

# NON-METAPHYSICAL REALISM: A DUMMETT-INSPIRED IMPLEMENTATION OF PUTNAM'S INTERNAL REALISM

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**Abstract.** The amount of realist positions put forward by philosophers of religion and theologians is impressive. One can certainly doubt whether there is a need for yet another alternative. However, most realist positions employed in studies on religion fall prey to Hilary Putnam's criticism against metaphysical realism. This gives rise to a dilemma that I aim at solving by introducing yet another realist position, namely non-metaphysical realism.

## THE ONSET OF A DILEMMA

Like many proponents of realist positions, I assume that we have need of a philosophical perspective that allows us to conceptualize and discuss utterances made in religious contexts as statements about a reality that exists independently of us and that we humans share with each other. We might not be able to justify those statements. However, such failures should not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the utterances in question are not, properly speaking, statements.

This basic assumption causes a dilemma that I believe we have to come to terms with. It arises within philosophy of religion due to some widely acclaimed arguments in realism debates within other philosophical fields. I will formulate this dilemma in personal terms since I know that not every philosopher of religion struggles with it. Its emergence rests on certain presuppositions.

On the one hand, I think that most believers understand at least some of the claims made in religious contexts as evidence-transcendent truths

concerning a shared independent reality. Consequently, a philosopher of religion aiming at analyzing religious ideas as they, in fact, are understood by believers needs access to a philosophical perspective that suggests that assertions made within religious contexts can be conceptualized in such a way. In addition to this, I believe that we philosophers need access to such a perspective since we at times have to argue that certain claims or certain activities that a particular religious context includes in fact presuppose the truth of some statements about a reality that we share with each other, even if the believers are unaware of this or explicitly deny this. Occasionally, we have to critically discuss such implicit truth-claims since they might have a negative impact on our shared social life, or yield unwanted consequences for the well-being of certain individuals.

On the other hand, I find Hilary Putnam's arguments against the philosophical perspective that he identifies as metaphysical realism convincing. My study of his reasoning caused something of a philosophical conversion in my life. Today, I take it that metaphysical realism is a philosophically untenable perspective that we have to abandon. Unfortunately, it is the most obvious option for those of us who want to conceptualize claims made in religious contexts as statements about a shared independent reality that may be evidence-transcendent truths. For this reason, some philosophers of religion are extremely unwilling to take leave of metaphysical realism. To them it seems as if a rejection of metaphysical realism would deprive us of every possibility to properly construe and justly criticize religious beliefs.

The two horns of my dilemma generate a challenging question. Can we conceptualize claims made in religious contexts as statements about a shared independent reality, statements that might be true even if we are unable to justify them, without presupposing metaphysical realism, at least not in a form that is affected by Putnam's criticism? In the following, I will elaborate an affirmative answer to this question by applying the non-metaphysical realist position that I identify and recommend. I will organize my argument in the following way: Initially, I will present metaphysical realism as it is understood by Putnam and me. Then I will summarize two lines of reasoning that I identify in Putnam's arguments against metaphysical realism and that I find convincing. In doing that, I will explicate some important presuppositions that his arguments rest on. In view of this clarification, I will distinguish what I take to be three different dimensions of the realism debates. In addition to metaphysical realism, I will define semantic realism and epistemological realism.

In light of this demarcation, I will argue that one can be a semantic realist and an epistemological realist without having to be a metaphysical realist. Lastly, I will show that this possibility includes the conclusion that I aim for.

