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Does anti-realism about truth lead to politically worrying consequences?

An examination of Mari Mikkola's writings on the issue

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to answer the question whether anti-realism about truth leads to politically worrying consequences. To do so, works of two anti-realists who eschew metaphysical objectivity in different ways, Catharine MacKinnon and Hilary Putnam, will be studied. Thereafter, Mari Mikkola's criticism of these authors will be examined along with her argument that feminists must hold on to metaphysical objectivity in order to stand a chance against opposing views.

Ágrip

Ritgerð þessi leitast við að svara spurningunni hvort að afstæðishyggja um sannleika hafi varasamar pólitískar afleiðingar í för með sér. Til þess að svara þessari spurningu eru skoðaðar tvær mismunandi kenningar þeirra Catharine MacKinnons og Hilary Putnams, en þau forðast að samþykkja hina frumspekilegu hugmynd um hlutlægan sannleika. Þar á eftir eru skrif Mari Mikkola um sama efni skoðuð ásamt gagnrýni hennar á skrif MacKinnons og Putnams. Í skrifum sínum færir Mikkola rök fyrir því að til þess að femínistar eigi möguleika á að berjast fyrir breyttri heimsmynd kynjanna, þurfi þeir að halda í hugmyndina um frumspekilega hlutlægni.

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Introduction

Metaphysics is one of the main branches of philosophy, and deals with fundamental questions about issues such as the nature of things. One such debate centers on the question whether the world is mind-independent or not. Realists in metaphysics believe that the world is mind-independent and that our beliefs are inherently true or false, depending on whether they correspond to the way the world really is. On the opposite side, anti-realists believe that there is no objective truth about how the world is. The truth or falsity about the world we live in is a product of our minds, the world itself is mind-dependent. In the anti-realist school of thought questions arise about what, if not the mind-independent world, makes things true or false. This metaphysical position, as well as the exploration of how truths are created in a mind-dependent world, raises interesting questions about possible political implications of metaphysical views.

Mari Mikkola is a contemporary philosopher who works within the field of feminist metaphysics. In her book chapter *Is Everything Relative? Anti-realism, Truth and Feminism*, she discusses the issue of political consequences of metaphysical relativist positions. Her argument in the essay is that if one decides to eschew metaphysical objectivity, one leaves feminism open to severe criticism. In her discussion, she takes on writings of several authors in the same field, and concludes that there is no way to escape politically worrying consequences if you adopt the anti-realist point of view (Mikkola, 2010, p. 179).

In this thesis, I will try to answer the question whether anti-realism really does lead to politically worrying consequences like Mikkola argues, or if that is not the case. In the first part, I will explain the basic concepts and theories that lay the ground for the following discussion, such as realism, anti-realism and truth. In the second part, I will look into MacKinnon's writings on male reality, which is an important input in the discussion, which Mikkola then responds to. In the third part, I will look at the writings of Hilary Putnam, where he promotes conceptual relativism which still allows for objectivity. In the fourth part, I will consider Mikkola's argument about the political consequences of anti-realism, and her view on MacKinnon's and Putnam's theories. The fifth part will include my discussion and evaluation of the topic, and lastly I will conclude with some remarks.

1. Realism, anti-realism and truth

1.1. *Realism*

Metaphysical realism is the belief that some aspects of the world exist independently of our minds, conceptual schemes, etc. We can also describe realism about a particular domain as the view that there are things that have elements which exist independently of our minds. This means that my opinion of a chair in front of me does not affect or change the way the chair really is. The chair is blue, even though my belief is that it is red, and although I believe it only has three legs, it still has four. Realism strictly means that the world is not ours to construct, but is an independent whole that we do not construct or change with our thoughts or our opinions. If we want to gain knowledge of the world, we need to go out there and learn about it by using our senses. We can get to know new areas and draw a map of the world, but we cannot make up the world by drawing a map of it (Brock & Mares, 2007, p. 2-3).

At the core of realism is a belief about a mind-independent existence. This makes it clear that realism does not account for mind-independent things that do not exist; such as (possible) fairy tale realities and other such imagined entities. It only accounts for an existing world with things that really exist and are in no way dependent on us. On the mind-dependence side of existential subjects, are anti-realist beliefs such as social constructivism and other anti-realist positions that will be explained hereafter (Brock & Mares, 2007, p. 4).

1.2. *Anti-realism*

Anti-realism opposes realism in fundamental ways. It is the belief that entities do not exist completely independently of our minds. The metaphysical anti-realist argues that the way we view the world affects how the world really is, that it can not just exist and wait to be discovered. The chair isn't just a chair until I discover it, it is a chair because I (along with the rest of the world) decide that the thing in front of me and is made out of wood is a chair. While still being a realist in some ways, one could be an anti-realist about particular categories of things, such as colors. This could for instance mean that she maintains the belief that the chair in front of her is not blue by itself. It is her mind that makes the chair blue; nothing *in* the chair itself makes it blue. If all of us decide that the chair is blue, it is blue, but as soon as we all decide that the former color of blue is now red, the chair *is* red.

Social constructivism is one kind of an anti-realist theory. For an entity to be socially constructed, its existence must not be determined by its own nature, its nature is not inevitable. The entity depends on how we choose to look at it, interpret and use it. This

means that the entity in question is not mind-independent as metaphysical realism implies, but mind-dependent. The chair in front of me, the color blue, my dad's bridge club, and monetary units such as dollars and euros are all arguably socially constructed entities. To be mind-dependent means that the existence of the entity depends on us, we bring it into existence for a certain purpose. Without society deciding to use dollars as a currency for trading with goods and services, the entity of the dollar would not exist, we intentionally socially construct it. Just the same, the blue chair in front of me is not a blue chair if I (and society) do not make it so by interpreting it as blue and by creating the concepts of a chair and the color blue (Brock & Mares, 2007, p. 37-38). These examples differ in some ways, and it has been argued that social constructivism about certain things can exist along with metaphysical realism (Kukla, 2000).

