




## Hilary Putnam's View on Relativism in Context of Truth and Rationality

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**Abstract:** Relativism has been discussed concerning the concepts of truth and rationality in Hilary Putnam's thoughts. Putnam suggested that truth is formed by idealizing rational acceptability. Rational acceptability is a criterion that depends on cognitive virtues and can change with human development. The relation of the sciences to the concept of conformity shows that our knowledge of the world presupposes values. Putnam considers relativism an inconsistent view in the sense that justification for truth is up to the individual. He says that at least some value judgments should be objective. He argues that some conceptual truths are not descriptions of reality but are indisputably true. Here, he thinks that we have objectivity without an object.

**Keywords:** Putnam, relativism, truth, rationality, rational acceptability, inconsistency, objectivity, values.

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## Introduction

This study aims to evaluate the power and limitations of relativism as an approach that continues to be effective and valid today by examining Hilary Putnam's criticisms of relativist thought depending on his understanding of rationality and truth and to form an opinion on whether it is defensible or not. Relativism is the view that accepts that things are as they appear to people, in the form adopted by Protagoras, one of the Sophist thinkers who are the most well-known defenders of relativism in ancient philosophy. This view is based on the idea that a definite determination that applies to everyone cannot be made about something. As a matter of fact, Protagoras also thinks that it is possible to say two opposite words for everything.<sup>1</sup> Relativism, in its generally accepted form in contemporary philosophy, is an approach that suggests that basic concepts should be understood in terms of a specific conceptual scheme, culture, theory, way of life, or society.<sup>2</sup>

In this study, relativism in Hilary Putnam's thoughts, its relationship with the concepts of rationality and truth, the relationship between rationality and value judgments, the inconsistency of relativism in the sense that the accuracy of statements depends on individuals, conceptual relativity as a type of relativity that does not lead us to the rejection of truth, objectivity that does not need objects, and conceptual relativism issues will be examined.

## Rationality and Truth

Putnam sees the concept of rationality as a concept related to human development and argues that there is a deep connection between truth and values. He says that moral principles are not an ahistorical set, but that this expression should not be understood as that values are merely cultural and relative. Putnam thinks that what makes a belief rational is not just any culture, but

<sup>1</sup> Walther Kranz, *Antik Felsefe: Metinler ve Açıklamalar*, çev. Suad Y. Baydur (İstanbul: Sosyal Yayınlar, 1994), 194.

<sup>2</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *Objektivizmin ve Rölativizmin Ötesi*, çev. Feridun Yılmaz (İstanbul: Paradigma Yayıncılık, 2009), 11-12.

an ideal theory of rationality. An ideal theory of rationality will provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for being rational in any possible world and under certain conditions.<sup>3</sup>

According to Putnam, although the concept of truth is related to rationality, the truthfulness of a statement cannot be its rational acceptability. Because rational acceptability is a criterion that can change. For example, the statement 'the earth is flat' was rationally acceptable three thousand years ago, but it is not a rationally acceptable statement today. Accordingly, we cannot say that the statement 'the earth is flat' three thousand years ago was true. Because to say this means to say that the world has changed shape. Putnam also says that rational acceptability is a matter of degree. For example, we say that the statement 'the earth is a sphere is true to some extent. However, the issue of degree is not the admissibility or justification of the statement, but the certainty of the statement. Putnam proposes the view that truth is constituted by the idealization of rational acceptability. To idealize rational acceptability is to accept it as true, a proposition that can be verified under epistemologically ideal conditions. Is it possible to achieve rationally ideal conditions? Putnam thinks that this is not possible, and argues that we may not even be close enough to idealized conditions. Under what conditions can we then justify the propositions? Putnam cites frictionless airplanes as an example of this point. Thus, it was impossible to obtain frictionless planes. But there is still talk of frictionless airplanes having a cash value. This is because a frictionless aircraft can be approached with a very high degree of approximation. Putnam says that there are two key ideas in the idealization theory of truth. The first is that while the truth is here and now independent of verification, it is not independent of all verification. The fact that a statement is true means that it can be verified. The second is that the accuracy must be stable or consistent. If a statement can be verified but not that statement, that statement does not carry a truth value, even though the

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<sup>3</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), ix-xi.