### METAPHYSICAL REALISM

Putnam identifies metaphysical realism as a philosophical perspective comprising three central theses. His definition in *Reason, Truth and History* reads as follows:

On this perspective [i.e. metaphysical realism], the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of 'the way the world is'. Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things. I shall call this perspective the *externalist* perspective, because its favorite point of view is a God's Eye point of view.<sup>1</sup>

I will explain how I understand Putnam's characterization of metaphysical realism by adding a few clarifications to the citation. Firstly, the metaphysical realist argues that reality consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. According to me, this fixed totality of mind-independent objects can be portrayed as a reality-in-itself, a reality that might be beyond human cognition. What is important to my argument is not that this totality is fixed. Instead, it is the mind-independence that is associated with this reality-in-itself that is essential. The metaphysical realist argues that there may be objects or states of affairs in reality-in-itself which human beings cannot experience or describe. William Alston, a philosopher whom I consider to be a metaphysical realist, illustrates what this implies. Alston writes:

Isn't it highly likely that there are facts that will forever lie beyond us just because of [human] limitations? [...] The cognitive design of human beings represents only one of a large multitude of possible designs for cognitive subjects. [...] Given all this, shouldn't we take seriously the possibility that even if there is something wrong with the idea of facts that are in principle inaccessible to any cognitive subjects (and I don't see any fatal flaw in this idea), it could still be that there are many facts

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<sup>1</sup> Putnam 1981: 49.

accessible to cognizers with radically different hardware and software but totally inaccessible to us.<sup>2</sup>

In this passage, Alston opens up two possibilities. Firstly, he assumes that there can be states of affairs in reality that no cognitive subject has access to. Secondly, he claims that there may be states of affairs that only some kind of non-human cognizers have access to. What is common to both of these notions is the assumption that there may be states of affairs in reality that are completely inaccessible to human beings. This is the essence of the metaphysical realist's understanding of mind-independent reality.

Secondly, the metaphysical realist assumes that there is only one true and complete description of reality-in-itself. She needs not hold that we have access to this one true description; the fact that her 'God's-Eye point of view' is an externalist perspective in relation to us humans and to our abilities may well imply that it is impossible for us humans to formulate the one true and complete description of reality. However, this one true and complete description of reality can nevertheless exist, and it can consist of, for example, all true propositions or every claim that an omniscient God, if such a God exists, would be able to verify.

Thirdly, the metaphysical realist would argue that we speak the truth insofar as our utterances correspond to states of affairs of this independent reality. Different metaphysical realists describe this correspondence in different ways but what they all agree on is that it is entirely possible that we do not know, and cannot know, that a true statement is in fact true. We may not have any verification methods with the help of which we can find out if the utterance in question is true or false and we may never be able to access such methods. It may be that it is in principle impossible for us to know any such truths, but the utterance in question can nevertheless be true as long as it corresponds to the states of affairs of independent reality.

Putnam states that the most important consequence of metaphysical realism is that truth is supposed to be radically non-epistemic.<sup>3</sup> The metaphysical realist would argue that what is true is independent of our abilities to find out whether it is true. What is true is independent of our practice of seeking knowledge and of our criteria for when something can be said to be true. This implies that it is entirely possible that

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<sup>2</sup> Alston 1997: 64-65.

<sup>3</sup> Putnam 1978: 125.

an utterance can meet the criteria for truth that we presuppose in our practice of seeking knowledge but that the utterance may nevertheless be false. What is true is not determined by us, from an internal perspective, but rather by reality-in-itself, from an external perspective. Putnam's arguments against metaphysical realism concern this externalism. In short, Putnam argues that it doesn't make sense.

### THE UNTENABILITY OF METAPHYSICAL REALISM

Putnam repudiates metaphysical realism by composing several different arguments against it. I will concentrate on two objections that are common to some of them. The first line of reasoning emphasizes that we cannot refer to a reality-in-itself that is beyond human cognition. Therefore, we cannot state that such a reality exists. The second line of reasoning maintains that if metaphysical realism is correct, then we would not be able to communicate with each other. However, we are able to communicate with each other, we do it every day. Therefore, metaphysical realism cannot be an accurate perspective.