André Kukla acknowledges that while some things can exist without our minds, some entities depend solely on them. Imagine the scenario that all human kind (and other living and thinking species) vanishes from the universe. The blue chair would still partly exist, but it would no longer be a blue chair. The material it is made out of would still be in the same place as before, so even though the blue chair won't exist after we all leave, *it* (the material part) would still exist. The same does not hold for my dad's bridge club, its existence depends metaphysically speaking on the minds of my dad, his friends and others that acknowledge the bridge club. We can call this entity, along with others such as money, laws and prime ministers, a psychological construction. Money is a good example of a psychological construction. As soon as we all leave (or decide to stop regarding dollars as money), the green-ish paper bills lose all their value. It is because of our conscious decision to bring those entities to life, that socially constructed entities exist: they metaphysically depend on us (Brock & Mares, 2007, p. 39-41).

It is useful to compare these clearly psychologically constructed entities with natural objects that do not depend entirely on our minds as the others do. Catharine MacKinnon is a lawyer and philosopher who states that the male perspective is the dominant perspective of our world, and creates a major hurdle for those who want to oppose the reality it creates. Thus the male reality appears to be a natural phenomenon that can not be changed (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 123). According to MacKinnon's description, it appears that it exists independently of our minds, just as rocks and mountains do (Brock & Mares, 2007, p. 41-42).

1.3. Truth

The question of whether anti-realism has politically worrying consequences will be the main issue of this thesis. To my mind, this is an important question that must be discussed. Even though metaphysics is an abstract discipline that often asks questions that are not usually asked in our everyday lives, it is still a discipline that asks questions about our *real* world. It seeks to explain and describe our world, where real things happen with real consequences. That is the reason one must take metaphysics seriously and take into account possible consequences of the metaphysical position one decides to adopt. If one chooses to argue for an anti-realist metaphysical position, an account of possible consequences must be a part of the argument. Furthermore, if one thinks that these consequences do not follow from anti-realism, it must be argued why and how that is not the case.

Truth is an essential element that must be looked at when discussing possible consequences of anti-realism. The reason for this should be clear. If we believe in an anti-realist metaphysical point of view, our view is briefly that the world is mind-dependent. If the world is mind-dependent, truth must be as well. If truth is mind-dependent, it follows that there is no such thing as an objective truth that holds still and that we, the minds, can not affect. After this clarification, it is easy to imagine a context where the truth is skewed by individuals or groups, to profit their own interests. Let's take an example to clarify. I'm standing in front of a painting with the artist who made it. Let's assume that in our world, non-square paintings are twice as expensive as square paintings, and that the painting in front of me has four equal sides and four 90° angles. It's pretty clear to me, that this painting is square. Now, we're bargaining for a price and the painter wants to sell it for \$1.500, two times the price of her normal paintings that cost \$750. She argues that the painting is clearly not a square. Now, the question arises; in a world where we accept anti-realism about truth; where we don't have an objective truth about squares, is there any way I can argue with the artist and pay a price I think is fair? This question is in essence the one that we will continue exploring in the coming chapters.

As we have now gone through the basic concepts that must be clear for the discussion ahead, it is time to move on. Next up, I will cover the writings of Catharine MacKinnon on male reality which Mikkola takes as her prime target of a metaphysical view that has worrying political consequences.

2. MacKinnon on the male reality

2.1. MacKinnon's writings on pornography and real world implications

MacKinnon has established herself in the forefront amongst feminist scholars and has participated in philosophical debates regarding feminism, reality, law and power structures for decades. Among her influential works are the books *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State* published in 1989 and *Only Words* from 1993. MacKinnon's description of our reality in the aforementioned books are often painful and dispiriting, to say the least. Pornography is the main subject of *Only Words*. She describes how pornography treats women as subordinates to men and how that echoes in reality, confirmed by statistics of sexual harassment, rape and sexual molestation. She furthermore argues that the U.S. legal system wrongly protects pornography on the basis of the First Amendment instead of treating it as something that goes against the Fourteenth Amendment, which addresses citizen rights and equal protection (MacKinnon, 1993).

“Protecting pornography means protecting sexual abuse *as* speech, at the same time that both pornography and its protection have deprived women *of* speech, especially speech against sexual abuse.” (MacKinnon, 1993, p. 9). MacKinnon argues that by standing by and protecting pornography as speech, we not only allow for creation, but also enforcement, of social inequality. The words and images pornography displays lay the foundation for the reality we live in, where women are raped and sexually abused. Just as you create racial segregation by not allowing blacks to enter your store, you create a real world subordination of women by displaying them as such in pornography (MacKinnon, 1993, p. 13-14).

It is not my mission in this paper to either reject MacKinnon's descriptions of the condition of women in Western societies or defend them. This is not a study in sociology or law. My main concern is with MacKinnon's relativism and social constructionism. My question is whether MacKinnon's metaphysical positions have worrying political consequences for feminists. Does her relativism undermine her goals as a feminist? Does her social constructivism lead to quietism? These questions become pressing once we see how she describes modern societies.

2.2. The male perspective

The core of Catharine MacKinnon's book *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State* is her description of the male reality, which she claims we live in today. She analyzes the interaction between how our thinking shapes social power in our society, and how social

power shapes the way we think at the same time. In the book, she looks at gender hierarchy and how it affects society, politics, and us as thinking and acting individuals (MacKinnon, 1989, p. ix).

MacKinnon describes the male perspective in our society as systemic and hegemonic. It puts restraints on women and overall limits their chance of doing what they want to do. The system decides what kind of life a woman can live. MacKinnon's powerful formulation of the male perspective and its consequences can sound strange, since maleness is something that we construct. Entities are not necessarily male by nature; being male is not based on biology, maleness is something that we socially construct, just like money. "Thus the perspective from the male standpoint is not always each man's opinion [...], although most men adhere to it, nonconsciously and without considering it a point of view, as much because it makes sense of their experience (the male experience) as because it is in their interest. It is rational for them" (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 114). This fact, that the male perspective is the dominant view, makes it the case that women are forced to see reality and live in it on these premises. It does not matter how you would like the world to be, it is just the way it is. And since it is the rational view of the dominant group, it makes it the case that reality is rational when it is according to this perspective (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 114).

