

### 1. *The Target View*

- ▶ Putnam's characterisation of the target:

**Psychologism:** Knowing the meaning of a term is just to be in a certain psychological state.

But what psychological state?

- ▶ The main form of this view that Putnam talks about is that knowing the meaning of a term involves having some **criterion** for distinguishing those things that fall under the term from those that don't.
- ▶ A very strong form of this view says that to know the meaning of a term we need to know a list of necessary and sufficient conditions for when it will apply.
- ▶ A weaker form of the view is just that we need some method, perhaps not an infallible one, for distinguishing things that fall under the term from things that don't.
- ▶ Critically a criterion is going to involve being able to use certain concepts: for instance, the criterion for 'water' will make appeal to *clearish liquid, drinkable* and so on.
- ▶ Restated, our target view is  
**Psychologism** Knowing the meaning of a term is just to have some criterion for determining whether an object falls under that term.

This is basically what he means by an 'intension'.

### 2. *Counterexamples to Psychologism*

- ▶ *Water and Twin-water.* There's a world far, far away that is an almost perfect duplicate of ours, Twin Earth. There are people there that call themselves "British" or "Americans" and those people there speak a language very like English.  
In only one respect does Twin Earth differ from Earth: there the liquid that people drink, that flows in rivers etc. has a very different chemical structure; we'll call it XYZ.  
**Intuition:** On Twin Earth, 'water' means XYZ.
- ▶ *Ye Olde Twin Earth.* Let's look back to the 1700s, before anyone on either Earth or Twin Earth knew anything about the chemical composition of the liquid that they drink, that flows in rivers etc.

Oscar points at a glass of water and says "There is some water". Twin Oscar similarly says "There is some water".

**Intuition.** Oscar and Twin Oscar do not mean the same things by 'water', even though *no one* at that time has the means to distinguish water from XYZ.

- ▶ *Elms and Beeches.* I can't tell an elm from a beech and probably neither can you. There's also no difference between what 'elm' means in my mouth and what 'elm' means in yours: in either case, the extension of 'elm' is the set of elm trees (whatever they happen to be). Likewise for 'beech'.

**Intuition.** (With respect to trees) we are in the same psychological state. But 'elm' in my mouth means something different to what 'beech' means in yours.

- ▶ *The moral of the story.* What we've seen here is that intensions are *not* enough to pin down what a word means. Both Oscar and Twin Oscar associate the same criterion with 'water'; but they nonetheless mean different things by it.
- ▶ Likewise, you and I do not associate different criteria with 'elm' and 'beech', but we nonetheless mean different things with those words.
- ▶ So if these examples are right, **Psychologism** is false.

### 3. *Objections*

- ▶ *Maybe XYZ is water.* One might be tempted to deny the intuition that XYZ isn't water. Maybe you say, what water really means is "clearish, drinkable substance that can be found in lakes etc"; and if that's what 'water' means then XYZ is water.
- ▶ *Response.* This is hard to square with the certain correction data. Suppose upon initially arriving on Twin Earth we take for granted that XYZ is water. Then we learn that XYZ isn't  $H_2O$ . A very natural way to report this would be to say that we discovered that XYZ is not water.
- ▶ *Maybe 'water' changed its meaning.* Why not think the meaning of 'water' changes when its chemical composition is discovered? Then we could say that they do indeed mean different things at the later time, when we had criteria which could distinguish between them; and that they meant the same thing at the earlier time when we didn't.
- ▶ *Response.* It's not obvious there's any *linguistic* evidence for this. In fact, the same kind of correction data points the other way. Suppose Oscar said of a glass of XYZ in front of him:

(1) That is water.

It seems like we could correct him by saying

(2) No, that's not water. (It has a totally different chemical composition.)

But if we mean different things by 'water' it's mysterious why we should be able to correct him in this way.

- ▶ *Maybe we don't (fully) know the meaning of water.* One might think that rather what this shows is that people don't *really* know the meaning of water; after all, the thought might go, they can't distinguish water from XYZ! Hence none of these count as counterexamples.
- ▶ *Response.* Surely the best indicator of whether you know the meaning of a word is whether you can use it to communicate things. But we have no problem in doing this with 'water': I can tell you plenty of things about water.

This is even true of 'elm', though I can't distinguish elms from beeches. So it's not clear there's any (non-question begging) evidence that we don't know the meanings of these terms.

- ▶ Furthermore, this would seem to have potentially extreme consequences. What *would* we end up knowing the meaning of, if this were true?

#### 4. *Division of Labour*

- ▶ We already noted that a criteria alone doesn't seem sufficient to determine a meaning. But note that the elm case has a further moral: sometimes you don't need *any* criterion in order to know the meaning of a word.
- ▶ One moral here is that, even if it is important for you to be able to talk about something like gold, you don't need yourself to have the means of distinguish gold from non-gold. You can leave that to the experts.
- ▶ Putnam suggests that what is important is that *someone* in the linguistic community possess a criterion. For 'gold' to pick out gold what it does, someone needs to be able to distinguish gold from non-gold. But not everyone need have this ability.
- ▶ Putnam hypothesises that *every* language will contain terms like 'elm', where we rely on experts.

## 5. What 'Water' Means and How It Means It (According to Putnam)

- ▶ Here are two theories about what 'water' means:
  - 'Water' means the same thing both on Earth and on Twin Earth. It's just that on Earth water is  $H_2O$  but on Twin Earth it is XYZ.
  - 'Water' means different things on Earth and on Twin Earth. On Earth it means  $H_2O$  and on Twin Earth it means XYZ.

Putnam thinks his examples push in favour of the *second* theory.

- ▶ Before we discovered that water is  $H_2O$ , it would have been natural to think water could be XYZ. But isn't that a situation in which water is XYZ?

Putnam says it is merely an *epistemic possibility*; as a matter of fact, it is metaphysically impossible for water to have been  $H_2O$ .

- ▶ Putnam suggests that we pick out what water means with a kind of ostensive definition: 'water' refers to whatever is the same liquid as *that stuff around here*.

Said while pointing to some water!

Notice that it is part of the view that we intend to pick out water by sameness of underlying structure rather than sameness of superficial features.

- ▶ Notice this adds an indexical element to natural kind vocabulary: what 'here' means will depend on where you utter it!

Similarly, Putnam thinks, what 'water' means will depend on where you utter it.

### Summary

- ▶ Criteria alone are *not* sufficient to determine what the meaning of a word is.
- ▶ Sometimes it's determined (in part) by social factors.
- ▶ Sometimes it is also determined by an indexical element.