themselves contribute to the formulation of our rationally revised ends. Likewise, our revised ends bring into relief aspects of our descriptive sources that otherwise would not emerge as relevant to what ends are truly rational."³⁴⁴

To be able to act towards aims the agent reverts to rationally formulate revised ends. The latter integrate descriptive sources that would otherwise stay hidden to realize what is truly rational.³⁴⁵

One problem that arises considering Putnam's papers is that he asks questions or gives his paper promising titles that suggest he will give answers to the topics/problems he addresses. However, he does this in a very unsatisfying way and makes it difficult to find clear evidence of his conception of rationality that is removed of the form of critique. He mainly speaks from critique without giving further answers on how it should be viewed otherwise.

Nevertheless, we can conceptualize a notion of Putnam's conception of rationality. One major aspect is that he sees the choice of values as rational. As the example of Theresa shows, the concern for autonomy is rational because we can differentiate between 'free will' and what we undergo. An agent wants to be able to give satisfactory reasons. In turn this acknowledgment to act from reason is a legitimate value that feeds into decision making. Reason and value therefore are entangled as they inform and complement each other.

This integration of value into reasons determines Putnam's postulate for external reasons. Ethical decisions are not related to a metaphysical internal foundation in the form of an abstract 'motivational' set. Rather choices are informed by an internal ethical standpoint. Putnam's idea of having reasons therefore emphasizes the importance of the real life, the acceptance of non-final and changing ends that need justification and focuses on a common-sense way of thinking about reasons that is not contingent on a strict procedure.

In the paper *Impact of science*³⁴⁶ Putnam deals with the idea that rationality is commonly equated with scientific rationality and the problems thereof. In *Reason, Truth, and History*³⁴⁷ Putnam likewise critiques 'wrong' conceptions of rationality. *Rationality in Decision Theory*

³⁴⁴ Hogan; Marcelle, *The Complementarity of Means and Ends*, 415.

³⁴⁵ Hogan; Marcelle, *The Complementarity of Means and Ends*, 415.

³⁴⁶ Putnam, *The impact of science on modern conceptions of rationality*, 359-382.

³⁴⁷ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 103-126.

and in *Ethics*³⁴⁸ tackles the view of rationality specifically in economics, where Putnam critiques classic rational choice theory, especially in reference to indifference and intransitivity. Putnam rejects the transitivity of preferences as an axiom of rationality and rather argues that one can have intransitive patterns and still be judged as perfectly rational. Putnam hereby inscribes the value of autonomy within a model of rationality. In his view rationality does not rest on unrevisable predefined final ends (like internalism would).³⁴⁹

In *Collapse*³⁵⁰ Putnam addresses the questions whether ‘ends’ as in values can or cannot be rationally discussed and if there is a notion of rationality that can be applied to normative questions. In his opinion this is possible due to the entanglement of fact and value.³⁵¹

This idea is not in the framework of scientific rationality as it includes valuations (which do not count as facts as per the exclusion of values in science by logical positivism, see Chapter 1). This ignorance towards the entanglement thesis restricts in Putnam’s view to correctly talk about rationality and minimizes its conception.

Thus, Putnam’s conception of rationality is to widen the general idea of rationality. He separates a human rationality from the commonly known scientific/economic rationality that Putnam’s deems as too narrow. This human rationality he calls for puts forward reflection and common-sense. For Putnam people’s motivations are influenced by their ethical reasoning, which they actively consider when applying practical reason. Therefore, the internal ethical standpoint of a person needs to be included when an agent considers his reasons.

Through the collapse of the dichotomy of fact and value, Putnam argues that values need to be integrated into the concern of objectivity and should no longer be sidelined as purely subjective emotions, that cannot contribute to reasoning.³⁵²

How we lead our actual life and how we make decisions relies on constantly revaluing, revising preferences in consideration of experience, are aspects of Putnam’s conception of rationality. The scope of practical rationality in view of his conception of rationality (importance of internal ethical standpoint) and his entanglement thesis will be explored in the following last chapter (Chapter IV).

³⁴⁸ Putnam, *Rationality in Decision Theory and in Ethics*, 19-28.

³⁴⁹ Hogan; Marcelle, *The Complementarity of Means and Ends*, 412.

³⁵⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*.

³⁵¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 2.

³⁵² Putnam, *Collapse*, 94.

IV Scope of Putnam's practical rationality

The last main chapter is concerned with the scope of Putnam's practical rationality. As examined in Chapter III, Putnam's practical rationality does not consist of predetermined subjective internal motivational sets but more so considers an internal ethical standpoint that allows for external reasons for the agent to inform their choices. Thus, external and internal reasons complement each other and are not final. Putnam includes value judgments in his conception of practical rationality. However, the idea of objectivity stays intact by this inclusion of values. Objectivity (not equal to description) in Putnam's sense is an important term that can be achieved despite the entanglement thesis, namely by applying epistemic values and other ordering types. So, Putnam does not consider value judgments to be purely subjective or to not be part of rational assessment. Therefore, 'objective value judgments' serve as a component towards reason and problem solving.

Thus, practical rationality in Putnam's understanding is always involved with ethics and experience. This stance is informed through the pragmatist tradition that Putnam follows. Not only pragmatism, but further the entanglement thesis, his view on the importance of democracy (political aspect) and the resulting form of inquiry are fundamental for applying reason. These aspects (objective value judgments, pragmatism, democracy, inquiry) constitute the scope of practical reason that Putnam applies under consideration of the entanglement of fact and value. Firstly, I will explain which elements of pragmatism mainly inform Putnam's arguments. Secondly, I will analyze the political aspect that concerns Putnam's idea of practical rationality. Especially the idea of democracy and the form of inquiry play an important role in this regard. Thereby Putnam mostly refers to Dewey. Thirdly, I will elaborate how Putnam views objectivity in ethics and how this understanding is related to reason and his practical rationality. Considering the presented ideas, I will sketch what a 'moral theory' in Putnam's sense would constitute of. Lastly, I will show how the arguments regarding the scope of practical rationality relate back to Putnam's initial claim of the entanglement of fact and value.

Pragmatism

One of Putnam's main objectives in general is to give the pragmatist movement more awareness in the philosophical discourse and to emphasize its importance and relevance. Principally the entanglement thesis and rethinking the dogma of objective facts and subjective values "[...] is

what pragmatists have been calling for for over a century. When will we stop evading the issue and give the pragma-tist challenge the serious attention it deserves?”³⁵³

Pragmatism governs Putnam’s views that lead towards his conception of practical reason among other things. The pragmatists, however, do not share a uniform view on topics and Putnam does on occasion disagree to some extent with their arguments or further develops his own inferences from their ideas. In the following section I will present the pragmatist ideas Putnam refers to the most.

There is a group of theses that Putnam mentions and follows. This conglomerate of views of the pragmatist movement are: (1) anti-skepticism (doubt requires justification just as much as belief); (2) fallibilism (there are no metaphysical guarantees that any of our beliefs will never need revision); (3) no fundamental dichotomy between ‘facts’ and ‘values’; and (4) the primacy of practice.³⁵⁴

Putnam emphasizes on the primacy of practice in connection with the indispensability argument. For him

“[...] normative discourse—talk of right and wrong, good and bad, better and worse—is indispensable in science and in social and personal life as well. [...] we make and cannot escape making value judgements of all kinds in connection with activities of every kind. Nor do we treat these judgements as matters of mere taste; we argue about them seriously, we try to get them right, and, as philosophers have pointed out for centuries, we use the language of objectivity in our arguments and deliberations [...].”³⁵⁵

Therefore, when reasoning about ethical questions the same laws of logic need to be followed and applied just as in physics, history, or any other area. For Putnam there is no ‘first’ philosophy higher than practice.³⁵⁶

Further, experience, subjectivity and perception are important to allow for a contextual interpretation of arguments and ideas. Any inquiry of reason does not follow strict predecided algorithms.³⁵⁷ Different cases require different actions because there are different ways of being good.³⁵⁸ For Putnam reasoning is always situated in the currently discussed problem and is not universal and additionally considers the personal point of view of the concerned parties.³⁵⁹

As well James as Dewey take the agents perspective seriously. The personal perspective and the notions essential to that perspective are considered in the same capacity as the conceptions that are crucial for the impersonal descriptive perspective. This stems from the stance that the

³⁵³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 145.

³⁵⁴ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 200.

³⁵⁵ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 202.

³⁵⁶ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 202.

³⁵⁷ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 220-221.

³⁵⁸ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 205.

³⁵⁹ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 214-215.

3rd person casual descriptive perspective is incomplete.³⁶⁰ Additionally, public discussion and experimentation are fundamental.³⁶¹ These aspects further emphasize Putnam's anti-metaphysical view.

Another pragmatist idea that Putnam follows is the importance of co-operation to form ideas and to rationally test them. Putnam stresses that said co-operation should follow Habermas's 'discourse ethics' (even though Putnam does critique the latter).³⁶² Moreover, an awareness of power-structures (bias) and the democratization of inquiry (Dewey, see following section) are essential for the assessment of reason.³⁶³ The before mentioned necessary fallibilism allows for possible intervention. Ideas must be put under strain if they are to proof their worth (Peirce)^{364, 365}

These pragmatist ideas not only inform Putnam's view on practical rationality but also his attitude towards moral disagreement, as these theses are interwoven with each other. Therefore, pragmatism plays an important role in the scope of Putnam's practical rationality. Another realm of this scope is the political idea of democracy, which will be the subject of the following section.

