

The Many Faces of Religious Truth.

Developing Hilary Putnam's Pragmatic Pluralism into an Alternative for Religious Realism and Antirealism

De vele gezichten van waarheid in religie.

Een uitwerking van Hilary Putnams pragmatisch pluralisme
als alternatief voor religieus realisme en antirealisme

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Utrecht op gezag van de rector magnificus, prof.dr. G.J. van der Zwaan, ingevolge het besluit van het college voor promoties in het openbaar te verdedigen op vrijdag 21 december 2012 des middags te 2.30 uur

door

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geboren op 8 september 1981 te Culemborg

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“Don’t ever try to make the truth seem false,
but always be humble about things you don’t know.”

Wisdom of Jesus Sirach 4,25; Contemporary English Version

“Verzet je niet tegen de waarheid
en wees je bewust van je onwetendheid.”

Wijsheid van Jezus Sirach 4,25; Willibrordvertaling

Preface

This study, which draws up a pragmatic pluralist perspective on religious propositions, aims to link up with actual human practices and beliefs, and to refrain from superimposing notions of truth on religious practices that are not their own. Religions do not employ the same notion of truth-value as the physical sciences do, but this does not imply that religious propositions cannot be true or false. I thus do not accept a skepticism that characterizes many contemporary views on (religious) truth. We should not make things so dear and close to us - and sometimes so true - seem false. At the same time the perspective I develop aims to do justice to the fact that there are various, sometimes conflicting religious and non-religious propositions. I believe this is because our propositions are fallible. We interact with various aspects of reality, but the knowledge we gain is not unrevisable.

Truth of course goes far beyond the truth-value of propositions: speaking the truth is but one manner in which one can be true or truthful. Also, religiosity far outruns holding or discarding particular propositions: religious practices speak through so much more than words. Nonetheless, history and present teach us that unreflectively holding on to supposed truths can lead to dishonest and unfaithful - untruthful - acts towards people, other animals, nature, and the world as it could be. I argue that though we have good reasons to refrain from denying that there can be true religious propositions, we have good reasons too to always reflect on them critically. I hope this study attests to my conviction that we should always balance a passion for what we take to be important truths, on the one hand, and being aware of the limitations of one's comprehension, on the other.

In the process of writing this dissertation at Utrecht University, and at Harvard University as Fulbright Visiting Researcher, I had countless great opportunities to face the limits of my comprehension, and to gain new skills and insights from others. I am utmost grateful for these opportunities and seized them with great pleasure. I thank my promoter and co-promoter for their boundless commitments, and all those - at Utrecht University, at NOSTER, at Harvard University, at K.U.Leuven, and at conferences - whom I bothered with ideas in various stages of their ripeness. I thank my parents, my family(-in-law), my friends, and above all my wife, for surrounding me with what I believe is indispensable in writing a thesis: a loving kindness that unreservedly allows one to think, make difficult choices, try, try again, and to succeed - in a word: to live and to grow.

Niek Brunsveld

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1.

Introduction: The truth-value of religious propositions

This study investigates whether religious propositions can in principle be true or false, and what it would mean for them to be true or false, if they are. It addresses the question, in other words, whether religious propositions are truth-apt, and if so, what their truth-conditions would be. In what follows, I will refer to this question as the question about the truth-value of religious propositions. I analyze paradigmatic religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions, and develop a pragmatic pluralist perspective on the same on the basis of an analysis of Hilary Putnam's notions of truth and experience. In this Introduction, I show why this question is a pertinent question, present how this study aims to answer it, explain a number of central notions, and reveal what the argumentation line consists in.

1.1 Reasoning about religious propositions today

This study provides a conceptual analysis of an important aspect of religiosity, namely the potential truth-value of religious propositions. As a theoretical investigation about religious propositions, it develops a framework within which questions can be dealt with such as why there are so many conflicting religious propositions, stemming from different religious traditions, and why we should take religious and natural scientific propositions to conflict with one another. I briefly describe the societal background of the problem basic to this investigation, the question that we address, and the hypothesis formulated on the basis of it.

1.1.1 Research background and problem

We start from the observation that today, on the one hand, a majority of people call themselves religious and are affiliated with one of the countless religious traditions,¹ and that, on the other hand, in many parts of the world

¹ While exact numbers are not available, Robert Martin et al., *World Religions Quicklist* (Online Source: The Association of Religion Data Archives,[2005]) shows that of the world population about 10 percent are agnostic and about 2 percent atheistic. A large majority is affiliate of one of the various religions. While these are of course approximate numbers, and

the truth-value of religious discourse is subject of debate, e.g. either because of conflicts between two or more religious traditions or because of conflicting insights between religious and non-religious practices.

One of the many examples of recent, far-going conflicts between religious traditions that attest to the problematic nature of religious truth-claims is the currently violent clashes between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslim groups in the Middle-East, which are in part based on different truth-claims about who was the rightful successor of the Prophet Muhammad. While violent conflicts most likely also have cultural and other causes, they are at least legitimized with conflicting religious propositions.² One of many examples of clashes between religious and non-religious practices that demonstrate the problematic nature of religious propositions is the debate about the origin of life between creationists, who argue mostly from a religious standpoint, and evolutionists, who approach this question from a non-religious, natural scientific view.³

The examples show that religion remains a very important aspect of the lives of many people in many parts of the world. Religious views, on which is the right religious tradition, on what the right views are on the origin of life, and on what conduct is to be permitted, influence politics all around the world. Concurrently, the secularization thesis, which holds that with the modernization of society religion becomes less central in the various domains of life,⁴ is progressively problematized, from various angles.⁵ The

while they do not necessarily show that people are actively religious, it does attest to how widespread religiosity is.

² Cf. Alyssa Fetini, "Understanding the Sunni-Shi'ite Divide," *Time World*, 16 September 2009.

³ For a balanced introduction to the debate from the viewpoint of evolutionists, see e.g. Committee on Revising Science and Creationism, *Science, Evolution, and Creationism*, ed. Francisco J. Ayala (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2007).

⁴ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Doubleday, 1967). What the secularization thesis consists in is subject to debate. I understand it to have meant not so much the disappearance of religion by modernization but a change of its role in society. Cf. Steve Bruce, *Religion and Modernization: Historians and Sociologists Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

⁵ See e.g. Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Peter L. Berger, "The Desecularisation of the World: A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999), 1-18; and Rosi Braidotti, "In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 6 (2008), 1-24.

role of religiosity in the lives of people, and in the public sphere has changed, but the idea that with modernization religion will slowly but surely fade away cannot be sustained. Religion plays an undeniably important role in human lives around the world.

The role of religion did change drastically, however, and religiosity and religious discourse are no longer unproblematic aspects of human reality. Contrary to a few centuries or even a few decades ago,⁶ religious reasoning in many parts of the world is nowadays hardly a widely accepted form of reasoning like non-religious forms such as scientific reasoning.⁷ Furthermore, given the plurality of outlooks, no worldview remains uncontested if it claims a hegemonic position in articulating and defending particular values basic to the public sphere. Whether religious propositions have truth-value is subject to debate, nowadays. Religions often make truth-claims and there are apparent conflicts among religious propositions and between religious and non-religious propositions. The problem behind this study, then, is that on the one hand, religiosity remains an important factor in human life, but on the other hand, whether, how, and which religious propositions have truth-value is heavily contested.

1.1.2 Research question and approach

The question that this study addresses is whether and how, on a fundamental conceptual level, religious propositions can be thought to have truth-value, and what the truth-conditions of religious propositions would consist in. As I aim to approach this question on a fundamental conceptual level, I reflect on it from a philosophy of religion perspective that stands firmly in philosophy of language and mind, and to a lesser extent in epistemology and metaphysics. It thus provides a perspective on the question whether we can, in contemporary societies, take religious discourse to have truth-value, and how. As such, it gives insight in whether and how, from a philosophy of

⁶ See e.g. Detlef Pollack, "Religious Change in Europe: Theoretical Considerations and Empirical Findings," *Social Compass* 55, no. 2 (2008), 168-186, for an analysis of the differences of church and religious membership between generations in Europe. It also shows that a particular understanding of the secularization thesis is still adequate in explaining the changed European situation.

⁷ See e.g. Hans Joas, "Social Theory and the Sacred: A Response to John Milbank," *Ethical Perspectives* 7, no. 4 (2000), 233-243; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and I. U. Dalferth, "Post-Secular Society: Christianity and the Dialectics of the Secular," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 2 (2010), 317-345.

language and mind point of view, conflicts among religious propositions and between religious and non-religious propositions can be approached.

The answer to the question of the truth-value of religious propositions should be tenable on a level of philosophy of language and mind, and be epistemologically viable. I analyze the religious realist and antirealist perspective, as well as draw up the religious pragmatic pluralist alternative. In doing so, what this study looks for is an account of what makes religious propositions true or false that is tenable, but that also at least in principle allows for the truth or falsity of religious propositions to be known. It concurs with what Paul Benacerraf describes, in relation to the truth of mathematical propositions, as an adequate account of the nature of mathematical truth.

It is my contention that two quite distinct kinds of concerns have separately motivated accounts of the nature of mathematical truth: (1) the concern for having a homogeneous semantical theory in which semantics for the propositions of mathematics parallel the semantics for the rest of the language, and (2) the concern that the account of mathematical truth mesh with a reasonable epistemology. ... I believe further that both concerns must be met by any adequate account.⁸

An adequate account of the nature of religious truth (i.e. of the truth-value of religious propositions) should thus not only have a harmonized semantical theory but should also leave it possible to make true and false religious propositions. Other than mathematical propositions, however, which have a more or less unified notion of truth-value, religious propositions are more diverse (as I will briefly address in 1.2.2), which requires leaving open the possibility that among religious propositions there are multiple, yet harmonized notions of truth-value. In order to get to such an account, I will critically analyze religious realist and antirealist perspectives in this light, and draw up a religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the same with this requirement on the background.

1.1.3 Research hypotheses and strategy

In Part I, I analyze two paradigmatic perspectives on whether religious propositions can have truth-value, namely religious realism (in Chapter 2) and religious antirealism (in Chapter 3). I draw up the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on religious propositions on the basis of an exploration of realism and antirealism in general. This results in two

⁸ Paul Benacerraf, "Mathematical Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 19 (1973), 661.

paradigmatic religious realist and two paradigmatic religious antirealist perspectives. I analyze these perspectives with regard to whether they manage to answer the question about the truth-value of religious propositions. It will become apparent that all four propositions have difficulty arguing why religious propositions can or cannot have truth-value. Central to these difficulties are their notions of truth and experience. In concluding the analysis of religious realist and antirealist perspectives on religious propositions (in Chapter 4), I show what aspects of truth and experience are especially problematic. In the religious realist and antirealist perspectives, briefly put, truth either consists in a one-on-one correspondence of our concepts and external objects or, alternatively, it amounts to whatever one's society takes as verified. In both cases, truth is taken to be a substantive property that propositions gain in virtue of their fulfillment of fixed conditions. As I show, these conditions are unattainable. Experience is thought to be either conceptualized and indirect or unconceptualized and direct. In both cases, experience cannot be a cognitive affair. Part I thus shows that in these paradigmatic views on the question, their respective notions of truth and experience lead to difficulties in answering whether and why religious propositions have truth-value.

This then allows for further specification of the research hypothesis, at the start of Part II. On the basis of Part I, I hypothesize that an alternative perspective on truth, as neither unique correspondence nor mere verification, and on experience, as neither conceptualized but indirect nor direct but unconceptualized, will allow for drawing up an alternative perspective on religious propositions that evades the difficulties that religious realism and antirealism face. For these alternative perspectives on truth and experience, I turn to Hilary Putnam's (1926-) viewpoints in philosophy language, philosophy of mind, and epistemology. Putnam used to endorse the perspective that is behind the religious realist perspective, but later came to criticize it fundamentally.⁹ His subsequent (internal realist) perspective came close to an antirealist perspective, which is behind the religious antirealist perspective. On the basis of his endorsement and criticism of both positions, Putnam developed an alternative, pragmatic

⁹ Although there is a strong continuity in Putnam's thinking Hilary Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) and Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) mark his transition from a metaphysical realist to an internal realist position, while Hilary Putnam, *Representation and Reality* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988) and Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) mark a transition to a pragmatic pluralist position.

pluralist perspective that aims to evade the fundamental difficulties that underlie both perspectives. Putnam's notion of truth is neither a substantive notion of unique correspondence or of verification, and his notion of experience is that it is both direct and conceptualized.

Turning to Putnam's criticism of the perspectives on truth and experience behind religious realism and antirealism (in Chapter 5) deepens our understanding of the problems of the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on religious propositions. It reveals which aspects of the notions of truth and experience should be evaded. Furthermore, my analysis of Putnam's notion of truth (in Chapter 6) and experience (in Chapter 7), shows that Putnam evades fundamental difficulties that both the realist and antirealist views on truth and experience run into. In his pragmatic pluralist perspective, truth is a formal, interactional notion. It is realist in the sense that the truth-value of propositions ultimately depends on reality, but it takes it that it depends on the various practices or conceptual schemes of human reasoning which conditions apply. Furthermore, experience is a transactional notion. Those experiences of which we are aware are direct and at the same time conceptualized. This allows them to play a cognitive role, and to come to true propositions on the basis of them. Putnam's perspective evades important difficulties of the realist and antirealist views on the same, but it has its own potential limitations too. As I show (in Chapter 8), the pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth and experience runs the risk of taking the truth of at least some propositions to be relative to a particular community with its own conceptual and perceptual abilities, and of presuming, on beforehand, that some experiences are more real than others.

At the start of Part III, therefore, the hypothesis is that while Putnam's notions of truth and experience will indeed be able to provide an alternative to the question about the truth-value of religious propositions posed at the start of Part I, this can only be done by going in against some of Putnam's own (partly implicit) viewpoints on the truth-value of religious propositions by amending his (Wittgenstein-inspired) views on the same on the basis of a Jamesian understanding of religious experiences as pertaining to religious aspects of reality which are irreducible to other, non-religious aspects of reality. Religious experiences, in James's view, potentially have cognitive value. I analyze Putnam's Wittgenstein-inspired views on the truth-value of religious propositions (in Chapter 9) and establish that his practical viewpoints on religious propositions do not cohere entirely with his theoretical viewpoints on truth and experience. I show that he implicitly rejects the cognitive value of religious experiences. On the basis of an

analysis of how religious experiences *can* be cognitive, namely by means of an analysis of William James's perspective on the cognitive value of religious experiences (in Chapter 10) I show that, in a pragmatic pluralist perspective, religious experiences need not be rejected on beforehand as non-veridical. This allows me to amend the Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth-value (in Chapter 11) in such a manner that we can see how it evades the risks of relativism and reductionism discerned at the end of Part II.

In conclusion, then, I draw up a religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions (in the Conclusion). I do so by offering an alternative to the religious realist and antirealist perspective on the same (as analyzed in Part I), on the basis of Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth and experience (as analyzed in Part II), and as amended on the basis of James's views on the cognitive value of religious experiences (as analyzed in Part III).

1.1.4 Research field and outcomes

I approach the question of the truth-value of religious propositions by analyzing religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the same, and by drawing up an alternative from the point of view of pragmatic pluralist philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. As such, this study combines the philosophy of religion and the more theoretical disciplines of philosophy of language and mind.¹⁰ Also, it stands in both a more or less analytic and a pragmatic pluralist philosophy of religion. The latter form of philosophy of religion combines aspects of, among others, William James's, Ludwig Wittgenstein's, and Hilary Putnam's points of view.

Because of the fact that it combines these disciplines and perspectives, the outcomes of this study are on a number of related fields of research. My study provides a critical examination of religious realist and antirealist views as well as of central aspects of Hilary Putnam's pragmatic pluralist philosophy of language and mind. The first is an outcome in the area of philosophy of religion, the second an outcome in contemporary pragmatism and philosophy of language and mind. On the basis of these analyses, this study shows first of all that Putnam's fairly implicit viewpoints on the truth-value of moral and religious propositions do not cohere entirely with his theoretical viewpoints. Secondly, it shows that contrary to Putnam's own viewpoints on these issues, a pragmatic pluralist perspective explains how religious propositions in principle have truth-value. Thirdly, Putnam's

¹⁰ I turn to my understanding of 'philosophy of religion' in 1.4 below.

viewpoints regarding truth-value, and his underlying notions of truth and experience, can be amended in such a manner that it becomes apparent that they avoid the risks of relativism and reductionism. These outcomes are in Hilary Putnam studies, in pragmatic pluralist philosophy of religion, and in pragmatic pluralist philosophy of language and mind. In the process, I touch on issues in epistemology, metaphysics, and Ludwig Wittgenstein studies and William James studies.

This study's main aim, viz. to give a conceptual analysis of a pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth-value in religious propositions against the background of the notions of truth and experience in realist and antirealist perspectives, calls for a clear demarcation of the research subject matter. I do touch upon, but cannot fully explore, the entanglement of the viewpoints on truth-value, truth, and experience discussed here, with the various other, contemporary and past perspectives on the same. Obviously, late twentieth century religious realism and antirealism, in all their facets, did not come up from nowhere, and neither did realism and antirealism in general. There are important ties with the various forms of realism and antirealism, nominalism and idealism, cognitivism and non-cognitivism that featured in past and present philosophy of language and mind, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, ethics, and systematic theology.

The same is true of Putnam's thinking, parts of which I analyze, elaborate on, and apply to the specific area of religious reasoning. It links up with and diverges from important sources in twentieth century philosophy (which I partly discuss) but also pre-modern and modern thinking, such as Plato's and Aristotle's, Thomas Aquinas', René Descartes', George Berkeley's, Immanuel Kant's, and David Hume's, to name only a few highly important ones. Furthermore, there are obvious but unexplored ties with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's idealism. I explicitly address Putnam's Wittgensteinian notions of reference and relativity, to the degree that this is relevant for the research question. The influence of three pragmatist philosophers on Putnam, i.e. Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, is unmistakable, but cannot be explored in detail either.

1.2 Proposition, religion, and truth-value

Before embarking on the research described, some central terms require delineation. What I investigate is how, if at all, religious propositions can have truth-value. Are religious propositions true or false and what are the

conditions for being true or false? These are questions that have their basis in epistemology, ontology, and semantics. Here, I introduce these questions and the concepts central to it as these are complicated, disputed matters. What makes a religious proposition a proposition? What makes it religious? I will also argue why I take these issues to be first and foremost questions in semantics, and that I will therefore approach religious realism and antirealism primarily as semantical positions.

1.2.1 Proposition, truth-value, and truth-makers

To be able to say what a religious proposition is, we need to establish, firstly, what a proposition is. With 'propositions' I mean claims or assertions or thoughts, which are statements that can be true or false, and that consist of two or more elements that, taken together, make up their semantic properties. Propositions are held by people. The proposition 'God is love' is believed by some people to be true, by others to be false, and by some to be meaningless. Propositions are about something. The proposition is about God and about love, and about what it means for something to be another thing.¹¹ When reflecting on whether and how religious propositions can have truth-value and what makes them true or false, we deal with assertions with propositional content.

These assertions with propositional content are necessarily in the indicative mood, since assertions in the imperative or subjunctive mood have no capacity to be true or false. The proposition 'Be true to yourself' cannot be either true or false, whereas 'It is good to be true to oneself' can. Thus a religious indicative statement such as 'God is love' is a proposition, while imperative and subjunctive assertions such as 'love one another' and 'let the God of love be praised' are not. Propositions can have truth-value. If they do, they are either true or false.¹² Whether they do or not, depends on whether they meet particular criteria.

For a proposition to meet particular truth-criteria is for that proposition to be 'made true'. A proposition is made true by a particular

¹¹ Cf. D. M. Armstrong, *Truth and Truthmakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12-4.

¹² Cf. William P. Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 6.

‘truth-maker’.¹³ A much used notion of the truth-maker relation is something of the following sort:

For every object x and proposition y : x is a truth-maker for y iff (if and only if, NB) it is necessary that if x exists, then y is true.¹⁴

In such a scheme, Allah’s existence could be a truth-maker for the proposition that ‘Allah exists’. I would contend that we can replace ‘object’ with ‘state of affairs’. This will be argued below, most notably on the basis of an analysis of Putnam’s criticism of metaphysical realist notions of truth (in Chapter 5) and his alternative perspective (in Chapter 6). Thus, a particular state of affairs, e.g. torture being wrong, can be the truth-maker for the proposition that ‘it is wrong to torture’. As we will see in Chapter 3, religious antirealists would contend that the truth of propositions depends on other criteria altogether. What makes a proposition true is a particular status of that proposition within a community. I investigate, thus, what the truth-makers could be of religious propositions, i.e. what a religious proposition’s being true (or false) could consist in.

1.2.2 Religion and religious propositions

The next important question is what we should take ‘religious’ in ‘religious propositions’ to mean. It will come as no surprise that I have no definite answer to that question.¹⁵ First of all, it should be noted that religious propositions are but one aspect of religiosity. Whatever else religiosity is, it often takes the shape of a largely performative practice, that evokes a particular worldview, and of which religious propositions form a part. How

¹³ Cf. Armstrong, *Truth and Truthmakers*, and Adolf Rami, "Introduction: Truth and Truth-Making," in *Truth and Truth-Making*, eds. E. J. Lowe and A. Rami (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2009), 1-36.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13. Cf. also Sami Pihlström, "Truthmaking and Pragmatist Conceptions of Truth and Reality," *Minerva* 9 (2005), 105-133, who shows that the notion of truthmaking is not necessarily at odds with a pragmatist notion of truth. As will become apparent, my analysis of Putnam’s notion of truth, in Chapter 6, as well as my depiction of a religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, in Chapter 12, attest to Pihlström’s contention.

¹⁵ Jonathan Smith concisely traces back origins of various definitions of religion, in Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press Chicago, 1998), 269-284. Cf. Henk J. Adriaanse, "On Defining Religion," in *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts, and Contests*, eds. J. Platvoet and A. L. Molendijk (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 227-244.

big or small their part is depends on the religious practice in question.¹⁶ As this study aims to connect closely to actual human practices of holding particular religious propositions, I would also like to keep an open view of what is understood to be a religious proposition. In order to be able to proceed, however, at least some delineations of 'religious', and especially 'religious propositions', have to be given.

While it seems impossible to define an essence of religion, there is a family resemblance between what are taken to be religions.¹⁷ One of the central aspects of religiosity is the notion of the sacred. The sacred can be one or more gods, nature, an unseen order, etc. Another aspect of religiosity is its life-encompassing nature. Religiosity gives people a particular outlook on life, not only about such issues as the origin of life, or the justness or injustice of abortion, but also on such matters as what our purpose is in life, whether we are allowed to be who we are, etc. These three aspects, which, for lack of better terms, I will label as the supernatural, the natural, and life-orienting aspects of religion, come back in what I take to be three domains in which we make religious propositions.

Often, religious propositions are held to be propositions about the existence of God, the problem of evil, etc., which are arguably predominantly theistic propositions. This does not do justice to the complexity of the varieties of religions today, and their respective aspects. Without attempting to settle the discussions about what the terms 'religion' and 'religious' denote, I will assume that a proposition is a religious proposition if it pertains to at least one of three of the abovementioned uses of religious language: on the supernatural, on the natural, and on life-orientation. In doing so, I aim to refrain from limiting the notion of religion to only one or two of these areas. As said, I would like these uses to be understood in an anti-essentialist manner, since it seems both impossible and in violation of the particularity of the various religions to pursue a supposed essence of religiosity. These uses mean to reflect a functional approach to the issue of

¹⁶ See Luther J. Binkley, "What Characterizes Religious Language?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 2, no. 1 (1962), 18-22, for a characterization of religion that leaves out the propositional aspect almost altogether, and John Hick's reaction in John Hick, "Comment," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 2, no. 1 (1962), 22-24, which defends the role of propositions in religion.

¹⁷ See Victoria Harrison, "The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 59, no. 3 (2006), 133-152, for a defense of a family resemblances approach to defining religion.

defining religion.¹⁸ They aim to do justice to the various roles that religion plays in the life of people.

First of all, then, there are those uses of language that intend to make statements about (the existence and character of) the supernatural. Propositions such as 'God is love', 'there are three gods', and 'the spirits are well-disposed to me' belong to this category. Secondly, there are correlated propositions about (the existence and character of) the natural, apparently generated by a life-orientation worldview. This includes propositions such as 'Earth is approximately 6000 years old', 'Adam and Eve were the first human beings', and 'Jesus came back from the dead'. An important note in this regard is that religious propositions, as understood in this fashion, can conflict among one another, but also with propositions coming from different, e.g. secular, perspectives. Thirdly, there are statements about life-orientation, generated from such existential matters as a struggle with or happiness about life, which include propositions such as 'the meaning of life is to love one another', 'there is a purpose to life', and 'money is the highest Good'.

Arguably, this leaves us with a wide variety of religious propositions. Furthermore, the third use of religious language comes close to that of worldviews in general. Nevertheless, I opt for a broader definition rather than a narrow one, partly because I believe it does more justice to the complex phenomenon of religion than a narrow definition does, partly because differentiating between these different kinds of religious propositions allows them to be true or false, or neither, in different ways (the proposition that 'God is love' may have truth-value, or not, in a different manner than 'Earth is 6000 years old' or 'God created Earth'). I will turn to this issue, of the variety of kinds of truth-value, explicitly and regularly throughout this study.

A phrase that I will use frequently in this regard is that religious propositions are or are not thought to refer to what I call 'religious aspects of reality'. That phrase denotes the idea that reality has various aspects, i.e. those aspects that can be studied by the natural sciences, moral aspects, aesthetic ones, etc., etc. About these various aspects of reality, we can hold propositions. These are what Michael Dummett calls 'statements in a given

¹⁸ Cf. Meerten B. ter Borg, "What is Religion?" in *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts, and Contests*, eds. J. Platvoet and A. L. Molendijk (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 1999), 379-408.

class'.¹⁹ What the ontology status is of these various aspects of reality is something that we cannot make out on beforehand. Thus, whether there are religious objects just like there are atoms or chairs is something this phrase leaves open.

1.3 Realism and antirealism as semantical theories

The theoretical background of the conceptual analysis of the truth-value of religious propositions is formed by what I label religious realist and religious antirealist perspectives, in philosophy of religion, on these issues. These, in turn, are based on realism and antirealism as positions in philosophy in general. As there is no consensus about what realism and antirealism consist in,²⁰ and since these positions as well as the debate in which they stand plays an important role in this study, I briefly introduce this debate and defend the view that realism and antirealism are to an important extend semantical theories, rather than purely ontological ones. In Chapters 2 and 3, I analyze the religious realist and antirealist perspectives in further detail, as well as how they relate to realism and antirealism in general.

It is a popular notion that realism holds that there exist objects independent of human belief while antirealism would deny this. In line with this notion, Michael Devitt²¹ takes it that the fundamental question, with regard to realism and antirealism, is an ontological one, namely whether there is or is no reality existing independently of our beliefs on the same.²² Devitt takes this to be a first order question, i.e. a question on which we settle without reference to more fundamental questions. The next question, Devitt takes it, is whether we can know that reality (an epistemological question), and what knowledge, truth, and meaning consist in (a semantical question). There are good reasons for qualifying this perspective on realism and antirealism, however, and they connect closely to the issue of this study, namely the centrality of the notion of truth.

¹⁹ See Michael Dummett, "Realism," *Synthese* 52, no. 1 (1982), 55-112.

²⁰ Cf. Paul Horwich, "Three Forms of Realism," *Synthese* 51, no. 2 (1982), 181-201, who maintains that "several distinct and independent positions have at various times been identified with realism, and the debate is marked by confusion, equivocation and arguments at cross-purposes to one another" (*Ibid.*, 181).

²¹ E.g. in Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

²² I will refer to this as 'human-independent' or 'mind-independent reality'.

Approaching the issue described above in a slightly different manner, Crispin Wright, and Paul Horwich, in his analysis of Wright's influential *Truth and Objectivity*, take realists to "maintain that there exist objective facts which are independent of human thought",²³ and antirealists to "suppose on the contrary that the facts are in some sense merely human creations".²⁴ Rather than over the existence of objects, here, the dispute between realists and antirealists is thought to be over the existence of objective *facts*. The issues of existence and of meaning therefore come closer. Realism is about whether there are facts that are made true by reality or not. If put in that manner, we can see that Devitt's claim that there exist objects independent of human belief is a claim about facts. A claim about facts, furthermore, involves a claim about meaning and truth. Devitt's claim presumes that is uncontested what it means for something to exist, but this is not necessarily the case. We first need to settle the meaning of the fact that objects do or do not exist independently of us, which is a semantical question, before we can acknowledge that this is the case or not.

In this connection, Putnam holds that Devitt's notion of realism is not a first-order question at all, but requires that one have a pre-set notion of existence, and of independence, and thus involves answering a question about meaning first. Putnam states that

Devitt's thought ... is that the realism question is not a semantic question at all; it can be stated in first order language, as 'Do things exist independently of our minds?' But 'independence' is not an unambiguous notion, An anti-realist like Michael Dummett does not claim that we caused the stars to exist, or that they would not exist if we did not exist, as Devitt's formulation suggests. ... For ... Dummett, the truth of a thing sentence entails its verifiability. For Devitt it does not. But to state these differences we have had to ascend to the metalanguage, and employ the predicates truth and verification.²⁵

To Putnam then, following Wright and Michael Dummett,²⁶ the question of realism depends on what one takes truth to consist in, and thus is first and foremost a semantic question.

Because Dummett holds that facts are the basic subject matter of the question of realism and antirealism, he states that

²³ Paul Horwich, "Realism Minus Truth," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56, no. 4 (1996), 877.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 877.

²⁵ Hilary Putnam, "Replies and Comments," *Erkenntnis* 34, no. 3 (1991), 411 - italics removed.

²⁶ E.g. Michael Dummett, *Truth and the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

it seems preferable to say that realism is a view about a certain class of statements - for instance, statements in the future tense, or ethical statements - since certain kinds of realism, for instance realism about the future or about ethics, do not seem readily classifiable as doctrines about a realm of entities. ... So construed, realism is a *semantic* thesis, a thesis about what, in general, renders a statement in the given class true when it is true.²⁷

Concurrent with the topic of this study, i.e. how to conceive of the notion of truth with regard to religious propositions and the possible implications of such a conception for fundamental questions of establishing the truth or falsity of religious propositions, I take realism and antirealism first of all as semantical theses, viz. as theses about what it means for propositions to be true. In my analyses of religious realist and antirealist perspectives, this will be my point of departure, and the relation of truth to realism and antirealism will frequently feature in my analyses.

1.4 Concluding notes: The truth-value of religious propositions and the philosophy of religion

This study is an instance of studies in the philosophy of religion. As such, it aims to contribute to a manner of 'doing' philosophy of religion that can make valuable contributions to contemporary questions. Just like defining 'religion' proved highly problematic, however, providing a harmonized notion of 'the philosophy of religion' is challenging. There is a variety of disciplines that are called 'philosophy of religion', but whose presuppositions and aims are diverse or even conflict with one another.²⁸ Wesley Wildman mentions six different traditions that exist or have existed within what is known as the philosophy of religion.²⁹ This study aims to contribute to this diverse field.

To make things worse, however, the philosophy of religion, if there is a philosophy of religion, has been characterized with what one could

²⁷ Dummett, *Realism*, 55.

²⁸ See Wesley J. Wildman, *Religious Philosophy as Multidisciplinary Comparative Inquiry: Envisioning a Future for the Philosophy of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010) for an excellent introduction into the question of the philosophy of religion or philosophies of religion, as well as for a perspective on a possible way out, which he calls 'religious philosophy'.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 247-305.

summarize as an “intellectual and religious parochialism”.³⁰ The various traditions that make up the field of philosophy of religion assume a particular intellectual approach and often stand in a particular religious tradition. Furthermore, the various traditions have rarely allowed for fruitful communication between them.³¹ In order to remain a discipline that can make valuable contributions to societal questions, it will have to become more open to modes of doing philosophy other than its current Western, mostly analytic mode, as well as broaden its now still predominantly Christian horizon.³²

I aim to contribute to the field of philosophy of religion by providing a study that could be considered an instance “of multidisciplinary comparative inquiry at the junction of philosophy and religious studies”.³³ Though my research stands in one of the traditions that Wildman mentions, it is open towards the other traditions of philosophy of religion. Furthermore, although it is not in itself a comparative inquiry, it provides a theoretical background for comparative perspectives on religious propositions. For in drawing up the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, this study aims to proceed as much as possible from the religious practices themselves, and it develops a perspective on truth-value that allows truth-value to depend on the religious practice of which the proposition is a part.

This study is intended as a work in that tradition within philosophy of religion that pertains to the philosophical study of themes and structures within the various religious traditions, especially religious reasoning. It is neither intended as a defense of particular religious beliefs or practices, nor as a defense of a particular disciplinary or religious tradition within the philosophy of religion. As a discipline on the intersection of theoretical philosophy and religious studies, it can contribute to both fields. The one side of such studies, such as analyses of the performative aspects of ritual or religious language, or the reality of religious experiences, etc. benefits from

³⁰ Ibid., x.

³¹ See e.g. the discussion in Nick Trakakis, *The End of Philosophy of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008) about the Continental and analytic divide in philosophy of religion.

³² Cf. Nancy Frankenberry, "Feminist Approaches," in *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings*, eds. P. S. Anderson and B. Clack (London: Routledge, 2004), 3-27; Parimal G. Patil, *Against a Hindu God: Buddhist Philosophy of Religion in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 3-27; and Wildman, *Religious Philosophy as Multidisciplinary Comparative Inquiry: Envisioning a Future for the Philosophy of Religion*, esp. ch. 1, 2 & 7.

³³ Ibid., xi.

being studied on the theoretical level, i.e. from the perspective of philosophy of mind, language, etc. On the other hand, the theoretical philosophical perspectives are amended and improved upon on the basis of their application to the religious issues.

PART I
RELIGIOUS REALISM AND ANTIREALISM ON THE TRUTH-VALUE OF RELIGIOUS
PROPOSITIONS

In this first part, I analyze two perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions, namely religious realism and religious antirealism. Since these are paradigm perspectives on the question of the truth-value of religious propositions, they are obvious starting points for an exploration of what the truth-value of religious propositions may consist in, if they have truth-value at all. Religious realists hold that the truth-value of a religious proposition hinges on the question of how human-independent (religious) reality is. The proposition 'God is love' is true (if and) only if it is actually the case that God is love. Religious antirealists hold that the truth of a proposition is not contingent on human-independent reality but solely on human epistemic abilities. A proposition is true if a particular community takes it as verified. Part I investigates how religious realism and antirealism answer the question delineated in the Introduction, i.e. whether religious propositions can be true or false, and what their truth or falsity would consist in. It investigates whether religious realism and antirealism manage to draw up a convincing perspective on it, or whether they have important limitations in answering it. It does so by outlining each perspective on the basis of a brief analysis of realism and antirealism in general, as well as on an analysis of the works of influential proponents of either one of the perspectives. In scrutinizing the notions basic to these positions, in the last chapter of Part I, it will show that because of their specific notions of truth and experience religious realism and antirealism are limited in explaining how religious propositions can ultimately be said to have or to lack truth-value. As an investigation into the various aspects that paradigm perspectives deem central to the issue of the truth-value of religious propositions and as an analysis of the limitations of those perspectives on the same, this first part will further delimit the research hypothesis. As such, it serves as a first part of an argument for a perspective that answers the question laid out in the Introduction about the truth-value of religious propositions.

2.

Religious realism on the truth-value of religious propositions

In this chapter, I analyze the religious realist perspective on the question about the truth-value of religious propositions, such as formulated in the Introduction. Can religious propositions be true or false, what does their truth or falsity hinge on, and (how) is showing the truth or falsity of propositions possible? There is a variety of theologians and philosophers of religion who call themselves religious or theological realists,¹ but there is disagreement about what it means to be one.² Andrew Moore and Michael Scott hold that against the background of explorations of what realism and antirealism amount to in the various disciplines, “work on religious realism has lagged behind. Although theologians have written on the problem, there has been no sustained philosophical investigation of religious realism akin to that found in ethics or the philosophy of science.”³ In order to provide a suitable definition of religious realism, I therefore start off from an influential definition of realism in general. On the basis of that, I can draw up a notion of *religious* realism that allows us to assess the perspectives of

¹ Theologians as different as Roger Trigg, John Hick, Peter Byrne, Joseph Runzo, and Janet Martin Soskice claim to present what I will call a religious realist position. See Roger Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 58-67 and 141-6; John Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); Peter Byrne, *God and Realism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 187; Joseph Runzo, *World Views and Perceiving God* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 145-71; Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 153; and Janet Martin Soskice, "Theological Realism," in *The Rationality of Religious Belief. Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell*, eds. William J. Abraham and Steven W. Holtzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 117-8.

² Trigg, for example, contends that positions such as Hick's are not worthy of the name realism at all because, in his view, these do not even claim to know whether the Real is one or plural. Cf. Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?*, 66. This shows that for Trigg, ultimately, religious realism is about the recognition that there is a, or one, religious Reality. In other places, however, Trigg contends that taking a realist position merely means that one holds that one should take reality not to be dependent on mind, concepts or language. Cf. Roger Trigg, *Reality at Risk: A Defence of Realism in Philosophy and the Sciences*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 28. I return to this difficulty in Trigg's theorizing below.

³ Andrew Moore and Michael Scott, "Introduction," in *Realism and Religion: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, eds. Andrew Moore and Michael Scott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 1.

two influential thinkers on these issues, i.e. Roger Trigg and John Hick, as religious realists.

I analyze what I will call Trigg's *robust* religious realism and Hick's *critical* religious realism with regard to whether they take religious propositions to have truth-value, and, if so, what truth-value consists in. Furthermore, I establish how they answer the questions about what would make religious propositions false or true and whether there is a religious reality to which religious propositions should refer. In this respect, it will become apparent that we need to turn to the issues of truth and experience in particular. I evaluate these perspectives in light of whether they manage to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of the truth-value of religious propositions.

2.1 Realism on the truth-value of propositions

Like 'religious realism', the predicate 'realism' is given to a variety of positions.⁴ As we will see, it can apply to many fields of reasoning, and if one is a realist in one field one need not be so with regard to another area too.⁵ Nevertheless, as a general perspective on various fields of reasoning, realism has certain distinctive traits.⁶ I will define these here, before turning to a

⁴ Michael Dummett notes that "[t]he term 'realism' is constantly used by philosophers, in various connections, to characterize certain philosophical views; but it is rare for them to attempt to explain what they mean by calling a view realistic or non-realistic" (Dummett, *Realism*, 55). Susan Haack discerns nine uses of realism, in Susan Haack, "Realism," *Synthese* 73, no. 2 (1987), 275-299. Michael Devitt holds that "[a] striking aspect of the realism debate is that it contains almost as many doctrines under the name 'realism' as it contains participants" (Michael Devitt, "Aberrations of the Realism Debate," *Philosophical Studies* 61, no. 1 (1991), 43-44). Thus, from various sides of the debate, there is consensus that the term 'realism' is employed in many, sometimes conflicting manners.

⁵ As Dummett puts it, "[i]t is clear that one can be a realist about one subject-matter, and not about another: though someone may have a general inclination towards realistic views, it is plain that there is no coherent philosophical position which consists in being a realist *tout court*. This may be expressed by saying that one may be a realist about certain entities – mental states, possible worlds, mathematical objects – and not about others" (Dummett, *Realism*, 55). See also Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, 4.

⁶ On the potential commonalities of realisms in the various fields, see e.g. Bob Hale, "Realism and its Oppositions," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, eds. C. Wright and B. Hale (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 271-308.

realist perspective on *religious* matters. I take Michael Dummett's,⁷ Crispin Wright's,⁸ and Richard Boyd's⁹ theorizing on these issues as basic, particularly since as we will see their work on the issue of realism and antirealism aids in understanding the issues basic to the research question, namely the aspect of the *truth-value* of propositions.

As argued in the Introduction, realism makes an ontological claim (there is a reality independent of us), but this has important semantical presuppositions (in order to grasp the ontological claim, we require a particular understanding of 'reality', 'exist', and 'independent'). Taking this point about semantics into account, a realist understanding of particular terms, for example scientific terms, is that those terms actually refer to objects in reality, whether directly or by inference. In this regard, Boyd contends that

by 'realism about' a subject area we should mean the doctrine that the characteristic intellectual achievement in that area involves the acceptance of statements which reflect, when understood literally, approximate knowledge of a reality which is logically (conceptually, etc.) independent of the theories, conceptual schemes, research interests, etc. which are adopted.¹⁰

⁷ There is an abundance of sources that, either sympathetically or critically or both, engage with Dummett's thinking. See e.g. Michael Scott and Graham Stevens, "Is God an Antirealist?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2007), 383-393; Julian Baggini and Jeremy Stangroom, *What Philosophers Think* (London: Continuum, 2003), 245; R. E. Auxier and L. E. Hahn, *The Philosophy of Michael Dummett* (Chicago: Open Court, 2007); Hilary Putnam, "Between Dolev and Dummett: Some Comments on 'Antirealism, Presentism and Bivalence'," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 18, no. 1 (2010), 91-96; R. G. Heck, *Language, Thought, and Logic: Essays in Honour of Michael Dummett* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Michael Devitt, "Dummett's Anti-Realism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 80, no. 2 (1983), 73-99.

⁸ For sources on Wright's notions of realism and antirealism and correlated concepts, see Richard Rorty, "Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Donald Davidson versus Crispin Wright," in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Michael P. Lynch (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 259-286; J. H. McDowell, "Response to Crispin Wright," in *Knowing our Own Minds* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online Monographs, 2000), 47-63; and P. Pettit, "Realism and Truth: A Comment on Crispin Wright's Truth and Objectivity," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1996), 883-890.

⁹ See e.g. R. Boyd, "Realism, Anti-Foundationalism and the Enthusiasm for Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Studies* 61, no. 1 (1991), 127-148.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 147. Cf. also R. Boyd, "Realism, Conventionality, and 'Realism about'," in *Meaning and Method: Essays in Honor of Hilary Putnam*, ed. George Boolos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 171-195.

Thus formulated, realism is a doctrine about statements, sentences, or beliefs, and about their referents, namely the doctrine that there is an independently existing reality to which our statements and beliefs generally refer and in light of which these statements and beliefs can count as knowledge.

As such, realism has both an important ontological and epistemological aspect, as it is a position regarding what there is and what is real as well as about the possibility of knowledge and true statements about that reality. Though realism does not necessarily make any claims about the content of reality, it does hold that we can in principle have knowledge of that reality.¹¹ Furthermore, it acknowledges an ontological thesis about the possibility of the existence of a human-independent reality.¹² The world we encounter is not constructed by ourselves, but exists independent of whether we are aware of it or not. In my delineation of realism and antirealism, therefore, both the ontological and the epistemological aspect will play a role.

Realism as a thesis about reality's independence of human preconceptions does not make an unequivocal claim about what truth amounts to. An ontological and epistemological view almost inherently has its repercussions on one's notion of truth. Thus Dummett characterizes realism as "the belief that statements of [a certain] class possess an objective truth-value, independently of our means of knowing it; they are true or false in virtue of a reality existing independently of us".¹³ According to Wright, concurrently, "[w]hat seems essential [to realism] is the conception of truth as constituted by *fit* between our beliefs, or statements, and the features of an independent, determinate reality".¹⁴ Though how such fit between propositions and reality should be conceived of precisely is subject to debate among realists,¹⁵ what is clear is that truth is not equivalent with what is decidable in a particular culture at a particular time, but that truth

¹¹ As Dummett puts it, "the fundamental thesis of realism, so regarded, is that we really do succeed in referring to external objects, existing independently of our knowledge of them, and that the statements we make about them carry a meaning of such a kind that they are rendered true or false by an objective reality the constitution of which is, again, independent of our knowledge" (Dummett, *Realism*, 104).

¹² If it is held that we can have knowledge of reality, and if knowledge involves at least that certain propositions in a given class are thought to fit reality, this implies that there is such reality.

¹³ Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 146.

¹⁴ Crispin Wright, *Realism, Meaning, and Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 2.

¹⁵ Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, ch. 4.

transcends verification. Our human means of verification are not enough to establish what is true. For the question about what is true or false, reality is ultimately decisive.¹⁶

In this regard, a correspondence theory of truth is generally held as basic to realist perspectives.¹⁷ Following Michael Devitt's definition, here, this theory of truth takes it that "[s]entences of type *x* are true or false in virtue of: (1) their structure; (2) the referential relations between their parts and reality; (3) the objective and mind-independent nature of that reality".¹⁸ Truth, in this realist picture, consists of the accordance of our propositions with independent reality. Realism holds that our theories do not ultimately deal with human preconceptions or constructions of reality but with reality itself, and that whether they are true or false ultimately depends on what reality is like, not on what our preconceptions are.

An example of a realist understanding of a given class of entities or statements¹⁹ is scientific realism. It comes down to the view that "the physical world has depths and dimensions for whose description the methods of concept-formation distinctive of theoretical science are indispensable, and for whose cognition we are reliant upon scientific method".²⁰ Scientific realism holds that for certain areas of reality, the scientific method is the single appropriate one for gaining knowledge of that reality. It need not be adhered to by all realists, since it makes the contestable claim that physical reality (solely) has characteristics that, in order to understand them, require only natural scientific method, while

¹⁶ Cf. Wright, *Realism, Meaning, and Truth*, 435. A more precise delineation of the realist perspective on truth is implied by Wright's phrase "truth as representation – realism as properly understood" (Crispin Wright, *Saving the Differences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 203).

¹⁷ Cf. Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 49. Donald Davidson holds that truth as "correspondence with reality [is] the classical form of realism with respect to truth" (Donald Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 6 (1990), 279-328, esp. 301).

¹⁸ Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 29 The first part of this definition concerns aspects of propositions such as tautology, the second part points at the need for accordance of parts of the propositions with reality, and the third part is the realist concern with reality being independent of human preconceptions.

¹⁹ The term 'a given class' points at a particular area of human experience or discourse, such as physics, morality, aesthetics, or religion. See Dummett, *Realism*, 55-112, and 1.2.2 above.

²⁰ Wright, *Realism, Meaning, and Truth*, 4. This accords well with the earlier mentioned definition by Boyd.

some realists may argue that morality is part of physical realism too, and requires methods other than the natural sciences for their description.²¹

Taking scientific realism as an example, it holds that “(successful) scientific theories deal in aspects of *reality*: that there are aspects of the natural world for whose correct description the techniques of concept-formation used by theoretical scientists are indispensable”,²² and not merely in aspects of a human-dependent world of language with no connections to reality itself. Rather, “the statements of scientific theories are candidates for literal (not merely disquotational) *truth*”.²³ It is particular “aspects of reality which confer truth on [these statements]”.²⁴ A true proposition is true because of its being in accordance with reality.

Following Boyd, Wright, Dummett, and to an extent Devitt, as well as in line with the delineation of realism and antirealism in the Introduction, I thus take realism in general as a perspective on the independence of reality and the referential nature of statements. Truth, in this view, hinges on the way the world is, not (solely) on what counts as such in a particular community. As such, it makes an ontological as well as an epistemological claim, namely that truth is not contingent (merely) on interpersonal factors but consists in its correspondence with human-independent reality, that having knowledge implies having access to that reality, that one can in principle make true propositions about aspects of that reality (one of them being that they exist), and that reality has the aspects to which the realism in question is thought to pertain (what it means for ‘reality to have particular aspects’ may differ from one subject area to another).

2.2 Religious realism on the truth-value of religious propositions

Just like scientific realism is a particular application of a general realist perspective to a given class of entities or discourse, i.e. physical entities and scientific discourse, I understand religious realism as a form of realism about

²¹ See e.g. Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, 145. I return to this issue in depth when I analyze Putnam’s alternative perspective, and when I point at possible limitations of Putnam’s alternative, in Part II.

²² Wright, *Realism, Meaning, and Truth*, 286.

²³ *Ibid.*, 286. Literal truth, in this sense, means that a proposition makes a true proposition about reality (e.g. the proposition that ‘the world is the sum of all particles’), and not about other propositions (e.g. the proposition that ‘the world is the sum of all particles’ is true).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 286.

the class of religious entities and discourse.²⁵ Based on the discussion of the notion of realism in general, and of the example of scientific realism in particular, I therefore define religious realism as the view that 'the intellectual achievement in the area of religious reasoning involves the acceptance of propositions which reflect approximate knowledge of (religious aspects of) a reality which is independent of the adopted theories, conceptual schemes etc.'²⁶ As a starting-point for the further analysis of religious realism, thus, I take it that religious propositions refer, if at all, to religious aspects of reality, that their truth is contingent on those religious aspects of reality, and that if there are true religious propositions there exists a religious reality independent of our conceptions of it.²⁷ I work out two different religious realist perspectives, i.e. robust religious realism and critical religious realism, and evaluate whether these manage to provide a tenable answer to the question of the truth-value of religious propositions.

2.2.1 *Robust religious realism on religious propositions*

The religious realist holds that religious discourse has truth-value, not on the (sole) condition that it is in accordance with human preconceptions, but because reality confers truth on it.²⁸ Whether statements in this class are true or false depends on human-independent reality. Truth, in other words,

²⁵ To Devitt, the term 'religious realism' would be a *contradictio in terminis*, since for him "[a]ntirealism is like religion. Religion is even less plausible than antirealism, is supported by even worse arguments, and yet is even more popular" (Devitt, *Aberrations of the Realism Debate*, 59) and he adds that "indeed, religion is not just a hazard of philosophy but a hazard of life. If we could explain religion, I think that we could explain antirealism" (Ibid., 59). William P. Alston, on the other hand, holds that "[antirealism], though rampant nowadays even among Christian theologians, is subversive of the Christian faith" (William P. Alston, "Realism and the Christian Faith," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 38 (1995), 37). To him, religious believers can, and should, be realists. Cf. Ibid., esp. 57.

²⁶ I paraphrase Boyd's definition of realism that I gave above, as found in Boyd, *Realism, Anti-Foundationalism and the Enthusiasm for Natural Kinds*, 147.

²⁷ This contrasts quite sharply with Joseph Runzo's contention that "[r]eligious realism, in brief, is the view that there is a transcendent divine reality independent of human thought" (Runzo, *World Views and Perceiving God*, xiii). Runzo's definition is in line with Michael Devitt's ontological definition. For the reasons mentioned, namely that the question about the meaning of the terms employed comes before the ontological question, I take it that a definition with a semantic drive is preferable.

²⁸ Cf. also Alexander Bird, "Scientific and Theological Realism," in *Realism and Religion: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, eds. Andrew Moore and Michael Scott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 61-81, who analyzes the notion of what he calls theological realism as compared and comparable to the notion of scientific realism.

consists of our statements being in accordance with the way religious reality is. Epistemologically, our preconceptions play no decisive role in the question of whether religious discourse is true; rather religious reality does. On an ontological level, it can be said that, in the religious realist view, (the existence of) religious reality is presupposed if it is held that religious statements can be true. The statement that 'God is love', in a realist understanding, is true if and only if it fits a reality in which there is a God who is love, and false if and only if it does not. I will further analyze the notion of religious realism by means of an analysis of the theorizing on this issue of an influential religious realist, Roger Trigg.

I reconstruct what I call the robust religious realist perspective on religious propositions on the basis of Trigg's views on these issues. It is robust in the sense that it holds strictly to the notion that the truth-value of religious propositions depends solely on religious reality, not on our epistemic circumstances. Trigg is an influential religious realist, who has written numerous contributions to the issue of realism in science and religion, as well as a number of entries on (religious) realism and antirealism in important encyclopedias.²⁹ In line with the definition of religious realism we have drawn up, Trigg maintains that religious realism is a view on semantical, epistemological, and ontological issues.³⁰ Religious realism holds that questions concerning religious issues, such as whether God exists, are "genuine [and] that such existence is in no way logically dependent on our understanding".³¹ These questions do not mean to merely address human concepts but are actually directed at religious reality. Which answers to questions about religious issues are right depends on religious reality itself.

Trigg's argument for a robust religious realist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, I would argue, comes down to a rebuttal of antirealism in general, which, combined with the argument that realism and antirealism are the only two options, should show that realism is

²⁹ E.g. Trigg, *Reality at Risk: A Defence of Realism in Philosophy and the Sciences*; Roger Trigg, "Reason and Faith," in *Religion and Philosophy*, ed. Martin Warner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 33-43; Roger Trigg, "Theological Realism and Antirealism," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 213-220; and Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?*

³⁰ As Trigg puts it, "[r]ealism and its opponent involve the most basic of all philosophical disputes. How can we characterize the nature of reality, and what is its connection with our understanding?" (Trigg, *Theological Realism and Antirealism*, 213).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

vindicated.³² Since, so the argument runs, one should be a realist (or antirealist) in all areas of interest, one should adopt a religious realist perspective too if one is a realist in general. Thus, religious realism argues for the role of objective reality, truth, and rationality in religious discourse by showing that its counterpart, (religious) antirealism, is untenable.³³ While refraining from an evaluation of this argument for now, I analyze what religious realism implies for the truth-value of religious propositions. How does religious realism answer the related questions about religious

³² I attend to the central aspects of Trigg's argument for religious realism in this paragraph. On the basis of his numerous contributions, I contend that very concisely, yet comprehensively put, the argument runs as follows:

- (1) Any perspective on the nature of reality and our knowledge of it pertains to the nature of all aspects of reality, which to Trigg thus includes religious aspects, and our knowledge of it (that nature) equally.
- (2) For any perspective on the nature of reality and our knowledge of it to be universally valid, it requires a metaphysical underpinning.
- (3) Concerning the nature of reality and our knowledge of it, realism and antirealism are the only two possibly viable perspectives.
- (4) Either realism obtains, or antirealism, not both.
- (5) Antirealism contests realism on the basis of a rebuttal of any metaphysical underpinning of viewpoints on the nature of reality and of propositions to knowledge about it.
- (6) Antirealism refutes itself (from 2 and 5).
- (7) Concerning the nature of reality and our knowledge of it, realism is the only viable option (from 3 (and 4) and 6).
- (8) Concerning the nature of religious aspects of reality and our knowledge of it, religious realism is the only viable option (from 1 and 7).

Cf. Trigg, *Reason and Faith*, esp. 34-8, Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?*, 76-80; Trigg, *Reality at Risk: A Defence of Realism in Philosophy and the Sciences*, 28; Trigg, *Theological Realism and Antirealism*, 214; Trigg, *Reality at Risk: A Defence of Realism in Philosophy and the Sciences*, 49-50; and Roger Trigg, "Realism, Religion, and the Public Sphere: Challenges to Rationality," in *The Evolution of Rationality: Interdisciplinary Essays in Honor of J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen*, ed. F. LeRon Shults (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 107-121.

³³ Michael Scott and Andrew Moore take a different approach to the argument for what they call theological realism. They evaluate whether and how D.Z. Phillips's argument affects the proposition that God exists. Scott and Moore's argument is that if Phillips's argument against what I call religious realism does not hold, then religious realism is vindicated. See Michael Scott and Andrew Moore, "Can Theological Realism be Refuted?" *Religious Studies* 33 (1997), 401-418. As Phillips's argument is not the only argument against particular forms of religious realism, however, showing that it does not hold does not imply that religious realism cannot be refuted.

propositions formulated in the introduction, to wit ‘what gives religious propositions truth-value?’, ‘is there a religious reality to which religious propositions refer?’, and ‘what is the role of religious reality in determining what religious propositions are true?’.

Robust religious realism has a number of implications for the questions concerning religious propositions. As explained above, it sees no reason to accept the religious antirealist view that religious discourse has nothing to do with objective truth. For religious propositions, on an epistemological level, this implies that they can be truth-bearers in the same way that other propositions can be.³⁴ “If we want to claim truth for our beliefs, they must be able to pass scrutiny on the public stage”.³⁵ That scrutiny should not be a matter of politics or agreement, but a rational effort that aims at truth. As we saw, such a rational effort, according to the religious realist perspective, involves a claim to universality and to being in accordance with the way the world is. A proposition with truth-value should aspire to be grounded in objective reality, since “[t]he idea of universality should always be tied to that of objectivity, and not to the sociological questions of what happens to be accepted at any given time”.³⁶ The truth of religious propositions, accordingly, depends on whether they are grounded in objective reality. Whether religious propositions are true does not depend on whether those who utter them are justified in claiming to know something or on whether those propositions are accepted by their community.

Religious antirealists, Trigg holds, maintain that religious propositions are not grounded in (religious) reality, but rest on human, subjective conceptions and traditions. In their view, according to Trigg, the truth-value of propositions such as that ‘God exists’, depends on “the contingent nature of beings like ourselves”.³⁷ According to Trigg, they therefore let go of the notion of truth in religion. Among religious antirealists, Trigg maintains,

[m]any ... would recoil in horror from the idea that God is a Being, one amongst many, who may or may not exist. Religion, they would claim, is not in the business of speculating about facts. ... The mere acknowledgement of the existence of an

³⁴ Cf. Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?*, 8-27. Cf. also Bird, *Scientific and Theological Realism*, 63-4.67.69-71.

³⁵ Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?*, 27.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

³⁷ Trigg, *Theological Realism and Antirealism*, 214. In the next chapter, I turn to an examination of the religious antirealist perspective on religious propositions. Cf. also Bird, *Scientific and Theological Realism*, 67-9.75-9 for a definition of religious antirealism.

entity is surely, they would argue, not what true religion is about. ... All religious assertions have then to be reinterpreted in a manner which assumes that they are not claiming truth about an objective state of affairs. This not only applies to the question of God's existence. It also covers all religious claims which might appear to justify faith on rational grounds.³⁸

To Trigg, the religious antirealist perspective renders religious propositions pointless. To him, a religious proposition is directed at truth, which is in turn directed at an objective state of affairs, or it lets go of reason and becomes irrational. Religious realism, in contrast, therefore holds that since faith aspires to truth, we need to be able to reason about faith. "Faith cannot be prised apart from the claims of reason, if it is to claim truth".³⁹ This, according to the religious realist perspective, involves a proposition to being in accordance with the way the world is. A proposition with truth-value should aspire to be grounded in objective reality, since "[t]he idea of universality should always be tied to that of objectivity, and not to the sociological questions of what happens to be accepted at any given time".⁴⁰ Like in the general realist perspective, truth transcends verification in religious realism.

The truth of religious propositions, accordingly, depends on whether they are grounded in objective reality. Truth, in this perspective, consists in the correspondence of propositions with reality. This religious realist perspective on the truth of religious propositions, which necessarily depends on accordance with religious reality, is in line with the definition of realism in general, and its perspective on truth as correspondence, above. Religious discourse, in this religious realist perspective, has truth-value because, and for as much as, it can live up to the requirements of this theory of truth.

Robust religious realism, thus, aims to save the notion of truth in religious propositions. But the question remains how one can, if only in principle, establish whether one proposition is true rather than another. First of all, for religious propositions, the religious realist views imply that one cannot argue for them on the basis of revelation that is not (in principle) understandable for everyone, since "retreating to specific revelation ignores the fact that that too needs to be confirmed by human reason".⁴¹ Trigg maintains that "[a]ll faith needs a rational basis, since without an ability to

³⁸ Trigg, *Theological Realism and Antirealism*, 214-5.

³⁹ Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?*, 190.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

reason, we could never even prepare ourselves for the possibility of a God who is revealed".⁴² The fundamental argument for Trigg to endorse a realism concerning religion is that according to him, if faith aspires to truth we need to be able to reason about faith.

For these reasons, Trigg holds that he endorses a form of natural theology, i.e. the view that one can come to know religious aspects of reality through an understanding of the natural aspects of reality.⁴³ Since, as we saw, non-religious and religious propositions are both thought to be about the same reality, we should begin from the assumption that human reason will be able to tell us something about reality, and therefore about religious (aspects of) reality.⁴⁴ Trigg argues that religious propositions require a basis that is accessible to all rational beings, since starting from special revelation does not clarify why one should start with the revelations originating from that particular faith or from any faith at all.⁴⁵ Religious propositions that are truth-apt (which all real religious *propositions* are), therefore, should in principle be accessible for all reasoning human beings.

To a religious realist such as Trigg, however, a mere philosophical account of religious propositions "will be inadequate, and has to be supplemented by some form of revelation".⁴⁶ This thus qualifies what I mentioned earlier, namely that Trigg believes that his position is a form of natural theology. He holds that "we cannot begin without belief and hope that human reason can establish anything about God".⁴⁷ That is why "natural theology should not be regarded as a substitute for any particular revelation but as the necessary rational underpinning for the acceptance of any".⁴⁸ Though our reasoning may get us far in establishing what we should take as sound arguments about (religious) reality, "our unaided reason could never be sufficient to grasp what is by definition beyond our grasp".⁴⁹ Reason alone

⁴² Ibid., 214.

⁴³ We will see, however, that for Trigg such understanding alone is not enough, and that his position is therefore not an instance of natural theology at all.

⁴⁴ To Trigg, religious aspects of reality, such as God or divine will, are integral aspects of reality (see Premise 1 of what I described as Trigg's argument for religious realism above). Thus, if reason can tell us something about reality, it can also tell us something about religious reality, even if only that it is non-existent.

⁴⁵ "[F]aith derived from a particular revelation ... never faces the question why we should start with any faith, and in particular that one" (Ibid., 181). Cf. also 178-80.214.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 198.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 180.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 198.

cannot get us far enough. Thus, the second characteristic of Trigg's answer to the question about how we can argue about the truth of our religious propositions consists in the view that religious propositions in the end depend on what is revealed to those who make those propositions. As religious aspects of reality are not knowable solely through the intellect, acquiring religious knowledge, and establishing the truth of religious propositions, in the end depends on revelation. When it comes to giving reasons for one's religious propositions, therefore, Trigg maintains that "[p]ersonal religious experience can feature as much as pure reason",⁵⁰ although always with the requirement in mind that the concepts one uses in the religious propositions "must be rooted in something that is in principle available to everyone".⁵¹ This is the anti-special revelation aspect of Trigg's religious realism. A revelation cannot be something that is understandable only to a single person. I will turn to whether I believe this is a fruitful perspective on the epistemological questions regarding religious propositions when I evaluate the religious realist perspective in the next section.

As a theoretical position, robust religious realism says it refrains from making statements about the character of religious reality. It aims to refrain from telling us what that reality looks like. In the same manner, it does not want to tell us what the right content of religious propositions should be. It *does* explicitly aim to tell us, however, how one should argue for religious propositions, their truth and their object. Religious propositions are true if they are in accordance with the way religious reality is. This has a number of implications for the ontological questions concerning religious propositions. Religious reality, first of all, has to exist in order for religious propositions to have truth-value. "Without any external constraints on what can be properly thought and said, there can be no reasons ultimately for or against believing anything".⁵² Just like for the natural sciences, "the test of faith is whether it is rooted in reality. It cannot be insulated from other forms of belief, since they all purport to be about one world".⁵³ If there are religious propositions with truth-value, therefore, religious realism implies that religious reality is real. "Faith can persist so long as it is believed that its object is real, but it logically

⁵⁰ Ibid., 182.

⁵¹ Ibid., 183.

⁵² Trigg, *Reality at Risk: A Defence of Realism in Philosophy and the Sciences*, 219.

⁵³ Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?*, 132.

cannot survive an acceptance of its unreality".⁵⁴ Since, according to Trigg, faith is a belief in something, a something which can have an effect on the belief itself, no faith could do without that something. Trigg does not describe what that reality looks like exactly in religious terms, i.e. he does not make a claim such as that the ultimate religious reality is the God of Christianity. He does, however, give an account of what this reality should be like ontologically, and that the religious believer, in the end, is dependent on the revelation of religious reality for the truth of his or her religious propositions. From this it seems we should conclude that according to religious realism, religious reality is such that it reveals itself to the human subject (in a manner that is in principle accessible for all human beings).

Linked to this last remark is a second implicit upshot of robust religious realism for the ontological questions, to wit that religious reality should be such that it is accessible. Religious reality need in principle not necessarily be accessible in order to be able to make true religious propositions, for, after all, their truth depends on whether they are in accordance with religious reality, not on whether we are justified in making them or able to tell whether they are true. Trigg's perspective implies that one could, in principle, make a true religious proposition without knowing religious reality, since what one claims could be in accordance with the way religious reality is. If, however, one wants to argue about the truth of one's religious propositions, religious reality will have to be accessible. Only if it is accessible do we have a chance of determining whether one rather than the other religious proposition is true. Only if we have some chance of determining whether a religious proposition is indeed true or false does the notion of truth-value have any import.

Summarizing, robust religious realism implies, for the questions on the truth-value of religious propositions worked out in the Introduction, that on an epistemological level religious propositions are not mere expressive notions which bear no truth-value, but statements which can bear truth similar to statements concerning science and other areas of thought. Religious propositions are true if they correspond to the way (religious) reality is. Distinguishing between right and wrong propositions therefore requires having access to religious reality and determining which of the propositions are indeed in accordance with it and which are not. Such access

⁵⁴ Trigg, *Reason and Faith*, 43. Trigg's main target here is Don Cupitt whose antirealist perspective on faith entails that the object of faith is not an existent divine reality but a human construction of ideals and needs.

can in principle be gained inferentially on the basis of non-religious aspects of reality, but for a more thorough understanding of religious reality some form of non-inferential knowledge is necessary. On an ontological level, therefore, there should be such reality in light of which religious propositions can be true or false. Furthermore, in order to be able to argue for the truth or falsity of one's religious propositions, one needs to have access to that religious reality.

