SUBJECTIVITY AND THE UNITY OF THE WORLD

By Kent Baldner

I. PUTNAM’S CHALLENGE TO KANT

In ‘Realism with a Human Face’, Hilary Putnam argues that we must abandon the notion that there is any ‘God’s-Eye View’ from which we can obtain a complete explanation of the entire world.¹ His argument is not simply that we cannot achieve such a picture of the world in practice. Rather, he argues, no such comprehensive picture is even theoretically possible, and so we must content ourselves with various partial or incomplete descriptions and explanations. While Putnam sees this conclusion as buttressing his own ‘internal realism’, he recognizes that not all will find such fare equally palatable. Specifically, he claims (p. I8) that even though there is something clearly Kantian about the idea that there are strict limits to what we can know, Kant himself would have been ‘distressed’ by this result. In this paper I shall examine the aspects of Kant’s account of experience that apparently generate this tension, and I shall argue that there is, in fact, no necessary incompatibility between Kant’s views and the results Putnam describes.

Putnam begins (p. 4) by calling our attention to certain features of quantum mechanics. On the Copenhagen interpretation of the theory (I confine myself to this interpretation, since all of Putnam’s comments about quantum mechanics presuppose it), ‘every property of ... [a] system is considered to have meaning and existence only in relation to a particular measuring apparatus in a particular experimental situation’. He summarizes this by quoting from Wigner that we must recognize a ‘cut between the system and the observer’. The importance of this point, argues Putnam, is that while quantum theory can be understood as providing an explanation for everything in the universe other than the observer (or measuring apparatus), it cannot be understood as providing an explanation for everything including the observer. This implies that quantum mechanics is essentially incomplete, in that it necessarily leaves part of the universe either as unexplained or as

¹ In H. Putnam, Realism with a Human Face (Harvard UP, 1990), pp. 3–29, esp. pp. 7–18.
explained by some other, possibly incompatible theory. If we accept this, it means that we must give up the idea that there is, even in principle, a single, complete and self-consistent ‘explanation of everything’.

Putnam thinks we reach essentially the same conclusion from considerations arising out of the so-called ‘semantic paradoxes’. The upshot of these, he argues, is that we must give up the idea that we can formulate a theory of truth general enough to be understood as applying to all languages, including the language in which the theory itself is expressed. Consequently, any theory of truth will at best apply to all languages other than the one in which it is expressed, with truth for this language left either unexplained, or explained by some other (perhaps incompatible) account of truth. What we have here, Putnam points out, is something that substantially parallels the ‘cut between the system and the observer’ posited by quantum mechanics. And so now it seems that with respect to both our scientific and semantic theories we are forced to give up the idea that there is, even in principle, a single complete and consistent way of describing the entire world.

The conflict with Kant that these conclusions generate may not be obvious at first glance. The very essence of Kant’s transcendental idealism, after all, is that there is no ‘external’ vantage point outside or beyond the world as we experience it, from which we can describe or explain things as they are apart from our epistemic relations to them. For Kant, knowledge is essentially knowledge-for-us (or at least knowledge for some possible experience), and so he would concur with Putnam’s suggestion that there is, even in principle, no transcendent perspective from which we can obtain ‘imper-sonal’ knowledge of how things are independently of the epistemic relations they stand in to us.

But Putnam believes the results discussed above establish something more than this, and it is this ‘something more’ that Putnam believes would distress Kant. Scientific explanation, according to Kant, pertains solely to the world as we experience it, and so he would not be distressed by the inability of some theory (such as quantum mechanics) to characterize any aspects of reality that purportedly transcend the possibility of experience. But, Putnam claims, the incompleteness he is attributing to quantum mechanics should not be understood as arising out of its inability to characterize the intrinsic nature of any transcendent reality. Rather, quantum mechanics is incomplete as an empirical theory, because it gives up any pretensions of being adequate for describing in its entirety even the world as experienced, and so apparently requires the existence of multiple incomplete and incompatible partial descriptions of the empirical world. Consequently, if we are to understand the problems these considerations concerning semantics and quantum mechanics apparently pose for Kant, we need to examine Kant’s
reasons for thinking that there is in fact a kind of unity or completeness necessarily implicit in our conception of the world as experienced.

