

Some Sources of Hilary Putnam's Pluralism

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“Reason has so many forms that we do not know which to resort to: experience has no fewer.” Michel de Montaigne, “On Experience”

I am interested in the lives of certain ideas, in their adventures as Whitehead put it. One of these ideas is pragmatism, which lives in a tradition of largely but not entirely American thought, in which Hilary Putnam has a stellar place. Another is pluralism, an allied tradition of thought, or what can be seen as an alternative version of the same tradition. My thesis here is that Putnam has a place in this tradition as well. Philosophical pluralism was first canonized in a book published in 1920 by a young Frenchman, Jean Wahl, who went on to become a professor at the Sorbonne, the teacher of Jean-Paul Sartre, and the author in the nineteen thirties of influential books on Hegel and Kierkegaard. Wahl’s book on pluralism, entitled *Les philosophies pluralistes d’Angleterre et d’Amérique*, was published in an English version by Routledge in 1925 as *Pluralist Philosophies of England and America*.

In Wahl’s lineup of pluralist thinkers, William James occupies the central place, not least for his book *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909). Wahl discusses James’s philosophy as a whole from a pluralist perspective, focusing on his “cult of the particular,” “polytheism,” “temporalism,” and “criticism of the idea of totality.” He also includes many other writers in his pluralist panorama: Gustav Fechner, Hermann Lötze, Wilhelm Wundt, Charles Renouvier, John Stuart Mill (to whom

James dedicated *Pragmatism*), John Dewey, Horace Kallen, George Santayana, Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller—even George Holmes Howison of Berkeley, said to be a “pluralist idealist” of the “Californian School,” and Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore, said to be aligned with pluralism because of their views about temporality.

What then does Wahl mean by pluralism? He offers no one definition but rather a plurality of them, a plurality of pluralisms, and he acknowledges that Arthur Lovejoy might easily follow up his already classic paper “The Thirteen Pragmatisms” with a similar paper on the many pluralisms. Wahl beats him to it, however, by distinguishing among noetic or epistemological, metaphysical, aesthetic, moral, religious, and logical pluralisms. Following James, for example, he states that noetic pluralism, is the view that “the facts and worths of life need many cognizers to take them in. There is no point of view absolutely public and universal” (Wahl, 155). Speaking more generally, he writes that “pluralism is a philosophy which insists by preference on diversity of principles...it asserts both the diverse character and the temporal character of things” (Wahl, 275). A few pages later Wahl writes that “pluralism is the affirmation of the irreducibility of certain ideas and certain things,” and also that it is a form of realism: “pluralism is ... a profound realism that asserts the irreducibility of phenomena... the irreducibility of one domain of the world to another” (Wahl, 279). Wahl notices the confluence between pragmatism and pluralism, but he denies their identity: “Speaking generally, pluralism is a metaphysic of pragmatism; though pragmatists cannot hold the monopoly of this metaphysic. It is usually associated with a realistic tendency which is particularly strong in the United States” (Wahl, 273).

The convergence of pragmatism, pluralism and a strong “realistic tendency” are again to be found in the United States, in the work of our contemporary Hilary Putnam. Let me briefly consider some ways in which Wahl’s words are true of Putnam. Regarding irreducibility, and leaving aside his work in the philosophy of mind, consider Putnam’s conclusion from a section entitled “Conceptual Pluralism” in *Ethics Without Ontology*. Putnam is considering the longstanding problem of how what he calls the “fields and particles scheme” of physics and the everyday scheme of “tables and chairs” relate to one another. He writes: “That we can use both of these schemes without being required to reduce one or both of them to some single fundamental and universal ontology is the doctrine of pluralism...” (EWO, 48-9).

Making the same point elsewhere, Putnam does not speak of the everyday as a “scheme,” and instead follows Husserl and Wittgenstein in defending the authority and legitimacy of what he calls “the lebenswelt.” Complaining that philosophy makes us “unfit to dwell in the common” (RHF 118), Putnam urges us to “accept” “the *Lebenswelt*, the world as we actually experience it” (RHF, 116). The verb “accept” is crucial here, because Putnam does not think that the existence of the world can be proven, and he does not think that the everyday world is the subject of a theory that is in competition with science. It is at this point that his thought converges with that of his Harvard colleague Stanley Cavell, who wrote in “The Avoidance of Love” (1969) that “what skepticism suggests is that since we cannot know the world exists, its presentness to us cannot be a function of knowing. The world is to be accepted; as the presentness of other minds is not to be known, but acknowledged.” (Cavell, 324). This is not meant to be a refutation of or even an avoidance of skepticism, but rather the

recognition of a difference. It is a difference that is obscured, Putnam holds, in the search for “the One Method by which all our beliefs can be appraised” (RHF, 118).

