

Putnam, “Meaning and Reference”

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Putnam's Key Arguments:

- (1) What we mean isn't always determined by what we think.
 - Meanings of terms are independent of our thoughts.
 - References are socially determined.
- (2) Natural kind terms are rigid designators.

Twin Earth, 1750

- Oscar₁ says 'water', referring to H₂O.
- Oscar₂ says 'water', referring to XYZ.
 - But when they think of water, they think the same thoughts.
- 'Water' has the same meaning in both languages, but different referents.
- Or it has the same intension for the two Oscars, but different extensions.

Twin Earth, 1950

- Different *extensions* of water_E and water_{TE} are revealed via chemical analysis.
- Earth reports:
 - “On Twin Earth the word ‘water’ means XYZ.”
- Twin Earth reports:
 - “On Earth the word ‘water’ means H_2O .”
- For a resident of Earth to call XYZ ‘water’ is now wrong.
 - “What changed was that in 1750 we would have thought that XYZ bore the relation same_L to the liquid in Lake Michigan, whereas in 1800 or 1850 we would have known that it did not” (703).

Another Twin Earth Example

- 1) Assume that molybdenum pots and pans *cannot* be distinguished from aluminum pots and pans.
- 2) Molybdenum is as common on Twin Earth as aluminum is on Earth; molybdenum is as rare on Earth as aluminum is on Twin Earth.
- 3) The words “aluminum” and “molybdenum” are switched on Twin Earth. “Aluminum” is the name of molybdenum, “molybdenum” is the name of aluminum.
- “If Oscar₁ and Oscar₂ are standard speakers of Earthian English and Twin Earthian English, respectively, and neither is chemically or metallurgically sophisticated, **then there may be no difference at all in their psychological states** when they use the word ‘aluminum’; nevertheless, we have to say that ‘aluminum’ has the extension *aluminum* in the idiolect of Oscar 1, and the extension *molybdenum* in the idiolect of Oscar 2...**Again we see that the psychological state of the speaker does *not* determine the extension...of the word**” (703).

A Real World Example

- Putnam can't tell elm trees from beech trees. In his mind, they're indistinguishable.
- “We still say that the extension of ‘elm’ in my idiolect is the same as the extension of ‘elm in anyone else’s’ viz. the set of all elm trees” (704).
- The extension of elm trees is: “the set of all elm trees,” regardless of what you think they look like.
 - Same goes for beech trees.
- Therefore, his thoughts do not determine the references of his terms.
- “Cut the pie any way you like, ‘meanings’ just ain’t in the *head*” (704).

Division of Linguistic Labor

- Experts determine the reference of a natural-kind term.
 - In the case of water, experts have determined that water is comprised of H₂O molecules.
- Not everyone can be expected to develop this knowledge; not everyone *needs* to develop this knowledge.
 - “The sociolinguistic state of the collective linguistic body... fixes the extension.” [706]
 - The knowledge that H₂O refers to water disseminates among Earth’s residents following the discovery.
- The average speaker refers to a stereotype of the natural-kind term, rather than the referent’s essential component.
 - An average Earthling knows that Earth has H₂O and Twin Earth has XYZ, which is different, but would not necessarily know the difference on sight.

Indexicality & Rigidity

- *Indexical* terms are those that have an extension which varies from context to context (“I,” “now,” “this,” “here,” &c.)
- *Rigid designators* (Kripke) refer to the same object in all possible worlds.
- Consider the example from before:
 - On Earth we have a glass filled with H₂O.
 - On Twin Earth we have a glass filled with XYZ.
- Two theories about the meaning of “water” might arise:
 - (1) The term “water” is *world-relative* but *constant in meaning*.
 - (2) “Water” is H₂O in all worlds (XYZ isn’t “water”). “Water” doesn’t have the same extension on Earth and Twin Earth.

Indexicality & Rigidity (cont.)

- These two theories can be written as:

(1') (For every world W) (For every x in W) (x is water \equiv x bears $same_L$ to the entity referred to as “this” in W)

(2') (For every world W) (For every x in W) (x is water \equiv x bears $same_L$ to the entity referred to as “this” *in the actual world W_1*)

- In (1'), “this” is indexical; in (2'), “this” is rigid.
- Putnam extends indexicality to include terms like “water.”
- Natural kinds have indexical components that make them refer rigidly.

Conclusion

- Meaning is not in the mind alone:
 - “extension is, in general, determined socially” (710)
 - “extension is, in part, determined indexically” (711)
- We rely on the expertise of others to fix the extension of natural-kind terms.
 - For the average speaker on topic x, the extension of ‘x’ is a paradigm informed by expert understanding.