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Rationality in Action: *Intentions, Interpretations and Interactions*



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image of action that was elaborated during the process of rational deliberation.

Is It Necessary for Practice to Be Interpreted? L. Wittgenstein, H. Putnam And The Problem of Scientific Cognition

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Abstract: *This paper deals with two philosophical approaches to the problem of practice and its interpretation. It is demonstrated that there is a significant difference between L. Wittgenstein's and H. Putnam's theories of practice. According to Wittgenstein, an actor should not interpret the practice and reveal some implied sense for correct rule following. But Putnam argues that without interpretation the practice cannot provide the reference of our language's terms to the reality. This article demonstrates that this difference in Wittgenstein's and Putnam's theories of practice is connected with their philosophical understanding of science and possibility of scientific cognition.*

Key words: *pragmatism, practice, interpretation, science, rule following*

Interpretation of practice: Wittgenstein vs. Putnam
Contemporary philosophy of language provides a lot of different ways to conceptualize interpretation and to analyze its significance for everyday and scientific practices. But this paper singles out theories of Wittgenstein and Putnam. Nowadays Ludwig Wittgenstein becomes one of the classic philosophers equally with Plato and Kant. His thought is one of the most influential sources for contemporary philosophy of language, social theory, political science and other hu-

manities. Hilary Putnam is not so famous as Wittgenstein, but his philosophical approach to the issues of practice and its interpretation can be alternative to the mainstream of Wittgenstein's ideas.

Wittgenstein Late Wittgenstein in his «Philosophical Investigations» conceptualizes the using of language and other cognitive and everyday practices in terms of «rule-following»¹⁶². According to Wittgenstein, any human, when he or she speaks, calculates, reads or so on, just follows for some rule. This human does not have to guess some implicit sense of the rule or interpret it¹⁶³. He or she does anything immediately. If something goes wrong, society corrects the actor — but this correction is also independent of any interpretation of the rule and practice.

So, in the late ideas of «Philosophical Investigations» Wittgenstein doesn't postulate some ontological structure of the language and practices, which can be found through interpretation and analysis. It helps the philosopher to avoid many ontological paradoxes of traditional metaphysics. But the concept of practice without interpretation and any ontological relevance cannot be used in philosophical defense of scientific knowledge's.

Putnam In debates on realism, Hilary Putnam criticizes «metaphysical realism». American philosopher uses this term to identify positivists» theory that there is only one real world and only one metaphysically preferred way of its description with some magic reference of language's terms to the world's ontology. Putnam shows that «metaphysical realism» is based on the philosophical model which considers language to passively copy the ontology of the world and to

¹⁶² *Wittgenstein L.* Philosophical Investigations. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001. §54.

¹⁶³ *Idem.* §34.

present it in internal language's structure.

Putnam argues that, on the contrary, there is no metaphysically privileged description of the world's ontology. This thesis is based on Putnam's philosophy of language and his theory of reference. If an image in mind or language is not interpreted by an interpreter, this image cannot represent any structures of reality. If an ant draws the line which looks like Winston Churchill, it does not mean that this ant really images Churchill.

This emphasis on interpretation is very significant for Putnam's philosophy of science. Putnam develops the principle of experimentalism, which is typical for classic pragmatism. Philosopher says that in an experiment the scientist interprets the scientific theory and constructs reference of terms of scientific theory to the elements of experimental practice¹⁶⁴. Of course, the ontological structure of the theory is worked out by scientific community. But the experiment verification of the theory is possible because of correlation between ontology of the theory and the elements of experimental practice. This correlation is connected with scientist's interpretation and understanding of theory's propositions and the concrete experimental practice. So, interpretation in Putnam's philosophy becomes the link between an experiment and a scientific theory.

Does Putnam indeed refuse Wittgenstein's general concept of language and practice? Of course, he doesn't. On the contrary, the ideas of «Philosophical Investigations» are significant for Putnam's version of pragmatism. In our everyday life, it is not necessary to interpret every proposition and every action for reference between our language, practices and reality. Our capacity to understand proposition is

¹⁶⁴ Putnam H. *Pragmatism: An Open Question*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995. P. 61.

enough for its correlation with reality in everyday practices¹⁶⁵.