I will explicate these two lines of reasoning in connection to Putnam's most amusing example, namely his brains in a vat scenario.<sup>4</sup> In elaborating the first line of reasoning, Putnam argues that the metaphysical realist's thesis that we might be brains in a vat, although we are unable to discover that this is the case, is self-contradictory. It is a thesis which, if true, implies its own falsity. The reason is that we cannot refer to the metaphysical possibility that we are brains in a vat. Although such brains can think the words 'We are brains in a vat', they cannot, Putnam maintains, refer to the same things that we refer to when we use the concepts 'brain' and 'vat' (supposing that we are not brains in a vat). For this reason, they can neither think nor say that they are brains in a vat (in independent reality) even if they think or say the words 'We are brains in a vat'. The brain in a vat that thinks or says 'I am a brain in a vat' is wrong in the same sense that a person who says 'I am dreaming' is wrong when she (in the dream) is not dreaming that she is dreaming.<sup>5</sup>

This line of reasoning rests on the presupposition that the brain's words cannot, in some mysterious way, hook onto a reality-in-itself that is completely beyond the reality that the brain experiences. According

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<sup>4</sup> Putnam 1981: 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Johannesson 2007: 60-63.

to Putnam, we can never refer to such a reality-in-itself since we must interact with that which we are talking about if we are to be able to say that our words refer to that which we are talking about. Consequently, we can never correctly state that the reality-in-itself that the metaphysical realist identifies exists.<sup>6</sup>

The decisive element in the second line of reasoning can best be explained in relation to the metaphysical realist's assumption that a theory that we deem to be ideal in fact might be false.<sup>7</sup> An ideal theory is a theory that under perfect circumstances for justification meets all the operational and theoretical constraints that we can think of. The metaphysical realist holds that such a theory could be wrong. For example, the theory that we are not brains in a vat can be false even if there are no circumstances under which we can discover that this is the case.

Putnam argues that the metaphysical realist's assumption that even a theory that we consider to be ideal might be false jeopardizes human communication. The reason is that we would not be able to learn what it implies that something is true if truth and idealized justification were separated from each other in the manner that the metaphysical realist presupposes. Since truth-claims are crucial to our interpretation of each other's utterances, as Quine and Davidson point out, we have to grasp what it entails that something is true in order to learn and master a language. Since we humans do understand each other, at least now and then, the metaphysical realist's differentiation between truth and our criteria for rational acceptability has to be erroneous. If truth and idealized justification were disunited, language learning and communication would be impossible.<sup>8</sup>

According to Putnam and the internal realism that he suggests, we can only learn to talk about truth and tell the truth if our discourse on truth is related to our conceptions of sufficiently good conditions for justification. We may disagree on what constitutes sufficiently good conditions for the justification of a certain statement. Such variations do not jeopardize human communication. As long as every truth-claim is associated with some notion about what would constitute sufficiently good conditions for its justification we can understand what it implies that it is true. By identifying the situations in which a certain speaker or a certain group

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<sup>6</sup> Johannesson 2007: 63-64.

<sup>7</sup> Johannesson 2007: 78-80.

<sup>8</sup> Johannesson 2007: 99.

of speakers, i.e. a particular linguistic community, is willing to make a particular statement, we are able to interpret its meaning.<sup>9</sup>

Putnam's argumentation reveals a certain entanglement of idealized rational acceptability, truth and correct linguistic behaviour that is essential to my argument. According to Putnam's internal realism, our ideas about correct linguistic behaviour reveal what we take to be sufficiently good conditions for justification and, consequently, they are the key to our understanding of truth. To say that something is true is to say that in a situation where sufficiently good conditions for justification are realized, we would consider a speaker in that situation to be justified in making the statement in question. In other words, the statement would be a manifestation of correct linguistic behaviour.

The entanglement of idealized rational acceptability, truth and correct linguistic behaviour implies that what constitutes sufficiently good conditions for justification can be discerned in our ideas about correct linguistic behaviour. The situations in which we consider ourselves to be entitled to make a certain statement are what clarify both our ideas about sufficiently good conditions for justifying that particular statement and what it implies that the statement is true. Thus, truth emerges as closely related to our conceptual resources insofar as it is linked to the correct usage of the conceptual resources that we have access to.