Political

A central idea of pragmatism is the criticism of institutions and values to achieve constant progress towards justice that is located within bounds of community and co-productive co-operation. Progress enables citizens to live in accordance with their various conceptions of the good life. Therefore, in pragmatism moral disagreement is not a metaphysical problem, but rather a political one, that takes place within the political idea of democracy. Especially important is Putnam's interpretation of Dewey's view of democracy, which he deems to be an epistemological justification. Therein democracy, inquiry, and rationality relate to each other. In turn solving moral disagreement objectively is made possible within this setting.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁰ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 214-125.

³⁶¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 105.

³⁶² An analysis of the critique would go beyond the scope of the thesis, but see: Putnam, *Collapse*, Chapter 7, 'Values and Norms', 111-134.

³⁶³ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 202.

³⁶⁴ Peirce, Charles S.: "Pragmatism and Pragmaticism" in: *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Pierce (Vol. V, Chapter 6)*, Cambridge 1965, 419.

³⁶⁵ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 219.

³⁶⁶ See: Hilary Putnam, "A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy" in: *Southern California Law Review* 63, (6), 1990, 1671-1698.

Epistemological justification of Democracy (Dewey II)

In *A reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*³⁶⁷ Putnam imputes on Dewey the claim that democracy is more than a form of social life and “[...] is the precondition for the full application of intelligence to the solution of social problems”.³⁶⁸

Dewey therefore formulates a critical justification of democracy that calls simultaneously for a defense and reform of democracy. Democracy ensures that the route of inquiry is not blocked through inequality or disparities caused by authoritarian structures and prevents institutionalized oppression and therefore criticism towards these is possible. To achieve the full potential of what Dewey calls *social intelligence* the underprivileged need to develop and use their capacities. Further entrenched privilege should not be rationalized. Dewey claims that “[...], social problems are not resolved by telling other people what to do, rather they are resolved by releasing human energies so that people will be able to act for themselves”.³⁶⁹ Adjacent to this is Dewey’s emphasis on education. If democracy is a precondition for the use of *intelligence* to solve social problems, then education must be designed in a way that produces people who are capable of learning on their own and thinking critically.³⁷⁰

He further believes that there are better and worse resolutions to human predicaments.³⁷¹ For Putnam Dewey’s social philosophy is more than a restatement of classical liberalism because the mere elimination of legal obstructions did not have the liberating result in effective rights as economical and intellectual imbalances remain. What Dewey’s calls for effective rights and demands that result for him from interaction. His conclusion therefore is “[...] that the attainment of freedom conceived as power to act in accord with choice depends upon positive and constructive changes in social arrangements”.³⁷²

By Putnam’s interpretation Dewey epistemologically justifies democracy because it is a necessary condition to formulate and discuss moral disagreement. In turn it is necessary for valid rational assessment of problems. Dewey’s justification of democracy does not rest upon transcendental arguments, but rather represents the outcomes of our collective experience.³⁷³

Putnam considers Dewey’s social philosophy to be correct. However concerning individual existential choices Putnam deems his theory to be more unsatisfying. Putnam claims that

³⁶⁷ Putnam, *A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*, 1671-1698.

³⁶⁸ Putnam, *A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*, 1671.

³⁶⁹ Putnam, *A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*, 1695.

³⁷⁰ Putnam, *A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*, 1696-1697.

³⁷¹ Putnam, *A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*, 1696.

³⁷² John Dewey, “Philosophies of Freedom”, in: *The Later Works- Vol. 3. 1927-1928*, John Dewey, Carbondale 2008, 101.

³⁷³ Putnam, *A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*, 1688.

James³⁷⁴ existentialism has a better solution than Dewey. If reason cannot decide which personal existential commitment to choose, a decision based on previous experience (need not be personal) will do.³⁷⁵

The main critique Putnam formulates against Dewey is, that he only knows two dimensions of human life – the aesthetic and social. This view leaves a gap in the case of existential choices. Dewey understands democracy as the means by which intelligent moral inquiry is practiced together and to seek solutions to the problems that are encountered together.³⁷⁶

Putnam follows this assessment. How the methodology of inquiry should be according to Putnam is explained in the following section.

Democratization of inquiry (Dewey III)

Putnam further follows Dewey regarding the structure of inquiry, which he calls the ‘democratization of inquiry’. In several papers³⁷⁷ he explains Dewey’s idea of how the form of inquiry should be. Dewey uses a non-metaphysical notion of *intelligence* that contrasts the traditional philosophical notion of reason, which is commonly understood as a transcendental faculty. The methodology of inquiry ensures that problems are solved under the full application of *intelligence* (reason). Dewey’s vague notion of *intelligence* is the ability to plan conduct, learn relevant facts, make experiments and profit from planning the facts and experiments but still allows to determine whether agents are more *intelligent* or less with respect to the conduct of their activity in certain areas. This is connected to the ability to develop new capacities for acting effectively in an environment which he calls ‘growth’.³⁷⁸

An inquiry consists of personal maxims that lead to severe subjectivity and need constant testing. The inquiry is accompanied by criticism through co-operation in practice. It is “[...] the method of experimental inquiry combined with free and full discussion—which means, in the case of social problems, the maximum use of the capacities of citizens for proposing courses of action, for testing them, and for evaluating the results.”³⁷⁹

³⁷⁴ James quotes J. Stephan, in: William James, “The Will To Believe” in: *James, William: The Will To Believe: An Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. S.I. 2010, 44.

³⁷⁵ Putnam, *A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*, 1688-1695.

³⁷⁶ More details on Dewey’s views on Democracy and Ethics see also: Anderson, Elizabeth: “Dewey’s Moral Philosophy”, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (Eds.), Spring 2023. [URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/dewey-moral/>].

³⁷⁷ Other writings where Putnam refers to ‘democratization of inquiry’: Putnam, *Collapse*; Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*; Putnam, *A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*; Putnam, *The Fact/Value Dichotomy and the Future of Philosophy*.

³⁷⁸ Putnam, *A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*, 1683.

³⁷⁹ Putnam, *A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*, 1682.

The main idea behind the ‘democratization of inquiry’ is to not hinder inquiry through challenging “[...] or by obstructing the formulation of hypotheses and criticism of the hypotheses of others. At its best, it avoids relations of hierarchy and dependence”.³⁸⁰ Further it has an insistence on experimentation, follows observation or a close analysis of observation where experiment is not possible.³⁸¹

Putnam formulates how an inquiry must be structured to be effective, it must: (1) obey the principles of ‘discourse ethics’, (2) have respect for the autonomy of others, and (3) follow symmetric reciprocity. Concepts of knowledge are essentially contested and always open to reform. The fulfillment of these criteria is the ‘democratization of inquiry’.³⁸²

In *Logic*³⁸³ Dewey claims that all inquiry presupposes values (also in pure science). Thus, there is a substantial overlap between cognitive and ethical values. Even though scientific and ethical values overlap, the values themselves are distinct. Therefore: “Scientific values are not simply instrumental [...], but they are relativized to a context—the context of knowledge acquisition—and knowledge acquisition itself is something that can be criticized ethically.”³⁸⁴ Thus, the values overlap in the way of how we acquire knowledge.³⁸⁵

By viewing values that way it follows that there is a close connection between inquiry and ethics because (a) co-operative activity involves a moment of inquiry and ensures an *intelligent* conduct of inquiry and (b) ethics itself requires inquiry. Additionally, in ethics it is necessary to be a fallibilist, since there are no inherited values which cannot be questioned. Thus, ethical disputes need to be settled by *intelligent* argument and inquiry. They are not conducted by appeals to authority or towards a priori principles.³⁸⁶

From these ‘premises’ of inquiry it can be inferred that “[...] an ethical community [...] *should* organize itself in accordance with democratic standards and ideals, not only because they are good in themselves (and they are), but because they are the prerequisites for the application of intelligence to the inquiry”.³⁸⁷ A society that limits democracy in turn also limits rationality at both ends of an established hierarchy. When set outside of a democratic structure, any inquiry does not produce solutions to value disputes that are rationally acceptable.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 105.

³⁸¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 104-105.

³⁸² Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 221.

³⁸³ John Dewey: *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, New York 1964.

³⁸⁴ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 222.

³⁸⁵ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 219-223.

³⁸⁶ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 219-223.

³⁸⁷ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 223.

³⁸⁸ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 223.