2.2.2 *Evaluation of robust religious realism*

Above I have analyzed robust religious realism's perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions. I argued that it aims to save the role of truth as consisting in a correspondence with (religious aspects of) reality, and that establishing whether religious propositions are true or false requires receiving particular, non-special revelations of that reality. As long as they hold that there are indeed true religious propositions, this implies, I showed, that robust religious realists take there to be a religious reality to which religious propositions refer, and that in principle we have access to this reality, which allows us to judge whether particular religious propositions are right or wrong. Here I determine whether the perspective that robust religious realism provides to the questions about the truth-value of religious propositions is viable. I start off with some remarks on the position in general before turning to its perspective on the truth-aptness of religious propositions.

In answering the question of the truth-value of religious propositions, robust religious realism has important desirable aspects, but there are some difficulties with the argument for the religious realist perspective as well. What seems advantageous about the perspective in general is the inclination to treat religious aspects of reality, if there are any, in a manner comparable to other aspects of reality. It takes it that reality can have both religious and non-religious aspects, and that we have no *a priori* reasons to deal with the religious aspects in a manner categorically different from non-religious aspects. As we will see, in Chapter 3, some forms of religious antirealism claim that religious propositions should be treated entirely different than other, non-religious propositions. They have difficulties arguing why we should do so, however, and cannot account for the fact that religious and non-religious propositions often conflict. In the religious realist perspective, these propositions can in principle conflict, which, as I posited in the Introduction, seems to be commonplace. Thus, this aspect of religious realism seems to be in accordance with practice.

One can argue, however, that, in contrast to the view that because there is only one reality someone who is a realist with regard to one area of inquiry should be a realist concerning *all* areas of inquiry, one can take *different* stances concerning such issues as the truth-value of propositions in case of *different* aspects of reality.⁵⁵ One could, for example, take the truth of one's discourse on the objects of the natural sciences to depend on human-independent objects, and not on a community's concepts and presuppositions, while the truth of moral discourse is *not* conferred on it by any moral objects or entities.⁵⁶ Similarly, one can be a realist concerning physics, while being an antirealist concerning religion.⁵⁷ Thus, it is not obvious why one should approach religious propositions in a realist manner just because one should approach other propositions in that manner.

A related potentially valuable aspect of the robust religious realist perspective concerns its notion of religious experience. In the analysis of its perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, we saw that in order for people to hold true and false propositions, they require some access to religious reality. Though the religious realist perspective on religious experience has problematic aspects, which I will address primarily in Chapter 4, a positive aspect is that it takes religious experience as, in some ways, akin to ordinary experiences, in the sense that they pertain to the same reality. As there is only one reality, religious and non-religious experiences connect to the same subject matter, though perhaps to different *aspects* of reality. This would imply that religious experiences can play an important role in the truth-value of religious propositions. I return to this issue in Chapter 4 in more detail.

The second premise in the argument against religious antirealism contends that any claim to truth requires a metaphysical underpinning. This is appealing because it seems to resonate with the common belief that the truth-value of propositions hinges in one way or another on a relation with the way the world is. There are two limitations to this prospect, however. The first is that much depends on how this metaphysical underpinning is understood. If it is thought to be the same as in the case of, say, the proposition that 'trees exist', where that proposition is true if and only if there actually are such objects as trees in the world, then such a

⁵⁵ Above, at the start of 2.1, we saw that Hale, Wright, and Dummett take this to be very well possible.

⁵⁶ Cf. J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin (Non-Classics), 1977).

⁵⁷ See my remarks and reference to Dummett's views on this issue, in 2.1.

correspondence notion of proposition and reality may prove difficult in the case of religious propositions which deal with issues other than (empirically) identifiable objects in the world, e.g. in the case of religious propositions that are about the meaning of life.⁵⁸ Furthermore, while the view that truth depends on how the world is is understandable from this realist point of view, it sidelines the antirealist from the start. An antirealist may take truth-aptness to be possible without having a metaphysical underpinning of one's propositions.⁵⁹ Thus, one can hardly count this as an argument against antirealism.⁶⁰

If we suppose the argument for robust religious realism *were* successful, then we can ask whether its perspective on the truth-aptness of religious propositions is convincing. The perspective on (establishing) the truth and falsity of religious propositions has important limitations, because of (1) its notion of truth, (2) its notion of experience, and (3) the combination of these two.

(1) In the religious realist perspective truth is a property conferred on religious propositions by a one-on-one correspondence of (parts of) the propositions with reality. This means that a religious proposition, such as 'God is love', is true if, and only if, reality is such that God is love. In a true proposition, the propositional parts are in accordance with reality itself. The correspondence perspective on truth, however, has important difficulties.⁶¹ An important objection to the correspondence theory of truth with regard to the research question here is "that such theories fail to provide entities to which truth vehicles (whether we take these to be statements, sentences or utterances) can be said to correspond".⁶² In mathematics, for example, the correspondence theory of truth would imply that a mathematical proposition could only be true if there would be a mathematical reality, viz. if there were

⁵⁸ I return to this issue below, when discussing religious realism's perspective on the notion of truth applicable to religious propositions.

⁵⁹ See my analysis of the antirealist perspective when I discuss the religious antirealist perspective on religious propositions, in Chapter 3.

⁶⁰ To be fair, it is questionable whether there is any manner in which the realist and that antirealist could come to an understanding in this respect, as they are diametrically opposed in many respects.

⁶¹ See e.g. those discussed in Donald Davidson, "True to the Facts," *The Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 21 (1969), 748-764; W. V. Quine, *Quiddities: An Intermittently Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge: Belknap Press / Harvard University Press, 1987); and George Englebretsen, *Bare Facts and Naked Truths: A New Correspondence Theory of Truth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), part I.

⁶² Davidson, *The Structure and Content of Truth*, 304.

(supersensible) mathematical entities, to which that proposition would correspond. It is highly questionable whether such reality or entities can be identified or even exist.⁶³ I discuss another important objection when analyzing Putnam's criticism of what he calls metaphysical realist notions of truth, in 5.1.

(2) In the analysis of the religious realist perspective on religious propositions it already became clear that it reserves an important but complicated role for revelation. In one way, it takes it that ordinary experiences of reality tell us, or allow us to infer, that reality also has religious aspects. In fact, robust religious realism holds that such generally accessible forms of reasoning are necessary in order to argue why religion would be an apt way of approaching reality at all. In another way, however, it discards particular forms of experience as unable to contribute to the truth-value of religious propositions. As specific revelation depends on notions that are not in principle generally accessible, and since true religious propositions should allow for evaluation on generally accessible rational grounds, it can therefore not be an appropriate starting-point for coming to justified religious propositions. Yet, as religious reality is thought to ultimately remain unknowable to mere human reason, Trigg takes some form of revelation to be necessary in order to come to true religious propositions. This lays bare a problematic incoherence with regard to the notion of experience in religious realism. On the one hand, particular religious experiences, namely revelations instigated by religious reality itself, are *necessary* additions to the impeded human reasonings, in order to approximate religious reality. On the other hand, specific religious experiences, namely those experiences that are not accessible to human reasoning, are considered *inadequate* for grounding propositions, since one has to reasonably show why that revelation and not another conflicting revelation obtains. Thus, while reason is inadequate to come to an understanding of religious reality by itself, it can and should nevertheless set the norms for what is to count as reliable religious experience.⁶⁴

⁶³ E.g. Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas*; Peter Milne, "Review: The Physicalization of Mathematics; the Reality of Numbers: A Physicalist's Philosophy of Mathematics; Realism in Mathematics; the Practice of Mathematics; Finite Empirical Mathematics: Outline of a System," *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 45, no. 1 (1994), 305-340; and Timothy John Nulty, "A Critique of Resnik's Mathematical Realism," *Erkenntnis* (1975-) 62, no. 3 (2005), 379-393.

⁶⁴ This problematic aspect seems to be rooted in religious realism's perspective on the nature of experience in general, an issue that I will analyze in Chapter 4.

(3) Even if the correspondence view of truth would be unproblematic, and if religious experiences would pass the test of generally accessible reason, it is questionable whether the robust religious realist perspective answers the questions on the truth-value of religious propositions. Suppose two individuals, A and B, both have an experience of a religious aspect of reality, say of God's feelings towards humanity. Suppose that A's and B's experiences both live up to the criteria of reasonableness, i.e. both experiences for example came about under the same, normal circumstances and do not contradict with things we know of (religious aspects of) reality through our natural cognitive abilities. Imagine then that A experiences God to love humankind while B experiences God to not-love (or hate) humankind. The fact that religious experience (i.e. non-specific revelation) has to stand the test of reasonable scrutiny cannot prevent religious experiences from being conflicting, since reason has no access to religious reality to the extent that religious experience has. If it is the case that two people may have diametrically opposed, equally valid religious experiences, then these cannot aid in determining true religious propositions. The robust religious realist may respond that it is impossible to have diametrically conflicting religious experiences, and that only one of the two can be a real experience. However, if that be the case, there is no means of distinguishing between real and unreal (e.g. hallucinatory) experiences, which would render it equally impossible, from the very start, to employ religious experiences in establishing which religious propositions are true and which are not.⁶⁵

The diversity of (conflicting) religious propositions seems to testify to the limitations of the notions of truth and experience in the robust religious realist perspective. Even if its notion of truth can rebut the criticisms brought in against it, and even if religious experience can play one role or another in one's religious propositions, then it can hardly accommodate the fact that there is a vast (and perhaps irreducible) diversity of (conflicting) religious propositions. The only way for robust religious realism to accommodate this fact is in maintaining that the vast majority of religious propositions is false and that for all conflicting religious propositions there is at most one true proposition. There are those who call themselves religious realists but who

⁶⁵ As I will explain in Chapter 4 and analyze in Chapter 5, this important limitation of the robust religious realist perspective is due to the views in philosophy of language and in philosophy of mind that it holds as basic, in particular the view that a veridical experience is necessarily a direct experience, and that direct experience is an unconceptualized experience.

claim to evade this problematic aspect, precisely because of an alternative perspective on the notions of truth and experience. I turn to them below.

2.2.3 *Critical religious realism on religious propositions*

An alternative perspective, of which John Hick is a prominent proponent, aims to avoid the problematic aspects of the robust religious realist perspective on correspondence truth and experience in relation to the truth-aptness of religious propositions.⁶⁶ Hick is well-known for his religious pluralism, which holds that all the world religions provide “a valid context of salvation/liberation [but that] none constitutes the one and only such context”⁶⁷ and that therefore they are all different or even conflicting, but valid, renderings of the salvific Ultimate Reality.⁶⁸ Behind this position, there is what he calls a critical religious realist perspective on such issues as perception, knowledge, and truth.⁶⁹ I take Hick’s critical religious realist perspective as a realist perspective because it aims to hold on to the claim that, ultimately, reality confers truth on religious propositions. I will discuss this perspective in as far as it provides an alternative perspective on religious propositions in this respect. I proceed in a manner similar to my analysis of robust religious realism, i.e. by analyzing the position itself briefly, and then turning to its specific perspective on religious propositions.

Hick’s position is intended as an alternative to what he calls the naïve religious realist position which, according to Hick,⁷⁰ takes religious reality to be exactly as we perceive it.⁷¹ Taking a cue from Hick, I call his position critical religious realism, as it takes particular critical realist notions as basic. There is a variety of positions called ‘critical realism’,⁷² and I turn to Hick’s

⁶⁶ Hick rejects positions such as Trigg’s, “holding that the world is just as we perceive it to be” (Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, 4), but which Hick believes fail to acknowledge the fact that our conceptions color our experiences.

⁶⁷ John Hick, “The Philosophy of World Religions,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37, no. 2 (1984), 229–36, 231.

⁶⁸ See e.g. *Ibid.*; John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); and Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*. Cf. also Paul R. Eddy, *John Hick’s Pluralist Philosophy of World Religions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

⁶⁹ Cf. Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, 4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷¹ See Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology, Volume 2: Reality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 202–9, for an analysis of the manner in which critical realism was thought to form an alternative to naïve realism.

⁷² Cf. *Ibid.*, 202.

because his is an explicit attempt to accommodate the plurality of religious viewpoints on the basis of a critical realist perspective on experience and truth in epistemology and philosophy of mind and language. In (loosely) applying critical realist viewpoints in philosophy to religious issues, Hick's pluralism takes its lead from Roy Wood Sellars, who criticized representational realist perspectives (called 'new realism' in his day) and drew up critical realism as an alternative.⁷³

Basic to Hick's religious rendering of the critical realist picture is an interpretation of Immanuel Kant's distinction between phenomenon and noumenon,⁷⁴ a distinction between reality-as-it-is-for-us and reality-as-it-is, and the contention that we always experience reality mediated through our preconceptions, as reality-as-it-is-for-us.⁷⁵ Hick claims to translate the general critical realist views to the field of religion. This position, as Hick frames it, aims to avoid "naïve realism, holding that the world is just as we perceive it to be".⁷⁶ His own position aims to take into account the cultural situatedness of the religious believer. On the other hand, Hick wants to steer clear from what he takes to be a religious non-realist position, i.e. the belief that there ultimately is no religious reality and that therefore all religious language pertains to natural aspects of reality. The religious non-realist position, he holds, ultimately comes down to a pessimism as it leaves us no reason for hope. "[T]he non-realist forms of religion, presupposing this naturalistic interpretation of the human situation, abandon hope for humankind as a whole".⁷⁷ To Hick, a naturalistic understanding of reality

⁷³ Cf. Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, 5-7. Note that Roy Wood Sellars is not the same as Wilfrid Sellars whose thinking we will come across when discussing Putnam's notion of perception. The latter is the former's son.

⁷⁴ Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 241-9, and also 129-140. Cf. also Merold Westphal, "Theological Anti-Realism," in *Realism and Religion: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, eds. Andrew Moore and Michael Scott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 131-145.

⁷⁵ Others influenced by this dual outlook on (religious) reality are the early Don Cupitt, e.g. Don Cupitt, *Christ and the Hiddenness of God* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1971); and Joseph Runzo, e.g. Joseph Runzo, *Reason, Relativism and God* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), whose thinking will be discussed below. It is also implied in Gordon D. Kaufman's thinking on God as a mystery and of the available God as a human construction. Cf. e.g. Gordon D. Kaufman, "Mystery, God and Constructivism," in *Realism and Religion: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, eds. Andrew Moore and Michael Scott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 11-29.

⁷⁶ Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

implies that there are no salvific aspects to it.⁷⁸ Hick proceeds from the notion that there is a reality that transcends our natural reality, and which cannot be experienced as-it-is, but only as-it-is-for-us. He dubs this reality the Real. The belief in the Real prevents religions from believing that the world's suffering is "the universe's last word".⁷⁹ To Hick, the belief in the Real, however one experiences it, is what separates religious realism from religious antirealism.⁸⁰ It is not Hick's beliefs about whether there is or is no hope that interest us here, but the implication that we can make propositions about the Real which are true in virtue of their accordance with the Real. I return to this issue in detail below.

Contrary to Trigg's robust religious realism, critical religious realism holds that the knowing subject's cultural preconceptions preclude direct access to (religious) reality.⁸¹ Hick holds that there is a world of the noumenal - of a mind-independent reality (the Real), which makes up the world 'as it is' - and a world of human perception. The first cannot be experienced immediately, but is always perceived through our concepts, language etc. As Hick puts it, the position he endorses

affirms the transcendent divine reality which the theistic religions refer to as God; but is conscious that this reality is always thought of and experienced by us in ways which are shaped and coloured by human concepts and images. We see the Real always and only through the spectacles of our religious categories.⁸²

Hick maintains that our experiences of the Real are always mediated. There is, in other words,

⁷⁸ As said, Hick's religious pluralism proceeds from the view that all major religions attest to the one, salvific Ultimate Reality.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 14. While the realism towards religious reality is good news for the many, ontological religious antirealist perspectives imply 'bad news for the many'. See John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension : An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 20-5.

⁸⁰ This deviates from how I approach the issues, as I take it that this issue pertains more specifically to the debate about the referential nature of religious propositions. A religious realist and antirealist may both hold that religious reality exists, but they disagree on whether the existence of a religious reality confers meaning on religious propositions.

⁸¹ Hick holds "that there is an important subjective contribution to our perceiving, so that the world as we experience it is a distinctively human construction arising from the impacts of a real environment upon our sense organs, but conceptualised in consciousness and language in culturally developed forms" (Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, 4).

⁸² Ibid., 7.

an important subjective contribution to our perceiving, so that the world as we experience it is a distinctively human construction arising from the impacts of a real environment upon our sense organs, but conceptualised in consciousness and language in culturally developed forms.⁸³

With regard to ontological questions, interestingly, critical religious realism, more than religious realism, explicitly affirms the existence of religious (aspects of) religious reality. Whereas Trigg is ambiguous about whether religious realism actually affirms the existence of reality's religious aspects, or whether it is merely a (semantical) thesis about how the truth of religious propositions is related to the properties of religious reality, Hick's critical religious realism unreservedly endorses particular ontological claims about the existence of religious reality. Hick's position "starts from the basic faith that religious experience is not purely imaginative projection but is also (whilst including such projection) a cognitive response to a transcendent reality".⁸⁴ Arguably, this is not an ontological claim, but a faith-based hypothesis.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, from the argument that rests on this hypothesis, Hick deduces a number of substantial ontological claims, viz. with regard to the existence of an Ultimate Real, and its characteristics.

On epistemological issues, on the other hand, critical religious realism denies, in contrast with Trigg's religious realism, that religious reality can be known directly. It acknowledges the existence of religious reality but holds that it is a mind-independent reality which can only be known mediated by our conceptual framework. Hick holds that we may postulate one Ultimate Reality behind the various and conflicting religious experiences. "All that we can say is that we postulate the Real *an sich* as the ultimate ground of the intentional objects of the different forms of religious thought-and-experience".⁸⁶ Experience, in this sense, is always experience of reality mediated through the conceptions we have and through the language that we cannot help but use to understand and make sense of those experiences.

⁸³ Ibid., 4. See, for a thorough discussion of Hick's distinction between the Real as it is and our perceptions of it Dirk-Martin Grube, "Die Irreduzible Vielheit Religiöser Ansprüche und die Einheit der Wahrheit," in *Wahrheitsansprüche der Weltreligionen. Konturen Gegenwärtiger Religionstheologie*, eds. Christian Danz and Friedrich Hermanni (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verl., 2006), 41-65.

⁸⁴ John Hick, "The Possibility of Religious Pluralism: A Reply to Gavin D'Costa," *Religious Studies* 33, no. 02 (1997), 164.

⁸⁵ For a critique of Hick's use of this faith-based hypothesis see Gavin d'Costa, "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions," *Religious Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996), 223-232.

⁸⁶ Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 350.

Hick proceeds from the supposition that religions have access to the Real, but that this is mediated by their conceptions in such a way as to make it impossible that they can know the Real itself. Nevertheless, Hick believes that, on the basis of these various, sometimes even conflicting, religious viewpoints, we can make propositions about the Real.

With regard to the notion of truth, I take it that Hick holds that the propositions that we make on the basis of the various religious traditions have truth-value because they ultimately correspond to it. I believe this is why, as we saw, Hick believes he can say that the Real is benign and salvific, rather than malign and destructive. Hick would not allow that a particular religious tradition draw up a coherent perspective on the Real in which the real were malign. In a coherentist theory of truth, propositions within a coherent perspective may be true if they conform to that perspective.⁸⁷ To Hick, however, that the Real is salvific is not because that conforms to a (number of) religious perspective(s), but because on the basis of those coherent perspectives we may conclude that the Real is benign. Therefore, Hick's is not a coherence theory of truth. In critical religious realist perspective, the truth-value of religious propositions ultimately hinges on a correspondence with reality.

2.2.4 Evaluation of critical religious realism

For the questions about religious propositions, in particular with regard to issues of truth and experience, this position entails the following. According to Hick's critical religious realism, the diverse religious propositions can all go back onto the one, in itself unknowable Real. The notion that religious experiences are cognitive responses to a transcendent reality implies that we can have knowledge of Ultimate Reality. Because of the indirectness of our experiences, however, such knowledge cannot be absolute, but is relative to one's preconceptions. While we can make true statements about reality-as-it-is-for-us we cannot do so with regard to reality-as-it-is.

On the one hand, thus, critical religious realism maintains that our knowledge of religious reality is always subjective, since the cultural preconceptions through which we experience reality prevent us from establishing what reality-as-it-is is like. There is thought to be an unsurpassable divide between reality as it is and us, and all we have are our mediated and colored perceptions of the Real. For this reason, we can have no justified substantial beliefs about reality-as-it-is, and may only postulate,

⁸⁷ I return to the issue of coherentist truth in 3.2.1.

in a formal manner, the existence of the Real. Hick indeed postulates the existence of such an Ultimate Reality, but also wants to take it as benign. As said, this is because as a kind of religious realist he wants to affirm the existence of a reality that gives us reasons for optimism. In doing so, as said, he takes a particular correspondence notion of truth as basic. As we can only postulate a formal notion of the Real, however, this means that we cannot know whether this Real is benign or malignant. Yet, a malign Real cannot save us from the religious antirealist's pessimism that Hick fears. Even the very idea that reality-as-it-is has causal effects on us is a substantive proposition.⁸⁸ Without such a claim, the critical religious realist perspective has no means to judge the various propositions religions make. But with it, the perspective ultimately rests on substantive propositions about mind-independent reality, which it itself takes to be impossible.⁸⁹

Despite Hick's belief that the propositions of the various world religions, as well as the fruits of the actions and practices of their believers, attest to a communally experienced Ultimate Reality, we ultimately cannot evaluate the truth-value of propositions about the same, as we have no means to establish what reality-as-it-is is like. At best, therefore, different propositions about (religious) reality-as-it-is-for-us can be true.⁹⁰ With regard to their truth, critical religious realism almost seems to take an antirealist stance, in the sense that it has to concede that if there are true religious propositions at all, they do not hinge on religious reality-as-it-is. For if critical religious realism is still a realist perspective, it would have to take it that the truth of religious propositions (ultimately) is conferred on them by the way religious reality-as-it-is is.

Religious experience, other than in the previously outlined religious realist picture, is taken to be indirect, conceptualized experience of religious reality. It is indirect and mediated via the human being's cultural conceptions. Although religious experiences vary according to the human

⁸⁸ For a development of this argument, see Philip L. Quinn, *Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Christian B. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), esp. 281-299.

⁸⁹ Roger Trigg's criticism, in his *Rationality and Religion*, comes down to a similar argument, although it is generated from his particular religious realist point of view. According to Trigg, a problematic feature of Hick's position is that it presumes a dichotomy between the subject and object of knowledge (between reality as it is, and us), which makes it hard to understand how reliable knowledge and revisability are possible at all. See Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?*, 58-68.

⁹⁰ This comes closer to a notion of justification than of truth. Because our experiences are limited, we cannot make true propositions, but we are justified in holding particular propositions.

preconceptions, religious reality itself may nevertheless be experienced by anyone. Concerning the notion of truth, this critical religious realist position takes it that we have no unmediated access to religious reality. For this reason, we cannot argue for any substantial propositions about religious reality-as-it-is. I already argued why this is a problematic aspect of Hick's thinking, since he does have substantial claims about the Real himself, namely that it is a salvific, benign Real.

Hick contends that, similarly to someone who experiences life physically, "it is fully rational for the person who experiences life, or some aspect of it, religiously to form beliefs on the basis of that mode of experience",⁹¹ but he does not elaborate on how (religious) experiences that are not causally connected to religious reality-as-it-is may function. I argued that it seems that he endorses a correspondence theory of truth. Having such a notion of truth, however, is even more problematic in the critical than in the robust religious realist case, because of the dichotomy that critical religious realism presumes between reality-as-it-is and reality-as-it-is-for-us. This renders it impossible to make any substantive propositions about religious reality-as-it-is, or about any aspect of reality for that matter. As such, it has no basis upon which to assess the truth-aptness of religious propositions, which renders the notion of truth in this respect void.⁹²

2.3 Concluding notes

Although to different degrees, both robust and critical religious realism take the truth of religious propositions to be conferred on them by virtue of corresponding to religious (aspects of) reality. As such, religious realism provides an appealing answer to the questions about the truth-value of religious propositions drawn up in the Introduction. It takes the notion of truth-value with regard to religious propositions to be comparable to truth-value with regard to other propositions. This saves the relevance of the notion of truth with regard to religious propositions, which would in principle allow for reasonable arguments about the same.

Both robust and critical religious realism's answers to the research question have important limitations, however. Robust religious realism's main limitation resides in the fact that it cannot make apparent how its

⁹¹ Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, 30.

⁹² Cf. Alston, *Realism and the Christian Faith*, 57.

notion of truth in religious propositions would be a workable notion. Its perspective on how we should evaluate religious propositions, viz. by rationally scrutinizing religious experiences, seem untenable, because while reason is thought to be incapable of establishing anything about religious reality by itself, it is supposed to assess the revelations which alone are thought to provide us with any knowledge about that reality. Concurrently, with regard to whether it would be an operational perspective on religious propositions, it cannot accommodate the fact that there is an abundance of divergent or even conflicting religious propositions, of which it is often held that they may at least to some extent be true. As a position about the truth-value of religious propositions, therefore, it has important limitations.

The alternative, critical religious realist perspective aims to avoid the problematic robust religious realist contention that we could have direct, unconceptualized religious experiences of religious reality by maintaining that truth hinges on a proposition's being in accordance with (religious) reality-as-it-is-*for-us*, not with reality-as-it-is. It holds that there is a plurality of religious propositions because we experience religious reality through our preconceptions, indirectly. Though it would accommodate the plurality of religious truth-claims, its most important limitation with regard to the question of the truth-aptness of religious propositions resides in the difficulty of showing how religious propositions can be cognitive if the connection with religious reality-as-it-is is only indirect. With regard to religious reality-as-it-is critical religious realism thus amounts to an antirealism about the nature of truth. As we saw, Hick, as prominent proponent of critical religious realism, himself is unwilling to take that approach, and holds that we can make true propositions about religious reality-as-it-is on the basis of the various propositions about religious reality-as-it-is-*for-us*. As said, he claims that the Real is benign. The proposition 'the Real is benign' to Hick is not true because it coheres with other propositions, but because it accords with the way the Real is. In doing so, what is implied is the view that these propositions are true in virtue of corresponding with religious reality-as-it-is. As such, critical religious realism provides no viable alternative to the robust religious realist correspondence theory of truth.

As an analysis of the perspective on religious propositions of one of the most influential perspectives on semantical, epistemological, and ontological issues concerning religious language, this chapter has brought forward important aspects of the notion of truth with regard to religious propositions. Next to prospects, important limitations emerged. In the next chapter, I will conduct a similar analysis with regard to the antirealist

perspective. In Chapter 4, I will return to the core problematic aspects of the religious realist and antirealist perspectives and will provide a systematic analysis of their notions of truth and experience in particular.

3.

Religious antirealism on the truth-value of religious propositions

Having concluded the analysis of the religious realist perspective on the question about the truth-value of religious propositions in the previous chapter, I turn to a similar analysis of religious *antirealism* in this chapter. I analyze how religious antirealism views religious propositions, that is whether it takes them to have truth-value, and, if so, what it takes the truth-value to reside in, what would make religious propositions false or true, and whether there is a religious reality to which religious propositions (should) refer. As in the previous chapter, I will provide a definition of antirealism, based again on the works of Crispin Wright and Michael Dummett amongst others. On the basis of that definition, I define religious antirealism as well as by means of the works of Don Cupitt and Joseph Runzo, the former of whom is well-known for his defense of religious antirealism. As in the previous chapter, I will determine how and whether, in light of the questions posed in the Introduction, religious antirealism provides a satisfactory perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions.

3.1 Antirealism on the truth-value of propositions

I will show that, in opposition to realism, antirealism takes the truth of our propositions, on one or more subject matters, not to be conferred on them by reality.¹ Wright takes the antirealist to attack one particular aspect of realism specifically.² As said, the realist admits “of the possibility of verification-transcendent truth”.³ This means that the truth of particular statements may be unknowable for human beings as it may surpass our epistemic capacities. Wright argues that Dummett’s antirealist arguments attack this very facet, and that his arguments amount to the view that truth consists of decidability or verification. Realists hold that because something is true in light of an external authority, such as ‘the way reality is’, truth can

¹ When turning to Hilary Putnam’s appraisal of the traditional realist and antirealist perspectives on truth and experience, in Chapter 5, we will see that they have important, problematic, shared basic viewpoints too.

² Because it is this specific aspect which antirealists such as Dummett attack, Wright takes it to be the “cardinal doctrine of realism” (Wright, *Realism, Meaning, and Truth*, 436).

³ *Ibid.*, 435.

transcend our recognition. Antirealists hold that truth does *not* transcend our recognition of some state of affairs as true. As Dummett puts it himself,

The anti-realist insists ... that the meanings of these statements [of the disputed class] are tied directly to what we count as evidence for them, in such a way that a statement of the disputed class, if true at all, can be true only in virtue of something of which we could know and which we should count as evidence for its truth.⁴ ... For the anti-realist, an understanding of such a statement [of the disputed class] consists in knowing what counts as evidence adequate for the assertion of the statement, and the truth of the statement can consist only in the existence of such evidence.⁵

In the realist perspective, what is true is independent of whether we can establish such truth, while in the antirealist perspective, what is true depends on our epistemic capabilities. Dummett holds that “[w]e have to relinquish the illusion that we know what it is for any proposition that we can frame to be true independently of our having any means of recognizing its truth and settle for a conception of truth as depending upon our capacity to apprehend it”.⁶ Establishing the truth or falsity of a statement cannot lie outside our epistemic capacities, for truth is tied to meaning, which is in turn essentially a human enterprise, dependent on our linguistic preconceptions.

An important disparity between realism and antirealism resides in their perspectives on the notion of bivalence. The notion of bivalence entails that every meaningful proposition is either true or false. The realist holds that this is the case, since reality confers truth on only one of two meaningful, contradicting propositions. A realist holds that if (N) ‘for 26.001035992 percent, the Netherlands is below sea level’, then N is either true or false, even if we would, for instance, only have means - now and in the future - to establish the exact percentage in *eight*, *not nine* decimals. Even if we cannot and will never be able to verify N, the realist still holds that N is either true or false. In that sense, truth is verification-transcendent to realists. Anti-realism, instead, favors a justificationist perspective on truth. Dummett’s argument for the contention that the truth of a statement should not be considered as independent of our means to establish its truth rests first of all on his belief that truth and meaning are interconnected. For reasons closely related to the issue of semantical aspects of realism discussed

⁴ Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas*, 146.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁶ Michael Dummett, *Thought and Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 85.

in the Introduction, Dummett holds that the world consists of facts.⁷ “The world of which I am speaking is *our* world, the world as we apprehend it”.⁸ He argues that there are propositions about the world that are meaningful but the truth or falsity of which is undecidable (by themselves or by other, decidable propositions). If that is the case, then not every proposition about the world is either true or false. If that is the case, then we have to let go of the principle of bivalence.⁹ Dummett argues that from his argument that bivalence does not hold for all statements it follows that reality is not as determinate as the realist would have it.¹⁰

Being a realist or antirealist involves other issues as well, however, including issues about existence.¹¹ Thus next to these semantic aspects of the antirealist perspective there are important epistemological and ontological ones as well, for not only does truth depend on our possibility of apprehending it, in a sense what is real depends on those capacities as well. The antirealist “regards physical reality as containing only what there is evidence that it contains - evidence that is not necessarily in our possession”.¹² In a similar fashion, Dummett notes that

Our world is ... constituted by what we know of it or could have known of it. ... [W]hat we could have known extends only so far as the effective means we had to find out... It would be wrong to say that we *construct* the world, since we have no control over what we find it to be like; but the world is, so to speak, formed from our exploration of it.¹³

⁷ It would take us too far to go into this comprehensively here. Dummett holds that ‘what there is’ is not a first-order question, but one that requires that we answer questions about the meaning of existence, reality, etc. first. Cf. *Ibid.*, 14-28. With this, as we saw in the Introduction, Putnam agrees. Dummett then argues that since what we deal with are statements about reality rather than reality itself, what we have access to is the world of fact, not a world apart from fact. As we will see in Part II, Putnam does not believe that we have no access to reality itself, and thus does not believe that when we deal with the world of fact this is independent of reality itself.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 92. This is an aspect, which I will address in turning to the *religious* antirealist perspective.

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 85-95.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of this argument, see Wright, *Saving the Differences*, 294, and Wright, *Realism, Meaning, and Truth*, 120-4.

¹¹ In Dummett, *Realism*, 55-112, Dummett withdraws his earlier viewpoints on this matter, namely that he held that being an antirealist merely means rejecting bivalence, which would imply that accepting bivalence necessarily means being a realist. Cf. *Ibid.*, 103.

¹² Michael Dummett, “The Justificationist’s Response to a Realist,” *Mind* 114, no. 455 (2005), 679.

¹³ Dummett, *Thought and Reality*, 92.

Thus, though we do not bring the world into existence, its shape does depend on our epistemic capacities.¹⁴

We may perhaps postulate that we are confronted with some reality,¹⁵ but we cannot take this reality to be determinate in any sense. “[W]hat reality consists in is not determined just by what objects there are, but by what propositions hold good: the world is the totality of facts, not of things”.¹⁶ With his statement that the world is the totality of facts, we should remember, Dummett refers to in principle verifiable propositions. As ‘fact’ thus is not a verification-transcendent notion, the world ultimately would consist only of what the statements convey that we can in principle justify. There is no sense in which one could speak of a reality entirely independent of our knowing. “We cannot conceive of the world in complete independence of the manner in which we apprehend it, although we acknowledge that other creatures apprehend it differently”.¹⁷ It is impossible to know reality directly, and our concept of reality is therefore always an interpretation of reality,¹⁸ and if we are to save the notion of true statements or beliefs, truth cannot be conferred on those statements or beliefs by reality.

An example of an antirealist understanding of a given class of statements is what one could call mathematical antirealism. This would entail that mathematical principles are not true by virtue of their being in accordance with mathematical entities or realities that transcend human verification of those principles. Rather, a mathematical proposition, such as ‘ $1 + 1 = 2$ ’ is true if it lives up to particular epistemic norms or culturally established preconceptions. Antirealists about statements in this subject area

¹⁴ Realism, instead, holds that the shape of the world does *not* depend on whether we can know it.

¹⁵ One can ask, however, what it means to claim that there is or is no external reality if the truth and meaning of our propositions does not hinge on reality. What right do we have to postulate that there is a reality external to the human community when the meaning and truth of our propositions depend on conditions entirely internal to the human community? When turning to Putnam’s criticism of the antirealist notion of truth, in Chapter 5, this will be further analyzed.

¹⁶ Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 464.

¹⁷ Dummett, *Thought and Reality*, 101.

¹⁸ Dummett rejects what he calls “[t]he naïve realist’s notion of immediate awareness, consisting in a direct contact between the knowing subject and the object of his knowledge” as “probably in all cases incoherent” (Dummett, *Realism*, 111). We turn to Hilary Putnam’s and William James’s slightly different conceptions and endorsements of naïve realism below, in Chapters 6, 7, and 10.

would hold that there are no mathematical aspects of reality that could confer truth on them, or at least this reality is inaccessible in such a way that we cannot establish whether our mathematical rules and principles correspond to them.¹⁹

Thus, we could distinguish between two aspects of the antirealist perspective, viz. one that focuses on semantical questions and which holds that while there may be a mind-independent reality, the truth of propositions does not hinge on their reference to that reality because we have no (adequate) access to it. Antirealists may still hold that true and false propositions are possible - in religious matters or in other areas -, but the truth-value of these propositions resides in whether it counts as verified within a relevant community.

The other aspect of antirealism entails an ontological claim (though it may be derivative of a form of semantic antirealism), and entails that since there are no (accessible) mind-independent (religious or other) aspects of reality there can be no propositions that are true about those aspects of reality. This is a form of reductionism or eliminativism. It either reduces the existence of some subject matter to another subject matter (a reductionist about, for example, moral beliefs may hold that moral beliefs are actually feelings of like and dislike) or it holds that some subject matter does not exist at all (an eliminativist about mental states would e.g. hold that mental states are figments of the human mind).

While I take antirealism, like realism, to be largely a semantical position - I take antirealism to be the view that the truth of propositions does not hinge on their reference to reality - I discuss both the epistemological and reductionist form of religious antirealism, since it is especially prominent in religious matters, i.e. there are many examples of realists about subject matters such as the sciences and everyday life who are antirealists concerning religion.

¹⁹ See e.g. Hartry H. Field, *Science without Numbers: A Defence of Nominalism* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1980). See also Dummett's discussion of the problems a realist can run into when taking a realist approach to mathematics, in Dummett, *The Justificationist's Response to a Realist*, esp. 674-679.

3.2 Religious antirealism on the truth-value of religious propositions

Concurrent with the definition above of antirealism in general, I take religious antirealism to be a position with important semantical aspects.²⁰ Similar to its implications for statements in mathematics or other fields of inquiry, I contend that antirealism about religious propositions holds that whether religious propositions are true or false depends not on their correspondence with or representation of (supposed) religious aspects of reality, but on whether the propositions are in accordance with human epistemic practices, and with human preconceptions, or not.²¹ As Roger Trigg puts it, religious antirealism entails that “[a]ll religious assertions have ... to be reinterpreted in a manner which assumes that they are not propositioning truth about an objective state of affairs”.²² In religion, the religious antirealist holds, truth does not consist in a representation of a religious reality but rather in living up to human epistemic rules, which are thought to be applicable to that field of inquiry. As we will see, a statement such as that ‘God is good’ does not mean to say anything about a being independent of humanity, and its truth does not transcend the epistemic capacities humans have. Rather, it has meaning within a particular religious group, and is true if it lives up to their verification standards.²³ In line with Dummett’s statement that one need not be an antirealist concerning propositions in all classes, I

²⁰ Cf. also Westphal, *Theological Anti-Realism*, 131-145. Westphal also focuses on the impossibility of knowing religious reality as the prime characteristic of religious antirealism. Also see his statements on the problematic confusions around metaphysical religious realism and antirealism and a semantic perspective on the same. Cf. *Ibid.*, 131-3.

²¹ Cupitt maintains that the issues of truth and truth-value in religion are closely related to the same issues in morality. As we will see, he holds that religious truth consists in adherence to a religious requirement much like truth in morality depends on living up to moral norms, not the objective representation of a religious or moral reality. See e.g. Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God* (London: SCM Press, 1980), 8 and 142.

²² Trigg, *Theological Realism and Antirealism*, 215.

²³ This already attests to one of at least two ambiguities in the religious antirealist perspective on religious propositions. First of all, the religious antirealist holds that religious truth consists in living up to a religious ideal, but at the same time takes it that religious truth is whatever a particular religious community holds to be religiously true. I would argue that this first view is a remnant of positivism in religious antirealism, while the latter is indebted to the more recent developments in the realism / antirealism debate in general. The other ambiguity resides in the fact that religious antirealism at times holds that truth cannot be conferred on religious statements because there is no such reality, while at other times it holds that while we may postulate such reality, we have no access to it. I will address these ambiguities below.

take it that religious antirealists can take either an antirealist stance toward religion *but* a realist stance towards various other areas of reasoning, or an antirealist stance concerning religious and other classes of propositions. I will discuss both forms here, by turning to two influential authors who endorsed these positions.

If we take the Dummettian approach to antirealism, one possible line of argument for religious antirealism would be the argument that although we can assume the existence of a human-independent (religious) reality, it is impossible to know this reality directly since we always experience reality through our human preconceptions. In this sense, it resembles Hick's critical religious realism that I analyzed in 2.2.3, since it presumes that we have no access to reality-as-it-is. In contrast to the critical religious realist, however, this epistemological religious antirealism, as one could call it, draws the conclusion that reality ultimately *does not* confer truth on religious propositions. Another possible antirealist position is that while there is verification transcendent truth with regard to propositions in the natural sciences and other domains, there is none with regard to the religious domain. This would be a reductionist or eliminativist view. I will discuss both forms of religious antirealism consecutively.

3.2.1 *Epistemological religious antirealism on religious propositions*

For a delineation of what I dubbed epistemological religious antirealism I turn mainly to Joseph Runzo's work on what he calls 'conceptual relativism'.²⁴ While Runzo aims to endorse the objectivity of faith, and claims to draw up a religious realist perspective, it will become apparent that his position ends up in a religious antirealism.²⁵ I will show how Runzo's position tackles an important aspect that both the robust religious realist and the reductionist religious antirealist neglect, but also that it is not without difficulties of its own, as will become particularly clear when this religious antirealist perspective's implications for religious propositions are discussed.

Runzo's conceptual relativism presumes "a basic *idealist epistemology*, ... the basic assumption that the world we experience and understand is not the world independent of our perceiving but a world at least in part

²⁴ Although Runzo's primary point of focus is the relation of different belief systems and religions, and although he doesn't wish to endorse a religious antirealist perspective, I will nevertheless discuss his theory as exemplary of the idealist argument for religious antirealism.

²⁵ Cf. Runzo, *World Views and Perceiving God*, 115-70.

structured by our minds”.²⁶ This implies the dichotomy of ‘reality as it is’ and ‘reality as we experience it’. Runzo holds, quite similarly to Hick, that “all experiencing is experiencing-as”.²⁷ Contrary to Hick, however, Runzo is willing to elaborate on what he calls ‘religious relativism’.²⁸

On the basis of his conceptual relativism, Runzo draws up a position he labels religious relativism. Of religion, “a *human* construct (or institution)”,²⁹ Runzo holds that it

fundamentally involves beliefs at two levels: (I) ... the meta-belief that the religion in question does indeed refer to a transcendent reality which gives meaning to life, and (II) ... specific beliefs - including vital core beliefs - about the nature of that ultimate reality and the way in which it gives meaning to life. The first ... is shared by the world religions. The second ... is the point of conflict among the world religions.³⁰

Runzo maintains that religious exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism fail to do justice to the different religions, while religious relativism does. I take Runzo’s ‘religious relativism’ to be an antirealism, epistemologically, in the sense that, while religious discourse has truth-value, the truth-value depends not on the way religious reality is, but on whether the discourse about religious reality lives up to the requirements set for truth in the particular community (according to his coherentist outlook) or on whether our religious discourse represents religious reality-as-it-is-for-us.

Runzo’s theory works from the assumption of “the metaphysical division ... between noumena and phenomena, distinguishing between God in Godself or the Absolute in itself, and God or the Absolute as humanly experienced”.³¹ It presumes what he calls “the Kantian epistemic notion that all experience, and so all religious experience, is structured by the (culturally and historically conditioned) world-view of the percipient”.³² This implies that we have no immediate access to ‘reality-as-it-is’. The reality we know is reality mediated by our preconceptions, ‘reality-as-it-is-for-us’. Concerning the issue of the truth-aptness of propositions, Runzo maintains

²⁶ Joseph Runzo, "God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism," *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 4 (1988), 350.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 350.

²⁸ Joseph Runzo, "Religion, Relativism and Conceptual Schemas," *The Heythrop Journal* 24, no. 1 (1983), 38-50. As mentioned, Runzo hopes to vindicate a form of religious realism, similarly to Hick, but it will become apparent that it is ultimately an antirealist position.

²⁹ Runzo, *God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism*, 346.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 346.

³¹ Runzo, *World Views and Perceiving God*, 203.

³² *Ibid.*, 203.

that first-order truth-propositions about reality ... are relative to the world-view of a particular society. ... [C]orresponding to differences of world-view, there are mutually incompatible, yet individually adequate, sets of conceptual-schema-relative truths. ... [T]ruth itself is relative and plural.³³

As truth, in this perspective, cannot consist of being in accordance with the way reality ultimately is, I take it that Runzo's perspective on truth ultimately is a coherentist one. He states, for example, that "[t]o be rational ... requires attempting to achieve a coherent world-view".³⁴ This is how and why, according to Runzo, we can be rational without having access to reality as it is. In that respect, "faith can be understood as essentially involving commitment to a world-view".³⁵ It is not in the business of representing reality. Rather, "[t]hat our religious beliefs have a correlation to the transcendent divine reality is a matter of faith",³⁶ as we have no access to noumenal reality, and thus no access to the Absolute God.³⁷

The epistemological religious antirealist holds that both religious and non-religious aspects of reality are only indirectly knowable. What we have access to is a mediated reality-as-it-is-for-us. In Runzo's words, we have access to reality-as-it-is-for-us and not to reality-as-it-is, the reality behind our experiences. Similarly, Don Cupitt, in his epistemological antirealist period, holds that in this view, "God is as real for us as anything else can be",³⁸ since all reality is reality as experienced via our preconceptions. For the truth-value of religious propositions, this means that it cannot depend on religious reality, but that it depends on the worldview that we have, since all

³³ Runzo, *God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism*, 351.

³⁴ Joseph Runzo, "World-Views and the Epistemic Foundations of Theism," *Religious Studies* 25, no. 1 (1989), 45.

³⁵ Runzo contends that the fact that faith should be understood as such doesn't infringe upon its objectivity. Cf. Runzo, *World Views and Perceiving God*, ch. 7.

³⁶ Runzo, *God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism*, 361.

³⁷ Runzo, *World-Views and the Epistemic Foundations of Theism*, 45. At certain points, however, Runzo holds that he doesn't "see how it could be shown that it is *impossible* that our concepts or beliefs do in fact correctly refer to the noumenal" (Runzo, *God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism*, 361).

³⁸ Don Cupitt, *The Sea of Faith* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1984), 271. Cf. Don Cupitt, "Free Christianity," in *God and Reality: Essays on Christian Non-Realism*, ed. Colin Crowder (London: Mowbray, 1997), 21; and Cupitt, *The Sea of Faith*, 270. I discuss Cupitt's other, reductionist religious antirealist views below.

we have is reality as experienced, mediated through the preconceptions that are part of our worldview.³⁹

3.2.2 *Evaluation of epistemological religious antirealism*

As said, Runzo holds that his view is a form of religious realism, because according to him religious propositions deal with religious reality-as-it-is-for-us, which can be assessed in the light of the epistemic good practices of the community within which those making the religious propositions stand.⁴⁰ This leads Runzo to believe that we can make objective statements about religious reality: “the God of theology can be a *real* God, not just a conception of or perspective on the divine”.⁴¹ Religious statements *do* correspond to reality-as-it-is-for-us, i.e. reality as mediated via our preconceptions. Thus, he opens up a perspective on religious discourse as being in the business of representation, although not of Ultimate Reality but of reality as experienced by us. Thus, “what is putatively experienced is not the noumenal Ultimate Reality, but e.g. the *real* God of history”.⁴² Thus, in Runzo’s view, religious truth is thought to hinge on religious reality, if that is understood as religious-reality-as-it-is-for-us. This reality differs from community to community, as each has its own preconceptions etc.,⁴³ which implies that religious propositions are directed at a plurality of religious realities. They have truth-value insofar as they are directed at representing religious reality as experienced by that community, that is, with religious reality in the minds and language of that community.

This perspective, I would argue, faces the same difficulties that Runzo’s view in general faces, namely that it cannot make apparent how our cognitive faculties are in any way involved when we experience reality - be that reality-as-it-is or reality-as-it-is-for-us. Although it takes reality-as-it-is

³⁹ I will come back to whether access to any reality (reality-as-it-is or reality-as-it-is-for-us) is even a possibility from an epistemological religious antirealist perspective.

⁴⁰ Cf. Runzo, *World Views and Perceiving God*, ch. 7.

⁴¹ Runzo, *God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism*, 357.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 358.

⁴³ As it are human constructions, Runzo holds, there are universal aspects to these preconceptions, which he believes opens up possibilities of communicating and reasoning between different communities: “Because world-views (and concepts) are social constructs, there not only are but must be general trans-schema canons of meaningfulness and truth-value, as well as specific shared concepts and beliefs, across world-views” (Runzo, *World-Views and the Epistemic Foundations of Theism*, 49-50). Since these issues reach far beyond a religious antirealist perspective on religious propositions, this is not the place to go into them further.

to have no role in the truth-value of religious propositions, it *does* hold that there is a reality-as-it-is-for-us, and that the truth of our propositions hinges on *that* reality. It objectifies, in a sense, religious reality-as-it-is-for-us in a way that it will not allow religious reality-as-it-is to be objectified. While we are thought to have no cognitive experiences of reality-as-it-is, because all experiences of the same are indirect and mediated through our preconceptions, we are thought to have access to reality-as-it-is-for-us. What is problematic about this is that in making reality-as-it-is-for-us into a reality that a particular community experiences, it becomes equally questionable whether our experiences of that mediated reality are cognitive. If we have no unmediated access to reality-as-it-is, then we have no unmediated access to reality as it is for one's community members. Runzo's perspective would therefore be solipsistic, since I would only have access to reality-as-it-is-for-me. If it is impossible to have non-mediated experiences of reality-as-it-is, then it is equally impossible with regard to reality-as-it-is-for-others. In other words, if experience of religious reality-as-it-is is always mediated experience, then why is not experience of religious reality-as-it-is-for-us mediated?⁴⁴ In Chapter 4 I argue that it is because of their notion of experience that epistemological religious antirealists (as well as critical religious realists) have difficulty answering the question of the truth-value of religious propositions adequately.

The epistemological religious antirealist could follow Dummett in taking truth to consist of verification. In that case, a religious proposition is true if justified by one's community of peers. The epistemological antirealist thus lets go of the idea that religious propositions are ultimately true in virtue of a relationship with reality-as-it-is. This would lead to the following position: if one person holds the proposition 'God is love', since her preconceptions lead her to experience reality such that God is love, and if we are to understand her proposition to be true depending on whether it is in accordance with the way her preconceptions lead her to experience reality, then the meaning of that proposition cannot be clear to another person. It would not and cannot even be in conflict with another person's proposition, e.g. that 'God is indifferent'. Instead of conflicting, the propositions do not affect each other. Conflicting religious propositions are no longer possible as these propositions pertain to different religious realities. Thus, the most problematic feature of this argument based on Runzo's conceptual

⁴⁴ We will return to this issue more thoroughly when turning to Putnam's rebuttal of the metaphysicalist perspective on experience, in Chapter 5.

relativism, is that it implies that all people deal with different religious realities. The epistemological antirealist perspective on the truth of religious propositions, based on Runzo's conceptual relativism, I believe, thus has important limitations.⁴⁵

3.2.3 *Reductionist religious antirealism on religious propositions*

The second religious antirealist perspective that I discuss is that which may be combined with a *realist* perspective on propositions in other areas. In order to differentiate between these areas, and to take realism to apply to most areas of reasoning while not to religious reasoning, it makes a reductionist or eliminativist claim, namely concerning the reality of what religious propositions are thought to refer to. As Peter Byrne puts it, “[i]t asserts that while the theories and discourses of other areas of human enquiry, such as science, can be taken to intend to refer to realities independent of human representations, theistic theories cannot”.⁴⁶ Like the epistemological religious antirealist, the reductionist religious antirealist holds that reality does not confer truth on religious propositions, but contrary to it, the reductionist would hold that it *does* so with regard to propositions in other classes.

Reductionist religious antirealism is comparable to the robust religious realism analyzed in 2.2.1, in the sense that both hold that religious propositions, if true at all, are true in virtue of a correspondence with reality. The robust religious realist, however, holds that reality may in principle have those religious aspects to which religious assertions are thought to refer, while the antirealist takes it that such reality is a figment of the human mind.

Don Cupitt's early religious antirealist works are exemplars of such a perspective, since they take a *realist* perspective on discourses such as those of the sciences, while endorsing an *antirealist* perspective on religion. Peter Byrne labels such perspectives as “contrastive, theistic antirealism”,⁴⁷ since

⁴⁵ Furthermore, Runzo's religious relativism rules itself out, that is according to its own standards. As we saw, it takes religion to presume that its discourse refers to a transcendent reality. We also saw, however, that in Runzo's perspective there is no way that we could ever know whether our discourse refers to transcendent reality. It refers to the world-view as constructed by the community or to reality-as-it-is-for-us, the phenomena as experienced through, and relative to, the percipient's preconceptions. Thus, it cannot be said to refer to a transcendent reality, as the theory requires, because there is no way that we could ever know whether it does. This means that the theory does not accommodate religion at all, at least not by its own standards.

⁴⁶ Byrne, *God and Realism*, 127.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

the 'theistic antirealism' contrasts with a realist approach of inquiries in other domains. Correspondingly, Byrne discusses Cupitt's *Taking Leave of God* as an instance of this position.⁴⁸ In *Taking Leave of God*, Cupitt aims to take leave of a perspective on religious discourse as directed at, and dependent for its truth on a mind-independent religious reality. This religious antirealist perspective is combined with a general realist perspective, since, unlike religion and morality, other discourses such as the natural sciences are thought to be concerned with representing mind-independent reality, and capable of making truth-propositions on the basis of a correspondence with the way that reality is. While Cupitt maintains that there *is* "historical and metaphysical fact",⁴⁹ which entails that there is an accessible reality, not constructed by the human mind, this is not the case for religion. In this reductionist religious antirealist view, for there to be religious truth, there would have to be a religious reality outside of the human language to which religious propositions could refer. As there is no such religious reality, according to Cupitt, "[t]here is no such thing as objective religious truth and there cannot be".⁵⁰

Cupitt's reasons for taking leave of the religious realist perspective I believe can be summarized in his contention that, "insofar as [religious realism] succeeds in being realistic it necessarily ceases to be religious".⁵¹ Cupitt holds that religious realism cannot be argued for in an age in which "notions of fact, truth and so on are religiously neutral",⁵² since the religious realist understanding of religious propositions would render them historical and scientific, while, taken as historical or scientific, religious propositions cannot live up to the modern requirements of historiography and science, and because, as such, their religious, i.e. spiritual, salvific, meaning would be eliminated. "The view that religious truth consists in ideological correctness or in the objective correspondence of doctrinal statement with historical and metaphysical fact is a modern aberration, and a product of the decline of

⁴⁸ See *Ibid.*, ch. 6, for an analysis of a number of 'contrastive, theistic antirealist' perspectives, including that of Cupitt.

⁴⁹ Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*, 43.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 45. I believe Stephen T. Davis phrases this contention as "Cupitt's implicit suggestion that his views are superior to belief in God for purely religious reasons" (Stephen T. Davis, "Against 'Anti-Realist Faith'," in *Is God Real?*, ed. Joseph Runzo. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), 56), and he describes this suggestion as 'grotesque'.

⁵² Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*, 45.

religious seriousness”.⁵³ Religious realism, in Cupitt’s view, is both mistaken about, and devalues, the purpose of truth-aptness of religious propositions. For Cupitt, religious truth is an existential truth, which says something about the measure in which one has devoted oneself to the religious requirement, and nothing about religious reality. So understood, religious propositions, if they are supposed to concern a mind-independent *religious* reality, are either meaningless or fail at their task, since it is simply impossible that they would be in accordance with the way reality is. His religious antirealism implies that, if religious propositions *were* thought to address a religious reality, they stop being religious.⁵⁴

Since there are no religious facts, like there are scientific and historic facts, religious truth comes to differ from the concept of truth in the sciences and everyday-life. Religious truth no longer concerns a description of a religious state of affairs. There are then two correlated options open for the religious antirealist but general realist, a reductionist and an eliminativist approach of religious propositions. The eliminativist approach to the idea that while there is no religious reality to which our propositions could refer would be to discard religious propositions altogether, i.e. to speak in a non-religious manner. A reductionist approach would be to keep on using religious propositions but to take the truth-value of religious propositions to consist in nothing more than social norms. Cupitt seems to take this latter line in holding that whether religious propositions are true or not depends on the degree in which they reflect the internalization of the religious requirement.

In contrast to the possibility of truth on the basis of a correspondence with reality when it concerns scientific and everyday propositions, Cupitt takes it that “[r]eligion is not metaphysics but salvation, and salvation is a state of the self. It has to be appropriated subjectively or existentially”.⁵⁵ Instead of doing away with truth in religion altogether, thus, the reductionist religious antirealist takes truth in religion to depend on religious values, which in turn it takes not to depend on reality but solely on human constructions. “Religious truth is not speculative or descriptive, but practical”.⁵⁶ In this antirealist view, “[t]he issue is not one of descriptive

⁵³ Ibid., 43. I take it that with ‘objective correspondence’, Cupitt means a supposedly unequivocal relationship between our words and a mind-independent reality.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Ibid., 43.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 43.

truth, but of the depth of one's concern".⁵⁷ Religious propositions, therefore, should not aim to describe religious reality, and if their content does seem to do so, they are merely expressive of an avowal to the religious requirement. "Religious belief is religious allegiance expressed in symbolic language".⁵⁸ It is the allegiance to religious values that counts, not a conformity to doctrine. Thus, in Cupitt's reductionist religious antirealist perspective, the possibility of the truth-value of religious propositions is rejected.

3.2.4 Evaluation of reductionist religious antirealism

An important limitation of the reductionist religious antirealist perspective is its adherence or, at least, indebtedness to positivism. This is reflected in Keith Ward's point, in a monograph directed against Cupitt's *Taking Leave of God*, i.e. his 1982 *Holding Fast to God*, that "[w]hen [Cupitt] says that metaphysics is impossible, he is using it".⁵⁹ Ward's point is that while Cupitt wishes to, and believes he can, do away with metaphysics in this religious antirealist account of religion, he actually takes in a metaphysical point of view himself. "It is a peculiar irony of C's position that he begins with a protest about subjecting religious truth to a metaphysical dogma (the dogma of objective theism). But he himself has his own straitjacket for religion ready to hand; it is the straitjacket of Positivism".⁶⁰ As we saw, Cupitt believes that the world is religiously neutral. Ward is right, I believe, to argue that this is itself a metaphysical view. This means that Cupitt's realist view on religious propositions is not a non-metaphysical view of religious propositions at all.⁶¹

If the reductionist religious antirealist perspective were tenable in the aforementioned respect, then it would have another important limitation, namely with regard to its notion of religious experience. Based on the (*a priori*) assumption that there are no religious aspects to reality, the reductionist religious antirealist concludes that religious experiences are not

⁵⁷ Ibid., 142.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁹ K. Ward, *Holding Fast to God: A Reply to Don Cupitt* (London: SPCK, 1982), 17.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁶¹ Next to being internally incoherent in the fashion outlined by Ward, Cupitt's perspective is self-contradictory in another manner too. Cupitt would have it that presuming the existence of a metaphysical being makes living up to the religious requirement impossible because it places upon people rules and viewpoints that are not necessarily their own, and therefore does not leave human beings entirely autonomous and free. If that is so, the metaphysical viewpoints that this religious antirealism endorses likewise perturb a modern person's autonomy and freedom, since they infringe upon their freedom from rules laid upon them from outside of them.

actually experiences of reality. As a philosophical position with regard to the nature of religious propositions, thus, it claims precedence over people's experiences and beliefs. For it to do so, it would have to present strong arguments as to why religious experiences, contrary to many 'ordinary' experiences, are not-real, and why so many people mistakenly believe that their experiences of reality *include religious aspects*. Cupitt, however, fails to provide those reasons, and it is questionable whether anyone can, on beforehand, reject a whole cluster of experiences as unreal, and of propositions based on them as entirely mistaken.⁶² If we cannot reject those experiences as unreal *a priori*, then we have no good reasons not to take them as possibly real and as potential bases for religious propositions, even if, *a posteriori*, we might have to dismiss those experiences or propositions as mistaken.

3.3 Concluding notes

For the second main perspective on religious propositions, the antirealist view, I again started off from Dummett's and Wright's notions of realism and antirealism. Dummett's antirealist or justificationist perspective, I showed, takes the truth-value of propositions to hinge on whether we are able to recognize it, not on an (alleged) relationship between reality and proposition that we do not necessarily grasp. True propositions are in principle verifiable or justifiable as true. Because true propositions, i.e. facts, do not hinge on reality but on our epistemic practices, the world of facts, so understood, depends on our truth-value processes. Though we do not create reality, we *do* construct the world (of facts).

On the basis of Runzo's (largely epistemological) notion of conceptual relativism and its implications for religious propositions as well as Cupitt's (more ontological) dismissal of the possibility of religious experiences and propositions, I distilled two central religious antirealist perspectives on the truth-aptness of religious propositions, and the role of experiences in that respect. To the epistemological religious antirealist, what we can know is

⁶² In mentioning a fraction of the various arguments against the reality of religious experiences, there are David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Chicago, Illinois: Henry Regnery Company, 1949 [1748]), section XI, and Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006), 87-92, to name but two. I am not so much concerned with the content of those arguments as with the contention that one could rule out religious experiences altogether on beforehand.

reality-as-it-is-for-us, i.e. experiences of reality mediated through our preconceptions. Runzo aims to show that his notion of conceptual relativism is concurrent with religious realism, since it would allow for objectivity because the truth of propositions hinges on reality-as-it-is-for-us. His perspective on experience is that it is mediated by our preconceptions in such a way that we have no access to religious reality. As such, it inhibits the truth of propositions to depend on reality-as-it-is. Therefore, his view leads to an altogether antirealist perspective in the sense that truth cannot bear on reality. As a perspective on religious propositions, however, it is problematic since its notion of experiences as indirect experiences of reality leaves them unfeasible as bases of knowledge claims.

Cupitt's reductionist approach, which holds that religion is a solely human affair with no connections to an external reality, provides no solace in this regard. It holds that while everyday discourse has truth-value because of its relation with reality, religious discourse does not, because there is no religious reality. It fails to show why one should be a realist concerning one class of statements while being an antirealist concerning religion. It rests on the problematic claim that while 'ordinary' experiences may serve as bases for establishing particular facts, all *religious* experiences are figments of the human mind.

Truth and experience as challenges for religious realism and antirealism

In this concluding chapter to Part I, I specify the challenges of religious realism and antirealism on the truth-value of religious propositions. As I have shown that the notions of truth and experience are problematic, in the previous two chapters, I turn to these notions specifically. In concluding my analysis of the realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-aptness of religious propositions, I turn to their notions of truth and experience in light of concepts in philosophy of language and mind. In particular, I assess the positions with help of notions that we came across briefly in the above analyses, namely whether truth is thought to be a property and is conferred on propositions by virtue of correspondence or by virtue of justification, and whether experience is thought to be cognitive or non-cognitive, direct or indirect, conceptualized or unconceptualized, and representational or nonrepresentational. I indicate why these specific viewpoints on truth and experience are fundamental to the limitations of the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions.

4.1 Religious realism and antirealism on religious propositions and truth

In assessing their perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions, the notion of truth turned out to play a crucial but problematic part in both religious realism and antirealism. As said in the Introduction, this study is especially interested in a perspective on the truth-aptness of religious propositions that not only allows for the possibility that such propositions are indeed true or false from a theoretical viewpoint, but that is also operational in the sense that it provides truth-conditions that are in principle attainable. This connects closely to the notions of realism and antirealism that we worked out in the previous chapters. The question is whether the truth-value of propositions resides in their referential nature or not. Therefore, I will focus here on the question of whether robust and critical religious realism manage to provide an adequate perspective on the referential nature of religious propositions, and whether the antirealist perspectives have a viable alternative.

As I argued in 2.2.2, the correspondence notion of truth of the religious realist is problematic because it is highly questionable whether all religious propositions have corresponding entities. Suppose, however, that in religious matters propositions are indeed true by virtue of their correspondence relation with objects, and suppose that there are such objects. Are true religious propositions then a possibility, and can we then assess them in a viable way? The notion of correspondence truth endorsed by religious realism would still be problematic for the following reason. As Putnam has argued, we have no unconceptualized access to reality, and no ‘unworldly’ access to concepts.¹ Our understanding of reality depends on our concepts, and the concepts that we employ have no meaning without the reality to which they refer. To show that a particular proposition, e.g. ‘God is love’, is true would require showing that it corresponds with the relevant aspect of reality, i.e. the phenomenon ‘God as love’ or ‘loving God’. Doing so, however, requires taking in a position from which one has unmediated access both to the proposition and to the reality to which it is thought to correspond. Only such unmediated access would allow one to objectively establish a correspondence relation between them. One thus has to understand a particular aspect of reality, or a particular entity in reality, but how does one understand the particular aspect of reality (loving God) unless it is conceptualized? When one experiences the phenomenon of a God of love, one will have to understand it as a God of love, and not e.g. as a God of hate or a Great Pumpkin, if one wants to be able to compare the phenomenon with the proposition. While the robust religious realist’s notion of truth thus would require unconceptualized access to reality in order to establish that it corresponds to the propositions, this is impossible because if we want to grasp the phenomenon, then it has to be conceptualized in such a manner that we can understand it.²

As we saw in 2.2.3, critical religious realism acknowledges the conceptualized nature of our access to religious reality. According to that perspective, however, truth ultimately also consists of a correspondence of religious propositions to reality. This position does not run into same difficulties as Trigg’s robust religious realist perspective, because it does not take our access to (religious) reality to be unconceptualized. If, unlike in the robust realist picture, our access of reality is conceptualized from the start, it should in principle be possible to establish whether the concepts we use are

¹ See e.g. Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 56-8.72-4.