This linkage between our conceptual resources and truth is vital to my reasoning. The combination of semantic and epistemological realism that I recommend is a certain exposition of it. I will account for this combination in light of a particular demarcation between different kinds of realism.

### REALISM IN THREE DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS

I will assume that there are three different dimensions to the concept of 'realism'. Since I understand 'anti-realism' as a term denoting the rejection of some kind of realism, I will correspondingly postulate that there are three different dimensions to the concept of 'anti-realism' as well.

The first dimension consists of the debate between metaphysical realists and metaphysical anti-realists. I recognize metaphysical anti-realism as an explicit rejection of metaphysical realism and its three

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<sup>9</sup> Johansson 2007: 148-150.

theses. Therefore, metaphysical anti-realism presupposes metaphysical realism in a certain sense. If metaphysical realism is unintelligible to us, then we cannot possibly understand the metaphysical anti-realist's denial of metaphysical realism either. Consequently, any criticism of metaphysical realism affects metaphysical anti-realism, as well.

The second dimension is epistemological and it concerns the existence of evidence-transcendent truths, i.e. truths that we humans cannot verify. An epistemological realist is of the opinion that there may be such truths. An epistemological anti-realist denies this.

The third dimension is semantic. My portrayal of it is closely related to Michael Dummett's work. Like Dummett, I take it that the realism debate, in its semantic form, is about which utterances we are entitled to conceive of as statements, that is, as sentences that are either true or false. If one is a semantic realist regarding a certain expression or group of utterances, then one claims that this expression or this group of utterances are statements, i.e. we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for this sentence or class of sentences. If one is an anti-realist one maintains that the saying or sayings in question cannot be properly understood as truth-claims. We are not entitled to assume that they are either true or false.<sup>10</sup>

My aim when I distinguish these three dimensions to the concepts of 'realism' and 'anti-realism' respectively is to argue that one can be a realist in one of these dimensions without having to adopt a realist position in all three dimension. Metaphysical realism is, arguably, a philosophical perspective that entails a comprehensive epistemological realism and a wide-ranging semantic realism. The metaphysical realist maintains that a certain claim about reality can be correctly understood as a statement even if we cannot imagine any situation in which conditions for its justification would be sufficiently good for us to be able determine its truth-value. Thus, she maintains that a particular statement can be true even if we do not know of any situation in which it would be correct to use it. This is an extensive semantic realism. Furthermore, she assumes that there might be truths that we cannot verify because they concern states of affairs that are beyond human cognition. This, in turn, is a comprehensive epistemological realism.

My main point is that not only the metaphysical realist but also the non-metaphysical realist can approve of a quite far-reaching semantic

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<sup>10</sup> Johannesson 2007: 176-177. Cf. Dummett 1993: 230.



realism as well as an epistemological realist position without falling prey to Putnam's criticism. I will describe this possibility by adopting the following strategy: I will take Dummett's characterization of the disagreement between semantic realists and semantic anti-realists as my point of departure. Then I will argue that we, in light of Putnam's internal realism, are entitled to be semantic realists in more cases than Dummett allows for. After that I will return to Dummett's work and show that we can achieve a corresponding expansion of epistemological realism using Putnam's internal realism.

### SEMANTIC REALISM

The question Dummett seeks to answer is the following: Under what circumstances are we entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for some class of statements? Dummett examines two alternative answers to this question. The first one is the idea that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for a given class of statements, independently of whether or not we know the truth-value of every statement in the class. The other alternative answer examined is the idea that we are only entitled to assume the principle of bivalence in cases where we are able to determine whether each individual statement in the given class is true or false.<sup>11</sup>

Dummett argues in favour of the second alternative. Accordingly, he is of the opinion that we are only entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for effectively decidable statements, i.e. utterances whose truth-value we can decide. What makes Dummett draw this conclusion is the assumption that we only know for sure that a certain class of sentences are either true or false when we are able to determine their truth-value. Like Putnam, Dummett claims that if language learning is to be at all possible, then our practice when it comes to making truth-claims and talking about what is true must relate issues about what is true to our knowledge about which statements we can verify or falsify and to the methods of verification and falsification that are available to us. However, unlike Putnam, Dummett assumes that our actual practice of verifying or falsifying statements limits our possibilities to justly claim that a certain utterance is either true or false.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Johannesson 2007: 178; Dummett 1978: xix, xxxi, 146.