Another feature of this methodology of inquiry is that it does not start from the position of doubting everything. If there is no coercion, violence, or total refusal to discuss, the participants of a discussion share many factual and value assumptions beforehand, which are not in question at the specific discussion: “[...] we are never in the position to start *ex nihilo* in ethics any more than anywhere else, [...]”³⁸⁹

The discussion does not appeal to a universal set of criteria but rather to values which are not in question in that dispute. Thus, a rational reconstruction may be necessary to resolve problems. However, it is not the goal to arrive at a set of universal principles that are applicable to all situations.³⁹⁰

For Dewey inquiry and valuation are in the widest sense human dealings with problematic situations. They involve incessant reconsideration of both ends and means. A person’s goals are not set in stone (as they are e.g. in rational preference theory). Any inquiry has both ‘factual’ presuppositions (including efficiency of various ends to various means) and ‘value’ presuppositions. If solving a problem presents itself as being difficult, a reconsideration of ‘factual’ assumptions and goals may be necessary.³⁹¹ “In short, changing one’s values is not only a legitimate way of solving a problem, but frequently the only way of solving a problem.”³⁹²

Thus, Dewey’s analysis of ends and means emphasizes on the consideration of consequences as crucial towards choice of action. All thought and reflection occur within a practical matrix that are contingent on the democratic structure of inquiry to achieve acceptable and valid outcomes.³⁹³ Putnam follows Dewey’s assessment in regard of inquiry and additionally highlights on the consistent use of “[...] *what holds good for inquiry in general holds for value inquiry in particular*”.³⁹⁴

This form of inquiry ensures for Putnam rationality concerning value judgments. Thus, rationality and democratic values are intrinsically connected. This supports Putnam’s claim for “[...] *effectiveness of regard for common ends*, commitment to the ethical life itself, and, [...] ‘the authority of intelligence, of criticism’³⁹⁵”.³⁹⁶

³⁸⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 106.

³⁹⁰ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 223.

³⁹¹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 97-98.

³⁹² Putnam, *Collapse*, 98.

³⁹³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 103-4.

³⁹⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 104; Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 223.

³⁹⁵ Putnam quotes Dewey: “Dewey 1925, 305” (Putnam, *The Fact/Value Dichotomy and the Future of Philosophy*, 39). – The reference is not listed in the Bibliography of the paper, so the reference is unclear.

³⁹⁶ Putnam, *The Fact/Value Dichotomy and the Future of Philosophy*, 39.

The following section is concerned with comments and critiques towards Putnam's view on the intrinsic entanglement of democracy and problem solving.

Comments towards Putnam's suggested methodology of inquiry

Hickey analyzes that Dewey attempted to introduce the experimental method into ethics and politics and acknowledged that there might be a *situated* resolution of ethical and political problems by attesting that there can be better or worse reasons to particular claims. Therefore, he not only allows argument in ethics but also the arguments are always set in a contingent historical perspective because inquiry arises from concrete problem situations.³⁹⁷

Hickey attributes to Putnam's position that he is

“[...] lowering the standard for knowledge and truth in science but raising them in ethics and politics. What results is a more nuanced view where every domain of inquiry is epistemologically on the same level, even if there may still be a difference in degree.”³⁹⁸

Hickey further concludes that democracy in Putnam's view is not merely a form of government but more so a method of thinking and a form of social transformation.³⁹⁹

Alcoff accepts Putnam's conclusion of the intrinsic connection between rationality and democratic values, which leads to the objectivity of morality. Even though she finds Putnam's arguments to not be airtight, she explores the implications of how democratic processes are necessary for social rationality. Political phenomena like hierarchies of power, privilege, institutions of exploitation and discrimination have a significant effect on the participants of inquiry. No science or any area of study can therefore be neutral with respect to politics.⁴⁰⁰

Hence, cultural and social facts affect inquiry in a pervasive way and become epistemically relevant. Putnam presents two arguments for why we ought to increase democracy in inquiry.

1) Science influences social relations and is vice versa affected by them. Thus, there are ethical and political reasons to want a 'democratization of inquiry'. 2) “[...] there are also epistemic reasons for maximizing democracy within science. Putnam suggests that the full development of science and its full application to social problems will be advanced in proportion to the degree of democratic inclusiveness in the enterprise.”⁴⁰¹ This does not transpire in a relativistic way, rather truth values can be achieved through Putnam's methodology of inquiry that considers all potential standpoints. In turn, the marginalization of viewpoints for epistemically irrelevant

³⁹⁷ Hickey, *Hilary Putnam*, 153.

³⁹⁸ Hickey, *Hilary Putnam*, 153.

³⁹⁹ Hickey, *Hilary Putnam*, 153.

⁴⁰⁰ Linda Alcoff: “Democracy and Rationality: A Dialogue With Hilary Putnam”, in: *Women, Culture and Development: A study of Human Capabilities*, Martha C. Nussbaum, Jonathan Glover (Eds.), Oxford 1995, 225.

⁴⁰¹ Alcoff, *Democracy and Rationality: A Dialogue With Hilary Putnam*, 228.

reasons is of epistemic concern. Alcoff infers from this “[...] that it is not the influence of politics *per se* that we need to eliminate from rational inquiry: it is the influence of oppressive politics.”⁴⁰² Therefore, the variety of positions should be recognized and the merits of a participatory approach to inquiry insisted upon.⁴⁰³

Thus, the limits of democracy in a society impose limits on its social rationality. Alcoff detects another challenge from this, namely that philosophical theories themselves need to be examined with this end in view. Philosophical theories of knowledge are likely to influence the possibilities for democratic inquiry.⁴⁰⁴ These possibly need to undergo the process of ‘democratization of inquiry’. Therefore, by following Putnam, there is imminent advancement regarding appropriate philosophical propositions and complete social rationality. The connection between politics and inquiry therefore has radical implications when pragmatist reasoning is seen as reasoning. Alcoff therefore calls for methods of analysis and debates internal to philosophy that need re-examination.⁴⁰⁵

Alcoff further detects a tension between two tendencies in Putnam’s work. While Putnam expands and complicates our understanding of what is involved in inquiry, he also contains the forces of power and desire through the ‘democratization of inquiry’ and segregates these outside of the domain of rational deliberation. Alcoff critiques that Putnam’s first argument makes the second one hard to follow and presents an alternative position to resolve this tension. In reference to Foucault’s dyadic concept of power/knowledge⁴⁰⁶, she states that power is necessary for the development and circulation of knowledge. It further manifests itself and is extended through claims of knowledge (authorization of power). Alcoff assesses that Foucault’s idea of power is a continuation of the pragmatist tradition where knowledge is theorized as a practice. It is an active process, that is put into an actual context and explores complications that arise from the connection between power and desire. This is “[...] motivated by Enlightenment goals of liberation and of progress (both epistemic and ethical) through expanded self-awareness”.⁴⁰⁷ For Alcoff being aware of these structures should increase our ability to maximize their democratic character and in turn improve social rationality itself.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰² Alcoff, *Democracy and Rationality: A Dialogue With Hilary Putnam*, 228.

⁴⁰³ Alcoff, *Democracy and Rationality: A Dialogue With Hilary Putnam*, 229.

⁴⁰⁴ Some works on such political effects are the writings of Marx, Adorno and Horkheimer, feminist philosophers like Potter, Elizabeth; Nye, Andrea, further see also Footer 4 in Alcoff, *Democracy and Rationality: A Dialogue With Hilary Putnam*, 229-230.

⁴⁰⁵ Alcoff, *Democracy and Rationality: A Dialogue With Hilary Putnam*, 229-230.

⁴⁰⁶ E.g. writings of Foucault concerned with power/knowledge: Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique: Une archéologie du regard médical*, Paris 1963; Michel Foucault, *Le Pouvoir psychiatrique (1973-1974)*, Paris 2003; Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*, Paris 1975.

⁴⁰⁷ Alcoff, *Democracy and Rationality: A Dialogue With Hilary Putnam*, 232.

⁴⁰⁸ Alcoff, *Democracy and Rationality: A Dialogue With Hilary Putnam*, 231-232.

Putnam's intrinsic connection of democracy and rationality is further connected with moral disagreement. His structure of inquiry therefore is directly connected to the thesis of moral objectivity, which will be explained in the next section.

Ethical – objectivity and rationality in ethics

The following segment is concerned with the notion of objectivity in ethics and how it relates back to Putnam's conception of practical rationality. Firstly, I will discuss Putnam's stance on warranted assertibility and his idea of truth in ethics. Secondly, Putnam's idea of moral objectivity is examined. In this realm rationality, inquiry and ethics come together. The final section sketches the elements of Putnam's 'moral theory' if he were to accept systematic theories.

Warranted assertibility and truth

In general, warranted assertibility in pragmatism is understood as that a person can hold a belief and also has the grounds to according to the epistemic norms of the practice. Warranted assertibility further sustains the possibility of objective criticism, is fallibilistic and open to revision of its normative criteria. Additionally, disagreement is not left unchallenged.⁴⁰⁹ In Putnam's case this is secured by following the correct methodology of inquiry.

From a pragmatist perspective objectivity is not viewed as universal or impersonal. Objectivity in pragmatism requires that beliefs need to be substantiated in the best possible way, i.e. have warranted assertibility.⁴¹⁰ Truth cannot be reduced to mere justification but at the same time truth is also not the principal norm in moral inquiry. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish adequately between truth and objectivity and to advocate for thorough fallibilism.

It follows "[...] that in a very wide range of cases moral inquiry has an objective basis (is immune to threats of relativism and skepticism) without necessarily subscribing to the norm of truth".⁴¹¹

Putnam has revised his position regarding the relation of truth and warranted assertibility.⁴¹² He no longer deems it necessary to define truth at all. Putnam argues that even if one were to believe that truth sometimes transcends warranted assertibility one would be at fault to suppose that truth can always transcend warranted assertibility. Some statements are simply not

⁴⁰⁹ Roberto Frega, "Rehabilitating warranted Assertibility: Moral Inquiry and the pragmatic basis of objectivity", in: *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 51 (1), 2013, 19.