² Chapter 5 includes an analysis of Putnam’s rebuttal of this notion of truth.

in accordance with conceptualized reality. A person's understanding of the phenomenon (God as love) would always be an understanding of that phenomenon through the conceptualization of it (God is love). Critical religious realists like Hick take access to religious reality to be conceptualized but therefore also to be indirect. We have no direct access to the phenomenon, but what we have is a representation of the phenomenon in our brain. In the critical religious realist view, access to religious reality consists of representations of that reality, and not of access to religious reality itself. The representation of the phenomenon (i.e. a bracketed 'God is love') is conceptualized, and we can therefore establish a correspondence relation between the representation and the proposition. Critical religious realism thus solves the problem of the unconceptualized access to reality. However, as this representation is thought to be an indirect representation, because of its being conceptualized, this leaves it unexplained how there can be a referential relationship between the representation and reality.³ Reality, again, would have to be conceptualized in order for the representation to be a representation of that reality.⁴

As we have no access to religious reality-as-it-is but *do* have access to mediated representations of such reality, what seems most appropriate a theory of truth in this perspective is not a correspondence theory of truth, but a coherence theory, which takes it that a true proposition does not necessarily correspond with reality or entities but should be coherent with other specific propositions.⁵ While we have no access to reality, one could perhaps infer the way reality ultimately is from the multitude of religious propositions. This could then ultimately be thought to lead to propositions that *do* correspond with reality. In Hick's critical religious realist picture, coherence indeed is thought to go hand in hand with 'accordance with

³ Though it would take too far to go into this issue further, here, I presume that reference is in some way intentional, i.e. that for something to refer to another thing, there has to be intention on the part of the referring, conceptualizing being. An ant's lines in the sand, which coincidentally strongly resemble the contours of Winston Churchill, do not by themselves refer to Winston Churchill. There is a referential relation of the lines and Churchill only when, e.g., a person stumbles on these lines and conceptualizes the lines as the contours of Winston Churchill. See *Ibid.*, 1-2. This is of importance here since it means that referential relationships are not things that exist apart from conceptualizations by (more or less) intelligent beings. If that is the case, then the critical religious realist implication that representations refer to unconceptualized reality is problematic.

⁴ In Chapter 5, I return to these fundamentally problematic aspects of this view.

⁵ Cf. R. L. Kirkham, "Truth, Coherence Theory of," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Craig, Vol. 9 (London: Routledge, 1998), 470-472.

religious reality'. The diversity of religious propositions of the world's religions is thought to reveal a unitary perspective on the salvific or benign nature of the divine. Hick contends that despite us having no access to reality-as-it-is, we can have certain (very minimal) true beliefs, because although our sensory perceptions of the physical world are private, they allow us to live, communally, in this world.⁶

The basic problem with such a coherence theory of truth, as Donald Davidson formulates it, is "that many different consistent sets of beliefs are possible which are not consistent with one another".⁷ Davidson holds that what is required, on top of the consistency of statements with one another, is "an appreciation ... of how the contents of a belief depends on its causal connections with the world".⁸ Hick does not explicate how there is indeed such a causal connection with the world. In other words, it is unclear why propositions about religious reality-as-it-is-for-us, even if they would show an abundance of coherence or a central commonality, can be taken to pertain to religious reality-as-it-is. This also has to do with the critical religious realist perspective on experience, to which we will return shortly.

In a manner similar to Hick, Runzo takes it we can have no access to reality-as-it-is. While his conceptual relativism acknowledges that, he holds that there can nevertheless be true religious propositions, as these pertain to religious-reality-as-it-is-for-us. Truth, thus, is considered to hinge on a correspondence with the relevant aspects of conceptually mediated reality. A criticism that I formulated earlier is that this would amount to the idea that we are dealing with as much religious realities as there are religious believers (in other words: with as many bracketed understandings of the phenomenon of God as love, as there are religious believers). On a more theoretical level, i.e. with regard to its endorsement of correspondence truth, epistemological religious antirealism ultimately also runs into the same problems as Hick's critical religious realism, because it holds on to the same ideas about the conceptualized but indirect nature of our access to religious reality.

Suppose then, that the epistemological religious antirealist would not contend that the truth-value of propositions hinges in any way on religious reality, but instead on whether these propositions are true within the (religious) community. This Dummettian approach would be to take it that religious propositions are true if they are verified within one's (religious)

⁶ Cf. Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, 5.

⁷ Davidson, *The Structure and Content of Truth*, 305.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 305fn.47.

community of peers. Though we have no access to religious-reality-as-it-is, so the argument would run, we do have access to religious-reality-as-it-is-for-us. We can verify religious propositions in light of the relevant parts of reality as it appears to us, in its mediated, conceptualized form. A person's proposition that 'God is love' would be true if that person were justified in holding the proposition, which depends on factors internal to that person's community. With regard to the epistemological religious antirealist perspective on the impossibility of knowing religious-reality-as-it-is, the question would then be why, if having access to reality-as-it-is is impossible, it *would* be possible to have access to another person's reality-as-it-is-for-him-or-her? If a person, say A, cannot have sufficient access to reality-as-it-is in order to be able to establish whether the proposition 'God is love' is true, because of A's preconceptions, then would not A's preconceptions also impede her access to the meaning of another person's, say B's, proposition that 'God is love'? If the meaning of the proposition that God is love, as uttered by A and as uttered by B, cannot be established by A and B, then how would they know whether A's understanding of B's proposition is in accordance with B's understanding of B's proposition? A's access to B's reality-as-it-is-for-her is mediated and conceptualized in a manner that would prevent A from knowing whether, in B's view, the religious proposition that A holds is indeed verified. A consistent approach to the antirealist's understanding of the referential limitations of (religious) propositions, then, would lead to solipsism, the notion that we can ultimately only be sure of our own (mind's) existence and our own knowledge claims.⁹ I return to this argument when discussing Putnam's criticism of the antirealist notion of truth, in Chapter 5.

Without going into this matter, here, we should note that in the religious realist as well as antirealist perspectives, truth is a substantive property.¹⁰ This means that the truth-value of propositions is linked to particular, predetermined truth-conditions, namely in such a manner that truth is conferred on propositions if they satisfy particular practice-independent requirements.¹¹ In the realist perspective, truth is a property

⁹ Cf. Jonathan Dancy, *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 70-3.

¹⁰ Cf. Michael Lynch on substantive and functionalist notions of truth in Michael P. Lynch, "A Functionalist Theory of Truth," in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Michael P. Lynch (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 723-749.

¹¹ Some perspectives, which we have not discussed, take truth not to be a property at all. Deflationists hold that truth is nothing but assertability, i.e. a proposition is true if one can

conferred on religious propositions if and only if they correspond to the relevant parts of reality. In the antirealist perspective, truth is taken as a property bestowed on propositions if they are verified. In both cases, propositions thus have to conform to particular, fixed criteria. I return to a further analysis of the problematic aspects of truth as a substantial property in Chapter 5.

4.2 Religious realism and antirealism on religious propositions and experience

The limitations of the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on truth correlate with their perspectives on experience, since it is because of the notion of the referential relation with reality that their notions of truth are problematic, and this notion of reference correlates strongly with the notion of experience. The importance of the role of experience in the truth-value of religious propositions became apparent in robust religious realism's notion of revelation, in critical religious realism's and epistemological religious antirealism's notion of experiences being indirect, and in reductionist religious antirealism's notion that religious experiences, other than non-religious experiences, are non-veridical. In order to get a firmer grip on the limitations of the understanding of the notion of experience that these views have, I reformulate the views in terms of maintaining that experience is direct or indirect, veridical or non-veridical, and conceptualized or unconceptualized.¹² In what follows, it will become clearer what these terms mean, while I will return to them when analyzing Putnam's criticism of traditional perspectives on experience as well as his own alternative views, in Part II.

In the robust religious realist perspective, experiences of religious reality are understood as revelations. These are considered necessary in order

assert it in a particular environment or community. Truth-value thus is not a property at all, but merely another name for assertability. I return to this when discussing Putnam's viewpoints on the same, in Chapter 5, and his alternative in Chapter 6.

¹² See Tim Crane, "Introduction," in *The Contents of Experience: Essays on Perception*, ed. Tim Crane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-17, for a helpful introduction to the topics of experience and perception. See also John Foster, *The Nature of Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. part I, which calls the indirect form of perceptual experience 'mediated' experience. In Chapter 5 and 7, I turn to the question of experience in a more comprehensive manner.

to gain the referential access to religious reality, which would enable a person to come to hold true religious propositions. The problematic aspect of this view on the role of experience in true religious propositions, as I analyzed it in 2.2, is that unaided reason is taken as unable to grasp religious reality, and therefore requires religious experiences, but that religious experiences at the same time are to be evaluated by reason with regard to whether they should be allowed as sources of knowledge. Seeing revelation as a form of veridical, direct, unconceptualized experience makes this difficulty more intelligible.

It is in principle possible that there are true religious propositions without us having any possibility of knowing which ones are true and which false. In the Introduction, however, we established that saying that religious propositions are true or false is an empty statement if the truth and falsity of religious propositions were altogether undeterminable. This implies that the truth-aptness of religious propositions correlates at least to an extent with being able to establish the truth or falsity of religious propositions. If that is so, then the religious realist has to take revelation to be veridical if there are to be any religious propositions with truth-value, since the experiences which are basic to true religious propositions will have to be reliable. Correspondingly, as we saw, Trigg indeed takes revelations to be veridical, although they need to be evaluated by reason with regard to their tenability.

Because the robust religious realist takes it that any human conceptions of religious reality will fail to grasp religious reality, it takes veridical religious experiences as unconceptualized. If the human subject contributes conceptually to the experience, so the argument goes, this would render the experience altogether non-veridical. If there is a variety of incompatible religious experiences, however, e.g. of God as love and of God as hate, this implies either that there is a variety of incompatible religious realities or that either the experience of God as love or the experience of God as hate is true, which in turn implies that all other experiences are non-veridical, i.e. figments of those human minds. In order to avoid this conclusion, I showed in 2.2.2, Trigg maintains that religious experience has to stand the test of reason. As said, however, if reason is to have any import here, it has to have some (possibly indirect) bearing on (religious) reality. Reason would have to be able to establish whether either one or the other experience is veridical. This, in turn, ultimately requires what was established as problematic from this religious realist perspective: referential access to reality.

In the alternative critical religious realist perspective, experience is always experience of reality mediated through the conceptions that we have and cannot help but use in understanding and making sense of the inputs. In this perspective, religious experiences can be real, but because they are indirect, it is hard to establish whether they are veridical. If a person experiences God as love, then this is a conceptualized representation of religious-reality-as-it-is. As we saw, Hick nevertheless maintains that we can establish what the reality behind the representation is like, viz. on the basis of an argument about the commonalities of religious experiences of various traditions. Because many people have experiences of the Real as salvific, although they may call the Real 'God', 'Allah', 'Adonai', or anything else, Hick concludes, we saw, that religious reality is indeed salvific. Who is to say, however, that any one of those religious experiences is veridical? Why would the majority of experiences have more authority than a minority? A majority of people may have experienced God as a man with a beard, at some point in history. Does that mean that, at that point in history, God was a man with a beard, while now, when the majority no longer has that experience, God is something or someone else? For one's notion of truth, this would imply that the truth of one's propositions ultimately does not hinge on the way reality is. If, in other words, what we are in contact with when we have experiences of religious reality that are actually conceptualized representations of that religious reality, then this seems to imply the loss of the cognitive value of those experiences. If, because it is conceptualized, the individual's experience of God as love is indirect, then how can the experience, which is in the mind of the individual, be said to have any cognitive ties with the part of reality that it is supposed to represent?

The epistemological religious antirealist perspective on experience in religious propositions proceeds from the same problematic notion of experience, but instead concludes, as we saw in the discussion of its notion of truth above, that we cannot establish whether these experiences are indeed experiences of religious reality. Based on Runzo's doctrine of conceptual relativism, it takes religious experiences to amount to views on religious-reality-as-it-is-*for-us*. It runs into the same problems as the critical religious realist, because of their mutual perspective that our experiences are mediated by our preconceptions in such a way that it is no longer clear how those representations cognitively relate to reality. The reductionist religious antirealist perspective, which takes it that there are no real, veridical religious experiences, is problematic as it has to argue why, while there can be veridical experiences of 'ordinary' aspects of reality, there can be none of

religious aspects. If it were to state that there is no religious reality of which one could have religious experiences, it would have to draw up a conclusive argument for that. I proceed from the supposition that because of the abundance of experiences of religious aspects of reality all around the world, we cannot *a priori* reject the potential veracity of these experiences.

The foregoing analyses may be summarized in the following table:

Table 1: Truth and experience in religious realism and antirealism

	Truth	Experience
Robust religious realism	A substantive property, conferred on religious propositions by virtue of their correspondence to reality	There are real, direct religious experiences; they are <i>unconceptualized</i> and cognitive experiences of religious reality
Critical religious realism	A substantive property, conferred on religious propositions by virtue of their correspondence to reality	There are real, <i>indirect</i> religious experiences; they are conceptualized and cognitive representations of religious reality-as-it-is
Epistemological religious antirealism	A substantive property, conferred on religious propositions by virtue of their being verified, in particular of their being part of a coherent worldview	There are real, <i>indirect</i> religious experiences, they are conceptualized and cognitive representations of reality-as-it-is- <i>for-us</i>
Reductionist religious antirealism	A substantive property, conferred on non-religious propositions in virtue of corresponding to reality, but on religious propositions at most in virtue of their being verified	There are <i>no real</i> religious experiences. There are real and direct ‘ordinary’ experiences; they are <i>unconceptualized</i> and cognitive experiences of reality

4.3 Concluding notes: Parameters of an alternative perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions

With regard to the religious realist and antirealist answers to the question about the truth-value of religious propositions, the notions of truth and experience turned out to be of central importance, but also problematic. I have outlined what I take to be the central prospects and problems of the religious realist and antirealist engagements with the notions of truth and experience in relation to arguments for the truth-value of religious propositions. All four positions, two realist and two antirealist, aim to show what the truth-value of religious propositions consists in, but all four have difficulties to provide a compelling perspective. On the basis of the analysis above, we can conclude that if it is to be feasible an alternative perspective on religious propositions will have to accommodate a number of aspects and potential difficulties with regard to the notions of truth and experience.

It has become apparent that the combinations of direct experience with unconceptualized experience and of indirect experience with conceptualized experience, and the combination of truth as a substantive property with either correspondence or justification, are at least in a large part responsible for the limitations of the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions. An alternative perspective on these matters will have to evade the problems fundamental to these notions. Therefore, the next chapter, i.e. the first chapter of Part II, involves a conceptual examination of an influential rebuttal of the notion of truth as a substantive property, as correspondence or justification, and as the same in all areas of reasoning or as different in one area from another, as well as a conceptual analysis of the notion of experience as real or unreal, direct or indirect, conceptualized or unconceptualized, and cognitive or non-cognitive. For reasons that I formulate at the start of Part II, the philosopher whose criticism of the notions of truth and experience I analyze is Hilary Putnam.

The alternative perspective has to deal with the fact that for a verification-transcendent notion of truth-value to be of any significance, explicating how propositions can refer to religious aspects of reality, and how individuals can have cognitive experiences of reality is of central importance. For a justificationist perspective would have to show how we can have access to the meaning of one another's propositions if the truth-value of religious propositions cannot depend on reference to reality. On top of that, the alternative perspective will somehow, at least generally, have to

accommodate the variety of religious propositions. It would also speak for such a perspective if there were some comparison in the manner that we conceive of the truth-value of religious and non-religious propositions, as we have seen that the reductionist religious antirealist has grave difficulties showing why those should be dealt with entirely differently. Lastly, if an alternative perspective cannot rule out religious propositions as lacking truth-value or religious experiences as non-veridical on beforehand, but would have to make a strong case why it believes it can do so.

PART II
HILARY PUTNAM'S PRAGMATIC PLURALIST PERSPECTIVE
ON TRUTH AND EXPERIENCE

Part I analyzed religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions and established that their notions of truth and experience play an important but problematic role. More in particular, the analysis showed that the specific underlying realist and antirealist views on truth as either correspondence or justification and on experience as conceptualized but indirect or as direct but unconceptualized are for a large part responsible for the limitations of the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions.

In order to understand the fundamental problematic aspects of the underlying notions of truth and experience, Part II analyzes Hilary Putnam's criticism of what he calls metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth and experience. Part II also analyzes and appraises his alternative, pragmatic pluralist views. As Putnam's views provide an alternative to the mentioned problematic aspects of truth and experience, his thinking forms a suitable starting-point for drawing up a tenable perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions.

The hypothesis formulated in the Introduction, i.e. that an examination of religious realism and antirealism will allow for answering the question of the truth-value of religious propositions, can now be further defined. A critical examination of relevant topics in Putnam's pragmatic pluralist philosophy of language and mind will allow for drawing up a perspective on the notions of truth and experience that evades the difficulties that religious realist and antirealist views have with regard to the truth-value of religious propositions. I explore Putnam's criticism of metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth and experience (in Chapter 5) and his alternative views on these notions (in Chapters 6 and 7). I show that Putnam's view on the truth-value of propositions potentially leads to two viewpoints that his pragmatic pluralism opposes, namely a form of cultural relativism and of reductionist naturalism (in Chapter 8).

Part III, subsequently, addresses and settles these two possible risks of Putnam's position. This allows for drawing up the alternative, religious pragmatic pluralist answer to the question on the truth-value of religious propositions, in the Conclusion.

5.

Putnam's criticism of metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth and experience

In the first part of this study I analyzed the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions. In that regard, their notions of truth and experience were of special importance. In this chapter, I analyze Hilary Putnam's criticism of the realist and antirealist perspectives on the notion of truth and the question of the cognitive value of experience, which are fundamental to the *religious* realist and antirealist perspectives on these notions. An exploration of Putnam's criticism of these realist and antirealist viewpoints on these notions will add to a better understanding of the limitations of the religious realist and antirealist views on religious propositions. Also, understanding Putnam's criticism of the realist and antirealist notions of truth and experience is vital for understanding his alternative perspective, as analyzed in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

As shown in Part I, the realist and antirealist perspectives on truth and experience behind religious realism and antirealism hold that propositions are true either in virtue of a unique correspondence with human-independent reality or in virtue of being justified, and that experience is either conceptualized but indirect or direct but unconceptualized. I refer to these as metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on truth and experience. What these positions entail will become clearer in this chapter, in analyzing Putnam's criticism of the same.

An important factor in understanding Putnam's criticism of metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth and experience, and of his own views on these notions, consists of understanding Putnam's analysis of what he takes to be the worldview behind both of these perspectives, i.e. the "Cartesian *cum* materialist picture".¹ Basic to this picture is "the idea that perception involves an interface between the mind and the 'external' objects we perceive".² While, according to Putnam, early dualistic versions of the

¹ Hilary Putnam, *Words and Life*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 283. See also Hilary Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, Vol. 5 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 15-9.43-8.165-6. Cf. also Michael Williams, "Context, Meaning, and Truth," *Philosophical Studies* 117, no. 1 (2004), 107-129, for an analysis of what Williams calls neo-Cartesian perspectives on truth and reference.

² Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 43. Putnam calls this a "disastrous idea" (*Ibid.*, 43) for reasons concerning the antinomy of realism which we will explore below.

Cartesian picture of the interface between mind and world hold that the interface consists of immaterial impressions (experiences or sensations existing apart from our material body or the material world), current versions take these impressions to be material, i.e. “‘identical’ with processes in the brain”.³ According to Putnam, as we will see, the contemporary, materialist versions also take experience to depend on an interface between ourselves and our surroundings, though in this picture the interface consists of *material* impressions in the brain.

In Putnam’s understanding, what this dualist worldview implies for issues in philosophy of language and mind is that the meaning of words and propositions can exist only on one side of this divide, namely in the human mental and cognitive capacities, which in turn are considered to be essentially (because cognitively) disconnected from reality. We will see that, in order to allow the meaning of words and propositions to have bearing on reality, this view implies that it needs to be *proven* that the propositions refer to that reality. Experiences, similarly, have to be *shown* to be actual experiences of reality rather than events that have no connection with the external world. Therefore, these perspectives have to presume the existence of a mediating instance between our mental capacities and the world. Putnam argues that such a mediating instance cannot be successfully argued for, and that the idea of a dichotomy between mind and world that this worldview presupposes has to be abandoned. As we will see, Putnam holds that this worldview is basic to the metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on truth but also on experience.

For the rejection of an interface notion of reference, Putnam is strongly influenced by William James’s and J.L. Austin’s thinking. Cf. *Ibid.*, 9-12.

³ *Ibid.*, 43. Without going into this in much detail, it is worth noting that Putnam agrees with Donald Davidson’s rejection of functionalist perspectives on experience as sense data that are identical to brain states. See e.g. *Ibid.*, 36, and Donald Davidson, “Mental Events,” in *The Philosophy of Mind: Classical Problems / Contemporary Issues*, eds. B. Beakley and P. Ludlow (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 137-149. Putnam rejects Davidson’s notion, however, that an experiential event is identical to a physical event, as this identity is thought to reside in these two events having the same causes and effects. Putnam holds that Quine has successfully shown that notion of identity to be circular (see Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 36-8 and Hilary Putnam, “Information and the Mental,” in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 327-362). See also Maria Baghramian, *Relativism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 191-8.

5.1 Putnam's criticism of metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth

I start off with an analysis of Putnam's criticism of metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on truth. *In tandem* with my definitions of religious realism and antirealism, what I call metaphysical realism and antirealism here has both ontological and epistemological aspects.⁴ Roughly put, Putnam discerns the following ontological and epistemological viewpoints of what he calls 'metaphysical realism':

[o]n this perspective, 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.⁵

Antirealism holds that truth depends on what counts as verified. It will become apparent that Putnam holds that the metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on truth have important, but problematic basic assumptions in common, namely in the sense that they both hold that what makes a proposition true is by means of a particular, substantive truth-maker, an instance that confers truth on propositions.

I take it that an analysis of his viewpoints on metaphysical realism and antirealism adds substantively to an understanding of the limitations of the religious realist and antirealist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions. Especially the role of truth, reference, experience and perception, and reality will be scrutinized. In what follows, I will briefly describe aspects of the metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth, and then note Putnam's criticism of these notions.

⁴ Recall that the analysis, in Part I, of realism and antirealism and the concurrent religious realist and antirealist positions, showed that from their semantical viewpoints with regard to the meaning of truth there followed a number of ontological and epistemological aspects as well.

⁵ Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 49. With regard to this (in)famous perspective on traditional forms of realism, Putnam admits that in that monograph he did not appreciate the way in which issues concerning perception and reference are connected. See Putnam, *Words and Life*, 281. His later views *do* intend to appreciate this connection, and provide a more elaborate understanding of metaphysical realism's problems with reference and perception, esp. in *Ibid.*, 279-312, and in Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 234. In my analysis of his take on traditional realist and antirealist truth, therefore, I use Putnam's more elaborate descriptions of metaphysical realism and his criticisms of the same in the aforementioned later works.

5.1.1 *Metaphysical realist and antirealist truth as substantive and monist*

From the Introduction onwards, I have approached the debate between realism and antirealism first of all as a debate rooted in semantics. As said, a significant number of (metaphysical) realists is opposed to such an approach, and would prefer to frame the debate as what they take to be an ontological debate over the independent existence of particular entities.⁶ Michael Devitt, for example, maintains that realism holds that “common-sense physical entities objectively exist independently of the mental”,⁷ while antirealism (which Devitt would prefer to call idealism) would hold that facts about these entities depend for the existence entirely on the mental. Even those who oppose a semantic approach, however, hold that there is some relationship between (metaphysical) realism and the notion of truth. Various realists and antirealists who differ about what it means to be a realist or antirealist tend to agree that a notion of truth as transcending evidence is appropriate for realism.⁸ With regard to statements about the physical entities mentioned earlier, Devitt holds that these “are true or false in virtue of: (i) their objective structure; (ii) the objective referential relations between their parts and reality; and (iii) the objective nature of that reality”.⁹ This shows that even in Devitt’s view, truth and realism are intimately related.

Putnam argues that metaphysical realism takes truth “to be something that *goes beyond* the content of the claim”.¹⁰ Metaphysical realists hold that when someone asserts a particular true proposition (e.g. ‘snow is white’), the truth of that proposition is not equal to what it states (i.e. that snow is white), but that, rather, truth goes beyond ‘merely stating what is the case’, and denotes a property that can be ascribed to particular (true) propositions. In this view, truth is a *substantive* property, in the sense that truth is not

⁶ E.g. Devitt, *Dummett’s Anti-Realism*, 73-99, and William P. Alston, “What Metaphysical Realism is Not,” in *Realism and Antirealism*, ed. William P. Alston (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 97-115.

⁷ Devitt, *Dummett’s Anti-Realism*, 76.

⁸ See e.g. Alston, *Realism and the Christian Faith*, 37-60, and Devitt, *Dummett’s Anti-Realism*, 73-99.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁰ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 55 – italics Putnam. Putnam’s current definition differs from his former definitions, such as in his Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, 145, where he held that “[t]he most important consequence of metaphysical realism is that *truth* is supposed to be *radically non-epistemic*” (*Ibid.*, 125) concurrent with the view that “metaphysical realism [is] the view that truth outruns even idealized justification” (H. Putnam, *Realism and Reason*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 85.

assigned to a proposition itself but to the “assertoric force”¹¹ of a proposition. The property of truth is *gained* by a claim if it lives up to something “in virtue of which the claim is true”.¹² According to Putnam, metaphysical realism *and* antirealism hold that the fact that our propositions are true cannot be dependent on factors which reside *within* our discourse. Rather, our ordinary ways of holding true propositions should be backed up by discourse-transcendent properties that are to guarantee their truth¹³ (e.g. ‘snow is white’ has the property of being true because it lives up to the universal requirement (of true propositions) of being coherent with other true propositions). Different positions vary about what exactly it is in virtue of what reason particular propositions gain the property of being true,¹⁴ but it is clear, to those positions that have metaphysical realist and antirealist presuppositions, that it resides not in the proposition itself but in a proposed, substantive property that the proposition should gain.

To Putnam, truth, in the metaphysical realist view, is not only a substantive property but also an absolute, monist notion in the sense that there can only be one notion of truth. Because it takes it that a proposition’s being true always consists in a particular correspondence with the relevant objects in reality, this notion of truth is a monist notion. Since, as Putnam has it, “the metaphysical realist ... postulate[s] that there is some single thing we are saying (over and above what we are claiming) whenever we make a truth claim”,¹⁵ this implies that what should count as ‘truth’ is set for all areas of investigation. Thus, a particular notion of truth that is applied in the natural sciences is then exported to other areas of inquiry, such as mathematics and ethics.¹⁶ Metaphysical realism, according to Putnam, maintains that one can take concepts such as truth that are applicable in one context and concerning particular objects and apply them to another context and to other objects in an unaltered fashion.¹⁷ In the area of the natural sciences, for example, the requirements of what is to count as a true

¹¹ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 55.

¹² *Ibid.*, 55.

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁴ As we will see below, the traditional realist holds that the substantive property of truth depends on the correspondence with reality, while the (traditional) antirealist holds that it resides in justification. Cf. *Ibid.*, 54-6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁶ Hilary Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3.18-22.

¹⁷ I will return to this subject in my discussion of Putnam’s criticism of the metaphysical realist notion of truth.

proposition are thought to be same as in the area of aesthetics. If this implies that in the area of aesthetics truth is unattainable, then that is a consequence the metaphysical realist is willing to bear. Putnam is a pragmatist, and more specifically, a Deweyan pragmatist in the sense that he holds that philosophy should aid a particular area of reasoning in understanding its practice, not impose notions on it.¹⁸ He is a (Wittgensteinian) pluralist in the sense that there can be a plurality of basic concepts such as truth depending on the practice of which these concepts are part.¹⁹

That the substantive aspects and the monism of the metaphysical realist notion of truth are intertwined becomes apparent in the example of a proposition such as that 'Love gives ultimate meaning to life'. According to metaphysical realism and antirealism, the truth of this proposition, if it is true, resides not in it 'merely' being the case that love gives ultimate meaning to life, but in the supposed conferral of the property truth to the proposition - bestowed on it because of e.g. (and this depends on whether one is a metaphysical realist or an antirealist) its correspondence to reality or its being verified. The notion of the property of truth, here, is substantive as its correspondence to reality is thought to *guarantee* that this proposition is true. At the same time it is a monist notion if this correspondence to reality is thought to be only one way in which a proposition can acquire the property of truth.

5.1.2 *Metaphysical realism's notion of truth as unique correspondence*

As said, Putnam takes it that metaphysical realists and antirealists disagree about what it is in virtue of which particular propositions gain the property of 'being true'. While antirealists hold that verification, from the point of view of a society's epistemic norms, is what confers this property unto a particular proposition, metaphysical realists hold that a proposition's correspondence with reality is the criterion for its being true. As D.M. Armstrong puts it, "[t]he traditional correspondence theory holds that [a proposition] p is true if, and only if, it corresponds to reality".²⁰ He notes that in the traditional correspondence theory, propositions are thought to be true

¹⁸ Cf. Putnam Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question*, 69-75, for Putnam's views on Charles S. Peirce's and John Dewey's notions of pragmatist inquiry. In discussing Putnam's alternative views on truth and experience, the works of the influential pragmatist philosopher William James will be central.

¹⁹ See e.g. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 64-9.

²⁰ D. M. Armstrong, *Belief, Truth and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 113.

if and only if they correspond to facts or states of affairs.²¹ Similarly, Putnam argues that metaphysical realists, who endorse this correspondence theory of truth, hold that what makes a proposition true is the unique equivalence of the proposition with particular objects or states of affairs.²²

Putnam frames the issue in such a way that in the metaphysical realist's correspondence view on truth it is thought to be the case that there are objects or states of affairs that guarantee the objectivity of the propositions in question. He takes it that metaphysical realists hold that this also applies to areas where there are no obvious objects or apparent states of affairs to which the words refer, such as in the case of mathematics or ethics. If, like in such a case, the objects that function in the process of truth-making are not plain to see, these should be considered to be supersensible, if there is to be any objectivity in that area of reasoning. When a proposition is equivalent with these (super)sensible realities (objects, facts, or states of affairs), this correspondence relation bestows the substantive property of truth upon the proposition.²³ This is congruous with how we analyzed the religious realist's perspective on truth in Chapters 2 and 4.

An overarching criticism that Putnam has of metaphysical realism's substantive, monist property of truth is that it calls on such notions like truth "to bear an explanatory burden - to bear metaphysical weight - in accounting for the relation between Thought and Reality".²⁴ In the metaphysical realist view, the 'ordinary' notion of truth, which functions in particular manners in specific areas of reasoning, becomes a 'queer' property with a single function and use that has to guarantee a relation that true

²¹ Armstrong, having a particular take on propositions, believes this view to be problematic. He takes a 'proposition' to be a 'mental proposition', having a meaning independent of its being asserted, entertained, or believed by someone. In such a view, 'proposition' equals 'fact' or 'state of affair' provided that the proposition is indeed true, i.e. factual or according to the state of affairs. This in turn implies that "the [true] proposition does not correspond with this fact or state of affairs, [but] rather [that] it coalesces with it" (Ibid., 113). Concurrently, Armstrong draws up an alternative perspective on correspondence truth that features different forms of correspondence-relation, in which *belief-states*, and not propositions, are thought to be capable of being true and false by corresponding, or failing to correspond, to facts and states of affairs. See Ibid., esp. ch. 9.

²² Cf. Fred Stoutland, "Putnam on Truth," in *The Practice of Language*, eds. Martin Gustafsson and Lars Hertzberg (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 147-176, for a brief but clear analysis of this view.

²³ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 22.

²⁴ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 54.

propositions already have, namely a relation with fact.²⁵ Putnam holds that “[t]he metaphysical realist ... wants a property that corresponds to the assertoric force of a sentence”.²⁶ This, as we will see below, counts both for the metaphysical realist and the antirealist. Both perspectives, however, do not succeed in establishing this substantive, monist property.

Putnam’s criticism of the metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth rests on one of two correlated pillars, which together make up what Putnam calls the “antinomy of realism”,²⁷ i.e. the difficulty of relating language to reality when one upholds the Cartesian *cum* materialist picture of mind and world.²⁸ This antinomy of realism is behind both perspectives and thus pertains to the concepts that are central to the problematic religious realist and antirealist notions of truth and experience. The first pillar of Putnam’s criticism of the antinomy of realism deals with the question of how language hooks on to the world, and is a criticism of what one could call the ‘semantic internalist’ view on meaning and truth of metaphysical realists and antirealists. The second pillar deals with the question of how (perceptual) experience hooks onto the world, and is a criticism of representational accounts of perception. I turn to the latter when discussing Putnam’s criticism of interface notions of experience, in 5.2 below.

According to the view to which the first pillar of Putnam’s criticism of the antinomy of realism is directed, i.e. a semantic internalism, “the (inner) mental states of speakers alone determine the extensions of their terms”.²⁹ Contrary to that view, Putnam endorses a semantic externalism, i.e. the view that the meanings of our propositions as well as the contents of our intentions (our references to reality) depend on the aspects of reality to which they refer. Putnam’s Brain-in-a-Vat-argument is one of the instances where he argues against this semantic internalist view on meaning and truth.³⁰ While the argument is often thought to be an argument against the

²⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 54-5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-17.

²⁸ See *Ibid.*, where he states that “[t]he ‘how does language hook on to the world’ issue is, at bottom, a replay of the old ‘how does perception hook on to the the [sic] world’ issue” (*Ibid.*, 12).

²⁹ J. Jylkkä, H. Railo and J. Haukioja, “Psychological Essentialism and Semantic Externalism: Evidence for Externalism in Lay Speakers’ Language use,” *Philosophical Psychology* 22, no. 1 (2009), 38.

³⁰ See Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 1-21.

(ontological) possibility of us being brains-in-a-vat,³¹ it actually is meant to have *semantic* import, i.e. to be an argument against the possibility that we cannot make any reference to reality (skepticism),³² and thus against the possibility of meaning existing inside a person's (or a brain-in-a-vat's) brain. If the argument works, and meaning indeed is not an affair internal to a person's mind, then this implies two things, which will be discussed below: (1) the correspondence theory of truth falls short because one of its central preconditions, viz. that the meaning of concepts is accessible without having access to the things to which they pertain (see 2.1 above) does not obtain, and (2) the meaning of concepts and propositions thus is not conferred on them in a second instance but is part of them because of the relation of the person entertaining the concept with reality. For Putnam's criticism of the metaphysical realist notion of truth, the first implication is of significance. In our analysis of Putnam's alternative, pragmatic pluralist notion of truth (in Chapter 6), the second will be central.

Without going into it comprehensively,³³ this argument, if understood as a semantic argument, runs as follows. Imagine a person (S) who sees a tree in front of her, and holds the proposition (PT) 'there is a tree in front of me'. Imagine also a number of brains-in-a-vat (BiV's) who are linked to a computer that stimulates the brains in such a manner that they have the stimuli that make them (seem to) see a tree in front of them. The BiV's also hold the proposition PT, but here it refers to computer rendering of the tree in front of the BiV. In this case, PT is still true, but only in vat-English, Putnam argues. Let's call that PT-VE. Suppose now that S entertains the proposition (PBiV) 'I am a brain in a vat'. Here, PBiV would refer to the actual situation where she is a brain in a vat. If a BiV entertains PBiV,

³¹ E.g. J. Harrison, "Professor Putnam on Brains in Vats," *Erkenntnis* 23, no. 1 (1985), 55-57; Anthony L. Brueckner, "Brains in a Vat," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 3 (1986), 148-167; and Anthony L. Brueckner, "Conceptual Relativism," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 79 (1998), 295-301.

³² E.g. T. Tymoczko, "In Defense of Putnam's Brains," *Philosophical Studies* 57, no. 3 (1989), 281-297.

³³ There is a vast body of secondary literature on this argument. Next to the articles mentioned above, see e.g. P. Smith, "Could we be Brains in a Vat?" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (1984), 115-123; Crispin Wright, "On Putnam's Proof that we are Not Brains-in-a-Vat," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 92 (1992), 67-94; and G. Ebbs, "Skepticism, Objectivity, and Brains in Vats," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (1992), 239-266, to name but a few places where the argument is discussed thoroughly and explicitly. See also Mark Quentin Gardiner, *Semantic Challenges to Realism: Dummett and Putnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

however, it refers to the computer simulation of being a brain in a vat. BiV therefore actually entertains PBiV-VE. Now suppose that S is really a BiV, viz. that a person may actually be a brain in a vat. If S holds PBiV, she actually holds PBiV-VE, not PBiV. As a BiV, S cannot entertain PBiV, but necessarily entertains PBiV-VE. Thus, S cannot hold that she is a brain in a vat (PBiV) if she is a brain in a vat (BiV), but rather holds that (PBiV-VE) 'I am a brain in a vat according to a brain in a vat'. Putnam's argument is directed against the idea that mental objects or brain states *intrinsically* refer to objects outside the brain.³⁴ If that is the case, then there is no unique determinable meaning to the words that we use. 'Tree', e.g. may refer to the tree that S sees in front of her, or to the computational trees that the stimuli that the BiV receives cause it to experience.

The central objection to Putnam's argument is that there are particular bounds that ensure a determinate reference of the words or concepts that we use.³⁵ The metaphysical realist has it that there are particular, discourse independent constraints on what a word may mean, e.g. because we can *inspect* whether the word 'tree' as employed by S (or the BiV) applies to an actual tree, or because we can establish an appropriate causal relation between S's use of 'tree' and her seeing a tree.³⁶ The metaphysical realist may respond, for example, that in the case of the BiV's 'tree' the reference relation is not 'appropriate', because there is no causal connection between the BiV's 'tree' and an actual tree. Therefore, since the reference relation does not conform to the proper constraints, the word 'tree' in the BiV's sense ('tree'-VE) does not *really* mean tree. S's 'tree' *does* mean tree because there is a causal connection between 'tree' and an actual tree. As Putnam sees it, the causal connection, to metaphysical realists who are physicalists (such as Michael Devitt), is part of physical reality itself. The question then, however, is how it can be that reality, understood from a physicalist perspective, can have intentional aspects, i.e. how reality itself

³⁴ See also Smith, *Could we be Brains in a Vat?*, 115-123, and Wright, *On Putnam's Proof that we are Not Brains-in-a-Vat*, 67-94, for an understanding of Putnam's argument as directed against semantic internalism. In technical terms, at least part of the extension of the brain state (be it S's or the BiV's) does not supervene on matters internal to the brain.

³⁵ See e.g. Michael Devitt, "Realism and the Renegade Putnam: A Critical Study of Meaning and the Moral Sciences," *Nous* 17, no. 2 (1983), 291-301; D. Lewis, "Putnam's Paradox," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 62, no. 3 (1984), 221-236; and R. Boyd, "What Realism Implies and what it does Not," *Dialectica* 43, no. 1-2 (1989), 5-29, esp. 20.

³⁶ Cf. Putnam's discussion of this argument in Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), ch. 5.

prescribes referential relations. Putnam holds that the only explanation that physicalist metaphysical realists have is to presume the existence of some 'metaphysical glue' between particular words and reality.

Devitt answers, however, that in showing what 'causally relates to' means when someone says that a concept causally relates to a particular object, that person merely has to explain that 'causally relates to' is related to a particular causal relation. Thus, Devitt holds that although this may allow Putnam to ask what 'causally related' in turn means, he "has not shown that our second answer, the explanation of reference for 'causally related', does not explain, *so far as explanation is necessary*, how 'causally related' uniquely refers".³⁷ Devitt takes it that his reply suffices because Putnam has not shown that 'causally related' does not uniquely refer. Putnam's response, would be to say that he has, namely in such arguments against unique reference, i.e. his argument with regard to conceptual relativity. I believe Putnam's argument for conceptual relativity works, but I postpone a discussion of it to 6.1.2, because it is fundamental to Putnam's alternative perspective on truth.

If it is the case that, as Putnam summarizes his semantic externalism, "meanings just aren't in the head",³⁸ then the notion of truth as correspondence described above becomes problematic. For truth to play the role that the metaphysical realist wants it to do, namely to ascribe a property to particular propositions, the meaning (and truth) of the propositions needs to be determinate. In order to establish a correspondence relation between a word and an aspect of reality, the meaning of that word has to be fixed. Putnam's argument shows, however, that it is not.³⁹ If a unique, right referential relation (intension) cannot be determined, there can be various, equally admissible reference relations between e.g. the concept 'tree' or 'God' and the reality to which it refers. If that is the case, there can be various, equally admissible meanings (extensions) of the term 'tree' or 'God', which leaves it impossible to establish an unrevisable, uniquely correct meaning of 'tree' or 'God'.

³⁷ Devitt, *Realism and the Renegade Putnam: A Critical Study of Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, 299.

³⁸ Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 19.

³⁹ To be sure, even though he takes it that meaning is not determinate, Putnam does not reject the idea that our words can have meaning. On the contrary, he argues that the metaphysical realist views amount "to skepticism about our ability to refer to a discourse-independent (or mind-independent) external world" (Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, 85), while he himself takes it that we *are* able to, and that our words *do* refer. Reference, as we will see when analyzing Putnam's notion of truth, just is not determinate.

Formulating it in a manner that anticipates our analysis of Putnam's notion of conceptual relativity and pluralism, one could say that in order to show a *unique* correspondence between a concept or proposition and the relevant aspect of reality one would need a reality-independent understanding of the particular concept or proposition as well as an unconceptualized understanding of the relevant aspect of reality. In order to show, for example, that God is love, the metaphysical realist correspondence theory of truth would require that one's concepts 'God' and 'love' have a meaning independent of their extensions (independent of that to which they refer), and that one has access to God and love without the use of the relevant concepts. If, however, concepts and propositions have their meaning at least partly because of their relation with reality (what 'love' means at least in part depends on the reality of love to which 'love' refers), as Putnam's semantic externalism stresses, it is impossible to have an unconceptualized understanding of reality and a reality-independent understanding of the concept.⁴⁰

5.1.3 *Antirealism's notion of truth as verification*

Similarly to Putnam's criticism, Dummett's main criticism of the correspondence theory can be summarized as its failing to recognize the degree to which "truth, meaning, falsity, assertion, justification and evidence are ... intertwined".⁴¹ Dummett, whose analyses of antirealism Putnam takes as paradigmatic for the antirealist notion of truth,⁴² concurs with Putnam's conclusion that the metaphysical realist notion of truth as unique correspondence is untenable. He therefore provides an alternative, antirealist perspective, which he calls justificationism. As we will see, antirealism takes truth to be conferred on propositions, not in virtue of their correspondence with reality, but in virtue of a proposition's being verified.

Antirealism, as delineated in Chapter 3, is not so much the rejection of the existence of particular objects or aspects of the world (such as unobservable objects)⁴³ as it is the rejection of the metaphysical realist notion of truth (and meaning) with which we dealt above. As we saw in Part I, Dummett takes it that an all-important issue behind the metaphysical realist perspective on reality having objective, human-independent

⁴⁰ Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 74.

⁴¹ Michael Dummett, "The Justificationist's Response to a Realist," *Mind* 114, no. 455 (2005), 672.

⁴² And so have I, in Part I.

⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 671-4.

properties, is the semantic issue of what it means to state that reality indeed has those properties. For metaphysical realism to work, one could say, it has to adhere to particular semantic views on meaning and truth.

As we saw, metaphysical realists hold that reality has objective properties, independent from whether human cognition is capable of tracking them. Phrasing this commitment in a manner that incorporates the semantic aspects that are involved, Dummett holds that “[t]he very minimum that realism can be held to involve is that statements in the given class relate to some reality that exists independently of our knowledge of it”.⁴⁴ As the way reality is is responsible for whether a proposition is true or not, a (meaningful) proposition is always either true or not. To Dummett, therefore, a central (viz. necessary though not sufficient) notion of the realist perspective is adherence to the principle of bivalence,⁴⁵ i.e. “that any statement with a definite sense must be determinately either true or false”.⁴⁶ Realists hold that even if we would have no way of establishing it, every meaningful proposition is either true or false.

As we saw in 3.1, however, Dummett maintains that the principle of bivalence is not tenable, because he takes “reality [to be] the totality of what can be experienced by sentient creatures and what can be known by intelligent ones”.⁴⁷ The world, in other words, consists of facts rather than of matter. If the world of facts is the world that we know, Dummett argues, then if there are propositions about the world that are meaningful but the truth or falsity of which is undecidable, then not every fact about the world is either true or false. If truth is a property behind the propositions we make, and if in particular cases we are unable to acknowledge whether a particular proposition indeed has the property of truth (or not), then, antirealists hold, it becomes incomprehensible how in other cases they *can* denote that property.⁴⁸ The proposition that Christopher Columbus’s first shipmate coughed three times on the day that they first saw what are now known as the Bahamas, cannot be decided, though we know what it would take for it

⁴⁴ Dummett, *Realism*, 55.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁶ Dummett, *Thought and Reality*, 60. Cf. also Dummett, *Realism*, 55.

⁴⁷ Dummett, *Truth and the Past*, 92.

⁴⁸ Cf. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 49. Cf. also Hilary Putnam, “When ‘Evidence Transcendence’ is Not Malign: A Reply to Crispin Wright,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 98, no. 11 (2001), 594-600.

to be decided. Thus, though the proposition is accessible, antirealists hold, it is not either true or false.⁴⁹

Rather than endorsing bivalence, the justificationist view “entails the weaker principle, namely that every meaningful statement is determined as true or as not true”.⁵⁰ If we know the meaning of a statement, this implies that we know how it can be determined, and whether the statement is indeed determinably true or false. Dummett thus endorses a justificationist notion of truth, in that “it explains truth in terms of what is, or can be, or could have been known”.⁵¹ Since facts, according to Dummett, depend on human cognition, what is true of the world can (in principle) be known. “An understanding of a sentence must involve a grasp of how it is determined as true, if it is true, in accordance with its composition”⁵². To Dummett, understanding a proposition implies being able to grasp its truth-value.

To Putnam, truth sometimes transcends recognition because sometimes the way the world is can be made sense of by us without being able (even in principle) to determine whether it is or is not the case.⁵³ When people had no access to the dark side of the moon, it was impossible to *determine* whether ‘there are two craters the size of a football field on the moon’ was *true or false*, even if people, back then, *understood* what it meant for the moon to potentially have two craters the size of a football field. This shows that for Putnam, one need not be able to grasp the truth-value of every statement to be able to make sense of its meaning. Therefore, for Putnam, the notion of bivalence ultimately is not of so crucial importance as it is for Dummett.

In accordance with the delineation above, Putnam holds that Dummett “sees the problem of realism as having to do with the ‘recognition transcendence’ of truth”,⁵⁴ and that Dummett holds “that ‘truth is justification’”.⁵⁵ In as far as it aims to settle the problem of the metaphysical realist notion of truth, Putnam holds that it is no solution at all, since it simply disavows realism. As antirealism allows truth to be only that which we can establish, much of what we would ordinarily take to be (potentially) true about the world vanishes. In a word, Putnam’s criticism of the antirealist

⁴⁹ Cf. Dummett, *Thought and Reality*, 85-95.

⁵⁰ Dummett, *Realism*, 61.

⁵¹ Dummett, *Truth and the Past*, 92.

⁵² Dummett, *Realism*, 62.

⁵³ Cf. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 69.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁵ Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, 114.

notion of truth as verification is that it “brings about the loss of the world”.⁵⁶ It is obvious, Putnam argues, that there are situations in which what is possibly true cannot now, and can never be, verified.⁵⁷ “We can *know* that there are some things which are possible (possible according to our scientific world-picture itself), but which are such that if they are the case, then we cannot know that they are the case”.⁵⁸ If that is so, then also other statements, such as the one above about Columbus’ first shipmate, can be either true or false, even if we cannot know whether they are true or false.

What is true can therefore not be identified with what can be verified.

What is mistaken about verificationism is the claim that the meaning of an expression like ‘things too small to see with the naked eye’ depends on there being methods of verifying the existence of such things, and the related claim that the meaning of such an expression changes as these methods of verification change (e.g. with the invention of the microscope).⁵⁹

If, say before the microscope, we could not verify the existence of bacteria, antirealism would have it that we were not justified in supposing that there are any bacteria, and so the proposition that ‘there are bacteria’ would not have had the property of truth. If, after the microscope, we would be able to verify their existence, the proposition becomes true. Thus, if the means of verification change, ‘what is the case’ also changes. It is “the excessively ‘idealist’ thrust of Dummett’s position”,⁶⁰ with which Putnam implies that in Dummett’s position reality in the end depends for its existence and form on our mind, which Putnam rejects.

In its contention that truth depends on justification, the antirealist notion of truth is the direct opposite of the metaphysical realist one, but in other respects it is not. It rejects the metaphysical realist notion of truth being a property that propositions gain in virtue of a correspondence with reality, but instead holds that the truth of propositions is conferred on them in virtue of their being justified. Putnam argues, therefore, that although “[a]ntirealism never admits that *it* is a form of metaphysics”,⁶¹ it shares with

⁵⁶ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 55.

⁵⁷ See the example of the 100 stars in Hilary Putnam, “Pragmatism,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 95 (1995), 294-5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁵⁹ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 56.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶¹ Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 124.

the metaphysical realist “the idea ... that our ordinary realism ... presupposes a view of truth as a ‘substantive property’”.⁶² Like metaphysical realism, antirealism imposes a particular, substantive notion of truth on various areas of reasoning.

5.1.4 *Internal realism’s notion of truth as idealized rational acceptability*

In an attempt to evade the metaphysical realist perspective on truth as consisting of a unique correspondence, with its consequence that the truth of propositions ultimately cannot be established, *as well as* the antirealist perspective of truth as justification, which causes the loss of the world, Putnam developed what has mistakenly become known as his ‘internal realist position’.⁶³ From the end of the seventies until halfway through the eighties, Putnam took the antirealist justificationist angle towards the issue of truth as a starting-point, although he did not equate truth with what can be verified but rather “with being verified to a sufficient degree to warrant acceptance under sufficiently good epistemic conditions”.⁶⁴ He thus aimed to retain the realist notion that “the world was allowed to determine whether I actually am in a sufficiently good epistemic situation or whether I only seem to myself to be in one”.⁶⁵ As we will see, however, Putnam himself agrees that this perspective runs into the same difficulties as the metaphysical realist and antirealist views, and fails to settle the ‘antinomy of realism’ (see 5.1.2).

In the internalist perspective, truth is neither strict correspondence nor mere justification, but “idealized justification”⁶⁶ or “(idealized) rational acceptability”.⁶⁷ It rejects the idea that truth can be a property conferred on propositions in virtue of their correspondence for the reasons mentioned above. It also rejects the antirealist picture, however, for the following

⁶² Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 55. Cf. also Karen Green, *Dummett: Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 28-30.

⁶³ Until the end of the 1970s, Putnam defended what one could call a metaphysical realist notion of truth himself. As early as the mid-seventies, a shift in his thinking can be discerned (Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 15). See *Ibid.*, 182n.36 for an explanation about why the position came to be known as ‘internal realism’, much to Putnam’s dismay. See *Ibid.*, 183n.41 for insights into whether one should still call Putnam an internal realist.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁶ Putnam, *Realism and Reason*, 85. Here, Putnam calls the position he defends empirical realism, while it had already become known as ‘internal realism’.

⁶⁷ Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 49; Putnam, *Representation and Reality*, 115 (where the brackets have disappeared).

reasons.⁶⁸ First of all, internal realism takes truth to be a property of propositions that these propositions cannot lose. If the proposition (p) ‘trees are plants’ is true now, then it cannot be false in the future (or in the past). In equating truth with justification or rational acceptability, however, justificationism would have it that the truth of p depends on the time and situation. On the basis of our description of Dummett’s antirealism above, we can see that, in his view, a person S₁ can be justified in rejecting p, at time T₁, for example because at T₁ all people (including S₁) believe that trees are animated and that plants are unanimated entities, and that therefore trees cannot be plants. As S₁ would be justified in rejecting p at T₁, this would make p false. At T₂, however, the situation could be such that S₁ is no longer justified in rejecting p, for example because all people (including S₁) now have come to see that plants *can* be animated. S₁ may now be justified to hold p, which would leave p true. Whether p is justified/true or not does not only depend on time (justification is tensed) but may very well depend on a particular subject’s situatedness (justification is relative to a person). At T₁, person S₁ may be justified to hold p while another person, S₂, is not. In that case p would be both true and false at T₁. Internal realism holds that it may be the case that what is *justified* now “may turn out not to be *true*”⁶⁹ later.⁷⁰ It takes the realist perspective as basic in adhering to the principle that truth cannot be a property that a proposition can lose or gain depending on whether we are justified in holding the proposition. A second important difference with the Dummettian antirealist is that the internal realist holds

⁶⁸ For the following, see Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 54-6, and Putnam, *Realism and Reason*, 84-6, Putnam, *Representation and Reality*, 113-6. Cf. also Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 17-8. There is a vast amount of secondary literature on Putnam’s ‘internal realism’, both appreciative and less favorable. See e.g. C. Brown, "Internal Realism: Transcendental Idealism?" *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (1988), 145-155; D. L. Anderson, "What is Realistic about Putnam’s Internal Realism?" *Philosophical Topics* 20, no. 1 (1992), 49-83; E. Sosa, "Putnam’s Pragmatic Realism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 90, no. 12 (1993), 605-626; D. Moran, "Hilary Putnam and Immanuel Kant: Two 'Internal Realists'?" *Synthese* 123, no. 1 (2000), 65-104; and L. Decock and I. Douven, "Putnam’s Internal Realism: A Radical Restatement," *Topoi* (2011), 1-10.

⁶⁹ Putnam, *Realism and Reason*, 85.

⁷⁰ This is directed, particularly, against Dummett’s contention that what counts as justification for sentences of a particular language can be fixed (by a definition that involves the notion of the meaning of those sentences, and thus – according to the justificationist – of justification itself) once and for all (cf. Dummett, *Thought and Reality*, 64). Against this view, Putnam contends that when "our total body of knowledge changes" (Putnam, *Realism and Reason*, 85), our justificatory practices change as well. As what the conditions for what is justified thus can alter, so would what is to count as true change.

that while verification is a matter of degree, truth is not.⁷¹ S₁ can be more or less justified in holding p, while p is either true or not, not something in between.⁷²

The alternative, internal realist perspective on truth, then, is that what is true and what is rationally acceptable are two interdependent questions, and that “a statement is true of a situation just in case it would be correct to use the words of which the statement consists in that way in describing the situation”.⁷³ In saying that p is true, we proceed from the assumption that if the epistemic situation were ideal, p would indeed be true. However, the internal realist argues, the epistemic conditions are never ideal, nor could we be entirely sure that we *are* in epistemically ideal circumstances. Nevertheless, we can employ the notion in a manner that scientists can employ the notion of ‘frictionless planes’ when, for example, investigating velocity. While “frictionless planes cannot really be attained either, ... talk of frictionless planes has ‘cash value’ because we can approximate them to a very high degree of approximation”.⁷⁴ The question then becomes how one can discern good from bad epistemic circumstances. The internal realist concedes that establishing what the right circumstances are will be no straightforward matter, but rather “depends on the statement one is dealing with”.⁷⁵ In a particular discourse, there are certain practice-related rules about what would make a proposition count as true, because there are suppositions about what the ideal epistemic conditions would be under which one could accept or reject a particular proposition. This makes internal realism’s perspective on truth a perspective internal to particular discourses: what rational acceptability comes down to depends on what is true, while what is true depends on what is rationally acceptable. The reason why this is not a form of antirealism, the internal realist contends, is because the world is “allowed to determine whether I actually am in a sufficiently good epistemic situation or whether I only seem to myself to be in one”.⁷⁶

While the prospects of the internal realist notion of truth are that it neither reduces truth to a unique correspondence to reality nor renders truth

⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 84.

⁷² Putnam holds that truth is a matter of degree as well, but in another sense, namely with regard to the question of how accurate a true proposition is, not how well justified. In my analysis of Putnam’s notion of truth, in Chapter 6, we return to this subject briefly.

⁷³ Putnam, *Representation and Reality*, 115.

⁷⁴ Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 55.

⁷⁵ Putnam, *Representation and Reality*, 115.

⁷⁶ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 18.

to mean justifiability, Putnam has subsequently argued that it faces the same central problem the metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth face, i.e. the problem of showing how language relates to the world if there is a dichotomy between our mind and the world (the antinomy of realism, see 5.1.2). Because Putnam's internal realism retains the notion of the world telling us what the right epistemic practices are, it falls prey to the same problem of showing what the world dictates (whether this be, as in the metaphysical realist picture, 'the way the world's objects are' to which our propositions about those objects should conform, or, as in the internal realist picture, 'the way the world's epistemic practices are' to which our epistemic practices should conform). Putnam argues, that

[i]f, on the picture we have inherited from early modern philosophy [the Cartesian *cum* materialist picture, see 5.1.2], there is a problem about how, without postulating some form of magic, we can have referential access to external things, there is an equal problem as to how we can have referential or other access to 'sufficiently good epistemic situations'.⁷⁷

As Putnam's internal realism, like metaphysical realism and antirealism, proceeds from the assumption that our mind is to be equated with our brain, and that our mental capacities are solely physical capacities, that position too faces the problem of how to make sense of the idea that the way the world is could be interpreted by our mind, i.e. how there can be a cognitive relation between our mind and reality. Since, in the internal realist notion of truth, the interface picture of mind and world remains unaltered, it cannot resolve the antinomy of realism.

5.1.5 Deflationism's notion of truth as assertability

A position that, according to Putnam, claims to evade the antinomy of realism without ending up in either metaphysical realism or Dummettian antirealism, is deflationism.⁷⁸ Similarly to antirealism, it rejects the notion of

⁷⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁸ Cf. Ibid., 54. The term deflationism is meant to make clear that this position lets the air out of the balloon of, in this case, truth. Deflationists like Michael Williams argue that not the inflationist notion of truth should be considered the default position, but the deflationist one. In that sense, inflationists have, according to the deflationists, blown up truth where truth need not be made more than it is – where it need not be more than an empty balloon. Cf. Michael Williams, "Realism: What's Left?", in *Truth and Realism*, eds. Patrick Greenough and Michael P. Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 77-99, 88fn.16. Staying with the metaphor, Putnam would argue that while inflationists indeed inflate the balloon of truth to such an extent that it snaps because the ideal becomes unattainable, deflationists

truth as a property conferred on a proposition in virtue of a correspondence with the world. Furthermore, like Putnam's internal realism and against Dummett's antirealism, deflationism does not take verification to be an either/or matter, but a matter of degree.⁷⁹ With their contention that truth *is* an either/or question deflationists discard the antirealist rejection of the notion of bivalence.⁸⁰ An important difference with metaphysical realism, antirealism, and internal realism is that in the deflationist picture truth is not a *property* of true propositions, but denotes an attitude of the person asserting the proposition towards the proposition.

An influential author on the notion of deflationism, Michael Williams, holds that deflationism's "central claim is that the use of the truth-predicate is expressive rather than explanatory",⁸¹ while deflationists may disagree amongst each other on how truth-talk actually accomplishes its expressive function.⁸² Paul Horwich, a leading deflationist philosopher whom Williams discusses, criticizes theories of truth that hold that truth is a property that (true) propositions gain in virtue of fulfilling a particular requirement. He argues that truth-making theories hold that they can "work out, for each of the many kinds of proposition that we believe and assert, which entities would have to exist for such propositions to be true".⁸³ Against the inflated notion of truth as an explanatory device, Horwich takes it that "the most plausible account of truth is *deflationary*: - it's the idea that there is nothing more to the concept than our taking '<p> is true' to be equivalent to 'p'".⁸⁴

also - though in their case deliberately - let all the air out, and thus leave the notion of truth useless. In Putnam's picture, as we will see, the default position should be an adequately filled balloon, which would ensure that the notion of truth, without collapsing, lives up to its commonsense, normative uses.

⁷⁹ Putnam discusses deflationism as a kind of verificationism, even though he acknowledges that a leading deflationist such as Paul Horwich, e.g. in Paul Horwich, *Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), does not defend a verificationist but, what Putnam calls, a warranted assertability version of deflationism. Cf. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 193-4n.27.28.31. See also Putnam, *Words and Life*, 315-329, for a discussion of warranted assertability.

⁸⁰ Cf. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 51.

⁸¹ Michael Williams, "On some Critics of Deflationism," in *What is Truth?*, ed. Richard Schantz (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 153. It provides Williams's analysis of deflationist notions of truth and an analysis of Putnam's objections to it.

⁸² Cf. Michael Williams, "Meaning and Deflationary Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 11 (1999), 545-548. In this respect, Williams discusses W.V.O Quine's, Paul Horwich's, and Robert Brandom's views as deflationist notions of truth.

⁸³ Paul Horwich, "Being and Truth," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2008), 258.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 262.

Horwich thus employs a disquotational notion of truth, consisting of equivalence between a proposition and some state of affairs.

Concurrently, Putnam holds that the notion of truth, to deflationists, is “a mere linguistic practice”,⁸⁵ which we employ for sentences such as ‘either snow is white or snow is not white’, where adding the words ‘is true’ (‘either snow is white is true or snow is white is not true’) is superfluous since stating the assertion equals to stating it as true or not true. ‘Truth’ is no property of propositions, but testifies to the speaker’s endorsement of the proposition. It consists of nothing more (and nothing less) than the acknowledgement of what is already acknowledged with the utterance of the proposition. Rather, the assertability, based on either confirmation or verification along community standards, of certain propositions, which is taken to be a descriptive rather than a normative notion, is what separates one proposition from the other. It is just a descriptive fact, a deflationist would hold, that in a particular community of speakers, the proposition ‘snow is white’ is assertable, while its negation is not.

With deflationism Putnam shares the objection to metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth that take it to be a substantive property. But while the deflationist discards any talk of truth as a property, and is willing, instead, to speak of truth at most as an assertive or expressive predicate to particular propositions,⁸⁶ Putnam is willing to hold on to truth as a property, though as a *formal* property.⁸⁷ If and where, Putnam argues, deflationism equals assertability with verification, in a manner similar to Dummett’s antirealism, it will have the similar difficulty of showing how statements about the past can be said to be true.⁸⁸ As such, it loses the world in a similar vein as antirealism does.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Putnam argues, although deflationism changes the notion of truth in such a way that we would be allowed to keep using it, “it fails to capture what is significant

⁸⁵ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 52.

⁸⁶ Cf. Horwich, *Being and Truth*, 258-273, and Williams, *On some Critics of Deflationism*, 151-3.

⁸⁷ See Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 55-56. Cf. also Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1-7, which argues that deflationists (Horwich in particular) let go of truth as a property, and that their notion of ‘predicate’ does not denote a property. Horwich, in turn, argues that ‘is true’ *should* be considered a property (“though one with no underlying nature” (Horwich, *Realism Minus Truth*, 879). His discussion takes us too far for our purposes here, but I will return to it when discussing Putnam’s notion of truth as a formal property.

⁸⁸ Cf. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 52.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 54-55.

about true sentences (as opposed to false ones)”,⁹⁰ i.e. a normative notion of rightness. “[I]t cannot properly accommodate the truism that certain claims about the world are (not merely assertable or verifiable but) *true*”.⁹¹ Thus Putnam holds that deflationism neither dodges the antirealist problems nor provides an alternative for the metaphysical realist substantive notion of truth, and thus does not manage to provide an answer to the antinomy of realism.

5.1.6 Concluding notes

After having discussed the various forms in which the notion of truth is thought to be a notion that goes beyond the truth-claim of the propositions we hold ourselves, and the various forms in which its normative relevance for propositions is denied, we are in a position to provide an account of what Putnam sees as the viewpoints that should be evaded in drawing up an alternative picture of truth.

Two aspects of the metaphysical realist and antirealist accounts of truth are central in this analysis: the presupposition of the interface between mind and world, and the inflation and deflation of the notion of truth. First of all, we will have to go beyond the idea of our mind not being in direct contact with reality, as well as the correlated notion that our mind’s understanding of reality can be exhaustively described in terms of our physical brain processes. The second of Putnam’s criticisms of these metaphysical realist tendencies in metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on truth resides in the claim that both postulate a requirement for truth that may be alien to the discourses that the propositions are part of.⁹²

Metaphysical realists and antirealists inflate the notion of truth to mean something above and beyond the actual truth-claim of the statement, either denoting a correspondence to reality-as-it-is or consisting of being verified. As Putnam puts it:

I see the attempt to provide an Ontological explanation of the objectivity of mathematics as, in effect, an attempt to provide *reasons which are not part of mathematics for the truth of mathematical statements* and the attempt to provide an Ontological explanation of the objectivity of ethics as a similar attempt to provide

⁹⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁹¹ Ibid., 56.

⁹² Cf. Ibid., 18-22.

*reasons which are not part of ethics for the truth of ethical statements; and I see both attempts as deeply misguided.*⁹³

In the case of the metaphysical realist, the 'Ontological explanation' consists in showing that there is a correspondence between the propositions and reality. The antirealist seeks this explanation in the proposition being verified. The deflationist combines two problematic aspects: the antirealist contention that only the assertability counts, and the deflationist notion that rids the notion of truth of any meaning. Putnam's criticism is that all of these approaches introduce criteria for what is to count as true which are alien to the way truth is constituted in the various discourses, and that none of them escapes the antinomy of realism.