<sup>12</sup> Johannesson 2007: 148, 180. Cf. Putnam 1983: 84.

According to Putnam, righteousness goes beyond justification in a sense that Dummett finds unintelligible. Putnam's and Dummett's diverging opinions concerning the relationship between truth and justification has to do with their different judgments regarding what is required for us to be able to learn a language and understand each other.

To me, it seems to be the case that if we are to be able to recognize and understand truth-claims, a capacity that is decisive for our ability to learn and master a language, we can only correctly assume that utterances that are associated with some notion of sufficiently good conditions for justification are statements.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, I agree to a certain interpretation of Putnam's position. I assume that for every utterance that we can accurately conceptualize as a statement, we can imagine a situation in which some speaker would consider herself to be justified in uttering the sentence in question. In such cases, we can understand what it implies for the utterance to be true. If we are unable to imagine any situation in which a speaker might want to utter a particular statement, we are not entitled to assume that that sentence is a statement.

The position that I advocate implies a certain enlargement of the scope of semantic realism. Inspired by Putnam, I argue that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence in further cases than Dummett admits. Most importantly, I believe that our incapacity to provide what we consider to be sufficiently good conditions for justification of a certain statement does not always entail the conclusion that the statement in question is not, properly speaking, a statement. Even if we cannot provide what we consider to be sufficiently good conditions for the justification of a certain statement we are entitled to assume that the statement is a statement as long as we can imagine some situation in which it would be correct to make the statement in question. Consequently, it is only our capacity to imagine what constitutes a correct linguistic behaviour, i.e. a correct use of a certain statement, which sets the boundaries for semantic realism.<sup>14</sup>

#### EVIDENCE-TRANSCENDENT TRUTHS

Semantic realism is linked to epistemological realism in such a way that one can only be an epistemological realist in relation to sentences that

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Johannesson 2007: 200-201.

<sup>14</sup> Johannesson 2007: 200, 204.

can be conceived of in a semantic realist way. Against the background of my assumption that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for utterances that are associated with a discernible idea of sufficiently good conditions for justification, I will explicate the kind of evidence-transcendent truths that I think we can allow for. In addition, I will identify two kinds of evidence-transcendent truths that metaphysical realists such as Alston might find comprehensible but which I find unintelligible.

Once again my point of departure will be Dummett's more limited acceptance of semantic realism. Dummett's position seems to exclude the existence of evidence-transcendent truths. However, I believe that even Dummett's position leaves a certain room for such truths.<sup>15</sup> In light of the more wide-ranging semantic realism that I advocate, this space can be extended. I will describe what this expansion implies in relation to two categories of evidence-transcendent truths that I think Dummett and like-minded philosophers have to reckon with.

Firstly, Dummett assumes that a particular statement is either verifiable or not. However, verification does not always come fully at once. A lot of the statements that we make are, for the moment, only partly verifiable. Such statements can be thought of as evidence-transcendent truths.<sup>16</sup> The non-metaphysical realist would definitely agree to this possibility since inconclusively verified truths are associated with an idea of what would constitute sufficiently good conditions for their final justification. Dummett, in turn, could assume that there are evidence-transcendent truths of this kind if he was of the opinion that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for sentences that are verifiable, but not yet conclusively verified or falsified.

Secondly, Dummett holds that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for sentences that we can verify or falsify in a finite time. If he allows this time period to be a relatively long one, then he can be of the opinion that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for sentences that we can verify or falsify in principle, though perhaps not in practice.<sup>17</sup> This is the position that I support.