⁴¹⁰ Frega, *Rehabilitating warranted Assertibility*, 3.

⁴¹¹ Frega, *Rehabilitating warranted Assertibility*, 3.

⁴¹² Putnam's previous position was that truth could be defined as warranted assertibility under 'ideal' or good enough conditions, which is determinable in the course of inquiry. See Putnam, *Collapse*, 107.

verifiable under any conditions, and they only would have the appearance of sense. For Putnam referring to things is not guaranteed by the nature of the mind, it rather requires information-carrying interaction with things. This in turn rules out the possibility that truth is in all cases independent of our verification possibilities.⁴¹³ Because “Truth cannot be so radically non-epistemic”.⁴¹⁴

However, what truth does is, that it entails warranted assertibility if the conditions are sufficiently good. For Putnam this claim holds especially for ethics where some subject matters have in their nature, that if they are true, they then can be verified under certain conditions. But truth does not transcend warranted assertibility under good enough conditions. For Putnam this entails specifically that ‘moral realism’ is a possible meta-ethical position.⁴¹⁵

“[...] some ‘value judgments’ are true as a matter of objective fact, without holding that moral facts are or can be recognition transcendent facts. If something is a good solution to a problematical human situation, then part of the very notion of its being a good solution is that human beings can recognize that it is. We need not entertain the idea that something could be a good solution although human beings are in principle unable to recognize that it is. That sort of Platonism is incoherent.”⁴¹⁶

This further implies that moral-realism should and does not need to commit to the idea that there are some final moral truths, all of which can be expressed in some fixed moral vocabulary. New concepts carry in them the possibility of formulating new truths, which may be formed through any new inquiry. The conclusion that there are no final ends however does not exclude the possibility to talk about truth, warranted assertibility or objectivity in pragmatism.⁴¹⁷

Perception involves the application of concepts (all perception is like that), and these concepts are always subject to criticism. Thus, inquiry does not end with perception, even if it is sometimes wrong. This doesn’t imply that it is never justified to trust it. In pragmatism doubt requires justification just as much as belief. There are many perceptions where there is no real reason to doubt them.⁴¹⁸

Putnam again follows Dewey’s account that the judgment that something is valuable requires not only valuing but also criticism. This is possible through (value) inquiry. Putnam’s main point is, that in our actual life’s we can distinguish between warranted and unwarranted judgments and therefore don’t need a recognition of transcended truth.⁴¹⁹ He argues that: “[...], we need no better ground for treating ‘value judgments’ as capable of truth and falsity than the

⁴¹³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 107-108.

⁴¹⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 108.

⁴¹⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 108.

⁴¹⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 108-109.

⁴¹⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 109.

⁴¹⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 110.

⁴¹⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 110.

fact that we can and do treat them as capable of warranted assertibility and warranted deniability.”⁴²⁰

Truth and final/normative moral truths are not of interest for Putnam. Rather warranted assertibility serves ‘value judgments’ in the same way as asking for truth or falsity statements. These are achieved through inquiry, which result in objective and valid outcomes. Thus, making objective ethical statements possible for Putnam. These are the subject of the following section.

Moral objectivity

One of Putnam’s main claims of his philosophy is that there can be ethical statements without a metaphysical explanation, they can be discussed rationally and be objective.

Objectivity in pragmatism means that there is a plurality of valid and legitimate solutions, which are justified and backed by experience and argument.⁴²¹

The possibility of moral objectivity stems on the one hand from Putnam’s views regarding truth and warranted assertibility and on the other hand from his understanding of practical reason. For Putnam rationality has no final ends, incorporates an intrinsic connection of ends and means and further highlights the entanglement of fact and value and calls for the need of incessant inquiry situated in practical life:

“As John Dewey urged long ago, the objectivity that ethical claims require is not the kind that is provided by Platonic or other foundation that is there in advance of our engaging in ethical life and ethical reflection; it is the ability to withstand the sort of criticism that arises in the problematic situations that we actually encounter, the kind of criticism which, as John McDowell remarks, ‘the appropriate image is Neurath’s, in which a sailor overhauls his ship while it is afloat.’”⁴²²

Putnam follows Dewey’s arguments concerning objective value and moral objectivity. For Dewey objective value arises from the *criticism of valuations*. Valuations are incessant and inseparable from all activities, including ‘scientific’ ones. By *intelligent* reflection on valuations one can conclude that some are warranted while others are not.⁴²³

What is central for Dewey (and in turn Putnam) is that learning through experimentation and discussion is necessary to increase the amount of good in our lives. Dewey shows “[...] that ‘warranted assertions’ are the reliable means of obtaining desired results, that they function in controlled activity designed to resolve problematical situations and produce valued consequences”.⁴²⁴ These are reliable only when the means employed to obtain them are also causally related to objective reality. So, “[...] there is no conceptually valid basis for the

⁴²⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 110.

⁴²¹ Frega, *Rehabilitating warranted Assertibility*, 21.

⁴²² Putnam, *Collapse*, 94.

⁴²³ Putnam, *Collapse*, 103.

⁴²⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 99.

distinction between factual judgment and value judgment, but that there is no basis for an ontological distinction either”.⁴²⁵

To defend this view of objective ethical judgments Putnam refutes the reductionist metaphysical objection that ‘we have no organ to detect value’. He argues that perception is not innocent, and that it is rather an exercise in our concepts. Certain things have certain value properties.⁴²⁶ Such judgments are fallible, which is not a problem for Putnam, as fallibilism is anyhow essential in any inquiry. Additionally, “[...] experience *isn't* ‘neutral’ [...] it comes to us screaming with values”⁴²⁷.

A separation of fact and value is not possible due to the entanglement thesis. Constant inquiry is necessary to contest all kinds of concepts that are necessary for progress. This leads to arriving at valid rational and objective outcomes and amends for certain arguments to be better or worse in regard of specific problems by the appliance of *intelligence* (reason).

“[...] in the case of ethics (unlike science), the true view cannot differ from the view for which there are the best reasons, provided we recognize [...], that ethical reasons cannot be always given as linear arguments.”⁴²⁸

For Putnam ethics and morality are transformative and not fixed to certain ends and means. Progress is made through constant revision of our value judgments that consider also to the consequences. The question in mind thereby always is: do our value judgments enable successful responses to novel problems?

There further is a negative argument that speaks for the objectivity of values, namely that the belief in the cognitive status of value judgments underlies an enormous amount of our practice.⁴²⁹

For Putnam it is apparent, that if ethical disagreements were treated as Dewey thought they should be, namely as disagreements that are not only rationally discussable, but also as disagreements that are discussed *intelligently* (ensured by the ‘democratization of inquiry’) then, warranted, and unwarranted arguments can be differentiated objectively.⁴³⁰

“Inquiry in any area relies upon both the careful evaluation of experience and the invention of new descriptions of experience [...]. By appeal to these and similar standards we can often tell that views are irresponsibly defended in ethics as well as in science. The right approach to our ethical problems is neither to give up upon the very possibility of intelligent discussion nor to seek a metaphysical foundation outside of (or ‘above’) all problematic situations, but to investigate and discuss and try things out cooperatively, democratically, and above all fallibilistically.”⁴³¹

⁴²⁵ Putnam, *Collapse*, 99.

⁴²⁶ In the sense of ‘thick’ ethical concepts like ‘compassionate’ or being ‘refreshingly spontaneous’.

⁴²⁷ Putnam, *Collapse*, 103.

⁴²⁸ Putnam, *Collapse*, 175 (footer 21/ Chapter 7).

⁴²⁹ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 208.

⁴³⁰ Putnam, *The Fact/Value Dichotomy and the Future of Philosophy*, 39.

⁴³¹ Putnam, *The Fact/Value Dichotomy and the Future of Philosophy*, 39.

Thus, the form of inquiry is an essential factor for discussing and discovering moral objectivity. However, even if there are in fact situations where some cases can't be decided the belief in ethical objectivity remains.⁴³² Therefore it follows for Putnam that:

“And finally, believing that ethical objectivity is possible is not the same thing as believing that there are no undecidable cases, or problems which, alas, cannot be solved. The point is that, once we give up the metaphysical claim that there cannot be such a thing as ethical objectivity, and once we observe that objectivity in other areas is strongly connected with values, we can begin to see not just that ethical objectivity might be possible, but, more importantly, that investigating ethical problems requires just the values that have come to be linked with the open society.”⁴³³

Putnam additionally infers that there is no hard distinction between descriptive and evaluative values, which reaches from the level of theory selection to the level of reasons behind an individual's values. In this sense all justifications become 'objective' as long as they are warrantably assertable. The application of epistemic values and the criteria of warrantableness form reasonable and acceptable justifications which make 'objective' value judgments possible. Seen this way epistemic values behave just like 'thick' ethical terms, where both ethical values and epistemic values are indispensable in our lives.⁴³⁴

The idea of moral objectivity is one of Putnam's central claims. It is not only related to the methodology of inquiry but also to his conception of practical rationality. To discover valid objective value judgments the correct form of inquiry is needed. The correct methodology of inquiry relies not only on democratic ideals for the participants in inquiry but also on the participants capability to employ their rationality/reason. His practical rationality considers consequences, reassesses values and considers an internal non final ethical standpoint that in turn becomes an integral part of inquiry to be able to reach rationally valid outcomes. This shows the scope Putnam's conception of practical rationality has, and where all the important elements find themselves to be entangled with each other.