5.2 Putnam's criticism of metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of experience

After having analyzed Putnam's criticism of metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth, I turn to his criticism of underlying notions of experience. In Part I, we saw that experience is an important aspect of religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions, since the issue of whether and how we have experiential access to religious aspects of reality has a significant impact on their perspective on whether and how religious propositions have truth-value. For this reason, I turn in particular to Putnam's criticism of whether and how, according to metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives, experience is cognitive. As we saw, religious realism and antirealism differ mainly on the question of whether experience consists of a direct relation of ourselves with reality, or whether it is an affair mediated through our conceptualizations. As we will see, below, these views are reflected by metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on experience, especially with regard to their notion of experience as representational, and the underlying notion of an interface between our minds and the world.

The import that the interface notion of mind and world has for experience makes up the second pillar of what Putnam calls the antinomy of

⁹³ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 3. See also *Ibid.*, 18-22.66, and Hilary Putnam, "Was Wittgenstein really an Anti-Realist about Mathematics?" in *Wittgenstein in America*, eds. Timothy McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 140-194.

realism.⁹⁴ The antinomy, to Putnam, resides in metaphysical realism's combination of, on the one hand, the need for an objective referential relation between our mind (and the words that we use or the experiences that we have) with reality, with on the other hand, the contention that the mind is a physical entity and consists of our brain states. Though the previous section of this chapter touched upon Putnam's criticism of the implications for the notion of truth, here a fuller analysis of Putnam's views on the Cartesianism *cum* materialism-worldview will be central, since the concept of experience touches directly on this issue. Briefly put, this perspective presumes a dichotomy between mind and world (Cartesianism), while holding that our mind is equivalent with physical brain states (materialism). The view mentioned has particular implications for issues in philosophy of mind (concerning perception), in which there is a dichotomy between our mind and the world it perceives, and in which perception necessarily comes down to a mediated instance. I will refer to this view as the representational physicalist perspective on experience.

I will take perception to be an instance of experience. Furthermore, I will take it that in as far as experience is non-inferential it is sufficiently comparable to perception in order to allow a discussion of the cognitive aspects of perception to have bearing on the issue of the cognitive aspects of experience in general.⁹⁵ In this chapter, I discuss Putnam's criticism of the notions, in philosophy of mind, of experience and perception that are basic to many of the metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives, which in turn are basic to religious realism and antirealism. As we will see, Putnam understands these perspectives on experience and perception to be (a) representational in the sense that they take it that what we experience are cognitive representations of the world in our mind, and (b) physicalist in the sense that the mind consists of our brain (or brain states). With Putnam's criticism on these perspectives on experience we gain insight into the parameters of an alternative perspective on the same.

5.2.1 *Representationalist notions of experience*

J.J. Valberg argues that the common-sense perspective on experience is that what we experience is the world, while particular philosophical perspectives on the same amount to the view that we do not actually experience an

⁹⁴ See 5.1.2, where I addressed the two pillars that according to Putnam support the antinomy of realism.

⁹⁵ In 7.1, I explicate why I take experience to be comparable to perception in this respect.

outside world. He holds that “[i]f we follow a certain line of reasoning about our experience, we are led to the conclusion that the object of experience is not part of the world, an external object. However, if we are open to our experience, all we find is the world”.⁹⁶ Valberg maintains that this presents us with an antinomy, which is due to the fact that the “problematic reasoning ... purports to show that no external object, no part of the world, could ever be an object of experience”.⁹⁷ On the basis of an analysis of the reception of Bertrand Russell’s idea of acquaintance (namely that “an object with which we are ... acquainted is present in experience; and an object which is present in experience is one with which we are acquainted”⁹⁸), Valberg argues that the reason why ‘problematic reasoners’ defend this view is that they hold that “what is present in my experience, what is available for me to focus on and refer to demonstratively, is never part of the world but always an internal object; it is always (in the traditional jargon) a ‘sense-datum’”.⁹⁹ As we can only get a cognitive grip on what is present to us, therefore, we only know the objects internal to our mind.

In my analysis of Putnam’s criticism of this ‘problematic reasoning’, we return to several of these issues. Putnam’s notion of the antinomy of realism is close to Valberg’s notion of the antinomy of what one could call ‘being open to experience’ and ‘philosophizing about experience’. Putnam and Valberg hold that basic to this view is the idea that the outer world (of fact) has to be represented by our inner world of experience in order to be able to demonstratively refer, i.e. in order to be able to make cognitive claims on the basis of one’s experience. It is this representationalist background of the antinomy that will be central here.

Paul Snowdon, an influential philosopher of mind, holds that “Representationalism ... can ... be defined as the conjunction of Indirect Realism and external world Realism”.¹⁰⁰ Indirect realism takes indirect perception as basic. Thus, as David Chalmers notes, “[a]ccording to standard indirect realism, we perceive objects in the world only indirectly, by virtue of directly perceiving certain intermediate objects such as sense-data”.¹⁰¹ There

⁹⁶ J.J. Valberg, *The Puzzle of Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18. Also see 5.2.3 below.

¹⁰⁰ Paul Snowdon, "How to Interpret 'Direct Perception'," in *The Contents of Experience: Essays on Perception*, ed. Tim Crane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 64.

¹⁰¹ David J. Chalmers, "Perception and the Fall from Eden," in *Perceptual Experience*, eds. John Hawthorne and Tamar Gendler Szabo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 93.

is no direct, cognitive relation between our perception and the external world. If this thesis is combined with a rejection of objects existing outside the mind at all, this amounts to a form of idealism (such as that of George Berkeley). If combined with the belief that there are objects that exist independent of the human mind ('external world Realism'), this leads to representationalism.

5.2.2 *Experience as indirect*

According to this metaphysical realist and antirealist perspective, then, experiences are representations (internal to the mind) of an external world. In a similar vein, John Foster takes what he calls

the representative theory [to make] two claims. First, it asserts the truth of physical realism: it claims that the physical world is something whose existence is logically independent of the human mind, and something which is, in its basic character, metaphysically fundamental. Secondly, and in effect in the framework of its acceptance of physical realism, it claims that our perceptual contact with the physical world is, in all cases, psychologically mediated.¹⁰²

Foster and Snowdon both reject the idea that perception can be direct, and they take there to be epistemological aspects to experience that cannot be integral to experience itself. Snowdon argues that the notion of 'direct perception' fails to accomplish what he takes it to claim to do, namely to make plausible that experiences have epistemological import, and therefore to rebut the skeptical argument.¹⁰³ Snowdon holds that the direct realist leans on the contention that there is a knowable physical world, but in order to do so, she has to justify why one can indeed make justified propositions about the physical world.¹⁰⁴ According to indirect realism, perception has to be mediated psychologically because that is how perceptual experiences gain their cognitive content, which in turn would allow experiences to have epistemological import. Snowdon takes both the representational and the direct realist theory to be problematic,¹⁰⁵ while Foster defends an idealist position.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Foster, *The Nature of Perception*, 195; cf. also 14-18.

¹⁰³ Snowdon, *How to Interpret 'Direct Perception'*, 48-78, esp. 64-65.

¹⁰⁴ In addressing Putnam's account of direct (or naïve) realism (in Chapter 7) will see that Putnam dismisses this argument as unintelligible.

¹⁰⁵ See *Ibid.*.

¹⁰⁶ Foster, *The Nature of Perception*, 244-283.

Similar to these analyses of important current perspectives on experience, Putnam holds that in the metaphysical realist and antirealist worldviews the representationalist and physicalist view of perception go together. On Putnam's view, early modern thinkers such as René Descartes and George Berkeley replaced medieval notions of *direct* perception, which had been handed down from Aristotle via, most notably, Thomas Aquinas, with a notion of *indirect* perception.¹⁰⁷ In the medieval view, Putnam holds, one actually perceives the world around oneself,¹⁰⁸ whereas early modern philosophers of mind came to hold that what we can perceive are only mental objects¹⁰⁹ and that what we perceive are representations in our mind of the world around us, not this world itself.¹¹⁰

According to this new philosophy of mind, our 'experience' is entirely a matter taking place within the mind (or within the brain [in the materialist sense, NB]), within, that is to say, a realm conceived of as 'inside', a realm where there are certainly no tables and chairs or cabbages or kings, a realm ... disjoint from what came to be called the 'external' world.¹¹¹

Putnam argues that according to this view, the outer world causes experiences which exist entirely and solely in our inner world, i.e. "inner'

¹⁰⁷ We will see that Putnam tries to restore what he takes to be accurate insights of Aristotelian direct perception that modern philosophy lost, while refraining from employing aspects of Aristotelianism which we cannot accept today (cf. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 24). See also Snowdon, *How to Interpret 'Direct Perception'*, 48-78, on the notions of direct experience/perception, representationalism, and direct realism. Snowdon argues that the notion of direct perception is vacuous, in the sense that one of its most important facets, an anti-skeptical force, does not hold up in the face of the criticism that it cannot show "how or why we know that [certain (sorts of demonstrative) judgements are true" (Ibid., 64). See below for an analysis of this position, and of Putnam's criticism.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 22. Putnam is aware of the problematic aspects of the Aristotelian notion of direct realism, viz. its contention that "the mind 'becomes' hot or cold (even 'potentially' if not actually hot or cold) when it perceives something hot or cold" (Ibid., 22).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Ibid., 9. Putnam gives a number of possible reasons for this shift in perspective (cf. Ibid., 22-3).

¹¹⁰ Cf. Ibid., 23. Putnam briefly discusses a number of possible reasons for this fundamental change in view on perception. According to Putnam, Descartes, e.g., needed "to allay his skeptical [sic] worries by minimizing the role of perception in knowledge" (Ibid., 23). Because of the nature of my study, however, I will leave the question about the reasoning behind this change aside.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 23.

experiences".¹¹² If S experiences God as love, for example, that experience exists only in S's mind. Where, in the metaphysical realist perspective on truth, the difficulty is to relate our propositions to reality, in the representational physicalist notion of experience the challenge therefore is to show that occurrences in our mind are correlated with reality outside our mind.

I would argue that Putnam takes it that Berkeley was right in concluding that, on the picture of perception that Berkeley himself, Descartes, and many of their contemporaries came to have, it is impossible to see how experience, being a matter taking place 'in the head', could have any cognitive relation with reality, as long as that is still conceived of as a matter largely 'outside the head'.¹¹³ On this view of perception, Putnam concludes, one runs the risk of ending up in idealism, which holds that our mind and its ideas shape the world, and that, if there is a world outside our minds and their ideas, then we do not have any means of establishing whether this world that we shape has any relation to the way this possible external world is.¹¹⁴ Those philosophers who want to save the notion of an outside world will have to evade this idealist conclusion. In an attempt to do so, 'early modern realist philosophers of mind' as Putnam refers to them, and their heirs, hold that while we do not *directly* perceive things, we can perceive them indirectly, because the "'external things' are the *causes* of our 'inner' experiences'",¹¹⁵ which as we saw, Valberg identified as 'sense data'. Thus, those representationalist philosophers who reject the idealist view that says that we can have no experiences of an outside world, have to suppose

¹¹² Ibid., 23.

¹¹³ See Ibid., 23-9.100-2.151-3. Cf. also Valberg, *The Puzzle of Experience*, 23-4, who holds "that the conclusion of problematic reasoning is not Berkeley's Idealism" (Ibid., 23). As said, Putnam would take representational physicalism, with its notion of sense data, to be one option, while Berkeley's idealism would be another, (but that both are problematic because of their common background notions).

¹¹⁴ Cf. also Foster, *The Nature of Perception* who argues, along a different route than Putnam's, that what he calls 'physicalist realism', according to either the 'strong direct realist' view or the realist 'broad representative theory', fails to provide an account of perception that does justice to both the character and role of 'the phenomenal content of perception' and the cognitive import of perception. While Foster seems to hold on to an interface notion of mind and world, and perhaps therefore sees only idealism as a way out of this problem, we will see that Putnam opts for what Foster calls a 'physicalist realism', but one that takes perception to be both direct and conceptual, an option Foster does not explore thoroughly.

¹¹⁵ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 23.

that there is a link between the world and our mind, even though they hold that this can not be a direct one.

5.2.3 *Experience and sense data*

Thus, a primary distinction can be drawn between those who take it that we experience things (i.e. objects or states of affairs in the outside world) more or less directly, and those who take experience to consist not of experiencing the external world directly, but rather of perceiving inner sensory experiences. Those theories that maintain that the objects of experiences must be inner objects, often call these 'sense data'.¹⁶ We are interested in these theories mainly because of the cognitive value that experiences are thought to have in virtue of the sense data.

Sense datum theory holds that we are aware of data that are directly present to the mind as they are fully internal to the mind. This allows for a *cognitive* awareness of the data. As Foster puts it, as part of an intricate analysis of the sense datum theory,

[t]he awareness in question ... brings [the sense datum] before the mind in a way which: (1) makes it available for demonstrative identification; (2) displays, and so makes available for cognitive scrutiny, certain aspects of its character; and (3) is ontologically immediate and non-representational - not involving the use of concepts, images, or symbols as a means of registering the presence of the object or the relevant aspects of its character.¹⁷

The sense datum theory holds that what is actually experienced are objects within the mind, with which we are thus cognitively connected because we are in direct contact with them. These sense data are in turn in one way or another thought to be connected to the outside world (unless one is willing to take an idealist position). Thus, it would solve the problem that our experiences cannot have epistemological import.

Putnam addresses this argument that because of the direct relation to sense data experiences have cognitive import. He calls those who hold this view 'sense datum epistemologists'.¹⁸ He holds that "[i]f sense data ... are themselves brain events, ... then the problem of just how a material event in the brain is supposed to cause an immaterial event in the mind is certainly avoided".¹⁹ With regard to the question of the cognitive aspects of

¹⁶ Cf. Crane, *Introduction*, 2-5, for a short but helpful introduction to the issue of sense data.

¹⁷ Foster, *The Nature of Perception*, 148.

¹⁸ See Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

experience, Putnam holds that what the 'sense datum epistemologist' is after is a perspective on sense data in experiences that allows for non-inferential knowledge, i.e. direct knowledge on the basis of the direct reference with the sense data. As we saw, this would be considered possible, because sense data are thought to be internal to the mind.

As, in the representational physicalist view, Putnam argues, one needs to be able to discern veridical from non-veridical (e.g. hallucinatory) perceptions, some aspects of our perceptions need to be necessarily incorrigible. According to Putnam, sense data are considered to have this role.¹²⁰ We are aware of sense data non-inferentially, the argument runs, which allows them to play a knowledge-foundational role. If S's experience that God is love consists in a direct, cognitive relation with the sense datum 'that God is love', then this sense datum can have cognitive significance. Putnam argues, however, that since experiences, in a sense datum theory of perception, are taken to be 'sensory inputs',¹²¹ which as impressions are already part of the mind, they do not *present* but *represent* external objects. In leaning on J.L Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia*, Putnam argues that sense data are at most representations of the external world, and that the problems of the representational aspect of indirect realism have not been resolved. The problem thus remains that, as a sense datum, it is unclear why 'God is love' would be a representation of an external world, rather than a mere figment of the mind. It would require showing that, in the representationalist perspective, there is a causal connection between the sense data and the external world in order to allow experiences to have cognitive import.¹²²

5.2.4 Experience and physicalism

If experience consists of these inner perceptions, the question arises what they are thought to consist of. If the outside world has *strictu sensu* no part in the event of experience, it is a small step from holding that experience is internal to the mind to holding that experience consists of having particular brain states. Putnam holds that many realists - impressed perhaps by how the laws of nature apparently rule everything - have come to see those experiential events as natural, material states.¹²³ In this view, experiences can

¹²⁰ Cf. Hilary Putnam, "The Depths and Shallows of Experience," in *Science, Religion, and the Human Experience*, ed. James D. Proctor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 75.

¹²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 73.

¹²² Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 24-6.101-2.

¹²³ Putnam poses that this idea may go back as far as Denis Diderot (1713-84) and Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-51), in *Ibid.*, 30.

be described wholly in terms of having a specific ‘stimulation of particular areas in the hypothalamus’.¹²⁴ These can be exhaustively described as brain-states. In this Cartesian cum materialist picture, therefore, “sensory experiences [are] identical to brain processes”.¹²⁵ The mind is viewed as an organ, and is identified with the brain. Experiences of reality are therefore taken to be equal to events in the brain.¹²⁶

In the materialist variant that Putnam takes to be common nowadays, these sense data are taken to be brain states. Is this view a tenable alternative to the sense datum theory? No, Putnam argues, since while the identity theory holds that “sensations and thoughts are just brain processes” and therewith solves part of the problem - i.e. to show how the mental sensations link up to the material brain - it takes the sense datum tenets as basic, and therefore is subject to the other major problem with sense datum - i.e. “how these qualia are supposed to be *observed*, that is to say how we become conscious of them”.¹²⁷

Whether considered to be non-physical properties of the mind, as in non-materialist Cartesianism, or physical properties of the brain, as in the materialist sense, these representations are taken as cognitively separate from the external world. The experiential inputs (our experiences of reality) are already internal to the mind, and the external world does not immediately feature in “our cognitive processing”.¹²⁸ The contemporary representationalist view on perception and experience, thus, is a combination of a Cartesian dualism of mind and world with a materialism concerning the mind’s representations of that world. The ‘experience of God as love’, in this picture, would equal the perceptual impression ‘in the head’ or the brain state that ‘God is love’, while ‘a loving God’ is not directly experienced.

5.2.5 *Physicalism and the causal theory of perception*

Unless representational physicalist theories of experience can show that there is such a cognitive connection between inner experiences and the outer world, Putnam holds that they fail to accomplish what the sense datum epistemologist wants them to do, namely to provide a basis for knowledge. If, as in the representationalist view, the object of experience and the outer

¹²⁴ Cf. Putnam, *The Depths and Shallows of Experience*, 73.

¹²⁵ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 32.

¹²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 15.19.22.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

world are two distinct realities, then how can we have any knowledge of outside reality at all? In this respect, the causal theory of perception is thought to bring solace.

The causal theory of perception, Putnam argues, holds that “the objects we perceive give rise to chains of events that include stimulations of our sense organs, and finally to ‘sense data’ in our minds”.¹²⁹ Though there is no immediate link between our cognitive faculties and the world outside, the sense data internal to our mind can be caused by the outer world. While, in the view of representationalism, the outside world may have caused our mind to have particular experiences in the mind (the representations), it becomes the question what it is that correlates the inner mind’s representations with the experiences of reality external to the mind, or what it is that even ensures that these representations are in any way adequate (are in accordance with reality). This view of perception comes in many varieties¹³⁰ and it attempts to answer the question about what it is that ensures some relation between the experiences internal to our mind with the outside world in various ways.

The problem with these views, Putnam holds, is that it becomes impossible to see how our thinking is directed in any sense towards reality.¹³¹ This shows that the problem of perception is immediately tied to the antinomy of realism, discussed above, where it becomes impossible to judge whether our words do or do not link up with reality. Putnam argues that his application of the Skolem Paradox, originally applied in philosophy of mathematics and showing that “every consistent theory has an enormous number of different possible interpretations”,¹³² to languages other than mathematics, shows that for any language that deals with predicates that are internal to a particular system (be that the system of mathematical ‘objects’ or the system of our mental representations) the “predicates ... will ... have a huge multiplicity of unintended interpretations”.¹³³ In the causal theory of perception, we form certain representations in the mind of the world outside through our perceptual activities. The world, in other words, causes our mind to have particular perceptions. Nevertheless, these representations, as

¹²⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹³⁰ Putnam holds that today’s cognitive scientific theories also “hypothesize the existence of ‘representations’ in the cerebral computer” (Ibid., 9).

¹³¹ In other words, one runs again the risk of ending up in a form of idealism, a position, as said, both Putnam and the causal theorists wish to evade.

¹³² Ibid., 15. Cf. our discussion of the Brain-in-a-Vat argument above.

¹³³ Ibid., 16.

said, are internal to the mind. In the previous section, on Putnam's criticism of realist and antirealist notions of truth, we saw that the meaning of our words cannot be an affair internal to our brain (or mental states). Similarly, if the representations that we have, i.e. the inputs of the cognitive process, are always and entirely internal to our mental process, then though we may come to agree on what those representations of the world are, we will still not be able to get agreement on what those representations actually refer to, because for that we would need to reach beyond the limits of our mental capacities.

Thus, while both of the direct and indirect realist positions in philosophy of mind aim to evade idealist conclusions about the external world, a project Putnam approves of entirely, and while Putnam is also critical of particular aspects of direct realist theories, he takes it that the indirect sense datum theory ultimately is fundamentally flawed.¹³⁴ He takes the theory to have become obsolete, but holds that basic assumptions are still behind many contemporary views on perception,¹³⁵ including his own former alternative, viz. the identity theory of experience. Putnam's previous alternative view to the representationalist theory of perception - an alternative he now rejects - was a form of the identity theory that took the representationalist picture for granted, but made a "verbal modification" which would allow one to "say we 'observe' external things".¹³⁶ In fact, however, Putnam holds that it actually presupposed that we did not observe any external things at all but that these supposedly external things had made a particular impression on us so as to leave us with particular inputs - inputs understood here as realities internal to oneself. The problem of the cognitive connection between outer world and inner impressions thus would still stand, and so would Putnam's criticism.

¹³⁴ Putnam's current alternative, as we will see in Chapter 7, is a form of direct realism. As the starting-point of his anti-sense-datum theory and of his alternative direct realism Putnam takes J.L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962 [1947]), which in turn was directed to a large extent at H.H. Price's, G.J. Warnock's, and A.J. Ayer's views on these issues. Cf. also A. J. Ayer, "Has Austin Refuted the Sense-Datum Theory?" *Synthese* 17, no. 1 (1967), 117-140, where Ayer aims to show that Austin has in fact not refuted the sense-datum theory. It is these and later versions of sense datum theory that are subject to Putnam's criticism.

¹³⁵ Cf. Crane, *Introduction*, 5. Crane holds that while the idea of sense data was considered more and more of an illusion during the second half of the twentieth century, "there is much that is worth recovering from the sense-data tradition" (*Ibid.*, 5).

¹³⁶ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 19.

5.2.6 Concluding notes

Putnam aims to settle the antinomy by arguing that indirect realism's entire idea of there having to be representations of reality in our mind rests on a mistake. Accordingly, he holds that "direct realism' is best thought of not as a *theory* of perception but as a denial of the necessity for and the explanatory value of positing 'internal representations' in thought and perception"¹³⁷. As Putnam puts it,

a 'third way' besides early modern realism and Dummettian idealism ... must ... *undercut* the idea that there is an antinomy and not simply paste together elements of early modern realism and elements of the idealist picture. No conception that retains anything like the traditional notion of sense data can provide a way out.¹³⁸

In the remaining chapters of Part II, I analyze in what manner Putnam undercuts the representationalist perspective, and how his pragmatic pluralist perspective provides a notion of experience that is both direct *and* cognitive.

5.3 Concluding notes: Parameters of an alternative perspective on truth and experience

In Putnam's criticism of metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth, many of the problematic aspects of the metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions that we discerned in Part I proved of central importance. It particularly shed light on religious realism's and antirealism's notions of (1) truth as conferred on religious propositions either by a unique correspondence with reality or in virtue of the assertability of the proposition within a particular community, and of (2) experience as either mediated and conceptualized or unmediated and unconceptualized. We can reframe the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions in the following manner, which facilitates a better understanding of how (the problematic aspects of) the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on truth and experience correlate (in 5.3.1). It also allows us to see which viewpoints are to be evaded in drawing up an alternative perspective on religious propositions (in 5.3.2).

¹³⁷ Ibid., 101.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 18 – Putnam states that this is John McDowell's urge.

5.3.1 Problematic aspects of metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth and experience and the truth-value of religious propositions

Putnam's criticism of metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on truth shows that both the metaphysical realist and the antirealist adhere to the notion of truth as a substantive property, viz. as a property that a proposition can gain if it lives up to a particular criterion. Correspondingly, and as we already anticipated, religious realism and antirealism share an important aspect of their perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, namely this notion of truth as a substantive property. Despite their mutual differences, not only robust religious realism but also reductionist religious antirealism takes it that truth is not a property that particular religious propositions may have, because they are indeed true, but a property that is to be conferred on them in virtue of a monist, fixed criterion. They only differ about whether religious propositions can indeed live up to that criterion.

The fact that they share this, Putnam's argument shows, can be traced back to another shared assumption, namely that there is an interface between our mind and the world. This interface view emerged most prominent in the analysis of critical religious realism and of epistemological religious antirealism, both of which were shown to hold that truth cannot consist of a straightforward correspondence between religious propositions and the way (religious) reality is. Critical religious realism holds that though we cannot know religious reality-as-it-is ourselves, the various perspectives on religious reality allow us to postulate that it has a particular content, which in turn means that the truth of religious propositions *does* ultimately hinge on a correspondence with that reality-as-it-is. Epistemological religious antirealism holds that because we cannot know religious reality-as-it-is, we can at best aspire to religious propositions that are true-for-us, i.e. justified within our religious community.

The interface view of mind and world is also basic to the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the cognitive value of religious experiences, and to the mutual problematic aspects of their views. From this interface view, one possible take on religious experiences is that they must be indirect experiences, mediated by our conceptualizations. Taking that view as basic, our conceptualizations inhibit an immediate experience of (religious) reality. Critical religious realists claim that we can ultimately have veridical experiences of religious reality-as-it-is, while epistemological religious antirealists hold that all we can experience is religious reality-as-it-is-for-us. The analysis of Putnam's criticism of the representational

physicalist perspective on experience shows that from their mutual presuppositions concerning the nature of experience the epistemological religious antirealist seems right to conclude that experiencing reality-as-it-is is impossible. The representational physicalist perspective rests on problematic assumptions, and both perspectives therefore have important limitations.

Another approach is to take religious experiences as direct, and therefore necessarily unconceptualized. The problematic facets of the robust religious realist understanding of religious experiences, we can now see, may very well be due to the antinomy of realism as well. Trigg aims to allow for veridical religious experiences, on the one hand, while he holds that religious reality is ultimately unknowable, on the other. This, I argued, seems to be due to the notion that as soon as human conceptualizations enter the experiential process, they corrupt the experience of religious reality. Trigg's notion of revelation aims to save the possibility of having religious knowledge, as it presumes that religious reality can make itself known to the religious believer. As soon as such revelation would require conceptualizations, however, it would fall prey to the same problems as any other religious experience. Religious experience, here, is conceived of as direct and unconceptualized. Putnam's analysis shows, however, that for experiences to have cognitive value they cannot be unconceptualized.¹³⁹

The antinomy of realism, which Putnam ascribes to the interface notion of mind and world, is fundamental not only to the metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on truth but also to their perspectives on experience. As these metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth and the representational physicalist notions of experience are, in turn, fundamental to the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions, the problematic aspects are too. In drawing up an alternative perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, these problems are to be evaded. This can be accomplished, I hypothesize, by making avail of Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth and experience.

¹³⁹ The issue of how an experience can be both direct and conceptualized, and thus have cognitive import, will be analyzed in Chapter 7.

5.3.2 Parameters of an alternative, Putnamian perspective on truth and experience

The alternative perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions that I will draw up in the Conclusion aims to avoid the pitfalls of the religious realist and antirealist perspectives discussed in Part I. It therefore aims to avoid the drawbacks of the metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on truth and experience, which the analysis of Putnam's criticism of these notions has revealed. In the next two chapters, I analyze Putnam's alternative perspective on truth and experience. Putnam's alternative aims to evade the problematic aspects of the discussed perspectives on truth and experience, namely the metaphysical realist and antirealist perspective on truth and the representational physicalist perspectives on experience. His pragmatic pluralist perspective therefore has the following parameters.

With regard to the notion of truth, Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective has to refrain from superimposing a particular 'philosophical' notion of truth on actual uses of truth, in order to evade the pitfall of metaphysical realism. It should not look to draw up a perspective on truth that leans on the basic assumptions that are responsible for the antinomy of realism either. On the other hand, therefore, truth cannot be a mere justificationist notion either. In evading metaphysical realist as well as antirealist views, the alternative will have to connect to the connotation of 'truth' of the various actual practices of reasoning, and see whether and how the truth-value of (religious) propositions hinges on reality.

Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on experience will, similarly, have to evade the mind/world dualism that lies behind representationalist and physicalist notions of experience. Like meaning, experience cannot be solely 'in the head'. Instead, Putnam's alternative should proceed from commonsense notions of experience as much as possible, and take experience to be (cognitively) directed towards an external world.

6.

Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth

In this chapter, I analyze Hilary Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on the notion of truth, in particular in connection with the question of the truth-value of propositions. The range of Putnam's theorizing is vast, and many of the issues that he works out relate to the notion of truth. In order to ensure a comprehension of Putnam's work to the extent that it shows how Putnam's notion of truth can be a viable alternative to the metaphysical realist and antirealist notions, I focus on his current perspective on truth as a plural notion, conceptual and descriptive, that consists of an interaction of concepts and reality. A more comprehensive analysis would require addressing such various and intricate engagements as his semantic externalism,¹ his previous endorsement and later rejection of functionalism,² and even his latest engagements with the Jewish philosophers Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, and Emmanuel Levinas.³

I analyze the pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth by turning to what I take to be its four central elements in connection with the question

¹ Throughout his scholarly career, Putnam developed and propounded the view that reference and meaning are not fixed by our mental states (cf. Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 22-5), i.e. the view, in philosophy of language, that was later called 'semantic externalism', that the meaning of a proposition or thought resides not (solely) in human mental capacities, but is constituted, at least partly, by its object of reference. See 5.1.2 above, where I touch on this issue.

² Putnam is famous for helping develop the doctrine of 'functionalism', which holds that what makes a particular mental state of a person S, a state of pain, or of pleasure, or of love, etc., is solely how it functions, for S. It renders mental states to (computational) brain states. Putnam later came to reject aspects of this doctrine fervently, for reasons not entirely separate of his rejection of representational physicalist notions of the mind. See 5.2 above. Cf. Putnam, *Representation and Reality*, 136, esp. ch. 5; cf. also Oron Shagrir, "The Rise and Fall of Computational Functionalism," in *Hilary Putnam*, ed. Yemima Ben-Menahem, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 220-250.

³ Although Putnam does not engage with the topic of truth explicitly, in these writings on how these Jewish philosophers and Wittgenstein are to be understood as guides to life, he touches upon issues of truth in morality and truth in religion, as becomes even more apparent in Putnam's reflections about the same in the introductory and closing words of Hilary Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 121. See also Hilary Putnam, "The Pluralism of David Hartman," in *Judaism and Modernity: The Religious Philosophy of David Hartman*, eds. David Hartman and Jonathan W. Malino (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 237-248, for an excellent example of how Putnam's pluralism and Judaism come together.

about the truth-value of propositions. These elements are that truth is a plural notion, rather than a monist one (6.1), that truth, being an interactional notion, can be descriptive (6.2) as well as conceptual (6.3), and that it applies to factual as well as value statements (6.4). I thus address those aspects that are fundamental to Putnam's current notion of truth as connected to the truth-value of propositions, and to his current notion of truth as juxtaposed to particular aspects of the problematic views on truth. This provides us with a perspective on truth that, combined with the perspective on experience, likely evades the problems that metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives run into when applied to the question of the truth-value of religious propositions.

A characteristic aspect of Putnam's pragmatic pluralism is his bringing together of a strong endorsement of fallibilism with a strong rejection of skepticism, a combination Putnam takes to be fundamental to pragmatist viewpoints.⁴ Fundamental to practical reasoning, by which, as we will see, many areas of human reality (not only everyday life, the sciences, but also e.g. morality) can be governed, is the practice of "fallibilistic inquiry".⁵ Putnam connects with pragmatists in rebutting skepticism, not only in scientific inquiry but also moral skepticism, while also rejecting authoritarianism and apriorism, again both in the sciences and concerning values.⁶ He positively engages with what he takes to be Dewey's notion of inquiry as "cooperative human interaction with an environment".⁷ Putnam takes it that basic to Dewey's notion of inquiry, and the role of fallibilism in it, was Peirce's emphasis on the supposition that, as Putnam puts it, "very often ideas will not be falsified unless we go out and actively seek falsifying experiences".⁸ We need to 'actively manipulate' our environment in order to come as closely as possible to the way things are. This process of falsification Putnam takes to be fundamental to pragmatist reasoning.

Putnam takes the fallibilist attitude to be contrary both to Descartes' rationalism, which holds that the laws of science can be known *a priori*, and to empiricists who take the data upon which science rests to be unconceptualized (and therefore unfallible) sense data.⁹ In that sense, his

⁴ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 99.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶ Putnam, *Words and Life*, 152.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁹ Cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 6-7.98.100; see also my analysis of Putnam's criticism of sense data theories in Chapter 5.

fallibilism intends to do away with, and do without, any metaphysical inflations of such notions as truth and falsity. The rejection of an inflated notion of truth, which would urge us to doubt even those things we cannot make sense of doubting and which would ask us to found statements on grounds external to particular practices, brings us to Putnam's rejection of skepticism, the doctrine that we should doubt every belief that we hold and every experience that we believe to have (had).¹⁰ As we will see, it would be impertinent to ask mathematics to provide foundations for the truth of its basic theorems, since we cannot even make sense of the denial of (at least some of) these theorems. If we cannot make sense of the denial, then the skeptical argument, which rests on the contention that we have no proof for the affirmation of a theory (the contention that we have no basis for mathematical knowledge because there are no foundations for mathematical statements), is itself in want of justification.¹¹ In this respect, Putnam mentions his concurrence with what he takes to be a pragmatist belief, i.e. that "doubt requires justification just as much as belief".¹²

6.1 A plural notion of truth

As we saw in the previous chapter, Putnam criticizes those views that impose a monist, substantive notion of truth on the various fields of inquiry and thought, i.e. of truth as either consisting of the unique correspondence of a proposition to reality or consisting of its being justified within a particular community. In doing so, these views are likely to fail to do justice to what 'truth' actually comes down to in praxis, and to the possible different denotations of the concept in various contexts.¹³ In this section, I do not

¹⁰ See e.g. Keith DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem," *The Philosophical Review* 104, no. 1 (1995), 1-52, esp. 1-4.

¹¹ Cf. Putnam, *Words and Life*, 245-60, esp. 258.

¹² *Ibid.*, 152. Cf. also Putnam's emphasis on Peirce's distinction between 'real' and 'philosophical' doubt in *Ibid.*, 152; see also Yemima Ben-Menahem, "Putnam on Skepticism," in *Hilary Putnam*, ed. Yemima Ben-Menahem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 125-155, which discusses Putnam's twofold strategy in disarming skepticism.

¹³ Instead of a monist epistemology that requires us to reduce the possible ways in which a proposition can be true to one, e.g. by corresponding to reality, Putnam proceeds from the observation that human practice allows for a variety of ways in which propositions can be true, and that reality itself and human engagement with it are so diverse. Because Putnam's pragmatic pluralism does not need to back up a single particular perspective on truth-value, neither does it need to postulate the existence of any supersensible entities. Cf. Putnam,

investigate whether particular assertions are true or false, and neither do I address the question as to whether particular truth-conditions may yield various true assertions.¹⁴ Rather, I investigate what Putnam means when he states that his is not a monist substantive notion of truth, that is, when he states that there is no single, unique truth-criterion that propositions of all areas of human reasoning need to fulfill in order to gain the property of truth, e.g. correspondence to reality.

6.1.1 *A variety of notions of truth*

Rather than giving priority to theory over praxis,¹⁵ Putnam takes cues from the pragmatists and Wittgenstein, and aims to approximate the uses of the notion of truth in various contexts. For this reason, his notion cannot be a substantive monist one, delineating on beforehand what truth denotes in the various discourses, but has to allow for variation at least. One of the most

Ethics without Ontology, 21-2. I take it that, in summarizing, those of Putnam's views on meta-philosophical issues, in epistemology, in philosophy of language, and in philosophy of mind that are significant for the pragmatic pluralist view on truth, can be characterized as advocating a program of epistemology and ontology with lower-case 'e' and 'o'. Cf. *Ibid.*, 21, where he states that his objections are directed to 'Ontology' with a capital 'O'.

¹⁴ We will see that the conception of truth as plural does not so much mean that there are many instances of truth, i.e. many true assertions. Of course, a plural notion of truth *may very well be* compatible with there being many instances of truth, but it need not be. Even if one allows that there is a plurality of truth-conditions, this does not necessarily imply that there are actually assertions that meet these conditions.

¹⁵ Concerning the role of philosophical theory as opposed to praxis, Putnam, first of all, connects with what he takes to be one of Dewey's basic beliefs about philosophy, i.e. that "philosophies arise out of time-bound reactions to specific problems faced by human beings in given cultural circumstances [and that] a philosopher can contribute to the reasoned resolution of some of the problems of his or her time" (*Ibid.*, 31; cf. also Putnam, *Words and Life*, 152-3). This implies, however, that when the cultural circumstances and the specific problems change, some of the philosopher's contributions to the resolutions will "have to be qualified or even rejected" (Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 31). Secondly, he agrees with what he calls Quine's indispensability argument, i.e. that "what is indispensable to our best paradigms of knowledge cannot ... be criticized from some supposedly 'higher' philosophical viewpoint" (Putnam, *Words and Life*, 153). Putnam argues that since, in mathematics, we cannot even make sense of the negation of $2 + 2 = 4$, it would be impertinent (for philosophy) to demand, e.g. because of an inflated notion of justification, that we doubt whether $2 + 2 = 4$. Particular conceptual schemes, Putnam argues, are indispensable for the functioning of their corresponding areas of thought. Philosophy is not, and should not aim to be, a meta-standpoint (a 'first philosophy', cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 153) from which these practices can be judged, without allowing for falsification by way of conflicts with insights of the practices of reasoning themselves. Instead, it should allow its presuppositions to be criticized by the actual practices.

central aspects of Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth, then, is that it is a plural notion. Not only can truth amount to both description of empirical fact and conceptual truths,¹⁶ the truth-conditionals themselves can be plural, depending on the practice of which the proposition is part. Whether descriptive or conceptual, *how a proposition is true* may vary. Propositions can have truth-value in a number of ways, because in each conceptual scheme or practice truth has its own function.

In Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective, philosophy is thought to have an assisting rather than a prescriptive role, and cannot superimpose a particular meta-philosophical viewpoint on actual uses of the notion of truth. Thus, Putnam's notion of truth aims to connect to the actual use and meaning of 'truth' in the various areas of human reasoning. Establishing what notion of truth is applicable requires investigation into the ways in which 'truth' is employed and functions in a particular area. In some cases, truth consists of description of empirical fact. In describing e.g. the contents of a room, say my office, truth may be almost entirely congruent with description of empirical fact, i.e. of the facts about the size of the chair, etc. In other cases, e.g. in a discussion about a copy of the contents of my office at an art exhibition, the truth-conditions depend on the aesthetic practice of which the proposition is then part, and depend to a greater extent on conceptual relations.

In affirming the phenomenon of a plurality of uses and meanings of the concept truth, Putnam's conceptual pluralist view holds that there can be a variety of ways in which the notion of truth functions, in various areas of human reasoning. We cannot establish *a priori* in which domains of human inquiry truth does and in which truth does not feature. In our practical and intellectual engagements with our surroundings, we use various conceptual schemes. In Putnam's perspective on truth, the actual use and meaning of truth can vary depending on the area of human reasoning within which it is employed because of the affirmation of the phenomenon of conceptual relativity. As we will see below, conceptual relativity maintains not only that

¹⁶ With regard to the notion that truth can be both descriptive and conceptual, David Hume similarly holds that "[a]ll the objects of human reason may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, *relations of ideas*, and *matters of fact*" (Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section IV). Cf. G. H. Bird, "Analytic and Synthetic," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 11, no. 44 (1961), 227-237, who analyzes among others A.J. Ayer's defense and W.V.O. Quine's rejection of a distinction between analytic and synthetic truths, and discusses the question of whether the distinction should be conceived of as a distinction in degree. I turn to descriptive and conceptual truth in 6.2 and 6.3 respectively.

it is impossible to pin down the use of 'truth' for all of these areas, but also that there is no absolute, unique meaning of the concepts fundamental to the descriptions of empirical fact and the conceptual relations, which together constitute the meaning of truth, either. We cannot *a priori* establish what the notion of truth comes, or should come, down to in the various areas.

6.1.2 Conceptual relativity

The notion of conceptual relativity, with regard to semantics and its related consequences for epistemology and ontology, concerns the question whether basic concepts that we use, such as 'exist', 'individual', and 'object', have one right use or many. Conceptual relativity is the phenomenon that, apart from the obvious homonyms,¹⁷ words can have more than one correct extension, non-reducible to one another and, though *prima facie* conflicting, cognitively equivalent.¹⁸ The phenomenon of conceptual relativity is important, because it would imply that if a particular word indeed has various, related extensions, then they may not have the desired strong epistemological import on the basis of which we would be able to draw ontological conclusions. If one can show that it is at least partly a matter of convention which extension words that are fundamental in ontology and epistemology (e.g. 'exist') have, then one cannot presume that there is only one meaning to those words. Those philosophical outlooks that aim to derive ontological conclusions from (seemingly) purely semantic premises would then need to draw up new arguments for their claims.

Some metaphysical realists, for example, understand 'exist' in what is thought to be *the* meaning of 'exist', namely its empirical meaning,¹⁹ and hold that, since the truth of a proposition consists of its correspondence with (existing) reality, only propositions about those things that exist in an empirical manner can be true.²⁰ If, then, a metaphysical realist would hold

¹⁷ A word such as 'tire' has two extensions, i.e. fatigue and wheel. Here, the question is whether words that are generally thought to have only one extension, such as 'exist', may actually have various, related extensions.

¹⁸ See Baghramian, *Relativism*, 163-87, for an extensive introduction to the notion of conceptual relativism and conceptual relativity.

¹⁹ 'The natural scientific meaning' of 'exist' is already a problematic notion, since the natural sciences are very diverse, of course. 'Exist' has a variety of uses in the natural sciences, such as in 'neurons exist' and 'gravity exists', or even 'the law of gravity exists'.

²⁰ Metaphysical realists may claim, for example, that truth consist of the correspondence of our assertions with the world, and that, therefore – or so they claim – for an assertion about particular parts of reality to be true, those parts of the world have to exist. A metaphysical

that moral norms do not exist in the manner that objects in natural sciences exist, this would imply that one cannot make true (or false) claims about moral norms. If, however, 'exist' can have more than one correct extension, and does not necessarily denote the 'existence' of physical objects, this would take away this particular metaphysical realist argument concerning the subjectivity of moral norms.

As what exists is usually taken to be objective, and not 'decidable', and since 'to exist' plays an important role in what Putnam takes to be 'inflationary and deflationary ontology', he takes it as a prime case for showing that the extensions of basic words in epistemology are a convention.²¹ Putnam's argument for conceptual relativity, then, runs as follows. Following Putnam's example, we may imagine a world with only three objects, say spheres s_1 , s_2 , and s_3 . How many objects are there in this world? The obvious answer would be three. Yet, if one attempts to pin down the notion of object, it is not obvious why one would not take the upper and the lower sides of these spheres as objects, which would amount to six objects. One might, in a particular logic, even ask why the combination of ' $s_1 + s_2$ ' should not count as an object, as well as ' $s_2 + s_3$ '.²² Counting the sums as objects as well amounts to seven objects, in a world previously described as containing only three objects. Our natural or everyday language would grant that there are three objects. If one chooses to speak mereologically

realist view of mathematics may then include e.g. that ' $2 + 2 = 4$ ' is true if, and only if, reality is such that $2 + 2 = 4$. In the metaphysical realist picture, this is thought to imply that the numbers 2 and 4 have to exist. If one takes 'exist' to denote what it (usually) denotes in the natural sciences, as many metaphysical realists do, many will have difficulties agreeing to the claim that numbers 2 and 4 exist. There exists no number 2 like chairs exist. This is why, Putnam holds, metaphysical realists who want to hold on to the realist character of mathematics have held that mathematical propositions must refer to *supersensible* entities (Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 22). Since truth depends on correspondence to reality, and since particular parts of reality can exist only in the manner things exist in the natural sciences, $2 + 2 = 4$ is true only if it refers to entities (if not sensible, then supersensible) that exist. If it is not the case that 'exist' can only be understood in only one way, e.g. in the natural scientific manner, then one cannot conclude that for $2 + 2 = 4$ to be true, numbers must exist as entities. (A fortiori, if 'exist' can have different meanings then neither can one conclude, on the basis that $2 + 2 = 4$ is true, that numbers exist.) Numbers may then also exist in a different manner, e.g. as concepts.

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 38. See also (Putnam 2001, esp. 151) for a discussion of why the meaning of these notions in mathematics is not the same as their meaning in other areas of inquiry.

²² Cf. also Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, 96-104.

(mereology is the language of sets),²³ one would count seven. “[T]he phenomenon of conceptual relativity ... turns on the fact that the logical primitives themselves, and in particular the notions of object and existence, have a multitude of different uses rather than one absolute meaning”.²⁴ One can give two seemingly incompatible though cognitively equivalent descriptions of the same situation.²⁵ One optional language may describe the same situation in a manner that seems in contradiction with a description in another optional language (e.g. the mereological ‘there are seven objects’ vs. the everyday view that ‘there are three objects’), but because they successfully describe the *same* reality, they are cognitively equivalent. Because the choice between languages is a largely conventional choice, pinning the meaning of ‘exist’ down to either one of the uses is not possible.

This does not imply, however, that ‘object’ and ‘exist’ can therefore mean anything. Taking the phenomenon of conceptual relativity as basic, fact and convention are not easily separable in these fundamental cases. While relativism would hold that it would be equally true to say, of the world with only three objects, that it has four objects, conceptual relativity does not allow for such a full-blown ‘conventionalism’. In our everyday language, three objects are three objects, and not four. If, in an optional language, we also count sets as objects, we could say that there are seven. But as long as there is no viable language that, in the case of the three spheres, would e.g. (for some mysterious reason) count the left and right half of s_1 as two while counting s_2 and s_3 as one each, which would add up to 4 objects, there is no reason to presume that there can also be four objects.²⁶ Which of the viable languages we choose may be a convention.²⁷ When we have chosen a particular language, however, what that word means is no longer a convention.

If conceptual relativity is a real phenomenon, Putnam argues, then we should acknowledge the doctrine of conceptual relativity,²⁸ which says that,

²³ Cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 33-47. Mereology was invented by the Polish logician Lezniewski.

²⁴ Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism: The Paul Carus Lectures*, Vol. 16 (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1987), 19 – italics removed.

²⁵ Cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 48.

²⁶ Although Putnam does not speak of ‘viable’ languages, I take it that this is what his argument against conventionalism ultimately comes down to.

²⁷ About the notion of which conceptual schemes and languages are ‘viable’, see the section on the practical and intellectual abilities.

²⁸ Cf. Jennifer Case, “The Heart of Putnam’s Pluralistic Realism,” *Revue Internationale De Philosophie* 4, no. 218 (2001), 417-430, who differentiates between Putnam laying bare the

in the case of at least some basic notions, there is no manner in which we could discern between right uses. As such, it contradicts the metaphysical realist doctrine that there is only one true description of the world, and that the world is made up out of a fixed number of objects. (As said, this view is held by metaphysical realists in part because of their perspective on the notion of truth. Since truth consists of a correspondence of our words with objective reality, and since there can be only one truth, the words that we use to describe reality must have only one meaning.) Since it does not take all aspects of the meaning of these basic terms to be convention, conceptual relativity is not compatible with relativism either.²⁹

6.1.3 Conceptual pluralism

The issue of conceptual relativity brings us to conceptual pluralism.³⁰ While conceptual relativity is the phenomenon that we can give cognitively equivalent descriptions that would be contradictory if part of the same language, conceptual pluralism is the view that one can describe the same situation in different non-contradictory ways, while making avail of the same natural language. The question fundamental to the issue of conceptual pluralism is whether, when describing particular phenomena, there can be different conceptual schemes within a natural language, or whether all descriptions should be based on a single conceptual scheme. Putnam uses

phenomenon of conceptual relativity and Putnam endorsing a philosophical doctrine called conceptual relativity. Note that while it would make some sense to use 'conceptual relativism' for the doctrine that acknowledges the phenomenon of conceptual relativity, acknowledging conceptual relativity does not lead to relativism, understood as the doctrine that all aspects of the meanings of our concepts are conventional. Cf. Maria Baghramian's use of the term conceptual relativism in Maria Baghramian, "From Realism Back to Realism: Putnam's Long Journey," *Philosophical Topics* 36, no. 1 (2008), 17, and Baghramian, *Relativism*. Since it would seem that it does support relativism, Putnam refrains from calling this doctrine conceptual relativism. Judging by his use of the term 'pluralism', Putnam has no such worries about employing 'conceptual pluralism'.

²⁹ Putnam claims that conceptual relativity is not incompatible with the kind of realism he wants to uphold (Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism: The Paul Carus Lectures*, 17). See my analysis and criticism of the conceptual notion of truth in 6.3. In Chapter 8, I argue that Putnam's viewpoints do run the risk of cultural relativism.

³⁰ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 49. While Putnam claims he did not always see clearly how these two issues are separate and different, he now takes conceptual pluralism to follow from conceptual relativity, but not the other way around. Cf. Putnam's discussion with Jennifer Case in Case, *The Heart of Putnam's Pluralistic Realism*, 417-430, and Hilary Putnam, "Reply to Jennifer Case," *Revue Internationale De Philosophie* 55, no. 4 (2001), 431-438; and see Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 139n.18. See below for a discussion of this relation.

the example of a room, with a desk and a chair.³¹ Can only one conceptual scheme, within a particular natural language, e.g. that of particle physics, ultimately yield the right description of the content of this room? Or can it equally well be described in another conceptual scheme, e.g. of everyday concepts such as desks and chairs? This question is of importance for the issue of which, if any, field of human reasoning has priority.

Since Putnam endorses conceptual relativity, he necessarily endorses conceptual pluralism as well.³² If one accepts that the meaning of certain (basic) words, which are *prima facie* conflicting (in their description of a particular object), can, depending on the optional language they are part of, actually be cognitively equivalent, then one must also allow for descriptions, of the same particular object, which are cognitively dissimilar. If one refrains from taking one of two (optional) languages as the right or authoritative one, even if they are conflicting in their description of the same situation or object, then one should also refrain from taking one of two or more conceptual schemes within a particular language as the proper one. In the case of both conceptual relativity and conceptual pluralism one refrains from taking one language as more basic than another.

6.1.4 *Truth beyond inflation and deflation: a formal definition of truth*

Contrary to what a title such as *Ethics without Ontology* may suggest, Putnam does not do away with all ontological thinking and theorizing.³³ Whereas he rejects inflationary and deflationary ontology, the former of which he characterizes as Ontology with a capital O, he finds no harm in doing ontology, i.e. with what one could call “the science of Being”³⁴ that examines “what we are doing when we say that various sorts of entities ‘exist’”,³⁵ as long as we have no pre-fixed, static conceptions about what we mean with ‘to exist’, and about what we ‘allow to exist’. Putnam has no

³¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

³² This relation goes this way only, since one can be a conceptual pluralist for reasons other than conceptual relativity and since if one allows for a plurality of conceptual schemes within particular natural languages one need not take there to be *prima facie* conflicting but actually cognitively equivalent statements.

³³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 18. See also Sami Pihlström, "Putnam's Conception of Ontology," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 3, no. 2 (2006), 1-13., David Copp, "The Ontology of Putnam's *Ethics without Ontology*," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 3, no. 2 (2006), 39-39-53, esp. 45-8, and C. Tiercelin, "Metaphysics without Ontology?" *Contemporary Pragmatism* 3, no. 2 (2006), 55-66, for thorough analyses of Putnam's ontological viewpoints.

³⁴ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 17.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

quarrel with ontology. We could call his ontology and epistemology ‘disinflationism’, as it neither inflates nor deflates the notion of truth, but disinflates where it has been inflated.³⁶ Below, we will see that he even has no problems with *morality* having ontology.³⁷ For Putnam, taking his cue from Dewey in particular, it would make no sense to presume that because no such things as moral objects exist, moral discourse would ultimately be without truth-value. Nor does it make sense to presume, in trying to save the objectivity of morality, that moral objects *do* exist. Morality ‘exists’, and there is moral truth, not because moral objects exist, but because it is an undeniable part of human reality.³⁸

So far what have been established are the conditions for the plurality of the notion of truth. We have seen *why* truth can have different meanings, not *how*. If it can be established how truth can, on the one hand, be more than just description, but on the other hand does not become meaningless if there are various other truth-conditions, then the plural notion of truth would fit into our search for a view on truth that connects with the various forms of inquiry and reasoning that exist. In the next sections, therefore, I analyze how, next to descriptive, there can be conceptual truth as well.

6.2 Descriptive truth

Though his recent writings explore the issue of conceptual truth much more extensively than descriptive truth, the latter of course also is a possible form of truth in Putnam’s view. Conceptual truth is a form of truth that depends on intra-linguistic abilities, whereas in the case of descriptive truth, the truth of a proposition depends rather straightforwardly on its relation with extra-

³⁶ Cf. Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*, 19. I take it that though Putnam says he agrees with the description Stoutland gives, in Stoutland, *Putnam on Truth*, 147-176, of Putnam’s notion of truth as ‘deflationist’, this deflationism is compatible with a moderate realist notion of truth, and I believe should therefore rather be called ‘disinflationist’.

³⁷ As I use these terms, here, ‘morality’ refers to what one could call the *capacity* to act in a particular manner, e.g. taking another’s or one’s community’s needs and wants into account, whereas I would limit the use of ‘ethics’ to the *reflection on morality*. For what I would call ‘morality’, Putnam often uses the terms ethics and morality interchangeably. Cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 22-8

³⁸ Morality can even be at least in part objective, not because some moral statements are in accordance with supposed supersensible moral objects, but because it can be conceptually true. Cf. *Ibid.*, 71-8.

linguistic reality, i.e. with empirical fact. An example of descriptive truth is the proposition that 'there is an elephant in the room' when there is indeed an elephant in the room.³⁹

To Putnam, no definite line can be drawn between conceptual and descriptive truth.⁴⁰ Therefore, much of the issues that play a part in conceptual truth, play a part in descriptive too, and vice versa. In fact, because of its nature, if Putnam's argument for conceptual truth holds up, it will *a fortiori* for descriptive truth. While I do not want to discuss Putnam's notion of descriptive truth comprehensively, because much will become clear when analyzing his notion of conceptual truth, it is important to mention one aspect briefly, namely about the foundational nature of descriptive truth.

In Putnam's view, contrary to metaphysical realists and antirealists, descriptive truths often do not need a further justification. When the circumstances are such that one need not doubt that one's judgment is clouded, e.g. because one is not under the influence of anything that may blur one's senses or intellectual abilities, then we need not fulfill supplementary criteria that would establish that the proposition is indeed true. When faced with the situation that there is an elephant in the room - which must be a rather noteworthy situation - it makes hardly any sense to deny the proposition. Therefore, it would make hardly any sense to ask for a further justification of the proposition, e.g. 'how do you know that there is an elephant in the room?', or 'how can you be sure that you are not actually hallucinating?'⁴¹ This attests to Putnam's anti-skeptical stance. With regard to descriptive truth, then, Putnam's concept of truth comes close to 'accordance with reality', which is something we can often establish without requiring further recourse to foundational arguments.⁴²

³⁹ Cf. Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 21-36. Hume takes it that "the nature of all our reasonings concerning matter of fact ... are founded on the relation of cause and effect ... and the foundation of all our reasonings and conclusions concerning that relation [is] experience" (Ibid., 28 - italics removed). As we will see, Putnam disagrees with Hume's contention that in experiencing no reasonable argumentation is involved. Putnam holds that without our intellectual abilities and conceptualizations, there is no experience.

⁴⁰ I return to this issue briefly in 6.3.1 and 6.3.5 below.

⁴¹ With regard to these issues, Putnam is heavily influenced by the later Wittgenstein, e.g. in L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979).

⁴² See Stoutland, *Putnam on Truth*, 147-176, for a comprehensive analysis of Putnam's notion of descriptive truth.

6.3 Conceptual truth

As said, Putnam's pragmatic pluralist account of truth holds that whether propositions are true or false does not consist in one criterion that supposedly applies to all areas of human reasoning. While descriptive truth is perhaps paradigmatic for contemporary perspectives on truth, the truth of some statements need *not* consist of a description of reality, i.e. of a relation of our statements to objects or states of affairs. This paragraph, therefore, turns to the question of what it means that not all true propositions are true because of a descriptive relation, but that some, according to Putnam, may be conceptually true.⁴³ 'All bachelors are unmarried' is often taken as an example of a conceptual truth.⁴⁴ In the traditional picture, such conceptual truths, like true mathematical and logical statements, "are 'true by virtue of their meaning alone'".⁴⁵ Contrary to descriptive truths, which depend on reality for their truth, one need only know the meaning of the words used in a conceptually true proposition to know the truth of that proposition. In this paragraph, I establish that Putnam, while connecting to particular aspects of the notion of conceptual truth, deflects from the traditional notions of conceptual truth as well.⁴⁶ Putnam, for example, maintains that "concepts

⁴³ Instead of 'conceptual', some would want to use 'analytic', stemming in part from Quine's well-known rejection of the synthetic-analytic division concerning 'truth', e.g. in W. V. Quine, "Main Trends in Recent Philosophy: Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *The Philosophical Review* 60, no. 1 (1951), 20-43. However, Putnam evades the use of the notion of analytic truth, because the terminology suggests that the truth in question would be unrevisable and/or *a priori* knowable, while he holds that this is not necessarily the case. Cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 60-1, and Putnam, *Pragmatism*, 301. As Putnam puts it "one must resist the tendency ... to take every claim that something or other is a conceptual truth as a claim that some sentence or other is analytic. Certainly it is unhappy to think of an arithmetical truth such as '5+7≠13' as analytic (either in the Kantian sense, or, less metaphysically, in the sense of being a 'verbal' truth like 'all bachelors are unmarried'); but nonetheless there is a significant sense in which we can say that it is a conceptual truth that 5+7≠13, namely that we simply do not understand what they would be asserting, if some people were to claim that five plus seven is sometimes thirteen, or that they had just found out that five plus seven is sometimes thirteen" (Ibid., 301). Furthermore, as we will see, while Putnam, with Quine, takes there to be no clear distinction possible between synthetic and analytic truth, this does not persuade Putnam that there can be no use for these concepts anymore.

⁴⁴ See e.g. P. A. Boghossian, "Analyticity and Conceptual Truth," *Philosophical Issues* 5 (1994), 118.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁶ Hume, for example, holds that the affirmation of what we have called 'conceptual truths' "is either intuitively or demonstratively certain" (Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human*

are (at least in part) *abilities* and not occurrences".⁴⁷ In conceptual truths, conceptual and practical abilities combine, which allows for an interaction of reality and concepts. Since recognizing descriptive truths also requires both conceptual and practical abilities, there is no dichotomy between conceptual and descriptive truths. Furthermore, as analyzed below, conceptual truths are not unrevisable.

6.3.1 *Conceptual relations and truth*

In the case of descriptive truth, as said, the truth-value of a proposition depends largely on its relation with extra-linguistic reality, i.e. with empirical reality. In the case of conceptual truth, so Putnam argues, the truth of a proposition to a greater extent⁴⁸ depends on its relation with other propositions, i.e. with other concepts. There are a number of things Putnam *does not* want to say when he calls particular assertions instances of conceptual truth, contrary to what some may expect. In line with the presuppositions laid out above, and other than traditional analytic philosophers, Putnam's notion of conceptual truth does not imply that one can establish, on beforehand, which truths are conceptual truths and which are not, nor does it imply that conceptual truths are *a priori* knowable, are incorrigible, or that there is a dichotomy of descriptive and conceptual truths.

Putnam's statement that "[w]hat makes a truth a conceptual truth, as I am using the term, is that it is impossible to make (relevant) sense of the assertion of its negation"⁴⁹ is a succinct defining characteristic of what makes a statement conceptually true. Only if one can make sense of the serious negation of an assertion, can one seriously contemplate its falsity. As we will see below, it depends on the practical and intellectual abilities that we have whether an assertion can or cannot be sensibly negated. If we turn to the example of the assertion that 'All bachelorettes are unmarried', we see that

Understanding, 21). To Hume, determining these truths is done merely by the faculties of our minds, and does not in any way depend on objects or states of affairs. The "truths [which are so] demonstrated ... would for ever retain their certainty and evidence" (*Ibid.*, 21). We will see that Putnam disagrees both on the issue of whether in discovering conceptual truths we also depend on our surroundings and on the issue of the unrevisability of conceptual truths.

⁴⁷ Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 21.

⁴⁸ According to Putnam, as said in 6.2, there is no clear distinction possible between descriptive and conceptual truth. I will work this out further in 6.3.5. As we will see in what follows, conceptual truth, though to a lesser extent than descriptive truth and in a less direct manner, depends on empirical reality too.

⁴⁹ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 61.

this is no descriptive truth, since nowhere is there the empirical fact, in a way similar to the empirical fact that I am sitting on a chair writing this text, that all bachelorettes are unmarried. However, with our present understanding of the terms 'bachelorette' and 'unmarried', it makes no sense to negate this assertion. For what would someone be saying who contends that 'Not all bachelorettes are unmarried'?

As said, it depends on our present practical and intellectual abilities whether a proposition is indeed conceptually true. When the meaning of the word 'bachelorette' or 'marrying' changes, because of some (presently unforeseeable) change in our practical and intellectual abilities with regard to bachelorettes or marriages, it may be the case that we *can* make sense of the denial of this proposition.⁵⁰ Thus, conceptual truths cannot be used as unshakable foundations of knowledge. To Putnam, therefore, they do not have the epistemological import they are sometimes thought to have. To him, however, that there are "assertions whose negations make no sense if taken as serious negations"⁵¹ is of *methodological* significance, since the fact that there are assertions of which it makes no sense to ask why they are the case, what proof one has for them, whether they are really true, etc., shows that *that* is how truth sometimes works.

6.3.2 *Interdependence: concepts and practical abilities*

As said, it depends on the practical and intellectual abilities that we have in a particular area of reasoning whether we can make sense of the serious negation of an assertion that rests on particular conceptual relations. A second central aspect of the conceptual notion of truth, therefore, is that what counts as a true (or false) proposition depends, at least partly, on the field in which it is employed.⁵² The conceptual abilities that we have concerning a particular discourse are interdependent on the particular practical abilities that we have within that field.

To Putnam, mathematical assertions are exemplary of how meaningful propositions are possible without their objectivity depending on the correspondence to supposed objects. With the conceptual resources we have now, such as the rules of simplicity and coherence, and of adding up

⁵⁰ In 6.3.4 I explain that this does not mean that all truths are *currently* revisable.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 63 – italics removed.

⁵² Putnam takes this aspect of his notion of truth to be a specifically *pragmatist* approach to truth. "The insistence, not just on the interdependence of our grasp of truth-claims and our grasp of verification, but also on the interdependence of our conceptual abilities and our practical abilities is at the heart of pragmatism" (Putnam, *Pragmatism*, 305-6).

and subtracting (but these may change), it makes no sense to negate particular mathematical propositions such as ' $2 + 2 = 4$ '.⁵³ We can make sense of particular conceptual relations only because, on the basis of our dealings with reality, we have acquired particular practical and intellectual abilities.

It works the other way around as well: we learn how to work (better) within such a field by applying the concepts (such as simplicity and coherence, adding up and subtracting)⁵⁴ to parts of these areas we previously had not applied them to. The conceptual abilities help us better understand our practices, and thus our environment. This is where, according to Putnam, "conceptual truth and empirical description interpenetrate".⁵⁵ On the one hand, the facts which we accept influence what we take to be valid negations of particular statements. On the other hand, the conceptual relations that we posit influence what we take to be matters of fact. "[F]or when we say that the denial of a certain statement makes no sense, we always speak within the body of beliefs and concepts and conceptual connections that we accept".⁵⁶

I understand Putnam's notion of the relation of truth to reality as an interactional one,⁵⁷ as implying that truth is a property that particular statements have, which, in light of the practical and intellectual abilities that people have acquired with regard to their (physical, mental, social, etc.) surroundings, stand in an appropriate relation to the experience of those surroundings.⁵⁸ This relation of truth to reality is interactional in the sense that the experiences of our surroundings shape our practical and intellectual

⁵³ Taking mathematics as a prime example, Putnam states that "we learn what mathematical truth is by learning the practices and standards of mathematics itself, including the practice of *applying* mathematics" (Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 66).

⁵⁴ Below we turn to the fact that these conceptual resources may be evaluative rather than descriptive.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 61. Stating it slightly differently elsewhere, Putnam contends that, "[t]he conception of conceptual truth that I defend, I repeat, recognizes the interpenetration of conceptual relations and facts" (*Ibid.*, 62).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 61. In a similar manner, this interdependence plays an important role in establishing *descriptive* truths. This is what Putnam means when he says that there is a conceptual connection between grasping an empirical concept and being able to recognize a perceptually justified application of that concept" (Putnam, *Pragmatism*, 295).

