

in Miłosz's poems (for example in the beautiful poem *To Mrs. Professor in defense of the cat's honour and not only*). The philosophy of History has a close relation to theodicy. Here Miłosz's masters were Hegel and his Marxist devotee, a friend of Miłosz's – Tadeusz Kronski. His influence was already highlighted in *Treatise on Poetry*, particularly in the extensive third part, *World Spirit (Weltgeist)*. In the last chapter of Siwiec's book, the question of evil comes back once again, this time enriched by reflections on the mystery of creative being and on the price paid by a poet for penetrating „the essence of monstrosity” (Miłosz, *Search*, p. 265).

This book by Marek Kazimierz Siwiec deserves high recognition. The excellent analyses of Wat's and Miłosz's poems allow the reader to penetrate their meaning deeply, to experience (if this is possible at all) the depth of their primordial experience, to ascertain their authentically philosophical character. To elicit this and to show it in a clear way is an impressive accomplishment by the author. The reason for drawing a connection between Wat and Miłosz has proved to be obvious: „Both poets, in a sense, have experienced a similar spiritual path, in which the turning moment is *being*, i.e. opening to mystery through the experience of evil” (p. 27).

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Piotr Sikora, *Słowa i zbawienie. Dyskurs religijny w perspektywie filozofii Hilarego Putnama* [Words and salvation. Religious discourse in the perspective of Hilary Putnam's philosophy], Kraków: Universitas 2004, 330 pp.

Hilary Putnam's Philosophy in the Battle for the Rationality of Religious Discourse

Does religious discourse make sense? Is it possible to use rational arguments in discussions about God and faith in God? Do notions used in religious thought function in the same way as notions used in other areas of human intellectual activity? Is it necessary to believe in God in order to take part in serious disputes about religious matters? These and similar questions seem to remain open to philosophical debate and they are as interesting as ever for one who would like to keep the conversation going in theology and philosophy of religion. And what is more, they are important, not only from a philosophical point of view, but also from a, so to speak, cultural perspective. Especially nowadays when we ask about the role of religion and its place in the contemporary world.

Sikora's book is an excellent example of philosophical work in which certain arguments and notions coming from philosophical discourse serve as tools for solv-

ing problems in religious thought. He chooses Hilary Putnam's philosophical ideas in order to formulate his account of religious discourse. The task of his book is to state a certain view of the sense, rationality and truthfulness of religious discourse (p. 5). At a glance the idea of using Putnam's thought in order to do that seems rather unwise. First of all, Putnam himself claims that it is impossible to submit religious discourse to philosophical analysis. Sikora is well aware of this fact, but he disagrees with Putnam's point (p. 6). Secondly, Putnam's thought has evolved. He has in the past given up his theories and he is famous for being the best critic of his own ideas. Hence, it is very difficult to interpret Putnam's philosophical thought as one, comprehensible, coherent philosophical perspective. Again, ambitiously, Sikora wants to do so by trying to present those views which seem correct to him, no matter when, chronologically speaking, they were formulated by Putnam himself (p. 7). Finally, and more generally, using philosophical arguments to prove the rationality of religious discourse involves taking for granted some assumptions which are by no means obvious. One of these assumptions is that religious talk should be ordered in the same way as other human discourses, and similarly, that it should be in the kingdom of reason (as it has been understood by philosophers). There is a strong and well grounded tradition deriving from Kierkegaard's thought in which religion and religious talk have nothing to do with reason, at least with reason as it has been seen by philosophers, logicians and scientists. Although the validity of this assumption would be a subject for another book, it is a pity that Sikora does not show, even in a footnote, that he is aware of the fact that he represents just one of many possible ways of understanding religious discourse.

The structure of the book

Sikora's book consists of three major parts. In the first one he presents Putnam's criticisms of metaphysical realism, and philosophical reductionisms and relativisms under the title, *The dilemma of contemporary philosophy*. In the second part, entitled *The ways of getting out the dilemma* he characterizes Putnam's positive views on the acting subject, meaning and truth. The third part *Religious discourse* is wholly devoted to all possible issues connected with religious talk and its characteristics.