II. THE UNITY OF THE SELF AND THE UNITY OF THE WORLD

The problem, once again, is that Putnam claims that contemporary developments in quantum mechanics and semantics undermine Kant's belief that there must be, at least in principle, some unitary, consistent and complete explanation of the entire empirical world. I shall argue that if we understand both the nature of the incompleteness Putnam finds in quantum mechanics and semantics, and the commitment to the explanatory unity of the world that follows from Kant's account of experience, we shall see that there is no incompatibility between Kant and these contemporary developments.

As I see it, Kant claims that there is a necessary unity implicit in the world as we experience it — a unity that makes itself manifest within experience, rather than something that can be surveyed or assessed only from some transcendent vantage point outside experience. His argument is that the very possibility of consciousness presupposes that there must be a unity of consciousness, and that this in turn presupposes that there must be a unity of the rules or laws in terms of which we experience the world. Consequently the claim is that the explanatory unity of the world as experienced is a precondition for the very possibility of experience.

Although Kant's discussion of these matters is contained in some of the most difficult portions of the Critique of Pure Reason, there are passages where he makes his case in a relatively straightforward way, as in the following remarks from the first edition version of the Transcendental Deduction:

There can be in us no modes of knowledge, no connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness that precedes all data of intuitions, and by relation to which representation of an object is alone possible. This transcendental unity of apperception forms out of all possible appearances, which stand alongside one another in one experience, a connection according to laws. For this unity of consciousness would be impossible if the mind in knowledge of the manifold could not become conscious of the identity of function whereby it synthetically combines it in one knowledge. The original and necessary consciousness of the self is thus at the same time a consciousness of an equally necessary unity of the synthesis of all appearances according to rules (A107–8; my italics).

I paraphrase the argument here as follows:

There can be no knowledge of an object without there being a single consciousness which interprets various representations as standing in necessary relations to one

2 All excerpts from the Critique are from the Kemp Smith translation (New York: St Martin's Press, 1929).
another. But the unity or singularity of this consciousness essentially involves a (potential) consciousness of the unity of the rules or functions in terms of which this interpretative activity takes place. In other words, consciousness of the necessary unity of the knowing subject involves consciousness of the equally necessary unity of the rules by which we organize the various parts of experience into an experience of objects, that is, consciousness of the unity of the world as experienced.

Before we look at the importance of this conclusion for our discussion here, let us look more closely at why Kant thinks that consciousness (of objects) presupposes a unity of consciousness. In the second edition version of the Deduction, Kant makes much the same point by saying ‘It must be possible for the “I think” to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought ... and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me’ (B131–2). The full import of this claim is easy to overlook. One of the things Kant is saying is that for me to conceive of any two (or more) representations as constituting components of a single experience of an object, I must conceive of them as occurring ‘in’ some one mind that interprets them as standing in externally necessitated relations to one another.

But he is saying more than this. What we have just established is that for any two or more representations to be experienced as being ‘about’ the same object, they must be experienced as occurring ‘in’ the same subject. But what Kant says in the passage just cited is that it must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all of my representations. It seems, that is, that the requirement under consideration applies equally to individual representations as well as to collections of representations. Consequently, the claim is that every conscious state that is or contributes to a representation of an object makes essential reference to some other (at least potentially) conscious state, i.e., to the awareness that this representation is my representation.

The essence of Kant’s thesis here can be found in the analysis of this ‘reference’ that each representation makes to the awareness that it is mine. What does this ‘reference’ consist in? That is, when I am aware of some representation as being mine, as belonging to a single, unitary subject, what is it that I am aware of? One thing I am not aware of, according to Kant, is any relation between this representation and a transcendent self-in-itself. I am aware of myself, just as I am aware of everything else, only as I appear to myself, and so my knowledge that this representation is mine cannot consist in any knowledge that it ‘belongs’ to some unitary enduring self-in-itself. The unity or identity of self necessary for the possibility of experience is not to be found in some ‘noumenal self’ that transcends experience, but in

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what is immanent within experience: it is none other than the identity of the rule or function by which we organize representations into experiences of objects. In sum, the necessary unity presupposed by the very possibility of experience is not the metaphysical unity of a noumenal substance, but rather the nomological unity of the world as experienced.