conditions are as ideal as we might think of doing it.<sup>4</sup>

Being rational depends on both the rational acceptability criteria and the relevance criteria. Our relevance criteria encompass all our values. For an entity to have reality requires it to have values. Putnam exemplifies the relationship between our eligibility criteria and our values in simple terms. If we examine the sentence 'The cat is on the mat', we will see that the use of this expression in a particular context is possible through concepts created within a particular culture. These concepts provide information about the values and interests of the culture in question. Our use of the concept of cat is related to the fact that we have the category of cat. Having the category of a cat depends on an acceptance that allows us to meaningfully distinguish the beings in the world as animals and non-animals, and we are related to the species to which any animal belongs. In this respect, we think that what is standing on the mat is not anything but a cat. Likewise, our possession of the mat category depends on our consideration of the distinction between non-living things as artifacts and non-artifacts and focusing our attention on the nature and purpose of a particular artifact. Accordingly, we express the object on which the cat stands, not as a thing, but as a mat. Having the category above depends on our concern with spatial relations. As a result, it is possible to associate an ordinary expression with a certain context with some presuppositions and the formation of these presuppositions; requires the meanings of the categories animate, inanimate, purpose and space. This indicates that our eligibility criteria are both based on our entire value system and reflect all of our values. If rationality is a complex system of abilities, then rationality itself must be value-laden if possession of this system of abilities gives the holder of the abilities the power to determine which questions are appropriate and what answers can be given.<sup>5</sup>

Putnam mentions that the following objection can be made on this issue. It can be said that the rational person can say what is

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<sup>4</sup> Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 55-56.

<sup>5</sup> Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 201-202.

justifiably arguable and what is not, and what he finds interesting, relevant, or important is not a matter of his cognitive rationality, but of his character. Here, a distinction between rational acceptability and appropriateness, such as the fact-value distinction, is highlighted. Putnam, in turn, argues that acceptability and conformity are intrinsically linked. Using a word, Putnam argues, will involve one in a tradition, an experience, a practice, and a theory. Besides, using a word requires interpreting a tradition, adapting it to new contexts, expanding and criticizing it. If we are completely outside the tradition to which a word belongs, we can interpret the tradition in various ways, but not fully apply it. Being in this tradition will be influential in what we determine as rationally acceptable. Putnam thinks that we do not have a verification method at our disposal, as he sees accepting a method to verify a statement as unfounded and a myth. Therefore, it associates rational acceptability with concepts, not abilities. Putnam thinks that, as a result, the idea of rationality presents a contradictory appearance. The paradoxical view results from our wanting to justify criticizing a system that we find morally objectionable and irrational, while on the one hand, we cannot judge the results as rational or irrational. One way to overcome this contradiction may be to accept a sharp distinction between fact-values. Regarding the fact-value distinction, Putnam supports a movement that recognizes that the distinction is at least ambiguous. The ambiguity of the distinction stems from the fact that both factual statements and the scientific research necessary to decide what is fact and what is not, presuppose values.<sup>6</sup>

Another issue related to rationality is the explanation of perception-related phenomena. Descriptions that can be made depending on perception always require the existence of some concepts related to culture. For example, if we asked someone living in a cultural environment without furniture to describe a room with chairs, tables, and coffee tables, it would be difficult for that person's description to provide the information that someone in

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<sup>6</sup> Putnam, *Reason Truth and History*, 202-205.

the culture with furniture would want. Here, the description given by the person in question would not have been appropriate, even if it were correct. From this example, Putnam concludes that the relevance of a description requires that the person depicting it contains certain concepts. It is associated with the person describing being rational, being able to obtain some concepts, and needing to use these concepts. The situation in question for descriptions of the environment is also valid for a description of interpersonal relationships. Just as a person who cannot use concepts such as tables and chairs fails to describe the room where the furniture is located, the description of a person who cannot say whether someone is thoughtful or not is not appropriate.<sup>7</sup>

Putnam, as a result, saw rationality as a concept related to the concept of truth but did not see truthfulness and being rationally acceptable as identical. He accepted rationality not as a concept that can be defined depending on unchanging criteria, but as a concept related to human development. He suggested a connection between accuracy and values. He proposed that truth is constituted by the idealization of rational acceptability. He said that for a statement to be true, it must be rational to believe it to be true.