Putnam's 'moral theory'

The following section sketches in a rudimentary way the most important aspects of Putnam's ideas concerning ethics to conceptualize his 'moral theory'. In his later writings Putnam stays shy of concrete theorizations.⁴³⁵ However, it is helpful to collect an overview of the most

⁴³² Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 224.

⁴³³ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 224.

⁴³⁴ Putnam, *Collapse*, 132.

⁴³⁵ “What I find attractive in pragmatism is not a systematic theory in the usual sense at all.” (Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 200); see also Salis' assessment: “However, the later Putnam is never eager to talk about principles and categories.” (Salis, *Putnam's Alethic Pluralism*, 8), or Strand's statement: “His refusal to come up with his own special vocabulary has not helped for sure.” (Narve Strand, “Putnam and the political”, in: *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37 (7), 2011, 743).

important aspects of what his ‘moral theory’ would consist of, to get a clearer grasp of his ‘concrete’ views, which appear quite scattered throughout the catalogue of his writings.

MAIN CLAIM

Putnam’s main claim is that ethical claims can be rationally discussed and can therefore be objective.⁴³⁶ Moral agents are capable to engage with arguments and their experience, fallibilism helps them reach objective ethical judgments. This responsiveness explains the cognitive content that morality now has.

GROUNDWORK IDEAS and PRAGMATIST THESES

In *Reason, Truth, and History*⁴³⁷ Putnam calls for the development of better philosophical conceptions of rationality, which he describes as an unending process, as it should be.

“The question: *which is the rational conception of rationality itself* is difficult in *exactly* the way that the justification of an ethical system is difficult. There is no *neutral* conception of rationality to which to appeal.”⁴³⁸

He simultaneously formulates three desiderata for a moral theory which are for him the same for a system of rational procedure. Thus, we can see how in his sense morality and rationality are always intertwined. 1) Basic assumptions should have wide appeal. 2) The system should be able to withstand rational criticism and 3) the recommended morality should be livable.⁴³⁹

From here we can refer to 1): what would be the basic assumptions? The before mentioned pragmatist theses seem likely to fit these criteria. Putnam elaborates these in his essay *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*⁴⁴⁰: (a) anti-skepticism, (b) fallibilism⁴⁴¹, (c) no fact/value dichotomy and (d) the primary of practice.⁴⁴²

These have a wide appeal and also are of course acceptable to Putnam, because they follow no maxims, are anti-metaphysical, individualistic and respect pluralism. Concerning 2), rational criticism is guaranteed through Putnam’s ‘democratization of inquiry’, that is situational and rooted in practice. As for 3), a livable morality again encompasses no universal goals, an individual approach to what the ‘good life’ can be, ensures the possibility of pluralism, and allows for objective discussion without exclusion. This makes the third criterion closely related to the first one.

⁴³⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 133.

⁴³⁷ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*.

⁴³⁸ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 136.

⁴³⁹ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 105.

⁴⁴⁰ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 225-234.

⁴⁴¹ Fallibilism and experimentalism are necessary as they remove bias and do not favor rationalizations for the interests of privileged groups as the discourses on ‘natural law’ and ‘what is agreeable to reason’ show. See: Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 208.

⁴⁴² Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 200.

LANGUAGE

Language is not only important for the entanglement thesis but also when considering ethics and rationality. On the one hand there is the entanglement in ‘thick’ ethical concepts that informs ethics (see also Chapter 2) and on the other hand the form of language itself plays a role for Putnam. Ethics are therefore not ‘unscientific’ they just act in another discourse, that for example may not be reducible to the language of physics:

“It is because we are too realistic about physics, because we see physics (or some hypothetical future physics) as the One True Theory, and not simply as a rationally acceptable description suited for certain problems and purposes, that we tend to be subjectivistic about descriptions we cannot ‘reduce’ to physics. Becoming less realistic about physics and becoming less subjectivistic about ethics are likewise connected.”⁴⁴³

Any knowledge and communication always have a background layer of unquestioned and unjustified beliefs that are connected to language, which is not neutral (conscious as well as unconscious).⁴⁴⁴

ANTI-RELATIVISM

Putnam’s view further stands in opposition to Williams’ metaphysical relativism (see also Chapter 2). Putnam presents an experimental method for situated resolutions in ethics and politics. We are capable to talk (rationally) about ethics. Hickey describes this process as follows:

“The application of intelligence to settle differences implies that there can be better or worse reasons for a particular claim, and so in this sense justifies the idea that argument is possible in ethics (and thus also the possibility of *vindicating* one view over another). On the other hand, there is no way to completely abstract from contingent historical perspective, for it is always from within a concrete problem situation that inquiry arises.”⁴⁴⁵

Thus, ethical disagreements and their solution are situated in a contingent situated space in time and area, but this is not confined to follow metaphysical relativism.

“But recognizing that our judgments claim objective validity and recognizing that they are shaped by a particular culture and by a particular problematic situation are not incompatible. And this is true of scientific questions as well as ethical ones. The solution is neither to give up on the very possibility of rational discussion nor to seek an Archimedean point, an ‘absolute conception’ outside of all contexts and problematic situations, but – as Dewey taught his whole life long – to investigate and discuss and try things out cooperatively, and above all *fallibilistically*.”⁴⁴⁶

METHODOLOGY OF INQUIRY

Following Putnam’s suggested methodology of inquiry is the only way to arrive at valid rational outcomes concerning moral disagreement. Constant inquiry is needed for progress.

⁴⁴³ Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 143.

⁴⁴⁴ Alcock, *Democracy and Rationality: A Dialogue With Hilary Putnam*, 231.

⁴⁴⁵ Hickey, *Hilary Putnam*, 153.

⁴⁴⁶ Putnam, *Collapse*, 45.

Experimentation and testing are crucial for the formation of rational beliefs about matters of fact.⁴⁴⁷ Main features of Putnam's rational inquiry are fallibilism and experimentation, which are decisive elements in rational paradigm change. Putnam further refers to the importance of 'discourse ethics' (Habermas).

The form of inquiry not only has ethics itself as a concern, but it also has political implications, which are related to democracy and "[...] that investigating ethical problems requires just the values that have come to be linked with the open society".⁴⁴⁸

Putnam claims that in ethics as well Aristotelian as well as Kantian insights are just as important as he wants "[...] to reconcile a concern for human flourishing with Kantian ethics. [...], our imperfect but indefinitely perfectible ability to recognize the demands made upon us by various values is precisely what provides Kantian (or 'discourse') ethics with *content*".⁴⁴⁹

Putnam never spells out how this should be done exactly. It leaves to assume that this understanding of ethics with *content* is achieved by the methodology of rational inquiry that includes values in ethical maxims.

PRACTICAL RATIONALITY WITH INTERNAL ETHICAL STANDPOINT

Putnam's 'moral theory' would further be contingent on his conception of practical rationality. The main point therein is to not naturalize values. In turn ethics are not something that are justified from the outside but rather presuppose a specifically internal ethical point of view in an agent to guide their choices. Thus, rationality and ethics are always intertwined and therefore also take part in (value) inquiry.⁴⁵⁰

NO ABSOLUTE TRUTH IN ETHICS

In moral deliberation not the question of absolute truth or falsehood is central for Putnam, but rather which decision is appropriate or inappropriate in a given situation. Truth per se is not excluded from inquiry but it circumscribes its function. Even if we agree on relevant factual knowledge, we might still disagree – rationally – about how to act.⁴⁵¹

"If the idea of a frozen 'final truth' does not make sense in science, it is even more the case that it does not make sense in ethics [...]."⁴⁵²

The relationship between ethics and truth that Putnam establishes highlight not only his anti-metaphysicalism but also shows how transformative the assessment of objective value judgments is.

⁴⁴⁷ Putnam, *A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy*, 1679.

⁴⁴⁸ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 224.

⁴⁴⁹ Putnam, *Collapse*, 133-134.

⁴⁵⁰ Putnam, *Collapse*, 94.

⁴⁵¹ Frega, *Rehabilitating warranted Assertibility*, 9.

⁴⁵² Putnam, *Collapse*, 109.

PLURALISM

For Putnam the makeup of ethics is set by the individual and is not universal. The central idea is the ‘good life’ that every person aspires to in regard of their personal conception. There is no single set of rules which describe both the universe and what would be a ‘perfect life.’ There is no ethical theory that can be made in advance and for Putnam pluralism needs to be tolerated.⁴⁵³ So “[...] there is the imperfect but necessary ‘path’ of struggling for and testing one’s ideals in practice, while con-ceding to others the right to do the same”.⁴⁵⁴ Where a clash of traditions and different conceptions of the good will are concerned Putnam urges that these issues need to be “[...] accompanied and tempered by the effort to understand values and conceptions of the good which are not our own and by the willingness to compromise, our worst fears will certainly come true”.⁴⁵⁵

The ‘moral theory’ set in place by Putnam is thus shaped by a high regard for individual choices and ideas by emphasizing the importance of pluralism.

These are the key elements that form the skeleton a ‘moral theory’ in Putnam’s sense would consist of, even though many questions in execution and specific resolutions are missing, assembling them is helpful to receive a more combined picture of his views.

The following section discusses comments and critiques concerning Putnam’s arguments in regard of the ethical scope of Putnam’s practical rationality.