In chapter I of the first part, the author presents the notion of metaphysical realism and the ways it has been criticized, with the support of two arguments. Namely, arguments against the idea of the radical independence of the world from the mind (the model-theoretic argument and the argument from semantic externalism). In what follows he discusses reductive objectivism, showing the points which have been made for and against it in the literature. In chapter II he claims, following Putnam, that it is not the case that everything goes and that everything is a text. Hence, he characterizes contemporary relativistic views and formulates arguments against them.

The second part opens with a discussion of the characteristics of the acting agent and the priority of praxis which is emphasized in Putnam's philosophy. Sikora pre-

sents Putnam's way of defending the normativity of reason, which is connected with giving up the fact/value dichotomy and with the claim that experience has a conceptual character. The difficulties with conceptual relativity are also discussed here (chapter III). In this part some problems in the philosophy of language take the stage, and the author considers the question how such basic notions as meaning, understanding and interpretation have been treated in Putnam's philosophy. He concludes by trying to present a coherent view of Putnam's conception of truth, which is an extremely difficult task, because Putnam has changed his views (chapter IV).

In the third part the author makes two important claims. First, that a philosopher of religion has to be personally engaged in religion (p. 216), and second, that arguments taken from philosophy are indispensable in discussing central problems of religious discourse, especially when it concerns semantic matters (p. 222) (chapter V). In what follows, Sikora defends the right of religion to be an element of culture (discussing the neo-positivist account and non-cognitivism in philosophy of religion, chapter VI). In the long and detailed chapter VII, Sikora explains how he understands the meaning of religious discourse within the perspective of Putnam's views, as characterized in the first part of the book. He especially considers the specific character of religious discourse, presents some theories concerning religious language, and gives an analysis of the reference of the word „God'. He also shows what the religious view of the world is and how it is connected with some non-religious views, and finally he discusses the truthfulness of religious discourse. The concluding chapter, VIII, is entitled *The rationality of religious discourse* and it contains all the issues which are crucial from the point of view of the task of the book. Sikora investigates the arguments in favor of the existence of God, he shows how the rationality of faith can be proved by means of the pragmatic ideas of W. James and he finishes his considerations by showing the rationality of religious discussions.

General remarks

The ambitious task of presenting in a monograph, one comprehensible and coherent interpretation of Putnam's philosophy is worthy of praise for three quite different reasons. Firstly because there has been no such attempt in Polish philosophical literature so far. Although Putnam's texts are often cited, and his arguments and ideas play quite a vital role in many texts written by Polish philosophers, there are not many works which characterize all of Putnam's most important ideas. Especially for a reader who is not so familiar with all of Putnam's books. Secondly, only a few of Putnam's most crucial texts are available in Polish, so it is important to have some secondary resources. And there is no need to prove to anyone that Putnam's ideas are worth studying. Finally, to interpret the philosophy of a very well known individual is to face the fact that there are many, many books and articles to be read, whether written by Putnam or by his commentators. Many of Putnam's theories have been given up the author himself and have been changed and trans-

formed in the context of arguments given in widely spread discussions in many different philosophical arenas (books devoted to Putnam's philosophy, conferences, internet websites, etc.). To interpret such a philosophy means also to take the risk and responsibility of presenting our own interpretation (which can always be criticized), to decide what is more and less important, and why it matters in relation to our own philosophical views. Sikora was not afraid to take this risk, and such an attitude is something which should be admired. Nevertheless, our ambitions and their realizations differ.

Sikora's method of writing is quite difficult, hence he has produced a text which is extremely hard to follow in some parts. He has decided to present Putnam's philosophy by characterizing at length the arguments Putnam gives in his works. As a result we have Putnam's arguments with Sikora's comments, followed by arguments given by one or more philosophers who have been in debate with Putnam, quite often enriched with the remarks of yet other thinkers (including Sikora). It is often the case that we do not know which is Putnam's view and why so many names have to be mentioned in order to explain Putnam's reasoning. It is especially annoying for a reader who does not know Putnam's philosophy very well. The impression is that we are dealing with a succession of many different arguments and comments which seem not to be organized by any idea, on the part of the author, as to why they should all appear in the same place. (As an example see point 3 of chapter III of the second part. There are eight philosophers whose arguments, remarks, comments or notions are mentioned on twenty pages there.) As a result the author's own views and ideas are lost in the tangle of someone else's arguments and it is sometimes difficult to be sure whose views are being considered (this is especially so in the first and second parts of the book).

