

Hilary Putnam. *Naturalism, Realism, and Normativity*. Ed. Mario De Caro. Harvard University Press 2016. 248 pp. \$49.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780674659698).

If the late Hilary Putnam had requested his brain to be preserved in a vat and if his brain could communicate with the *world*, we could pose the following questions about his latest collection of essays: 1) Does this collection of essays give us a good overview of your philosophical position? I think Putnam's brain in the vat would respond: No, for two reasons: Firstly, I no longer hold the positions in the various essays in the book as well as those positions attributed to me by the editor in the Introduction. I have changed my *mind* about *liberal functionalism* and *liberal naturalism*. Secondly, this book of essays covers ground already covered by my earlier collection of essays also edited by De Caro (along with David Macarthur) called *Philosophy in An Age of Science: Physics, Mathematics, and Skepticism*. 2) Do the essays, at least give a flavour of your philosophical outlook to those who have little familiarity with your *oeuvre*? I [Putnam's brain in a vat] can't answer that question with a simple yes or no for three reasons: Firstly, the question about my philosophical outlook could mean: 'have I held to one set of fundamental philosophical principles over my entire career?', or it could mean—'have I used a consistent philosophical method, or at least style over my entire career?' In the first meaning, if you look at Section V, 'Looking Back,' you can see how I have changed my views on Semantics (199 ff). However, in the next essay, which is the last essay of the book (213ff), I highlight two of my most well-known philosophical thought experiments (The Twin Earth and The Brain in a Vat). Those two quite famous philosophical thought experiments spin out the thread connecting the development of my thought over 'sixty-five years count[ing] from my graduation from the University of Pennsylvania' (213). Secondly, the thread of the development of my [Putnam's] thought intertwines two major cords: i) The development of a grand overview of the disparate elements of the understandings of our cosmos; and ii) The dispelling of various illusions and mistaken views that we acquire throughout our lives (215-216). Thirdly, this view of my thread of development is itself the result of a change in my [Putnam's] Wittgensteinian view of philosophy, 'that the real task of philosophy is to lead us to see the "unintelligibility" of philosophical positions ... I criticize the whole idea that philosophical positions are often, let alone as a rule, literally unintelligible' (215).

Putnam's brain in the vat continues: The second *meaning* of my 'philosophical outlook' involves asking the question: Are you [Putnam] consistent in your philosophical style or method? Putnam's brain in the vat might answer: Firstly, in the essays in Section IV, 'Naive Realism, Sensation, and Apperception' (139-196), I [Putnam] refer to the theories of perceptual psychology concerning philosophical arguments about perception and *sense-data* (in Russell's arguments for inference in perception—the inference from observables to unobservables) and *qualia* (in Ned Block's arguments about the phenomenal aspects of perception). Secondly, I still use the traditional method of conceptual analysis that I used in my early days, along with others involved in the practice and development of analytic philosophy, to rebut the arguments made by John McDowell for his view of the conceptual ladenness of all perception (see Chapter 9, 'Sensation and Apperception' 139 ff). Thirdly, in the very next essay (Chapter 10, 'Perception without Sense Data,' 152 ff), I use my tools of critical argumentation against the views of Russell, Quine, and Kant (and John McDowell's neo-Kantianism), as well as against my own earlier view of *computational functionalism* (166), and refer to my latest view that I dubbed *liberal functionalism*. Critical enquiry as 'my [Putnam's] *Doktorvater* Hans Reichenbach taught me, [requires] scientific investigation and philosophical analysis' (168).

Here is one last question to Putnam's brain in the vat: 3) What do you think of your editor De Caro's claim in, 'Introduction: Putnam's Philosophy and Metaphilosophy' (1-18), about an over-arching *Putnamian* approach and *problematique*? De Caro says: 'Putnamian liberal naturalism ... has a pluralistic attitude both in ontology and epistemology ... this approach gives rise to what could be called a "reconciliation problem"—the problem of showing how the different kinds of features of the world can all be real without conceptual tension or even contradiction' (11). Putnam's brain in the vat might answer: De Caro should know this! In Chapter 1, 'Naturalism, Realism, and Normativity' (21-43), I say: 'One can learn from pragmatists and Wittgensteinians and philosophers of so many other kinds without becoming a card-carrying member of any philosophical sect. And that is something I have always tried to do in my philosophical life' (43).

One might put the following question to a reader of this collection of Putnam's work: Can we learn anything of substance from this collection given that the late Hillary Putnam's views evolve through critical enquiry? Our reader who happens to be a critical but sympathetic reader of Putnam might answer as follows: Yes! We learn the important point that no philosopher who tackles serious problems should be dismissed, and that critical enquiry requires sympathetic understanding of the philosopher. Let me explain how this collection of Putnam's essays illustrates its chief lesson from Putnam as a serious philosopher who tackled fundamental questions and developed evolving answers in response to critical argumentation. The essays in this book have a critique format as follows: Putnam's critic X-Y-Z, criticizes a position that Putnam gave up previously (for instance, *internal realism*); X-Y-Z's interpretation is crucially off the mark, and so X-Y-Z's criticisms misfire; and, Putnam's new position is as follows. Moreover, X-Y-Z's position is mistaken for the following reasons, or has already been better developed and argued for by Putnam. Putnam uses this critique format with variations in all the essays if only as a structural framework for his argumentation. As an instance, I quote the opening remarks of Putnam's essay, Chapter 5, 'Richard Boyd on Scientific Realism' (90-96), where Putnam explicitly uses the critique format: 'I agree with many of the things Richard Boyd says. What's more I've agreed with them for a long time, but Boyd misses this because he reads me in a systematically wrong way. Boyd was so upset by the things I wrote in my "internal realist" period that he has been projecting those views onto my publications ever since, and he shouldn't do that' (90). This leads me to ask our critical but sympathetic reader of Putnam, a final question of Putnam's book: how can one avoid projecting viewpoints that a philosopher developed at one point in that philosopher's work onto all of the philosopher's writing, especially a dead philosopher who can no longer respond to criticisms? Putnam, in a way, answers this question in the very same essay, as follows: 'one can learn from a philosopher without believing everything he says, or even believing everything he regards as tremendously important. John McDowell and I both believe we can learn a great deal from Kant, but that doesn't mean we don't reject certain ideas from the first *Critique* that Kant would have regarded as absolutely essential to his whole vision. It had better be the case that we can learn from dead philosophers, 'cause we're all gonna be dead!' (92). If our goal in critically thinking about a philosopher is to learn, then we must develop an interpretation isomorphic to the philosopher that the philosopher could recognize as a virtual realization.

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