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DICHOTOMIES AND ARTIFACTS:
A REPLY TO PROFESSOR HOOKWAY

ABSTRACT. In this reply to Professor Hookway's lecture the comments are focused, first, on the topic of what dichotomies really are, since it is an illuminating way of understanding pragmatism in general and Putnam's pragmatism in particular. Dichotomies are artifacts that we devise with some useful purpose in mind, but when inflated into absolute dichotomies they become metaphysical bogeys as it is illustrated by the twentieth century distinction between fact and value. Secondly, a brief comment on the so-called "thick" ethical concepts and artifact terms is presented, and finally it is added a word on John L. Austin, whose approach to dichotomies is aligned with pragmatism and Putnam.

> The familiar contrast of "normative or evaluative" as opposed to the factual is in need, like so many dichotomies, of elimination.
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> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), Lecture XII.

Professor Hookway's lecture concerns a key issue, perhaps *the* key issue of Hilary Putnam's reflections in recent years: the putative dichotomy of fact and values – inherited from the empiricism of the Vienna Circle – that has distorted the vision of a good number of philosophers of the twentieth century. In his brilliant lecture, Hookway pays particular attention to the first and second chapters of *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*, and to its final chapter: "The Philosophers of Science's Evasion of Values" (Putnam 2002).

In my brief comments I will deal first with the topic of dichotomies, which is an illuminating way of understanding pragmatism in general and

Putnam's pragmatism in particular; second, a comment on the so-called "thick" ethical concepts and artifact terms, and finally a word on John L. Austin, from whom I have selected a quote as a motto for my paper.

1. Dichotomies

First of all, I want to say in advance that I am in agreement with Hookway's general presentation of Putnam's approach to distinctions and dichotomies. I will add here some comments of a historical and lexicographic character in order to gain a clearer view of the whole issue that may help to understand better pragmatism in general and Putnam's pragmatism in particular.

In the introduction to *Classical American Philosophy*, a collection of writings of Peirce, James, Royce, Santayana, Dewey and Mead, John J. Stuhr identifies seven characteristics that constitute a "family resemblance" amongst the six major American pragmatist philosophers. The first such characteristic is the rejection of modern philosophy's "dualism," i.e. its habit of articulating and defending its positions in terms of dichotomies: subject/object, mind/matter, appearance/reality, theory/practice, facts/values, individual/community, and so on. Stuhr explains:

> Classical American philosophers did not refuse to use these terms; instead their point was that these notions refer to distinctions made in thought rather to different kinds of being or levels of existence. That is, these terms have a functional rather an ontological status; they stand for useful distinctions made within reflection, and not for different kinds of being, discrete and separate prior to reflection. (Stuhr 1987, p. 5)

In *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* Hilary Putnam aligns himself with this honorable tradition, crediting John Dewey's lifelong battle against dualisms as a source of inspiration For Putnam, distinctions are not dualisms or dichotomies (Putnam 2002, p. 9). "The errors [. . .]" – Hookway writes – "arise only when such distinctions are transformed into "dichotomies." Indeed Putnam agrees with Dewey that, in these cases we need both to understand "the importance of respecting the distinction" [Putnam 2002, p. 10] while recognizing the damaging effects of inflating it into a dichotomy" (Hookway 2004, pp. 1-2). On Putnam's account, harmless and innocent distinctions become – at least in some cases – metaphysical bogeys when inflated into absolute dichotomies. "One difference between an ordinary distinction and a metaphysical

dichotomy [is that] ordinary distinctions have ranges of application, and we are not surprised if they do not always apply" (Putnam 2002, p. 11).

But let us stop here for a while. What is a dichotomy? In order to answer this type of question I always love to go to Baldwin's *Dictionary* (1901-1905), which from time to time gives the gift of an entry by Charles S. Peirce. In the case of "dichotomy" the entry is by Robert Adamson, professor of Logic at Glasgow University, but Peirce is the co-author of a related entry "Dualism (in Philosophy)." Here is Peirce's definition of 'dualism':

> (1) A general tendency to divide any genus of objects of philosophical thought into two widely separate categories, as saints and sinners, truth and falsehood, &c.; opposed to the tendency to look for gradations intermediate between contraries. Especially (2) any theory which explains the facts of the universe by referring them to the action of two independent and eternally coexistent principles. (Baldwin 1901-1905, I, p. 298)