The third part of the book is easier to read, as if the author has found a philosophical context for which he has more passion. Putnam's ideas, which were so carefully analyzed in previous parts, are used here to illustrate Sikora's views on religion and religious discourse. However, sometimes one can have the impression that the author's reasoning would have remained the same even without Putnam's help (pp. 226-236, 249-256, 298-311) and that Putnam's notions serve only to illustrate some points which have been made independently from the very beginning (p. 247, 263). As a reader of Putnam's texts, aware of his philosophical style, in which he tries to avoid making absolute and fundamentally metaphysical (in traditional sense) claims, one is surprised that Sikora does not follow him here. There are a lot of general statements in the third part, concerning which the reader does not know whether they are just accepted as definitions or are hypotheses which are going to be proved (but sometimes are not).

Few more detailed disputable points

Only books written by ambitious writers, with factual knowledge, are suitable for constructive criticism. Such books are able to provoke the reader to think over her

own ideas, to force her to analyze the details, and to formulate some counter-arguments. There is no question that Sikora's book meets these requirements. Hence let me point out the few places where my doubts have been raised.

On page 12 Sikora enumerates seven theses which define a 'metaphysical realist' and claims that according to Putnam one becomes such a realist when one accepts just one of them. This is not so obvious for me. In *Dewey's Lectures* (p. 466) Putnam quite clearly states that a metaphysical realist accepts all three ideas, each of them being treated as representing metaphysical realism in a sense. They are the following: there is a definite totality of all objects (Sikora's claim number 1), there is a definite totality of all properties (Sikora claim number 2), and truth is a kind of correspondence (Sikora's claim nr 3). All the other claims (4-7) which Sikora rightly points out, can be treated as additions to the package of three ideas mentioned above.

One of the great advantages of Sikora's book is that it gives a kind of overview of some basic notions, arguments and ideas used in contemporary discussions, in so called analytic philosophy, which are not always very well known. Hence, it is important to present them in clear and informative way. However, in Sikora's book this is not always the case. When he writes about Quine's indeterminacy of translation and Davidson's indeterminacy of interpretation (p. 38-39), he infers the right conclusions from both of these notions, but he does not explain exactly what theses are implicit in them. Which, in this context, may seem to suggest that these two indeterminacies are more or less the same, which is not true. Similar problems occur when some of Wittgenstein's notions are introduced. On page 61 Sikora underlies the role of nature in Wittgenstein's philosophy. The question is, what does 'nature' refer to? It is by no means obvious in Wittgenstein's texts, and the problem of interpreting the naturalistic hints in his philosophy (especially his attitude towards the nature/culture dichotomy, his critique of natural-science based methodology, and the role of a specifically understood grammar in his views on language) is still the subject of debate. Then on page 221 Sikora, referring to Wittgenstein's famous notion, writes that 'Religion is a form of human life'. It is not obvious what exactly a form of life is and one cannot be sure, in this context, who the author of above claim is: Putnam, Wittgenstein or Sikora himself. (On page 195 the author uses the expression „[...] it requires one to commit oneself to the given form of life', and respectively on page 313 'the form of life which is practiced', which seems to presuppose that people can choose the form of life they are going to live by. Such an interpretation would be very hard to reconcile with its Wittgensteinian origins. Sometimes Sikora suggests that he understands that notion according to Wittgenstein's views, but the example shows that he uses it – rightly so – in his own, but unexplained way.)

I have already mentioned the problem with the general statements which can be so easily found in Sikora's book. Let me be more specific. I very much appreciate Sikora's style, in which he is not afraid to evaluate arguments, to disagree with

someone's ideas, to show the weak points of the theories analyzed. It is great that he does not hide his own views, but he presents them in a very unsystematic way. Unfortunately, he sometimes falls into the trap of making judgments so general that they do not refer to anything or anyone in particular. Let me give two examples. On page 72 he complains, following Putnam, that not all deconstructivists attempt to justify their claims, and even when some of them do so, their argumentation is incomplete. The reader does not know whose texts, exactly, Sikora has in mind (although Derrida is mentioned, not even one text written by him is referenced). On page 101 Sikora writes that '[...] a lot people think that reason treated as something normative does not exist', again I would like to know, who has made such a claim, and where.

