

Putnam on Meaning

wylie.b@new.ox.ac.uk

Pre-lecture reading:

Putnam, H. (1973), 'Meaning and Reference', *The Journal of Philosophy* **70**, pp. 699-711.

1. Putnam's Twin Earth scenario. Twin Earth is exactly like Earth, except the watery stuff called 'water' there is XYZ, not H₂O.
2. Putnam's claims (Oscar is on Earth, Twin Oscar is on Twin Earth):
 - (2.1) The extension of 'water' in Oscar's mouth is different from the extension of 'water' in Twin Oscar's mouth. In Oscar's mouth it is H₂O; in Twin Oscar's mouth it is XYZ.
 - (2.2) Meaning determines extension. Since the extension of 'water' in Oscar's mouth is different from the extension of 'water' in Twin Oscar's mouth, the meaning of 'water' in Oscar's mouth is different from the meaning of 'water' in Twin Oscar's mouth.
 - (2.3) Oscar and Twin Oscar are in the same psychological state (or were, in 1750). Since the meaning of 'water' in Oscar's mouth is different from the meaning of 'water' in Twin Oscar's mouth, the psychological states of Oscar and Twin Oscar do not determine the meaning of 'water' in their mouths.
 - (2.4) Meanings ain't in the head. The world makes a contribution to the meaning of our words.
3. Issues with these claims:
 - (3.1) Why talk about the extension and meaning of 'water' in Oscar and Twin Oscar's mouths, rather than the extension and meaning of 'water' on Earth and Twin Earth? Because need to be careful: there is difference between *context of utterance* and *context of evaluation*.
 - (3.2) What about indexicals, like 'I'? The extension of 'I' in your mouth is different from the extension of 'I' in my mouth, but the meaning of 'I' in your mouth is the same as the meaning of 'I' in my mouth. Right? Putnam seems to be saying that 'water' is not indexical in the way that 'I' is. Compare two different ways that Earthians and Twin Earthians might give meaning to 'water' - on one way they give it the same meaning (like 'I'), on the other they give it a different meaning (like 'Oscar'). Fixing the reference of 'water'. Rigid vs non-rigid terms.
 - (3.3) What about the fact that our brains are largely H₂O, and Twin brains are largely XYZ? What if psychological states extend outwards to the environment? Each is a problem for the claim that Oscar and Twin Oscar are in different psychological states.
 - (3.4) Well, *some* meanings ain't in the head - those of natural kind terms. What about the meaning of 'I' - is *that* in the head? What conclusion would we draw if we run the Twin Earth thought experiment for 'I'?

4. Further questions:

- (4.1) Is there any water on Twin Earth? Is water *necessarily* H₂O? If so, this seems to be a necessary truth that we discovered *a posteriori*.
- (4.2) Is there is a sense in which we don't know what we mean by 'water', or didn't know in 1750? In what sense *do* we know what we mean by 'water'. What knowledge do we have to have in order to understand the word 'water'? Compare: knowing what 162² is; knowing who the President is.
- (4.3) Do Twin Earthians speak English?
- (4.4) Can Twin Oscar use 'water' in the same sense as Oscar does? What about Oscar - can he use 'water' in the same sense as Twin Oscar?
- (4.5) What is Putnam getting at with his idea of the division of linguistic labour?