"Each sex has its role, but their stakes and power are not equal. If the sexes are unequal, and perspective participates in situation, there is no ungendered reality or ungendered perspective" (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 114). It is easy to argue that the sexes are truly unequal in our world today, and if we follow MacKinnon's line of thought, we find out that in such a world there is no ungendered perspective. This means that there is no objective standpoint where we can judge whether things are right or wrong objectively, because the standpoint always depends on the dominant perspective. What does this mean for the realism and anti-realism debate? What does this mean for truth and political consequences? This could potentially have serious implications as it becomes difficult to fight against an unequal male reality where there is no objective point of view. In such a world, the dominant perspective decides how things are done and judged; deciding what is true or false is shaped by the dominant group and its perspective.

2.3. Fighting the male reality

MacKinnon argues that feminism is the main weapon to fight the dominant male reality. Feminism is in her mind a political practice that is neither subjective nor partial although it emerges from the experiences of women. Furthermore it is neither objective nor universal,

because it doesn't claim an external ground for itself to rest on. Feminism's aim is to represent the thoughts and experiences of women who are oppressed by the male reality. It should fight anti-feminist views, whether they originate from women or men. It should express the experience and claim it as a valid view in our reality (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 115-6). In a metaphysical sense, this is similar to a group that would fight for the validity of the view that the chair in front of us is red but not blue, given that the dominant group in the society would say that the chair is blue. This can be a troublesome task, especially if it would be the case that the blue-group had a righteous view to defend. That is luckily not the case here, anti-feminists that want to keep women subordinate to men truly do not have a righteous view to defend.

The task of fighting the dominant perspective, and in this case the male reality, can be hard because the male reality is a firm and widespread system of power. Just imagine, if half of mankind would benefit greatly from a system where the chair is seen as blue. Would it not be wise for the ruling group to stay true to their beliefs that the chair is blue, and fight against other opposing views? Being a part of the dominant blue-chair believers, would it not be hard to say to yourself: "Am I really right to believe that this chair is blue?", when everyone else seems to be holding steadily to their belief and is fighting against the strange red-chair half of mankind. This furthermore leads us to the next question: "What about the red-chair half?" Can they really stick to their game and fight the blue-chair people together in an organized manner? The answer is no. Why is that? It is difficult to fight the dominant perspective in a world where you do not have an objective point of view, where the people with the power benefit by keeping their position and where not everyone is willing to fight the people in power. Just imagine fighting the whole 12 rounds and when it comes to the judges to decide who won, all of the judges sat on the same, blue chair all along. "There is no Archimedean point—or, men are their own Archimedean point, which makes it not very Archimedean. If feminism is revolutionary, this is why" (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 117). It may just seem easier to live by the belief of the blue-chair people and think that their point of view is probably true after all. But when it comes to the male reality, which has more consequences than the blue-chair reality, we must not wait on the sideline and let it persist. We must fight against the oppression with feminism as our weapon.

2.4. Women's perspective

According to MacKinnon, it is in the interest of women to overthrow the idea of what it is to be a woman. Women have been objectified as sexual beings, and are put in predetermined

situations defined by the male reality (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 120). Pornography shows us how women are objectified and portrayed as submissive actors who only want to please men. Similar portrayals of women can be seen in other fields than pornography such as in advertising, pop culture, etc. Seeing how our reality still portrays women shows us why it is of immense importance for feminists to work against these beliefs by overthrowing old and oppressive distinctions.

This is the task of feminism. To analyse the world and detect how it works to maintain a male reality is an important factor. By raising questions about this system and by raising consciousness, women can grasp these facts of reality from within. Feminism should claim a women's perspective as its claim to truth and furthermore claim that sexual politics actually exist (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 121).

2.5. The feminist fight

Our reality is hard to deal with. We cannot change it by only thinking of it; it stays unchanged in front of our eyes. It is a reality where men rule and where women are objectified things. This is incorporated in our world and it is hard to change a world where men are taught to desire submissive women and where women are taught to be submissive. And no matter how you look at it or think about it, reality is in your face, you are real and you are in reality. You are forced to take part in it and you are forced to be a woman (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 123).

What feminism must do is to be conscious of the fact that the world is shaped by male power and that our social reality is a reality where men's perspective is the dominant perspective. It must be critically aware of the fact that the world is biased towards a male perspective, which is neither natural nor fair. There is nothing just about a society where women work as prostitutes for middle aged men or boys that want to get laid. There is nothing just about a society where women are portrayed as submissive objects that are made to please men. These are the things that feminists must perceive, acknowledge and say out loud, in order to fight the male hegemony.

At this point it is hard to be positive about the future, and about fighting for a more equal world. As MacKinnon states, reality is never ungendered and truth lies in the hands of the one who has the power. And as we live in a male reality, truth is in the hands of men; reality is according to the male perspectives and so on. What changes do we have to make, to make this world a better place? Can we ever live in a world where men and women play a fair game? This is a question that many ask and is an important question for those who want

to judge people by their capabilities but not their genitals. What we have to do to make this possible, is to create a situation where truth does not lie in the hands of those who are in power, as a status quo situation will only bring us an ongoing male-biased reality.

3. Putnam's internal realism

3.1. Internalism vs. externalism

Mikkola also considers another philosopher who rejects metaphysical realism, Hilary Putnam. Putnam defends a view, which he describes as an internalist perspective.