Like Dummett, I assume that it is absurd to hold that a sentence can be true even though there is nothing whatever such that, if we knew of it,

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<sup>15</sup> Johannesson 2007: 192-193.

<sup>16</sup> Johannesson 2007: 192.

<sup>17</sup> Johannesson 2007: 192-193.

we should count it as evidence or ground for the truth of the statement.<sup>18</sup> This is the essence of the assumption that every statement has to be associated with some idea concerning what constitutes sufficiently good conditions for its justification. However, unlike Dummett I believe that we do not have to be in possession of so much evidence that we can verify a certain statement in order for us to be able to rightly conclude that it is a statement.

In fact, occasionally we can rightly argue that a certain statement has truth-conditions which are satisfied, or which are not satisfied, even if there is neither any evidence supporting the conclusion that the statement is true, nor any evidence supporting the conclusion that it is false. Admittedly, every statement cannot be of this kind. In that case, we would not be able to learn what it implies that something is true and, consequently, we would be unable to learn a language. However, once we master a language, we can sometimes justly claim that the principle of bivalence applies to a certain statement even if we haven't got a clue as to its truth-value.<sup>19</sup>

If one reasons as I do, there is a rather large space for evidence-transcendent truths. However, two kinds of evidence-transcendent truths that the metaphysical realist might want to reckon with are excluded. Firstly, my non-metaphysical realist perspective excludes the possibility that there might be truths for which we cannot envision sufficiently good conditions for justification. If we do not know when it would be correct for us to make a certain statement, we cannot meaningfully imagine what it implies that the statement in question is an evidence-transcendent truth.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, we cannot meaningfully imagine the possibility that there might be evidence-transcendent truths that we cannot formulate, using our conceptual resources. Arguably, there are truths that I as an individual cannot express. However, we cannot comprehend the existence of truths which are altogether beyond human conceptualization.<sup>21</sup> The entanglement of truth, idealized justification and correct linguistic behaviour excludes this kind of evidence-transcendent truths. Nevertheless, I believe that we are entitled to conceptualize truth as in

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<sup>18</sup> Dummett 1978: 15.

<sup>19</sup> Johannesson 2007: 193-194.

<sup>20</sup> Johannesson 2007: 162.

<sup>21</sup> Johannesson 2007: 161.

a certain sense independent of us and our language. Next, I will turn to the interdependence between semantic realism and ontological issues in order to explain how this is possible.

#### STATEMENTS ABOUT A SHARED INDEPENDENT REALITY

According to Dummett and Putnam, our approach to semantic realism affects not only our possibilities of assuming that there are evidence-transcendent truths, but also our view of the constitution of reality. This is because there is a correlation between true sentences and facts. The correlation entails that there can be no facts, no states of affairs in reality, which we are unable to express in statements, using our conceptual resources.

Admittedly, what this implies is that in a certain sense, that which exists independently of us and our language depends on us and our language. Our ability to imagine states of affairs in reality presupposes our concept formation and our practice of justifying statements. To some, for example to Alston, this might seem as an obvious rejection of the claim that many believe sets realism apart, namely the claim that reality is independent of us human beings and our outlook. Furthermore, since conceptual resources and ideas about what would constitute sufficiently good conditions for the justification of a certain statement vary across temporal and cultural boundaries, this dependence may appear to result in the conclusion that we can never justly claim that a certain statement is true for everyone, even for ancient people who did not speak the language by means of which the statement is expressed.

However, the fact that we need access to some set of conceptual resources in order to express a statement does not necessarily imply that a certain statement is true only for speakers of a particular language or that it would cease to be true if no speakers were to be found. That this conclusion doesn't follow depends on our possibility to conceptualize truths as objective and true to us all by universalizing our current conceptual scheme.