In his entry on "dichotomy," Adamson explains that a dichotomy is "a form of logical division in which, at each step, the genus is separated into two species, determined by the possession and non possession, the presence and absence, of a mark or attribute. The species so determined satisfy the rules of division: they exclude one another, and they exhaust the extent of the genus divided." Adamson describes cursorily the use of dichotomy by Plato and Aristotle, and suggests that the method of division by dichotomy "lies at the foundation of Jevons' and indeed of all symbolic logic," because it "expresses the fundamental distinction in thought between position and negation" (Baldwin 1901-1905, I, p. 279).

The point I want to stress is that a "dichotomy" is mainly a form of logical division, of classification; that dichotomies appear when and where there are human beings thinking, classifying, establishing classes, collections and categories. To assert a dichotomy is to cut something into two parts which are "mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive" (Brody 1967, p. 60). This cut is a logical one, made by our reflection: it could be said that if were nobody to do the cutting there would be no dichotomies. I like to tell my students that in the middle of the sun there are no problems; that problems only appear where there are human beings thinking. The same could be said of dichotomies. In the world there are no dichotomies, but only continuity and interaction. Along this way, the only two ontological usages of 'dichotomy' found in dictionaries – for instance the *Oxford English Dictionary* – come from astronomy ("That phase of the moon, (or of an inferior planet) at which exactly half the

disk appears illuminated") and from botany ("A form of branching in which each successive axis divides into two; repeated bifurcation").

But the phenomenon that Putnam has detected is the metaphysical inflation of a distinction that transforms a logical division into a metaphysical dichotomy, "thought to be philosophically obligatory, *both* sides of the distinction were thought to be natural kinds, each a category whose members possessed an "essential property" in common" (Putnam 2002, p. 13). This could be a new usage of the term 'dichotomy'. We human beings are very fond of making this type of division into two parts, and then promptly to forget that the division was made by *us*, with some practical purpose in mind in each case. We are tempted to believe that reality is divided in two according our dichotomy. As Putnam shows in detail, the transformation of a distinction into a metaphysical dichotomy turns the distinction into a Procrustean bed (cf. Putnam 2002, p. 27). Let's recall the story from Greek mythology: Procrustes was a bandit from Attica who had a bed which he invited passersby to lie down in. Those who were shorter than the bed he would stretch until they fit, while those who were too tall would have their legs chopped short.

2. Ethical Concepts and Artifact Terms

In his book, Putnam demonstrates convincingly that "the fact/value dichotomy is, at bottom, not a *distinction* but a *thesis*, namely the thesis that "ethics" is not about "matters of fact"" (Putnam 2002, p. 19). Putnam identifies three reasons why we are tempted to establish the fact/value dichotomy. The first (and more dangerous) reason is that, like the Procrustean bed, this dichotomy is a way of cutting off not only rational argument about values, but even thought: "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" (Putnam 2002, p. 44). As Putnam has written extensively elsewhere "a central insight in Dewey's ethics (and all of Dewey's work is in one way or another connected with "ethics") is that *the application of intelligence to moral problems is itself a moral obligation*" (Putnam 2000, p. 10). This is the core of pragmatism and the distinctive mark of philosophy itself, and has been in the heart and in the texts of Putnam for at least the last two decades. Philosophy, as understood and lived by him, is "to do what Socrates tried to teach us: to examine who we are and what our deepest convictions are and hold those convictions up to the searching test of reflective examination" (Putnam 2002, p. 44).

In his lecture, Chris Hookway pays special attention to the entanglement of fact and value that appears in the use of words like 'cruel', that have a mixed descriptive and normative function. Putnam holds that "the so-called thick ethical concepts are counterexamples to the claim that there is an absolute fact/value dichotomy" (Hookway 2004, p. 4; cf. Putnam 2002, p. 35), and he adds that this has long been pointed out by Philippa Foot, Iris Murdoch, John MacDowell and David Wiggins in their criticisms of the dichotomy. Putnam discusses with some detail the answers of R.M. Hare and John Mackie to those criticisms, but before doing so he announces that a possible Humean response would be just to banish all thick ethical concepts to the limbo of the "emotive" or "noncognitive" right along with the "thin" ones ("good," "ought," "right" *et al.*). This would be a highly impoverished language. Putnam continues,