“Internalism does not deny that there are experiential *inputs* to knowledge; knowledge is not a story with no constraints except *internal* coherence; but it does deny that there are any inputs *which are not themselves to some extent shaped by our concepts*, by the vocabulary we use to report and describe them, or any inputs *which admit of only one description, independent of all conceptual choices*.” (Putnam, 1981, p. 54)

He makes a clear contrast between his metaphysical theory and the one that he calls the externalist perspective. The externalists are the ones that support metaphysical realism. The externalists believe that the world is made up of things that are mind-independent. In the externalist world, truth corresponds to *the world as it really is*. That being so, propositions are true to the degree they represent the world they try to describe. In this theory, and unlike the theory of MacKinnon, there is an objective perspective that judges propositions as true or false, that is often named the God's Eye point of view, as it can be said that it lies above and is always true, no matter what we think (Putnam, 1981, p. 49).

Putnam's internalism differs from the externalism in some key aspects. The name is drawn from the fact that in this line of thought, it is said to be rational to answer the question about what the world is made up of, within a theory or description. So, the truth is not something that is judged by a God's Eye point of view, but by our experiences instead. Truth is some kind of a rationally accepted point of view, which is made up by our experiences and us (as people) working together towards truth as a whole. In the case of the chair in front of me, the truth about the chair being blue would not be confirmed by an objective perspective, a God's Eye point of view, but by a system of beliefs made up by my previous experiences, my relation to you and your experiences, etc. (Putnam, 1989, p. 49-50).

At this point, the internalist stance is compelling. The externalist side has to argue for the God's Eye point of view, an epistemically objective perspective. That idea is problematic in many ways. For instance, it is arguably impossible to establish or even imagine such a point of view, and even if it could be established it would not allow for any other truths than

the one truth it represents. Cultural diversity and different truths for different cultures, do not exist where there is only one accepted truth. The internalism stance looks a bit better for now, as it does commit to one universal truth, but offers that truth is constructed from inside, from ourselves, but still in a rational way.

Moreover, Putnam's internal realism refuses to answer questions that are based on the desire to find out which truth is the real truth (Putnam, 1990, p. 96). He allows different descriptions of the same reality to exist, and chooses not to judge which one is the most real or true. That is a good thing for us, if we do not want the male reality to be the one and only truth, but give other perspectives a chance to prove their point to be true. Still the absence of an objective perspective makes it impossible to judge between two allegedly true (but different) descriptions of our reality. This is the problem of relativism, which can either be fixed by accepting an objective perspective, a God's Eye point of view, or by ruling out some perspectives. Both of these ways are problematic.

3.2. Internalism dealing with the issues of relativism

Putnam wants to find a middle ground, a way between having to match all propositions to a universal truth which one gets with a God's Eye point of view, and having to accept all conceptual schemes as equal, no matter what they imply. He argues that internalism can be this middle ground, this theory that slips in between those extremes and the dire consequences that come with both. He wants to position internalism as a theory that can accept conceptual relativism but still be able to rule out some conceptual schemes. What a proposition must be to count as true, is to be rationally acceptable (Putnam, 1981, p. 54).

A proposition or a perspective that is rationally acceptable, is one that is coherent. Not only must it be coherent with your other beliefs and experiences, but also with other people's experiential beliefs. A perspective you hold is one that is deeply rooted in society, through culture, biology and probably your upbringing as well. This perspective is not just some kind of a perspective that states that men have wings, but is a perspective that is connected with our values and the real world. So, even though it is not tied to the God's Eye point of view and even though it is not objective in that way, it is still a perspective that is made out of our conceptions and is real to us. And it is not just real; it is objective to us as it describes our reality (Putnam, 1981, p. 54-5). This premise looks good, as it takes a step towards eliminating perspectives that are irrational and do not describe the real world we live in. But, can it also rule out an anti-feminist perspective that denies objectification of women in pornography, which is a perspective that goes against a widespread belief in our world? Or is

that perspective not obscure or irrational enough to rule out, like the belief that men have wings?

Putnam does not want to give a systematic definition of truth, but he still wants to give us an idea of what it is. A true proposition should be justifiable if one would need to justify it. It should also be stable and it should not be just as easy to justify its negation. He also describes truth as an idealization of rational acceptability, as in some cases a proposition could be rationally acceptable without being true (Putnam, 1981, p. 56). An example of this would be the proposition that stated that the earth is flat. It was probably rationally acceptable at the time, but still not a true proposition. Again, this sounds reasonable, and Putnam's internalism still seems to work.

But, let's now take a step back and see what has been done. Putnam has described a theory which argues that a true proposition should be coherent with our beliefs and experiences along with the experiences of others. Still, Putnam does not want to make up between true beliefs and he denies one conception of truth, one that could be achieved by an objective perspective. Does this mean that we have escaped from the trouble we were left in in the theory of MacKinnon? She described a male reality where women are oppressed and the male perspective is the ruling one, the perspective that defines truth and reality. What if the male perspective is coherent with itself and the experiences of the one who holds the perspective? It is probably often the case that one holds a male perspective and it seems to cohere with one's beliefs. And it is not too hard to imagine that one man's perspective also fits with others' of the same gender. Can Putnam get away with his internalism approach but still rule out the male perspective MacKinnon talks about? In the following chapter, I will try to answer this question.

4. Mari Mikkola on anti-realism and the importance of objectivity

In a book chapter named *Is Everything Relative? Anti-realism, Truth and Feminism in New Waves in Metaphysics* from 2010, Mari Mikkola critically examines the writings of Catharine MacKinnon and Hilary Putnam, as she takes a stance against feminist theories that want to eschew metaphysical objectivity. Mikkola argues that by doing so, they open up to politically worrying consequences. I will now explain Mikkola's chapter step by step, and how she challenges MacKinnon's and Putnam's writings.

4.1. Mikkola on MacKinnon's male reality

Mikkola starts by discussing MacKinnon's account of the male reality, where there is no such thing as an objective epistemic perspective, only the male perspective. This account rules out metaphysical objectivity, as it needs epistemic objectivity as a premise. The dominant perspective constructs reality, and as the male perspective is the dominant one, reality is constructed by it. One way this comes to light is through pornography, which portrays women according to the male perspective and their desires. Men, by and large, want women to be submissive, portray them as such in pornography, and in some cases make it real in patriarchal societies (Mikkola, 2010, p. 181-2).