### **Rationality and Values**

Putnam thinks that rational acceptability depends on some cognitive virtues such as consistency and functional simplicity, which shows that values not only correspond to the feelings of the people who use them, but also to the characteristics of the things to which they are applied. We express rational acceptability in terms such as being justified, being validated, and being the best of available explanations. If properties such as consistency and simplicity are accepted as dependent on people's attitudes toward theories, not theories, the terms we use to describe rational acceptability must also be subjective. Putnam argues that we must

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<sup>7</sup> Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 137-138.

admit that at least some value terms are objective, as he has already shown that the subjectiveness of rational acceptability is a self-defeating view. Putnam draws attention to the characteristics that terms such as consistency and simplicity have in common with paradigmatic value words. Just as ethical and aesthetic concepts such as kindness, beauty, and goodness were discussed philosophically, epistemic terms such as consistency and simplicity were also discussed. Philosophers' understandings of rationality vary widely. In Putnam's words, the question of which rational conception of rationality is as difficult a question as ethical and aesthetic questions. Putnam concludes that there is no neutral conception of rationality to which we can appeal.<sup>8</sup>

Putnam thinks that the use of the word fact requires a conception of rationality. In this respect, according to Putnam, while expressing different truths according to different theories, we are not talking about facts that do not contain value judgments. We use the word fact from a certain basic assumption. Expressing any word or phenomenon requires cognitive values such as consistency, simplicity, and instrumental usefulness. We also rely on these values when expressing facts that say what is relative, and these values, in general, seem arbitrary when considering the development of humanity. The relationship between facts and, accordingly, science and values emerges depending on our standards of rational acceptability. Accordingly, the question arises of how rational acceptability standards are formed. Putnam argued that there is no neutral conception of rationality. Here, can rational acceptability standards be considered a concept with no definite boundaries? In this regard, Putnam argues that it is necessary to impose a limitation on the concept of rationality. Regarding this issue, Putnam mentions that rational acceptability standards have a wider use besides their literal meaning as they are the standards that tell when the statements can be accepted, their correctness or falsity. Rationality, in this broad sense, is also about how we can decide the adequacy and clarity of its expressions.

<sup>8</sup> Putnam, *Reason Truth and History*, 135-136.

Putnam points out that the exact sciences are not only concerned with finding statements true and universal in their form but also with their correctness and their appropriateness. The concept of conformity, on the other hand, is a concept based on values to a great extent. When we accept the relationship of the sciences with the concept of conformity, we accept that our knowledge of the world presupposes values. But we do not accept the more radical thesis that the real world is tied to values.<sup>9</sup>

Putnam expresses some principles in scientific research as methodological value judgments. Methodological value judgments are judgments such as consistency, simplicity, and reasonableness that are included in scientific research. The resemblance of such judgments to aesthetic judgments is a subject that has often been discussed. For example, Dirac said that some theories should be taken seriously because they are beautiful. Scientists rely on a type of unnatural intuition to decide which theories are worth testing. This course of action is, according to Putnam, a form of Platonism, and Putnam considers such Platonism to be unnecessary. Just as adjectives that are considered ethically important, such as ruthless and compassionate, describe the adjectives that human beings can possess, not supernatural features, so simplicity and consistency describe the features that human-made scientific theories can possess. Just as judging the cruelty of someone is for evaluation rather than descriptive purposes, qualifications such as simplicity and consistency in scientific theories are for evaluation, not just descriptive purposes. Such assessments may be flawed, but successful scientists can develop the capacity to form such judgments through the learning process and their scientific experience.<sup>10</sup>

Putnam compares ethical judgments with methodological value judgments, considering two purposes. First, he wishes to

<sup>9</sup> Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 136-137.

<sup>10</sup> Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, (Cambridge & Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 68-69.



point out that extreme forms of naturalism, which reject objectivity for ethical values, should show the same attitude toward methodological value judgments. Second, it wants to show that in the field of values, the main problem is the objectivity of the discussion, not the existence of a field of unnatural objects. Putnam considers ethical statements, like any other form of cognitive activity, to be forms of reflection governed by norms of truth and validity. Reflection on reasonable action, given concerns about the moral life, is also dependent, according to Putnam, on the fallible investigative standards upon which all practical reasoning depends, and the concepts of truth and validity are included in practical reasoning. Although Putnam thinks that logical truths are not descriptions, regarding truths in the ethical field, he accepts that some values are descriptions, and some values are not descriptions. A problem that arises about whether judgments about ethics a metaphysical basis have is that the claims in the field of ethics are often controversial. This situation also created a problem brought against the claim of objectivity of ethical claims.<sup>11</sup>