Critique and comments of Putnam’s idea of ethics

In this section comments and critique towards Putnam’s ideas regarding ethics are discussed. Quesel assesses that Putnam argues towards a common-sense philosophy that is set in a daily practice where we can robustly differentiate between warranted and unwarranted claims. Thus, not the highest truth is the solution rather an imperfect, human sense that evolves and cognitively works with the requirements that develop out of a plurality of values.⁴⁵⁶ Quesel infers from this: „In diesem Verständnis plädiert er für einen situierten Optimismus, der das Übel nicht ignoriert und doch an das Gute glaubt.”⁴⁵⁷

For Hickey it follows from Putnam’s arguments that every theory that is part of our modern scientific worldview results from norms that govern theory choice. In turn facts cannot be made

⁴⁵³ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Relativism*, 195.

⁴⁵⁴ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Relativism*, 195.

⁴⁵⁵ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Relativism*, 196.

⁴⁵⁶ Carsten Quesel, “Hilary Putnam: The collapse of the fact/value dichotomy and other essays, in: *Philosophische Rundschau* 52 (1), 2005, 92.

⁴⁵⁷ “This understanding supports a situated optimism that does not ignore evil but still believes in the good.” [transl. LM] (Quesel, *Hilary Putnam: The collapse of the fact/value dichotomy*, 92).

sense of independently of the theories they are couched in because all facts presuppose values.⁴⁵⁸ Hickey critiques Putnam's new moral synthesis that rational discussion and debate on basic moral principles will lead to successful universal agreement by wanting to unify Kant and Aristotle. For Hickey Putnam thereby overlooks the incompatibilities of these very different moral positions. Putnam should have rather concentrated on a *method* for producing agreement within modern liberal democracies (like e.g. Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*⁴⁵⁹). Further Putnam's arguments are missing detail. However, for Hickey this critique does not impact Putnam's metaethical argument that there is no principled objection to the objectivity of moral statements.⁴⁶⁰

Philström characterizes the pragmatists defense of the objectivity of moral values as an attempt to 'naturalize' values and normativity. He claims that naturalism needs to be rethought and in turn should accommodate distinctly human activities including valuation within nature, where naturalism is emancipated from crude scientism. Values are based on what *we* think and do. They are part of reality connected to the actions that transform our surroundings. Philström misses an explanation from Putnam of how values entangled with facts are real for us and to what exactly objective moral values refer to. He further disagrees with this non-reductive version of naturalism because for Philström Putnam's rejection of metaphysics is unacceptable. Philström calls for a pragmatist middle ground where we might reject 'metaphysical realism' but not get rid of metaphysics altogether, as metaphysics itself can be reinterpreted pragmatically.⁴⁶¹ Two of these concepts are emergence⁴⁶² and continuity⁴⁶³.

Bernstein describes Putnam's claim that there is no intrinsic difference between science and ethics to not only be related to the issue of moral objectivity but also to Putnam's view of objectivity as a form of internal and pragmatic realism. Here objectivity is compatible with different conceptual choices. Thus, it is not algorithmic reasoning with a univocal solution to problems but instead

“[...] there is place for *phronesis* and reasonable objective disagreement. This is a feature of objectivity that turns out to be highly relevant for ethical and political

⁴⁵⁸ Hickey, *Hilary Putnam*, 150.

⁴⁵⁹ John Rawls: *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2005.

⁴⁶⁰ Hickey, *Hilary Putnam*, 148.

⁴⁶¹ Philström, *Toward a Pragmatically Naturalist Metaphysics of the Fact-Value Entanglement*, 326-330.

⁴⁶² “Values arise out of facts, [...], yet are something ‘new’ in relation to them and cannot be either conceptually, ontologically, or explanatorily reduced to any factual structure of the world.” (Philström, *Toward a Pragmatically Naturalist Metaphysics of the Fact-Value Entanglement*, 337). Values are fully natural yet not reducible to nature like in physical sciences, see further: (Philström, *Toward a Pragmatically Naturalist Metaphysics of the Fact-Value Entanglement*, 331-338).

⁴⁶³ Fact and value are seen as continuous, inseparable, and deeply interwoven in the processual reality that constitutes the world. In reference to Pierces synechism values are metaphysically construed as habits and developmental tendencies, see further: (Philström, *Toward a Pragmatically Naturalist Metaphysics of the Fact-Value Entanglement*, 338-341).

disputes, but also has a place in the 'hardest' physical sciences. More generally, objectivity is compatible with pluralism (and pluralism is not to be confused with relativism)."⁴⁶⁴

Bernstein describes how flexible Putnam's concept of objectivity is, and how deep his commitment to pluralism is.⁴⁶⁵

"[...] still we may feel some uneasiness with Putnam's claims concerning moral objectivity. After all, if one claims that there is no difference in *kind* between scientific objectivity and moral objectivity, a good pragmatist is not going to deny that there are *real* differences between scientific reasoning and ethical reasoning, that objectivity in the case of a scientific dispute is not quite the same as objectivity in a moral dispute. Putnam is frequently far more effective and persuasive in criticizing dichotomies than he is doing justice to important differences."⁴⁶⁶

Bernstein further analyzes that Putnam is aware of how deep ethical and political disagreement can go. However, Bernstein claims that Putnam's stance for moral objectivity is not oriented towards the present. Bernstein characterizes it as a

"[...] an argument about what *ought* to be. We ought to develop practices in which there will be a greater moral objectivity, where there will be a stronger attempt to engage in rational argumentation about what is right and wrong, where there will also be a wider acceptance of pluralism in moral orientations."⁴⁶⁷

Therefore, he infers, that: "Objectivity is not a metaphysical or an epistemological given, but that it rather is an ongoing *achievement* – one that must be constantly rethought."⁴⁶⁸ Thus, Bernstein argues that objectivity, whether in science or ethics, has *nothing* to do with metaphysical realism. According to Bernstein Putnam is advocating a non-metaphysical way of thinking about objectivity in science and ethics.⁴⁶⁹

Bernstein further detects a circularity of reasoning in Putnam's claims about objectivity in ethical and political disputes (analogue to a hermeneutical circle). Putnam states that we ought to cultivate and institute practices that enhance greater objectivity and reasonable argumentation to solve problematical situations. If such a democratic ethical community is fostered, then objectivity becomes a real matter of fact. Putnam may be bootstrapping himself in order to bring on a moral objectivity that does not exist. However, Bernstein sees this bootstrapping not as objectionable.⁴⁷⁰

Another form of critique one could inflict on Putnam is, that he is seeking to *impose* standards of moral objectivity rather than *discovering* them. For Bernstein also this critique misfires because some sorts of moral objectivity are objectionable and the deliberations needs to follow

⁴⁶⁴ Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn: The Entanglement of Fact and Value*, 258-259.

⁴⁶⁵ Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn: The Entanglement of Fact and Value*, 258-260.

⁴⁶⁶ Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn: The Entanglement of Fact and Value*, 259.

⁴⁶⁷ Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn: The Entanglement of Fact and Value*, 259-260.

⁴⁶⁸ Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn: The Entanglement of Fact and Value*, 2560.

⁴⁶⁹ Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn: The Entanglement of Fact and Value*, 258-260.

⁴⁷⁰ Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn: The Entanglement of Fact and Value*, 261-262.

Putnam's democratized inquiry, which provide better norms and standards for achieving moral objectivity.⁴⁷¹

Bernstein endorses that Putnam delivers arguments against ethical skepticism, defends an enlarged conception of rationality, is more open and argues for a liberal sense of moral objectivity that escapes moral metaphysical realism. Bernstein sees Putnam as being effective in criticizing the dichotomy between science and ethics and making the entanglement of fact and value apparent. Further Putnam exposes for him the inadequacy of all appeals to 'absoluteness'. Bernstein describes Putnam's line of argumentation as 'abstract' to clear the space for a proper deliberative democratic way of dealing with value judgments and decisions. For Bernstein Putnam has shown quite well on an abstract level how a non-metaphysical way of thinking about moral objectivity would be. However, what Putnam has not shown is, how to determine which of our concrete value judgments are objectively true and which are false. Bernstein therefore like Hickey misses some form of *guidance* on how to proceed with Putnam's insights, especially concrete details.⁴⁷²

In the following last chapter of the thesis, I will summarize the scope of Putnam's conception of practical rationality and lastly will connect the themes with Putnam's initial claim of the collapse of the fact and value dichotomy.

Entanglement (again)

This last chapter of the thesis was concerned with the scope of Putnam's practical rationality and comprises ethical and political aspects. Further his ideas are strongly rooted in pragmatism. The methods of pragmatism are removed from metaphysics or any kind of meta-ethical theory and focus on practice itself. Putnam follows a conglomerate of pragmatist views that inform his ethics and in turn also his practical rationality: (1) anti-skepticism; (2) fallibilism; (3) no dichotomy between 'facts' and 'values'; and (4) the primacy of practice.⁴⁷³

The political dimension of Putnam's practical rationality lies in the political idea of democracy. For Putnam it is more than a form of social life but the precondition to be able to fully apply reason. Democracy ensures that inquiry is not blocked through disparities caused by authoritarian structures or institutionalized oppression. From this idea of democracy Putnam formulates a problem driven conception of inquiry that relies on public discussion, experimentation, and co-operation to form ideas and to rationally test them. All concepts of knowledge are essentially contested and always open to reform. This structure further ensures

⁴⁷¹ Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn: The Entanglement of Fact and Value*, 262.