Mikkola argues that MacKinnon's attempts to meet the difficulties that follow from the male reality are not successful. Mikkola interprets MacKinnon in such a way that this situation can be escaped by showing that the fact that women are submissive is a contingent fact about them; if not all women are submissive, it can not be argued that women are generally submissive. This is something Mikkola does not agree with, and states that when MacKinnon rejects the idea of a perspective independent reality, she can not talk about another reality than the one that is portrayed by the male perspective. There is no other, true reality that lies hidden beneath the male reality that can save women from their objectified status in the male reality, as it is the only reality. The only way to escape it is to create a new reality that replaces the male one, but to be successful at that, one must have enough power to do so (Mikkola, 2010, p. 182). One could say that in our world today, feminists are already trying to replace the male reality, but with no or slow and little success. Women are still being portrayed as submissive and do not earn as much as men, while doing the same job.

MacKinnon's Achilles heel is precisely her metaphysics. Mikkola points out two implications: The *relativist implication* means that different perspectives are true for different believers. Due to the fact that MacKinnon talks about two perspectives that exist, the feminist one and the anti-feminist one, she opens up the possibility of even more perspectives. And if you do not have an objective perspective, you do not have a method to tell which perspective is true and which is false. This implies, that e.g. the view that sexual favors for promotions are okay is true in the world of the anti-feminist. This view would not be true in the world of the feminist, but as MacKinnon will not accept an objective point of view, she cannot rule out the anti-feminist view as simply false (Mikkola, 2010, p. 183).

Mikkola also points out that MacKinnon's theory has an even more worrying consequence, one that Mikkola calls the *quietist implication*. The theory labels views that are not in accordance with the male reality as simply false. If the dominant male perspective

constructs the male reality and what is real in our world, it must follow that perspectives that oppose the male one, turn out to be false in the male reality, or plainly not real. In other words, if a feminist says that pornography objectifies women and if this view opposes the male perspective, the view is false and objectification of women in pornography is not considered as real (Mikkola, 2010, p. 183-4). Imagine that you are with me in a room and we are discussing the chair in front of us. I tell you that the chair is blue. Well can't you see, it is obvious, just as it has four legs? You do not agree and tell me that it only has three legs and that the color is clearly velvet red. Now let's try to settle this in a philosophical way. We disagree on the truth of how this chair looks like, but we do not have any way of settling the matter, as we have no objective perspective available that provides an universal truth on how the chair really looks like. What can be done? Not much, unless we accept that the proposition that I made about the chair being blue with four legs is true in my world, and that your proposition about the chair being velvet red with three legs is true in your world. Here we have the same problem as MacKinnon faces in her case with realities, where we have different worlds but no objective point of view that can tell us what is true and false. Furthermore, when you accept that somehow one of our views about the chair can become real due to the power of our social status, it automatically makes the view of the other false in the real world, namely unreal. To say the least, these metaphysical implications are not acceptable, at least not in my mind and neither in Mikkola's mind. Hilary Putnam tries to find a solution that succeeds in avoiding the metaphysical implications that arguably follow MacKinnon's writings, and Mikkola continues by examining Putnam's internal realism.

4.2. Mikkola on Putnam's internal realism

Mikkola starts by briefly explaining Putnam's theory and his argument for internal realism. As said before it represents an idea about a metaphysical system where one can foster two different philosophical positions, namely relativism when it comes to concepts but still a kind of objectivism when it comes to truth, *our* objectivism. This could be something great for MacKinnon, but before Mikkola can accept his argument, Putnam's theory must be able to objectively reject the male perspective described by MacKinnon. If objectively rejecting the male perspective is possible within Putnam's internalism, Mikkola will likely accept the theory, as it would get rid of bad political consequences of the male reality MacKinnon described. Mikkola needs to look into whether or not Putnam's conception of truth is malleable enough to keep away the aforementioned consequences (Mikkola, 2010, p. 186).

To Putnam, truth can not be absolute and is merely idealization of rational acceptability. By arguing in this way, he draws attention to the widely held opinion that there is no ideal, external, coherent and objective epistemic standpoint. That means that no matter what, you would never get to the point where you could say that proposition A is absolutely true. Propositions, such as the one about the earth being flat was for instance rationally acceptable once upon a time, even though it isn't today. The reason is that our tools to observe and to draw conclusions about the world have gotten better and positions us in more ideal epistemic conditions. What Putnam points out, is that even though we get to a place where we can *better* judge if propositions are true or false, we can not get to a God's Eye point of view. Putnam doesn't offer a definition of truth, but rather clarification of what it is all about. According to him, a true statement should have the possibility of being justifiable and it must also be stable. In other words, the statement about the chair having four feet is true if it is possibly justifiable (even though it might not be the case right now), and if the statement is stable; the negation of the statement should not be easily justified (Putnam, 1981, p. 54-6).

To Mikkola, Putnam's characterization of truth is too vague. She begins with an example where Putnam argues that truth is something we would be justified in rationally accepting, while being in epistemic ideal conditions. An example of epistemic ideal conditions would be if person A were in a healthy state (not drugged/intoxicated, etc.) and with all senses fully functioning. Mikkola points out, that it is not a strong argument to make epistemically ideal situations, like the one mentioned above, be a premise for stating that something is true. One could not simply state that anti-feminists with obscure views are necessarily positioned in non-ideal epistemic conditions. They could argue that their epistemic conditions are truly ideal, just like feminists would do on their own. Even though one would say that paying for a promotion with sexual favors would be acceptable, one could still see, hear and think clearly. Putnam could then argue that this person is prejudiced or even unethical (Mikkola, 2010, p. 186-8). But then again, who will be judge whether my view or the anti-feminist view is the one that is prejudiced and/or unethical? Can I be the judge of that?

