**Thursday, 3/30/17: Putnam-Style Anti-Skepticism -- Readings 15, 16** Phil. 270

**Brains in Vats, Evil Geniuses (Deceiving Gods), Dreaming, and the Basic Skeptical Argument Based on Such “Skeptical Hypotheses”**

-skeptical hypotheses are proposals as to what our situation is that explain how we might be going wrong with respect to the things we take ourselves to know

-The basic skeptical argument here is something I call the “Argument from Ignorance” (AI) [where ‘H’ is a skeptical hypothesis and ‘O’ is something we would ordinarily take ourselves to know]:

1. I don’t know that ~H

2. If I don’t know that ~H, then I don’t know that O

So, C. I don’t know that O

-“Moorean” responses attack premise 1. Putnam-inspired\* responses to BIV-skepticism do so by providing a proof that ~H

\*See pp. 8-9 of 16 for Putnam’s own attitude here. From here on, for convenience, I’ll just write as if Putnam himself is attacking skepticism

**Refuting the Skeptic** [see sect. 2 of Reading 16]. Putnam’s response falls into a long tradition in which anti-skeptics attempt to refute the skeptic, to prove that the skeptic wrong. This is done by means of arguments for anti-skeptical results [often, for the likes of O; but also often, and in Putnam’s case, for ~H], that, in order to be “proofs”, start from premises that even the skeptic does not dispute. Often the premises available for such a “proof” are limited to two classes: a) simple obvious facts about one’s own states of consciousness (what’s transpiring in one’s own mind); and b) clearly intuitable claims about facts that are metaphysically necessary.

-example of Descartes

**Semantic Externalism:** the contents of at least some of one’s thoughts are not completely determined by ‘internal’ facts about what is going on inside one’s head, but are at least partially determined by such ‘external’ facts as the nature of the items one has been in contact with

**Causal Constraint:** You cannot think with certain concepts unless you have been causally connected in the proper way with items that fall under that concept

-illustrated by Putnam’s Twin-Earth Example.

**Semantic Externalism Applied to the BIV Hypothesis**

-Perhaps BIVs aren’t falsely thinking such things as that they’re seeing trees or that they’re not BIVs, but are thinking such true things as that they’re “seeing” trees-in-the-image and that they are not BIVs-in-the-image?

-Or perhaps they’re not having truth-evaluable thoughts at all? (37.6-.7)

**Dilemma Argument** (as rendered at 16, p. 14):

If I am a BIV, then by, ‘I am not a BIV,’ I mean that I am not a BIV-in‐the‐image (or some closely related true thing), which is in that case true. On the other hand, if I am not a BIV, then by ‘I am not a BIV,’ I mean that I am not a BIV, which is in that case true. Thus, whether I am a BIV or whether I am not, my use of ‘I am not a BIV’ is true. Either way, it’s true; so, it’s true: I’m not a BIV.

**Compatibilist Argument** (suggested at 15, p. 32.4; explained here at 16, p. 14):

[The Compatibilist Argument] combines a negative externalist claim about what a BIV does not (or cannot) mean or think—that by ‘tree’, ‘hand’, ‘vat’, etc., the BIV does not refer to trees, hands, vats, etc.—with a positive claim to the effect that we do have the thoughts in question—the thoughts that the BIVs cannot have. These together imply that we are not BIVs.

**How Strong a Form of Semantic Externalism Do These Arguments Need?:**

-Dilemma argument requires “high-grade” SE (16, pp. 15-16) which Putnam himself seems to have doubts about (15, p. 37.6-.7 again). The Compatibilist Argument has a big advantage here in that it requires only a very modest form of S.E.: it can be fueled just by the causal constraint (16, pp. 16-17). Well, so long as we use Putnam’s BIV scenario. But….

**Problem: Other BIV Scenarios:** both arguments have a big problem with other BIV scenarios, like recent envatment versions of the BIV hypothesis (16, pp. 17-19; P’s scenario is at 15, p. 31.4)

**Refuting the Skeptic and the Compatibilist Argument:** Does SE expand certainty, or doubt? Given S.E., does the presumed certainty we have about our own mental states seep out into the external world (since we couldn’t have those thoughts without the external world being certain ways), or does the presumed uncertainty of our grasp of the external world seep into our grasp of the contents of our own thoughts?!

**Heroic vs. Diagnostic Responses to Skepticism (sect. 6 of Reading 16)**

But suppose Putnam has “proven” that ~BIV. How does that help with our skeptical argument? What about my mom? Riff on heroic vs. diagnostic responses to skepticism.

**[Putnam himself and Skepticism]**

-Putnam claims to being giving “an argument…that shows we are not brains in a vat”

-but he only mentions skepticism at 31.2, and in such a way as to indicate a lack of interest: he seems more interested in “raising issues about the mind/world relationship (see KDR, 8.9-9.0)

-but then there’s the later (1994) material (about his argument being directed against “internal skepticism”) discussed at KDR 9-12