> For a Spanish reader this historical reference Not even David Hume would be willing to classify, for example, "generous," "elegant," "skillful," "strong," "gauche," "weak," or "vulgar" as concepts to which no "fact" corresponds (Putnam 2002, 35). [And in a footnote Putnam adds] The words quoted in this sentence were listed as examples by José Ortega y Gasset, who noticed the phenomenon of entanglement very early. See his *Obras Completas*, vol. 6 (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1923). (Putnam 2002, pp. 317 and 320-321)

For a Spanish reader this historical reference – which already appears in Putnam's "Pragmatism and Relativism: Universal Values and Traditional Ways of Life" (Putnam 1994, pp. 188-189) – makes a lot of sense. The quotation from Ortega proceeds from his "Introducción a la estimativa" of 1918: it was his address for entering into the "*Real Academia de Ciencias Morales y Políticas*" of Spain. I have defended for years – with small success until now! – the deep affinity between American pragmatism and Hispanic philosophers of the early decades of the twentieth century, such as Unanumo, Ortega and d'Ors (Nubiola 1998). In the case of Ortega, John Graham published in 1994 a careful study in which, after noting Ortega's hostility to American pragmatism, he reveals "many basic connections, similarities and points of identity, so that concrete influence and dependence seem more plausible than "coincidence" between Ortega and James." Graham gives evidence that Ortega read James early in his career, and that Ortega was aware that James had anticipated the notion central to his of "*razón vital*" (Graham 1994, pp. 145 and 147-152; see also Barzun 1984, p. 299). His evidence of James' influences on Ortega by German sources themselves influenced by James is specially convincing (Donoso 1995, p. 499).

Back to the main line of my comment: Putnam's discussion of these thick ethical concepts show clearly the deep entanglement of fact and value or – what in the end is the same – that the dichotomy, as a sharp division, is really impossible, as it is said by Claudine Tiercelin in her delightful book on Putnam:

> The border between fact and value is faint: the terms considered to have a function of ethical evaluation have also a descriptive explicative and predictive function. When somebody is qualified as "scrupulous," at the same time one evaluates his or her character, one describes it. Understanding a human being is a mixture of estimation of his or her character and of explication and prediction of his or her actions'. (Tiercelin 2002, p. 50)

In his lecture, Hookway skillfully describes the problem of the mixture of evaluation and description that appears in these thick ethical concepts. However, for me the most interesting aspect is the unexpected turn that his reflection makes when he asks himself how far this strategy extends:

> Is it applied solely to words (like 'cruel' and 'kind', for example) that really do seem to have a centrally ethical or evaluative use? The question is: if this argument works for thick ethical concepts, how far does its application extend? Are there concepts that we would superficially think of as "descriptive" to which it applies? (Hookway 2004, p. 5).

Hookway chooses an excellent example in order to test the extension of the "semantic strategy" against the fact/value distinction: a 'lamp'. This is the name of an artifact that surreptitiously – it is the same with all artifacts – reintroduces in the scene a mixture of description and evaluation:

> We might think of a "lamp" as a wholly descriptive concept – certainly it does not embody any *ethical* evaluation. But identifying something as a lamp involves regarding it as having a distinctive *use*, as meeting some need or purpose. Nobody who failed to grasp how lamps are used, nobody who could not evaluate how suitable something was to meet the needs which lamps are designed to need, could properly apply the concept of a lamp as we do: a sensitivity to how we evaluate things as meeting the needs which lamps are designed to meet seems to be required for applying the term and assessing what falls in its extension. (Hookway 2004, p. 5)

What is it to be a lamp? Is 'lamp' in fact a pure descriptive term, or does not its use involve some evaluation about the extension of the concept? As most of the readers of this volume know, Putnam's view on

natural-kind terms as indexical can be extended also to artifacts. 'Pencil', 'chair' or 'bottle' were the terms used by Putnam as paradigmatic examples in "The Meaning of 'Meaning'":

> [. . .] 'pencil' is not synonymous with any description – not even loosely synonymous with a loose description. When we use a word 'pencil', we intend to refer to whatever has the same nature as the normal examples of the local pencils in the actual world. 'Pencil' is just as indexical as 'water' or 'gold'. (Putnam 1975, p. 243)

According to Putnam, the nature of a pencil or of a lamp is not some mysterious structure underlying the surface characteristics of the object (for a discussion of this issue, see S.P. Schwartz 1978 and H. Kornblith 1980). With Aristotle we can say that the essence of an artifact is extrinsic to the artifact, is its utility, while the matter of its composition is accidental (Aristotle, *Physics* II, 2, 1929b 8-20): the function or utility of the artifact is the nature referred to by the user of the term 'lamp' or 'pencil'.