According to Putnam, at least some value judgments must be objective. An example of these value judgments is justification. When metaphysical realism and subjectivism are seen as opposing views, it can be concluded that the theses against metaphysical realism support subjectivism. But Putnam does not simply see metaphysical realism and subjectivism as opposing theses. Today, while the tendency to be a realist in physics-related issues dominates, the tendency to be subjectivist in ethics-related issues is seen more. Putnam relates this to the approach of seeing physics as the only true theory. This approach stems from the recognition of physics as the only rationally acceptable description, not as a suitable description for achieving certain goals, and consequently tends to be subjectivist regarding descriptions that cannot be reduced to physics.<sup>12</sup>

Putnam thinks that in any situation where we have objectless

<sup>11</sup> Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 72-75.

<sup>12</sup> Putnam, *Reason Truth and History*, 142-143.

objectivity, denying the possibility of objective judgments poses greater problems. Metaphysical reasons for denying the possibility of objective ethical judgments may also be a justification for the impossibility of methodological value judgment. Here, it would be necessary to reject the objectivity of science itself. Additionally, to make an explanation that considers the existence of non-natural entities, such as abstract entities, in cases of objectless objectivity, would be a pseudo explanation.<sup>13</sup>

As a result, Putnam says that if the justification for the truth of a belief is expressed as an absolute idea, an absolute concept of truth will be accepted. Additionally, he says that the relativistic approach rejects the idea of objective fit and that the existence of being right in any matter requires accepting a kind of objective truth as a presupposition. He also argued that concerning rationality, it is self-refuting to accept that rational acceptability is subjective, so we should accept that at least some value terms are objective. Another issue that Putnam deals with concerning his conceptions of rationality is the inconsistency of relativistic ideas.

### **Inconsistency of Relativism**

The simplest criticism of relativistic doctrines is the inconsistency of a relativist thinker's acceptance of one perspective even though he claims that no perspective is more correct than the others. Putnam points out that this criticism was also used by Alan Gorfinkel in a speech, but he thinks that despite the inconsistent appearance of relativism among philosophers, the fact that many of the relativistic doctrines have been marketed by clever philosophers shows that this simple rebuttal for relativism is not sufficient. A relativist might argue against this criticism that other truths are not as remarkable as the truths he admits. However, the explanation is also inconsistent. Accepting that opinion is more attractive also means accepting the truth or being verified as a relative concept. Although Putnam finds this explanation inconsistent,

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<sup>13</sup> Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 78-79.

he thinks that the criticism of relativism requires a deeper argument. In the criticism mentioned and expressed by Alan Gorfinkel, it was said that if everything is relative, then relative is relative. However, although this argument provides an explanation against relativism according to Putnam, this explanation is not sufficient. A similar argument was used by Plato against Protagoras. In response to this criticism, Protagoras, a relativist thinker, said that when he said 'x' he meant 'I think there is x.' According to this idea, when we say 'snow is white', we mean 'I think snow is white.' A more sophisticated version of this argument can be stated as follows. When we say snow is white, we want to say 'Snow is white for me.' When someone else says that the snow is white using the same words, he wants to say that the snow is white according to him. According to this idea, the expression 'snow is white' does not have the same meaning when we say the same words and when someone else says them. Putnam points out that this shows that there is a fundamental relationship between the idea of relativism and the idea of incommensurability.<sup>14</sup>

The counter-argument brought by Plato against the explanation of Protagoras is as follows. If someone wants to say 'I think x is' when he says x, he actually wants to say 'I think I think x is.' Here, someone who says 'I think the snow is white' means 'I think I think the snow is white.' Adding the phrase 'I think' to this expression can be repetitive. As a result, this person actually wants to say 'I think, think, ... that the snow is white.' Plato, therefore, regards this argument as a reduction to the absurd (*reductio ad absurdum*). To this argument, Protagoras replies that this analysis cannot be applied to itself indefinitely, but only a finite number of times. In this respect, Putnam states that Plato's argument is not as strong as it seems, but he also thinks that Plato realized something very profound. Pointing out that some philosophers, such as Foucault, refer to the justification being relative to speech as absolute thought, he says that if the truth or falsity of saying that a statement is true according to person A is accepted as absolute, an