Pluralism shows up in Putnam’s work not only in the contrast between science and the everyday—a species of what several recent writers have called “vertical pluralism,” the pluralism of different domains or discourses—but in his discussions of truth, even truth within science. This latter is “horizontal pluralism,” the claim, as Maria Baghramian puts it, “that there can be more than correct account of how things are in any given domain” (Baghramian, 304). In his pragmatist period Putnam defends a conception of truth that owes something to Charles Sanders Peirce, who wrote that the “opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth” (Peirce, 139). Putnam states that “a true statement is one that could be justified were epistemic conditions ideal” (RHF, vii). Unlike Peirce, however, Putnam asserts that there need not be only one such scheme. Why, he asks, “should there not sometimes be equally coherent but incompatible conceptual schemes which fit our experiential beliefs equally well? If truth is not (unique) correspondence then the possibility of a certain pluralism is opened up” (RTH, 73).

These incompatible schemes fit the experiential beliefs of a community of inquirers, as wave and particle schemes appeal to the community of physicists. Putnam goes further however in asserting what amounts to another form of pluralism in *Realism with a Human Face* when he denies that truth can conceivably be attained by a single community. It is not that the community will in the long run find several schemes that fit their experiential beliefs, but that no single community can know all the truth. “People have attributed to me the idea that

we can sensibly imagine conditions which are *simultaneously ideal* for the ascertainment of any truth whatsoever, or simultaneously ideal for answering any question whatsoever. I have never thought such a thing....There are some statements which we can only verify by failing to verify other statements" (RTH, viii). This statement chimes with James's claim, quoted by Wahl, that there is "no absolutely public and universal point of view."

There is yet another site in Putnam's writing where a kind of pluralism emerges. This is in "James's Theory of Perception," in *Realism with a Human Face*, one of the most sympathetic and imaginative discussions of James's so-called "radical empiricism" to be found in the literature. For a Darwinian like James, Putnam argues, no two individuals are identical, so that although "there is a 'central tendency,' this tendency is simply an average; Darwin would say that it is a mere abstraction." For Darwin, Putnam concludes, "the reality is the variation," not the type (RHF 235). James's criticism of the power of concepts to capture reality is a reminder, Putnam argues, "that even though the rationalistic type of thinking has its place—it is sometimes pragmatically effective—once it becomes one's only way of thinking, one is bound to lose the world for a beautiful model." (RHF 236). The world one loses is the world of concrete particulars, of "variations." This is a pluralism not of schemes or truths, but of particulars, and it is aptly rendered by James's explicitly pluralistic slogan quoted above, namely: "Something always escapes."

I have now touched on Putnam's defense of common sense against scientific reductionism, and of the possibility of incompatible schemes at the limit of inquiry, and his idea that no community could be in the position to justify every true statement. I want now to consider even more briefly three

other characteristics mentioned by Wahl as characteristic of pluralism: their focus on temporality, their realism, and their pragmatism.

Temporality appears not in Putnam's metaphysics but in his epistemology. The term "history" in Putnam's title, *Reason, Truth, and History*, for example, refers to the view of knowledge that he learns not only from James and John Dewey, but from Thomas Kuhn, Michel Foucault, and even Ludwig Wittgenstein. Putnam reads Foucault's historical studies, for example, not as those of a relativist who is concerned to argue that "past practices were more rational than they look to be," but as those of a fallibilist, for whom all practices, including our own, are less rational than they appear to be. Putnam concedes that rationality cannot be "defined by a 'canon' or set of principles," and that our conceptions of the cognitive virtues evolve, but he at the same time asserts the authority of regulative ideas, such as that of "of a just, attentive, balanced intellect" (RTH, 163). In *Ethics Without Ontology* Putnam finds a continuing basis for agreement with Foucault's idea that our concepts have histories: "Although 'analytic' philosophers still often write as if concepts were a-historic entities (which is exactly how they were conceived by the fathers of analytic philosophy, Moore and Russell), there is no reason for their latter-day successors to deny that concepts have a history, and that conceptual analysis and historical analysis can fruitfully enrich each other..." (EWO, 113).