I think that Kant has hit on something fundamental here concerning the nature of consciousness (of objects): that it is essentially holistic. What this means is that representations of objects 'would be nothing to us' apart from their relations to other representations. Individual representations can come to consciousness (or can contribute to a conscious experience of some object) only by way of necessary, internal relations to other representations. 'Units' of consciousness are not conceptual atoms, with extended periods of consciousness being mere collections or aggregates of independent units that would still count as conscious episodes apart from their relations to each other. Rather, consciousness is essentially a 'whole', where the individual representations or 'parts' can contribute to consciousness only by way of necessary connections to one another.

A fundamental tenet of Kant's transcendental idealism is that 'the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are likewise the conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience' (A158/B197), or, as I would say, of the possibility of objects as experienced. Consciousness, I have just argued, is essentially unitary and holistic. But consciousness (at least consciousness of objects) is also intentional – it is of or about something – and consequently the unity necessarily immanent within experience must make itself manifest in the unity of this 'something' we experience. I argued above that the unity of consciousness necessary for the possibility of experience cannot be understood by appeal to any transcendent self-in-itself, but must be found instead in the unity of the rule or function by which we organize our representations into an experience of objects. But, by the same token, the unity of this rule or function cannot itself be understood in terms of the unity of any transcendent act of synthesizing (of which we could have no awareness), but only by appeal to some unity necessarily implicit in the world as we experience it. Consequently, the transcendental unity of apperception, necessary even for the possibility of experience, can be none other than the unity of the world, as experienced. If successful, then, Kant's argument here establishes that our experience of objects is possible only if we experience those objects as parts of one world, or, as he says, as parts of 'one nature' (A216/B263) – that is, as subject to one set of laws and amenable, at least in principle, to one over-arching complete and consistent explanation. And this, it seems, is precisely what Putnam denies.
III. ABSOLUTE VERSUS PERSPECTIVAL INCOMPLETENESS

It looks, at this point, as though there is a fundamental incompatibility between Kant's views about the nature of experience and the incompleteness Putnam claims to find in contemporary physics and semantics. Kant's claim is that in order to be conscious of the world at all, we must experience it as essentially 'one' – as being bound, at least in principle, by one set of rules or laws, and thus as explainable in terms of some single complete explanation. Putnam, on the other hand, has apparently demonstrated that this sort of explanatory completeness is incompatible with our best empirical theories of the world, and likewise with any semantic theories whatsoever. I shall argue in this section that the appearance of incompatibility is illusory.

Let us look again at the kind of incompleteness Putnam finds in semantics and quantum mechanics. It may help to begin by contrasting this with the more customary sort with which we are all familiar from standard discussions in meta-logic. In those discussions, we characterize a theory as incomplete when, for any formalization of it, there are statements we informally recognize as being entailed by the theory whose formal counterparts cannot be demonstrated within the system. So in these discussions the incompleteness is with regard to certain 'truths' that cannot be captured by any formalization of the theory in question.

The kind of incompleteness Putnam has been describing, on the other hand, arises when some theory does not apply to certain objects or entities to which we are inclined to feel it 'should' apply. In quantum mechanics, Putnam claims, we must exclude the measuring apparatus from the domain of phenomena explained by quantum-mechanical principles, and in semantics we must exclude the language we are using from the domain of languages our theory purports to explain. But in each case we feel the exclusions are arbitrary or problematic, because we think of the theories as purporting to explain all phenomena meeting some specific description, and believe that the excluded cases fall under these descriptions.