<sup>14</sup> Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 119-120.

absolute concept of truth will be accepted with this statement. In this respect, in a fully relativistic approach, he says that whether a statement is true according to person A must also be relative.<sup>15</sup> According to Putnam, an expanded version of Plato's critique of relativism is the Special Language Argument put forward by Wittgenstein. This argument is known as an argument against the copy theory of truth and reveals that the similarity theory of reference does not work, even in the case of referencing sensations. In this respect, Putnam considers this argument a movement against metaphysical realism, but also a traditional argument against a realist viewpoint and a relativist viewpoint. The relativist position in question here is methodological solipsism. Methodological solipsism justifies accuracy by the specific knowledge we have about our experiences rather than rational acceptability. Wittgenstein's argument suggests that with Putnam's account, the relativist cannot distinguish between being right and thinking he is right. Failing to make this distinction ultimately means being unable to distinguish between asserting or thinking and making sounds or forming mental images. Having this thought indicates that we do not see ourselves as thinkers, but merely as animals, and we commit mental suicide. To show that Wittgenstein was right, Putnam takes the distinction made by relativistic thinkers between being true and being true one person. The relativist thinker, starting from the idea that truth is the idealization of rational acceptability; the fact that X is justified for someone may agree that X will be true for that person if it has been sufficiently observed by that person. Here, however, a problem arises with the difference in the interpretation of conditional sentences. A metaphysical realist can take it for granted that a proposition will be true or false if a certain situation occurs. If a relativistic thinker interprets the truth or falsity of a proposition in this way, with a realistic approach, under certain conditions, he accepts an absolute class of propositions. Thus, he abandoned the relativistic approach.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Putnam, *Reason Truth and History*, 120-121.

<sup>16</sup> Putnam, *Reason Truth and History*, 121-123.

The basic feature of the relativistic approach is that it rejects the objective notion of fit. Therefore, the relativist thinker cannot understand talking about truth in terms of objective justification requirements. As a result, Putnam says, using conditional statements, the distinction between being true and thinking it is true fails. Because a relativist cannot have an objective concept of truth about conditional statements either. If there is no difference between claiming that he is right and claiming that he thinks he is right; Is there any point in making images and similar sentences in the hope of having a subjective feeling in the mind that thinking will be right? The point Putnam wants to draw attention to here is that the existence of a kind of objective rightness is a presupposition of thought itself. Putnam thinks that relativist thinkers fail to see this.<sup>17</sup>

While Putnam acknowledged that relativistic approaches were inconsistent, he himself accepted an explanation of conceptual relativity.

### **Conceptual Relativity**

Putnam explains conceptual relativity by considering the problem of mereological sums. Mereology is a subject created by the Polish philosopher Leśniewski. It deals with the calculation of parts and wholes. Leśniewski, with the example given by Putnam, accepted the sum of two separate entities such as my nose and the Eiffel tower as a new object. The difference between mereological totals and classes is expressed by the example of Massachusetts and its counties. The sum of the provinces in Massachusetts makes Massachusetts. However, the sum of land plots and state parks in Massachusetts also makes Massachusetts. This indicates that Massachusetts could be dismantled in more than one way. The set of counties in Massachusetts is not the same as the set of land plots and state parks combined in Massachusetts. This means that the sets are not identical to the corresponding mereological sums.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 123-124.

<sup>18</sup> Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 33-37.

According to Putnam, conceptual relativity is a view that does not accept the idea that there is no truth, or that truth is just a name given to what a group of people agrees to, even though it may seem like relativity. If we think that the world consists of  $x_1$ ,  $x_2$ ,  $x_3$  objects, we can say that there are three objects in the world. However, according to the assumption of mereology, discovered by the Polish logician Leśniewski, the sum of both particles counts as a separate object. If we ignore the empty objects, we can say that the world of three objects actually includes seven objects. According to the first assumption, the world consists of  $x_1$ ,  $x_2$ ,  $x_3$  objects. According to the second assumption, it consists of  $x_1$ ,  $x_2$ ,  $x_3$ ,  $(x_1+x_2)$ ,  $(x_1+x_3)$ ,  $(x_2+x_3)$ ,  $(x_1+x_2+x_3)$  objects. While Putnam argues that the existence of mereological sums is a matter of convention, he does not consider the laws of logic true by convention. Putnam does not think that the kind of convention he describes is the kind we never have to abandon. Driving on the left side of the road or driving on the right is a matter of convention. Putnam considers such a concept convention, used by David Lewis, to be a good sense of convention. A consensus on this matter does not require any metaphysical assumptions about analyticity, relevance, or immunity to revision.<sup>19</sup>