I shall be even briefer with regard to Putnam's realism and pragmatism. Putnam is of course a pragmatist, bearing out Wahl's generalization that pragmatists tend to be pluralists. In regard to realism, Putnam's pragmatist period is marked by a vigorous attempt to defend a form of realism. Following Kant and James, he attempts both to credit the human contribution to the world

we know—enunciated in the slogan he draws from James, that “the trail of the human serpent is over everything”—, and at the same time to assert the reality and objectivity of that world. Putnam called one such attempt “internal realism,” and later chose “pragmatic realism” when the “internal” in “internal realism” seemed to suggest a lack of contact with the world or an excessive subjectivity. In any case, it is only “metaphysical realism”—the fantasy of a “God’s eye view of the world”—that Putnam rejects, not the realism of common sense or of science. In his title as in his book *The Many Faces of Realism* Putnam asserts both plurality and realism.

Finally, Wahl states that pragmatists tend to be pluralists, and so it is in the case of Putnam, who accounts for the connection in the statement cited above. If “the world” is the world as we conceptualize and encounter it, a world bearing the marks of the human serpent, then, as Putnam says, a certain possibility of plural schemes is opened up.

In the rest of this essay I want to consider three figures in the background of Putnam’s pluralism. Two of them, like Putnam himself, are self-identified pragmatists who taught at Harvard: William James and Nelson Goodman. The third is Ludwig Wittgenstein, neither a pragmatist nor a Harvard professor, whose importance for Putnam and in general for what we know as “neopragmatism” is immense, and whose relation both to pragmatism and to pluralism is interestingly complicated.

The term *pluralism*, the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us, originally had an ecclesiastical use, indicating the practice of holding more than one office at a time. It first makes its way into philosophy only in the late nineteenth century.

James employs the term in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and in *A Pluralistic Universe*, where he defines pluralism as “the doctrine that [the universe] is many” He goes on to state:

Everything you can think of, however vast or inclusive, has on the pluralist view a genuinely ‘external’ environment of some sort or amount. Things are ‘with’ one another in many ways, but nothing includes everything, or dominates over everything. The word ‘and’ trails along after every sentence. Something always escapes. ‘Ever not quite’ has to be said of the best attempts made anywhere in the universe at attaining all-inclusiveness. The pluralistic world is thus more like a federal republic than like an empire or a kingdom” (J: 776).

The dominating unity of James’s day was the Hegelian and Neo Hegelian Absolute Spirit propounded by his contemporaries Thomas Hill Green and F. H. Bradley, but James also wishes to counter an emerging scientific reductionism. His position is both metaphysical and epistemological: there is no one overarching entity, and no all-inclusive explanation of the world.

James develops the idea of multiple systems of truth, multiple useful ways of making our way through the world, *Pragmatism* (1907), in the chapter entitled “Pragmatism and Common Sense.” Our common “ways of thinking” “concepts” or “categories” have a history, James maintains, and our notions of “One Time,” “One Space,” “Bodies,” “Minds,” “Thing,” “Kinds,” “causal influences” and “Subjects and attributes” are useful tools “by which we handle facts by thinking them” (J, 561). These ways of thinking, he suggests, are discoveries of “prehistoric geniuses whose names the night of antiquity has covered up” and which then “spread” over long periods of time “until all language rested on them

and we are now incapable of thinking naturally in any other terms" (J, 566). "There are many conceptual systems," James holds, including the categories of common sense, the theories of science, the criticism of philosophy—all of them means of "rationalizing" the "everlasting weather of our perceptions" (J, 562). James presses the question, so important for Putnam, of which of these schemes is the true one, and he answers that although each is useful for one sphere of life or another, there "is no *ringing* conclusion possible when we compare these types of thinking, with a view to telling which is the more absolutely true... Common sense is better for one sphere of life, science for another, philosophic criticism for a third; but whether either be *truer* absolutely, Heaven only knows" (J, 569).

If Putnam wants to admit into his republic the language and practices of ordinary life, including those of morality, James wants to admit not only science and common sense, but religion in at least some of its aspects. James was a scientist: he attended the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard, not Harvard College, and spent his junior year abroad floating down the Amazon with Louis Agassiz. His graduate degree was in medicine and his first appointments were teaching anatomy and physiology at Harvard, though he soon moved to psychology and then philosophy. He begins *The Varieties of Religious Experience* with a chapter on religion and neurology, but it is in the conclusion to that work that he makes some of his most provocative statements about the sciences. "The scientist" he states "is, during his scientific hours at least, so materialistic that one may well say that on the whole the influence of science goes against the notion that religion should be recognized at all" (VRE, 533). James nevertheless speaks up for religion not as a set of doctrines or practices, but as an example of certain modes of experiencing and conceptualizing the world. "It is the terror and