⁵⁷ Putnam also calls this 'interpenetrating' in Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question*, 58 and Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 61, and 'interdependent' in Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question*, 58, and Putnam, *Pragmatism*, 291-306.

⁵⁸ As Putnam takes perception to be direct and not indirect perception, perception of one's surroundings is perception of *reality*, and not of *representations* of reality. As said, I will go into this aspect of Putnam's pragmatic pluralism in the next chapter.

abilities, while these practical and intellectual abilities shape how we experience our surroundings. Furthermore, what the appropriate relation is, is determined in interaction with these surroundings as well.

6.3.3 *Interaction of concepts and reality*

In light of the foregoing, and ever since he developed what has become known as his ‘internal realism’,⁵⁹ which is in many ways a forerunner of his pragmatic pluralism,⁶⁰ Putnam has been criticized for taking an epistemological antirealist or relativist stance towards the notion of truth.⁶¹ Even more so than in the case of his internal realism, however, Putnam’s pragmatic pluralist take on (conceptual) truth attempts to be an epistemological *realism* in the sense that, in determining which statements are true and which false, reality plays an indispensable part. Without the practical abilities that we acquire in interaction with reality (e.g. moral aspects of reality, mathematics, physical, etc.) we would acquire no intellectual abilities, and would be unable to form conceptual relations.⁶² These conceptual relations, in turn, are basic to both our engagements with the world of empirical fact and our conceptual truths. Putnam’s notion of conceptual truth “recognizes the interpenetration of conceptual relations and facts”.⁶³ Which conceptual relations are basic, depends on which concepts are central in a particular discourse, and on how these concepts are

⁵⁹ Putnam contends that he never named his position in this way, but that he only started using it when he saw that the title had become commonplace. Cf. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 182n.36. See my analysis above, in 5.1.4.

⁶⁰ Whereas Putnam concedes that his internal realist notion of truth as idealized rational acceptability was mistaken because it still took the metaphysicalist antinomy of mind and world as basic, and therefore could not successfully account for a relation of truth to reality, he holds that it was never an antirealist notion, as it held that whether one is in sufficiently good epistemic circumstances, ultimately, depended on reality as well. Cf. Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, ch. 3; Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 43-72; and Hilary Putnam, "Between Scylla and Charybdis: Does Dummett have a Way through?" in *The Philosophy of Michael Dummett*, eds. R. E. Auxier and L. E. Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 2007), 160-3.

⁶¹ Cf. Maximilian de Gaynesford, *Hilary Putnam* (Durham: Acumen Press, 2006), 150-163, for an analysis that takes Putnam’s notion of truth as largely antirealist. De Gaynesford consults only one primary source later than 1981, i.e. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*. Consultation of other sources after Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, would allow for a more nuanced perspective on the same.

⁶² As said, this works the other way around as well. Our conceptual abilities can help us to better understand our practices better.

⁶³ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 62.

used. This in turn depends on the practical and intellectual abilities one has in these areas.

Speaking about the room that is my research office, again, but this time from an evaluative point of view, our practical and intellectual abilities concerning such issues as what we view as valuable aspects of research can interact with views about what does or does not reveal appreciation. An assertion such as that ‘This office shows how research is recognized in the Netherlands’ might be true because facts about the size, furnishings, location, etc. of the researcher’s office might say something about how Dutch society values research. If looking at the exact replica of the contents of my room on an art exhibition, on an aesthetical level, the proposition ‘This piece speaks to its spectators’ may be true, since its truth depends on notions of ‘performance’, ‘imagination’, etc., and how these interact with concepts such as ‘still life’ and ‘spectator’. It depends on whether the various relevant concepts have come together in a right manner. What the right manner is can only be established, again, in an interaction of practical and intellectual abilities in that field (in this case, the field of aesthetics) with reality.

6.3.4 Analyticity and (un)revisability

This shows that, though Putnam’s notion of conceptual truth is conceptual to an important extent, i.e. because it leans on conceptual relations rather than descriptions, it is not analytic in the sense of analytic philosophy’s traditional take on it. Such philosophers hold that, since analytic or conceptual truth depends solely on the meaning of concepts, it is unrevisable.⁶⁴ Putnam holds, however, that “[t]he leap from ‘there are conceptual truths’ to ‘there are unrevisable truths’ ... is utterly unjustified”.⁶⁵ Putnam takes a balanced middle position between the view that conceptual truths are *never* revisable and the view that they are *all* and *always* revisable.

Though Putnam contests Quine’s contention that *all* truths are *presently* revisable, he does assent to Quine’s belief that no truths can be immune to revision,⁶⁶ since for conceptual truths to be unrevisable, the meaning of the two concepts that are supposedly synonymous would have to be fixed, once and for all, in order for there to exist an identity relation between the two concepts. In this respect, Putnam concurs with what he

⁶⁴ See also Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 21-36.

⁶⁵ Putnam, *Pragmatism*, 301.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 300. See also Quine, *Main Trends in Recent Philosophy: Two Dogmas of Empiricism*, 20-43.

takes to have been Josiah Royce's and Charles Sanders Peirce's view on meaning. "For Royce - who was influenced by Peirce - the statement that two terms have the same meaning is a statement that involves interpretation, and for both Royce and Peirce, interpretation is an endlessly revisable process".⁶⁷ However, although Putnam strongly endorses fallibilism, he does not maintain that *all* that we currently hold true - *all* our beliefs - can presently be altered.⁶⁸ Therefore, other than Quine's, Putnam's view *is not* that all truths are presently revisable.⁶⁹ According to Putnam, as we saw, there are at least some beliefs we hold true the revision of which we currently cannot make sense of, because "if we cannot *describe* circumstances under which a belief would be falsified, circumstances under which we would be prepared to say that -B had been confirmed, then we are not presently able to attach a clear *sense* to 'B can be revised'".⁷⁰ As Putnam puts it, "[t]he conception of conceptual truth that I defend ... grants that there is an important sense in which knowledge of conceptual truth is corrigible".⁷¹

The distinction between analytic (conceptual) and synthetic (descriptive) truth is often criticized because those who make this distinction are thought to believe that if we can distinguish purely analytic truths from synthetic ones, we have an unshakable foundation for further epistemologizing. This is what Timothy Williamson means when he says that "much of the putative significance of the analytic/synthetic distinction is

⁶⁷ Putnam, *Pragmatism*, 301.

⁶⁸ Cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 16. With Quine, Putnam did endorse a revisability thesis, i.e. the thesis that all truths are revisable. In his 'Rethinking Mathematical Necessity', however, Putnam critically discusses Quine's "doctrine that 'no statement is immune from revision'" (Putnam, *Words and Life*, 248). Putnam holds that we cannot presently make sense of the negation of at least some truths. His counterargument to Quine's claim that statements are, in principle, all revisable, is not a proof of all statements being in principle revisable but an argument showing that in the case of at least particular statements (such as classical logic's theorems), no sense can (as of yet) be made of questioning their revisability (Ibid., 248-58). We can see how this view is congruent with Putnam's conceptual notion of truth.

⁶⁹ Cf. C. Norris, *Hilary Putnam: Realism, Reason and the Uses of Uncertainty* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 192-217, and C. Norris, "Putnam, Peano, and the Malin Génie: Could we Possibly Be Wrong about Elementary Number-Theory?" *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 33, no. 2 (2002), 289-321, for a detailed description of Putnam's disagreement with Quine on this issue.

⁷⁰ Putnam, *Words and Life*, 253.

⁷¹ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 62.

epistemological”.⁷² With this he means that most of those who endorse a conceptual notion of truth hope that conceptually true beliefs generate unshakable foundations for knowledge. Putnam does not fit this category, however, as his notion of conceptual truth is *not* intended to provide *unshakable, unalterable* foundations for further theorizing. In this regard, Putnam argues that his view differs from Rudolf Carnap’s, who “wanted a notion of analyticity that would have epistemological clout”,⁷³ in the sense that in his own view it is merely descriptively true that we cannot make sense, presently, and with our present abilities, of particular negations.

As, to Putnam, conceptual truth does not depend solely of linguistic data, i.e. on concepts alone, but also on our practical abilities and thus on empirical fact, his notion deflects fundamentally from analytic philosophy’s view on analytic truth that which a proposition can be true by virtue of its meaning (which is thought to be an intra-linguistic affair) alone.⁷⁴ Instead, it requires interpreting a proposition and its meaning, in light of our other conceptual and practical abilities, in order for us to establish whether the proposition is conceptually true. It is because of our practical and intellectual abilities in particular fields of reasoning, for which we depend on our interaction with reality, that we can come to see whether something is conceptually true.

6.3.5 *Whether a truth is conceptual is a matter of degree*

Our descriptive truths depend on our conceptual abilities, and our conceptual resources depend on empirical facts. In this sense, many conceptually true propositions depend on fact. Therefore, what is and what is not a “[c]onceptual truth is a matter of degree”.⁷⁵ As conceptual truths depend partly on descriptive truths, and vice versa, this implies, I would argue, that what is a descriptive truth is a matter of degree too. Interdependence plays an important role in establishing *descriptive* truths too. This is what Putnam means when he says that “there is a conceptual connection between grasping an empirical concept and being able to

⁷² Timothy Williamson, “Conceptual Truth,” *Supplement to the Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 80, no. 1 (2006), 8.

⁷³ Putnam, *Words and Life*, 258.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 259.

⁷⁵ Putnam, *Representation and Reality*, 133; cf. also Case, *The Heart of Putnam’s Pluralistic Realism*, 417-430, esp. 423.

recognize a perceptually justified application of that concept".⁷⁶ Being able to judge whether, when I claim to 'see' that my room is an office, this is actually the case, requires having a particular understanding of what it means for a room to be a room, for an office to be an office, for a room to be an office, etc. This understanding of these empirical concepts depends on our conceptual abilities, but there is no distinct point where description and conceptualization can be separated. Therefore, whether an assertion is a conceptual rather than a descriptive truth cannot always be determined.⁷⁷ Some of our seemingly straightforward descriptively true propositions may turn out to be descriptively false if and when our conceptual resources that are fundamental to determining those empirical facts change. Some of our seemingly straightforward conceptual truths may not be as hard as they seemed if the relevant facts turn out not to have been facts after all.

6.4 Truth in morality

Propositions, whether mainly conceptual or descriptive, can have a variety of truth-conditions. In working out what these conditions may amount to in various areas of reasoning, Putnam focuses mainly on logic, mathematics, and morality. Because religious reasoning is arguably more akin to moral reasoning than to logic and mathematics, I will analyze Putnam's views on descriptive and conceptual truth in morality. This will make the rather abstract perspective on the notion of truth more concrete, and allows us to make a transition to religious propositions in Part III. It also brings to the fore a potential limitation of Putnam's perspective on truth.

Concurrently with his perspective on the relevance for concepts for facts, and *vice versa*, Putnam holds that the abilities, intellectual and practical, that we have in a particular field of inquiry, say chemistry, consist not only of abilities with empirical facts but also of abilities with making value-judgments, or, as Putnam calls them, 'valuings'.⁷⁸ Whether a fact holds, as we saw, depends partly on conceptual abilities. These may be evaluative conceptual abilities, such as being able to see whether the theory that

⁷⁶ Cf. Putnam, *Pragmatism*, 295. Cf. also William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975 [1907]).

⁷⁷ See Putnam, *Was Wittgenstein really an Anti-Realist about Mathematics?*, 180; Putnam, *When "Evidence Transcendence" is Not Malign: A Reply to Crispin Wright*, 594-600; and Putnam, *Reply to Jennifer Case*, 431-438.

⁷⁸ Cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 74.

supports the fact is 'coherent' and 'simple'.⁷⁹ There is thus an overlap between facts and values, but Putnam is also willing to distinguish between the two. Putnam holds that though "there is a distinction to be drawn (one that is useful in some contexts) between ethical judgments and other sorts of judgments ... *nothing metaphysical follows from the existence of a fact/value distinction*".⁸⁰ The fact that it is sometimes useful to distinguish between facts and values does not imply that one can quantify over facts while values, norms, and morals *do not* 'exist',⁸¹ nor that the notion of truth would only apply to the world of empirical facts.

To Putnam, morality, or 'ethics' as he usually names it, is equally an area of human reasoning. He maintains that morality is an area of human life characterized by an enormous diversity of goals, rules, etc.⁸² For example, not only values and norms are central in morality. Putnam contends that much of our moral propositions have factual aspects (just like much of our empirical propositions imply evaluative judgments): "one cannot say ... simply", as one *can* about logical truths, "that [all] ethical truths are not descriptions, because it is a matter of *which* ethical statements one has in mind".⁸³ A statement such as 'abortion is killing a fetus' can have a predominantly descriptive meaning in the sense that it aims to tell us something about what abortion means, while it can also have a normative meaning in that it tells us that abortion is wrong as it involves killing (or murdering) a fetus.⁸⁴ Concerning morality, an area where value is of central importance, Putnam holds that moral statements are "forms of reflection that are as fully governed by norms of truth and validity as any other form of

⁷⁹ A second reason is that, as the conceptual relations that we draw in making value judgments arise from our practical and intellectual abilities in a way at least comparable to empirical judgments, value judgments are not necessarily devoid of truth-value. Although this is a valid line of argument in Putnam's thinking, I do not stress it here, because, as we will see, Putnam seems to neglect it in his views on conceptual truth in ethics, i.e. on the intersection of conceptual relativity, optional languages, ethics and truth.

⁸⁰ Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*, 19 – emphasis by Putnam.

⁸¹ With regard to (moral) values and norms, as explained, the verb 'exist' amounts to something other than in the context of chemistry. We should not conceive of a 'moral norm' existing in a manner similar to 'zirconium', or even as an entity existing somewhere supersensibly.

⁸² Cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 22-32.72-5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁸⁴ Cf. also Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*, 34-35.

cognitive activity”.⁸⁵ Putnam, agreeing with what he takes to be one of the important insights of the classical pragmatists, holds that “reality ... makes demands on us”,⁸⁶ and therefore is not “morally indifferent”.⁸⁷ I take it that Putnam holds that, as part of human reality, we continually come across situations which are intrinsically moral, and which make an appeal on us. When we experience that a person hits another, defenseless person, this immediately makes a moral impression on us, because of our conceptual abilities with regard to such matters as cruelty, defenselessness, and responsibilities. Our conceptual abilities aid our practical abilities, and vice versa, in experiencing the moral aspects of this situation. This is not something we imagine, or something that we paste on top of a morally neutral reality. Rather, it is an inherent part of it.

On the other hand, however, Putnam states that “I do not believe that someone who stands outside the whole circle of related concerns I have described as constitutive of ethics can be brought to share any one of them by argument alone”⁸⁸ and that “the fact that there is no way of justifying standing within the ethical life from outside does not mean that reason and justification have no place *within* the ethical life”.⁸⁹ The conceptual notion of truth therefore counts for moral statements too, but with the *proviso* that one needs to be part of a moral language/life in order to be able to grasp the truth (or falsity) of moral statements. Evaluative and moral statements can therefore be said to be ‘true’ or ‘false’ too. To virtually anyone who speaks the language of morality, the statement ‘it is wrong to torture a newborn’ cannot sensibly be negated. There are true moral propositions without those propositions being - in one way or another - descriptions of (super)sensible fact, but whose serious negation makes no sense, at least if one is part of a moral life.

To Putnam, the possibility of reasoning *about* - i.e. not from a perspective *internal* to - a moral life is limited. On the one hand, as we saw, Putnam holds that reasonable arguments alone are not enough to grasp the meaning and truth of moral statements, if one does not already stand within a moral life. Putnam seems to maintain that speaking morally is something one can evade, an option that not everyone needs to grasp. This is reflected

⁸⁵ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 74.

⁸⁶ Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein*, 6 – italics removed.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁸ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 29.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

in Putnam's statement about *religious* language that "[t]he decision to employ religious language seriously is an 'existential' decision, in the sense of being deeply connected with one's way of being in the world".⁹⁰ On the other hand, Putnam adds, in one go, that he sees "no similarity whatsoever between such a decision and the decision to use technical linguistic devices such as mereological language",⁹¹ which seems to imply that religious language *cannot* be seen as an optional language in a sense similar to mereology.⁹² Thus, engaging in either religious or mereological language has conventional aspects. Choosing to speak religiously (or not) is a decision, however, that is tied up closely to one's existential beliefs, while choosing to speak mereologically (or not) is a choice that has less deep-seated strings. I turn to this potential ambivalence of the notion of truth in morality and religion in detail in Chapter 8 and Part III.

In morality, according to Putnam's views, descriptive and conceptual aspects of truth come together. With the conceptual and practical abilities that we have while standing within a moral life, we cannot make sense of the negation of particular moral propositions. When standing in such a moral life, we understand reality as making moral demands on us, to which we need to answer in an appropriate fashion. In understanding and reacting to reality in this manner, we employ our conceptual and practical abilities. It is because of the interaction of those abilities with the moral facts of life that we can come to grasp the truth of moral propositions.

⁹⁰ Hilary Putnam, "Replies to Commentators," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 3, no. 2 (2006), 74.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 73-4.

⁹² Thus, the notion that one needs to be part of a moral life to see the truth of moral propositions applies to religion as well. Only to those who already live a religious life, particular religious statements can be true. When analyzing Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Lectures on Religious Belief*, Putnam notes that to Wittgenstein, with whom Putnam agrees on this, "one's life may be organized by very different pictures" (Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 146), and that one needs to understand "a religious form of life" (*Ibid.*, 154) in order to have any access to the meaning and truth of a religious person's statements. This why a "religious man and [an] atheist talk past one another" (*Ibid.*, 143). There is thus an ambivalence with regard to the notion of truth in morality and in Putnam's perspective on religion. Cf. also J. H. Y. Fehige, "Hilary Putnam's Semi-Fideism," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 187, no. 3 (2007), 214-233; and Y. J. H. Fehige, "The Negation of Nonsense is Nonsense: Hilary Putnam on Science and Religion," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 52, no. 4 (2011), 350-376, esp. 362-370.

6.5 Concluding notes: Truth as interactional

Having analyzed Putnam's notion of truth with regard to its descriptive and conceptual aspects, as well as when applied to an area such as morality, it has become clear how truth is indeed a plural notion, but one which has important commonalities across the various fields of reasoning. To Putnam, truth is a realist notion, as what is true depends on how the world is,⁹³ but he refrains from delineating truth in terms of the metaphysical realist perspective.

As Putnam rejects the idea that the property of truth is a monist, substantive notion, but does not hold that truth is no property at all either, what the property of truth amounts to is thought to depend on the conceptual scheme or practice of which it is part. Since truth is a property and since there are considerable commonalities between what the notion amounts to in various practices, however, I believe this allows us to draw up a working definition of the formal property of truth: why a particular proposition is true or false (what makes a proposition true or false, in truth-making terminology) depends on an interaction between the conceptual abilities that we have in a particular conceptual scheme or practice, on the one hand, and descriptive facts about reality, on the other. In one area the latter may be of greater significance than the other, and in another area it may be the other way around.

The truth of propositions depends on this interaction because there are no facts without conceptual abilities, and there are no conceptual abilities without facts. Putnam's notion of conceptual relativity makes it plausible that at least some basic *facts* require that we have access to what *words mean*. Therefore, some facts depend on our understanding, which may be conventional rather than factual. On the other hand, in order to understand *the meaning of the concepts* which are central to the particular true propositions we require *facts*, since the meaning of our concepts

⁹³ As said, Stoutland, *Putnam on Truth*, 147-176, argues that Putnam's notion of truth is a form of deflationism that proceeds from the equivalence principle (see also 11.1 below). Putnam consents with this depiction in Putnam, *Replies to Commentators*, 68. My analysis of Putnam's notion of truth, which focused much more on the notion of the interaction of conceptual and practical abilities with facts, as laid bare predominantly in Putnam, *Representation and Reality*, 136; Putnam, *Reply to Jennifer Case*, 431-438; and Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 160, comes to a similar conclusion, namely that what is true depends on how the world is, though with a greater understanding of how this may apply to propositions other than the more straightforward empirical ones.

depends on that to which they refer. As we saw, Putnam's semantic externalism entails that meaning does not exist in the head, but in the relation of our minds and the objects to which we refer. Experience can therefore play an important role in grasping the truth or falsity of propositions, since "we can make no clear sense of the idea of grasping these familiar concepts apart from possessing the appropriate perceptual verification abilities".⁹⁴ Those who do not recognize a chair when they see one do not understand the meaning of 'chair'. This does not imply that whenever a person (or other being) connects 'chair' to a chair, this person's 'this is a chair' would be true. That would imply that the truth of 'this is a chair' depends on verification.

Thus, at those points where, with all of the conceptual and practical abilities that we have, we can make no sense of the negation of a proposition, the proposition is conceptually true. In a similar vein, there can be true moral propositions where, within a conceptual scheme with all of the relevant conceptual and practical abilities, we cannot make sense of the negation of the proposition. Truths are in part abilities. They depend on our intellectual and practical abilities, as well as on reality. As, to Putnam, this counts for descriptive truths too, there is some overlap between the two. Moral truths, as we saw, can also hinge on reality in a more direct way, as some moral propositions are more descriptive than others. It could be argued that both in the case of conceptual and of descriptive truth, being able to make sense of its negation is a central criterion. In the case of propositions that are conceptually true, making sense of their negation is (more or less) impossible, because of the semantic value of the components of the propositions. In the case of descriptive truths, we cannot make sense of the negation, because our experience (whether with our eyes or with a microscope, or with our ears, etc.) tells us that it is so.

Putnam's notion of truth aims to evade the problematic aspects of the metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on truth. These are fundamental to the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on religious propositions. While I will argue in Chapter 8 and Part III that his perspective on truth in areas such as morality and religion has *limitations* with regard to this aim, I believe that Putnam *succeeds* in doing so with regard to the notion of truth in general. This is due to his notion of truth as a plural, interactional notion. With antirealism, Putnam's pragmatic pluralist notion maintains that the truth of propositions depends at least in part on an

⁹⁴ Putnam, *Pragmatism*, 305.

understanding of the relevant concepts used. The truth of propositions, conceptual and descriptive, is thought to depend on an interaction of conceptual relations *and* facts, though in different degrees. What makes this a realist definition is that truth is recognition transcendent, and depends on the way the world is. It avoids both the metaphysical realist and antirealist notions that proceed from the problematic presupposition that truth is a property that needs to be conferred on a proposition in light of a particular, practice-independent criterion.

Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on experience

In this chapter, I analyze Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on the notion of experience, in particular with regard to the question of the truth-value of propositions. The strategy is comparable to that of the previous chapter. I analyze Putnam's perspective while keeping in mind his rejection of metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of perception and experience, which I analyzed in 5.2. It is in light of these presuppositions and our aim to find an alternative to those notions of experience that I balance which aspects of Putnam's notion of perception and experience are central and which are not. With regard to the question of the role of truth and experience in religious propositions, I focus on what we saw was problematic of the religious realist and antirealist views on these issues. I focus on Putnam's notions that experience is both cognitive and corrigible, as well as both direct and conceptualized. This will allow for drawing up an alternative perspective on experience in the truth-value of religious propositions.

As much as Putnam's account of truth is first of all an attempt to uproot monist, substantive notions of truth that are entrenched in contemporary analytic philosophy of language and epistemology, his work in philosophy of mind principally aims at showing that current notions of experience are fundamentally flawed because of their presupposition of a mind-world dichotomy. Both deal with the issue of the antinomy of realism, as we already came across in the previous chapters. "Winning through to natural realism is seeing the *needlessness* and the *unintelligibility* of a picture that imposes an interface between ourselves and the world".¹ Connecting with James's inclination to start from the assumption that "the way it seems to be is the way it is",² Putnam also puts the burden of proof on those who hold that experience can *not* be direct.

The most important influences for Putnam's direct notion of experience are William James,³ J.L. Austin,⁴ and Peter F. Strawson.⁵

¹ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 41.

² Hilary Putnam, "Pragmatism and Realism," in *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture*, ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1998), 40.

³ Putnam takes James to have held "that the *phenomenology* of perception is the best guide to a correct *ontology*" (Ibid., 40), and to have refrained, accordingly, from taking the philosophers' views on perception as dependent on "immaterial intermediaries" (Ibid., 40).

Contemporary conversation partners that are close to Putnam on the issue of perceptual experience are John McDowell,⁶ Ned Block,⁷ and Charles Travis.⁸ Putnam connects to William James's direct realism in important ways, but his own pragmatic pluralist perspective on experience also deflects from it.⁹ Putnam's perspective on experience is ground-breaking in the sense that it defends a notion of experience as both direct, and therefore potentially cognitive, *and* conceptualized, and therefore corrigible. Similarly to the perspective on truth, it connects to basic pragmatist tenets of fallibilism and anti-skepticism as well as the tendency to connect to actually prevalent practices and views, in the various domains of human reasoning, rather than imposing particular meta-philosophical viewpoints on them. Other than in his perspective on truth, however, Putnam's notion of experience connects to William James's thinking on the notion of direct perception more than to Wittgenstein's thinking in philosophy of language.

One of the surprising facets of Putnam's notion of experience is that, regarding its cognitive implications, it has features that, at first sight, seem conflicting, but which turn out to be compatible and even mutually

⁴ B. Maund, *Perception* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 89-109, critically analyzes Putnam's claim that his natural realism (or theory of direct perception) stems from J.L. Austin's thinking.

⁵ See e.g. Peter Strawson, "Perception and its Objects," in *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, eds. A. Noë and E. Thompson (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2002), 91-110.

⁶ See e.g. J. H. McDowell, *Mind and World: With a New Introduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), and Hilary Putnam, "McDowell's Mind and McDowell's World," in *Reading McDowell on Mind and World*, ed. Nicholas H. Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 174-190.

⁷ See Ned Block, "Wittgenstein and Qualia," *Philosophical Perspectives* 21, no. 1 (2007), 73-115.

⁸ See Charles Travis, "The Face of Perception," in *Hilary Putnam*, ed. Yemima Ben-Menahem, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 53-82; Charles Travis, *Unshadowed Thought: Representation in Thought and Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Hilary Putnam, "Travis on Meaning, Thought and the Ways the World is," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 206 (2002), 96-106. Very recently, Putnam has begun to work out a slightly revised perspective on the problem of perception, steering away from a position close to McDowell's disjunctivism to a position he develops with Hilla Jacobson-Horowitz, called transactionalism (as communicated in a yet to be published paper at the conference 'Philosophy in an Age of Science, a Conference in Honor of Hilary Putnam's 85th Birthday' by Hilla Jacobson-Horowitz, and Putnam's response), which is in turn closer to Ned Block's phenomenism. Cf. Hilary Putnam, *Philosophy in an Age of Science: Physics, Mathematics and Skepticism*, eds. M. De Caro and D. MacArthur (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 624-39.

⁹ Cf. Putnam, *Pragmatism and Realism*, 37-8.

supportive, much in the same way as his notion of truth (discussed in the previous chapter) leans on seemingly incompatible yet mutually reinforcing notions. A surprising aspect of his view, as we will see, is that though Putnam takes our experiences to supervene on physical processes (there is no experience without physical processes), experiences *are* experiences of our environment, and not of sense data in our head.¹⁰ In the first paragraph, I briefly discuss why Putnam's viewpoints on perception are relevant for the issue of experience in general. In 7.2, an exploration of the notion of experience as being immediate is central. The third section deals with the notion of experience as conceptual. In the first three sections, I give the parameters of Putnam's perspective on experience, while I work out the implications for the cognitiveness of experience, in 7.4. There, I turn to the question what it means for experiential properties (the properties that we perceive) to be objectively relative, an issue central to our larger question of the cognitive import of experience.

7.1 Perception and experience

Before turning to the topic of the cognitive value of experience, we need to briefly reflect on the terms 'experience' and 'perception' in this regard. To an extent, these terms may be synonymous in the sense that experience is sometimes limited to sensory experience and that perception may mean more than just visual perception. Like many authors in the philosophy of mind, Putnam most often addresses the issue of (sense) perception or perceptual experience, rather than of experience.¹¹ In this study, we are, however, mostly interested in the broader concept of experience,¹² since if there are religious experiences that potentially figure in the arguments for

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 41.

¹¹ Putnam contends that he mostly works on perception not so much because perception would be the most important issue in philosophy of mind but because, to him, it currently poses the most interesting problems (cf. Hilary Putnam, *Philosophy in an Age of Science: Physics, Mathematics and Skepticism*, 627).

¹² Cf. what Putnam calls the 'richness of experience' in Putnam, *McDowell's Mind and McDowell's World*, 174-190, and to what he alludes when speaking of aesthetic, moral, religious, and 'scientific' experiences in Putnam, *The Depths and Shallows of Experience*, 71.

religious propositions then these are arguably not only sense perceptions but also other experiences, such as auditory and mystical experiences.¹³

With regard to this issue, Putnam holds that even though there is no definite line between perceptual experience and other, inner, experiences, there are distinguishing features. “[W]hat I am *experiencing* [may outrun] what I am *perceiving*”.¹⁴ The important aspect in which experiences can be like perceptions, however, is that both can be non-inferential experiences of reality, of which we are aware, i.e. non-inferential, apperceptive experiences.¹⁵ This is important not only in light of understanding Putnam’s theory of perceptions and experiences, but more significantly also for the question that is fundamental to this second part, namely how experience relates to the truth-value of propositions.

7.2 Experience as direct

One of the prime aspects of Putnam’s notion of perceptual experience is that it adheres to the hypothesis that we perceive ‘external things’ directly. As we saw in 5.2, Putnam rejects the interface notion of experience, i.e. the representationalist view that we perceive ‘external things’ indirectly, mediated through inner representations. If experience is direct, this takes away particular difficulties that indirect understandings have, but it potentially generates significant problems too. On the one hand, it opens up the possibility that there is a cognitive connection between the outer world and our experiences. On the other hand, it can be questioned how direct experiences can be cognitive at all, if it would mean that they are therefore not conceptualized. In this regard we will see that Putnam holds that experiences can be both direct and conceptualized. Furthermore, one could ask why some experiences, if all experiences are direct, are veridical and other non-veridical (i.e. are hallucinatory or illusory). Putnam’s argument there is that the fact that some of our experiences are non-veridical does not imply that therefore our experiences are indirect.

¹³ I turn to these at length when discussing James’s views on the cognitive value of religious experiences, in Chapter 10.

¹⁴ Putnam, *McDowell’s Mind and McDowell’s World*, 182.

¹⁵ Apperception combines ‘perception’ and ‘apprehension’. Apperceptive experiences are those experiences that we are aware of. Cf. Hilary Putnam, “Sensation and Apperception,” in *Consciousness and Subjectivity*, eds. S. Miguens and G. Preyer (Heusenstamm: Ontos Verlag, 2012), 39-50.

7.2.1 *Perceptual experience as direct*

Contrary to the understanding of perceptual experience as consisting of sense data mediated to our cognitive capacities through an interface between us and the world, i.e. contrary to an understanding of experience as indirect, Putnam holds on to the notion that we perceive reality directly. The salient feature of such a notion of direct perception, especially with respect to our purposes here, is that it does not conflict with the notion that experiences can be cognitive. We often use experiences, and the experiential properties that we discern, as bases for the truth-claims that we make. Putnam holds that, “[e]pistemologically, we have every reason to prefer an account under which our experiences are ab initio encounters with a public world”.¹⁶ I return to this issue when I discuss Putnam’s notion of the face of perception and the face of cognition below. What I analyze here, is what it means, in Putnam’s view, for experience to be direct.

To Putnam, William James’s direct realism comes “close to an Aristotelian way of thinking about perception”.¹⁷ Other than the Cartesian notion of perception as having “‘images’ or ‘representations’ of [external] things before our minds”,¹⁸ Aristotle, despite a possible essentialism,¹⁹ “at least believed that we *do* have an awareness of the sensible properties of ‘external’ things”.²⁰ We experience the properties of external things, not mental representations of the same. With perspectival or experiential properties, when used here, I mean the properties that we may discern through perception or experience in general, of aspects of reality.

Putnam’s modern-day analysis of Aristotle’s view, to which he seems disposed favorably, amounts to the view that “[p]erception is supervenient on physical processes”²¹ with which he means that when we have particular perceptual experiences this necessarily implies that there are particular physical processes going on in us (there are no experiences without physical processes). When we perceive something, our brain and sense apparatus is necessarily involved. If perception supervenes on physical processes, one may

¹⁶ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 40.

¹⁷ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Realism*, 40. Cf. also Putnam, *Words and Life*, 62-81, and Putnam, *Sensation and Apperception*, 39-50.

¹⁸ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Realism*, 41.

¹⁹ Aristotle can be understood as holding that when we perceive, we have the essence of an object in our mind. Putnam says that Gisela Striker has made the suggestion that Aristotle may not have had such an essentialist perspective when it comes to perception. Cf. *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

be inclined to hold that the perceptions that we have are physical entities that represent external things in the metaphysicalist manner.²² If physical processes are necessarily involved when we perceive something, this could raise the view that the perception itself is a physical object, such as the brain state of the sense datum theorists. This would amount to an account of perception as indirect, since what we perceive is then a copy, a representation, of the experiential properties. Putnam rejects this view.

Putnam holds that the supervenience of perception on physical processes (thus the notion that when our physical processes change our perceptions change) “is no obstacle to thinking that what *results* from all these transactions between the organism and the environment is the perception of the ways something *is*”,²³ i.e. the direct perception sketched here. The fact that our perceptual capacities are supervenient on physical processes does not imply that the resultant, viz. perception, is itself a physical state. Rather, the physical processes that are involved in our perceptual capacities lead to an awareness of the experiential properties themselves.

7.2.2 *Hallucinations and illusions do not imply indirectness of experience*

An important objection to the view that perception is direct is that it cannot account for the fact that perceptions are fallible. It stems from the fact that we can have hallucinations and illusions, and that we wish to be able to distinguish between real and non-veridical experience. In the fifth chapter, we saw that whereas many proponents of representationalist views on perception hold that if a perception is direct it must necessarily be veridical, Putnam discards this relation. He holds that “the inference from ‘perception is not infallible; therefore it cannot be direct’ is a peculiar one, and clearly needs premises that are going to be problematic”.²⁴ He holds that while our experiences are not always correct, they need not be indirect. Though, as said, Putnam spends most of his time showing that the representationalist perspective is untenable, we are interested in the pragmatic pluralist perspective that experience can both be direct and sometimes non-veridical, and how this relates to the cognitive aspect of experience.

²² As discussed in Chapter 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁴ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 25.

Putnam takes James to give a ‘stunningly simple’ account of why our experiences can be both direct and mistaken. “James’s picture is that when I have a veridical perception of a fire I don’t see a private sense datum of a fire and infer the fire; I just see the fire. When I have a hallucination, in James’s picture, what I see is a fire that isn’t really there”.²⁵ To the sense datum theorist who holds that the sense data that a person has of a hallucinatory fire are “similar to the sense data produced by the presence of a real fire [...] James proposes the stunningly simple [...] alternative that the hallucinatory object is similar in a certain way to the real object; you mistake the hallucination for a real chair because it *looks* like a real chair”.²⁶ Though Putnam sees how this view may be ‘preposterous’, since it seems to go back to outdated theories of perception in which the objects that we perceive must also be in our brain, he holds that it does succeed in providing “a consistent alternative to sense-datum theory”.²⁷ Though not all of our experiences are actual veridical experiences, this does not show that experiences are therefore *always* indirect, i.e. mediated through representations of the same. “James argues that all the traditional epistemologist has shown by appealing to hallucinations (and other illusions) is that we *sometimes* experience things that are, in the traditional terminology, ‘mental’. He has not shown that we *never* directly perceive parts of reality as they are”.²⁸ A similar argument is made by disjunctivists like McDowell,²⁹ who take it that hallucinations and illusions should be conceived of as not sharing with real experiences what real experiences do accomplish, namely an experience of external states of affairs.³⁰

It is Putnam’s contention, which he shares with James and others (e.g. Strawson³¹), that we should “separate the questions *Do we immediately*

²⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁶ Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, 244.

²⁷ Ibid., 244.

²⁸ Ibid., 245.

²⁹ Predominantly in McDowell, *Mind and World: With a New Introduction*, 25-7.111-3, and J. H. McDowell, *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 225-56.

³⁰ Putnam names McDowell, who defends a disjunctivist view of perception, as an important source of his views that we should go beyond the interface notion of representationalist perspectives on perception (Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 18). As said, Putnam does not adhere to the disjunctivist notion of perception as a whole, however. Cf. Putnam, *McDowell’s Mind and McDowell’s World*, 174-190, and Putnam, *Philosophy in an Age of Science: Physics, Mathematics and Skepticism*, 624-39.

³¹ See e.g. Strawson, *Perception and its Objects*.

perceive external things? and *Do we perceive external things incorrigibly?*"³² While representationalist perspectives on perception presume that we cannot take these to be immediate since having immediate perceptions would imply having incorrigible perception, Putnam holds that direct perception need not be incorrigible. If one can let go of the indirectness of perception, the interface conception of perception becomes redundant. If it is the case that perceptions can be at the same time direct and corrigible, then one need not postulate the indirectness of perception in order to save the idea that perception is not always correct. Sense datum theory was devised in order to show that experiences can function as a cognitive basis for our beliefs. Putnam holds that James showed that their views actually amounted to the impossibility for experiences to have any cognitive import. Instead, though our experiences are not always veridical, they are direct, and thus *can* have cognitive import. When turning to how direct experience can be conceptualized, it will become clearer why experiences can be corrigible, namely because our conceptual and practical, experiential abilities may improve.

Putnam proceeds from James's pragmatist presupposition that philosophy should connect to the common person's experiences.³³ For this reason, he is not willing to follow the same James, however, who aspires to provide a metaphysics to replace the representationalist account.³⁴ To accommodate the fact that we have both veridical and nonveridical experiences, Putnam understands James as drawing up a metaphysics in which reality is a 'pluriverse' that consist of both real and unreal objects, i.e. of actual adjective and merely intentional attributes of instances of experience. In contrast to James, Putnam works from the everyday assumption that there is one reality (containing both veridical and nonveridical experiences). The fact still stands, though, that people can have a variety of experiences of what the ordinary observer nevertheless takes to be the same object.

³² Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, 242.

³³ Cf. Putnam, *Pragmatism and Realism*, 50-1.

³⁴ Cf. Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, 236-7.250, and Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 41.

7.3 Experience as conceptualized

We have seen that one need not suppose that experience is indirect, and that one can instead work from the idea that experience is direct, which allows for the cognitive potential of experience. Putnam also stresses the corrigibility of experience, however. How can a direct experience be corrigible, and what does it mean for experience to be corrigible? The answer resides in the notion of apperceptive experience being conceptual, i.e. in the fact that those experiences of which we are aware are permeated with interpretation on the basis of a transactional relationship of our experiential abilities and our environment. The conceptuality of experience is an important aspect of the cognitive import of experience, as we will see below in 7.4. Here, therefore, I investigate what it means for experiences to be conceptual, revisable, and indeterminate.

7.3.1 *Experience as sensation and conception fused*

Putnam combines his account of direct perception of external things with the idea that perception is conceptual. He holds that “[w]hat we perceive, insofar as the perception is available to us as a source of knowledge, is a sort of alloy of sensation and conception *fused*”.³⁵ Here, I investigate why Putnam endorses this combination, and what it amounts to. It shows how it can be that experiences are both sensations of our surroundings and cognitive.

When considering experiences, it is implied that these experiences are apperceptive experiences, in the sense that we are aware of our sensations. Since, as Putnam argues, experiences *need not* always be conceptually articulated (in order to be experiences at all). We can imagine having experienced a sound without having been aware of the presence of the sound. When sitting behind my desk, I may hear a finch singing, but being absorbed by my reading material, I do not realize that I’m hearing the finch’s song. When thus experiencing the sound without being aware of it, I need not employ the conceptualizations with regard to the sounds that finches make. If, however, I am *aware* of the finch’s song (if I apperceive it), I immediately employ conceptual abilities with regard to finches, songs, etc. Putnam ascribes the view that we do always employ conceptualizations when experiencing, even when non-apperceptive, to John McDowell. While apperception, the recognition that one perceives something, *is*

³⁵ Putnam, *Pragmatism and Realism*, 48. Cf. also Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question*, 66-8.

conceptualized, mere sensation (such as perception or other forms of experience) without such an apprehension of one's sensation is *not*.³⁶

Putnam wishes to hold fast to the view that when we experience something, we experience external experiential properties, such as 'red', 'long', 'ugly', 'chair', etc. As we saw above, Putnam also holds that what we experience are not physical or material renderings, in our minds, of the actual experiential properties out there, but rather the experiential properties themselves. In 5.2, we saw that Putnam holds that "if one thinks of the 'contents' of experience as 'non-conceptual' then it will be virtually impossible also to think of them as 'out-there'".³⁷ In order for the experiences of the experiential properties of the outer world to be actual cognitive experiences of that reality, they must be *conceptual* engagements with reality. As Putnam puts it,

[t]he direct realist idea of experience, as a taking in of how it is in the world, virtually requires one to see experience as conceptually structured, since it is only in that way that we can identify the content of experience, the content which is to be identified with part of the content of the world, with something formal rather than material.³⁸

Putnam puts forward that concepts are immediately part of our apperceptive experiences. In explaining what this means we should remember that Putnam holds that "[e]arly modern epistemology and metaphysics saddled us with an interface conception of conception as well as an interface conception of perception".³⁹ In discussing Putnam's notion of truth, in the previous chapter, we saw how our conceptions are abilities that, because of the part they play in particular fields of inquiry, immediately have a particular meaning rather than being random 'marks and noises' or word-vehicles that we need to ascribe a meaning to. When we have mastered English, a sentence such as 'the dog ate my pudding' makes sense, not because we ascribe meaning to the word-vehicles but because with the conceptual and practical abilities that we have, in that language, and its interaction with the world of fact (with dogs, with eating, with pudding, etc.), the words carry their meaning inextricably (though corrigibly).

In a similar manner, Putnam argues, perceptions are not vehicles that we need to ascribe a meaning to, but meaning-carrying experiences. When I

³⁶ Putnam, *Sensation and Apperception*, 39-50.

³⁷ Putnam, *McDowell's Mind and McDowell's World*, 174-190.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

³⁹ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 45, italics removed.

see my dog eating my pudding, I do not ascribe a meaning to the perception-vehicles that are supposedly there (that are represented in my brain). Rather, having mastered the *experiential* abilities that most people master in perceiving ‘dogs’, ‘eating’, ‘pudding’, etc., implies mastering the *conceptual* abilities that are involved in ‘seeing’, ‘dogs’, ‘eating’, and ‘pudding’. Putnam’s views on how the conceptual and experiential interconnect, become visible succinctly when he states, on the basis of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, that

[w]hen we hear a sentence in a language we understand, we do not associate a sense with a sign design; we perceive the sense *in* the sign design. Sentences that I think, and even sentences that I hear or read, simply do refer to whatever they are about ... because the sentence in use is not just a bunch of ‘marks and noises’.⁴⁰

When part of the community of people who have mastered those conceptual and perceptual abilities, the apperceptive experience of ‘the dog eating my pudding’ has that meaning because of the interdependence of the conceptual and experiential abilities, i.e. of concepts and the facts.

Bearing in mind this transaction of concepts and perceptual experiences, of mind and world, we can see what Putnam means when he says that “language alters the range of *experiences* we can have”.⁴¹ The experiential abilities that we have, and therefore the experiences that we can have, depend on the conceptual abilities that we have mastered. In this sense, Putnam again follows what he takes to be a Jamesian lead:

Extending the line of thought that William James had begun with his talk of apperceptive ideas and sensations as ‘fusing’, Dewey saw that science endlessly and inventively creates new observation-concepts, and that by doing so it institutes new *kinds* of data. A scientist with a cloud chamber may now *observe* a proton colliding with a nucleus (without being able to answer the question ‘Exactly what visual sensation did you have when you observed it?’ except by saying ‘It looked like a proton colliding with a nucleus’), or *observe* a virus with the aid of an electron microscope, or *observe* a DNA sequence, and so on.⁴²

This is one aspect of what it means when Putnam holds that “experiences and concepts interpenetrate”.⁴³ If we have the appropriate conceptual abilities in physics, we can have experiences of the table, not only as

⁴⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁴¹ Ibid., 48.

⁴² Putnam, *The Depths and Shallows of Experience*, 79.

⁴³ Ibid., 76.

something we may bump into, but also as e.g. consisting of atoms. I will discuss the issue of the various objective experiential properties that we may perceive, relative to our conceptual and perceptual scheme, at length in section 7.4.

7.3.2 *Experience as indeterminate and revisable*

The fact that experiences and concepts are interdependent also implies that our experiences are not always determinate, and that they are revisable. The degree to which our conceptual abilities are accurate and appropriate will affect the degree of accuracy and appropriateness of our experiences. The indeterminacy of experiences will reflect the indeterminacy of conceptions. Whether experiential and conceptual abilities are indeed appropriate, and to what degree, can be established only in the transaction between those abilities and our environment.

Apperceptive experience, so Putnam holds we learn from Immanuel Kant's *The Critique of Pure Reason*, "is fused with conceptual content".⁴⁴ Furthermore, "[i]ndeterminate concepts are not purely intellectual concepts; they require both a *sensible* subject matter and the application of active imagination".⁴⁵ Therefore, "some of the perceptions we value most are fused with indeterminate, open-ended, conceptual content, content in which imagination and reason cooperate under the leadership of imagination".⁴⁶ Putnam takes it for granted that experiences can yield indeterminate yet 'conceptual' concepts in areas such as aesthetics, morality, and religion.

In the deepest human experiences, ways of perceiving things that are inseparable from those experiences but nonetheless conceptual, at least in the way indeterminate concepts are conceptual, fuse so intimately that you cannot tell where one begins and the other ends.⁴⁷

But, he holds, this is true for the natural sciences too.

On the metalevel, the level of the methodological appraisal of scientific theories, we also find something in science analogous to the indeterminate concepts involved in aesthetic judgment, indeterminate concepts that figure in judgments that are internal to scientific inquiry itself: judgments of coherence, simplicity, plausibility, and the like.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 78. Cf. also Ibid., 75.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 79.

Below, in 7.4, I return to the issue of the relativity of our experiences to the conceptual schemes that we employ and the perspectives that we have. Apperceptive experiences, i.e. those experiences that we are aware of, are revisable for reasons similar to why conceptual (and descriptive) truths are revisable, i.e. because they consist of a transaction between ourselves and our surroundings. When the concepts that we use in coming to apperceptions change, those apperceptions change too. To this, I return at length below.

7.4 Objectively relative experiential properties

Putnam's contentions that we sketched briefly above, of experience being both direct and conceptualized, are fundamental to his view that the properties that we perceive, of external objects and states of affairs, are both objective and relative, in a manner comparable to how truth can be both objective and relative. In a yet to be published article, Putnam sketches a view on perception that he is working out with Hilla Jacobson, namely transactionalism.⁴⁹ It features much of what we have already come across, and which I will work out in this section, namely that "what we perceive depends on a *transaction* between ourselves and the environment",⁵⁰ though it differs with his earlier thinking in some very specific respects, which cannot and need not be addressed here. What is important in this regard is "that in a successful perception we experience properties of [external objects or states of affairs], and not properties of our minds or brains, while *leaving room for recognition of subjective as well as objective factors in perception*".⁵¹ Experience is relative in a sense similar to how certain concepts are relative to particular languages that are employed. As I will explain, Putnam's position is that while the experiences are relative to our conceptual schemes, they are objective with regard to the properties that we experience. I show that Putnam's notions of conceptual relativity and conceptual pluralism apply to the issue of the cognitivism of perception as well. To see how they apply precisely, I distinguish between 'optional views' and 'experiential schemes' in a fashion similar to the distinction between optional languages and conceptual schemes in the previous chapter.

⁴⁹ Cf. Putnam, *Sensation and Apperception*, 40n.2.

⁵⁰ Putnam, *Philosophy in an Age of Science: Physics, Mathematics and Skepticism*, 636.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 636, italics mine.

7.4.1 One object, a variety of experiential properties

Putnam holds that not only external factors influence our perspectives on, for example, one and the same chair, but that internal conditions do as well. “These perspectives [e.g. on the chair] depend not only on the illumination and the distance and angle from which we view the visual object (and on various familiar factors in the case of the other senses) but also on our own physiological condition”.⁵² Attending to the issue of the epistemological impact of Putnam’s notion of experience, the question arises whether the properties that we perceive in various, situation-dependent ways are then objective or subjective. If our experience depends on internal conceptual and perceptual conditions, then is not experience fundamentally relative to our preconceptions?

Since, in Putnam’s view, what we perceive is relative to the situation we are in when perceiving an object, this could lead one to assume that the properties that we perceive in the perception of that object are subjective. Putnam, however, holds that the “longstanding tendency in philosophy to think that perspectival properties are subjective, not really properties of ‘external things’, ... is a mistake”.⁵³ In explaining why our perceptual experiences may vary per subject while the experiential properties are objective, Putnam takes the famous Müller-Lyer Illusion as exemplary of how various perspectives on the same object (with objective experiential properties) may yield a variety of perceptions.

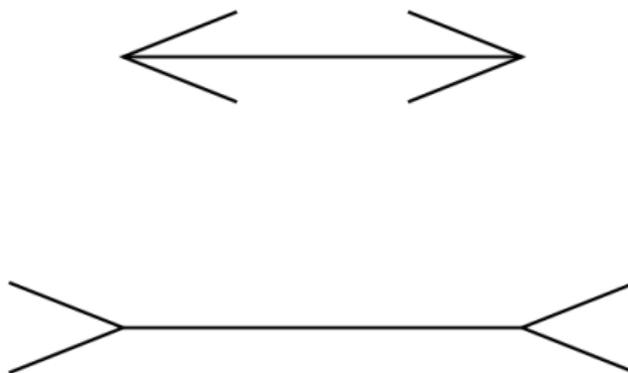


Figure 7.1: An instance of the Müller-Lyer Illusion

⁵² Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 159.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 159.

In this illusion, Putnam holds, the

lines are both of equal length when measured with a ruler *and* such as to appear of unequal length to a typical human viewer. But there is only one pair of lines - and a multitude of perceptual and other transactions we can have with them and a corresponding variety of *objectively relative* properties of *those same lines*.⁵⁴

We perceive different properties, depending on the transaction that we have with the same object.

In light of our question, one aspect of Putnam's phrase is particularly interesting. Should we say, with Putnam, that when measured with a ruler the lines *are* of equal length, while in the case of a typical human viewer they only *appear* to be of unequal length? If put it that way, it would seem that the experiential property established by means of the ruler ('equal length') is objective while the experiential property established by an ordinary person's view ('unequal length') is relative to that person's particular circumstances. If that is the case, can we then also say that in the first case, the perceptual experience is correct while in the latter it is mistaken, or that in the first case the perceptual experience is cognitive while in the latter case it is not? This seems to contradict Putnam's own contention that to think of experiential properties as subjective is a mistake.

We can have various transactions with one and the same state of affairs. To Putnam, however, the various properties of the object that we discern (depending on what transaction we have with it) are not subjective. Rather, they are 'objectively relative properties of external things'. How, though, can experiential properties be objective if the contents of our perceptual experiences are relative to our circumstances? If experiential properties are not subjective, then how are we to understand the Müller-Lyer Illusion to be an example of how perceptual experiences are both relative and objective? Putnam contends that the tendency to hold experiential properties to be subjective is correlated with the tendency to deny "the relativity of many of our fundamental notions to conceptual schemes",⁵⁵ a tendency that he argued against in his *The Many Faces of Realism*.⁵⁶ In discerning the epistemological implications of this aspect of Putnam's thinking in what follows, I analyze what the precise relation is with the tendency he argued against in the aforementioned monograph.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 159.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 159.

⁵⁶ Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism: The Paul Carus Lectures*, 98.

In *The Many Faces of Realism*, Putnam contended that the meaning of at least some words that we employ depends on the conceptual scheme that we adopt. As we saw in the previous chapter, Putnam since then amended this part of his theory in distinguishing between conceptual relativity with its related notion of ‘optional languages’, and conceptual pluralism with the notion of ‘conceptual scheme’.⁵⁷ While these issues concern the meaning of concepts, and not the properties of experiential objects, these two fields are closely related, since, as we saw above, experience is conceptualized. In the paragraphs above, we established that, according to Putnam’s pluralist pragmatism, ‘conceiving of objects’ and ‘experiencing objects’ have much in common. For these reasons, it is understandable that Putnam should claim that the mistakes concerning conceptual relativity and conceptual pluralism in one area (i.e. in the area of concepts) may be made in another area as well (namely, the area of experience).

The question then arises whether the reason that experiential properties of objects are objective while the experiences are relative to one’s (environmental or physiological) circumstances is a case of conceptual relativity or of conceptual pluralism (as discussed in 6.1.2 and 6.1.3). Imagine that one person uses a ruler and establishes that the lines are of equal length, while another uses no ruler and establishes that they are unequal. Are both views, namely ‘the lines are of equal length’ and ‘the lines are not of equal length’, comparable to the propositions about the number of objects stemming from different optional languages? In that case, both views (optional views, one could say), are seemingly contradictory but cognitively equivalent. If they are an instance of views stemming from different experiential schemes (comparable to the conceptual schemes worked out in 6.1.2), then the two views would be cognitively *non-equivalent*. I work out this question below.

7.4.2 *Experiential relativity*

As we saw in the previous chapter, Putnam’s notion of truth leans to a significant degree on his doctrine of conceptual relativity. As a doctrine, this view says that certain basic terms have no definite, single meaning. There are optional languages in which the term ‘object’ may have an altogether different meaning from our everyday language’s ‘object’. As ‘there are three objects’ may therefore describe the same situation as ‘there are seven objects’

⁵⁷ Cf. Case, *The Heart of Putnam's Pluralistic Realism*, 417-430, and Putnam, *Reply to Jennifer Case*, 431-438.

in an as accurate manner, these two seemingly conflicting propositions may nevertheless be cognitively equivalent. Therefore, we cannot pinpoint a single, definite meaning of basic concepts. In the previous paragraphs, we saw that our experiences are conceptual. Therefore, how we experience particular objects is subject to the same relativity. In this paragraph, I show that the fact that we cannot show why particular basic notions necessarily have only one meaning, counts not only for our conceptual abilities, i.e. for the notion of 'object' in the case of mereology and ordinary talk of objects, but *mutatis mutandis* also for our experiences, and the correlated experiential properties.

In experience, we are dealing with experiences rather than with concepts. Therefore, I will call the notion, in philosophy of mind, corresponding to the issue of conceptual relativity, 'experiential relativity'.⁵⁸ Besides the Müller-Lyer Illusion, another famous picture is that of the Duck-Rabbit drawing by Joseph Jastrow (see image below), which became famous in philosophy of language and philosophy of mind by Ludwig Wittgenstein's allusions to it,⁵⁹ and to which Putnam alludes as well.⁶⁰ I will refer to this picture as the either-duck-or-rabbit drawing.⁶¹

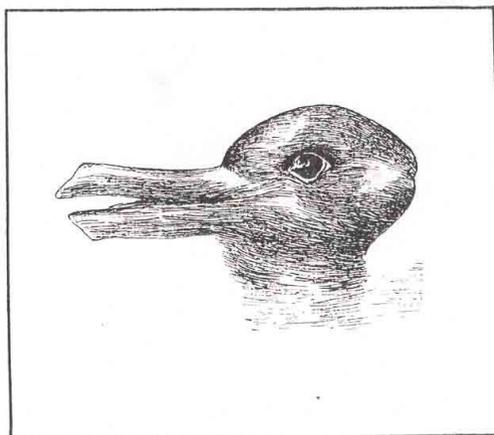


Figure 7.2 Joseph Jastrow's Duck-Rabbit drawing⁶²

⁵⁸ Cf. also Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 38-41.

⁵⁹ E.g. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962, II, xi.

⁶⁰ See e.g. Putnam, *Realism and Reason*, 209.

⁶¹ For reasons that will become clear shortly, this picture is better suited to illustrate the issues fundamental to the notion of perceptual relativity, and the related mistakes, than the Müller-Lyer Illusion.

⁶² J. Jastrow, "The Mind's Eye." *Popular Science Monthly* 54 (1899), 299-312.

The drawing may be held to portray a duck's or a rabbit's head (I will just speak of 'duck' and 'rabbit' from now on), depending on how one happens to see it.⁶³ If one sees the picture for the first time - and one does not know about the peculiarity about it - one most likely sees either a rabbit or a duck. A subject who sees a rabbit may be led to also see a duck, for example by saying 'look, this is the duck's bill, and this is the back of its head'. Most subjects would then probably also be able to see the duck. Once one has seen both a duck and a rabbit in the drawing, it is not so hard to switch between the two. There may be no way that one can pinpoint the 'actual' portrayal. Both may very well be equally suitable.

Two things lay bare the phenomenon of experiential relativity: (1) the fact that there are no objective criteria why one should see either a duck or a rabbit in the drawing, but that it is relative to the view that one happens to have of the picture, and (2) the fact that it is nevertheless not conventional that one should *not* see a cow. Just like the word 'object' had at least two equally objective extensions, i.e. 'object' in the ordinary sense and 'object plus sets' in the mereological sense, the portrait has at least two equally objective experiential properties, i.e. 'portraying a duck' according to one view and 'portraying a rabbit' according to another perspective. In the case of mereology, Putnam holds that "to ask whether mereological sums *really exist* would be stupid. It is ... a matter of convention whether we say that mereological sums exist or not".⁶⁴ Similarly, it makes no sense to ask whether the duck-perspective or the rabbit-perspective really exists. It is a matter of convention whether we say that the drawing has the property of 'portraying a duck', or of 'portraying a rabbit', but it is a matter of fact that it has both experiential properties.

Similar to how it makes no sense to say, however, in the case of the three spheres that we discussed in the previous chapter, that there are four spheres, it does not make sense to claim that this drawing has the property of

⁶³ Perceivers of a similar drawing are much more likely to see a bunny around Easter than in October, and much more likely to see a bird in October than around Easter. See P. Brugger and S. Brugger, "The Easter Bunny in October: Is it Disguised as a Duck?" *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 76, no. 2 (1993), 577-578. "Whereas on Easter the drawing was significantly more often recognized as a bunny, in October it was considered a bird by most subjects irrespective of their age" (Ibid., 577). This could testify to the arguments developed in this chapter, namely that depending on our conceptual abilities, the experiential properties may change.

⁶⁴ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 36.

‘portraying a cow’, unless one could argue how one can see a cow in this picture, in a manner similar to how one can help those who only see a rabbit to start to see a duck. At the moment when our experience is that of a duck, the experiential property of the drawing is that of ‘portraying a duck’. Once our perspective changes - for what ever reasons - and we have the perceptual experience of a rabbit, the experiential property is that of ‘portraying a rabbit’. But as long as we do and can not perceive a cow in the drawing, the experiential property is not of ‘portraying a cow’.

Similar to the case with conceptual relativity, acknowledging the phenomenon of experiential relativity does not necessarily, and according to Putnam should not, lead to relativism. Paraphrasing Putnam, it means that ‘saying that the drawing has the experiential property of a duck when one has the experience of a duck is a *matter of fact* as opposed to saying that it is a cow, and a *matter of convention* as opposed to describing the experiential properties as portraying a rabbit according to the experience of a rabbit’.⁶⁵ This shows that experiential properties are objective even though they are relative to a particular, optional view.

7.4.3 *Experiential pluralism*

Like acknowledging the phenomenon of conceptual relativity necessarily leads to acknowledging conceptual pluralism, experiential relativity leads to what I would call ‘experiential pluralism’.⁶⁶ Conceptual pluralism is the view that (1) we can adopt various conceptual schemes when confronted with a particular state of affairs, that (2) these various conceptual schemes yield non-conflicting, cognitively non-equivalent understandings of the same state of affairs, and that (3) we cannot *a priori*, if at all, determine the right conceptual scheme to do so. Here, we show what it means to adopt different conceptual schemes in perception. This will help shed a light on how adopting different conceptual schemes may cause us to perceive various non-equivalent, nevertheless possibly equally objective experiential properties.

In looking at an actual house, or at a drawing of a house, an aspect of the Müller-Lyer Illusion effect may also occur. Take a room such as in the figure below. At first sight, I may perceive the room as being just as wide in

⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶⁶ Just like in the case of conceptual relativity and conceptual pluralism, however, the relation is not mutual. One need not acknowledge perceptual relativity when one acknowledges perceptual pluralism.

the rear as in the front. This would imply that the shape of the floor is a perfect rectangle.

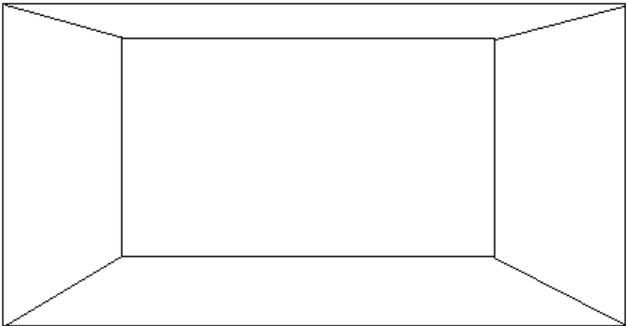


Figure 7.3: Room with a back wall that seems at first sight to be just as wide as its front wall.

Suppose I place a carpet, of which I know that it has the shape of a perfect rectangle, on the floor in the room. If the floor of the room indeed has the shape of a perfect rectangle, and the rear wall thus is of equal size with the front wall, then there should be even amounts of distance between the side walls and the carpet. When I place the perfect rectangular carpet on the floor, I see the following.

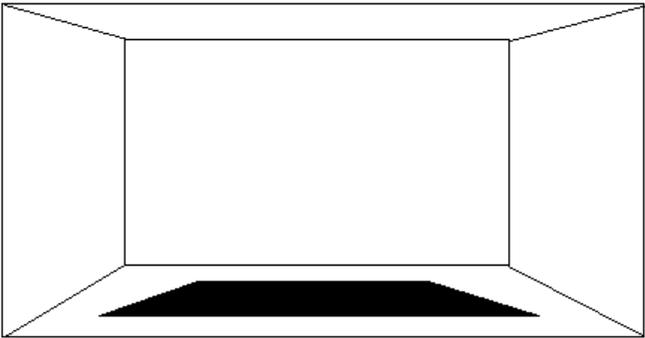


Figure 7.4: Room with a rectangle carpet - presuming the carpet is indeed a rectangle, the back wall must be wider than the front one. The room would thus have a trapezoid shape.

As the side walls are further separated from the carpet at the rear of the room, the room itself apparently is not entirely rectangular. Thus, the back wall must be larger than the front wall. Now, my perception is corrected. Looking at Figure 7.3 again, I can see how the rear wall, on second thought, may be bigger than the one in the front. Although (the picture of) the room itself gives me the opportunity to see the room both as having a rectangular

and as having a trapezoid shape, I now may be able to see it as having a trapezoid shape, whereas I may have been unable to do so previously. The reason why I can now perceive it as such, is because I now use a suitable experiential scheme, i.e. that of a carpenter, rather than that of a casual onlooker. In many circumstances, it may make no difference whether I perceive the room as a casual onlooker, and thus as having a back wall that is of an equal size as the front wall or not. Should I have liked the carpet to fit the room in such a way that it leaves an equal amount of space between the carpet and the side walls, however, it would have been appropriate to use the experiential scheme that a carpenter uses.

When perceiving the room, one could also adopt an aesthetical experiential scheme. Then, the room will have even more different properties, such as 'being of the most peculiar shape'. Not every experiential scheme is equally appropriate in every situation, however. Depending on the situation, particular experiential properties that are perceived when employing a specific experiential scheme are more relevant than others. If, in the future, I wish to put a carpet in another room, I may well want to perceive it from the carpenter's experiential scheme from the start, in order to establish the appropriate experiential properties. It cannot be established *a priori*, however, which experiential scheme is the right one to approach the object. The experiential scheme of the carpenter does not (necessarily) lead to experiencing more objective properties than the aesthetic's point of view.

The fact that, depending on the experiential scheme that we choose, we come to different, non-equivalent experiences of the same object, which may have equal validity, reveals the phenomenon of experiential pluralism. The main difference with the either-duck-or-rabbit drawing, i.e. in the case of an instance of experiential relativity, is that in that case it is a matter of having one of two optional views, within one experiential scheme (say the scheme of animal pictures), which would lead to discerning seemingly conflicting experiential properties ('portraying a duck' or 'portraying a rabbit') which are nevertheless cognitively equivalent. 'This portrays a duck' and 'this portrays a rabbit' give an equally objective description of the picture within one experiential scheme (i.e. the experiential scheme of animal representation). Within the same experiential scheme, one may be able to perceive both properties (though never at the same time), depending on the optional view that one has of it. As the propositions 'this is/portrays a rabbit' and 'this is/portrays a duck' are equally descriptive of the picture, they are, though seemingly contradictory, actually cognitively equivalent. In the experiential pluralist case, however, it is a matter of two different

experiential schemes (e.g. a carpenter's and an artist's scheme). Using different experiential schemes (the carpenter's, the casual spectator's, or the aesthetic eye), on the contrary, causes us to perceive different, cognitively *non-equivalent* experiential properties.