Another situation where Putnam's conditions for truth would be met is where our idealized rationality would match our ideas of the good. This could do if we could easily judge some views as simply not good and thus not true. Let's take as an example the view that sexual favors for promotions are appropriate. We could say that this view does not match our ideas of the good, resulting in the conclusion that the view is not true. But Mikkola points

out that Putnam himself has argued against an independent and objective perspective in any sense, even if we would want that perspective to present our concept of human good. And if we do not have this objective perspective, we can not rule out any opinion on the basis that it does not match the universal good concept. That means that no matter how disgusting we might find an argument of some anti-feminist, we could not dismiss it, at least not with the help from Putnam's theory (Mikkola, 2010, p. 188-189).

The third situation where Putnam's conditions for truth would be met, is if the truth is made up of our beliefs, experiences and where these cohere with the ones of others. Mikkola also argues that this condition is not strong enough to uproot the anti-feminist views. One of the faults in this premise, is the fact that there is no guarantee that our beliefs will become better while they are matched with our experiential inputs. For instance, the outdated anti-feminist beliefs can stay the same even though one would be faced with experience, which should work against the former beliefs. This could happen when one would interpret his experience so it would fit his former beliefs. This is explained by the fact that our beliefs shape the way we think about and experience our surroundings, and these experiences only work in the way our mind allows it to work (Mikkola, 2010, p. 189-190).

Mikkola concludes the section on Putnam's work by stating that his formulations of truth are not strong enough. For Mikkola to accept these formulations, they would have to be objective enough to be able to rule out views such as the ones of the anti-feminist that thinks objectification of women in pornography does not exist, etc. It seems like Putnam does not succeed in fulfilling these hopes of Mikkola, at least not in her opinion (Mikkola, 2010, p. 190).

4.3. Mikkola on the political consequences of anti-realism

The core of Mikkola's argument is simple. If you choose to eschew metaphysical objectivity and argue for an anti-realist account of the world, you dismiss the opportunity to be able to use objectivity for the greater good (Mikkola, 2010). If the world is as realism says it is, mind-independent, it is possible to argue against and rule out certain views and social arrangements that are thought of as unjust. You would do that on the basis that these arrangements are against the nature of the world. Beliefs that correspond to those arrangements would simply be false, as they would not correspond to reality. In the case of gender equality, you could argue that nothing in the nature of the world makes it reasonable for society to objectify women in pornography and to pay them lower wages for the same work as men do for higher wages. There is nothing in the way we are built that justifies that.

Yes, we are different in certain biological ways, but that does not change the fact that we are created equal and should be treated like that.

If you think that the world you are in is unjust in its social arrangements, the fight for a better world becomes much more difficult in an anti-realist world. As Mikkola explains in her book chapter from 2010, anti-realism about truth is dangerous and what can follow are both relativist and quietist implications. The relativist implication makes it impossible to say that anti-feminist claims are false and do not correspond to reality. The quietist implication can make feminist claims false as they oppose the male reality, and the feminist perspective becomes even unreal while the male perspective is the true and real perspective (Mikkola, 2010, p. 180).

These are implications that Mikkola wants to find a way out of, but can not do so within the framework of anti-realism. That is the reason that drives Mikkola to argue for metaphysical objectivity, as a better way to fight anti-feminist claims.

4.4. Mikkola on metaphysical objectivity

Mari Mikkola wants to work towards her feminist goals in the metaphysical sphere, and to do so she believes that holding on to metaphysical objectivity is essential. She states, unlike anti-realists such as MacKinnon and Putnam, that metaphysical objectivity does not require epistemic objectivity. Moreover, she does not claim that reality is scheme dependent even though our descriptions of it are so, and lastly she states that metaphysical objectivity does not necessarily entail a problematic conception of truth (Mikkola, 2010, p. 190-1).

In order to prove her point about the unnecessary of epistemic objectivity, Mikkola uses two cases. Her first case is a mundane case, where the debate is about whether it is sunny today or not. She argues that in this case the talk about a God's Eye point of view is unnecessary, as it is as unattainable as in other examples. But though you could not objectively judge if it's sunny outside or not, it might still *be* sunny outside. "The impossibility of this sort of epistemic objectivity, then, does not undermine metaphysical objectivity" (Mikkola, 2010, p. 192). In the second case, we are faced with the anti-feminist argument that no sexual harassment took place in for instance the case of a boss accepting sex for promotion. One can say, that to be able to know precisely if this is statement is true or false, one must possess an objective epistemic point of view. But Mikkola further argues that even though one would have this point of view, it is not given that one could determine if sexual harassment took place. That is because it can be hard to say at which point certain actions become sexual harassments, and when the same actions only count as bullying or

something else. Even though this case might be more difficult to solve, it does not mean that metaphysical objectivity is undermined Mikkola argues (Mikkola, 2010, p. 191-2).

In her second point, Mikkola challenges the view that reality can not exist independently of conceptual schemes because our descriptions of it are bound to conceptual schemes. That view is something that MacKinnon and Putnam argue for, but is something that Mikkola is not ready to settle on, as she has already argued that epistemic objectivity is not a necessary requirement for metaphysical objectivity. The same goes in this case. Even though she agrees with Putnam that reality can not be described without conceptual schemes, the reality can still exist independent of the conceptual schemes. Only the description changes, while the entity itself stays the same, independently of our minds and conceptual scheme based descriptions (Mikkola, 2010, p. 192-3). The object in front of me still exists, no matter how I choose to describe it.

Lastly, Mikkola rejects the argument that metaphysical objectivity presupposes a problematic conception of truth. She argues that neither is there a problem with the claim that there are absolute truths in the world (like the one that the chair I am sitting on has four legs) nor with the claim that some statements have indeterminate truth conditions. It is in the nature of the world that many ideas and propositions are indeterminate due to the complexity of many aspects of the world. But the indeterminateness lies in the description of things but not in their being, and therefore, this does not mean that metaphysical objectivity should be ruled out (Mikkola, 2010, p. 194-5).