I consider this general theory of non-metaphysical pragmatic reference to be the transcendental condition for Putnam's view on philosophical significance of interpretation in the science. A scientist is just a human doing some kind of practice. But his practice is linked with the specific function of language which presents us some knowledge about reality. So, scientific knowledge and interpretation of scientific theory in experiment both are the forms of life with their specific rules. The scientist follows these rules and does research through interpretation of his experimental practice, but it is possible because first of all this scientist is a human who can understand some linguistic proposition and do some practices which has immediate correlation to the real world.

Interpretation of the practice and significance of science So, Hilary Putnam analyzes the function of interpretation in scientific practices. At the contrary, Wittgenstein does not emphasize any specific form of life which needs interpretation for correct rule following. This difference between two philosophical approaches is caused by different general attitudes to science in Wittgenstein's and Putnam's philosophy.

For Putnam, the philosophical apology of the science is one of his aims. His philosophy of realism, which has been developed from 1970ths, has been worked out in debates with relativistic attitude to science and methodology which is the key idea of historian school in philosophy of science (T. Kuhn, P. Feyerabend) and postmodern pragmatism (R. Rorty).

¹⁶⁵ Putnam H. *Pragmatism and Realism*. L., N.Y.: Routledge, 2002. P. 84.

Nevertheless, Putnam deals with the issue of interpretation also in the discussion with positivism and scientism in order to defend ethical and existential spheres of human life from ambitions of reductionism. In his late book «Ethics without Ontology,» Putnam emphasizes that even the best scientific theory in the world cannot restrict the freedom of interpretation¹⁶⁶.

Late Wittgenstein, as well as Putnam, criticizes positivistic ambition to reduce all human life to the scientific model of reality. In his notes «Culture and Value» Wittgenstein writes that he wants to resist European civilization with its idea of scientific progress which actually is only word progress¹⁶⁷. So, in his opposition to the science Wittgenstein is more radical than Putnam, that's why he totally refuses any ontological and philosophical significance of the science. Of course, he also argues against skepticism, but he is interested in fundamental skeptic problems such as solipsism and radical skepticism in Hume's sense. But metaphysical debates with skepticism don't make Wittgenstein defend significance of scientific knowledge.

That's why Wittgenstein doesn't agree with the specific ontological function of the science and refuse it as the part of progress's civilization, which doesn't understand fundamental metaphysical and religious questions of human being. But this general attitude to science doesn't allow Wittgenstein to reflect on the interesting case of language games and rule following in the science.

On the contrary, Putnam tries to demonstrate that we can agree with the significance of the science without reduc-

¹⁶⁶ Putnam H. *Ethics without Ontology*. Cambridge, L.: Harvard University Press, 2004. P. 83–83.

¹⁶⁷ Wittgenstein L. *Culture and Value*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. P. 9.

tionism and neglect metaphysical and religious sense of our life. The concept of interpretation helps Putnam to work out well-balanced attitude to the science. On the one hand, the science is really important part of our life, because it is not only set of practices like the magic or ancient rituals as well as only abstract theories which are artificially constructed by scientific society and have not any correlation and reference to reality itself. On the other hand, science cannot provide us with completed metaphysical description of the world's ontology which should give an answer to any human's question.

Conclusion The difference between Putnam's and Wittgenstein's theory of practice and its interpretation in the everyday life and scientific activities has two significant consequences. On the one hand, Putnam's theory provides intellectual strategies for apology of realism whereas Wittgenstein's one cannot be used for discussing metaphysical problems. On the other hand, Putnam works out his concept of the practices to defend, as well as to circumscribe, scientific cognition of the world. Putnam, as well as Wittgenstein, doesn't consider scientific progress to be the solution for all the spiritual question of human being. So, American philosopher doesn't betray Wittgenstein's emphasis on value of everyday life and religious sense of the world. He just says that the science based on our capacity of interpretation is the important part of the human life. Nevertheless, this part can't forbid anybody to interpret the world in metaphysical or religious way.

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