⁴⁷² Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn: The Entanglement of Fact and Value*, 263-264.

⁴⁷³ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 200.

that problems are solved under the full application of reason. To be effective, it must: (1) obey the principles of ‘discourse ethics’, (2) have respect for the autonomy of others, and (3) follow symmetric reciprocity. Further this form of inquiry does not start from the position of doubting everything because the participants of a discussion share many factual and value assumptions beforehand, that are not in question at a specific discussion. The goal of any inquiry is never to arrive at a set of universal principles that are applicable to all situations. Inquiry and valuation involve incessant reconsideration of both ends and means. If solving a problem presents itself as being difficult, a reconsideration of ‘factual’ assumptions goals may be necessary.⁴⁷⁴

All thought and reflection occur within a practical matrix that are contingent on the democratic structure of inquiry to achieve valid outcomes. Thus, rationality and democratic values are intrinsically connected. An ethical community should organize itself in accordance with democratic standards because a society that limits democracy in turn also limits rationality.⁴⁷⁵

Moral reasoning in this sense involves competing and conflicting values and principles and does not refer to normative maxims. It further includes a range of moral considerations, like a personal internal ethical standpoint, and the view that any argument needs to be justified through critical reflection through the correct mode of democratized inquiry.

For Putnam morality is transformative and not fixed to certain ends and means. Progress is made through constant revision of value judgments that also consider its consequences. Therefore, the warrant for value judgments lies in human conduct and not in a priori or metaphysical fixed references. For Putnam it is apparent that ethical disagreements should be treated as disagreements that are rationally discussable, so that warranted, and unwarranted arguments can be differentiated objectively.⁴⁷⁶

A possible ‘moral theory’ in Putnam’s sense would consist of three necessary elements where the basic assumptions should have wide appeal, the system should be able to withstand rational criticism and the recommended morality should be livable. Putnam’s theory would further follow pragmatist ideas and more specifically encompass an emphasis on the importance of language. Factual description and valuation cannot be perceived separately as any description effectively engages in valuation. This stems from Putnam’s view that all knowledge presupposes values. His ‘moral theory’ would reject relativism and universal truths, follow the structure of ‘democratized inquiry’ to accomplish situated objective value judgments through active participation, call for the need to accept pluralism, and lastly include his conception of practical rationality.

⁴⁷⁴ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 219-224.

⁴⁷⁵ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, 223.

⁴⁷⁶ Putnam, *The Fact/Value Dichotomy and the Future of Philosophy*, 39.

Putnam's view on ethics therefore can be described as a dismissal of any form of metaphysics that is mainly influenced by Dewey and relies on the combination of two 'practices' those of democracy and fallibilism.⁴⁷⁷

By establishing the entanglement of fact and value, Putnam needs a new approach towards understanding practical rationality. Bagnoli assesses the power of the collapse as follows: "The impact of the collapse of fact/value dichotomy can be fully appreciated by considering how it reshapes the account of practical reasoning."⁴⁷⁸

Putnam does this by including values in his conception of practical rationality. However, with the collapse of the fact/value dichotomy in place Putnam does not abandon the idea of objectivity. Rather objectivity (not mere description) is seen as more than the formalistic language of physics and is in fact for him included in ethics. The entanglement thesis enables a rational and objective discussion of ethical judgments, because warranted and unwarranted statements can be assessed in ethics through the application of the correct methodology of inquiry that is inherently connected with Putnam's conception of practical rationality that also inherently is inhabited by values. The entanglement shows how objectivity is part of value judgments and the other way around. Facts are presupposed by values (like epistemic values), thus making value judgments part of objective ones.

⁴⁷⁷ Hilary Putnam, "Capabilities and Two Ethical Theories", in: *Philosophy in an Age of Science: Physics, Mathematics and Skepticism*, Hilary Putnam, Cambridge, MA: 2012, 310.

⁴⁷⁸ Carla Bagnoli, „Change in View. Sensitivity to Facts and Prospective Rationality", in: *Facts and Values. The Ethics and Metaphysics of Normativity*, Giancarlo Marchetti; Sarin Marchetti (Ed.), New York, 2017, 141.

Conclusion

Putnam's conception of practical rationality draws from two main arguments. Firstly, his idea is rooted in pragmatism and therefore is inherently connected to agency and practice. The second argument is established from the premise of the entanglement thesis, where fact and value are intertwined. The entanglement thesis is affirmed by 'thick' ethical concepts and enables the inclusion of values into the concept of rationality. Having an internal ethical standpoint is part of having reasons. Through this inclusion of values, it is rational for an agent to choose their own values (coin-flip example). Agents can make rational decisions in their practical lives that not only involve logical reason but more importantly include the agents own beliefs, desires, and values. This standpoint is not final, a priori, absolute, or normative. It allows for external reasons to inform choices. This ensures that agents can lead meaningful and fulfilling lives on their own accord. However, these reasons are objectively justified through rational testing of said reasons.

Coming to terms with decisions is not made up through algorithms but involves engaging with the world and considers the actual life the agent wants to lead, considers their own values and goals. For Putnam there is no single, objective standard of rationality that can be applied universally to all people and all situations. Instead, rationality is a complex, context-dependent process. The motivations for action and in turn ends and means thereby play an important role in the explanation of Putnam's practical rationality.

Ethical questions are removed from formerly established methods as universalism, metaphysics, or classical rational choice theory because value and rationality are intertwined. Through the incorporation of an ethical standpoint any discussion on reason always stands in relation to moral considerations. In turn when moral disagreement is in question (or any kind of inquiry) a better or worse solution can be found. Thereby knowledge is theorized as a practice.

Putnam's claim is that objectivity *can* be achieved in ethics and that rational discussion and debate on values may produce more agreement on the controversial issues of the day than people typically think possible. Objective value judgments are possible through Putnam's procedural account of rationality. The idea of the path of inquiry predominantly stems from Dewey.

For Putnam truth and knowledge in ethics are obtained in the same way as in natural science. Rational inquiry consists of a practice that involves democratic and non-hierarchical inclusiveness and symmetrical relations of cooperation, which Putnam calls the

‘democratization of inquiry’.⁴⁷⁹ Solving moral disagreement is an active process, that is put into actual context. It is always situated towards a specific problem that must undergo rational testing.

The idea of moral objectivity and objective value judgments therefore have real world effects. Value judgments are warranted through human activity and not through normative or prefixed references that are external to that activity.

Putnam's views on practical rationality are thus influenced by his commitments to pragmatism, his common-sense approach towards philosophy, the collapse of the fact/value dichotomy, his views on language and agents' interaction in the social and cultural context when shaping beliefs, values, and reasons.

The key points of the thesis therefore were to show how Putnam's conception of rationality relates to the entanglement thesis and is differentiated from other accounts of practical rationality that adhere to the dichotomy of fact and value that Putnam attacks and was inflated by logical positivism. The entanglement theory is further justified by linguistic arguments that Putnam brings forward, namely ‘thick’ ethical concepts. Another topic of the thesis was to take a closer look at how Putnam understands having reasons. These are set up by having an internal ethical standpoint, allow for non-final ends, externalism, adhere to the idea that values are chosen, and why it is rational to do so. The last aspect of the thesis was to show what the scope of this conception of rationality entails. It goes beyond individual and existential choices and includes ethical and political aspects regarding problem solving. The outcome of this methodology is again linked to the entanglement thesis, that states that objective value statements can be rationally discussed. Thus, there is no asymmetry between truth and knowledge being obtained in natural science and in ethics (and theology).

Main points of critique against Putnam are that he seems to be driven by his cause against the fact/value dichotomy instead of giving substantial arguments. His writing presents itself often as vague and besides the points he announces to be dealing with. He often treats abstract issues and ideas that seem to not relate truly to the addressed problems, or he constructs linguistic arguments that miss their impact as arguments. Further his methodology of inquiry sometimes lacks concrete elaboration.

Putnam's call to use a distinction instead of a dichotomy is used by him solely as a vehicle to weaken the premise of the fact/value dichotomy at a first instance. The distinction allows for acknowledgement of epistemic values (which seem reasonable and apparent within theory selection) to keep ethical statements at bay from other evaluative statements. However, he does

⁴⁷⁹ Alcoff, *Democracy and Rationality: A Dialogue With Hilary Putnam*, 233.

not employ the idea of a distinction later as he anyhow includes ethical values to have the same properties as epistemic values in view of the entanglement thesis. It remains unclear why he establishes the insistence on a distinction within values (or between facts and values for that matter) in the first place, if he later argues for the entanglement of all value judgments, including ethical ones.

Putnam defends his view on moral objectivity despite the entanglement thesis. Likewise, ethics are part of the domain of science. This is possible for him because ethical beliefs are always involved but are susceptible to deliberation and therefore receive objective justification. The constraints of objectivity can be upheld through his account of the pragmatist approach of inquiry.⁴⁸⁰

For Putnam philosophy as a practice can offer a lot to society. This includes a vision of democracy – that he shares with Dewey – that will ultimately result in a change in our common practices. The view of a practical rationality that results in the critique of instrumental rationality ensures this goal. This can be achieved by making practices more intellectualized and intelligent instead of making intellectual life more practical.