5. Discussion

5.1. The problem of MacKinnon's theory

MacKinnon's writings describe a reality that corresponds in many ways to the one we live in, and it is a scary thought. Furthermore her belief in how the dominant perspectives shape our reality and at the same time disbelief in an objective perspective doesn't offer us a way out of the reality she describes.

MacKinnon's anti-realism opens up to relativist and quietist implications, as we've seen Mikkola argue. MacKinnon herself explains straightforwardly how rationality is defined: "Because it [the male perspective] is the dominant point of view and defines rationality, women are pushed to see reality in its terms [...]" (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 114). Arguably, the reason we still live in a male biased reality is that the dominant perspective is the male perspective. This is what we have to fight against, the dominant perspective can't

have the power of defining rationality. It seems to me that if one wants to change the way the world is, one must at least strive to take a metaphysical objective stance, and at the same time find a way to dismiss the the assumption that to do so one must have an objective epistemic perspective.

To my mind, it is not feasible to accept a world view where sexual favors to get promotions are possibly acceptable. Nor is it feasible to argue for a world where opposing views to the dominant view, turn out to be false or non-existing. This is probably not something that MacKinnon had in mind or wishes to be the case, but Mikkola makes a good argument for these implications of MacKinnon's writings. I agree with Mikkola that the relativist and quietist implications are simply too harsh, and thus shows too many weaknesses for MacKinnon's theory to be acceptable.

5.1.1. MacKinnon's possible answers

Although Mikkola has shown us that the implications of MacKinnon's writings are politically worrying, she has not shown us that MacKinnon is wrong in the interpretations of our world, and Mikkola doesn't answer her point about contingent facts. MacKinnon argues that facts and facts are not the same, some facts are contingent while others are not. An example of such a contingent fact would be that women *are* sexually submissive. According to MacKinnon, that proposition shouldn't be considered as a true fact because it is contingent; the proposition is only true about some women, just as it is true that *some* men are sexually submissive. Mikkola takes stance against this argument by saying that MacKinnon can not state this, "since she rejects the existence of a perspective independent reality" (Mikkola, 2010, p. 182).

MacKinnon could reply that Mikkola's argument against contingent facts is not strong at all. Even though MacKinnon rejects a perspective independent reality, Mikkola can not prove that there are objective truths that we should appeal to. Furthermore, she can argue that truths about entities can not be based on contingent facts, no matter if she rejects a perspective independent reality or not. The argument that contingent facts must and can not be used to construct true propositions is quite appealing and is similar to Putnam's line of thought about true propositions being stable and convergent. It is true to many that contingent facts about an entity (such as females) do not make up what the entity itself is. Furthermore, MacKinnon could raise the question why we should not judge the truth of proposition by their contingency. Using that metric is better than having none, given that Mikkola can not provide us with an objective standpoint.

5.2. Putnam's reasonable attempt

Putnam puts forward an interesting theory where he argues for internalism, which is supposed to solve the problem of conceptual relativism without applying an objective perspective, a God's Eye point of view. This is an ambitious task to say the least, but he makes an honest attempt to solve this complex puzzle.

Putnam takes the accountability for truth away from the outside objective view and puts the responsibility on ourselves. He argues that truth can be achieved by justifying one's proposition at the individual level. This is within one's power if the proposition proves to be rationally acceptable.

I think that Putnam's formalization of truth as possibly justifiable and being stable or convergent, is a wise move. But as Mikkola points out, the moment you start talking about how you could justify a proposition and what might be the ideal epistemic conditions, it becomes more difficult to defend the view. As always when you start to talk about epistemic justifications or situations, it becomes seemingly impossible to find the one true definition of what fulfills our needs. You can hold a belief on the premise of having perfectly working senses and a well justified belief, but even if that is the case, the belief you hold can still be false as Gettier famously demonstrated (Gettier, 1963). Furthermore, one can ask for a non-prejudiced view when judging the proposition, but that begs the question on which side the prejudice is. And to judge which side is the just one, you would again need epistemically ideal conditions. The same problem arises, how can you get to this objective perspective?

Perhaps, the best shot for Putnam is to stick to only talking about truth as an idealization of rational acceptability, without explaining further how the idealization could or should be.

5.2.1. Putnam's possible answers

Mikkola criticizes Putnam's work by pointing out that being in epistemic idealized situation is problematic, that we can not rule out anti-feminist views based on Putnam's internalism, and that even obscure anti-feminist views could cohere with other's of the same kind. If I were Putnam, I would argue that I could indeed rule out some views on this basis. I would argue that for instance the view that women are inferior to men would not be rationally acceptable. This view is based on contingent facts and coheres probably with views of a really small group. With many opposing views, consequently it could hardly be considered stable or converging. On that basis, I would rule out the belief.

Furthermore, Putnam could point out (just like MacKinnon could), that Mikkola does not offer a proper way to rule out opinions such as the one mentioned above. She does argue successfully that metaphysical objectivity doesn't require epistemic objectivity, but the position she ends up with does not give us a way to rule out anti-feminist views.

5.3. Mikkola's fight for metaphysical objectivity

Mikkola's stance on the metaphysical implications of anti-realism are well founded in my opinion. She has shown in her writings that with MacKinnon's male reality, you open a way for the representatives of harmful anti-feminist views by giving them freedom to push forward their view and hold on to their dominant position in the world. The male perspective controls what is real and in a metaphysical system that allows relativist implications, we end up in a place where the feminist view is false, or worse – non-existing.

Mikkola then tries to see if Putnam's internal realism can save us from the relativist and/or quietist implications of MacKinnon's male reality. Even though Putnam's theory looks promising, it is still far from flawless and ends up with similar problems as follow MacKinnon's theory. He refuses to accept an objective perspective, associated with the God's Eye perspective, and rejects the idea of an absolute truth, as things are made true by ourselves, our beliefs and surroundings. This means that we can still have the same anti-feminist guy that claims to be representing the truth, as he rationally accepts his own view by confirming it with his former beliefs and experiences.

