In this exciting new book, Tim Button explores the battle between internal and external realism about metaphysics, viewing the debate through the prism of Putnam's formidable contributions thereto. And while the book maps a (much needed) clear and detailed path through some rather murky argumentative waters, its real value lies in the strikingly original positions that it advances. Anyone interested in metaphysics or its methodology will benefit greatly from engaging with this well-written book.

The book is divided into four parts. Part A argues that Putnam's infamous model-theoretic arguments, coupled with his just-more-theory manoeuvre, generate a successful *reductio* of external realism. Meanwhile, Part B shows how three Putnamian attempts to avoid this pitfall – nonrealism, 'natural' realism, and justificationism – fall prey to the same *reductio*. Building on these results, Part C examines the connection between realism (both internal and external) and scepticism via Putnam's brain-in-vat argument, ultimately concluding that we should adopt a mitigated aporia concerning the spectrum of realisms – i.e., we fall somewhere between external and internal realism, but we can't say much more than that. Finally, Part D turns to contemporary debates in metametaphysics, advocating a novel Putnam-esque position ('conceptual cosmopolitanism') designed to liquidate shallow metaphysical debates; however, which debates to liquidate isn't entirely specified. The book then concludes with two technical appendices, on the inner-workings of the model-theoretic arguments and on Fitch-style reasoning about truth and justifiability. The following discussion focuses on Parts A, C, & D.

Button first defines external realism as commitment to

Independence The world is made up of objects that are mind, language, & theory independent

Correspondence Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words/thought-signs and external things

Cartesianism Even an ideal theory might be radically false

Showing how this trio readily lends itself to a model-theoretic treatment, Button then presents Putnam's *indeterminacy* and *infallibilism* model-theoretic arguments. The former shows that, if there is a model that satisfies theory *T*, then there are many such models (e.g. produced by permuting the domain to yield a distinct, isomorphic structure), thereby threatening radical referential indeterminacy and, in turn, undermining **Correspondence**. The latter, meanwhile,

shows that, if *T* is ideal, then necessarily there is at least one model that satisfies it (e.g. one containing only natural numbers); this immediately undercuts **Cartesianism**. Button's presentation here is extremely lucid, and will undoubtedly serve as a useful guide for interested students and philosophers for years to come.

Button then turns to external realist responses (Ch.3), before carefully and persuasively arguing that no such response could succeed, due to Putnam's just-more-theory manoeuvre (Chs.4-7). For example, one might reply to Putnam's arguments by invoking a Causal constraint, according to which an intended interpretation must respect all appropriate causal connections between words and objects. In principle, this should cut-off any deviant models generated by permutation. But, Putnam retorts, since one must state the causal constraint theory-internally, such a restriction is 'just more theory' – i.e., it too is subject to permutation. Hence such constraints don't help after all.

Yet, as Button notes (S. 29), orthodoxy holds that the JMT manoeuvre begs the question; when offering a constraint, the external realist isn't claiming that some sentences of her theory fix reference, but rather that some extra-linguistic element serves to do so. So 'causation fixes reference' is a theory-external claim, and not subject to permutation.

But Button rejects orthodoxy, offering a detailed and (to my mind) convincing argument that the JMT doesn't beg the question. First, recall that, because she accepts **Cartesianism**, the external realist buys into the worry that a theory could 'get everything right with regard to appearances and still be undetectably and radically false' (46). Hence she thinks we can 'bracket away' appearances, e.g. consider them independent of their reference, correspondence, etc., and then ask if they fit with the world. According to Button, this bracketing commitment means that the external realist must gloss 'ideal' as something like 'gets everything right at the level of bracketed appearances', which in turn entails that the notion of *empirical content* is exhausted by what's happening at the level of bracketed experiences. As a result, any attempt to build a bridge between mind and world (i.e. link bracketed experiences to whatever is beyond my bracketed experiences) must be without empirical content – if it weren't, then we couldn't bracket it away. As this includes semantic relations, invoking some notion as a means of constraining reference – e.g.., asserting 'causation fixes reference' theory-externally – necessarily lacks empirical content. It is tantamount to invoking magic – a '*one-knows-not-what*' that 'solves our problem *one-knows-not-how*' (Putnam 1983a, quoted on S. 61).

The immediate upshot is that a theory-external reply to Putnam's challenge won't work. And, since a theory-internal answer won't work either (because any such answer is just

more grist to the permutation mill), this means the external realist has no reply to Putnam's challenge.

In effect, we fundamentally mis-understand Putnam if we read him as asking the external realist a *method* question, like 'how is correspondence between word and world possible?' in the same sense that we might ask 'how is going from Hamburg to Bonn possible?'). Instead, we must read him as asking the external realist a *desperation* question: how is reference *so much as possible*, given these constraints? In other words, as Button diagnoses it, the worry Putnam's arguments invoke isn't *Cartesian angst*, i.e. worry over whether appearances to refer are deceptive, but *Kantian angst*, i.e., worry over how our thoughts could even be sensitive to the world at all. Thus 'the modal theoretic arguments and the JMT manoeuvre form a machine that converts Cartesian angst into Kantian angst' (S. 58).

The problem is that the serious entertainment of Kantian angst is incoherent: if the Kantian worry is correct, then nothing could express it. This gives us a *reductio* of external realism: it is committed to Cartesian scepticism (due to **Cartesianism**), and hence, given the above, to Kantian angst. However, Kantian angst is incoherent. Therefore, so too is external realism.