7.4.4 *Experiential relativity and pluralism*

With these elaborations on what I have called 'experiential relativity' and 'experiential pluralism', I believe we grasp what Putnam means when he says what we have already come across, namely that

[t]here is a long-standing tendency in philosophy to think that perspectival properties are subjective, not really properties of 'external things', but this is a mistake. (The mistake is connected with the mistake I argued against in *The Many Faces of Realism*, the mistake of denying the relativity of many of our fundamental notions to conceptual schemes).⁶⁷

I take it that Putnam would want to amend this claim in a way that he did with regard to the notion of conceptual truth in the light of his discussion with Jennifer Case on the difference between optional languages and conceptual schemes.⁶⁸ The mistake is connected, I believe it should read, 'with the mistake of denying the relativity of many of our fundamental notions to optional languages', and, in the case of experiential properties, 'of our fundamental notions to optional views'.⁶⁹

Thus, paraphrasing Putnam again, experiential properties are conventional relative to the particular experiential views that we can have, but objective relative to certain experiential schemes.⁷⁰ As Putnam puts it:

Saying that there is an electrical field in a certain place *as opposed to saying that* there are particles interacting by exchanging other particles, may be a matter of

⁶⁷ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 159.

⁶⁸ In Putnam, *Reply to Jennifer Case*, 431-438; cf. also Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 48.139n.18.

⁶⁹ This is also why I take it that the either-rabbit-or-duck drawing is more suitable than the Müller-Lyer Illusion. The former shows more clearly than the latter that objects can have two seemingly conflicting but cognitively equivalent and objective perspectival properties. More clearly than the Müller-Lyer Illusion, the example of the room shows that the same state of affairs can have different, non-equivalent, but possibly equally objective perspectival properties, how, in other words, "there is only one pair of lines – and a multitude of perceptual and other transactions we can have with them and a corresponding variety of *objectively relative* properties of *those same lines*" (Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 159).

⁷⁰ Cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 45.

convention. Saying that there is an electrical field in that place as opposed to no electrical field in that place, is a matter of fact (at least in a fixed reference frame). ... *Everything* we say is conventional in the sense that we might have said something else, perhaps something verbally incompatible; and *everything* we say is factual in the sense that we could not have said just anything else.⁷¹

We can now see how experiential properties, like conceptual relations, can function as a basis of propositions that we make (i.e. how they are objective) without there being Archimedean points from which to start (i.e. how they are relative as well). Both empirical and conceptual knowledge are objective and conventional. Putnam's view that "our empirical knowledge, or any piece of it, is conventional relative to certain alternatives and factual relative to certain others"⁷² would thus apply to knowledge on the basis of experiential properties as much as to knowledge on the basis of conceptual relations.⁷³

7.5 Concluding notes: Experience as transactional

What I have shown is that, in Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective, we can have immediate experiences of our environment, though these direct experiences are fusions of sensations and conceptions. Furthermore, experiences, in part because they are conceptual, are not infallible, but, *because* they are conceptual, can also be cognitive. Thus, when Putnam agrees with McDowell that "conceptualized experiences are epistemologically fundamental",⁷⁴ this is because, as conceptualized experiences, they can be experiences of objective states of affairs. As such, they can in principle provide a basis for beliefs about the world.

The pragmatic and pluralist aspects of Putnam's perspective are most prominent in its taking in of the pragmatist tendency to connect to the actual way we have experiential experiences rather than to impose a metaphysical view on it that reduces experiences to experiences of objects in the brain, and in its acknowledgment of a plurality of irreducible experiences, relative to the conceptual and experiential views that we have or the conceptual and experiential schemes that we employ.

⁷¹ Putnam, *Realism and Reason*, 179.

⁷² Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 45.

⁷³ Above, I indicated that Putnam takes there to be considerable differences between conceptual and empirical knowledge, but that he also holds that there is no dichotomy separating both fields absolutely.

⁷⁴ Putnam, *Sensation and Apperception*, 43.

We may conclude that in Putnam's view, experiences are 'objectively relative'; they are epistemologically basic transactions between ourselves *and* our surroundings. Putnam:

As Dewey might have put it, perception is *transactional*. We are aware of ourselves as in *interaction* with our experiential objects. I am aware of a series of visual, tactile, etc., *perspectives* on the chair without ceasing to perceive the chair as an object that does not change as those perspectives change.⁷⁵

The next chapter explores how these transactional experiences, together with the interactional notion of truth, allow for a pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of propositions.

⁷⁵ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 159.

8.

Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on the face of truth-value

My analyses so far have shown that in Putnam's pragmatic pluralism, truth and experience, as central issues in the question of the truth-value of propositions, are entangled robustly, i.e. truth depends on an interaction of our conceptual and practical (including experiential) abilities with reality, and veridical experience depends on a transaction between ourselves (including both our cognitive and experiential faculties) and our surroundings. Contrary to metaphysical realist and antirealist views, this entanglement is possible because of the absence of an interface between us and the world. Instead of interfaces, one could say there are *faces*.¹ The world, we ourselves, our concepts - we interact with these faces. This allows us to engage fruitfully with our surroundings, while remaining aware of our role in this engagement. As such, Putnam provides a promising alternative to the problematic metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of propositions in general. As these perspectives are basic to the religious realist and antirealist perspectives, they will also be able to provide an alternative, religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions. An exploration of that alternative, however, will have to wait until Part III.

In this chapter, I bring together Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth and on experience (in 8.1), as well as connect these with a Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of propositions (in 8.2). In attending to the issue of how the entanglement of conceptual and experiential abilities affects the realist character of the Putnamian view on the truth-value of propositions, however, a difficult question becomes pressing. I argue below that a realist perspective on truth-value, because of its being an interactional notion, should allow for any sufficiently rational subject to be *in principle* able to recognize whether a proposition is true if his or her peers can see that it is indeed true. It is questionable, however, whether in a Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of propositions, we can in principle enable any sufficiently rational subject to understand and judge the truth-value of a proposition that we can see is true.

¹ Cf. Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 43-70, and Travis, *The Face of Perception*, 53-82.

I bring this up because, although Putnam emphasizes the *realist* aspect of his notion of truth-value, there are two issues which could render his notion a form of *antirealism*. First of all, there is the question of whether reason alone (being an interactional practice) should in principle be sufficient in order to convince others of the truth of a proposition. Secondly, the related question rises whether, in backing up a particular proposition, in principle experiences of all kinds should be allowed. If the first question is answered negatively, I will show, one ends up in a form of cultural relativism. If the second is negated, one takes in a reductionist naturalist position. These are two positions that a Putnamian pragmatic pluralist wants to evade. I elaborate on these critical questions by showing how relativism (in 8.3) and reductionism (in 8.4) are risks that Putnam's notions of truth and experience face.

8.1 The entanglement of conceptual and experiential abilities and reality

In the previous chapters and in the paragraphs above, we saw why experiences should neither be taken, in an absolutist manner, to function as Archimedean points of cognitive departure, nor be taken, in a relativist manner, to have no cognitive value at all. The same, we saw, is the case for conceptual truths. Though we cannot make sense of the negation of what we take to be conceptual truths now, and though these accordingly have at least some cognitive value, we cannot exclude the possibility that we may, one day, be able to make sense of the negation of one or more of them.

It reveals a connection between Putnam's views in philosophy of language, i.e. on our conceptual abilities, and his views in philosophy of mind, i.e. on our experiential abilities. This connection, as we saw, is basic to Putnam's rejection of 'the antinomy of realism'. It rejects the notion that we should look for an Archimedean starting-point, either with regard to meaning or with regard to experiences. Instead of these interface notions of truth and experience, Putnam puts forward the metaphor of cognition and meaning as 'having a face'.² In our effort to establish how, in a Putnamian view on the truth-value of propositions, the conceptual and experiential

² Putnam's notion of realism having a face already emerges with Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), and Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism: The Paul Carus Lectures*, 98.

abilities are entangled, we first turn to Putnam's notions of 'the face of meaning' as well as to Charles Travis's Putnamian notion of 'the face of perception'.

An important chapter of Putnam's, basic to our analyses so far, has been 'The Face of Cognition', in *The Threefold Cord*.³ The metaphor is an important one as it shows two things. First of all, it shows that for Putnam, cognition is a practice that requires sensitivity to context, much like the sensitivity required in reading facial expressions. Secondly, grasping the truth-value of particular propositions, and cognition in general, is not a one-way street. Instead, human cognition depends on an interaction of our conceptual and experiential abilities and the surroundings that we encounter. I will show what it means that Putnam's notion of 'face' implies that grasping the truth-value of propositions depends on an entanglement of experiential and conceptual abilities with reality.

For the notion of context sensitivity, I lean partly on Travis' aforementioned work on Putnam's notion of the face of meaning, and his extension to the issue of perception. I analyze what the entanglement of abilities and reality, in Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth and experience, consist in. As such, it will show why even empirical truths, as paradigm cases of the entanglement of our conceptual and experiential abilities with reality, like conceptual truths, lack absolute foundational powers, but may nevertheless be objective, and why even experiences of 'middle-sized dry objects' (such as chairs and stones), as paradigm cases of how our experiential abilities and reality connect, depend on a transaction but may nevertheless be veridical and have cognitive value. The cognitive engagement with the world is possible, as explained in the previous chapters, because we should reject the idea of an interface between us as knowers and our environment. Instead, through the interactive process of meaning-giving and finding, and perceiving, we are already in cognitive contact with our surroundings.

With the metaphor 'the face of meaning' Putnam aims to communicate a view on meaning that is contrary to the metaphysicalist beliefs that the extensions of particular words or propositions are in principle fixed and that 'meaning' is a monist notion. In this view, whether a particular extension of a word or proposition is appropriate (say whether 'one of two pads we walk on' is an appropriate extension for the word 'foot') can be established along unambiguous lines. It should also provide an alternative to

³ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 43-70.

the antirealist belief that meaning ultimately depends on what one's peers let one get away with.⁴

In analyzing Putnam's notion of 'the face of meaning', Travis continues Putnam's arguments against metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of meaning, but does so in a different manner, i.e. in a language that Putnam touched upon with his metaphor of 'the face of cognition'. Travis argues for the occasion-sensitivity of knowledge along lines similar to the notion of conceptual relativity developed by Putnam that we discussed in 6.1.2.⁵ There we saw that there are instances where the world may be divided up in different, but cognitively equivalent, ways, and where we have no compelling argument why we should choose one over the other, since the principles that fix why we should speak, in the case of three spheres, of three objects (in normal language) and of seven (counting the sums as objects too, in mereology) do not fix why we should opt for one or the other.

Travis's notion of occasion-sensitivity takes the semantic externalism fundamental to Putnam's thinking as basic when it holds that our concepts themselves are occasion-sensitive, "[f]or what we state or ask in speaking ... is not fixed by the concepts our words express ..., but depends also on the understanding on which we speak of what those concepts are concepts of".⁶ Here, Travis develops the Putnamian view that sometimes our experiences of the world do not cohere with the way we, thus far, sorted the world. Galileo's insight that the bottom of a ship disappears behind the horizon before the top does was at odds with the belief that the world was flat. Our sorting of the world then conflicts with what we see. In such instances, Travis holds, Putnam believes "we must be able to see the right thing to say given that an answer is not thus calculable".⁷ In situations where we cannot infer an answer from the principles that we employ, we may nevertheless come up with a right way of sorting the world. When we see which "additional constraints on sorting (...) it would be right to take",⁸ we employ our conceptual capacities. It is these conceptual capacities that Travis holds are fundamental to the notion of the face of meaning.

⁴ Putnam's criticism of the metaphysical realist and antirealist views, and his alternative that I analyze here, both lean heavily on his notion of 'semantic externalism', addressed in 5.1.

⁵ E.g. Travis, *The Face of Perception*, 68.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

In coming to see what the face of meaning means, Travis distinguishes between “a recognition capacity”⁹ and what one could call ‘our capacity to recognize beyond recognition of essentials’, i.e. between being able to recognize something and the ‘conceptual capacities’ connected to the notion of the ‘face of meaning’ and the ‘face of perception’.¹⁰ The first capacity is a capacity to tell whether a particular fixed aspect of an object or person etc. obtains. It distinguishes particular essential features of something. Furthermore, this capacity works along a set of theoretically or actually determinable principles. The second capacity, our conceptual capacity, does not work along the lines of determinable principles, in search for essentials. Rather, apart from whether particular essentials are present and from whether we follow particular lines of induction or deduction, these conceptual capacities are what enable us to recognize something as something. These conceptual capacities “need only be sensitive to features that in fact distinguish [something] from other things”.¹¹

The distinction is this. A particular capacity to recognize X, i.e. to tell whether, at time T₁, X, say a dozen red apples, is indeed an instance of X, e.g. by counting the number of red spherical forms, does not itself allow us to tell whether that same capacity to recognize X, i.e. by counting the number of red spherical forms, is a viable manner of recognizing X at T₂. If, because of some virus, at T₂ red apples would only come in cylindrical forms, a dozen red apples would still be a dozen red apples, but counting the number of red spherical forms would no longer enable one to recognize them. Contrary to the mere recognition capacities, “[o]ur conceptual capacities allow us to see such things - how something could still be [X] while lacking the features on which a given such recognition capacity relies, or fail to be [X] while having such features”.¹² One could compare these capacities with recognizing what Wittgenstein calls ‘family resemblances’.¹³

The conditions for recognizing something as X as well as what (essentially) makes something X, may in principle be determinate.¹⁴ We can perhaps comprehensively describe what it takes for someone, say S, to recognize a dozen apples as a dozen apples. S would have to have such and such a conceptual understanding of apples, of dozens, and have such and

⁹ Ibid., 59.

¹⁰ Cf. Ibid., 58-9.

¹¹ Ibid., 58.

¹² Ibid., 59-60.

¹³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 65ff.

¹⁴ Recall the distinction made in Chapter 6 between conceptual relativity and relativism.

such experiences. There are situations, however, in which no such essentials nor particular inferential methods can be determined, but in which we can nevertheless recognize something as X. When we employ those capacities which nevertheless enable us to recognize something as X, we are “seeing faces of meaning”.¹⁵ A word, say ‘foot’, can have a number of extensions, i.e. entities or realities to which it refers. Whether foot has a particular extension, e.g. ‘one of two objects with usually five toes that we stand on’, cannot be determined along the lines of an *a priori* or fixed established process, but depends on whether, in particular circumstances, it is reasonable, or appropriate, to use that extension. We can see which meaning is appropriate.

The distinction that Travis makes is important not only because it explains what conceptual abilities are like, as opposed to mere recognition capacities, but also because it shows, in a manner reminiscent of Putnam’s elaboration of the notion of conceptual relativity, that meaning cannot be fixed once and for all. We employ conceptual abilities whenever we see that something is X despite it lacking the characteristics that we thought were essential to something being X. When we realize that it is at least sometimes possible that something can still be identified as X while not having the supposedly essential characteristics, this shows that while the meaning of our words cannot be reduced to particular essentials, we can still come to grasp the meaning and truth-value of particular propositions. While there may be no foundational reason why a dozen of apples should be recognized as a dozen of apples, or why a proposition such as ‘this is a dozen of apples’ is true, our conceptual abilities in these matters allow us to recognize them as such, and to grasp the truth-value. That is the face of cognition.

8.2 The face of truth-value

On the basis of Putnam’s pragmatic pluralist views on truth and experience, as well as of his views on ‘the face of cognition’, we can conclude that in Putnam’s pragmatic pluralist view, propositions can have truth-value because they are part of conceptual schemes (I call these practices, from now on) which are based on an interaction of our conceptual and practical abilities with reality, and can be backed up by experiences which are transactions between ourselves (including our conceptual and experiential

¹⁵ Travis, *The Face of Perception*, 59.

abilities) and our surroundings. While there is no ultimate foundation on the basis of which we could grasp the truth-value of particular propositions, we have acquired conceptual abilities that allow us to do so. While we cannot provide ultimate proof of whether our experiences are veridical, they are epistemologically basic.

Because our experiences are from the start interpretative, conceptual events, they can function in our cognitive enterprises. As we saw in Putnam's arguments against representationalist notions of experience, in 5.2, indirect experiences (experience thought of as only causally connected to the cognitive faculties of our mind) cannot function cognitively. On the basis of the transaction between ourselves and the world around us, we come to have particular experiences. Instead of building cognitive frameworks on the basis of supposedly uninterpreted data, the experiences we have are from the start part of a cognitive framework. We make (unintentional) cognitive choices on the basis of other experiences and conceptual beliefs that we have simultaneously with having experiences. Since we cannot separate experiential data from interpreted data sharply, we cannot take particular supposedly uninterpreted data as fundamental in the process of grasping the truth of particular (basic) propositions. This shows how our experiential and conceptual abilities are intimately interconnected.

We can summarize two important aspects of the Putnamian perspective on truth-value under the common denominators of 'pragmatism' and 'pluralism'. The pragmatist aspect, first of all, says that whether propositions are true is not a matter of showing whether they are in accordance with rules of what can count as true, or whether they live up to truth-conditions in the particular field of reasoning. In some societies, religious reasoning may be the paradigmatic mode of reasoning, but inquiry in other fields should not be hampered by having to adhere to notions of truth, experience, and justification prevalent there. In today's Western societies, where the truth-value of propositions in the natural sciences is deemed paradigmatic, there is an urge to superimpose the central notions with regard to reasoning customary in that field to other fields of reasoning. The pragmatist aspect of Putnam's notion of truth-value prohibits such moves, and insists that what the truth-conditions are varies from one practice to another. Furthermore, the pragmatist aspect entails the recognition of the role of our conceptual abilities in experience, as well as the role of our experiential abilities in conception. Contrary to metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth, Putnam's pragmatist view holds on to the common sense notion that we are in contact with reality. It is through

the interaction of ourselves with reality that propositions get their truth-value, and through the interaction of ourselves with reality that we come to see whether and how our propositions indeed meet the relevant truth-conditions. This allows Putnam to persist in maintaining that his notion of truth-value is a realist one.

The second denominator, pluralism, contends that what truth-value amounts to depends on the practice of which it is part. Why a particular proposition, e.g. 'the table has been set', is true, if at all, depends on the practice it is part of. In a particular practice, for example that of everyday objects, truth-value could depend on whether the table is indeed empirically set, i.e. whether there are plates and forks and knives (and perhaps spoons, etc.) on the table. In practices such as that of a religious ritual, whether the proposition is true depends, not on whether forks and knives and plates are present, but on whether it has been set in a manner appropriate to the ritual.¹⁶ In the first case, the question is of a more empirical nature, while in the second case, it would involve other, more normative and further conceptual abilities. According to the notion of conceptual pluralism, a plurality of such practices can be used to approach the same situations. One can of course discuss whether in a particular situation the one rather than the other practice is appropriate. When setting the table for celebrating Passover at home, for example, one can argue about which of the two practices is most suitable, the everyday practice or the religious one. During Passover, whether 'the table has been set' depends on whether all things are arranged according to the religious ritual. If, however, it is meant as a common meal, other truth-conditions would apply for 'has the table been set?'

Anticipating on the topic of Part III, one could say that the proposition that 'Humankind has been given responsibility over Earth and its creatures' may have different truth-conditions depending on who utters, and from which practice. From a religious practice, where one reflects on such issues as the meaning of life, God's plan with creation, and the like, whether the proposition is true depends on whether, in that proposition, the relevant conceptual abilities interact appropriately with reality. If we presume that reality is indeed such that it allows for such an interaction (i.e., in reality,

¹⁶ We can see how this also counts in part for the empirical conceptual scheme just mentioned. Whether a table is set is not a merely empirical question but involves standards of etiquette etc. This testifies to Putnam's contention that empirical truth is not free from valuings either. See 6.4.

humankind can be given responsibility, Earth exists, etc.), then this proposition may arguably be true within that practice. In a scientific practice, where one reflects on the laws of nature, the empirical facts about natural reality, etc., whether the proposition is true depends on whether, in it, the conceptual abilities that are part of *that* practice interact adequately with reality. Arguably, even if we assume that reality would allow for this interaction, the proposition can hardly be said to be true within that practice, since the scientific modes of inquiry are unable to accommodate such questions as whether someone is indeed responsible, what concepts like 'being given' mean, etc.

We can now see how the Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth-value aims to avoid the pitfalls of both metaphysical realism and antirealism and proceeds from the belief that "a third way must ... *undercut* the idea that there is an 'antinomy'",¹⁷ i.e. that there is "an interface between the knower and everything 'outside'".¹⁸ It is possible for propositions to have truth-value because the process of making propositions is not hampered by an unbridgeable dichotomy of our cognitive faculties and the world around us, but can, instead, lean on the fact that we recognize 'true propositions' and better and worse processes of 'truth-making' when we *face* them. As such, the pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth-value evades the difficulties that metaphysical realist perspectives have. Since, however, recognition is not what makes a proposition true, it also evades the antirealist perspective. In the Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective, 'truth-value' is a realist notion: reality, of which concerning these matters we form an important part, ultimately determines whether a proposition is true. As such, Putnam provides a promising alternative to the problematic metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of propositions in general, and quite possibly of religious propositions in particular.

8.3 The face of truth-value and the risk of relativism

As said, however, there are two potential limitations of Putnam's notion of truth-value as having a face. The first has to do with the degree to which truth is interactional and the second with the extent to which experience is

¹⁷ Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

transactional (which I discuss in 8.4). The first issue connects to Putnam's contention that, with regard to moral propositions, one cannot come to see the truth-value of moral propositions if one is not already part of a moral life. This worry arises when we realize that, to Putnam, moral propositions are only true and meaningful for those who already stand within a moral life, and that reasonable arguments alone cannot get someone standing outside a moral life to grasp that truth and meaning. As said, Putnam states "I do not believe that someone who stands outside the whole circle of related concerns I have described as constitutive of ethics can be brought to share any one of them by argument alone",¹⁹ and that "there is no way of justifying standing within the ethical life from outside".²⁰ Such a stance would possibly let go of the realist thrust of the notion of truth and embrace an antirealist, relativist notion. Putnam's position runs the risk of becoming relativist in the sense that Maria Baghramian describes as a form of subjectivism, namely 'alethic relativism':

The most common form of stating alethic relativism is through the expression 'true for'. The claim is that what is true for one person or society or culture may not be true for another. The subjectivist understands any occurrence of the predicate 'is true' as a truncated version of the longer statement 'true for person x at time t'.²¹

A *cultural* relativist thus is an alethic relativist who holds that the truth-value of propositions is limited to a particular culture or practice. Putnam's statements about the scope of the truth-value of moral propositions seem to come close to the view that Baghramian describes as subjectivism or relativism. As this is an antirealist position,²² which the pragmatic pluralist aims to evade, it is pivotal that we establish whether Putnam's viewpoints indeed lead to a form of cultural relativism. In this section, I investigate what this means for the realist aspect of Putnam's notion of (moral) truth.

8.3.1 *Truth, practices, and interaction*

While I believe Putnam's notion of truth provides a fruitful alternative to the notions of truth that are basic to realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions (which we will explore in detail in Chapter 12), the potentially problematic aspect, which has to do with the

¹⁹ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30, which, as we saw, "does not mean that reason and justification have no place *within* the ethical life" (*Ibid.*, 30).

²¹ Baghramian, *Relativism*, 94.

²² Cf. the delineation of antirealism in 3.1.

interactional nature of truth, is the following. Since the truth-value of propositions depends in part on the conceptual and experiential abilities one has, this could imply that truth-value is limited to a particular practice with its distinct conceptual and experiential abilities. It would then be possible that, if one is part of practice A, one would be unable to come to grasp the meaning and truth-value of the propositions which are part of practice B. If this would be the case, this has important repercussions for the scope of their truth-value, and thus for the question of whether Putnam's views are ultimately realist or antirealist.

The question, then, is whether the truth of the propositions of the various human practices ultimately hinges on the way the world is, or whether it merely depends on what goes within a particular practice (conceived of as not based on an interaction with the way the world is). Analyzing the extent to which (the truth-value of) the propositions within a particular practice can come to be understood by those (previously) standing outside that practice, should show the extent to which the conceptual and practical abilities of those standing within those practices are thought to interact with reality.

Let us take the example of a moral practice (MP), and assume that, when standing in MP, the proposition (p) 'it is wrong to torture animals', is true. As we saw, Putnam allows for propositions to be true within practices such as MP. If, then, p is true in MP, Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth implies that the conceptual and practical abilities concerning p, of the people within MP, are in an appropriate interaction with reality. Thus, with all of the conceptual and practical abilities that people have within MP, which they have formed on the basis of an interaction with reality, they cannot make sense of the negation of p.

If it is really the case that those within MP have acquired their moral conceptual and practical abilities in interaction with reality, then those outside MP should also be able to develop those moral conceptual and practical abilities in interaction with reality. Just like those outside the natural language of say, Mandarin, can learn that language by an interaction of concepts and reality, one can learn the conceptual and practical abilities of MP by that interaction. If one can learn those abilities, then one can also come to see the truth of p with reasonable arguments only.

8.3.2 Practices as optional languages?

Why then, does Putnam hold that those outside MP cannot learn the truth of p by reasonable argument only? A possible explanation would be that

Putnam's views - on why someone outside particular practices cannot come to see the truth-value of the relevant propositions by reason alone - stem from the fact that, for him, practices such as MP are instances of optional languages, which in turn are an example of conceptual relativity.

The practice of morality would resemble optional languages (like mereology) in this respect, namely (1) that nothing in reality dictates why we should understand *p* in the manner MP does, and that (2) it is therefore a convention whether one does or does not decide to understand *p* in the manner MP does. In this case, the meaning and truth-value of *p* would be unconnected with reality. The fact of someone torturing an animal need not be a fact at all, if one does not stand within MP. If someone (*S*) does not stand within MP, e.g. because *S* has only learned the language of the natural sciences and thus stands within the practice of the behavioral sciences (BSP) *only*, then what those within MP call 'torturing an animal' *S* would call 'the infliction of pain by a human being on an animal'. If speaking in the language of MP is optional to *S*, so the argument would go, then getting *S* to stand within MP would not be possible on the basis of reasonable arguments, i.e. on the basis of an interaction of reality with conceptual abilities, alone.

In fact, however, this argument does not hold, since the phenomenon of conceptual relativity itself does not imply that choosing to speak mereologically or not is an unreasonable affair. It does require a leap of faith, i.e. it requires that one let go of one's common understanding of objects in order to start seeing objects as consisting of sets as well. But to Putnam, this is only meant to attest to the fact that the meaning of at least some of our basic concepts is conventional rather than absolute. It does not mean that one could not come to see the meaning of objects in the mereological sense, in interaction with reality. It is in this respect, I believe, that in reaction to Sami Pihlström's question on this issue Putnam holds that "[t]he decision to employ religious language seriously is an 'existential' decision, in the sense of being deeply connected with one's way of being in the world",²³ and that he sees "no similarity whatsoever between such a decision and the decision to use technical linguistic devices such as mereological language".²⁴ As employing moral language is arguably equally an existential decision, this

²³ Putnam, *Replies to Commentators*, 73. Pihlström's question, in Pihlström, *Putnam's Conception of Ontology*, is very legitimate, however, because of the unclarity of Putnam's viewpoints. I aim to settle these unclaritys in Part III.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 73-4.

implies that the moral practice *cannot* be seen as an optional language in a sense similar to mereological language.

8.3.3 *Practices as conceptual schemes?*

So where do Putnam's views on why it is impossible for someone standing outside the moral practice to come to see the truth-value of moral propositions stem from? The alternative is that he has these views due to the fact that, for him, practices such as MP and BSP are various conceptual schemes. That is, as practices they are cognitively *non-equivalent*. If that would be the case, they would be an instance of conceptual pluralism, rather than of conceptual relativity. How would this explain Putnam's contention about truth being internal to the moral practice?

Other than in the case of optional languages, propositions from different conceptual schemes address the same reality without conflicting with each other. As we saw in 6.1, this is because they attend to different aspects of reality. When S, while standing within BSP, sees someone torturing an animal, she would hold that 'that person inflicts pain on an animal'. With regard to the same situation,²⁵ another person, M, standing in MP, could hold that 'it is wrong for that person to torture the animal'. The notion of conceptual pluralism dictates that both may be equally right in their observations, since these observations stem from different conceptual schemes, and are not cognitively equivalent. This explains why someone standing in BSP need not also stand in MP.

It does not explain, however, why someone standing in BSP cannot also come to stand in MP with reasonable arguments alone, and vice versa. The argument concerning understanding these views about optional languages applies here too. As both practices - conceived of in this case as conceptual schemes - can function very well simultaneously, and as a person may very well stand in both practices, there is no reason why the interaction of conceptual abilities and reality may not cause S to come to see the truth of p. Thus, Putnam's contention about the mere internal truth of moral propositions can stem neither from his views on conceptual relativity nor pluralism.

²⁵ What the same situation is is something that is conceptually relative. Here, however, that is of no importance, since S and M may have the same understanding of the situation at that level.

8.3.4 *An ambivalence with regard to interaction*

What remains as a possible explanation is that in Putnam's view the truth of moral propositions, and that a moral practice in general, does not consist in an interaction of the relevant conceptual and practical abilities with reality. If the truth of moral propositions were to hinge on an interaction of our moral conceptual and practical abilities, on the one hand, and moral aspects of reality, on the other, then one would expect it to be in principle possible to justify standing in a moral practice with reasonable arguments alone. Putnam rejects the idea that propositions internal to the moral practice can be shown to be true to those outside that practice. Coming to see the truth-value of moral propositions for someone outside a moral practice thus would require what I would call, an 'unreasonable' 'leap of faith'. I argue that if the conceptual scheme that is appropriate to grasp the truth of particular propositions is attainable for a person, who does not already have that conceptual scheme, *only with a leap of faith that has no connection with reality, and not through a reasonable process* of interactional and transactional engagements of that person with her surroundings, then the truth of those propositions does not ultimately depend on the way the world is, but on what counts as justified within a particular (moral) community. That would render the truth-value of moral propositions culturally relative.²⁶ As said, this is a view that Putnam wants to evade.

From a theoretical level, Putnamian pragmatic pluralism implies that, as long as a practice is based on an interaction of its conceptual abilities with reality, it should be possible to argue for the truth-value of propositions internal to that practice to those *outside* the practice on the basis of reasonable terms alone, even if that would have to resemble teaching that person a new language. Putnam's own more practical views on morality reject this, however.²⁷ Putnam's thinking therefore is ambivalent about whether the truth of propositions depends on an interaction of our conceptual abilities with reality or whether it depends on whether those propositions count as verified in a particular community.

Thus, depending on the extent to which practices are thought to consist of an interaction of conceptual abilities with reality, there is a risk of cultural relativism, since if the propositions of certain practices are not true in virtue of their interactions with reality, but merely because there is a coherent system of concepts within a particular community, then this

²⁶ See the notion of relativism described at the start of 8.3 above.

²⁷ This will become even more apparent in Chapter 9.

amounts to an antirealist notion of truth. This risk is intensified by the risk of reductionism, on which I elaborate below.

8.4 The face of truth-value and the risk of reductionism

This question connects to Putnam's implicit reluctance to allow moral experiences to have the same weight as paradigmatic experiences such as those of 'middle-sized dry objects'. For if the former *were* allowed the same weight, it *should* in principle be possible to argue for the truth-value of particular moral propositions in a manner similar to propositions about dry, middle-sized objects, to those outside a moral practice. Are there possibilities of dismissing particular experiences (e.g. as hallucinatory or as unreasonable), and on what grounds can we, or can we not, do so? The question, here, is whether all kinds of experiences are in principle allowed to be veridical experiences, or whether experiences associated with particular practices can be discarded on beforehand (because they are deemed illusory or inauthentic). Analyzing the extent to which the experiences associated with a particular practice are in principle allowed to play a role in arguments for the relevant propositions within that practice, should show the extent to which the experiential abilities of those who stand within those practices are thought to depend on a transaction between them and the external world.

This question comes up with regard to the issue of the interactional nature of moral truth, discussed above, since the lack of interaction between the relevant conceptual and practical abilities on the one hand and reality on the other could be due to a lack of transaction between those within the moral practice (MP) and their surroundings. Putnam's apparent contention that moral propositions only have truth-value within a MP, and the implicit contention that there is no interaction of concepts and reality in moral practices, could be explained by there being no *transaction* between us and our environment with regard to moral aspects, i.e. by there being no moral experiences.

While it is clear, in a Putnamian pragmatic pluralism, that we can have experiences of empirical facets of reality, e.g. of horses and colors, it also holds that some experiences are not real, such as those of unicorns and pink elephants. As we saw, however, there is no dichotomy between real and hallucinatory or illusory experiences, in the sense that there is no single aspect that real experiences have but unreal experiences do not have. Furthermore, as we saw, pragmatic pluralism proceeds from commonsense

experience. It holds that we should refrain from imposing a particular experiential scheme on aspects of reality, since there is a plurality of experiential schemes that each may yield objective experiential properties. Putnam is clear about the fact that, to him, reality does not only have aspects that can be discerned from a natural scientific point of view. Reality also has evaluative, aesthetic, moral, and other aspects.²⁸ Reality makes demands on us, Putnam holds, including moral demands.²⁹

Thus, while the pragmatic pluralist holds that reality has moral aspects too, from our analysis above it seems that Putnam may hold that we cannot have experiences of those moral aspects in a manner similar to how we can have experiences of middle-sized dry objects. For if we *could* have veridical experiences of moral reality, and if we could develop the appropriate conceptual and practical abilities in interaction with reality, then it *should* be possible to get those who do yet recognize the truth-value of moral propositions to come to do so.

Rather than with truth and our conceptual abilities, the second issue thus connects more closely with the issue of experience and experiential abilities. It deals with the possibility that from the point of view of a particular practice, some experiences may be deemed veridical, while from another conceptual and experiential framework those experiences would count as incomprehensible or even nonveridical. It asks whether we can ever establish limits, on beforehand, to what can count as a (veridical) experience. If Putnam indeed maintains that we can have veridical experiences of horses and colors, which would in turn allow us to come to true propositions on the same, while we cannot do the same on the basis of our transactions with *moral* aspects of reality, then his position runs the risk of becoming a form of reductionist naturalism.³⁰ For in that case, we would hold that only middle-sized dry objects can be interacted with cognitively, which implies a view on reality that takes it that only those aspects of reality that can be studied with the natural sciences are veridical aspects.

It seems that *a priori* allowing experiences of middle-sized dry objects while being suspicious about other, religious experiences, testifies to a

²⁸ See e.g. Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*, 190, and Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 160.

²⁹ Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein*, 6.

³⁰ 'Physicalism' is another term for reductionist naturalism. Cf. 5.2. In Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein*, 6-7, Putnam notes that while he still endorses a naturalist perspective, he is no *reductionist* naturalist, i.e. not only those propositions of which the natural sciences can make sense pertain to reality.

reductionist naturalism which favors a particular physicalist understanding of reality. The Putnamian pragmatic pluralist runs the risk of reductionism if, because of the adherence to a particular practice with its corresponding experiences (namely a natural scientific one), he or she discards particular experiences as non-veridical or not fit for cognitive interaction on beforehand. However, if we hold that there may be various aspects of reality, we have to refrain from discarding any experiences on beforehand. The Putnamian pragmatic pluralist has to refrain from fast judgments concerning what may be 'real experiences', although it should be possible to show, *a posteriori*, which experiences are veridical and which are not.³¹ One can then generalize on the basis of such judgments to the extent that any experience of a unicorn must be non-veridical. If someone experiences a unicorn, the transaction must be going wrong somewhere. As fallibilists, however, pragmatic pluralists have to remain open to the possibility that even unlikely, genuine experiences, may be veridical, and that instead of dismissing a particular experience as nonveridical our conceptual and experiential abilities may have to alter, in favor of allowing the experiences to be veridical.

8.5 Concluding notes: Putnam's pragmatic pluralist face of truth-value

The purpose of this chapter was twofold. First of all, it investigated how Putnam's perspective on the notions of truth and experience can further our understanding of the question of truth-value, and in particular with respect to the limitations of the (religious) realist and antirealist views on the notions of truth and experience. Since, in Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth and experience, the entanglement of conceptual and experiential abilities is essential, 'truth-value' is a context-sensitive term.³² It

³¹ I believe it is of course very well possible, in the pragmatic pluralist view, that some experiences, e.g. those of fairies and ghosts, are established as non-veridical, on the basis of research that shows that such entities are non-existent. This is in principle possible for religious entities too, of course. What is important, however, is that one cannot dismiss a whole class of experiences as non-veridical on beforehand, i.e. without investigations into them.

³² Cf. Travis, *Unshadowed Thought: Representation in Thought and Language*. Putnam attests to the influence of Travis' thinking on doing away with the shadows of thought, and proceeding instead of the notion of the context sensitivity of thinking in Putnam, *Travis on Meaning, Thought and the Ways the World is*, 96-106. See also Putnam on Travis in Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, 87.

depends on the abilities that we have in certain areas of reasoning - abilities that we have because of an interaction with reality - what truth-conditions apply. As we have those abilities because of an interaction of our conceptual abilities with reality (with regard to truth), and because of a transaction of our experiential abilities with our environment (in experience), which truth-conditions apply ultimately is not up to us to decide, and thus remains a realist notion.

Secondly, in making some of these relations explicit where Putnam's works leave this open, this chapter revealed two potential limitations of the Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on the notions of truth and experience with regard to the truth-value of propositions. As explained above, there are two worries with the notions of truth and experience in relation to truth-value. In Part III, I will show how, on the basis of Putnam's own viewpoints on truth and experience - and contrary to his remarks on the truth of moral propositions being internal to moral practice -, we *can* evade both risks. I will do so by analyzing James's views on how religious experiences can be of cognitive value. On the basis of that, I draw up a Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, in the Conclusion.

PART III
TOWARDS A PRAGMATIC PLURALIST PERSPECTIVE ON THE TRUTH-VALUE OF
RELIGIOUS PROPOSITIONS

In this last part, I take the necessary steps in coming to the alternative view on the truth-value of religious propositions that evades important aspects of the problematic notions of truth and experience basic to religious realist and antirealist perspectives. I laid out the basis for the steps that I take in Part III in my analysis of Hilary Putnam's pragmatic pluralist views on truth and experience, in Part II. I spell out this alternative, pragmatic pluralist perspective on religious propositions in the Conclusion.

On the basis of the findings in the previous parts, I can now adjust the hypothesis of Part I and II in the following manner: while Putnam's theoretical viewpoints indeed mitigate important problematic aspects of religious realist and antirealist perspectives on truth and experience, his more practical viewpoints on the truth-value of (moral and religious) propositions have important potential problematic aspects themselves. The hypothesis for Part III therefore is that if the potentially problematic aspects of Putnam's notions of truth and experience that I revealed in Chapter 8 can be settled, his pragmatic pluralist viewpoints will yield a perspective that can mitigate the fundamental difficulties of religious realist and antirealist perspectives discerned in Part I, and will provide a perspective on the notion of truth-value that is more in line with Putnam's theoretical pragmatic pluralist presuppositions than his own more practical views are.

In order to successfully apply Putnam's theoretical viewpoints on truth and experience to the question of the truth-value of religious propositions, I first turn to Putnam's largely practical perspective on this issue in analyzing Putnam's Wittgenstein-inspired views on the truth-value of religious propositions (in Chapter 9). This will show that Putnam seems not to fully acknowledge the interactive nature of (moral and) religious propositions. In turning explicitly to William James's views on how experiences of religious aspects of reality can have cognitive value (in Chapter 10), I show how Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth-value *can* evade the risks of relativism and reductionism discerned at the end of Part II (in Chapter 11). In conclusion I draw up the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions (in Chapter 12).

9.

Putnam's Wittgenstein-inspired perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions

In this chapter, I turn to Putnam's views on the role of truth and experience in the truth-value of religious propositions, on the basis of his scarce explicit writings on the implications of his views for *religious* discourse. Part II showed that Putnam's (particularly Jamesian) pragmatist presuppositions are most prominent with regard to his views on the issue of experience, while his (largely Wittgensteinian) pluralist presuppositions come to the fore most clearly in connection with his notion of truth. Part II also revealed two significant potential difficulties of Putnam's account of truth-value, i.e. its risk of cultural relativism and reductionist naturalism. In turning to Putnam's views on the truth-value of religious propositions, I investigate whether Putnam's perspective on these more practical philosophical issues lives up to the theoretical philosophical presuppositions of pragmatic pluralism, and thus manages to evade both relativism and reductionism.

I analyze Putnam's views on Wittgenstein's 'Lectures on Religious Belief' (in 9.2), and show what it means that in Putnam's view religious discourse is discontinuous with other discourses (in 9.3). In order to provide a thorough analysis of Putnam's largely implicit perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, I turn to his views on the truth-value of moral propositions (in 9.4), and translate these to the case of religious ones (9.5). From this it shows that Putnam's views on the truth-value of religious propositions do not cohere with what one would expect a Putnamian pragmatic pluralist view on the truth-value of religious propositions to consist in, and that the risks of relativism and reductionism remain.

9.1 Preliminary remarks about Putnam on the truth-value of religious propositions

In my search for a Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, this section turns explicitly to Putnam's perspective on religion. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive account of Putnam's views on the subject of religion, nor of his personal religious

commitments.¹ First of all, this would be a problematic enterprise, because of Putnam's reluctance to speak about his religious views.² Secondly, and more importantly, what is required here is an analysis of Putnam's perspective on the *truth-value* of religious propositions in particular, and not on religion in general, so that we can juxtapose this with the pragmatic pluralist viewpoints on truth and experience with regard to religious propositions.

It will become clear why we cannot speak of 'Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions', for two reasons. First of all, as we will see, Putnam barely discusses the propositional aspect of religion, but rather takes religion to be a practice beyond and to a large extent alien to propositional reasoning.³ Secondly, the analysis, below, of those points where Putnam *does* turn to these issues explicitly, shows that Putnam's views on religious reasoning do not cohere entirely with his theoretical philosophical views on truth and experience in the various domains of reasoning. Putnam takes it that "for a religious person *theorizing*

¹ For Putnam's religious commitments see Hilary Putnam, "Replies," in *Philosophical Topics: The Philosophy of Hilary Putnam*, ed. Christopher S. Hill, Vol. 20 (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1992), 347-408; Hilary Putnam, "On Negative Theology," *Faith and Philosophy* 14, no. 4 (1997), 407-422; Hilary Putnam, "God and the Philosophers," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 21 (1997), 175-187; Hilary Putnam, "Thoughts Addressed to an Analytical Thomist," *Monist* 80, no. 4 (October 1997, 1997), 487-499; Putnam, *The Pluralism of David Hartman*, 237-248; Hilary Putnam, "Monotheism and Humanism," in *Humanity before God. Contemporary Faces of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Ethics*, eds. William Schweiker, Michael A. Johnson and Kevin Jung (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 19-30; and Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein*, 1-8.100-8. Cf. also Sami Pihlström, "Hilary Putnam as a Religious Thinker," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* x (1999), 39-60, for an analysis of how Putnam's religious thinking relates to important pragmatist presuppositions.

² At a conference in honor of Putnam's 85th birthday, at Brandeis and Harvard Universities, 31 May – 3 June 2011, Putnam contended that, to him, "religion is like sex. I don't particularly like to talk about it in public, and one size doesn't fit all".

³ Cf. Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, where he writes approvingly about Wittgenstein's viewpoints, in the latter's *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (L. Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. C. Barrett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966)), on the same, that "what Wittgenstein (in the company of Kierkegaard) is saying is this: that religious discourse can be understood in any depth only by understanding the form of life to which it belongs. What characterizes that form of life is not the expressions of belief that accompany it, but a way – a way that includes words and pictures, but is far from consisting in just words and pictures – of living one's life, of regulating all of one's decisions" (Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, 154).

about God is, as it were, beside the point”.⁴ As we will see, he takes religious language to be ‘a-rational’.

It will become clear that, for Putnam’s views on these matters, Ludwig Wittgenstein is of central importance, most notably his ‘Lectures on Religious Belief’.⁵ Other important conversation partners are John Dewey, predominantly his *A Common Faith*,⁶ and Martin Buber.⁷ A figure who features prominently in Putnam’s viewpoints in philosophy of mind and who has written extensively on religion and religious experience, William James, is virtually absent in Putnam’s views on religion. In the chapters that follow, I will show that James’s reflections on religion can make an important contribution to a Putnam-inspired pragmatic pluralist perspective on religious propositions.

While Putnam turned to the subject of ‘religion’ increasingly in the last two decades of the previous century as well as during the first decade of the new millennium, his writings mostly do not address the question of the role of truth and experience in, or the truth-value of, religious propositions explicitly. Here, therefore, I analyze these scarce explicit views on the role of truth and experience in the truth-value of religious propositions, and I deduce his views on the same on the basis of an analysis of his views on the truth-value of *moral* propositions. In our query into Putnam’s explicit references to the issues pertaining to the truth-value of religious propositions, special focus will be on whether it runs the risk of cultural relativism or reductionist naturalism, or both.

9.2 Putnam’s Wittgensteinian presuppositions on the truth-value of religious propositions

One of the most important sources of Putnam’s views on the truth-value of religious propositions and of religious reasoning in general are three chapters in Putnam’s *Renewing Philosophy*, i.e. ‘Wittgenstein on Religious Belief’, ‘Wittgenstein on Reference and Relativism’, and ‘A Reconsideration of

⁴ Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein*, 6.

⁵ Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*.

⁶ John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960 [1934]).

⁷ Cf. Putnam’s remark, in 2008, that his religious standpoint was “somewhere between John Dewey in *A Common Faith* and Martin Buber” (Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein*, 5). Cf. also 100, where he develops this notion further.

Deweyan Democracy'.⁸ The first two of these chapters deal with Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Lectures on Religious Belief*.⁹ These three chapters are of great importance, in our regard, because of the fact that they allow for an analysis of how the issue of 'truth-value' connects with Putnam's Wittgenstein-inspired perspective on religious reasoning, religious language, and religious belief.

With his analysis of Wittgenstein's, and to a smaller extent Søren Kierkegaard's, views on these issues, Putnam discerns a difference between religious and other beliefs. In Putnam's reading of Wittgenstein, "religious belief 'regulates for all' in the believer's life, even though his religious belief may alternate with doubt".¹⁰ Thus, to an individual (or group) a religious proposition can function as guiding that person's life, even if he or she is not, or cannot be, certain about its truth. Putnam holds that this is different in the case of what we have called descriptive truths (in 6.2), since in the case of descriptive truth, or empirical beliefs, we would refrain from taking actions if we have doubts about them.¹¹ From Wittgenstein's 'Lectures on Religious Belief', Putnam also deduces the idea that the formation of religious beliefs runs along lines different from the formation of empirical beliefs. While reasons play a conclusive role in empirical belief formation, the same may not be the case for religious beliefs. To a larger degree the latter may rest on such things as emotional and eschatological appreciations of particular aspects of life.¹²

This is not to say that the religious person and the non-religious, or 'empirical' person contradict each other, in Putnam's account of Wittgenstein's view. There is an interesting mix of understanding and not understanding, contradicting and failing to contradict. When a non-religious person says 'I do not believe in a Judgment Day', that person does not deny what the religious person says when that person says 'I believe in a Judgment Day'. For to deny or contradict it, it would have to have the same or at least a similar meaning. I turn to this issue of (in)commensurability in 9.3.

⁸ Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, 134-200.

⁹ Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*.

¹⁰ Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, 145.

¹¹ This is reminiscent of William James's notion of the right to believe, namely that in certain cases (i.e. in the case of a genuine option) we cannot refrain from taking some beliefs as life-guiding, even if we have no compelling evidence for them. See James William James, "The Will to Believe [1896]," in *The Ethics of Belief Debate*, ed. Gerald McCarthy (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1986), 55-71.

¹² Cf. Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, 146-7.

What these things mean is that, for Putnam in following Wittgenstein, religious propositions have particular truth-conditions of their own. In accordance with his rejection of imposing notions of and criteria for truth that apply to one area to another, Putnam refrains from taking the notion of empirical truth and applying it to religious propositions. In a more recent article in which he turns to issues related to our interest, Putnam holds that “Wittgensteinian language philosophy cannot tell us whether religious belief is nonsense or not”.¹³ Rather, Putnam holds his Wittgenstein-inspired language philosophy to aim at unfolding problematic confusions. When further analyzing Putnam’s viewpoints on the issue of the reasonableness of religious belief we should keep this in mind.

To Putnam, philosophy has an important role, i.e. to rid us of the confusions that have sneaked into our understanding of the various domains of human reasoning, religious and non-religious, but it cannot *prescribe* notions of truth. As Robert Brandom puts it: “Putnam wants us to learn from [Wittgenstein and Dewey] an attitude, a way of ‘reflecting on our lives and language’”,¹⁴ rather than to extract theses that might be of use in building theories. “The most important thing about their example is that they ‘take our lives and practice seriously in philosophical discussion’”.¹⁵ What should count, in analyzing the notion of truth-value that applies to religious propositions, is how the truth-value of religious propositions is implied in everyday religious use.

Thus, there are a number of important Wittgenstein-inspired presuppositions to Putnam’s perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions. Reasons play a different role in the truth-value of religious propositions. Truth itself is of a different importance in religions. Furthermore, religious propositions can have truth-value, but the conditions for truth-value are different from those for propositions of other practices. To Putnam, not only rational but also emotional and deep-seated views on the meaning of life play an important part in the truth-value of religious propositions. Religious and non-religious propositions pertain to different aspects of life, and thus do not (necessarily) contradict each other. As we will see, this connects to Putnam’s pragmatic pluralist notion of conceptual pluralism.

¹³ Hilary Putnam, "Reply to Jean-Pierre Cometti," *Revue Internationale De Philosophie* 55, no. 4 (2001), 468.

¹⁴ Robert B. Brandom, "Review of *Renewing Philosophy* by Hilary Putnam," *The Journal of Philosophy* 91, no. 3 (1994), 141.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

9.3 Religious propositions as discontinuous with other propositions

While our interest, here, is in Putnam's view on the truth-value of *religious* language, Putnam more frequently and comprehensively turns to *moral* language. In *Renewing Philosophy*, he works his way from the implications of Wittgenstein's view on the relationship of religious and everyday discourse¹⁶ for the notion of reference to a view on the relationship of everyday and moral discourse. When analyzing Wittgenstein's 'Lectures on Religious Belief', Putnam notes that to Wittgenstein, with whom Putnam agrees on this, "one's life may be organized by very different pictures".¹⁷ Wittgenstein's 'pictures' are what we have called 'conceptual schemes' in 6.3 and Chapter 8. We use various pictures, or conceptual schemes, to interact with our environment. How do these different pictures correlate with regard to the issues of truth and experience? I return here to the question of the (in)commensurability of religious and other propositions. This sheds light on the question of how, in Putnam's view, the truth-value of religious language ultimately hinges on reality or not.

As we saw already, Putnam takes Wittgenstein to reject the idea of a continuity of proper scientific (empirical) and proper religious beliefs. Putnam makes it clear that he believes Wittgenstein would reject three common interpretations of his notion of the discontinuity of religious and other language: it would be wrong to say that religious people use language metaphorically while non-religious people use it literally, and it would be wrong to hold that the religious person uses religious language non-cognitively, which would imply that religious language is merely emotive.¹⁸ One cannot replace religious phrases wholly by emotive phrases. This would be a kind of reductionism, which, as we saw in Chapter 5, Putnam rejects. The third interpretation of Wittgenstein's view that Putnam rejects is to take religious and other languages to have different meaning. When you say that "two speakers aren't able to communicate *because* their words have different 'meanings'",¹⁹ implies that one knows the meaning of their words. If one were

¹⁶ Putnam, of course, criticizes the idea that there is an 'everyday' discourse which would somehow be primary, as opposed to a religious discourse which would be secondary. This is the criticism that we encountered, in 5.2, of physicalism. From my analysis here, it shows that he does, nevertheless, proceed from the (implicit) conviction that religious and non-religious discourses are in principle separable, and that religious discourse is a-rational.

¹⁷ Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, 146.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 147-8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

to know what the two people mean, the problem of the discontinuity of religious and non-religious propositions would no longer reside in their having a different meaning. One would then be able to contrast the one meaning of a word with another. In that case, it would make no sense to say that the two discourses are discontinuous, because they *are* continuous in some way; they just do not mean the same.

The discontinuity of a religious person's and a non-religious person's use of a particular phrase is thus not a difference in meaning. How then should we approach this issue? In Putnam's Wittgensteinian view, the discontinuity resides in the fact that one has to understand a particular discourse by understanding the form of life to which it belongs. One has to understand the religious practice of the person who holds the religious proposition in order to understand the proposition. Putnam states that what Wittgenstein was doing was to try

to get his students to see how, for *homo religiosus*, the meaning of his or her words is not exhausted by criteria in a public language, but is deeply interwoven with the sort of person the particular religious individual has chosen to be and with pictures that are the foundation of that individual's life.²⁰

One needs to understand "a religious form of life"²¹ in order to have any access to the meaning, and truth of a religious person's statements. This is why, in Putnam's Wittgensteinian picture, a "religious man and [an] atheist talk past one another".²² The meaning of a religious proposition thus depends on the form of life of which the person holding the proposition is part. This is congruent with what we established, in Chapter 6 and 8, about the role of conceptual schemes or practices in meaning and truth-value.

The truth-value of a religious proposition, thus, also depends at least in part on that form of life. If it is the case that religious propositions have truth-value only *within* a particular religious form of life, they cannot have truth-value from a perspective *external* to such a religious form of life. A proposition such as 'God is love' would have truth-value only to those who stand in a particular religious form of life.²³ The discontinuity resides in the

²⁰ Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein*, 5.

²¹ Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, 154.

²² *Ibid.*, 143.

²³ As we saw in Chapter 6, Putnam takes there to be a plurality of conceptual schemes, which not necessarily conflict with each other because they pertain to different aspects of reality. This situation of conceptual plurality, and Putnam's doctrine of conceptual pluralism, is

fact that there are various conceptual schemes which cannot be said to consist merely of differences of meaning, but which on their own make up practices that one has to be part of in order to come to see the truth-value of the particular propositions. This does not yet show what the notion of truth amounts to with regard to religious propositions, in Putnam's view, but it shows that to Putnam the meaning of a religious proposition can only be understood to those within a particular religious conceptual scheme. This, as I analyze in the next two sections, has important implications for the scope of the truth-value of religious propositions, and therefore for whether his views on the truth-value of religious propositions manage to evade the risks of cultural relativism and reductionist naturalism.²⁴

9.4 Putnam on the truth-value of moral propositions

In order to see how the discontinuity of religious with non-religious propositions affects the truth-conditions for the latter, I turn to Putnam's perspective on the truth-value of moral propositions, since whereas Putnam does not work out a perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions he does so on moral ones. Putnam holds that the abilities, intellectual and practical, that we have in a particular field of inquiry, say chemistry, consist not only of abilities with empirical facts but also of abilities with making value-judgments, or, as Putnam calls them, 'valuings'.²⁵ To Putnam, morality, or 'ethics' as he usually names it,²⁶ is equally an area of human reasoning, where propositions have truth-value. They have truth-value for two related reasons.

Moral propositions, first of all, can have truth-value because they do not differ categorically from other propositions with regard to the reality of values. It is in this respect that Putnam holds that though "there is a distinction to be drawn (one that is useful in some contexts) between ethical

backed up by Putnam's notion of conceptual relativity, the idea that there at least some basic notions have no unambiguous meaning.

²⁴ In 8.3 and 8.4 I showed how if the scope of the meaning and truth-value of religious propositions is limited to a particular conceptual scheme, this can lead to the risk of relativism and reductionism.

²⁵ Cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 74.

²⁶ For what I would call 'morality', Putnam often uses the terms ethics and morality interchangeably. Cf. *Ibid.*, 22-8. I reserve the term 'ethics' for 'the theoretical reflection on morality'.

judgements and other sorts of judgements ... *nothing metaphysical follows from the existence of a fact/value distinction in this (modest) sense*".²⁷ The fact that it is sometimes useful to distinguish between facts and values does not imply that one can quantify over facts (facts exist) while (moral) values and norms *would not* exist, nor that the notions of rationality and truth would only apply to the world of 'empirical facts'. Putnam reveals and acknowledges his pragmatist heritage when holding that the world does not exist merely of the physical but also of human values and ideas.²⁸

The conceptual relations that we draw in making value judgments arise from our practical and intellectual abilities in a way at least comparable to empirical judgments. Concerning morality, an area where value is of central importance,²⁹ Putnam holds that moral statements are "forms of reflection that are as fully governed by norms of truth and validity as any other form of cognitive activity".³⁰ In line with his views on truth as not necessarily only descriptive but possibly also conceptual or moral, Putnam holds that moral truths can be established by contrasting particular conceptual abilities with others and with practical abilities.

In line with Putnam's views on experience, recognizing the fact that values and facts are interwoven starts with the assumption, secondly, that experience of reality itself is not neutral, but ridden with values.³¹ Apperceptive experience itself "involves the application of concepts".³² It is here that the conceptual abilities come into play. We can look critically at the valuations that we make in the perceptions that we have. In that sense, "[o]bjective value arises, not from a special 'sense organ', but from the

²⁷ Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*, 19.

²⁸ Note that this does not mean that, to Putnam, there is a world of ideas of its own. Rather, the mental supervenes on the physical. Even though, thus, there is no mental aspects to reality without the physical, this does not mean that the mental and interpersonal aspects of reality is not real.

²⁹ Not only values and norms are of importance in morality, though. As said, Putnam holds that many of our moral propositions have factual aspects to them, and that many of our empirical propositions rest on evaluative judgments. See 6.4, and Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 73.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

³¹ For a full understanding of Putnam's notion of (empirical) truth, an analysis of his thinking in philosophy of mind is of great importance, most notably of his thinking on perception. His views on these matters are arguably influenced by William James's notions of experience / perception. I will not turn to that issue here, but stick to Putnam's more Wittgensteinian notion of conceptual truth since that connects more directly to his rather Wittgensteinian notion of truth in morality and religion.

³² Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*, 109.

criticism of our valuations".³³ Evaluative and moral statements can therefore be said to be 'true' or 'false' too. To almost anyone who speaks the language of morality, the proposition 'it is wrong to torture a newborn' is true, for example because when imagining a situation in which a newborn is tortured we immediately experience it as wrong with the practical abilities that we have, and when critically reflecting on it with the conceptual abilities that we have, we may still come to the conclusion that the proposition is true. One could also put it as follows: with all the practical and conceptual abilities that someone within a moral practice has, the proposition cannot sensibly be negated. There can be true moral propositions without those propositions being - in one way or another - descriptions of supersensible, moral fact, but whose serious negation makes no sense.

In spite of the fact that moral discourses can have truth-value, however, Putnam states, as we saw, that he does "not believe that someone who stands outside the whole circle of related concerns (...) described as constitutive of ethics can be brought to share any one of them by argument alone"³⁴ and that "the fact that there is no way of justifying standing within the ethical life from outside does not mean that reason and truth-value have no place *within* the ethical life".³⁵ The notion of truth therefore counts for moral statements too, but under the condition that one is already part of a moral practice. One has to be part of a moral life in order to be able to grasp the truth (or falsity) of moral statements. I will return to this issue briefly below, and in detail in Chapter 11 and 12.

9.5 Putnam on the truth-value of religious propositions

Putnam's notion that moral propositions have objectivity only internal to a particular practice connects to what I analyzed with regard to the discontinuity of religious and non-religious language (in 9.3) as well as to what I showed with regard to the possible relativist and reductionist thrust of his viewpoints (in 8.3 and 8.4). For the truth-value of religious propositions, the fact that religious language is discontinuous with other languages means that religious propositions can be true or false only to those who already have an understanding of a religious form of life, i.e. to those who in one way

³³ Ibid., 103. Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, 234 – Putnam's emphasis.

³⁴ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 29.

³⁵ Ibid., 30.

or another live a religious life. The question then is what the discontinuity implies for the kind of notion of truth-value that may apply to religious propositions. We established that religious propositions only have truth-value within particular conceptual schemes and that a religious proposition need therefore not conflict with a non-religious one, and now we investigate what the truth-value of religious propositions may consist in.

If religious conceptual schemes are discontinuous with other practices, the question rises whether they are also discontinuous in the sense that the truth-value of religious propositions does not ultimately hinge on an interaction of reality. This question connects to the issue that I discussed in 8.3, namely about whether the truth-value of particular propositions depends on interactions with reality. While Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective is that truth is a plural notion, we saw that there is formal unity across the various conceptual schemes with regard to the fact that truth consists in an interaction of propositions with reality. How this interaction takes shape would then depend on the conceptual scheme of which the proposition is part.

Similarly to his view on the truth-value of moral propositions, Putnam's perspective on religious propositions is ambiguous with regard to the question whether the truth-value of religious propositions ultimately depends on the interaction of those propositions with reality. This is because Putnam can be read as saying that whether to speak religiously or not is a choice,³⁶ whereas at other points he denies that this choice is similar to how speaking mereologically or not is a choice.³⁷ This speaks from Putnam's rare explicit references to such questions as about the rationality of religious propositions, such as when he states that

the big issues: to believe in God or not to believe in God; to engage in such religious practices as prayer, attending services, studying religious texts or not to do so (I am *not* equating this with the issue of believing or not believing in God, by the way); to look for proof of God's existence, if one is religious (or thinking of being religious), or to regard such a quest as misguided; to be pluralistic in one's approach to religion, or to regard one religion as truer than all the rest—these are deeply personal choices, choices of who to be, not just what to do or what to believe. I do not believe that philosophical or scientific discussion can provide compelling reasons for making these choices one way rather than another, although such discussion can help us make whichever choices we make more reflectively.³⁸

³⁶ Pihlström, *Putnam's Conception of Ontology*, 1-13.

³⁷ Putnam, *Replies to Commentators*, 67-98.

³⁸ Putnam, *The Depths and Shallows of Experience*, 71.

Similar to in the case of moral statements, the possibility of reasoning *about*, i.e. not *from* a perspective internal to, a religious form of life, would be limited. Only to those who already have these practical abilities, who already live this religious life, are particular religious statements conceptually true. It seems that it *is* possible to teach someone mathematics or physics with reasonable arguments alone, i.e. by bringing a person's practical, intellectual, and conceptual abilities together in such a manner that, through this interaction, the meaning of the terms employed becomes known to this person. When it comes to Putnam's perspective on morality and religion, however, this interaction seems to be lacking. The person currently outside a moral or religious practice cannot be brought into those practices on the basis of arguments that proceed from an interaction of (moral and religious) conceptual abilities and reality.

The ambivalence with regard to the notion of truth in morality is thus also present in Putnam's perspective on religion.³⁹ Whether a religious statement is true depends on whether one already speaks such a language. On the one hand, Putnam seems to maintain that speaking religiously is something one can evade, an option that not everyone needs to grasp. This is the sense in which Putnam's views on moral and religious languages seems to resemble his views on optional languages such as mereology, which is reflected in Putnam's statement that "[t]he decision to employ religious language seriously is an 'existential' decision, in the sense of being deeply connected with one's way of being in the world".⁴⁰ On the other hand, Putnam adds, in one go, that he sees "no similarity whatsoever between such a decision and the decision to use technical linguistic devices such as mereological language",⁴¹ which seems to imply that religious and mereological language *cannot* both be seen as optional languages in a similar sense.

Putnam would agree with D.Z. Phillips' contention that Wittgenstein's importance for accounts of religious belief is that

[b]ecoming acquainted with a language is not simply mastering a vocabulary and rules of grammar. It is to know how things bear on one another in such a way as to make it possible to say certain things and see certain connections, but not others.

³⁹ Cf. Fehige, *Hilary Putnam's Semi-Fideism*, 214-233, which also discerns the ambivalence.

⁴⁰ Putnam, *Replies to Commentators*, 73.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 73-4.

The same must be said for religion. ... [I]t is impossible to imagine a religion without imagining it *in* a form of life.⁴²

How a religion is part of a particular community's form of life is what should be central for understanding the meaning and truth-value of religious propositions made within that community. Putnam seems to go a step further, however, and holds that since the meaning and truth-value is limited to that particular community's form of life, it is a-rational. Therefore, it would not depend on an interaction of our conceptual and practical abilities and reality. That brings up the question whether Putnam's perspective is a form of fideism. Fideism, with regard to the truth-value of religious propositions, takes it that not the findings of reason or rationality but of faith should be central. The truth of religious propositions should be sought in the practice of faith, not in that of rational reflections.⁴³

Putnam's pragmatic pluralist viewpoints on truth and experience are that truth *is* ultimately an interaction, and that our experiences *are* transactions between ourselves and our environment. It seems, however, that with regard to *religious* truth and experience, this is not the case. With regard to religious propositions, Putnam seems to come close to a fideism, but I will argue in the Conclusion that his theoretical viewpoints do not necessitate or even allow that. There, I formulate the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions that takes the pragmatic pluralist notions of truth and experience as basic. It will then become clear that the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective is *not* an instance of fideism.

Even if religious language is connected to one's existential commitments in such a way that at least some people cannot opt out from speaking it, Putnam's view is that this does not necessarily imply that it is a public language. On the other hand, neither are religious propositions ultimately thought to be ineffable. While turning to Wittgenstein's views on religious belief and to his viewpoints on the same, in his 'Reply to Jean-Pierre Cometti', Putnam explains that Wittgenstein's claim that "What belongs to a language game is a whole culture' [§ 26 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*] ... [implies] that it is not only 'exceptional' sorts of language

⁴² D. Z. Phillips, *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1986), 79.