beauty of phenomena, the “promise” of the dawn and of the rainbow, the “voice” of the thunder, the “gentleness” of the summer rain, the “sublimity” of the stars, and not the physical laws which these things follow, by which the religious mind still continues to be most impressed...” (VRE, 541). James is impressed too, and he sees the source of religion’s authority in the personal point of view. “Science,” (with a capital “S”) is “impersonal” (VRE, 543) by its very nature, and therefore, James argues, it is not equipped to register the world in these ways. The sciences offer us ways of knowing the world, but there are other ways which science cannot duplicate or reduce to its terms. The universe is:

a more many-sided affair than any sect, even the scientific sect, allows for....the world can be handled according to many systems of ideas, and is so handled by different men, and will each time give some characteristic kind of profit, for which he cares, to the handler, while at the same time some other kind of profit has to be omitted or postponed (VRE, 137-8).

James defends these personal and humanized ways of thinking against the charge that they are just survivals that must be eliminated in the course of a general “deanthropomorphization of the imagination.” James’s call not only to retain and develop but to recognize the authority of an anthropomorphized imagination is echoed ninety years later in Putnam’s assertions of the objective validity of the human point of view. “There *are*,” Putnam tells us in *The Many Faces of Realism*, “tables and chairs and ice cubes. There are also electrons and space-time regions and prime numbers and people who are a menace to world peace and moments of beauty and transcendence and many other things” (MFR, 16). These tables and chairs are James’s subject in “Pragmatism and Common Sense,” and these moments of beauty and transcendence are his subjects in *The*

Varieties of Religious Experience.

Putnam acknowledges the importance of Nelson Goodman for his own pragmatism in many places in his writing. In "After Empiricism," for example, he links him with Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Austin, and Wittgenstein in countering Hume's project of dividing reality into "the Furniture of the Universe" on the one hand and "our projections" on the other (RHF, 52). In his earlier review of *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978), Putnam states that "the heart of Goodman's book ... is its defense of pluralism." For example, he takes Goodman as saying that while both physicalism and phenomenalism are good "research programs," if they become "dogmatic monisms ... there is everything wrong with both of them" (Putnam, 1983, 155).

Putnam entitles a section of his review "one world or many?" and this is the question I now want to consider, with the help of an earlier paper by Goodman that Putnam does not mention, entitled "The Way the World Is" (1960). In this paper, published, appropriately enough, in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Goodman takes up the question of the way the world is by first considering how it is given to us, a question to which he argues there is no clear answer. He next turns to the question of how the world is best seen, and he argues that the answers are many: "For the ways of seeing and picturing are many and various; some are strong, effective, useful, intriguing, or sensitive; others are weak, foolish, dull, banal, or blurred. But even if all the latter are excluded, still none of the rest can lay any good claim to be the way of seeing or picturing the world the way it is" (PP, 29). Goodman's central claim, embedded

in the following passage, is that there is no *one* way the world is, but that the world is *many* ways:

If I were asked what is *the* food for men, I should have to answer 'none'. For there are many foods. And if I am asked what is the way the world is, I must likewise answer, 'none'. For the world is many ways. ... For me, there is no way that is the way the world is; and so of course no description can capture it. But there are many ways the world is, and every true description captures one of them (PP, 31).

Whereas in *Ways of Worldmaking*, Goodman speaks of "multiple actual worlds" (WW, 6), here he speaks of the many ways the world is. Putnam calls the multiple actual worlds position "naughty" (RHF, 42) presumably because it clashes with our commonsense view that there is just the world. That is why I like the language of "The Way the World Is." However, Goodman argues that it makes little difference how we speak about the matter, that whether there are many worlds or one world with many versions depends on how we take things:

As intimated by William James's equivocal title *A Pluralistic Universe*, the issue between monism and pluralism tends to evaporate under analysis. If there is but one world, it embraces a multiplicity of contrasting aspects; if there are many worlds, the collection of them all is one. The one world may be taken as many, or the many worlds taken as one; whether one or many depends on the way of taking (PP, 2).

I would want to say, then, that I find it most profitable and least confusing to take the one world as many rather than to speak of many worlds. I think also that the idea of contrasting aspects is worth considering, for its implication that multiplicity is a feature not just of our schemes, theories, or versions, but of the

world itself. How much distance, I wonder, is there between Putnam's "many faces of realism" and Goodman's "multiplicity of contrasting aspects"?