If we take Putnam's entanglement thesis seriously, the collapse of the fact/value dichotomy implies to rethink metaphysics, normative ethical approaches and brings forward a form of practical rationality that is set in agency, practice, and collectivity in the case of moral disagreements.

Considering the goals of social progress in pragmatism, the approach of considering rationality to be sourced by value judgments is coherent. From a pragmatist point of view Putnam's arguments to infer objectivity in ethics are sound. Questions that may arise need to be seen in the context of the definition of objectivity and what the term should supply. The entanglement thesis is agreeable with Putnam's valued ideals like pluralism or individualism in opposition to metaphysical ideas or normative norms. His approach gives room for change and revision, that he deems as necessary. The question remains if the existence of epistemic values is a strong enough argument to collapse the dichotomy.

Putnam's idea that truth and knowledge are obtained in the same way in ethics as in natural sciences opens the discussion surrounding science and scientific facts. Can scientific facts still be discussed adequately without being only subject to opinion with value statements entangled with facts? This relates also back to the question from before if epistemic values are grounds enough to ensure the validity of scientific facts. Can the suggested methodology of inquiry ensure well enough what will be accepted as scientific fact and what not, as inquiry is

⁴⁸⁰ Alcoff, *Democracy and Rationality: A Dialogue With Hilary Putnam*, 231.

determined by individual assessments of warrantedness and consensus through cooperation? Should the criteria in the exact sciences be defined by democratic consensus? Does this in turn lead to an erasure of ‘facts’?

Further Putnam’s conception of practical rationality has implications regarding the views on methodology in economics and the general role of social sciences. Putnam rejects the idea of positive economics and their supposed value-neutrality (see further *The End of Value-Free Economics*⁴⁸¹). Here he integrated ethical orientation concerned with human capabilities with economical knowledge.

The type of social science that Putnam strives towards should help to intelligently solve practical problems and this approach cannot be value-neutral. Objectivity and value should be joined and this in turn leads to the question what is disputable and what not. Thereby, the dimension based on consensus in the first instance grows into a political one. Thus, the connection between politics and inquiry has radical implications when this form of pragmatist reasoning is seen as valid reasoning.

The collapse of fact and value is understood as a practical question where one’s own agency is important. Such an account of rationality finds itself situated in a realm that lies between the idea of what social sciences are, what our social reality should be and the following political implications.

Putnam’s arguments are taken as a basis and subsequently used for new theories. For example, Sakar takes Putnam and puts him in the context of group rationality (in science groups).⁴⁸²

Bagnoli on the other hand takes on some of Putnam’s arguments and develops from the Murdoch and Hare discussion on ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ ethical concepts her own non-cognitivist conception, namely that of prospective rationality. Like Putnam’s views this one is also removed from being purely formal and procedural and includes an evaluative aspect but relies more on timely dimension and emotional engagement.⁴⁸³

Putnam’s conception of practical rationality in view of the entanglement thesis does not seem to play a very important role in the general discussion concerning the addressed issues or in the discussion of pragmatism today. However, Anderson’s fairly recent analysis in her article *How to be a pragmatist*⁴⁸⁴ shows, that Putnam’s pragmatist views are relevant although she does not explicitly refer to him.

⁴⁸¹ See also Hilary Putnam and Vivian Walsh (Eds.): *The End of Value-Free Economics*, London 2012.

⁴⁸² Husein Sarkar, *Group Rationality in Scientific Research*, Cambridge 2007.

⁴⁸³ Bagnoli, *Change in View. Sensitivity to Facts and Prospective Rationality*, 137-158.

⁴⁸⁴ Elizabeth Anderson, “How to be Pragmatist”, in: *The Routledge Handbook of Practical Reason*, Ruth Chang; Kurt Sylvan (Eds.), London 2020, 83-94.

Anderson describes how in pragmatism there is no quest for fundamental principle of right action and no definitive criterion for good in pragmatism. The goal rather is to look for methods that intelligently update our moral beliefs.⁴⁸⁵ Updating our moral beliefs intelligently is the same focus that Putnam applied. Normative truths are not needed but rather, “[...] methods for intelligently updating our current intuitions or normative judgments to address the problems we currently face and similar problems we realistically risk facing”.⁴⁸⁶

Further moral reasoning is likewise described here as a joint and co-operative effort, that principally entails demanding and requesting claims onto each other. Additionally, they require justifications to these other persons, so that they can react appropriately.⁴⁸⁷

Anderson further presents a schematized multistep process to update our value judgments in the case of moral failure.⁴⁸⁸ This procedure seems to be in accordance with the vague solutions or references to Dewey that Putnam offers.

Here also the primacy of practice is emphasized. It works by being practiced, in turn collective moral consciousness is being transformed. Anderson’s example of such a transformation is the moral status of slavery.⁴⁸⁹ She argues that the abolishment of slavery was not achieved by pure moral argument alone, but because of (among other things) power bias. Morally objectionable practices need to be opposed in action, not just in arguments. Therefore bias-correcting methods needed to be implemented. A way to achieve these are “contentious politics”⁴⁹⁰. According to her, reasonableness needs to be proved again and again to be in line with the challenged problems. Our normative judgments are not absolute, they are not facts. Anderson states: “We should not suppose that the project of improving our normative judgments, and our practices of rea-soning about norms, will end.”⁴⁹¹

Because our normative concepts change over time as we encounter new circumstances, we constantly need to refine our concepts to cope with them. Therefore, moral arguments should not be removed from practice, from scientific and empirical knowledge or from other people. Moral arguments should be away from a priori mode, be discussed in the actual world and put

⁴⁸⁵ Anderson, *How to be Pragmatist*, 83.

⁴⁸⁶ Anderson, *How to be Pragmatist*, 85.

⁴⁸⁷ Anderson, *How to be Pragmatist*, 87.

⁴⁸⁸ (1) survey problematic features, (2) diagnose the problem (actual situation not bizarre situation), (3) reflection of current deficiencies of current habits, norms, and normative judgments, (4) find systemic biases that led to error, (5) implement bias correcting or bias blocking procedures, (6) test out new practical judgment by acting them out and evaluating the results, (7) Does this solve the problem? Are the side effects acceptable? If yes, it is a successful test of the new judgment in an experiment in living. If not, a new diagnosis, new revision is needed until we arrive at a value judgment which solves the problem with the consequences we can live with. See: Anderson, *How to be Pragmatist*, 86-87.

⁴⁸⁹ For full elaboration see: Anderson, *How to be Pragmatist*, 88-90.

⁴⁹⁰ E.g. Coordinated action by groups around a shared agenda, which often disrupts the routine operation of challenged institutions. Activist element, for example today climate activists.

⁴⁹¹ Anderson, *How to be Pragmatist*, 90.

to the test in practice. Practical reasoning encompasses three main things according to Anderson: (1) practice, (2) cognitive science and (3) democracy.⁴⁹² All her points go hand in hand with Putnam's ideas.

Putnam's methodology on inquiry is directly related to his conception of practical rationality which is relevant not only in the social sciences but also in philosophy as far as the entanglement of fact and value is concerned.

⁴⁹² Anderson, *How to be Pragmatist*, 91.

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Attachments

German abstract

Wissenschaftliche und ethische Aussagen werden allgemein als diametral zueinander gesehen. In *The Collapse of the fact/value Dichotomy* vertritt Putnam die These, dass diese Dichotomie nicht aufrecht zu erhalten ist. Deshalb ist es notwendig, eine neue Konzeption praktischer Rationalität zu entwerfen. Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, Putnams Ausführungen dazu zu untersuchen. Putnams Ansatz ist im Pragmatismus verwurzelt, den er um seine Verflechtungsthese erweitert. Nach dieser These ist die Einbeziehung von Werturteilen in die praktische Rationalität möglich. Für Akteure wird es rational, über ihre eigenen Werte zu entscheiden. Diese Werte sind nicht endgültig oder normativ, sondern müssen rationalen Diskursen standhalten. Der Diskurs wird dabei als ein komplexer und kontextabhängiger Prozess verstanden. Werturteile und Begründung (Validität) sind nun miteinander verknüpft. Putnam behauptet, dass Objektivität in der Ethik erreicht werden kann. Der Zusammenbruch der Fakten-/Werturteil-Dichotomie erfordert ein Umdenken in der Metaphysik und normativen Ethik und bringt eine Form praktischer Rationalität hervor, die auf Handlungsfähigkeit, Praxis und Kollektivität basiert.

English abstract

The common view today is that scientific and ethical statements are seen as diametral to each other. In *The Collapse of the fact/value Dichotomy* Putnam states that the view of these strict dichotomies is unattainable. With the collapse of the dichotomy of fact and value, there is need for a new conception of practical rationality. The aim of the thesis is to examine Putnam's conception of practical rationality in view of this collapse. His idea is rooted in pragmatism and is contingent on the premise of the entanglement thesis. Through the inclusion of values, it is rational for an agent to choose their own values. This standpoint is not final, or normative. Reasons need to be objectively justified through rational testing. Rationality is understood as a complex and context-dependent process where reason is related to moral considerations. Putnam claims that objectivity can be achieved in ethics. The collapse of the fact/value dichotomy implies to rethink metaphysics and normative ethics and brings forward a form of practical rationality that is set in agency, practice, and collectivity.