I will illustrate what such a generalization entails with the help of an example. We consider the statement 'The sky is blue' to be true. This means that, according to us, the sky would have been blue even if our conceptual resources had been radically different and we had had completely different concepts of colour. Furthermore, we believe that

the sky would have been blue even if there had been no human beings around to state that the sky is blue. In this regard, the colour of the sky is, according to us, independent of us.<sup>22</sup>

However, the fact that the sky is blue, and the statement that it is blue, cannot exist independently of us and our conceptual resources. Independently of us and our conceptual resources, the fact that the sky is blue cannot be discerned, and the statement that the sky is blue cannot be formulated. Thus, in a certain sense, it is we and the decisions we make when we develop our conceptual resources that determine what might be a fact.<sup>23</sup>

However, this does not imply that we cannot conceptualize statements as about a shared independent reality or justly claim that they, if they are true, are true for everyone; quite the opposite. By assuming a particular conception of what might constitute sufficiently good conditions for the justification of a certain statement, we can maintain that the statement in question is true (or false) not only for us but also for people who do not share our conceptual resources or our conception of what constitutes sufficiently good conditions for justification.

The core of this claim might be summarized as follows: When we make a statement we assume that what it implies for this statement to be true is that, if a speaker who masters our language and finds herself in a situation where sufficiently good conditions for justification are realized (i.e. sufficiently good conditions according to our standards) were to make the statement in question, she would be fully warranted in accepting that statement as true. In universalizing our current conceptual scheme, we are universalizing our conceptions of sufficiently good conditions for justification as well as our conceptual resources. By doing that, we are able to claim that a certain statement is true independently of us and to us all. Whether this claim is correct or not can subsequently be discussed, even among people who do not share the same conception of sufficiently good conditions for justification for this particular statement.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I will return to the two horns of the dilemma that is the upshot of my argument. On the one hand, I take it that we need access

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<sup>22</sup> Putnam 1996: 302; Johannesson 2007: 146-147.

<sup>23</sup> Putnam 1996: 302; Johannesson 2007: 146-147.

to a philosophical perspective that suggests that assertions made in religious contexts can be conceptualized as statements about a shared independent reality, statements that might be true even if we are unable to justify them. On the other hand, I believe that we cannot make use of the metaphysical realist perspective since language-learning and human communication appear to be a complete mystery if our discourse on truth and our notions about sufficiently good conditions of justification and correct linguistic behaviour are isolated from each other.

The solution that I propose is a particular realist outlook. It consists in a certain combination of semantic realism and epistemological realism and it can be summarized as follows:

- (1) We are entitled to assume that a certain utterance is a statement, i.e. that it is either true or false, if it is associated with a particular conception of what constitutes sufficiently good conditions for its justification, a conception that we can discern by identifying in what situation it would be appropriate to make the statement or conclude that it is false.
- (2) We are entitled to conceptualize an unverified statement as an evidence-transcendent truth if we can imagine its justification and would recognize a situation in which it would be appropriate to make the statement.
- (3) We are entitled to conceive of a particular truth-claim as being about an independent reality that is common to all of us in those cases where we can universalize a certain set of linguistic resources and a particular conception of sufficiently good conditions for its justification.

By adopting this kind of realism, i.e. non-metaphysical realism, I believe that we can conceptualize certain religious claims as statements and as an evidence-transcendent truth about an independent reality that we share with each other without being affected by Putnam's criticism of metaphysical realism. Furthermore, in light of this kind of realism the task to distinguish and critically discuss different opinions about what would constitute sufficiently good conditions for the justification of frequently occurring religious statements stands out as a major task for the philosopher of religion. In carrying out this kind of work, I think that the philosopher can contribute an analysis that can be useful also for theologians and religious people since it might, for example, help people to overcome religious doubts or facilitate the dialogue between different

religious traditions. This is a major advantage according to those of us who believe that philosophical work should be of relevance also to others than the ones conducting it.

*Acknowledgment.* This paper was originally presented in Mainz, Germany, at a conference for the Analytic Theology Project, generously funded by the John Templeton Foundation.

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