Before leaving "The Way the World Is," I want to consider Goodman's statement that: "If I were asked what is *the* food for men, I should have to answer 'none'. For there are many foods." Goodman is a pluralist about foods. He gives no examples, but it is easy to think not just of different bowls of cornflakes and multiple hamburgers, but of different systems, cultures of foods: Sichuan, Tunisian, Italian, Mexican, paella, fejoado, poi, bagels, collard greens, nettle stew and Cashel blue. It is so hard *not* to agree with Goodman that there is no one food for human beings that I am reminded of Wittgenstein's statement in the *Investigations* that if one were to try to advance theses in philosophy it would be impossible, because a philosophical thesis is one to which everyone would agree (PI, 128). The pluralist seems sometimes not so much to be advancing a thesis as attempting to remind us of something—"for a certain purpose," as Wittgenstein says (PI, 127). What are Goodman's purposes in reminding us about the plurality of foods and asserting the plurality of worlds?

Goodman raises just this question in *Ways of Worldmaking* when he writes:

in what non-trivial sense are there ... many worlds? Just this, I think: that many different world-versions are of independent interest and importance, without any requirement or presumption of reducibility to a single base. The pluralist, far from being anti-scientific, accepts the sciences at full value. His typical adversary is the monopolistic materialist or physicalist who maintains that one system, physics, is preeminent and all-inclusive, such that every other version must eventually be reduced to it or rejected as false or

meaningless. ... But the evidence for such reducibility is negligible....(How do you go about reducing Constable's or James Joyce's world-view to physics?) ... A reduction from one system to another can make a genuine contribution to understanding the interrelationships among world-versions; but reduction in any reasonably strict sense is rare, almost always partial, and seldom if ever unique. The pluralists' acceptance of versions other than physics implies no relaxation of rigor but a recognition that standards different from yet no less exacting than those applied in science are appropriate for appraising what is conveyed in perceptual or pictorial or literary versions....(WW, 4-5).

As it is for Putnam, reductive physicalism is Goodman's main enemy, but in contrast to both Putnam and James, Goodman makes art a central concern. It is Constable's or Joyce's "world-view" from which we are said to learn, just as we learn from those of Aristotle or Einstein. Constable, Picasso, Fra Angelico, and the unnamed wall painters of ancient Egypt all show us aspects of the world, according to Goodman. In *Languages of Art* Goodman argues that both art and language can refer to or depict the world, and he draws attention to art's capacities for exemplification and expression. In *Ways of Worldmaking* he argues that expression and exemplification add to the ways in which we understand the world—add to the worlds we make, as he prefers to put it: "Worlds are made not only by what is said literally but also by what is said metaphorically, and not only by what is said either literally or metaphorically but also by what is exemplified and expressed—by what is shown as well as by what is said" (WW, 15). In his review of *Ways of Worldmaking*, Putnam pushes Goodman toward an even wider pluralism that would acknowledge the moral underpinnings of his

project: “Goodman recognizes that we wish to build worlds because doing so enriches us in many ways. And this, it seems to me, requires him to recognize that the notions of truth and rightness subserve a vision of the good” (RHF, 168-9). Putnam’s critique not only looks forward to his concern with what he calls “the collapse of the fact/value dichotomy,” but, as he is well aware, back to William James’s view in *Pragmatism* that truth is “one species of good” (J, 520).

Wittgenstein is an important influence on Putnam, but he is neither a pragmatist nor a self-identified pluralist. Nevertheless, his later philosophy is deeply concerned with plurality, multiplicity, and variety, and this is one reason, I have argued, for the deep affinity he felt for William James, despite his hostility to pragmatism. Wittgenstein does not, however, assert a multiplicity of world versions or worlds, but rather a “multiplicity” of language-games and concepts. He states that there are “countless” different kinds of use of words and sentences, and that “It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (Including the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.)” This multiplicity, he also states, has a temporal structure: it “is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten” (PI, 23). Wittgenstein considered as an epigraph for the *Investigations* a quotation from *King Lear*—“I’ll teach you differences.” His book teaches the differences among such concepts as intending, deciding, hoping, thinking, conversing, reading, and confessing, and among the language games we play in describing things, giving orders or

measurements, making up a story, telling jokes, playing chess, and translating from one language into another.