In order to fully understand the logic of the incompleteness Putnam is calling to our attention, we need to keep in mind a parallel point about the logic of explanation, namely, that on pain of circularity our description of the phenomena to be explained must not logically entail the proposed explanations of these phenomena. The relevance of this point for the discussion here is that we need to be able to pick out the kind of phenomena to be explained in a way that does not already presuppose the adequacy of our purported explanations. But satisfying this requirement leaves open at least
the possibility that the explanation we offer might not successfully explain all
the instances of the kind of phenomena in question. So, let us say, a theory is
absolutely incomplete when it cannot successfully explain all the instances of the
kind of phenomena it is introduced in order to explain. Quantum mechanics
and semantics, then, are apparently absolutely incomplete, because there are
entities they cannot account for that are included within the domains of
entities they are introduced in order to explain.

But, I claim, quantum mechanics and semantics are not incomplete in the
sense just described, because in neither case is any particular object or
phenomenon permanently excluded from the domain of explanation. Put-
nam regards quantum mechanics as incomplete because the properties of
any ‘system’ we are observing can only be defined relatively to the measur-
ing apparatus by which we are observing them: we cannot apply the
quantum-mechanical principles we are using to characterize this ‘system’ to
the measuring apparatus itself. But this does not imply, of course, that this
particular measuring apparatus can never be characterized by the principles
of quantum mechanics. We remain able to examine and characterize it in
some other experiment, using different measuring devices. And so the ex-
clusion of some particular measuring apparatus or some particular observer
from the domain of entities we can explain by appeal to quantum-
mechanical principles arises only with respect to some particular occasion of
description or explanation. There remains no physical object (or proper
subset of physical objects) that cannot be explained in quantum-mechanical
terms on some occasion or other.

I believe the same kind of point can be made with respect to the
incompleteness Putnam attributes to semantics. Let us assume that theories
(semantic or otherwise) are not simply to be identified either with particular
groups of formally describable marks or symbols, or even with specific
interpretations of such particular groups of marks. Let us assume, that is,
that theories can be translated from one language to another, and thus that
we can speak of the ‘same’ theory being expressed in a number of different
languages. Let us assume now that we offer some general semantic theory,
and that it is expressed in some language $L$. Putnam argues that in order to
avoid paradox we must understand this theory as at best applying to all
languages other than $L$ itself. Let us assume that this is so, and that the
theory thus offers a plausible explanation of truth for all languages other
than $L$, including, specifically, some other language $L'$. But now, consistently
with our assumption above, let us translate the theory from $L$ into $L'$. Given
our desire to avoid the sorts of problems Putnam describes, we must now
understand our account of truth as excluding $L'$, but as presumably
including our original language $L$. But this gives us essentially the same
result as we reached above with respect to quantum mechanics, namely that
the exclusion of some particular language from the domain of our theory
arises only with respect to some particular occasion of description or explain-
ation. None of this, of course, in any way simplifies the formidable task of
constructing a perfectly general account of truth. Rather, the point is that,
assuming we have such a theory, it need not for the reasons Putnam suggests
be incapable of being applied to any specific language. There is, once again,
no particular language (or proper subset of languages) that cannot be
accounted for, on some occasion or other, by our original semantic theory.

This sort of incompleteness, then, arises when a theory cannot, on any
particular occasion, account for all of the entities we would initially describe
as falling within the domain of phenomena the theory is introduced in order
to explain, but when there is, nevertheless, no such entity that cannot be
accounted for on some occasion or other. As a first approximation, we can
say that this kind of incompleteness arises when our descriptions or explana-
tions are offered from a perspective within the domain under consideration.
In such cases, we want to say, what is excluded is merely the specific
‘vantage point’ from which the theory is articulated, or the observation
made on some particular occasion, and so that which is at any one time ‘left
out’ can be included if we simply ‘shift perspectives’. What is excluded on
any particular occasion, we might say, is simply the ‘point of origin’ of the
perspective, but this point of origin can itself be included in the domain on
some other occasion if we simply shift points of origin. Of course, from this
new perspective, something else will be omitted (the new point of origin), but
yet it remains the case that there is no specific phenomenon or collection of
phenomena that is permanently excluded from the domain of our explana-
tion. Let us call this sort of incompleteness perspectival incompleteness.