⁴³ Cf. Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, eds. A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 16-93. See also C. S. Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998) for an account of fideism as not necessarily 'against rationality'.

(e.g. religious) that 'belong to whole culture' and that are part of 'a form of life'. This is true of *all* language".⁴⁴ Thus, either all languages are private languages in the sense described above or none of them are. This further deepens the problematic aspects of Putnam's perspective on whether the truth-value of religious language is in any sense comparable to truth-value in other domains.⁴⁵

9.6 Concluding notes: Requirements for a pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions

In turning to Putnam's own explicit views on the truth-value of religious propositions, and placing these next to Putnam's theoretical views on truth and experience in general, this chapter showed that Putnam's own views on the truth-value of religious propositions do not cohere with what one would expect a Putnamian pragmatic pluralist view on the truth-value of religious propositions to amount to. We have seen that while in Putnam's perspective on truth and experience Wittgensteinian conceptual relativity and pluralism and Jamesian direct realism are of comparable importance, in his perspective on moral and religious propositions they are not.

In his views on morality, the discrepancy is less visible than in his perspective on religion, because in his perspective on the former the pluralist account of truth is combined with the pragmatist notion of human reality consisting of more than what the natural sciences can study (and with the correlated pragmatist rejection of the fact/value dichotomy). This allows for a notion of moral propositions as having truth-value, albeit only internal to moral practice. In Putnam's explicit references to religious discourse, however, the notions of conceptual relativity and pluralism remain central while the notions of truth as interaction and experience as transaction are absent. This results in the view that basic religious concepts may be incommensurable with other, non-religious concepts,⁴⁶ but the pragmatist notion that human reality may include more than those objects that the

⁴⁴ Putnam, *Reply to Jean-Pierre Cometti*, 467.

⁴⁵ Joerg Hermann Fehige comes to the conclusion that Putnam endorses a semi-fideism on the basis of Putnam's religious points of view, whereas my analysis is of Putnam theoretical pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth-value and to a lesser extent of his religious points of view. See Fehige, *Hilary Putnam's Semi-Fideism*, 214-233.

⁴⁶ Notwithstanding the fact that Putnam holds that religious discourse is quite unlike an optional language such as mereology.

natural sciences can accommodate does not result in exploring the possibility that human reality may have religious aspects in a manner similar to how it has moral aspects.

In taking Putnam's views at face value, *religious* propositions are ultimately thought to be *without* those ties to reality that non-religious propositions are thought to have, and have fundamentally different truth-conditions. In the end, as my explorations in 8.3 and 8.4 elucidated, this would lead to a perspective on religious propositions, in which their truth eventually depends on whether a community takes it as verified, rather than on some interaction with reality, and in which experiences cannot really be experiences of religious aspects of reality. This shows that the problematic aspects of the Putnamian notion of the truth-value of propositions that we discerned in Chapter 8 have not been resolved. On the contrary, turning to Putnam's views on religious propositions makes it clear that the Putnamian notion of truth-value, which emphasizes (Wittgensteinian pluralist) conceptual relativity and pluralism but seems to overlook the (Jamesian pragmatist) notion that there are more aspects to reality than what the eye can see, runs the risk both of cultural relativism and reductionist naturalism, whereas his pragmatic pluralism strongly opposes those viewpoints.

As a thorough examination of the Putnamian notion of truth and experience with regard to religious propositions, however, this analysis also allows us to see what a revised Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective would require in order to better live up to its own requirements stemming from a direct realism combined with a conceptual pluralism. It requires a thorough re-assessment of whether one can preclude leaning on religious experiences in coming to see the truth of religious propositions, and a reflection on whether and how religious experiences may attest to the interaction of those propositions with reality. I therefore turn to the question of whether religious experiences can, in principle, feature in coming to see the truth of religious propositions. I do so by means of an assessment, in the next chapter, of William James's reflections on the cognitive value of religious experiences.

William James's *Varieties* on the cognitive value of religious experiences

In its aim to establish whether, in a pragmatic pluralist perspective, religious propositions can have truth-value because of an interaction with reality, this chapter explores whether and how, from the perspective of William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature*, religious experiences are thought to have cognitive value. I investigate whether and how, from that perspective, religious experiences are a basis for religious knowledge and thus give insight into the truth and falsity of religious propositions. As Putnam's pragmatic pluralism intensely engages James's thinking in philosophy of mind, and as James has explored the issues of truth and religious experience extensively, an analysis of this specific aspect of James's thinking will contribute to a pragmatic pluralist view on the truth-value of religious propositions. In doing so, it determines whether Putnam's practical viewpoints on the nature of religious truth conform to his theoretical pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth and experience.

Unlike Putnam, James is willing to take religious experiences as in principle similar to experiences of other aspects of reality. This allows us to see how the various religious experiences can be transactions between people and their environment just like other experiences, and how the truth-value of religious propositions can consist in an interaction of conceptual abilities and reality. Turning to James's truth and religious experience will make a twofold contribution to a pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions. It will further the pragmatic pluralist perspective on the role of (religious) *experience* in religious propositions, and it will further its perspective on the *religious* aspects of experience in the truth-value of (religious) propositions.

I analyze James's perspective, in *The Varieties*, of the notion of truth in relation to religious experiences. This understanding is to an extent implicit in the sense that, in *The Varieties*, James does not reflect on the notions of truth and experience in an as systematic manner as he does in other works, such as *Essays in Radical Empiricism*,¹ 'A World of Pure Experience',² and

¹ William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ Press, 1976 [1912]).

² William James, "A World of Pure Experience," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 1, no. 20 (1904), 533-543.

Pragmatism.³ What is pivotal about an analysis of these issues in his *Varieties* is that this provides a perspective on James's relatively implicit notion of cognitive value with regard to religious experience, inferred from his use of cognitive aspects of religious experience. I go into these issues in some detail, because they attest to the possibility of approaching religious experiences and religious propositions in a manner not discontinuous with other, non-religious experiences and propositions. As such, it contrasts with Putnam's viewpoints on the same, and aims to balance the pragmatic pluralist perspective on the potential cognitive value of religious propositions. Combined with the fact that James turns to religious experience explicitly, this should provide a fruitful perspective on how, contrary to Putnam's viewpoints on the same, religious truth can be interactive with reality, as religious experiences are transactions between the religious believer and her surroundings.

10.1 Preliminary remarks about James on the truth-value of religious experience

In analyzing James's perspective on the truth-value of religious experiences in *The Varieties*, it is pivotal to realize that this perspective is not necessarily congruous with his explicit views on truth and experience in other, more theoretical writings. Furthermore, it should be remembered that our interest here is not so much a full-blown analysis of James's views on truth and experience, or even a comprehensive view of these notions in *The Varieties*. Rather, this chapter means to show whether and how the truth-value of religious propositions is an interactive notion, which should in turn allow us to draw up a pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions in the next chapter.

A first delimitation of my analysis is that I will not turn to James's explicit writings on truth and experience,⁴ but rather his more implicit views on the cognitive value of religious experiences in *The Varieties*. Only to a small extent will it provide insights into James's views on truth with regard to (religious) experience. It will, however, provide us with a perspective on the relationship of religious experience to truth, and thus allows answering the

³ James, *Pragmatism*.

⁴ For an analysis of James's notion of truth, see David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 205-9.

question about whether the truth of religious propositions is based on an interaction with reality.

We should also turn briefly to the term 'religious experience'. As I have done in analyses above, I understand experience both ontologically and phenomenologically. An 'experience' can denote the experienced object, such as the experienced 'cat' when perceiving my cat, as well as the event of experience in which we perceive an object or a property, such as 'experiencing my cat' when perceiving my cat.⁵ In Chapter 5 and 7, I argued why we should not delimit 'experience' to a state internal to the mind. Religious experiences, if there are any, are therefore also conceived of as events that involve a transaction between an individual and the individual's surroundings.

In the Introduction, I have argued that what I mean with 'religious propositions' is much broader than propositions concerning God or gods,⁶ and that therefore I do not restrict the meaning of 'religious experience' to a theistic understanding of the same.⁷ Although James has a well-known understanding of religion as "the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto",⁸ he himself is aware of the difficulties of defining religion.⁹ Among other reasons

⁵ Cf. David Lamberth on James's notion of experience in *Ibid.*, 26ff.

⁶ Cf. my discussion in the Introduction. In brief, I argue that the extensions of the term religious in religious propositions can be as various as natural scientific, historical, moral, and existential-religious. A statement about the existence of gods between the molecules is at least in part a natural scientific statement; a statement about the first human beings being Adam and Eve, is in effect a statement in the field of history; a statement about the ways that God asks us to live with each other, is for a part a statement in morality; and a statement about the reasons for our creation, can be a statement on the meaning of life.

⁷ I take it that James's use of the notion of religion is just one of the uses of the notion of religion today. His view amounts to the idea that a religious proposition is a proposition about such an unseen order, but we find that various propositions, such as about issues in the natural sciences, in historiography, in morality, in the existential-religious etc. may be called religious, that is if they are motivated by or based on a religious outlook. It is nevertheless a rather common view, today also, that religion pertains to some kind of unseen order, and for now we can take James's views as applicable to this view.

⁸ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, ed. J. Ratner (New York: University Books, 1963 [1902]), 53. This is itself a more substantial view than his earlier presupposition that "[r]eligion, ... as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men [sic] in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (*Ibid.*, 31).

⁹ See e.g. *Ibid.*, 26-31.

because he does not want to force the definition onto his study subjects, he does not discuss those subjects who, in his view, have described a religious understanding of their experience but who would reject such a claim themselves, under the rubric of *religious* mystical experiences but rather under “mystical experiences without explicit religious significance”.¹⁰ Though James had a rather clear picture of what it is to be religious, for his study into the notion of mystical religious experiences the debate is not about what counts and what does not count as religious but rather about whether mystical religious experiences have epistemic import. In a similar vein, my investigation delves not into the nature of religion but into the cognitive value of what we take as religious experiences.¹¹

10.2 James on truth and experience in *The Varieties*

With the delimitations of this investigation into James’s notion of the truth-value of religious propositions in mind, we turn to an analysis of how experience functions in determining the truth of religious propositions in William James’s thinking on religious experience. What I will establish here, is whether and how experiential access to religious aspects of reality, in James’s view, allows for religious propositions to have truth-value. This will be fundamental to establishing the pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions in the next chapter.

In coming to understand James’s views on the role of truth and experience in the various forms of mystical (religious) experience, we come to an analysis of the truth-value of these experiences. A number of aspects will turn out to be central to this analysis: James’s stress on the role of experience and feeling, not philosophy and rationalism, in cognition;¹² James’s contemplations concerning the convincingness of religious experiences to those subject to them, but possible unconvincingness to those not subject to them; and James’s conviction that a “[m]an’s thinking is organically connected with his conduct”,¹³ which has important

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 389-93.

¹¹ See my remarks in the Introduction for the various fields of inquiry and reasoning this may pertain to.

¹² Cf. Kappy Suckiel, *Heaven’s Champion: William James’s Philosophy of Religion* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1996). See also James’s letter to Mrs. James, Castebelle, April 13, 1900, in: James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 533.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 442.

repercussions on how conceptual and practical abilities relate. As we will see, these aspects connect intimately with Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on the role of conceptual and practical abilities in truth and experience.

10.2.1 James's study of mystical and religious experiences in *The Varieties*

James sets out to study religious experiences from a psychologist's point of view, which he holds implies among other things that "not religious institutions, but rather religious feelings and religious impulses must be its subject".¹⁴ To James, individual experiences are at the root of religions.¹⁵ The personal religious experiences and the beliefs that have come to be held on the basis of them have primacy over the institutional religious beliefs. "In critically judging of the value of religious phenomena, it is very important to insist on the distinction between religion as an individual personal function, and religion as an institutional, corporate, or tribal product".¹⁶ It is with the former that James engages in this work, since these are the authentically 'religious' experiences, not tainted with a-religious and anti-religious powers.¹⁷

According to James, "personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness".¹⁸ He takes mystical experiences to have two necessary and a further two recurrent aspects.¹⁹ Subjects of mystical experiences hold that the experience cannot be adequately expressed. To understand it, one must have experienced it oneself, much like having a particular feeling. This is what James calls a mystical experience's 'ineffability'. The second necessary component is its 'noetic quality', which

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵ Cf. Ibid., 334-9; cf. also Joseph Ratner in his introduction to James's *Varieties*, Ibid., vii.

¹⁶ Ibid., 334.

¹⁷ In this respect, James writes that "[a] survey of history shows us that, as a rule, religious geniuses attract disciples, and produce groups of sympathizers. When these groups get strong enough to 'organize' themselves, they become ecclesiastical institutions with corporate ambitions of their own. The spirit of politics and the lust of dogmatic rule are then apt to enter and to contaminate the originally innocent thing ... and to some persons the word 'church' suggests so much hypocrisy and tyranny and meanness and tenacity of superstition that in a wholesale undiscerning way they glory in saying that they are 'down' on religion altogether" (Ibid., 334-5). Cf. also James's claims about the heterodoxy of the "genuine first-hand religious experience" (Ibid., 337) and John Dewey's worries about the same in the first part of Dewey, *A Common Faith*.

¹⁸ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 379.

¹⁹ Cf. Ibid., 380-2.

points at their cognitive or intellectual aspects. Even though their content is hard to communicate, mystical experiences have intellectual qualities. The further two aspects that often go with mystical states of consciousness are their brevity and their passive nature, the latter of which denotes the fact that even though subjects can sometimes invoke mystical states of consciousness, once he or she has such a state it feels to the subject as if his or her “own will were in abeyance”.²⁰

James claims that his is first of all a *descriptive* analysis of the phenomenon of mystical religious experiences. In answering the question “what are the religious propensities?”,²¹ one seeks to answer what the nature is of something, how it came about, and what its constitution, origin, and history are.²² The various examples of religious and non-religious mystical states of consciousness that James addresses speak of the impression they have left on the subjects of their truth, and of the revelatory import that subjects cannot but ascribe to it. And James sees no reason, on beforehand, to question that this be so. It is from such a “purely existential point of view”²³ that James sets out to study the phenomena. This is in rather stark contrast with Putnam’s tendency to take religion as not directed at reality.

10.2.2 Truth and experience in mystical experiences without explicit religious weight

James starts out with a principally descriptive analysis of “some typical examples”²⁴ of mystical experiences that “claim no special religious significance”.²⁵ There are various degrees of mystical experiences of this kind. A first more ‘rudimentary’ such experience consists of having a “deepened sense of the significance of a maxim or formula”²⁶ swept over one. James then describes two kinds of mystical experience of a ‘dreamy state’, i.e. “sudden invasions of vaguely reminiscent consciousness”,²⁷ which we would call déjà-vu’s, and a feeling of finding oneself surrounded with meaning and truths, both of which form a second, more ‘pronounced’ class. A more radical kind

²⁰ Ibid., 381.

²¹ Ibid., 4.

²² Cf. Ibid., 4.

²³ Ibid., 6. ‘Existential’, here, pertains to the historical and physical facts, not to a religio-existential dimension.

²⁴ Ibid., 382.

²⁵ Ibid., 382.

²⁶ Ibid., 382.

²⁷ Ibid., 384.

of mystical experiences, for which subjects increasingly fail to find appropriate descriptions, include those in which the subject loses all senses of time and space, and self. James dismisses the idea that these states are necessarily pathological.²⁸ A further class that James turns to, and with which he claims to have some experience himself, is those experiences generated by intoxicating substances.

As to the content of these mystical experiences without explicit religious import, James notes that

[l]ooking back on my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposite of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. ... [I]t is a monistic insight, in which the *other* in its various forms appears absorbed into the One.²⁹

This conforms to James's findings on what others have reported about the content of their mystical experiences.³⁰ There is a sense of conflicts being settled, both in a metaphysical and in what one could call a moral sense. What, in a non-mystical state of consciousness, are deemed opposite aspects of reality is one and the same in these mystical states.³¹ Where good and bad are thought to be on equal footing in non-mystical states, mystical experiences reveal "the nobler and better"³² aspect of reality to soak up and absorb the less noble and inferior one.

On the basis of James's descriptions, we can conclude that James takes it as a matter of fact that mystical states of consciousness during which subjects have these experiences³³ can be induced by various means, such as

²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 384-386 for James's arguments against James Crichton-Browne's views on the same.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 388-9.

³⁰ Cf. e.g. *Ibid.*, 387.

³¹ Below, I return briefly to a discussion of the monism in this view as opposed to James's pluralism in other writings.

³² *Ibid.*, 388.

³³ James's use of consciousness, here, is close to that of having a particular mental state, which, I take it, in turn is necessarily connected to experience. Cf. Owen Flanagan, "Consciousness as a Pragmatist Views it," in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 25-48, esp. 29. Flanagan's is a noteworthy perspective on James's notion of consciousness, including the problems with seeming inconsistencies or changes of mind throughout James's intellectual career.

chloroform, nitrous oxide, anesthetics,³⁴ but also ‘a warm glow of light’.³⁵ Thus, he does not deny that these experiences may come about through abnormal physical circumstances. Yet, this does not persuade him to deny that the alternate experiences of reality themselves (e.g. experiences of being one with the Unseen) are real, and that the alternate aspects of reality experienced (e.g. a reality whose opposites have united) may be real. Let us turn to these two observations.

For the cognitive value of the mystical experience, James’s views imply, firstly, that the alternate experience of reality itself is real.³⁶ No matter how the experience has been triggered, it is nevertheless an experience. To James, as said, experiences have primacy over our philosophical deliberations, and thus also over our philosophical deliberations about what is to count as a real experience. James contends that we have no *a priori* reasons to dismiss the experience as a real experience just because it has been brought about through unconventional means. “[O]ur normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different”.³⁷ There is no reason for privileging, on beforehand, one sort of experience, e.g. the experience of the naturalistic kind, over another, such as the mystical experience. Although this does not imply that experiences can then function unimpeded as sufficient warrant for beliefs about reality, since our perceptions are corrigible and can therefore be flawed,³⁸ it does show that in

³⁴ Cf. the various ‘typical examples’ of mystical experience James gives in James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 382-8.

³⁵ Quote from J. Trevor, *Ibid.*, 397.

³⁶ It might seem that ‘the alternate experience of reality itself *can* be real’ would be more appropriate, here, than ‘*is* real’, since the former expression would allow for some experiences to be veridical and for others to be non-veridical, while the latter would take all experiences to be veridical. However, we should not forget that to James, as to Putnam, experiences are not incorrigible, which is true for experiences of the naturalistic kind as well as for mystical experiences (cf. *Ibid.*, 428). This means that experiences, though real, may be flawed. Thus, since an experience is real if it is an experience, and not only if it is a veridical experience, since, in other words, an experience is already a real experience if it is an experience, not only if it is a ‘true’ or unflawed experience, we should stick to the phrase that ‘the alternate experience of reality itself is real’.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 388. As said, I take it that where it says consciousness we can read ‘mental state of experience’.

³⁸ I come back to this below.

James's view a subject's perceptions should be taken at face value, i.e. as experiences with at least some cognitive import.

Secondly, the alternate aspects of reality that these mystical experiences suggest may be real. As there is no *a priori* reason for privileging experiences of the naturalistic kind over mystical experiences, just like the experiences themselves cannot be dismissed, the reality that the subjects experience cannot be written off *a priori* either, e.g. by reference to the manner in which it was perceived. "No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded".³⁹ James is aware, of course, of the diversity of mystical experiences, their inexpressibility, and their inconclusiveness. "How to regard them is the question, - for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map".⁴⁰ Until we have reasons to assume that the insights are flawed, we have no reasons to presume that the reality they induce is not real. These views on the cognitive value of religious experiences turns the rationalist's argument around, a finding to which we will turn shortly.

10.2.3 Truth and experience in mystical experiences with explicit religious weight

The continuum of mystical experiences stretches from those without religious pretensions to those that are said to have special religious significance. This latter group, instances of which James holds not to be uncommon, centers on those mystical states of consciousness that include a "sudden realization of the immediate presence of God".⁴¹ In between are mystical experiences of nature's and cosmic unifying reality. In my analysis of James's descriptions, I will focus on the perceptual and cognitive value that is attributed to these states of consciousness, i.e. on the question of whether and how these experiences are real and veridical, and if they can function in attaining true insights into (religious) reality.

Before turning to experiences that are placed, by their subjects, in particular religious traditions, James quotes a number of passages that speak of mystical experiences that seem to be triggered and fueled by the outdoors, and that have cosmic significance. James holds that these examples should at

³⁹ Ibid., 388.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 388.

⁴¹ Ibid., 393.

least convince his audience that there are mystical states of “an entirely specific quality”,⁴² and that these have a significant impact on those subject to them. The passages that he quotes speak, in one way or another, of the cognitive insights that these experiences generate, e.g. “I know ... that all the men ever born are also my brothers and the women my sisters and lovers”,⁴³ and “the spiritual life ... is a life whose experiences are proved real to their possessor”.⁴⁴ This connects to what it means for them to be of an ‘entirely specific quality’. In addressing this quality, James introduces, approvingly it seems, psychiatrist R.M. Bucke’s term ‘cosmic consciousness’, with which Bucke means to convey that subjects in these mental states are conscious “of the cosmos, of the life and order of the universe”.⁴⁵ The enlightenment, as Bucke calls it, is intellectual. It provides knowledge of the eternal scheme of things, and into the moral order of the universe.⁴⁶ Instead of addressing this supposed cognitive aspect of mystical experiences, James turns first to examples of religious experiences from particular religious traditions.

In James’s analyses of mystical experiences with religious pretensions, as he calls this group, issues of knowledge, reason, and intellect are again central, and he addresses them somewhat more explicitly here. In mentioning of the yoga traditions in India, he quotes the nineteenth century yoga theorist Swami Vivekananda who describes the state that the yogi can attain, called ‘samâdhi’, as providing cognitive insights that go beyond reason, as receptive to the ‘Truth’, especially about the state of ourselves in the universe.⁴⁷ James further contends that the Vedantic belief that one can judge whether someone has really attained samâdhi by the subject’s subsequent practices is similar to his views on judging religion’s value, since it is the empirical test that “its fruits must be good for life”.⁴⁸ According to James, Buddhists know this state of consciousness ‘samâdhi’ too, but they also take there to be higher states of consciousness, known as ‘dhyâna’. However, unlike in the case of samâdhi, higher states of dhyâna consciousness lose their intellectual aspect. Instead, “indifference, memory, and self-consciousness are perfected”.⁴⁹ About this James contends, however,

⁴² Ibid., 398.

⁴³ Quoting Walt Whitman, Ibid., 396.

⁴⁴ Quoting J. Trevor, Ibid., 397.

⁴⁵ Quoting R.M. Bucke, Ibid., 398.

⁴⁶ Cf. the lengthy quotations of R.M. Bucke’s in Ibid., 398-9.

⁴⁷ See Ibid., 400.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 401.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 401.

that in this higher state of consciousness memory and self-consciousness cannot be similar to the same faculties in non-mystical or lower mystical states, as in this latter state they *are* connected to intellect. I take it that he believes it is ‘doubtful’ what memory and self-consciousness come down to in the case of higher states of consciousness, because, in his view, these faculties are always tied up with the intellect, whereas there they are separated.

In James’s lengthy quote from al-Ghazālī’s autobiographical writings on the latter’s personal experiences with Sufi methods of mysticism, the issue of knowledge through mystical consciousness is central. Al-Ghazālī differentiates between, on the one hand, learning about, and having the actual experiences of being absorbed in God on the other. Since the experience goes beyond perception of forms and figures one cannot, without sin against God, i.e. without betraying the true reality that one has experienced, give an account of the experience the subject has had. Therefore, the learnings of Sufi can never yield to the non-mystic the insights that Sufi’s themselves have. It is this ‘incommunicableness’ of the insights of mysticism that James zooms in on. Though the mystical religious experiences themselves are instances of communication between a (higher) reality and the mystic, the mystic cannot fully communicate the insights gained through the experiences to the non-mystic.⁵⁰ James holds that, therefore, the insights based on mystical experiences are truths to the mystic, not the non-mystic, and that these insights are more similar to insights based on sensations than those based on conceptual thought.⁵¹ Just like sensations, one must have the mystical experiences oneself in order to understand them.

Both the sensory aspect of religious experiences and their cognitive import are basic to James’s description of particular Christian mystical practices.⁵² By making one ‘ideal thing’, such as an imaginary picture of Christ, fully occupy the mind through meditation, the mystic can detach him or herself from other, outer sensations. Mystical experiences, in these imagery cases, can be communicated to others. However, higher states of

⁵⁰ James does not discuss whether the mystic can communicate these insights to other mystics, but it could be that this is deemed equally impossible, since the reason why these insights are incommunicable is that one has to have had the experience oneself to understand the insights. Perhaps it is easier, however, for a mystic to communicate his or her insights gained through a mystical experience to another mystic, since both have had experiences of a relatively comparable nature.

⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 405, see also 380.

⁵² Cf. *Ibid.*, 406-13.

consciousness where all sensory aspects have gone, even the imaginary representations in the mind, are “insusceptible of any verbal description”.⁵³ James introduces Saint John of the Cross’s ‘dark contemplation’ as representative of what he takes to be the unanimity of mystical teachings on this ineffability. While the mystic receives knowledge in its most direct manner, translating it into language cannot do justice to the actual religious experience. Another lengthy quote of Saint Teresa’s *The Interior Castle* is to underline that for a mystic the truth of, and the truths transported by, the religious experience, such as God being in the mystic and the mystic in God, are at the same time incommunicable and undeniable.

As to the contents of the truths transported through both the sensory and the non-sensory experiences, James holds that these are various. They can be about this world, e.g. about nature, history, the future, meaning, etc. James holds, however, that “the most important revelations are theological or metaphysical”,⁵⁴ with which he means that they pertain to matter beyond the thisworldly order. While many may dismiss the insights generated by these religious experiences because of supposed pathological conditions of the mystics, James holds that only an inquiry into their fruits for life can tell us something about their value. Although James holds that mystical experiences have had much positive impact on the lives of many mystics, he also concedes that the positive impact would be misguided if the experiences themselves would be erroneous.⁵⁵ In an attempt to come to an answer to the question of whether mystical consciousness can establish the truth of religious convictions, James provides a generalization of the “outcome of the majority of them”.⁵⁶ James’s summaries⁵⁷ lead him to conclude that “the general traits of the mystic range of consciousness”⁵⁸ are pantheism, optimism, anti-naturalism, twice-bornness, and otherworldliness.⁵⁹ As the

⁵³ Ibid., 407.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 410.

⁵⁵ Here it seems that James has an ambiguous outlook on truth. On the one hand, he holds that whether something (an insight generated by the mystical experience) is true depends entirely on its fruits, while on the other, he allows truth to be independent of its fruits (the inspiration itself can be not true). I will return to the issue of whether truth does or does not depend entirely on the fruits it generates shortly.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 416.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 416-22.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 422.

⁵⁹ Three pages later, James takes back much of what he says here about the unanimity of mystical experiences. Cf. Ibid., 424-5.

content of these states is not of our concern here, I proceed to the question of whether and how these experiences are thought to be veridical.

James's general stance seems to be that "there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to make a critic stop and think".⁶⁰ James explores the *authority* of religious experiences to mystics, and its repercussions for critics. While those who do not have the experiences cannot be expected to see their veracity, the fact that those who have those experiences *do* see their veracity counters the critic's claim that only non-mystical experiences can be veridical.⁶¹ As mystical experiences are as much direct experiences of reality as many of our sensational experiences of reality are, and as the beliefs that the mystic holds on the basis of these experiences are therefore as 'rational' as ours are, the mystic is at least allowed to be convinced by these experiences, and to hold the beliefs that he or she has formed on the basis of them true. To James, however, this gives the mystic no right to presume that mystical experiences should have the same authority over those who have not had the experiences. Because these mystical experiences do not appeal to outsiders in the manner that they do to mystics, what they can justifiably evoke in the non-mystical mind is a 'presumption' concerning a possible worldview and possible truths. Furthermore, these experiences are only relatively commonly directed towards the earlier mentioned philosophical outlooks,⁶² but even if they were more unanimous this would not be a compelling reason to take them as authoritative. As they stem from a region of the mind that contains both the 'seraph and the snake', "[t]o come from thence is no infallible credential".⁶³ Just like we need to test

⁶⁰ Ibid., 419.

⁶¹ James holds that

- (1) Mystical states, when well developed, usually are, and have the right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come.
- (2) No authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically.
- (3) They break down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith (Ibid., 422-3).

⁶² As said, James takes back much of what he said earlier about the abundance of agreement among mystical experiences on Ibid., 424-5.

⁶³ Ibid., 426.

the experiences we have on the basis of our non-mystical senses in order to justifiably base beliefs on them, non-mystics have to test the mystical experiences by empirical method. James maintains, thus, that what his analysis has shown is that the non-mystical experience is just one manner of approaching the world, and that we cannot *a priori* dismiss mystical insights.

10.2.4 *Religious experiences and truth*

James thus insists on the potential veracity of religious experiences, and their cognitive import to those who have these experiences. On the other hand, he holds that the experiences themselves cannot be communicated fully with those who have not had them. What interests us here is not the content of the mystical experiences, such as whether the mystic consciousness is indeed pantheistic and optimistic, but what James takes to be the cognitive relevance of these experiences. It will then become apparent what James's presuppositions concerning perception and truth are with regard to religious experiences.

One of the most telling parts regarding the question basic to our investigation states that

[i]t must always remain an open question whether mystical states may not possibly be such superior points of view, windows through which the mind looks out upon a more extensive and inclusive world. The difference of the views seen from the different mystical windows need not prevent us from entertaining this supposition. The wider world would in that case prove to have a mixed constitution like that of this world, that is all. ... We should have to use its experiences by selecting and subordinating and substituting just as is our custom in this ordinary naturalistic world; we should be liable to error just as we are now; yet the counting in of that wider world of meanings, and the serious dealing with it, might, in spite of all the perplexity, be indispensable stages in our approach to the final fullness of the truth.⁶⁴

It would seem that, behind these words, there lives for James a hope that the world as a mystical, religious state of mind knows it may be just as adequate, or perhaps even *more* true to the whole of reality, than the non-mystical mind's understanding.⁶⁵ If this hope were what had to justify the idea that

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 428.

⁶⁵ It is clear that James was attentive to religious questions himself. See e.g. Suckiel, *Heaven's Champion: William James's Philosophy of Religion*, ch. 1, who argues that despite his ambivalence about being religious himself, James nevertheless took religion to be one of the most important aspects of life. Furthermore, James believed that being religious would help a person live a morally better life. See William James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral

the mystical state possibly has a more extensive and inclusive window to the world, then James's view would not be of use to the question of this chapter as to the potential transactional nature of religious experiences. His hope might have triggered James's stress on the possible superiority of this outlook, but what grounds his views on the indispensability of mystical experiences is the argument that mystical experiences possibly provide adequate or even superior access to the wider reality.⁶⁶ James's conclusion that in our aim to understand the complex universe we should take into account not only the non-mystical but also the mystical experiences, I believe, is based on 1) the contention that, even if their outcomes are more diverse than the paradigm experiences that the sciences use, we have no *a priori* reasons to exclude particular experiences from our inquiries, on 2) the belief that we can approach both these kinds of experiences in a fallibilistic manner, which allows us to in principle reject or accept certain upshots of particular (religious) experiences, on 3) the notion that what the (truth-)value of these experiences is should be tested in light of the wider experiences that we have, and on 4) the claim that for a full grasp of this world's complexities, it will be detrimental to limit one's studies to just one form of experience.

These views turn the rationalistic argument around. The rationalistic anti-religious argument holds that only those beliefs that are grounded in

Life," *International Journal of Ethics* 1, no. 3 (1891), 330-354. Cf. also Michael R. Slater, *William James on Ethics and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch. 3 and

⁶⁶ For reasons discussed above, James holds that whether one experience is superior to the other should always remain an open question. This does not mean that one should never opt to *act* upon the conclusions one draws on mystical rather than on natural experiences. That this may sometimes be necessary can be defended on the basis of James's argument in James, *The Will to Believe*. Very briefly put, James's argument there is that in certain situations, i.e. in the case of genuine options which are live and whose settling should and cannot be postponed, answering certain questions, i.e. questions for the answer to which no evidential support is available, requires a will to believe, i.e. a willingness to take a point of view without evidence for it (which in turn would give a person the right to a (religious) belief – hence James's statement, in *Pragmatism*, that he preferred to see the arguments as an argument for the *right* to believe; James, *Pragmatism*, 124; cf. Slater, *William James on Ethics and Faith*, 19). In case of those genuine options, for which we have no 'intellectual grounds' to decide, and for which non-mystical experiences provide no hypotheses or directions, it would be justified to choose to rely on the hypotheses or directions that one can draw from mystical experiences.

evidence are justified,⁶⁷ yet James's views imply that we have no *a priori* reasons to dismiss the possible insights that mystical experiences may generate. Rather, we should assess them, much like beliefs that we hold on ordinary experiences, by way of empirical tests: within the wider range of our experiences, how do these beliefs hold up? Furthermore, the rationalist take on what are to count as justified beliefs is too narrow to accommodate even our ordinary beliefs.⁶⁸ James also rejects rationalistic intellectualism in religion, which does not manage to take into account the human experiences of reality either. What comes first, James holds, is human feeling, be it towards the sensational part of reality or the non-sensational, religious aspects. The rationalistic arguments about the existence of a particular divine entity cannot do justice to this. Religious beliefs are not based on these rational arguments, but on subconscious, non-rational aspects of our mind's thinking.⁶⁹

From James's descriptions of religious experiences and their cognitive impetus, an ambiguous perspective on truth emerges.⁷⁰ On the one hand, truth is connected to what is of most value. Not only do James's descriptions breathe the supposition that we should take religious experiences seriously because so many people have deemed them so valuable to their lives, James also explicitly mentions the 'utility' of religion.⁷¹ On the other hand, however, James's notion of truth, here, is bound to the results and adequacy of our cognitive practices. Within this latter notion of truth, at times what is stressed is the more pragmatist notion, of empirically testing the religious experiences by looking at the fruits that they bear. At other times a more realist notion of truth as correspondence with reality is basic, e.g. where the

⁶⁷ Of course, what these evidential grounds come down to varies among rationalists. Cf. William K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief [1877]," in *The Ethics of Belief Debate*, ed. Gerald McCarthy (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 19-36, of which William James's *The Will to Believe* is meant as a firm rebuttal, for one influential, rationalist stance.

⁶⁸ Cf. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 73. See Suckiel, *Heaven's Champion: William James's Philosophy of Religion*, esp. ch. 1, for James's struggle against intellectualism in a largely scientific environment.

⁶⁹ Cf. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 73-4. See Hunter Brown, *William James on Radical Empiricism and Religion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), esp. ch. 1, for an account of James's endeavor to bring in subjectivity in epistemology.

⁷⁰ See Henry Samuel Levinson, *The Religious Investigations of William James* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), esp. 220-30, for a discussion of the meanings of the term truth in James's days and ours.

⁷¹ Cf. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 377-505-7.

truth-value of beliefs in absence of evidential support is discussed.⁷² In both cases, however, it applies not only to naturalistic issues but also to religious ones. As James holds that religious experiences are experiences of reality, furthermore, their truth-value consists in an interaction of the propositions with reality.

As we have seen, however, although truth is applicable to the issue of religious experiences, this does not imply that these experiences, and the beliefs they generate, are necessarily communicable. Whereas, in the case of beliefs generated by communally accessible aspects of reality these can be authoritative for those who have not had the same experiences, the private experiences of the mystic do not allow for such weight. The truth of religious propositions based on these private experiences thus cannot be evaluated in a manner comparable to the truth of propositions based on publicly accessible experiences. It is this aspect of truth and experience in religious experiences that we need to square with the pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of propositions.

10.3 Truth and experience in *The Varieties*, and the truth-value of religious experiences in pragmatic pluralism

In order to establish whether James's views on the cognitive value of religious experience can be used to draw up the Putnam-inspired pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious experiences, I address whether and how James's views on the role of truth in religious experience square with the pragmatic pluralist perspective on the same that we drew up in the Part II.

10.3.1 Squaring religion in The Varieties with pragmatic pluralism: truth

As we saw, the analysis of James's views on religious experiences shows that in his view veridical religious experiences are experiences of reality, which have cognitive import. Because of their interactional relation with reality, religious propositions that go back onto religious experiences therefore potentially have truth-value. While this is in line with the pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth that we analyzed in Chapter 6, there also is a potential

⁷² Cf. Suckiel, *Heaven's Champion: William James's Philosophy of Religion*, ch. 5, for a discussion of what is often thought to be an ambiguous notion of truth in James's works, amongst which *The Varieties*.

problematic aspect of James's views on the cognitive value of religious experiences, viz. his contention that religious experiences are ineffable. Other than in the case of experience, to which I turn below, Putnam rejects important aspects of James's notion of truth, even if he reads James carefully, and therefore uncovers a more nuanced view of James on truth than others have ascribed to him (namely that 'truth is what works').⁷³

In James's view, religious experiences are essentially ineffable in the sense that the individual who has the experience cannot communicate the experience fully to another person. Contrary to non-religious experiences, there thus is a solipsistic quality to religious experiences. The question is what the consequences are for the truth-value of religious propositions if they are based on these ineffable experiences. From the analysis above it shows that religious experiences cannot function in the same manner as non-religious experiences can in showing the truth-value of the propositions based on them, since religious experiences are mostly individual affairs and since their full extent cannot be explicated to those who have not had them. To James, then, religious experiences are ultimately private or solipsist events, since they cannot be communicated to others. If that is the case, then the question is whether the religious propositions based on them are also ineffable.

As we saw in Chapter 6, pragmatic pluralism takes truth to be a formal, plural notion rather than a substantial one, which means that there is no (single) property that can be ascribed to every true proposition. Instead of gaining the property of truth, propositions already have or do not have it, because of the interactional relation of these propositions with reality. What makes this a plural notion is that what this interaction consists of depends

⁷³ Cf. Richard A. Hertz, "James and Moore: Two Perspectives on Truth," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (1971), 213. Putnam's pragmatic pluralism conflicts e.g. with James's notion that concepts acquire meaning through external relations rather than having meaning through their intrinsic relation with that to which they refer (Putnam's semantic externalism that we discussed in Chapters 5 and 6). Putnam regrets that James was not as radical with regard to the interface notion of conception as he was with rejecting the interface notion of perception. See Hilary Putnam, "James's Theory of Truth," in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 166-185; see also Hilary Putnam, "James on Truth (again)," in *William James and "The Varieties of Religious Experience": A Centenary Celebration.*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (London: Routledge, 2005), 172-182, and David C. Lamberth, "James and the Question of Truth: A Response to Hilary Putnam," in *William James and "The Varieties of Religious Experience": A Centenary Celebration.*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (London: Routledge, 2005), 221-234.

on the various practices that make up human reality. In this picture, the conceptual abilities that we have concerning a particular discourse are interdependent on the particular practical abilities that we have within that field. As we saw, “[w]e learn what mathematical truth is by learning the practices and standards of mathematics itself, including the practice of *applying* mathematics”.⁷⁴ But it works the other way around as well, in that we learn how to work within such a field by learning what the concepts (such as simplicity and coherence) amount to. Mathematical assertions are exemplary of how true propositions are propositions that are in accordance with reality without their objectivity depending on the correspondence to supposed objects. As a true proposition is true because of a specific interaction of a person’s conceptual abilities and reality, pragmatic pluralism implies that it is possible to communicate the proposition and its truth-value. In this picture, truth is essentially non-solipsistic since it consists of an interactional relation of a proposition with particular aspects of reality, a relation which depends on our linguistic and other practices, which in turn depend on a community.

When turning to the contention that religious experiences are ineffable, then, what does it say about the notion of truth if the religious experiences can be true while at the same time incommunicable? If the belief that an experience has generated is true if, in one way or another, it is in accordance with reality,⁷⁵ then this would imply that even though the mystic has in an extraordinary manner seen how and why this belief is indeed in accordance with reality, then it should from a pragmatic pluralist perspective in principle be possible for a non-mystic to come to see this truth also, provided that the aspects of reality accessible to the mystic are not *categorically* different from those accessible to the non-mystic.⁷⁶ This coheres with James’s notion that the fruits of the religious experiences, among which are the religious propositions people hold on the basis of them, can be evaluated in a fallibilistic manner, namely in ‘the laboratory of life’. Thus, the ineffability of the experiences has no detrimental consequences for the truth-value of the propositions. Rather, the reality of religious

⁷⁴ Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 66.

⁷⁵ Cf. Putnam, *James’s Theory of Truth*, 166-185; Putnam, *James on Truth (again)*, 172-182; and Suckiel, *Heaven’s Champion: William James’s Philosophy of Religion*, esp. ch. 5, for a discussion of James’s realist tendencies in his notion of truth.

⁷⁶ Perhaps a non-mystic can gradually close in on those aspects of reality that the mystic has encountered instantly. The non-mystic would close in on them not from an extraordinary experience but by discarding those beliefs that after testing them have proved inadequate.

experiences, even if ineffable, impairs the reductionist contention that only non-religious experiences could have cognitive value.

I take it that James implied that the experience itself is ineffable while the propositions held on the basis of them can in principle be communicated. Although we should conclude that in James's view religious experiences are ineffable, in a pragmatic pluralist perspective true religious *propositions* based on them *are* in principle effable. As the ineffability of religious experiences thus need not conflict with the communicability of religious propositions, James's views on the cognitive value of religious experiences fit the pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth as an interactional notion.

10.3.2 *Squaring religion in The Varieties with pragmatic pluralism: experience*

James's notion of religious experience may thus be individualistic or even ultimately solipsistic in the sense that religious experiences are thought to occur to individual mystics, not to groups of mystics, and that they cannot be communicated fully to others. Nevertheless, the propositions based on these experiences can in principle be communicated. The question with regard to the religious experiences themselves, however, is whether the perspective on experience in *The Varieties* coheres with the pragmatic pluralist perspective on experience. In Chapter 5 and 7 we established that in the pragmatic pluralist perspective, experience consists of a transaction between an individual and his or her surroundings. We saw that for his views on experience Putnam relies strongly on a number of significant features of James's thinking, such as the views that experience is direct, and that it is conceptualized. This explains why there is more agreement between James's notion of (religious) experience and the pragmatic pluralist view on experience.

For the pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, James's view on the notion of experience or perception with respect to religious experiences implies the following. It has made it plausible that there is no *a priori* reason to dismiss religious aspects of reality, or, for that matter, to refute experiences of religious aspects of reality. These experiences may be as real as any other experience of natural aspects of reality. Furthermore, just like the latter kind of experiences may be improved and corrected, religious experiences can in principle be amended. Both should count as key features of a pragmatic pluralist perspective on religious claims, as it links up closely with Putnam's rebuttal of representationalist

notions of perception, and with Putnam's endorsement of experience as a transactional notion.

This accords well with pragmatic pluralism's take on experience as direct but corrigible. Whether an experience is 'real' depends not on whether it is true. Whether these experiences give the subjects real insights in the aspects of reality is connected to those insights being true. These two aspects of James's notion of experience, i.e. his notion of experience as in principle real, but not necessarily veridical, and his corresponding unwillingness to limit experiences, on beforehand, to only the non-mystical, naturalistic experiences, are vital for drawing up the pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions.

10.4 Concluding notes: The cognitive value of religious experiences

Instead of having argued about James's position regarding truth and experience on the basis of an analysis of his explicit writings on the subject, I sought to take James's insistence on the practical relevance of one's perspective on truth and his belief that experience and feeling should be the primary source of (religious) knowledge seriously by showing what his notions of truth and experience amount to in the more practical issue of the abundance of religious experiences. As such, this has allowed us to reflect on what the role of religion, and religious experience in particular, may consist in when it comes to a pragmatic pluralist view on the truth-value of religious propositions.⁷⁷

Congruent with the pragmatic pluralist perspective on experience that I analyzed in Part II, James's perspective on religious experience as it emerges from *The Varieties* is that these are potentially transactions between the experiencing individual and reality. James shows that we have no *a priori* reasons for discarding religious experiences as hallucinatory or non-veridical. In taking these experiences at face-value, i.e. in approaching them in a manner that one would generally approach any experience, James explores their potential cognitive value. We can conclude that as transactions between knowing subject and reality, religious experiences can aid in establishing the truth-value of religious propositions.

⁷⁷ It has also given us insights into James's views in epistemology and philosophy of perception from an unusual angle, i.e. not from his explicit theorizing on the same but from the more practical engagements with the issue of religious experiences.

11.

Pragmatic pluralism on the truth-value of propositions revisited

The argument of this study has conclusions on two levels, the central one of which is an alternative, pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, as laid out in Chapter 12. Before turning to that conclusion, however, this penultimate chapter has to deal with the conclusion on a more theoretical philosophical level. It sets forth a revised Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on issues basic to the notion of truth-value, namely on the notions of truth and experience. On the basis of the findings of the previous chapters, I bring together two strings that as we saw are already present in Putnam's pragmatic pluralism but which are not integrated fully. These are a Wittgenstein-inspired belief in the plurality of notions of rationality in various language games or practices, and a more Jamesian, 'naïve realist' stress on the transactional nature and cognitivity of (perceptual) experience. Because they are not integrated to their fullest extent, Putnam's notion of truth-value, as we saw in Chapter 8, runs the risk of cultural relativism and reductionist naturalism. In this chapter I show that these risks can be evaded if we take all experience as transactional, rather than, on beforehand, excluding some experiences as non-veridical.

In the synthesized notion of truth-value that I work out in this chapter, truth can have a plurality of not to be conflated connotations, which nevertheless all depend on an interaction of conceptual abilities and reality. While truth is not a substantial notion in the sense that a proposition would gain the property by virtue of a single, specific relation between the proposition, the speaker, and the world, there are important resemblances between the functions that the notion of truth-value has in various contexts. Furthermore, an important feature of the pragmatic pluralist notion of truth is that truth remains a normative notion. Contrary to metaphysical realism and antirealism, therefore, that would have the truth-value of propositions to reside in a pre-set, practice-independent relation between proposition and reality, and contrary to those deflationists who reject the idea that truth amounts to anything more than a confirmation of an already established equivalence relation, the pragmatic pluralist perspective on propositions is that their truth-value denotes a practice-dependent interaction between proposition and reality that sets true propositions apart from false ones.

In the next, concluding chapter, I show how this notion of truth-value provides an alternative for the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on

religious propositions. I work out various aspects of the pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth-value on the basis of examples of religious propositions. It is because of the direct realist contention that our experiences are in principle cognitive and the semantic externalist notion that our words have their meaning by virtue of that to which they refer that communication between people standing in various practices is not in principle impossible. Other than in Putnam's own perspective on truth-value in morality and religion, this leads to the view that seeing the truth-value of particular (moral and religious) propositions is not limited to those within a particular practice. The argument is that, as true propositions depend on interactions of concepts with reality, which in turn depend on experiences, i.e. transactions of individuals with their surroundings, propositions and their truth-value are in principle accessible for those outside a practice.

11.1 Revisiting pragmatic pluralism on the truth-value of propositions

The Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of propositions allows for a plurality of true propositions not only because (ontologically speaking) it allows for reality to be made up of a plurality of aspects (not only natural scientific, but also logical, moral, aesthetical, religious, etc.), one not reducible to the other, but also because (semantically speaking) truth is a plural notion, in the sense that what it amounts to depends on the practice of which the propositions are part. Whereas Putnam's pragmatic pluralism theoretically allows for this in all fields of reasoning, I showed that his practical viewpoints on moral and religious propositions amount to the view that ultimately their truth-value is limited to the specific practice. In Chapter 10, I analyzed James's notion of religious experience as potentially veridical, and as potentially having cognitive import. On the basis of those elaborations, I can now revisit Putnam's theoretical viewpoints on the notion of truth-value.

One aspect of Putnam's views on these matters is that one should be capable of applying the various conceptual relations and perceptual abilities that are part of particular practices in order to see why a particular proposition may be true. This notion of truth-value as having a face, a face that one can discern when being part of a particular practice that I analyzed in Chapter 8, stands firm. One needs to be part of a moral or religious life in order to see why a particular proposition in those practices is true or false. By undercutting the antinomy of realism, i.e. the idea of there being an interface

between the knowing subject and the subject's environment, Putnam's pragmatic pluralism manages to explain how propositions in various practices can have truth-value in various manners while the notion of truth retains its normative connotation.

I also argued in Chapter 8, however, that Putnam seems to refrain from making the final step needed to undercut the antinomy of realism when he implicitly holds that at least with regard to some practices the truth-value of propositions ultimately does not hinge on reality, but on what are the shared beliefs of people in a particular practice. I argued that in saying that if one is not already part of a moral life one cannot come to see the truth of a moral proposition, and that in saying that one can choose to speak religiously or not, Putnam implicitly holds that propositions that are part of moral and religious practices are ultimately not true because of an interaction with reality. I showed that if they were, then it would in principle be possible to get someone who currently does not see the truth-value of a particular religious proposition to come to see the truth-value by gradually coming to stand inside a religious practice, by making one's concepts interact with reality. With regard to morality, and even more so in the case of religion, Putnam seems to hold on to a view that excludes the notions of truth-value in these practices to be a full-blown interaction of conceptual abilities and reality.

If the truth-value of propositions has a face, as I argued in Chapter 8, one would expect it not only to be immediately recognizable as such by those within the practice of which the propositions are part (i.e. without need of bridging an interface), but one would also expect it to co-depend on reality. In Chapter 8, in other words, I worked out the question whether the face of truth-value implied that the truth-value of propositions is necessarily context-sensitive (or concept-dependent) but also necessarily hinges on the way the world is. I showed that Putnam was ambivalent about this latter aspect. In Chapter 9, I deepened this issue by showing that Putnam's perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions seems to opt for the possibility that their truth-value is an intra-conceptual affair, rather than an issue that ultimately depends on reality.

On the basis of James's notion that even religious experiences are transactions between ourselves and our environment, we can see that one way of becoming part of a religious life is by reasonable arguments, based on experiences that are potentially cognitive, and that one way of coming to see the truth of a religious proposition is by (long and arduous but nevertheless) reasonable arguments. If person A wants to show person B that proposition p

is true, A has to take B along in showing how A's concepts interact with reality, and vice versa. In that sense, coming to see why p is true is comparable to coming to see the meaning of a word in a language that one does not speak. One has to follow the argument, and thus slowly become part of the practice (or the language), which gradually gives one an understanding of the proposition's truth.¹

In showing the truth of p, A can rely on reasonable arguments because the practice as a whole, and p as a part of it, depends for its meaning and truth on reality. Assuming that A and B live in the same reality, arguing reasonably about the meaning of p, like one would about the meaning of a foreign word, should enable B to come to see what A means. We need not be skeptics about the possibility of mutual understanding, since meaning is not in the head, but depends on an interaction of concept and reality. In essence, reason should be conceived of as incorporating such things as gradually showing another person the truth of a proposition by bringing that person into the practice of which the proposition is part. This is possible not only in the field of quantum mechanics or mathematics, but also in morality and religion, since, ultimately, all these practices depend on reality.

On the basis of my analysis of James's notion of the truth-value of religious experiences, I would therefore amend Putnam's view that one would not be able to convince someone who stands outside a moral life of the truth of one's moral proposition with reason alone.² On the basis of the argument that if we take religious experiences as potentially veridical experiences with cognitive value, religious propositions are not a-rational, as we saw Putnam would have it, but are in principle rational, as they may too stand in an interactional relation with reality. Reason alone, conceived of as incorporating transactions of subjects with their (religious) environment, *can be* enough in bringing someone into a religious life.

Where Putnam accentuates the separateness of the various practices with their own conceptual relations and experiential abilities,³ in order to

¹ Just like one can come to speak (to a certain level) a foreign language by learning the rules of that language, one can come to understand a moral practice by learning the rules that apply. Perhaps the level of understanding is not as high as when one has actually lived in a community that lives according to the moral practice, but it will arguably be sufficient to come to see why a particular proposition is justified. If a person has not been socialized with a particular moral view, moreover, it is probably most fruitful if that person is taught the rules before joining the community in question.

² E.g. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 29-30. Also see 6.4 and 9.4.

³ E.g. Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, 234, ch. 7. Also see 9.3.

evade conflating the various notions of truth and experience in a way that metaphysical realist and antirealist perspectives do, I would contend that separation should not result in a dichotomy. Whereas we should indeed not conflate the notions of truth-value of the various practices, we should not separate them strongly either, as they are all ultimately based on an interaction with reality. Propositions can be true or false in a variety of ways, depending on the practice of which they are part, but the notion of truth-value retains its normative import because of its connection with reality, i.e. with a source that transcends recognition.

This amendment of Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on the notion of truth-value is largely congruous with Frederick Stoutland's view, which we came across in Chapter 6, namely that Putnam's notion of truth adheres to what Stoutland calls 'the Equivalence Principle', which merely says that a proposition "is true just in case it says what is really the case".⁴ Since, as we have seen, pragmatic pluralism holds that truth is not a substantive property that alone would make a proposition true but a property that varies from practice to practice, Stoutland calls Putnam's notion of truth a proper 'deflationist notion of truth'.⁵ Putnam's notion of truth deflates, or disinflates, the correspondence theory's notion of truth as a singular, substantive notion, and holds that whether propositions are true or false depends on the specific practice. What the equivalence consists of, in other words, depends on the practice of which a proposition is part.

Stoutland's analysis, as we saw in Chapter 6, makes a valuable contribution to understanding Putnam's views on truth. My re-examination of Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth-value extends Stoutland's analysis of Putnam's notion of truth in the sense that my re-examination addresses the plurality of ways in which propositions may be true, and whether and how in those various practices propositions can indeed be true. My analysis, in other words, picks up Stoutland's notion of the deflationist equivalence principle, and shows how, in the various practices, the equivalence of true propositions depends on an interaction of conceptual and practical abilities that may be unique to the practice in questions. Furthermore, it works out what Stoutland hints at, namely how truth and experience are interrelated.⁶ It explains why it is a crucial aspect of Putnam's theory that what counts for the notion of truth counts for

⁴ Stoutland, *Putnam on Truth*, 148.

⁵ See *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 174-5.

perception as well, namely that we should reject an interface notion of the relation between propositions and reality as well as between experiences and reality.

11.2 Revisiting the risks of relativism and reductionism

My analysis and re-examination of Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth-value shows why it is that truth and experience are indeed interconnected in the manner suggested. On the basis of James's argument that even religious experiences can be transactional, we can conclude that if the truth-value of propositions indeed hinges on an interaction of conceptual and practical abilities, the truth-value of propositions within particular practices is in principle accessible to those outside the practice, even if it requires them to gradually become part of the practice in question. As I argued above, becoming part of the practice in question is possible in a manner comparable to becoming fluent in a particular language. Just like the meaning and truth of propositions depends on interaction, so becoming part of a practice depends, and learning to see and experience things according to the conceptual and perceptual schemes of the practice in question, depends on an interaction with reality. As such, the revisited pragmatic pluralist perspective manages to settle the worries about cultural relativism and reductionist naturalism.

11.2.1 Revisiting the problem of cultural relativism

In Chapter 8, I concluded that Putnam's pragmatic pluralism runs the risk of cultural relativism because of the fact that in Putnam's view the truth-value of propositions within practices such as morality and religion ultimately did not depend on reality. In stressing Putnam's Jamesian notion of the transactionality of (religious) experience I argue that, according to an amended Putnamian pragmatic pluralism, (religious) propositions do have truth-value and that their truth-value does ultimately depend on reality. On the basis of that contention, I now turn to the question whether pragmatic pluralism does or does not ultimately endorse a cultural relativist perspective, and I elaborate on the implications for religious propositions in the next chapter.

In evading a cultural relativist perspective on truth-value, as Putnam's pragmatic pluralism intends, it is pivotal that the truth of propositions ultimately hinges on reality. Of course, as said, the pragmatic pluralist

perspective differs from the metaphysical realist in the sense that it does not take there to be a singular, substantial notion of truth. In that sense, pragmatic pluralism takes truth-value to co-depend on reality and on the conceptual abilities that we have. If, however, the truth-value is *ultimately* dependent on reality, then cultural relativism is evaded. In order to see how this is the case, we have to understand that the fact that one and the same proposition can be true in e.g. a religio-existential practice while false in a natural scientific practice does not attest to cultural relativism but to pluralism.

A meaningful (religious) proposition can only either be true or false, but the meaning of what seems to be the same proposition may differ from (religious) practice to (religious) practice. If, within a conservative Protestant religious practice, the proposition 'God loves his people' is true, and if, within a conservative Muslim religious practice, that proposition has the same meaning, then it is necessarily also true. If, however, in the Protestant practice 'his people' denotes conservative Protestants (and perhaps some other Christians), while in the Muslim practice 'his people' denotes all people, then the proposition in the one practice is discontinuous with the proposition in the other. In such a case, the proposition might be true in the Protestant while false in the Muslim practice, or vice versa, or true or false in both.

Though it depends on the practice of which a proposition is part whether it is true or false, this does not imply that every religious proposition can be true. This has to do with Putnam's pragmatic pluralist notion that the truth-value of a proposition can be conventional relative to one but factual relative to another proposition.⁷ While Putnam holds that this applies to empirical propositions, it may equally be thought to apply to religious propositions for three interrelated reasons: there is no dichotomy of conceptual and empirical propositions, religious propositions have aspects of both conceptual and empirical propositions, and, as we saw in the previous chapter, religious experiences can function in seeing the truth-value of religious propositions in a way similar to how perceptions can for empirical propositions.

In thus consistently applying the pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth and experience to the question of the truth-value of propositions, we can see that propositions can have truth-value because they ultimately depend on interactions with reality. Though this interaction leaves room for

⁷ Cf. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 45. See also 6.1.2 and 7.4 above.

a plurality of propositions that are conventional relative to one another, it also allows for these propositions to be factual relative to reality. Paraphrasing Putnam, we can put it as follows. Within a particular religious practice, saying that ‘Adam and Eve were the first human beings’ may be a matter of fact, as opposed to saying that ‘Kain and Abel were the first human beings’. Either the one or the other, or neither, is true within that practice, but not both. Similarly, if we understand the proposition as making a natural scientific claim, then within a natural scientific practice, also, the proposition ‘the first human beings evolved from other primates’ is a matter of fact as opposed to the proposition that ‘Adam and Eve were the first human beings’. If we understand the latter proposition as part of a religious practice and the former as part of a natural scientific practice, then one is conventional relative to the other.⁸ If this is possible for religious propositions, then *a fortiori* propositions in other practices can have truth-value as they are tied to reality too. Thus, cultural relativism can indeed be evaded.

11.2.2 Revisiting the problem of reductionist naturalism

At the end of Part II, I established that a second, central risk that potentially affects Putnam’s theory is that it implicitly takes a reductionist naturalist perspective as basic. With the risk of cultural relativism, this would imply a second way in which Putnam’s theory would potentially fail to settle the antinomy of realism. In Chapter 10, I showed that, according to James’s views, religious experiences *can* be transactions between individual and environment and that they can be cognitive. Thus, in applying Putnam’s theoretical pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth and experience to religious propositions, I can settle the question about the risk of reductionist naturalism.

As I showed in 8.3 and 8.4, Putnam’s viewpoints on the unfeasibility of arguing for the truth of moral propositions on the basis of reason alone raised the question whether Putnam’s pragmatic pluralist perspective on experience ultimately was that not all human experiences are in principle allowed to be veridical or to have cognitive import. In 9.5 I showed, furthermore, that if religious and moral propositions are indeed a-rational in this sense, it is implied that those experiences of religious and moral aspects of reality would not be actual experiences in the sense of transactions between the subjects and their surroundings.

⁸ I elaborate on this in Chapter 12 extensively, e.g. in 12.3.

As said, an explanation for such a view could reside in a remnant of a metaphysical realist notion of reality as consisting of physical objects, not of other aspects of human reality. In this view, paradigmatic objects such as chairs, bicycles, and lamps *have* reality while such matters as norms, laws, and rules do not.⁹ On the basis of the analysis of James's notion the cognitivism of religious experiences in Chapter 10, I would argue that religious experiences *can*, at least in principle, be veridical, and *can* have cognitive import. As such, we can see how Putnam's pragmatic pluralism can let go of any remainders of reductionist naturalism. This would be congruent with the presuppositions of Putnam's pragmatic pluralism itself, as it rejects the view that we can *a priori* decide which aspects of reality are real and which are not.

In Chapter 10, we saw that, other than Putnam, William James explicitly explored the possibility of dealing with religious experiences in a manner similar to experiences of paradigmatically empirical objects. As I will argue in the next chapter, therefore, religious experiences can be direct, conceptualized experiences in a manner similar to how experiences of dry, middle-sized objects can be, and that we can approach the same situation with different experiential schemes leading to different experiences. I would argue that as these experiences are transactions in which conceptual abilities and experiential data are fused, they are cognitive experiences. This is congruent with Putnam's pragmatist beliefs that reality consists of more than what we can study with the physical sciences.

Thus, not only with regard to physical aspects of reality can there be transactions between an individual and reality but also with regard to moral and religious aspects. Since an individual can in principle come to have experiences of moral and religious aspects of reality, namely by coming to have particular conceptual and perceptual abilities through a transactional relation with reality, not only those who stand within a moral or religious practice can see the truth-value of their propositions, but those presently outside them can come to do so as well. There is thus no *a priori* reason for taking particular experiences to be exceptions in this regard. Only *a posteriori*, i.e. after thorough reflections on it with the conceptual and practical abilities that we have, should we perhaps have to conclude that some experiences, like experiences of ghosts or of Hamlet, are fictional experiences. Recognizing this, any risk of reductionist naturalism is evaded.

⁹ Cf. 5.2.

11.3 Concluding notes: Both interaction and transaction fully adopted

On the basis of James's notion of the cognitive value of religious experiences, and *pace* Putnam's more Wittgensteinian views on the discrepancy of the truth-value of religious and non-religious propositions, I revisited the pragmatic pluralist perspective on the role of truth and experience in the truth-value of propositions in general. I argued why we need to, and can, let go of the idea that in some practices truth is and in some truth is *not* a fully interactional notion, and of the notion that in some practices experience is and in some experience is *not* a fully transactional affair. If amended in this manner, pragmatic pluralism provides a perspective on the truth-value of propositions that finalizes undercutting the antinomy of realism, and that can serve as a basis for a religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions that evades the problematic aspects of religious realism and antirealism.

The results of this study regarding the Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth-value ask for further expansion, e.g. with regard to the various ways in which the truth-value of propositions consist of interactions of the conceptual and practical abilities that people have in particular practices, as well as the ways in which these may in turn depend on transactions between people within that practice and their surroundings. It is the more empirical question of how, in the various practices, truth-value, conceptual and practical abilities, and practice relate. In the next chapter, I show how in religious practices there can be a variety of interactions and transactions. Other practices, we can assume, have a similar plurality of ways in which something is true and in which something is an experience. Having revealed important aspects of the theoretical background of the various ways in which propositions can have truth-value, we can study how in various practices propositions are deemed true or false without being hindered by the presumption that that truth-value has to conform, somehow, to a practice-independent norm.

12. Conclusion: Religious pragmatic pluralism on the truth-value of religious propositions

This chapter draws up a Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions. With the previous chapter it brings together the two strands of my argument. In the previous chapter, I concluded the argument that there is a discrepancy between Putnam's theoretical pragmatic pluralist notions of truth and experience and his more practical viewpoints on the truth-value of (moral) propositions (as analyzed in Part II) by showing how this discrepancy can be overcome. I give the second, main argument, namely for an answer for the question about the truth-value of religious propositions, in this concluding chapter. This argument started with an assessment of religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions as problematic because of their notions of truth and experience (in Part I), turned to Putnam's alternative pragmatic pluralist notions of truth and experience (in Part II), and then argued that in Putnam's pragmatic pluralist perspective we should emphasize the Jamesian notion of the transactional nature of (religious) experience (in Part III). The argument now comes to a close in a Putnam-inspired religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions.

Within a Putnamian pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth and experience, I synthesize Putnam's Wittgensteinian contention about *the a-rationality of religious belief* and James's insistence on *the potential cognitive value of religious experiences*. Putnam stresses the idea that notions of truth, rationality, and truth-value in non-religious practices are incomparable with the way similar notions function in religious contexts. From this perspective I salvage the notion that religious reasoning should not be conflated with other forms of reasoning. Putnam also proceeds from the contention, however, that religious practices deal with ideals rather than with reality (though he acknowledges that ideals can have a fair amount of reality to them), which implies that the truth-value of religious propositions cannot depend on an interaction of religious (aspects of) reality and our practical and intellectual abilities similar to in the case of non-religious propositions.