Another example that Putnam mentions regarding this issue is the disagreement about the ontological status of the Euclidean plane. If we think of an airplane on the Euclidean plane, it is possible to think of the points on the plane as parts of the plane, as Leibniz said, or as boundaries, as Kant said. To say that these two interpretations are two different ways of slicing the same dough means, according to Putnam, to accept a piece of space as an abstract entity, and in this case, we accept which entities are abstract and which entities are concrete depending on the version. According to the example mentioned, different answers were given to the question of how many objects the world consists of. If we clarify how the concept of an object or the concept of existence is used in

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<sup>19</sup> Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism*, (Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1987), 17-19.

this question, an unconventional answer will emerge. In this respect, Putnam says, such an example does not support radical cultural relativism. Although our concepts are culturally relative, whether what we say using these concepts is true or false is a matter decided by the culture. Putnam also considers it a logical illusion to ask the question of how many objects exist, depending on the idea that there is an Archimedean point or use of existence found in the world itself.<sup>20</sup>

Putnam called conceptual relativity the view that what exists may depend on some conventions we accept. The type of consensus Putnam mentioned here is exemplified by the different ways in which the parts that make up a whole can be expressed. Putnam accepted conceptual relativity as an attitude that leaves open the question of which of these different forms of expression is correct.

### Objectivity

Putnam views the idea that the world dictates the only correct way to divide the world into objects, states, features, and the like, as philosophically shortsighted. He thinks that this narrow-mindedness is based on what we call Ontology. From the perspective of ontology, the idea that every instance of objectivity must be supported by objects is a notion that Putnam finds wrong. In this respect, Putnam attempts to explain the possibility of objectivity without objects.<sup>21</sup>

As for how truth can be explained without a description of an object or group of objects, Putnam explains it first by showing examples of statements that are not descriptions of objects but are unquestionably true. The most obvious of these examples is the statements of logic. Statements about logical relationships indicate which statement logically follows from an expression. For example, if we say that all mammals are oviparous mammals, we infer from this expression that anything that is not an egg-laying mammal is not a mammal with a beak. As a result, it is possible to

<sup>20</sup> Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism*, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Putnam, *Ethics Without Ontology*, 51.

say that the statement we deduced is a description of the logical relationship between the two statements. To say this is to describe some kind of relationship between some material objects and to do so is to be a "Platonian" in the philosophy of logic. Putnam is against Platonism when he says that we do not describe objects when an inference is valid, or that a statement is a tautology.<sup>22</sup>

With the expression of objectivity, which does not need objects, Putnam wanted to explain that the correctness of a judgment is not necessarily supported by objects. He illustrated this idea by saying that logical inferences are truths that are not descriptions of any object. He related the issue of how to verify logical expressions with conceptual truths.

### Conceptual Truth

If statements of logic are not descriptions of some part of reality, the issue of how we can know the truth of these statements is related to the issue of conceptual truth, according to Putnam. The main feature of conceptual truths is that it is impossible to suggest that the negation of these statements is meaningfully true. Conceptual truths are often intertwined with empirical descriptions. Saying that rejecting a statement is pointless is related to the beliefs, concepts, and conceptual connections we hold. For example, the statement "The sum of the interior angles of a triangle cannot be more than two right angles" was a statement that it was considered meaningless to construct one, not before 1700. However, after the discovery of non-Euclidean geometries, this statement was also accepted as a correct statement.