Less metaphorically, perspectival incompleteness arises when the
following conditions are met: (a) the theory or description is intended as pro-
viding a general account of all phenomena meeting some independent
characterization; (b) phenomena which constitute the articulation of the
theory or the application of the description to some explanatory or descrip-
tive domain are themselves presumably included in those domains; (c) for
any particular occasion of application or articulation, these same pheno-
mena must be excluded, on that occasion, from the domain of phenomena
the theory or description can adequately explain or characterize; and
(d) phenomena so excluded on any one particular occasion can be success-
fully included in these explanatory or descriptive domains on some other
occasion. The key clause here is apparently (b). Perspectival incompleteness
arises only for theories or explanations that are in some important way re-
flexive, i.e., when they purport to include themselves within their explanatory
or descriptive domains. Clause (d), furthermore, is what distinguishes perspectival incompleteness from absolute incompleteness. While clauses (a)-(c) are not necessary conditions for absolute incompleteness, they are, coupled with the negation of (d), sufficient for it. So my claim is that (a)-(d) are at least sufficient for perspectival incompleteness, and that (a)-(c) plus the negation of (d) for absolute incompleteness.

Consequently, I am making here only a very narrow point about the relativity of explanations with respect to interests or to other context-dependent considerations. It is an empirical fact that there are explanations where the marks or other physical objects that constitute the articulation of this theory (or some observation on which the theory relies) are included within the domain of objects or phenomena the theory is proposed as explaining. Putnam has argued that, for the kinds of theories he mentions, there are compelling reasons for wanting to exclude these objects from the explanatory domain of these theories, even though we are inclined to insist that these objects are part of the domain of entities or phenomena the theories are proposed in order to explain. My response has been to argue only that it is these exclusions that are relative to the context; and, furthermore, that the features of the context to which they are relative are arbitrary and unimportant; and consequently that these considerations do not show that these theories suffer from the kind of explanatory incompleteness that Putnam suggests.

Given this, I can now describe my thesis as the claim that Putnam has shown only that quantum mechanics and semantics are perspectivally incomplete, but not that they are absolutely incomplete. He has shown, that is, that for any particular occasion of observation or articulation, there are objects or languages that cannot be included in the explanatory domains (of quantum mechanics or semantics) on that particular occasion, but not that there are any objects or languages that cannot be included in these domains on some occasion or other. Consequently, if we allow that theories can be translated from one language to another and that the measuring device which must be excluded from our (quantum-mechanical) explanation on one occasion can be explained by the same principles on some other occasion, he has not established that there are any languages or objects that cannot be accounted for by a single semantic theory or a single physical explanation of the empirical world.

But this, it seems clear, is not incompatible with the account of the necessary unity of experience I earlier attributed to Kant. The essence of Kant's account of the unity of experience is that I must be able to 'connect' or 'unify' any given group of representations, as a condition of recognizing them as 'mine'. Any collection of representations I could not connect with
others already recognized as being my own would not be experienced as being my representations, and consequently would simply not be parts of my experience. Likewise, any objects or collections of objects I could not conceive of as being bound by the same set of rules or laws that govern the other objects of my experience would not be objects I would recognize as being in 'my' world. But none of this implies that I must be able to unify or connect all of the objects in 'my' world on any one single occasion, but only that there must be no such objects incapable of being combined, on some occasion or other, in accordance with the same synthesizing function. As long as we make the same assumption as above – namely, that I can combine representations in accordance with the same synthesizing function on different occasions – there is nothing in the perspectival incompleteness we find in semantics and quantum mechanics that is incompatible with Kant’s account of the necessary unity of experience.