Wittgenstein also teaches the difference between the methods of science and the methods of philosophy. As Jim Conant points out in “Putnam’s Wittgensteinianism,” a section of his introduction to *Realism with a Human Face*, Wittgenstein warns in *The Blue Book* against our “craving for generality” and its source in “our preoccupation with the method of science...., the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest number of primitive natural laws.Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness.” (RHF, xlix). This is a Wittgensteinian source for Putnam’s “vertical pluralism.”

Although Wittgenstein emphasizes the multiplicity of language games, he does not assert the multiplicity of human forms of life. He tests the limits of our human form of life—for example, in his discussions of hypothetical tribes who measure the quantity of a stack of wood by how much ground it covers, and he observes that “one human being can be a complete enigma to another” (PI, p. 223). Yet his emphasis is on what is common, on the human form of life that we share, not on ways in which we are different. He contrasts the human form of life not with other actual or possible human forms, but with those of dogs—who are said not to be capable of believing that their masters will be at the door tomorrow—and lions—whom we could not understand, even if they could speak.

There is this difference also. The pragmatist pluralists James, Goodman,

and Putnam are all epistemologists, whereas Wittgenstein is centrally concerned not with knowledge or metaphysics, but with language and philosophical psychology. In *On Certainty*, the one work of Wittgenstein's where knowledge comes to center stage, he does not assert a plurality of schemes, theories, or ways of worldmaking, but writes of a "world-picture [that is] the substratum of all my enquiring and asserting" (OC, 161). This world-picture, which includes "the existence of the earth" for many years in the past (209), is not only my picture, but "our" picture: "it gives our way of looking at things, and our researches, their form. Perhaps it was once disputed. But perhaps, for unthinkable ages, it has belonged to the *scaffolding* of our thoughts." (211).

The world-picture evolves, perhaps at a rate as slow as that of common sense as James understands it in *Pragmatism*, but Wittgenstein does not conceive of the world-picture as "knowledge." That is part of his quarrel with Moore and implicitly with James. "Why," Wittgenstein asks, "should the language-game rest on some kind of knowledge? Does a child believe that milk exists? Or does it know that milk exists? Does a cat know that a mouse exists? Are we to say that the knowledge that there are physical objects comes very early or very late? (OC, 477-9). The answer to all these questions is presumably "no," and Wittgenstein's point is that knowledge is not the foundation for our language-game. For James—at least in his pragmatist guise—and I think for Goodman, our relation to the world is fundamentally one of knowing it. With his Wittgensteinian focus on the *lebenswelt*, and his exploration of what he calls our "moral images," Putnam has a wider view of that relation.

To conclude: I have been considering some sites of pluralism that

resonate with Putnam's work in the writings of William James, Nelson Goodman, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. If Jean Wahl were updating *Pluralist Philosophies of England and America* today he would clearly have to add some more chapters. "Pluralism," like "pragmatism," "romanticism," and "religion" is a family resemblance term, (cf. VRE, 31), but running through many of its uses is the idea that there are multiple ways of understanding a given subject, range of phenomena, or just the world, with no one way adequate for a full account of it all.

It seems to me that philosophers are in a particularly good position to appreciate pluralism so construed, for two reasons. First, because we are the custodians and producers of ethical theories, and although most of us have our favorites, we also know that each of the standard models—deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics—has both strong and weak points, and that none is completely adequate to our moral intuitions and experience. So it is with philosophy itself, and this is my second reason for thinking that philosophers already have an intimate pluralistic understanding. If someone asked me what is *the* philosophy to study I would say along with my namesake Nelson Goodman: "none"; for to study philosophy is to study not just one person or theory, but a range of them. Whitehead said that all philosophy is a footnote to Plato, and Aquinas thought of Aristotle as "the philosopher," but we do not teach our students that there is just one philosopher or philosophy. James gives us a reason for our approach and a reason for believing that it will never be otherwise in his emphasis on the *humanity* and *personality* of philosophical writing. He states in *Pragmatism* that the history of philosophy is a study in individual points of view and individual temperaments, and that "the finest fruit of our ...

philosophic education” is our understanding of the “essential personal flavor” of these strange and profound views of the world (J, 502). In *A Pluralistic Universe* he writes that a philosophy is “the expression of a man’s intimate character,” and that a philosopher’s “vision is the great fact about him.”

As I think about Putnam, I keep coming back to a sort of energetic happiness expressed in all his writing, from early papers like “It Ain’t Necessarily So” through *Reason, Truth, and History* and beyond. It a joy in his own powers and insights, melded with a penetrating intellectual and moral seriousness. Putnam reminds us not only of the many faces of realism but of the many human faces of philosophy—among which his is one of our time’s most probing, imaginative, and sane.

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