To this Wittgenstein-inspired perspective, therefore, I add an emphasis on the James-inspired notion of non-reductionist naturalism,

which Putnam accepts,¹ which is based partly in the Jamesian naïve realist notion that (real) experiences are *ab initio* cognitive and interpretative.² In accordance with this naïve realism, Putnam developed the notion of experience being transactional, i.e. as consisting of transactions between ourselves and reality.³ In the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective that I develop, we cannot categorically or on beforehand reject the potential veracity of particular experiences. This perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions is in line with Putnam's theoretical views on truth and experience but contrasts quite remarkably with his practical views on the truth-value of moral and religious propositions.⁴ While basic notions, such as truth, experience, rationality, and truth-value, have their own meaning and use in the various practices, such as the natural sciences, mathematics, morality, and religion, the truth-value of religious propositions is seen as in principle comparable to truth-value in other practices, viz. as a notion that depends on the interaction between conceptual abilities and reality, as well as on transactions between ourselves and our (religious) environment.

12.1 The religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth

In drawing up a pragmatic pluralist alternative to the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the notions of truth and experience with regard to the truth-value of religious propositions, I turn to the first of two problematic aspects of religious realist and antirealist perspectives on religious propositions that we discerned in Part I, viz. the notion and role of truth. In what follows, I summarize the problematic aspects of the notion and role of truth in religious realist and antirealist perspectives on religious propositions, and provide a pragmatic pluralist rejoinder on the basis of the findings in Part II and III.

12.1.1 Religious realism and antirealism on religious propositions and truth

In Part I, I established that with regard to the question of the truth-value of religious propositions, religious realism amounts to the view that these are

¹ See e.g. Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein*, 5-6.

² See Chapter 7. See also Putnam, *Philosophy in an Age of Science: Physics, Mathematics and Skepticism*, 624-39, and Putnam, *Sensation and Apperception*, 39-50.

³ See Chapter 7.

⁴ As analyzed in Chapter 9.

true if (and only if) they correspond uniquely to religious (aspects of) reality in a manner comparable to how paradigmatic natural scientific propositions are true because of a correspondence with discernible objects. In this view, religious truth can consist solely of a unique correspondence of religious concepts and propositions with (discernible or indiscernible) religious objects and states of affairs. In religious antirealism, whether something is true depends solely on whether a relevant group or individual takes it as verified. It amounts to the view that a particular person's, say A's, religious propositions are true if and only if A's relevant peers implicitly or explicitly consent with A's propositions.

A problematic aspect of the religious realist perspective is that the singular, substantive correspondence notion of truth makes it impossible to achieve the goal of objectivity. For, as I argued in Part I, showing that the religious propositions correspond with reality, in this manner, would require access both to the reality-independent meaning of the religious proposition and to the language-independent understanding of reality. This, Putnam has shown, is problematic since the meaning of our propositions depends in part on reality, and our understanding of reality depends in part on our language. The strong correspondence theory of truth has too demanding criteria, since it leaves unexplained why, in various fields of inquiry, truth *is* thought to be a possible property of particular propositions. For this reason as we saw, deflationist perspectives take truth not to be a property at all, but merely a notion coinciding with the very assertion of a proposition.⁵ Similar to the case of religious realism, however, one should ask how come that in various fields of inquiry, truth *is* thought to be a property that some propositions can have.

More than religious realism, religious antirealism takes into account the fact that historical and contextual aspects of the epistemic practices, of which religious propositions are a part, play an important role in whether a religious proposition is true. In this sense, it connects closely to the common belief that religious beliefs, propositions, and practices depend on historical and contextual factors to a larger degree than other, more paradigmatically objective practices. In taking those religious propositions to be true that are considered verified by those who are thought to have the relevant authority, however, religious antirealism leaves no room for objectivity at all anymore, which goes in against the common belief that not just anything goes in

⁵ Independent of whether deflationists would endorse a more religious realist or antirealist perspective.

religion. We saw that in this respect, a strong aspect of the religious *realist* perspective is that the truth of religious propositions is thought to depend at least in part on (religious aspects of) reality. Whether religious propositions are true is thought to be case not because of mere historically and contextually relative epistemic practices, but on the basis of objective criteria. As said, however, the religious realist perspective subjects religious propositions to a notion of truth that they cannot attain.

Even if one would ignore the fact that religious realism understands the notion of truth as a substantive property, this leaves unexplained why there could be only one notion of truth. This is also a problematic aspect of religious antirealism. In line with metaphysical realist and antirealist understandings of truth, both religious realism and antirealism endorse a unique, singular notion of truth, viz. either the strong correspondence or the culturally relative notion. Whereas there are numerous discourses with a variety of epistemic practices, both perspectives take truth to be a monist notion. One could ask, as explained in Part I, why a particular notion of truth that applies to a particular field of reasoning, say to particular natural sciences, has to be the paradigm notion of truth, to which notions of truth in other fields of reasoning should adapt. It remains up to the metaphysical realist and antirealist to show why either only the correspondence to entities or only the verification of peers could amount to truth.

12.1.2 Religious pragmatic pluralism on religious propositions and truth

The alternative to the religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the notion of truth in the truth-value of religious propositions based on Putnam's pragmatic pluralism can be labeled 'religious pragmatic pluralism'. This perspective aims to retain the religious realist contention that what is true ultimately depends on how the world is, and thus rejects the antirealist view that truth is ultimately a matter of decision among particular individuals.⁶ More akin to religious antirealism, however, religious pragmatic pluralism takes truth not to be a human-independent notion, in the sense that our conceptual abilities (our epistemic practices) play an important role in what is to be a true religious proposition. This perspective on the notion of truth in the truth-value of religious propositions introduces those of Putnam's concepts of truth that were analyzed in Part II, which include: truth as a plural notion, as a formal property, as potentially a conceptual

⁶ For more detailed elaborations of what follows, I refer back to Chapter 6 on the pragmatic pluralist notion of truth.

notion, and as an interactional notion. As we saw in Part II, these in turn are grounded in Putnam's elaborations on semantic externalism, conceptual relativity, and conceptual pluralism. When turning to the pragmatic pluralist rejoinder to the problem of the notion of truth, we should also take Putnam's other views on the issue of truth and truth-value into account, most notably his fallibilism and anti-skepticism.⁷ Other than Putnam's views on moral and religious propositions, however, religious pragmatic pluralism takes it that the truth of religious (and moral) propositions *does* depend on an interaction with reality.

Identical to religious realism and some versions of antirealism is religious pragmatic pluralism's contention that there can be true and false religious propositions, or that, in other words, religious propositions have truth-value. It does not deflate the notion of truth with regard to religious propositions. From a pragmatic pluralist perspective, however, truth cannot be a *substantive* property that propositions gain in virtue of fulfilling a particular condition. Contrary to both realism and antirealism, thus, it takes truth to be neither a substantive property nor no property at all. Instead, truth is a formal property. A formal property is a property that particular propositions have, not because such a proposition *has received it* by virtue of accommodating a particular requirement set in advance, but because it *has it* in a particular practice. The proposition (p₁) 'the meaning of life ultimately is to care for one another' is true, if it is indeed true, not because we attribute the property of truth to it by virtue of our acknowledgement of p₁'s correspondence to reality or because it is verified by our peers, but because, in a particular practice with its particular truth-conditions, p₁ is true. As, again, truth is a plural notion, what it is that the phrases 'being true' or 'having the property truth' amounts to, depends on the particular practice within which p₁ stands.

Contrary to both religious realist and antirealist positions, accordingly, religious pragmatic pluralism takes truth to be a plural notion. As said, the field of religious propositions is diverse, perhaps even more than other fields of inquiry and action, most notably because religious propositions can be made about various issues, such as historical, biological, moral, and religio-existential issues. It is not clear on beforehand what notion of truth applies to p₁. What 'truth' denotes depends on of which

⁷ These notions run throughout Putnam's criticism of the metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth and experience, as well as his own pragmatic pluralist alternative, as analyzed in Part II.

practice the proposition is part. One could take p_1 as primarily a proposition about the biological aspects of life. If, in the biological sciences, a form of correspondence truth were prevalent that is common in empirical studies, then whether p_1 were true or false would depend on whether it indeed corresponds with the way the world is. As it is questionable, however, whether, in understanding p_1 , the biological sciences can address issues of meaning, value, and caring normatively. It is therefore questionable whether p_1 , as a biological proposition, makes sense and is either true or false at all. Suppose we should rather take p_1 as a religio-existential proposition, and suppose a more conceptual notion of truth is common in the relevant religio-existential practice. In that case, p_1 could very well have meaning, and may even be true.

In line with Putnam's rejection of metaphysical realist and antirealist notions of truth in Chapter 5 and the analysis of his pragmatic pluralist alternative perspective in Chapter 6, the perspective that I work out here is that the truth of religious propositions is not either an empirical notion or an analytic one. One paradigmatic notion of truth is that of empirical truths in which the truth or falsity of a proposition such as (p2) 'a tortoiseshell cat is never a male cat', depends on whether it is actually the case that tortoiseshell cats are never tomcats. This empirical notion, however, need not be the only possible notion of truth. The proposition (p3) 'all bachelors are unmarried' is true (if indeed true) not so much because one would be able to go out and establish whether all the bachelors that one could find are unmarried, but because it is an 'analytic' or conceptual truth, i.e. the very word 'bachelor' denotes an unmarried man. In Chapter 6 I showed, however, that there is no dichotomy between empirical and analytic or conceptual truths. Rather, both notions of truth depend on an interaction of conceptual abilities and reality.

Despite this plurality of connotations of 'truth', there is a formal unity too.⁸ Though what 'truth' denotes may vary from one practice to another, the manner in which truth is established is comparable in the sense that it depends on an interaction of conceptual relations that we discern and reality. The unity is only formal, however, since what this interaction consists of depends on the practice in question. The interaction, nevertheless, is between a particular practice's conceptual relations and particular factual aspects of reality. Within a practice such as the biological sciences the interaction of conceptual abilities and reality may be such that there should be a correspondence between concepts and objects, while in a practice such

⁸ See 6.5.

as the moral sciences the interaction may be such that the conceptual abilities that we have should not conflict with known facts about the matter. Being an interaction, what the facts amount to depends partly on the conceptual relations, and how the conceptual relations are conceived of depends in turn on the aspects of reality that are known.

Because of this interactional character of truth, we established in Part II, there is no dichotomy between more empirical and more conceptual truth. The reasons why p_1 , p_2 , and p_3 are true (if they are), all reside in both conceptual relations and reality, though to various degrees. As these propositions are true within a particular practice, which features both conceptual and empirical notions, no proposition is completely and solely empirically, and no proposition exclusively conceptually true. As understanding 'bachelor' implies understanding 'man' at least in part, without an understanding of such issues as 'being a man' on a more empirical level (i.e. without a real-life understanding of what a man is), p_3 makes hardly any sense. Understanding how the skin of a tortoise could be on a cat without it really being on the cat (i.e. figuratively), requires notable conceptual abilities and understanding of conceptual truths, without which the largely empirical notion of p_2 would be nonsensical. It is for this reason that religious pragmatic pluralism holds that the truth-value of religious propositions may reside in something other than either a strictly empirical or a strictly analytic notion of truth.

As, in Putnam's pragmatic pluralist view, conceptual truths are interactional too, they are not necessarily unrevisable or incorrigible. In that sense, we saw, they differ from the notion of analytic truth that many other philosophers defend.⁹ What makes a truth a conceptual truth is that it is impossible, with the conceptual (and therefore, to a degree, empirical) abilities that we have, to make sense of its negation. p_2 is true, if true, mainly because of empirical data that we have. p_3 , however, is true because it is (virtually) impossible to make sense of the proposition ($\neg p_3$) 'not all bachelors are unmarried'. In case of some propositions, it will be easier to come to make sense of its negation. That is why, according to the pragmatic pluralist perspective, the truth and falsity of propositions is not an unrevisable matter. With the various conceptual and empirical abilities that we have now, it is arguably impossible to make sense of $\neg p_3$. Virtually all human beings share the practice in which p_3 , or its equivalent in another

⁹ See 6.3.

natural language, cannot sensibly be negated. In the future, however, this may change.

In a similar manner it may be impossible, for someone (S) within a particular religio-existential practice, to make sense of the negation of proposition p_1 . In that case S, standing within a particular religious practice, cannot make sense of $(\neg p_1)$ 'it is not the case that the meaning of life is ultimately to care for one another'. An important difference between conceptual and religious truths, however, is that there is a variety of religio-existential practices. Whereas we virtually all approach conceptual truths such as p_3 in a similar manner, p_1 can be approached from various practices. At a particular moment in time, T_1 , S may be part of a practice in which p_1 cannot be sensibly negated, but if at T_2 S were to stand in a different practice, S *would* perhaps be able to make sense of the negation of p_1 . Whereas truth, in both the case of p_1 and p_3 , is an interactional notion, and while the practices themselves consist of interactions between concepts and facts too, there can be multiple interactions in the case of p_1 while p_3 currently allows only of one. Religious pragmatic pluralism thus holds that while truth is an interactional notion in the case of religious propositions too, there can be a variety of (religious) practices which can accommodate p_1 . In one practice, p_1 may perhaps sensibly be negated, while in another it cannot. The aspect of plurality of truth in pragmatic pluralist perspective thus becomes even better visible in its perspective on *religious* propositions.

It can be concluded that these pragmatic pluralist contentions on the notion of truth allow for a perspective that does not have the limitations that religious realism and antirealism have. While a religious pragmatic pluralist perspective does not give in to the metaphysical realist requirement for propositions to correspond with (super)sensible entities, either by taking religious propositions to indeed correspond with those entities or by taking religious propositions to have no truth-value at all, it does not deflate the notion of truth to mere assertion or verification either. Putnam dismisses the notion that philosophical theories such as metaphysical realism are right in being skeptical about the possibility of engaging with the world at all. Religious pragmatic pluralism dismisses those theories leaning on a reductionist naturalism that stress that we should be skeptical particularly about the possibility of gaining reasonable insights in anything outside the reach of the natural sciences. Instead, we can and should work from the presumption that we are in contact with our surroundings, and that we can

therefore interact with reality.¹⁰ It is a fallibilist perspective too, however, in that it holds that we should always allow for the possibility that the propositions that we take to be true are to be discarded.

Because of its endorsement of a plurality of notions of truth, there is room for a more conceptual next to a more empirical notion of truth. Like other propositions, but to a different degree and in a different manner, religious propositions can have truth-value because of an interaction between our conceptual abilities with reality. Religious propositions depend strongly on conceptual notions, and are thus not identical to empirical propositions about reality. Arguably, p_1 cannot be true in the way empirical propositions are true, since we cannot 'see' such things as the meaning of life in a manner identical to how we can see tortoiseshell cats. The truth of p_1 depends not only on empirical matters such as life and human interaction but also on more conceptual notions such as what it is to care, who one's other is, what meaning is, etc. Within a particular religious practice, one can hardly make sense of the negation of some propositions, or perhaps even no sense at all. Nevertheless, as said, this counts for propositions such as p_2 too, though to a different degree. In all cases, the truth of a proposition depends on both conceptual and empirical factors, since even conceptual truths such as in the case of p_3 cannot do without any empirical input.

Thus, just like other meaningful propositions are true or false, sensible religious propositions have truth-value. More than in the case of empirical or conceptual truths, however, there is a plurality of religious propositions. This is the case for two reasons. In religious propositions the role of our conceptual abilities is bigger than in paradigmatic, empirical notions of truth. Other than in conceptual truths, however, there is a greater variety of interactions between our conceptual abilities and reality in religious propositions. Thus, because there is a plurality of potentially conflicting religious propositions, there can also be many conflicting religious propositions. On the one hand, religious pragmatic pluralism shows why, in spite of the many conflicting propositions, we need not let go of the whole notion of truth in religion and can still speak of *true* religious positions. On the other hand, it refrains from taking all conflicting religious propositions as equally true, and would stress the need to continue reflecting on one's propositions in order to come closer to the truth.

¹⁰ This is based to a large extent on Putnam's other central pragmatic pluralist notion, viz. that our experiences are transactions between ourselves and our world. See Chapter 7 and 10.

12.2 The religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on experience

The religious realist and antirealist perspective on the role and nature of experience in the truth-value of religious propositions is the second of the two problematic aspects that we discerned in Part I. In briefly summarizing these aspects, I discern those aspects that the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective that I draw up retains and those that it rejects, after which I provide a pragmatic pluralist rejoinder on the basis of the findings in Part II and III.

12.2.1 Religious realism and antirealism on religious propositions and experience

In Part I, we saw that with regard to the question of whether we can have direct experiences of religious reality there are those that hold that we can (robust religious realists) and those who hold that we cannot (critical religious realists and epistemological religious antirealists), and there are those who hold that we can have no religious experiences at all (reductionist religious antirealists). Each position has different implications for whether and how religious experiences can function in the truth-value of religious propositions. We established that both the religious realist and the religious antirealist perspectives on the role of experience in the truth-value of religious propositions are problematic.

Critical religious realism and epistemological religious antirealism hold that we can have no unhampered experiences of religious reality-as-it-is since all religious experience is indirect, conceptualized, and interpreted. As the religious aspects of reality escape human categories, so the argument runs, we always understand them in a distorted manner. As there is an element of interpretation in all our engagements with (religious) reality, we have no direct access to it. Despite the indirect, interpretative character of religious experiences, critical religious realism holds that we can have veridical experiences of religious reality. It argues that we can take particular religious experiences as veridical because the various experiences of religious reality allow us to hypothesize a particular religious reality. Though some people, e.g., experience Adonai, others have experiences of Allah. On the basis of those various experiences, the argument runs, we may hypothesize that behind what we experience there exists what one could call 'Ultimate Reality'. On the basis our experiences of religious reality-as-it-is-for-us we can make valid judgments about religious reality-as-it-is.

Robust religious realism refuses to reduce the conflicting nature of the various religious experiences to a single, hypothesized reality, and takes particular religious experiences to be veridical while others are not. What allows us to take some of our experiences as trustworthy, according to these religious realists, is the recognition of some experiences as instances of true divine revelations. Experiences of a God calling people to wage a war against a particular 'axis of evil', for example, could be considered revelatory and thus veridical, or, on the contrary, experiences of a God who calls for love towards those people could be considered revelatory. In Part I argued that as robust religious realists hold that we have direct, unconceptualized, and uninterpreted religious experiences, this makes it very hard to understand how they can have cognitive value.

On the basis of the role that they take interpretation to play in experiences of (religious) reality, epistemological religious antirealists conclude that there can be no veridical experiences of religious reality-as-it-is. As all experiences are interpretative, so the argument runs, we have no means to distinguish between accurate and false experiences of religious reality-as-it-is, but all we have are experiences of religious reality-as-it-is-for-us. For this reason, religious experiences have no more value than as expressions of individual or social religious feelings and emotions. As we saw, some versions of this antirealist perspective take all experiences to be nonveridical, while other versions take experiences of e.g. chairs, lamps and tables as veridical while religious experiences are not. The problem with the latter view, I showed in Part I, is that it ultimately leaves unexplained why some experiences would be veridical (e.g. an experience of a chair) and other would not (e.g. the experience that 'life makes sense'). Those religious antirealists that deny both the veracity of religious experiences and of experiences of middle-sized dry objects have a consistent view. An important argument against their view, however, is that they then have to show why what so many people take as possible - namely to have veridical experiences of reality(-as-it-is) - is in fact impossible.

With regard to the issue of the truth-value of religious propositions, the combination of these critical realist and epistemological antirealist notions of experience and their notions of truth also is problematic. As argued in Part I, the religious realist perspective on truth in the truth-value of religious propositions, concurrent with its metaphysical realist underpinnings, requires unmediated access to religious reality in order to establish whether these propositions are indeed in accordance with this reality. Religious realism takes such unmediated access to be impossible.

Therefore, religious realists either have to presume that there are privileged experiences of religious reality - i.e. revelations - that do allow the religious community to establish what religious reality looks like, and which religious experiences are therefore veridical (robust religious realism) or they have to presume that on the basis of experiences of religious reality-as-it-is-for-us there can be true propositions about religious reality-as-it-is (critical religious realism). In the case of robust religious realism, however, the arguments for which experiences are privileged in the end depend on questions of authority, not of reason. In the case of critical religious realism, there is no cognitive connection between religious reality-as-it-is and religious reality-as-it-is-for-us, and therefore being able to have (cognitive) experiences of religious reality-as-it-is-for-us does not aid towards having true propositions about religious-reality-as-it-is.

12.2.2 Religious pragmatic pluralism on religious propositions and experience

The alternative religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the notion of experience in the truth-value of religious propositions aims to retain the robust religious realist notion that religious experiences are cognitive. While it concedes that it is perhaps impossible to show that particular experiences, and *a fortiori* religious experiences, are veridical, it takes it that it is up to the religious antirealist to show why religious experiences cannot serve as a basis for religious propositions. With critical religious realists and epistemological religious antirealists, it stresses the conceptualized character of all (religious) experiences, i.e. also those that are thought to be privileged or that in any other way are thought to give us access to religious reality in an unconceptualized manner. Against all religious realist and antirealist perspectives on religious experience, it holds that if (religious) experiences are conceptualized they are not necessarily mediated or indirect. As we will see, the distinctive feature of religious pragmatic pluralism over against the discussed positions is that it takes religious experiences to be direct experiences of religious reality, and therefore to have cognitive value, while they are at the same time conceptualized.

The religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on experience in the truth-value of religious propositions starts from Putnam's pragmatic pluralist view that experience is direct or unmediated, but nevertheless conceptualized and corrigible. However, religious pragmatic pluralism does not accept Putnam's contention, which we analyzed in Chapter 9, namely that the rationality of religious propositions is incomparable with the rationality of other propositions. I traced that view back to Putnam's implicit

contention that religious propositions cannot consist in an interaction with reality, which in turn relied on the implicit contention that religious experiences are not fully transactions between individuals and their environment. Instead, my perspective proceeds from aspects of William James's perspective on the cognitive value and potential veracity of religious experiences. Not only non-mystical experiences can be real, potentially veridical, and may serve as a cognitive basis for the truth-value of religious propositions, but mystical, religious experiences as well.

Religious pragmatic pluralism adopts the pragmatic pluralist notion that experiences are real *if they actually are experiences*, not only *if they are veridical*,¹¹ and applies this to the issue of religious experiences. As such, it takes the Jamesian notion as basic that, as long as someone actually has a religious experience, it does not matter how this experience has been triggered. If it is an experience, the experience is real.¹² Suppose, for example that person S experiences that life is valuable in and of itself. Concerning the question of whether S's experience is real, it does, in principle, not matter whether that experience came about through the use of a drug or not. S has the experience, and thus the experience is real. That does not mean that S's experience is therefore also veridical. As experiences are conceptualized, we can have non-veridical real experiences.¹³ James is also inclined to take experiences, even those mystical experiences with religious import triggered by drugs, as real experiences that may provide a perspective on the various aspects of reality that 'normal' experiences cannot provide. As S's veridical experience, like any apperceptive experience, is a *conceptualized* experience, the fact that it is veridical does not mean it cannot be improved on.

As we saw, Putnam's pragmatic pluralism holds that experiences do not depend on *representations* of parts of reality. The problem with taking experiences as representations, we saw, is that it becomes unintelligible how they can be cognitive, since a mental representation of reality has no cognitive connection with reality. In Putnam's perspective, instead, our cognitive faculties are in direct contact with reality. Non-referential experiences of reality are direct and therefore potentially cognitive experiences of reality. James holds that the mystic's sensation of an

¹¹ As analyzed in 7.2.

¹² Analyzed in 10.2 and 10.3.

¹³ Even hallucinations, however, which often serve as a counterargument for the directness of experiences, could be real experiences, though false. As we saw in 7.2, Putnam stresses that the amount of hallucinations that actually occur is very small. One could say that hallucinations have a disproportionately large role in epistemology and philosophy of mind.

immediate presence of God is a direct sensation, and not one that is mediated through a mental rendition of reality.¹⁴ According to my religious pragmatic pluralist perspective, then, (real) religious experiences are direct experiences. If S experiences that God is love, she experiences God as love, not a picture of God as love in her mind. This aspect, we saw, is important with respect to the cognitivity of experiences, to which I will return shortly.

Even though religious experiences are unmediated, they are nevertheless conceptualized. As analyzed, pragmatic pluralism holds that experiences have a transactional nature, in the sense that in apperceiving something the sensations and concepts are interdependent. In sensing something, we employ concepts; in coming to have certain concepts, we depend on sensations. Experiences are 'sensations and concepts fused'.¹⁵ To James, also, the mystic normally entertains particular concepts in his or her experiences. Though some mystics, as we saw in 10.2, speak of going beyond the intellectual, James holds that the intellect normally plays an important part in mystical religious experiences. Drawing on Putnam's viewpoints, we could state this in the following manner. A person (S) may experience God as love, or in other words, may experience that God is love. In that case, not only S's experiential capacities, such as the perceptual and the auditory senses, are involved, but also S's conceptual abilities with regard to such notions as 'love', 'God', 'how someone can be something', 'how God may be something', etc. Without the exercise of such concepts, there is no experience. In coming to have religious experiences, thus, the subject's conceptual abilities are involved in an intricate manner.

In showing why religious experiences, while indeterminate fusions of sensations and concepts, may very well be *cognitive* experiences, we need to return to the issue of perceptual and conceptual relativity and pluralism. In 7.4, I showed that, according to pragmatic pluralism, experiential properties are objectively relative. Objects, such as the either-rabbit-or-duck-drawing can have multiple objective experiential properties. In the case of the aforementioned drawing, the two objective experiential properties are 'portraying a rabbit' and 'portraying a duck'. As I argued, which of these properties the drawing has, is relative to one's particular optional view. I also argued, however, that saying that one of the properties was 'portraying a cow' would be false. Thus, though experiential properties are relative to one's perceptual experience, this does not lead to relativism. Experiential

¹⁴ See 10.2.3 and 10.2.4.

¹⁵ See the analysis in 7.3.

properties are objectively relative. Within the sphere of religious experiences, this notion of perceptual relativity is of importance when it comes to the fact that religious objects would in principle be able to have multiple objectively relative properties. For our purposes here, this notion of perceptual relativity is of importance predominantly as an argument for perceptual pluralism.

Being able to see one drawing in two, seemingly incompatible but actually cognitively equivalent manners attests to the notion of perceptual relativity (not relativism). Acknowledging perceptual relativity, we saw in 7.4.3, necessarily implies acknowledging perceptual pluralism, which is the idea that one can see one drawing in two, possibly equally objective, cognitively *non-equivalent* manners. According to the notion of perceptual pluralism, two individuals may experience the same situation differently, i.e. they may ascribe different experiential properties to the same thing or situation, because of their different perceptual schemes, and their experiences may be cognitive to the same degree. Suppose A, B, and C are at the same place at the same time, and all witness the same situation, call it *x*.¹⁶ Suppose A approaches situation *x* in a religious manner, while B takes a moral standpoint, and C tackles *x* by using only natural scientific, e.g. biological, explanations. Suppose, now, that A's experience is that 'these people are abiding to God's call to feed each other', while B's experience is that 'these people care for one another'. C experiences the situation as 'humanoids exchanging nutritional products'. Arguably, C's experience is mostly taken to be the most veridical experience.

The natural scientific approach is often supposed to provide a rendering of *x* that is unhampered by conceptualizations of the same.¹⁷ The other two experiences are considered less veridical, if at all, because of their interpretative character. Being a transactional event, however, *all* experience depends on conceptualization, i.e. on an interplay of conceptual and perceptual schemes as well as on our surroundings. It is not the case that A's and B's experiences are hampered by conceptualizations while C's is not. C's natural scientific conceptual and perceptual scheme equally influences the

¹⁶ In imagining this, we should remember that perceptual relativity tells us that what *x* amounts to may be expressed in a variety of cognitively equivalent but semantically incompatible ways. Thus, we cannot pin down *x* without privileging a possible perceptual experience of the same. This is why I refrain from describing *x* as, for example, 'two individuals handing bread to another human being'. Instead, what we have is one situation, *x*, which can not only be experienced in various manners, but can also already be described in various ways.

¹⁷ Cf. the analysis of physicalism in 5.2 and of reductionist naturalism in 8.4.

transaction between himself and his environment. Perceptual pluralism, backed up by the doctrine of perceptual relativity, maintains that these different experiences, based on transactions between different perceptual schemes and the environment, may be equally cognitive, and perhaps equally veridical. One cannot, on beforehand, take one approach as the right one.¹⁸ Thus, the experiences of A, B, and C can all be cognitive experiences, as they consist of a direct (though conceptualized) interaction of A, B, or C with their environment. Approaching reality from a religious perceptual scheme can in principle be an equally appropriate manner of coming to potentially veridical experiences.¹⁹

Religious experiences are in principle direct experiences, and can in principle be cognitive. Because they are conceptualized, however, they need not be incorrigible. Religious pragmatic pluralism incorporates pragmatic pluralism's contention that we can better our experiences. With James, it takes it that one can improve on one's religious experiences as they can be tested in light of the wider range of experiences that we have. Suppose an individual (S) experiences love between the members of S's religious community. S also has an experience of God as loving S and the members of S's religious community. Suppose, furthermore, that S takes human love and God's love to be somehow related.²⁰ S's experience of God loving only herself and her community members may change, for example, when S falls in love with someone from outside her community, in which case she may come to experience human love not to be bounded to S's particular community. S may then also start to experience God as loving, not just those within S's religious community, but all human beings, and, perhaps even, all creatures. One can improve on one's experiences with regard to love, one's community, etc., in light of other experiences and conceptual abilities that one has. This wider range of experiences, to which religious experiences are related, allows us to test these religious experiences.

¹⁸ *A posteriori*, perhaps, one could argue that, within a particular question frame, one approach is better than the other. The reason why one approach would then be better than the other, however, is because such a question frame invokes particular conceptualizations. I discussed this in 11.1.

¹⁹ This does not imply that any religious experience is possible or equally veridical. It requires continuous reflections in order to establish whether the religious experience in question is veridical and what its cognitive value is. I return to this issue in 12.3.

²⁰ It may be noted that this is largely a conceptual belief. For the argument this should not be problematic, since, as said, concept and sensation are always fused in experience.

For my perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, this Jamesian perspective on religious experiences is of importance because it maintains that they are cognitive and potentially veridical. In contrast to the religious realist and antirealist perspectives, religious pragmatic pluralism holds that we need neither presume that religious experiences are all nonveridical nor that their veracity depends on authority rather than on reason. On the basis of our findings in Part II and III, we can conclude that in a pragmatic pluralist perspective on religious propositions, experience, in its widest sense, can function in religious propositions in a manner similar to the way experiences can function in the truth-value of non-religious propositions, because we cannot *a priori* exclude religious experiences as interpreted or even non-veridical while other, paradigm cognitive experiences would be uninterpreted and veridical. Below, I disseminate what this implies for the truth-value of religious propositions.

12.3 The truth-value of religious propositions from a religious pragmatic pluralist perspective

From the above considerations on a pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, we can draw up conclusions about the notion of the truth-value of religious propositions.²¹ We can answer the question how religious propositions could be true or false, and what the implications are of the notion of truth-value for possibilities of assessing whether religious propositions are indeed true or false. It is because of pragmatic pluralism's twofold contribution to this alternative perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions, namely with regard to the notion of truth and the notion of experience, that religious pragmatic pluralism manages to provide a perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions that escapes important limitations of the religious realist and antirealist perspectives.

I argue that if we take pragmatic pluralism's views that truth is interactional and that experience is transactional to be applicable to all areas

²¹ The exploration of the implications of the pragmatic pluralist perspective on truth and experience for religious pragmatic pluralist's perspective the truth-value of religious propositions in this chapter also allows for a better understanding of whether and how pragmatic pluralism manages to evade the risks of relativism and reductionism, which I discussed in Chapter 11.

of human reasoning and inquiry, (meaningful) religious propositions too have truth-value. As truth and experience are interactional and transactional notions, they function the way they do because of the practice of which they are part. In its argument for the potential truth-value of religious propositions, the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective starts from considerations about the human practice of inquiry and from the reality of human experience. More than the religious realist position, in other words, it starts from a situational and empirical standpoint. It will become apparent that this is both its strength and its most vulnerable aspect, as this makes it vulnerable to charges of fideism. I turn to these charges below.

12.3.1 Interaction in the truth-value of religious proposition

The first aspect that needs to be addressed is whether and how religious truth can indeed consist of interactions of conceptual abilities and reality, since it is often questioned whether reality plays a role at all in religious propositions. As various practices have a variety of notions of interaction and of concepts, the risk is that truth amounts to what counts as verified within such a practice. If the practice is the norm for the notion of interaction that applies, then if the practice itself depends merely on human epistemic practices, this leads to a cultural relativism, as argued in Chapter 8. In order for these propositions to have truth-value they should be based on an interaction between the conceptual abilities of the person holding the proposition and reality. For this to be the case, the practice itself needs to be based on an interaction between the conceptual abilities that are in place and reality. By means of an example, I will argue that the truth-value of religious propositions indeed depends on interactions of concepts and facts, and how this is the case. I will address a further counterargument as well.

On the basis of the analyses in the first two parts of this chapter, it can be stated that a religious proposition, such as ‘God wants me to make the most of life, even if that causes myself to be hurt occasionally’, is true if it reveals an appropriate interaction between the relevant conceptual abilities and relevant aspects of reality. Which conceptual abilities and which aspects of reality are relevant as well as what interaction is appropriate depends on what practice the proposition and the individual(s) holding it belong to.²² Suppose an individual S belongs to a particular liberal-Protestant practice. S may utter the proposition, for example in reaction to a pressing question that

²² I turn to the possibility that a proposition is mistakenly thought to belong to a particular practice later.

S₁ has, namely whether she should open herself up to the world in order to experience life to the fullest but thereby becoming vulnerable, or keeping to herself so that she is not hurt easily but also does not experience the many aspects of life. Within that practice there are many concepts, beliefs, and practices concerning living life fully, God's hope for human beings, opening oneself up towards others, being vulnerable, etc. Furthermore, there are many facts of the matter concerning being hurt, what happens if one opens oneself up, or keeps to oneself, etc. This goes to show that in various practices various standards of interaction and meanings of concepts indeed apply.

What these conceptual abilities consist in exactly, and how they are tied to reality depends on the particular practice. On the one hand, concepts such as those of God's creative abilities, hurt, and life, enable us to approach reality. These concepts are conceived of through our experiences of reality. On the other hand, reality makes demands on us, such as when we find ourselves in a situation of genuine, forced, and momentous doubt about whether to live life to the fullest or not. It thus urges us to take certain actions, and to form certain concepts. How these various aspects of (religious) practices come and go together varies because of the different conceptual schemes that the various practices have. Within a practice such as the liberal-Protestant one, a particular interaction of conceptual relations and reality is appropriate. Therefore, within it, some propositions are true while other propositions are not.

Conceptual abilities reflect various conceptual beliefs and experiential data, including the notion that reality is God's creation, and that in creating human beings, God gave people particular duties. Suppose, when taking such a conceptual scheme as basic, that one of the practice's central beliefs is that experiencing the many aspects of life is a duty bestowed upon human beings by God their creator. Suppose, furthermore, that people within the practice experience the empirical fact of being hurt predominantly as a stimulus for further individual growth rather than as something to be averted at all costs. With its particular form of interaction, only specific propositions are appropriate. If we set aside that the conceptual relations and reality basic to any true proposition are of course much more complex than in the case of this single belief and fact of the matter, we can then see how, within the liberal-Protestant practice, S's proposition that 'God wants me to make the most of life, even if that causes myself to be hurt occasionally' could be true.

12.3.2 Cultural relativism and the truth-value of religious propositions

The criticism about the potential cultural relativist thrust of this view can now be more clearly formulated. The truth-value of a religious proposition always depends for a large part on the relevant religious practice. This is thought to imply that, as long as a practice can be found in which a particular proposition is true, that proposition is indeed true. The short answer to this criticism would have to be that that is indeed the case, since it does indeed depend on the practice whether a particular proposition is true. A further objection might then be made that that would imply that truth-value depends solely on verification within a particular community, which one could characterize as a form of cultural relativism. That objection has to be rejected for reasons connected with the discussion about conceptual relativism and conceptual relativism, in Chapter 6.²³ These reasons are, as I show below, that a practice is itself interactionally related with reality. Therefore, propositions made within a particular practice are ultimately true by virtue of reality too, not by verification.

Not just any religious proposition can be true, because a religious practice, like any practice, comes into existence by an interaction of people's conceptual abilities and reality. The practices within which particular religious propositions can be true are therefore not mere conventional phenomena, but depend on reality in the sense that reality does not allow for just any practice. It is an example of what we analyzed concerning the issue of conceptual relativity, in 6.1.2. Though using one extension for a word rather than another can sometimes be a matter of convention (say, taking 'objects' to have the extension 'single entities' or 'single entities plus sets of those entities', depending on whether one uses mereological language or not), in other cases using one extension rather than another is a matter of fact (e.g. counting three objects as three entities instead of as four). While there can be multiple practices, according to which different propositions can be justified, these practices are about matters of fact.²⁴

What religious pragmatic pluralism holds, thus, is that only those practices that have come into being as authentic interactions of a community's conceptual abilities with reality should be regarded as practices in the sense of the word meant here. The position defends, furthermore, that a proposition is indeed true when, within such a practice, it fulfills the requirements about truth-value that are central to that practice. Religious

²³ We touched upon it in 8.3 and 9.5 too.

²⁴ In 11.3, I worked this issue of cultural relativism out on a more theoretical level.

propositions are true because and in as far as the religious practices of which they are a part are themselves interactions with reality. This is why the Jamesian notion that religious experiences may indeed be experiences of reality is of such importance for the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective.

If it is the case that the truth-value of a religious proposition depends on whether and to what extent the religious practice of which it is a part is an interaction, it could be objected that the same proposition can be both true and false, depending on what practice the person holding the propositions stands in. A religious practice may take a particular proposition as true while another practice considers it to be false. Imagine that there are two practices: a conservative religious practice, which is an actual interactive practice and within which the proposition (p) 'Adam and Eve were the first human beings' is true, and a biological, historic practice, in which there is a vast consensus that it is false.

Is it the case according to religious pragmatic pluralism, then, that both p and $\neg p$ are true, merely depending on which practice one is part of? There are two interrelated arguments that settle this further objection. First of all, religious pragmatic pluralism holds that within the conservative religious practice p possibly has a different meaning and therefore possibly a different truth-value than in the biological, historic practice. In the first practice, p may mean to say something about God's plan with human beings, namely that one human being is not enough since he (Adam) needs someone to accompany him (Eve). In the latter, p says something about the biological and historic aspects of life on Earth, and as such is false. This would be a case of conceptual plurality. Different conceptual schemes lead to different meanings of what at first sight seemed to be the same proposition. As discussed in 6.1, conceptual schemes can exist along side one another.

It could be the case, however, that those standing within the conservative religious practice *do* hold that p addresses biological and historic aspects of life on Earth rather than (merely) the religious aspects of the meaning of life. In that case, p *would* have the same meaning in both practices. Rather than being an instance of conceptual pluralism, this would mean that the proposition is part of the same practice, i.e. the same conceptual scheme. In such a case, the conservative religious practice would hold that p is true while the biological, historic practice would hold that p is false. My position contends, however, that in such a case, i.e. when p has one meaning, the proposition cannot be both true and false, but can only be

either true or false.²⁵ The reason is that the truth-value of *p* depends on an interaction of the conceptual abilities of people in either the first or the latter practice with reality. As the interaction is with reality, *p* and $\neg p$ cannot both be true, provided there do not exist multiple, conflicting realities.²⁶ If *p* is considered true in the first but false in the latter, then either in the first or in the latter the interaction of the conceptual abilities and reality is not full.

Religious pragmatic pluralism argues that if we understand *p* in the biological and historic sense, the conservative religious practice is most likely not the appropriate practice to evaluate *p*'s truth-value. This practice's conceptual abilities pertain to religious aspects of reality rather than to historical and biological ones. Those within the practice may disagree, and hold that their practice also has the appropriate conceptual abilities to engage with biological and historic aspects of reality, but they may also come to see that whereas a religious practice is more appropriate than a biological, historic practice to make true propositions about God's intention with human beings and the meaning of life, the latter practice allows for more fuller interactions of its conceptual abilities with historical and biological aspects of reality.

It is because religion is part of a different form of life that Putnam's viewpoints came close to a fideism (as I showed in 9.5). In the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective, however, the practices are interactions with reality, and reflection and reasoning are the processes by which religious (and all other) propositions true or false. It therefore differs strongly from fideism, whether one takes fideism to mean that not the findings of reason or rationality but faith should be central²⁷ or in the sense that while rationality plays a role, religious practices have their own rationality which is incommensurable with other forms of reasoning.²⁸ In religious pragmatic pluralism, other than in fideism, reason plays a central role, and the truth of religious propositions ultimately depends on the way the world is. This is possible because our religious practices are interactions with reality. Furthermore, more than fideism, it acknowledges that religious and non-religious propositions can and do conflict, since similar notions of truth-value can be at play in between the various practices, and since the various

²⁵ Cf. our discussion of the principle of bivalence, and Putnam's criticism of Dummett's rejection of it, in 5.1.3.

²⁶ I discussed this proviso in 11.2. See also Baghramian, *Relativism*, ch. 7.

²⁷ Cf. Plantinga, *Reason and Belief in God*, 16-93.

²⁸ Cf. Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*.

practices pertain to the same reality. Though religious pragmatic pluralism shares with fideism the notion that the practices play a crucial part in what is to count as a true religious proposition, it holds that what makes a religious proposition true depends equally on the way the world is.

12.3.3 Fallibilism and the truth-value of religious propositions

In light of the issue above, it is important to note that according to religious pragmatic pluralism one should always be willing to investigate whether the religious practice in question (in this case the conservative one) can evaluate a particular proposition (in this case *p*) adequately or whether it should perhaps be examined with the conceptual and experiential tools of another practice. It holds that one has to be a fallibilist. This is because of the interactional character of practices, and it correlates with the issue of the corrigibility of the truth-value of religious propositions, which I discussed in 11.2.²⁹

As experiences are shaped partly by concepts, and concepts by experiences, it is impossible to draw an exact line between what is a completely accurate experience and what is not, as well as between what is an entirely valid concept and what is not. Whether a proposition lives up to the particular form of interaction that applies in a particular practice, moreover, cannot always be established unambiguously, since what counts as the appropriate form of interaction may be left implicit. What makes a proposition true is not always spelled out or even formalized. Since the conceptual and experiential abilities are not determinate matters in any practice but arguably even less so in religious practices, whether a proposition is true or not is likely to remain less clear than in practices that have more determinate conceptual and experiential abilities. Practices are constantly reshaped, by ever-changing conceptual abilities as well as by new or revised experiences of reality. This brings us to the notion of experience in the truth-value of religious propositions.

12.3.4 Transaction and the truth-value of religious propositions

From the analysis of religious realist and antirealist perspectives on the truth-value of religious propositions, in Part I, it became clear that the combination of their notions of truth and of experience was especially problematic. In religious pragmatic pluralism's combination of truth and

²⁹ This in turn is based on Putnam's pragmatic pluralist viewpoints on the corrigibility of truth in 6.3.4. See also 12.3.5 below.

experience, instead, lies its strength. As analyzed in Part II, cognitive access to (aspects of) reality is essential for the interactional account of the truth-value of propositions to work. For religious propositions, then, a transaction is necessary between the cognitive faculties of subjects with religious aspects of reality. Above we saw that pragmatic pluralism argues that such transactional experience is possible, and on the basis of the analysis of James's views, I argued that it should in principle be possible in the case of religious experiences too. We now have to establish how that might work.

From the analysis in Part I it showed that experience is a complicated notion by itself, and *a fortiori* in connection with religion. As said, we limit ourselves to the notion of experience as akin to perceptual or other sensical experience in the sense that the person experiencing something is aware of his or her sensation, i.e. as apperception. Also, we are concerned with non-inferential experiences, rather than experiences that depend entirely on other experiences. Religious pragmatic pluralism connects up with Putnam's pragmatic pluralist claim that perceptual experience is cognitive because it is immediate *and* conceptualized, as well as with James's contention that *religious* experiences can have cognitive value. We already saw above (in 12.2) that we cannot reject the cognitiveness of that experience on beforehand. Religious experiences are potentially veridical, and can therefore in principle serve in the interactional truth-value of religious propositions. Thus, we take religious experiences as experiences of religious aspects of reality in a manner comparable to perceptual experiences of empirical reality. If we do so, one can ask whether and how we can conceive of such experiences.

How does the notion of experience that we worked out above (in 12.2) function in the truth-value of religious propositions? Suppose two individuals, A and H, witness how a donkey is hit by a car in the street. In apperceiving the accident, A and H are struck by sadness for the loss of the donkey's life. At a different moment, (other relevant things being equal,) A and H see that a cow is hit by a car. In apperceiving the accident, A is again saddened by the loss. H, however, experiences it as downright sacrilegious towards the cow. Because of his religious conviction that cows are sacred animals whereas donkeys are not, H experiences the accidents as of entirely different orders. A, believing that donkeys and cows are equally (un)important on the level of the sacred, experiences both accidents as similar in that respect.

Both A's and H's experience are non-inferential, because in experiencing the accidents, they experience them (directly) as sad for the donkey and/or cow or as sacrilegious towards the cow. In both cases,

however, the experience is conceptualized too. A has particular concepts regarding donkeys and cows, and so does H. In the case of H, these concepts can be said to be religious, whereas in the case of A, they may not be. This has no bearing on the status of the experiences, since one cannot determine, *a priori*, if at all, which conceptual scheme is the appropriate one. What accounts for the difference in experience is the fact that experiences are conceptualized. A religious person, such as H, may therefore experience the same situation in a manner that differs from the non-religious person's experience.

One may raise the objection that if everyone sees situations according to their own conceptual scheme, this implies that every experience of reality is equally adequate (or inadequate). If that is the case, furthermore, then religious pragmatic pluralism would be relativistic about experiences, as well as about the judgments made on the basis of them. Apperceptions are indeed non-inferential and direct, but conceptualized. Only because of the concepts that H has access to, can H apperceive the accident as sacrilegious to the cow. In fact, to experience the accident as an accident already involves concepts. Though therefore we cannot pin down the single right experience, this does not mean, however, that all experiences are equally successful or adequate. For this, I refer back to the notion of conceptual and perceptual relativity, as well as to what I called objectively relative experiential properties.³⁰ In perceiving the accident as sacrilegious, H simultaneously employs particular conceptual abilities and directly takes in the data. The data invoke particular conceptual abilities, and H's conceptual abilities allow him to apperceive the data. It is in this sense that the experience is transactional. Because the experience is a transaction between H's cognitive faculties and reality, it can serve in the truth-value of particular propositions that H may hold. Thus, on the basis of this experience H may come to endorse the propositions that 'it is *sad* that the *donkey* was hit by the car' and that 'it is *sacrilegious* that the *cow* was hit by the car'.

12.3.5 Corrigibility and the truth-value of religious propositions

It may be objected that if it is the case that a subject can have direct, cognitive experiences of religious aspects of reality, this would mean that religious reality is the way the subject experiences it. If both A and H have direct, cognitive experiences of reality, then reality would be both in accordance with A's experience that hitting the cow *was not* sacrilegious and

³⁰ In 7.4.

in accordance with H's experience that hitting the cow *was* sacrilegious. This would, however, mean that reality is such that it *is* and such that it *is not* sacrilegious to hit a cow by one's car. Reality would be either self-contradictory or plural.

In answering to this objection, we should recollect the fact that in religious pragmatic pluralism the conceptual plays an important role in experience. With the conceptual abilities that H has, and the event being the way it is (again, 'what the event is' has no one true description, but depends, for its description, on one's conceptual abilities), H experiences the event in the way that H does. Even though H's experience has epistemological force, it need not be (entirely) correct. The fact that the experience is direct does not mean that the experience is necessarily (entirely) veridical. Just like one may (directly) perceive the two lines in the Müller-Lyer Illusion as of different length, while they may, and are actually equally long, H may perceive the two accidents as of a different order, while they may actually be similar. Because experiences are conceptualized they are also corrigible. H's experience of the cow being hit as sacrilegious may be an unsuccessful experience of the accident because of the fact that H's conceptual scheme is possibly problematic. It may be the case that H's presuppositions about cows make it impossible for him to perceive the situation adequately, just like we may find it hard to perceive the room of the example in 7.4.2 adequately, namely as having a larger back wall than front wall.

In fact, with such experiences as those involving a cow's sacredness, the conceptual aspect of the experience is of such weight that the veracity of the experience arguably becomes harder to establish. We do not have access to objective measures as we do in the case of the example of the room in 7.4.2. In that case, we can measure whether our experience of the two walls as of equal width is correct. For religious experiences, this is arguably much more difficult. Suppose one of the central concepts of an individual, C, is that God becomes visible in the benevolent actions of human beings. When C perceives benevolent actions of people, she therefore may experience God. Suppose now, that C has an experience of a situation in which benevolently acting people care for one another. In such case, C may experience that God cares. Establishing whether C successfully apperceives the situation requires addressing whether C's conceptual scheme is tenable, and whether that scheme is an adequate means for perceiving the situation.

Because the concepts are open to fine-tuning the experiences themselves can be altered. Thus, one can improve on one's experiences. Like in the example of the room (in 7.4.2), where when one puts a square carpet

in what one thought was a square room the room then turns out to be wider in the back than in the front (having the shape of a trapezoid), one can come to see that one's experience of a particular situation or object is in fact mistaken. When looking again at the same room but without the carpet, one may again apperceive the room as square, while one now knows that it actually has the shape of a trapezoid. Even though the apperception of the room as square is real, it is not correct.

Returning to the accidents with the cow and the donkey, we could imagine that A has recently converted to a religion that holds that cows are sacred himself and is still in the process of internalizing the religion's beliefs and practices. H may show A, then, that he should actually see the two accidents as of a different order, because the cow is sacred. A may understand this, and may come to see (in revisualizing it) hitting a cow as sacrilegious. Suppose the accident happens again (other relevant things being equal). If A perceives hitting the cow as sad rather than as sacrilegious, A and H are likely to hold A's experience to be mistaken. In the process of internalizing the conceptual and corresponding perceptual scheme, he may gradually start to perceive it appropriately.

It is also possible, of course, that those who experience particular situations or objects in a religious manner, like in the cases above, will come to hold that their religious conceptual and perceptual schemes as well as their religious experiences are mistaken. As long as we have no compelling reasons why religious experiences would all be hallucinatory, however, we should not write them off as non-cognitive *a priori*. On the basis of James's inclination to treat religious experiences like other experiences, and in a manner similar to Putnam's (pragmatist) endorsement of the notion that reality has many aspects, I stress the possibility that reality also has religious aspects.³¹ These potential religious aspects of reality can in principle be experienced in the manner described, and as experiences with cognitive import they may function in the truth-value of religious propositions.

12.3.6 *The cognitive import of religious experiences*

One could object that, even if we would grant that religious experiences have cognitive import, they cannot be assessed with regard to their veracity, because of the inaccessibility of their object of knowledge. Religious

³¹ If and when Putnam stresses the notion that reality has religious aspects too, he seems to have moral aspects in mind; cf. Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein*, 6.100-2.

pragmatic pluralism would indeed concede that the veracity of most religious experiences is harder to assess than paradigmatic experiences of reality.³² In experiences of reality, the conceptual and perceptual schemes are involved as well, but these are arguably shared to a greater extent than the conceptual and perceptual schemes involved in religious experiences. The claim is therefore that while we can rightfully base our propositions on experiences of dry middle-sized objects we cannot do the same for experiences of religious aspects of reality. I will argue that this claim is not tenable as it stands.

With Putnam's pragmatic pluralism, religious pragmatic pluralism starts from the assumption that what people experience should be taken seriously. With James, it holds that this should count for religious experiences too. It takes it that religious propositions can be responses to (experienced) religious aspects of reality, and it would allow those religious propositions while having less room for religious propositions that are based on metaphysical speculation (though metaphysical speculations can be a form of extending the conceptual abilities that one has acquired in interaction with reality, of course).³³ In the case of religious propositions, like in other practices, the balance of conceptual relations and reality varies. In the interaction of conceptual abilities and reality, the weight may sometimes be more on the concepts derived from (previous) interaction of conceptual relations and reality, and sometimes more on direct (religious) aspects of reality (which nevertheless always depend on this transaction).

When perceiving a table, there is a significant consensus on what the concept of table entails, and whether it does or does not apply. When experiencing God's love, there is a variety of potential conceptual and even perceptual schemes involved. Assessing the veracity and potential cognitive

³² In 11.2, I discussed the issue of the diversity of religious experiences and propositions, and the issues about the differences in assessment and truth-value. When talking about the distinction between non-religious, empirical fact and religious aspects of reality, it is important to remember that these cannot be separated sharply according to my analysis of pragmatic pluralism, since both are possible objective aspects of reality. See 6.4 for a similar argument about moral propositions, and 10.3 for religious ones.

³³ This correlates with James's attempt to start off his research with what he took to be the most authentic and basic experiences, those of the individual mystic. I do not think it need to be an individual's experiences, nor those of a mystic. One could say, however, that experiences of those 'trained' in experiencing religious aspects of reality could in general be veridical to a larger extent than those of people who have never contemplated about religious aspects of life before, because in coming to religious propositions, like in all domains of life, one needs to balance the various conceptual and perceptual abilities, which can be done better or worse. Cf. 7.3 and 10.2.3.

import of the former kinds of experiences is thus easier than establishing whether religious experiences are adequate or not. With James, religious pragmatic pluralism nevertheless contends that there is no absolute difference between the assessment of the veracity of religious experiences and other, more paradigmatic experiences (of tables, chairs, etc.). The conceptual and perceptual schemes operating in the transaction between the (religious) subject and the religious aspects of reality are, so to speak, more diverse and less tangible, but they have equally come into being because of the transaction between reality and those schemes. The 'religious transactions' may be unsuccessful, e.g. because the schemes are inadequate, but they are nevertheless transactions, which can be assessed in a manner not wholly different from how these transactions are assessed in the case of empirical data.

12.4 Concluding notes: Interaction and transaction in the truth-value of religious propositions

This view on the truth-value of religious propositions urges us to differentiate between the various fields in which we utter our religious propositions and to assess them with the various practical and intellectual abilities that we have in those fields. Just like we can come to see that we should not answer questions about which value is to be more important from a perspective of the natural sciences, we can come to see that we should perhaps not try to answer questions about historical fact on the basis of religious books. Thus, in order to establish the truth-value of a particular proposition one should establish what kind of proposition it is, i.e. to which practice it belongs. These practices are not always clearly differentiable, and establishing to which practice a proposition belongs depends on its meaning and truth-value, which makes it an interactional process. There are propositions, for example, some stemming from the perspective of Intelligent Design, are not easily determinable as either religious or scientific. What this means is that in this regard further research is needed in two areas. Further research could be done on how one can differentiate between propositions and the practices to which they are thought to belong. Analyses are opportune with regard to how, in the pragmatic pluralist perspective, truth, justified belief, and knowledge relate. Furthermore, it should be investigated how one can come to see that one proposition belongs to one rather than to another practice.

Other important issues that this investigation evokes but cannot settle with regard to the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions are the following. The theory drawn up here could be tested by investigating whether it is indeed the case that religious propositions can conflict with non-religious ones with regard to issues that are not clearly either religious or non-religious. An example is the existence of God, which is considered a religious issue by many religious believers but which is also a question that some believe could perhaps be settled with various natural scientific investigations. Those standing within a particular religious practice may hold that 'the God of love exists', understood as making a claim about the God of love's physical or super-physical existence is true, while those standing within a natural scientific practice would hold that it is very likely not true. The proposition, understood as making a more religio-existential claim about love as the highest value for life, would not conflict with a natural scientific view.

As noted in the Introduction, religion consists of so much more than religious propositions. Religious reasoning, furthermore, is a diffuse field, perhaps more than any other field of reasoning, as it includes but is not limited to propositions about such diverse issues as historical, geological, cosmological fact, as well as moral, life-orienting, and political views.³⁴ When turning to the question of whether and how religious propositions can have truth-value, the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective aims to do justice to the fact that there is an immense diversity of religious practices and a vast plurality of propositions stemming from those religious practices. These observations form an integral part of the perspective on religious propositions that I have worked out. As they formed the challenges that religious realism and antirealism faced (on a more practical level, i.e. apart from the challenges on the level of metaphysical realism and antirealism), they thus formed the challenges for an *alternative* perspective on the same. With (conceptual) plurality at its core, as well as with its views on how our practices co-shape our propositions, Putnam's pragmatic pluralism proved an ideal theory to address the observations about the plurality of religious propositions.

Especially since it takes full account of the diversity of propositions and the role of religious practices with regard to religious truth and religious experience, religious pragmatic pluralism provides a perspective on the

³⁴ Cf. Nancey Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1994), esp. part 2.

truth-value of religious propositions that can further the debates about the status of religious propositions. As much as possible, it proceeds from the facts about religious reasoning, rather than imposing a particular philosophical outlook on them. It manages to explain such central issues as the vast diversity of religious propositions, the fact that religious and non-religious propositions can clash, and does justice to so many people's belief that there is more to life than what physics can study. Religious pragmatic pluralism further clarifies what is meant with 'a true religious proposition', or when someone says she makes her religious proposition on the basis of a deep personal experience. For those who stand in a religious practice, finally, it expands on the tools to critically reflect on one's religious interactions and transactions.

As we saw, the perspective that I have developed settles many problematic aspects of the various religious realisms and antirealisms that we discussed in Part I, on a theoretical level. It settles, and provides an alternative for, the view that truth consists of a correspondence between a conceptualized proposition and a non-conceptualized object (robust religious realism and critical realism), or that those religious propositions are true that a particular religious community can agree on (epistemological religious antirealism and reductionist religious antirealism). It goes beyond a notion that experience is always either direct but non-conceptualized (robust religious realism), or conceptualized but indirect (critical religious realism and epistemological religious antirealism), and beyond the idea that religious experience is of a wholly incomparable order than paradigmatic forms of experiencing (reductionist religious antirealism). More than robust religious realism, religious pragmatic pluralism can account for the diversity of religious propositions, and for the fact that with regard to true religious propositions, the various religious practices can communicate with each other, and potentially come to an understanding, rather than being dependent on specific revelations or on presumptions about which practice is to be the master. More than critical religious realism and epistemological religious antirealism, it proceeds from the possibility that we have unmediated experiences of religious aspects of reality, and that we can make true propositions about the way(s) the world is. Other than critical religious realism and epistemological religious antirealism, it does not hold that we are talking about different religious realities altogether.

With the religious pragmatic pluralist perspective on the truth-value of religious propositions I have devised a perspective that does justice to the diversity of (religious) practices as well as to the notion that religious

propositions do not rest on mere conventional beliefs but ultimately depend for their truth-value on (religious) reality. It is a perspective on religious propositions that at least in principle allows for reflection on the truth-value of religious propositions, and argues how such reflection can take place, while leaving room for the particulars of the various practices. As such, this perspective has provided a promising answer to the question of the truth-value of religious propositions.

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Dutch summary (Nederlandse samenvatting)

In een samenleving waarin religieus zijn niet langer de norm is, en waarin er een veelheid aan religieuze en niet-religieuze levensbeschouwingen en taalvelden naast elkaar bestaan, wordt vaak aangenomen dat religieuze uitspraken geen waarheidswaarde hebben. Religieuze claims, zoals dat Allah liefde is of dat God ons verbiedt te doden, worden vaak gezien als subjectieve meningen die niet waar of onwaar zijn. In mijn proefschrift, dat op het snijvlak van de godsdienstwijsbegeerte en de theoretische filosofie ligt, pas ik de noties van waarheid en ervaring, zoals de hedendaagse Amerikaanse filosoof Hilary Putnam (geb. 1926) deze uitwerkt, kritisch toe op dit vraagstuk. Zo toon ik aan dat religieuze claims wel degelijk waar of onwaar zijn. Waarheid speelt wel degelijk een rol inzake religieuze claims, omdat waarheid een notie is die op verschillende manieren functioneert, en omdat we ervaringen van religieuze aspecten van de werkelijkheid niet van tevoren als onecht of onwaarachtig kunnen afwijzen. Dat stelt mij bovendien in staat een uitweg te formuleren voor twee mogelijke valkuilen van Putnams theoretische denken.

Putnam, die zich onder andere baseert op het denken van Ludwig Wittgenstein en William James, heeft zelf gedurende zijn filosofische carrière traditionele visies op waarheid en ervaring verdedigd. Dit gaat om visies die stellen dat uitspraken waar zijn als zij voldoen aan vaststaande criteria daarvoor, en dat ervaringen van die werkelijkheid een door onze vooronderstellingen gekleurde representatie daarvan zijn. Putnam stelt dat achter die traditionele visies een dualistisch wereldbeeld ligt dat stelt dat we de werkelijkheid begrijpen en ervaren via onze conceptuele vooronderstellingen. Putnam laat zien dat men deze visie niet vol kan houden, omdat het zou betekenen dat we er dan nooit zeker van kunnen zijn dat we in contact staan met de werkelijkheid. Sommigen stellen daarom dat, omdat ons contact met de werkelijkheid via onze preconcepties gaat, alle waarheid relatief is. Die stelling acht Putnam in zichzelf tegenstrijdig. Mijn proefschrift maakt aannemelijk dat deze traditionele visies op waarheid en ervaring ook ten grondslag liggen aan traditionele visies op de waarheidswaarde van religieuze uitspraken.

In tegenstelling tot die traditionele visies stelt Putnam dat wat waar is, afhangt van de werkelijkheid (en dus niet relatief is) én dat werkelijkheid en waarheid interactionele grootheden zijn (en dat waarheid dus niet absoluut is). Ware proposities en de werkelijkheid zijn dus niet apart verkrijgbaar.

Wat de feitelijke werkelijkheid is, hangt zowel van die werkelijkheid als van onze conceptuele en praktische vermogens af. We staan wel degelijk in direct contact met de wereld om ons heen, en zetten in dat contact tegelijkertijd onze conceptuele en praktische vermogens in. In tegenstelling tot veel traditionele visies stelt Putnam daarom dat er niet slechts één notie van waarheid bestaat, maar dat in verschillende praktijken verschillende waarheidsvoorwaarden bestaan. Ook betekent het dat ervaring tegelijk direct en geconceptualiseerd kan zijn. Dit houdt vervolgens in dat er niet slechts één categorie van ervaringen is die echt zijn. Mensen hebben namelijk afhankelijk van de praktijk of het taalveld waarin zij staan verschillende, of zelfs conflicterende ervaringen.

Mijn proefschrift analyseert hoe in Putnams pragmatisch pluralistische denken de waarheidswaarde van proposities bestaat in een adequate interactie tussen enerzijds de werkelijkheid en anderzijds de binnen de betreffende praktijk gebruikelijke conceptuele en praktische vermogens. Deze interactie kan ten dele gebaseerd zijn op ervaringen die weer bestaan uit een transactie tussen onszelf en onze omgeving. Om deze redenen kan men niet één notie van waarheid opleggen aan de verschillende praktijken van het menselijke leven. Vanwege deze interactie kunnen uitspraken wel degelijk objectief zijn (anti-relativisme), en vanwege het feit dat ervaringen transacties zijn tussen mens en omgeving kan men deze niet reeds van tevoren afdoen als onwerkelijk (anti-reductionisme). Mijn analyse laat zien dat Putnam, wanneer het gaat om zijn eigen, praktische visie op de waarheidswaarde van uitspraken, mogelijk toch een relativistische en reductionistische visie aanneemt. Daarom baseer ik mijn toepassing van zijn denken op religieuze uitspraken op zijn *theoretische*, niet op zijn praktische denken.

Door Putnams theoretische denken over waarheid en ervaring in dialoog te brengen met zijn Wittgensteiniaanse, meer praktische visie op religieuze proposities en met William James' visie op de cognitieve waarde van religieuze ervaringen, laat ik zien dat religieuze claims wel degelijk waar of onwaar kunnen zijn, omdat ook in *religieuze* praktijken waarheid uit een interactie van onze denk- en handelingsvermogens en de werkelijkheid bestaat, en omdat we niet van tevoren kunnen uitsluiten dat ook *religieuze* ervaringen een transactie tussen onszelf en onze omgeving zijn. Al doende toon ik aan dat, anders dan in Putnams eigen visie, praktijken uiteindelijk bestaan uit een interactie van werkelijkheid en conceptuele vermogens, en dat ervaringen nooit op voorhand als onwaarachtig afgewezen kunnen worden.

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Niek Brunsveld (1981-) obtained a master's degree in Theology/Religious Studies (with honors) with a major in Ethics from Utrecht University (the Netherlands) in 2006, a postgraduate degree from the Protestant Theological University (the Netherlands), and a master's in the Advanced Studies in Theology and Religious Studies from K.U.Leuven (Belgium) in 2007. He was a Junior Fellow (Special Research Fund) at K.U.Leuven before starting as a PhD-candidate at Utrecht University's Faculty of Humanities in 2008. During the fall semester of 2010/2011, he was Fulbright Visiting Researcher at Harvard University's Faculty of Divinity. His paper on 'Putnam on truth (again). Conceptual truth in religion and morality, and the risk of relativism' received the Hilary Putnam International Young Scholars Essay Prize in 2011.