So, I argue, Putnam has not shown that any developments in empirical science or semantics are incompatible with the account of the necessary unity of experience that Kant provides in the first Critique. Kant’s arguments demand only that there must be no objects in the world as we experience it that cannot be explained in terms of the same laws and theories as are the other objects we experience, and so that all the objects we experience must in principle be subsumable under one overarching theory or explanation. The matters Putnam points to, on the other hand, do not demonstrate the existence of any particular objects or languages that cannot be accounted for by the same explanatory apparatus as the rest of the objects or languages in our world. Rather, they demonstrate only that there is no single ‘perspective’ from which we can explain or describe all of these objects at once, including, in particular, both the objects seen ‘from’ that perspective, and also the objects or phenomena at the ‘point of origin’ of that perspective, in virtue of which it is able to constitute a perspective upon those other objects. And so Putnam has shown neither that quantum mechanics nor that semantics poses any sort of insurmountable difficulty for Kant.

IV. INCOMPLETENESS AND SUBJECTIVITY

Thus far my claims have been largely negative. I have argued that Putnam has failed to demonstrate any incompatibility between Kant’s claims about the necessary unity of experience and the kind of incompleteness implicit in both quantum mechanics and semantics. In this final section I would like to say something more positive, albeit more speculative, about what all this suggests about the nature of subjectivity.
Putnam’s discussions about the kind of incompleteness he finds in quantum mechanics and semantics occur in the early pages of *Realism with a Human Face*. There is a remark, however, that Putnam makes much later in this work that suggests a separate, but, I shall argue, merely apparent incompleteness in our understanding of the world that we experience. I shall argue that this apparent incompleteness is, according to Kant, no real incompleteness at all in the sense described here, but is, instead, part and parcel of the nature of subjectivity.

The passage I have in mind occurs at a later stage when Putnam is defending his own views from the charge that they amount to a kind of relativism. He goes on to make the following claim:

I can sympathize with the question ['Why are you not a relativist too?'] ... because I can sympathize with the urge to know, to have a totalistic explanation which includes the thinker in the act of discovering the totalistic explanation in the totality of what it explains,... But I am saying that the project of providing such an explanation has failed.\(^3\)

In this passage Putnam claims that what we cannot do is provide a complete or overarching explanation of the world we experience that includes in its domain the thinker or discoverer in the act of discovering this very explanation. Although this remark initially appears compatible with the earlier remarks about quantum mechanics and semantics, I think it suggests something quite different. What is excluded here is not any particular object or set of objects, but something of a different sort altogether. It is not ‘thinkers’ in general that must be excluded, or even discoverers in their own totality, but only the discoverer in the act of discovering. It looks as though what Putnam is alluding to here is akin to what I earlier described as ‘the point of origin’ of some perspective on the world. What is excluded here is not any object or set of objects, but rather the subject of this very experience. What is excluded, it would seem, is just one's first-person perspectival awareness or consciousness of the world one experiences, or, more simply, what I shall call ‘subjectivity as such’.

Given this, it seems that perhaps we should re-interpret Putnam’s earlier discussions of quantum mechanics and semantics. It looks now as though the real force of these earlier discussions is not that there are any objects that cannot in principle be captured by our empirical explanations, but instead that what I am calling subjectivity as such can never be included within the domain of such explanations. If this is indeed what Putnam is suggesting,

\(^3\) In the essay entitled ‘Why is a Philosopher?’, p. 117. I am indebted to Jennifer Case for bringing this passage to my attention.
then it is important to note not only that this is not incompatible with Kant’s account of the necessary unity of experience, but that it is, on the contrary, of a piece with what Kant says about the nature of subjectivity. On my interpretation of Kant, his claims about the necessary unity of experience require that there be no objects or sets of objects that cannot in principle be explained (on some occasion or other) by the same single, overarching explanation as can all other objects. But the claim that subjectivity as such cannot be contained in the domain of any such theory or explanation is incompatible with this view only if Kant holds that subjectivity is (contra Hume) an object of some possible experience.

But clearly he does not:

the simple, and in itself completely empty, representation ‘I’ ... is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever ... since any judgement upon it has already made use of its representation ... consciousness itself is not a representation distinguishing a particular object, but a form of representation in general (A346/B404).