Moreover, when we think about what it is to be a "proper lamp" or a "good lamp," we realize that there is some hidden evaluation that governs the pragmatic application of the term, as Hookway's argument suggests. I agree with that, but my minor reply is that there are no sharp boundaries about what it is to be a lamp: a broken lamp or a miner's lamp are also lamps, in spite of the fact that I cannot use them on my desk. (By the way, Hookway has credited Peirce for the example of the lamp, and looking in Peirce's *Collected Papers* I found that there are eight occurrences of 'lamp' there, and one of them is "Aladdin's lamp"! [Peirce 1931-1958, 6.552, 1887]) Let me quote here one of Wittgenstein's comments about lamps and their boundaries in his *Philosophical Investigations*:

> One may say of certain objects that they have this or that purpose. The essential thing is that this is a lamp, that it serves to give light; – that it is an ornament to the room, fills an empty space, etc., is not essential. But there is not always a sharp distinction between essential and inessential. (Wittgenstein 1953, p. 62)

Having all this in mind, the last point I want to make in this section is that any dichotomy, like the fact/value dichotomy (which has been consistently rejected by Putnam as a metaphysical bogey), is also an *artifact*, a product of the human mind. It seems to me really important to realize that "dichotomies" are tools like lamps, drawn to get a clearer view of some area of philosophical discussion or in this case – as it was said earlier – unfortunately to stop any discussion at all. The making of

dichotomies was perhaps seen by the vast majority of our colleagues in the past century as a useful tool to make philosophical progress; thanks, however, to Putnam's work we now realize that this distinction, especially when metaphysically inflated, blocks inquiry and distorts our view of rationality and human flourishing. We know now what the classic pragmatists already knew: that facts and values interpenetrate, that "value judgments are essential to the practice of science itself" (Putnam 2002, p. 135). From a practical point of view, we have learned that the dichotomy between value judgments and judgments of facts was not really a dichotomy, i.e. a division of the judgments into two sub-classes mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive. Rather, it was an ideological thesis made in order to avoid philosophical discussion about values. This provides ample reason for the negative overtones of the term 'dichotomy' in Putnam's writings.

3. A Final Word on J.L. Austin

Almost thirty years ago I did my licentiate thesis on John Austin's analysis of truth, working closely on his William James Lectures (delivered at Harvard in 1955 and published posthumously as *How to Do Things with Words*). Over the last ten years I have been teaching regularly Austin's philosophy of language, and I am persuaded of the deep affinity between Austin and the pragmatist tradition. In a footnote to chapter seven of *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*, Putnam writes: "Most of the points I have attributed to "American pragmatism" in this chapter are also made by Austin – who, like Murdoch, appears not to have read the pragmatists" (Putnam 2002, p. 171, n. 24). My impression is that the view of language that Austin presents in the last lecture of *How to Do Things with Words* fits pretty well with a pragmatist approach to language.

But the point I want to highlight here is not only that John Austin, like Putnam, advocates the elimination of the contrast between the normative or evaluative and the factual, but he characterizes of this dichotomy in lecture XII as a "*fetish*." According to the dictionary, a fetish is something "that is worshiped, because a spirit is believed to live in it," or "to which more respect or attention is given than is normal or sensible" (Cowie 1990, p. 449). What Hilary Putnam has shown is that the "scientific spirit" that was embodied by that fetish is simply unscientific, and not only does not deserve any respect at all, but on the contrary has to be denounced systematically as a treason to philosophy

and an attack on human flourishing. This is one of the treasures of the heritage of American pragmatism, and Putnam has been instrumental and influential in its rediscovery.

Acknowledgements

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