On page 240 we find the question whether the doctrine of salvation is an important element of all religions. But just a few pages later (p. 261), this feature is taken for granted and defines all religious discourse as such. There is nothing wrong with this move as long as we are told if the definition mentioned above is just one proposal among many, or the only possible theoretical move (and if so, why). According to the author, the need for salvation equals a complete and inalienable flowering of humanity (p. 261), and it can be achieved only if we accept that God exists (p. 308). It is not clear if such claims are valid only within religious discourse or they have to be accepted universally (and in what sense of 'universal'), which would be an important matter in the perspective of Putnam's philosophy. In the conclusion Sikora openly writes that there is a universal need (for salvation) which is grounded in the source of every religion and that religious disputes can take place only if 'our whole rationality' is used (p. 313). But, how much can we learn from that if some explanations are not added? How can we follow such advice of using 'our whole rationality' in practical situations? It was Putnam himself who taught us to be careful with any generalizations which we tend to make in philosophy. It is a pity that after detailed consideration of Putnam's views in the first and second part of the book, Sikora finishes the book with such vague statements as conclusions.

There are some bibliographical points which have to be mentioned for the sake of the order of this review. In footnote 16 on page 64, and again on page 67, Sikora refers to Davidson's famous text *On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme*, but neither there, nor in the bibliography does he mention that there exists a Polish translation of this text. („O schemacie pojęciowym”, tłum. Jarosław Gryz, *Literatura na Świecie* 1974/5, pp. 100-119).

There are a lot of citations in the book, which have been translated by the author and many of them are really difficult to follow in Polish. I treat translations as interpretations, so as a matter of personal preference I would prefer to have less literal translations, which would sound less rough in Polish. (There are, however, a few mistakes in some of them as well. To mention just one, on page 163 there is a quotation from Putnam's *Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity*, in which the author has not emphasized that it begins in the middle of the sentence, and what is more

the word „disputes” has disappeared in the Polish version (he writes: ‘towards values in practice’, where there should be ‘towards value disputes in practice’). Referring to Putnam’s texts Sikora sometimes suggests something which is highly disputable. For example on page 166 he writes that Putnam is ready to accept that the truth of sentences is based on their agreement with reality, which is supposedly found in Putnam’s *Sense, Nonsense and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind*. But the word ‘agreement’ does not occur there. Putnam just says that empirical statements already make claims about the world, even if they do not contain the expression ‘is true’. To say that things are as the sentences about them tell us, is different than saying that we want to use the notion of agreement in our theory of truth. And Putnam is very well aware of this fact.

I treat the contents of a bibliography as a matter of choice, and I am not going to raise any points against Sikora’s selection. Nevertheless I would like to mention that it is a pity that in discussing the problem of the fact/value dichotomy (pp. 148-166), the author has not used Putnam’s text *Pragmatism and nonscientific knowledge*, which is available in Polish. (U. Żegleń (ed.), *Pragmatyzm i filozofia Hilary Putnama*, Toruń 2001.) What is crucial here is that this text originated as a talk delivered at the conference on American Neo-pragmatism organized in Poland (Toruń) in 1998, and there is also an English version of it. (J. Conant and U. Żegleń (eds.), *Hilary Putnam. Pragmatism and Realism*, London: Routledge 2002.)

Instead of conclusion

Sikora’s book is not an easy one to read. I have felt lost quite often, following too many overlapping arguments, and quite frustrated when reasoning with a rich content has led me to rather modest conclusions. The book is certainly meant for the ambitious reader who is patient enough to take her time for slow and careful reading – which I treat rather as an advantage in our contemporary world obsessed with action governed by ‘fast time’. On the whole, let me underlie that one can learn a lot from Sikora’s work, and can even find philosophical pleasure in analyzing it.

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