The answer to both MacKinnon's and Putnam's theories is a commitment to metaphysical objectivity. She makes a clear and strong case that metaphysical objectivity is in fact an essential thing for feminists to be able to fight for equal rights. And furthermore, without metaphysical objectivity, it becomes much harder for feminism to make a claim to truth, in a society where the male perspective is the dominant one.

In my opinion, metaphysical objectivity is an important thing for us to have. I acknowledge that the idea of an objective perspective is a problematic idea. Some would say that I am too optimistic to hope for such a thing, even unrealistic. But is it not the case that most of us agree that objectivity is important in some contexts? For instance, what are laws other than objective measurements on what is right and wrong? Of course these differ between societies, but we also have the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that most societies in our world have chosen to sign and thus act by. That is a document that outlines an objective perspective that nearly all agree on. These examples can maybe be a way to show

that metaphysically objective perspective can be socially constructed, even in order to protect minorities and without establishing an objective epistemic point of view.

5.4. Problems Mikkola might face

As I've said above, Mikkola's argument for metaphysical objectivity is convincing, to say the least. She argues that the being of the world doesn't depend on us knowing how it is, metaphysical objectivity doesn't need epistemic objectivity, as others would argue against. Her argument about this is quite strong, but if we take a step back I believe she still might be missing the point.

Let's say that our end goal is to build a foundation for feminists to base their fight for equality on. One version of that foundation would be that it is an universal truth that there is nothing about the biology of males and females that justifies inequality between the two. According to Mikkola, this could perhaps be a metaphysically objective truth, that doesn't change by the different views or the fact that epistemic objectivity is not in place. But then the question arises: how can we know about the metaphysical truth about the equality of male and females?

Let's imagine a person that would walk up to Mikkola and argue that males and females are not equal and shouldn't be treated equally. She argues that this is true, and says that she's going to let this truth guide her actions. How can Mikkola argue against this person? Even though metaphysical objectivity might not depend on epistemic objectivity, you still need some kind of an objective viewpoint if you want to really judge that the view above is right or wrong. And I'm not convinced how Mikkola can solve that puzzle: she detaches metaphysical objectivity from epistemic objectivity, but does not provide us with the foundation that we need. We still can't verify *what is really and objectively the case*, namely that men and women are intrinsically equal.

5.5. Social constructivism and its problems

Taking a step back leads me to the question why someone would at all want to eschew objectivism and argue for anti-realism or social constructivism. My first thought is that it allows for cultural diversity and helps to explain the nature of things that science have a hard time explaining. Furthermore it allows views that are free from the boundaries of science. If you believe that science is a patriarchal field that supports a male dominating reality, social constructivism probably excites you. But social constructivism sometimes comes with a price.

In the preceeding chapters, we have seen how anti-realism about truth or social constructivism can lead to politically worrying consequences. This shows clearly in chapters 4.1., 4.2. and 4.3. where Mikkola's criticism on MacKinnon and Putnam is covered.

Social constructivism has many followers in feminist theory but also many critics, apart from Mikkola. Two of those, Patai and Koertge, have argued that social constructivism in feminist theory, such as the ones we have seen in MacKinnon's theory, can have worrying consequences and serve as a straitjacket that we should try our best to get rid of (Patai & Koertge, 2003, p. 147).

"But a stronger, more radical social constructionist position holds that all knowledge is so deeply imbued with the cultural norms and personal identities of its producers that it can never be true – or without far-reaching modification – even useful for individuals not belonging to the producer's own group. [...] Taking this view, one can reject science and all other forms of specialized knowledge simply by pointing out that they have been constructed by males [...]" (Patai & Koertge, 2003, p. 141-2).

A situation where one starts rejecting science on the basis of his social constructivism is alarming. Social constructivism formulated in this way becomes politically worrying. Rejecting science and scientific methods because they are not built objectively by men and women alike, also takes away our chance to overthrow anti-feminist views that simply do not hold to scrutiny. If we allow feminism to get into a line of thought like this, we're in a bad place. We must try to approach truth on a more responsible path than is described above.

5.6. *Back to relativism?*

It is not an easy decision to commit to the idea of metaphysical objectivity if you can not find a way to confirm truths about the world. In the search for objective truths, it seems that you most often give up while trying to argue for an epistemically objective viewpoint. If you want to make use of an objective truth, you somehow must know what the truth is, right?

Lorraine Code makes a good argument that feminists should take up relativism, as there are truly no objective truths except the truth that relativism argues for: that all truths are relative to the viewer. She argues that relativism can give us truths about the world as it is, and the fact that it is relative, should not make us go to the anti-relativist side, as on that side there are no more truths than on the relativist side (Code, 1995, p. 196-7). Maybe this is the way to go, to accept the fact that an objective truth is only a fantasy and go with relativism as it can give you contextual truths, even though they will never become universal.

Code's line of thought differs from Putnam's in the way that she wants to embrace the relativist argument that there will never be an absolute/objective truth. She argues that

relativism shows us that “human cognition is *located*, and hence only capable of producing knowledge from somewhere, partial and approximate, some better, some poorer, but none perfect.” (Code, 1995, p. 197) She sees knowledge as inherently contextual and being utilizable as such, while she doesn’t try to argue for epistemic ideal conditions. This puts her in a different situation, a situation that I think Mikkola would have a hard time arguing against.

Conclusion

Does anti-realism about truth lead to politically worrying consequences? Yes, most probably. As Mikkola argues, it is hard for an anti-realist to rule out opinions that don’t match our world view and we would define as politically worrying. MacKinnon’s writings on the male reality and Putnam’s internalism doesn’t seem to get us that far. Still, even though Mikkola makes a good argument for metaphysical objectivity not being dependent on epistemic objectivity, it is not obvious how her line of thought would deal with anti-feminist views that we would like to rule out.

Objective truth is certainly something that could be helpful in the fight for gender equality, but not something that is easily attained. Even though that is the case, we should not consider giving up, but rather continue with well articulated arguments and strive to construct truths about gender equality that can not be easily challenged or overthrown.

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