This passage claims that consciousness itself, or what I am calling subjectivity as such, can never be an object of any possible experience. This does not imply, of course, that I cannot experience things as being subjects in their own right. My own personal experience includes many objects that I experience as continuing self-identical subjects of experience, including both other people and that unique individual constantly encountered in my memories of myself. What it means is only that I can never find in my experience of the world the subject of this very experience. But of course the point here has nothing to do with me personally or with whatever particular sort of experience I happen to be having at any given moment, but rather with the relation of consciousness to its object. The argument seems to be that I cannot know as an object something that is presupposed in the very process in virtue of which it is possible for me to experience anything as an object in the first place. And I think that ultimately the reason for this stems from the perspectival nature of our experience of objects. To say that experience is essentially perspectival is to say that it is essentially intentional – in effect, that it is essentially ‘bipolar’, so that while it is always ‘of’ something, it is also always thereby ‘from’ somewhere, and so that this ‘point of origin’ of our perspectival awareness of the world must remain outside the boundaries of experience just so long as it is such a point of origin. Consequently, in any given experience, the subject of that very experience will always be beyond its own reach. And so it follows that while there are many subjects among the objects of experience, subjectivity itself can never be one of them.4

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It is important to keep in mind here that, if I am right, the fact that subjectivity as such can never be an object of any possible experience does not count as an instance of incompleteness, at least not in the sense in which we have been using that term thus far. If subjectivity as such can never be an object of experience, then there is, a fortiori, no object of experience thereby excluded from any of our explanations or descriptions of the world as we experience it. So this lack of subjectivity from the world as we experience it does not constitute either what we earlier called 'absolute' or 'perspectival' incompleteness.

Nevertheless, while this may not count as an instance of 'incompleteness' in the precise sense employed here, it certainly counts as such in some looser sense, in that it is disturbing, to say the least, to conclude that we are unable to attain theoretical knowledge of what is arguably the single most important feature of our lives. And yet this seems to be precisely what follows from the above considerations. Assuming that this is so, I shall close with the following observation about what all this says about the philosophy of mind. My claim is that the considerations just discussed suggest that there simply cannot be any science of subjectivity. This does not imply, of course, that there is not plenty to be learned about the nature of brains and central nervous systems, about representational systems generally, or about neural networks, artificial or 'natural' intelligence, or any of the other subject-matters loosely bound under the common label cognitive science. On the contrary, there is plenty for us to learn about that class of objects which are also subjects. What it does imply is that all of these endeavours will ultimately exclude from discussion precisely that phenomenon that seems to so many to be the single thing that makes the whole enterprise of singular importance, viz., the ultimate character of subjectivity and the first-person nature of our consciousness of the world. If so, this would help to explain why, according to Searle, contemporary philosophy of mind has so systematically ignored or denied the existence of consciousness, and also the dismay that Searle and others feel as a result of this. Consciousness is, and perhaps ought to be, ignored because it is not and never can be the object of any possible experience. So in this sense the eliminative materialists may be correct. If we stipulate that subjectivity is the primary focus of study in the philosophy of mind, then there simply is no such thing in the world as we experience it for us to study. And yet, while it is not a part of the world as experienced, it is, nevertheless, a condition of our experience of it, which goes a long way in explaining the sentiment that by ignoring consciousness, we are ignoring what is really crucial in the philosophy of mind.

Unfortunately, I have no resolution to offer to this conundrum. Indeed, if my argument is correct, there simply is no resolution to be found. I said in §II above that on my view Kant’s claim is that the unity of the self makes itself manifest in the unity of the world as we experience it. I think we have reached a similar conclusion here, namely, that subjectivity as such makes itself manifest in the very existence of our experience of the world. As a condition of our intentional relations towards the world, it is never a part of the world, but, as Wittgenstein suggests in the Tractatus, its limit, or, as I have suggested here, its unity. So on this view the lack of subjectivity from the world of our experience is the price we pay for assuring the explanatory unity of all of the objects in this world. And so, while Putnam is wrong to suggest that contemporary developments in either semantics or quantum mechanics pose any insurmountable difficulty for Kant, it may yet be true that both the views of Kant and these contemporary developments point to the same insurmountable difficulty in trying to come to terms with the nature of subjectivity.

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