The intelligibility of this statement was due to changes in the background information. Putnam accepts that conceptual relations and facts are intertwined, and in this respect, conceptual truths are correctable truths. Putnam also does not dismiss distinctions between scientific truths, as Quine does, but considers them methodologically important. Conceptual truths are not the

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<sup>22</sup> Putnam, *Ethics Without Ontology*, 55-56.



foundations of our knowledge in the old sense, but they are related to the existence of our whole knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

Putnam, however, does not consider all logical truths conceptual truths. Some logical truths are truths that seem self-evident and need no proof. If all beaked mammals are egg-laying mammals, it follows that anything that is not an egg-laying mammal is not a beaked mammal, or the statement “ $2+2=4$ ” can be cited as an example of such accuracy. The logical truth of these statements can be accepted as conceptual truth. Some logical truths do not appear as logical truths but are shown to be logical truths through evidence. To know what logical truth is, it is not enough to recognize some examples of logical truths that seem self-evident. To know what it is for something to be logically true, it is necessary to recognize examples of logical justifications. Logical justification becomes necessary in the process of showing that a complex statement or set of statements that do not appear contradictory is actually contradictory, or in the process of showing that a statement that does not appear to be logically necessary truth is actually logically necessary truth. To know what logical truth is, it is necessary to know the standards and functioning of logic. The standards and operations of logic do not require evaluating logical truths in terms of unnatural entities such as propositions or the logical structure of the world.<sup>24</sup>

According to Putnam, logic is concerned with the evaluation of high-level causes, forms of inference and forms of assertion, and evaluation of inference as good or bad. Putnam's particular emphasis on this issue is that judgments expressing causes are not descriptions. Putnam considers this issue to be ignored by naturalist metaphysicians. In this regard, he mentions two kinds of truth. These are mathematical truths and methodological value judgments. Pure logical truths are unprovable truths, but truths related to the basic logic of quantization, called quantization logic, are provable truths. But there is also a problem Putnam specifies

<sup>23</sup> Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 62-63.

<sup>24</sup> Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 63-65.

with associating mathematical truth with demonstrable truth. Philosophers who tried identifying mathematical accuracy with demonstrability could not adapt to the actual applications of mathematics in physics.<sup>25</sup>

According to Putnam, mathematical truths are truths learned through the practices and standards of mathematics itself. In this respect, mathematical truths are similar to logical truths. It also poses some problems in accepting those mathematical truths that need a set of objects to be true. A reason for this is that the objects do not have an explicit identity relationship. Numerous problems can be created regarding the identity between different categories in the mathematical field. Questions such as whether functions are a type of set, whether sets are a type of function, whether numbers are sets, or if they are sets, what kind of sets can be asked. Putnam considers issues of the identity of relationships between different categories of issues of consensus. In this respect, the fact that there are different assumptions about this subject exemplifies a type of conceptual relativity.<sup>26</sup>

Putnam accepted conceptual truths as truths that we can't assert their negations meaningfully. According to Putnam, although conceptual truths are not the basis of our knowledge, they are related to the whole of our knowledge.

Our everyday experience of problem-solving and the types of non-deductive inference in the natural sciences are based on judgments about which theories are robust enough to be tested. Non-deductive inferences are not formulated as deductive inferences. However, non-deductive inferences have something in common with deductive inferences in that they are reasoning exercises. Putnam thinks that the tendency to be Platonist is the tendency to find mysterious beings who stand behind it and guarantee correct judgments on being reasonable or not. According to Putnam, most

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<sup>25</sup> Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 65-66.

<sup>26</sup> Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 66.

ethical judgments are also judgments of the reasonable or the unreasonable. These judgments are not Platonic judgments necessary for the comprehension of transcendent metaphysical ability through reason, but judgments that say what is reasonable and what is not reasonable in terms of concerns about ethical life. There may be disagreements among people about which behavior is ethically reasonable in daily life.<sup>27</sup>

### Conclusion

According to Putnam, what determines what is rational is not any culture, but an ideal theory of rationality. Putnam thinks that an ideal theory of rationality can give necessary and sufficient conditions under ideal conditions to be rational. However, rationality gives criteria that can change with human development. Therefore, although the concept of rationality is closely related to truth, it is not identical to the truth.

To understand Putnam's thoughts, it is necessary to explain what rationality is. It has been said that rationality is a concept associated with human development, but no precise definition has been provided. It has been said that, based on the lack of unchanging criteria of rationality, it is impossible to conclude that values are cultural or relative.

Putnam thinks that the justification of thought is a presupposition of thought. Therefore, to say that truth is acceptable under certain conditions means to abandon relativist thinking. Although Putnam accepts conceptual relativity as different interpretations of the whole and part relationship, he does not accept the view that all values are subjective. It has been said that at least some value judgments must be objective. It has been said that conceptual truths as a type of truth whose negation is impossible to assert, are related to all our knowledge.

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<sup>27</sup> Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 70-72.

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