Part C explores the link between realism and scepticism by examining Putnam's brain-in-vat argument. The BIV argument amounts to a robust tool for refuting radical scepticism; as a consequence, it serves to undercut the external realist's **Cartesianism**. However, it doesn't immediately push us to full-blown *internal* realism – according to which every Cartesian scenario can be defeated – because, according to Button, even the BIV argument is impotent in the face of *some* sceptical scenarios (Ch. 14). This places the would-be realist in a strange situation: they can't be external *or* internal realists. Instead, they must fall somewhere in-between. But where? Walking the reader through a series of 'Vat variations', Button argues that determining exactly which forms of scepticism survive the BIV argument is vague. Consequently, 'precisely where we should position ourselves between the twin poles of internal and external realism is equally vague' (S. 176-7). In other words, the best we can do is a mitigated aporia: we're neither external nor internal realists, but we shouldn't aim to be any more specific than that.

Here Button is too quick. One might respond to his vat-variations by carefully working through them one-by-one, slowly building to a kind of reflective equilibrium. He rejects this methodology, arguing that (a) there is no reason to think equilibrium could ever emerge victorious; and (b) even if one did, it would have no right to do so. This is because our semantic intuitions, necessary to settle the various scenarios, are *humble* (emerging from

everyday considerations) and *fragile* (susceptible to framing effects). Since they are humble, when we take them out of everyday practice and plant them in some exotic scenario, while we expect them to 'bear their ordinary fruits; they might equally well wither, or mutate into triffids' (S. 165). Metaphors aside, why accept this pessimistic description? Grant that our semantic intuitions were developed in response to realistic and simple cases, and that, as Lillehammer puts it, 'lack of realism and complexity can therefore detract from reliability' (2008: 457, quoted on S. 164). Even so, *can* doesn't equal *must*. Similarly with fragility: that framing effects *can* taint out intuitions doesn't mean that any equilibrium we reach is in fact so tainted. While worries about such taint might give us pause, it doesn't necessarily undermine any results. And it is this second, necessity claim that Button seems to think follows. Still, this is a minor quibble, a request for Button to say more about why this methodology is necessarily mistaken.

Finally, Part D examines two themes related to the now-defunct realism debate. Turning first to semantic externalism, Button argues (Ch. 17) that a 'messy' kind of semantic externalism 'falls out of our own practices of investigation and referring' (S.181). Consequently, all realists can (and should) accept semantic externalism. However, it will always be 'messy' because the question of just how external our externalism is, amounts, according to Button, to the question of where precisely we locate ourselves on the realism spectrum, which, given Part C's results, is an unanswerable question. Meanwhile, the final two chapters concern conceptual relativism, which Button characterizes (S.197-8) as the commitment to:

> **Tolerate** There is more than one, but no best, way to approach the world
>
> **Relativize** The objects that we talk about and the kinds they fall under are relativized to conceptual schemes
>
> **Liquidate** Certain contemporary metaphysical debates are bankrupt and must be liquidated

Button attacks relativism with his *behind-the-schemes* argument: in effect, every attempt to affirm conceptual relativism requires invoking something that sits *behind* any particular scheme, violating **Relativize**. Hence the relativist cannot even state her own position without undercutting it.

Yet while conceptual relativism is dead, *conceptual cosmopolitanism* emerges from the ashes. This position has two 'active ingredients' (209*ff*). The first is the thought that, if the participants in a debate both regard each other as making true statements, then their debate is shallow (i.e., not worth having) and should be liquidated. The second, meanwhile, is

the possibility of someone being a *cosmopolitan* – someone who is fully and equally 'at home' in multiple conceptual schemes. Now, assume X is a cosmopolitan, at home in the schemes attached to two sides of a particular debate. If we ask X which of the schemes is *really* true, she'll 'indifferently give different answers to the question… at different times', depending upon which scheme she's employing at the time of inquiry (S. 215). Should we insist that X pick a single scheme as home for 'ontological tax purposes', she'll respond that she's 'happy to take … chances with the ontological bailiffs' (ibid). Similarly if we ask X to *interpret* the schemes (she'll provide different interpretations depending upon which scheme she's employing at the time). Finally, if we try to run a behind-the-schemes argument against X, she'll just thank us for 'supplying… a third way of speaking about the world' (S. 216). In other words, while committed to **Tolerate** and **Liquidate**, cosmopolitans reject **Relativize** (and consequently dodge the behind-the-schemes argument). Further, cosmopolitanism threatens any metaphysical debate which can be shown to involve 'rival' schemes that can both simultaneously be regarded as true; such debates will be shallow and hence ought to be liquidated.

So, which debates suffer this fate? Button refuses to give a general answer here, instead again professing a mitigated aporia: 'not every apparent metaphysical debate is contentful, and not every debate is empty, but it is hard to say much more than that' (S. 220). This strikes me as a missed opportunity. Button could have greatly strengthened the punch of this Part – the part of the book that most directly connects with what contemporary (meta)metaphysicians are debating – by applying his cosmopolitanism to some sample debates. As it stands, readers are left to determine for themselves if their pet debates will have to be put down. Regardless, cosmopolitanism certainly warrants room at the metametaphysical table (though it's unlikely to win many converts).

In sum, while I've occasionally been critical, this book is exceedingly excellent, weaving together scholarship and philosophical thought of the highest quality; reading and thinking carefully about it will undoubtedly prove fruitful for anyone interested in such matters. I am really confident that it will structure the debate about realism for years to come.

- Nathan Wildman, Hamburg