

Putnam on Natural Kind Terms

period of late 60's/early 70's

pivotal for phil. mind/phil. lang./epistemology

taking modal metaphysics seriously

capacity to hold a subject matter vs. to know about it "latch on" to subject matter

Kripke: distinct! unlike Frege/Russell's naming \Leftrightarrow having descriptive knowledge of object

replaced descriptive account w/ causal chain

Putnam: doing largely the same thing but applied to kinds of things (predicates)

Evans: this all relates to phil. mind. \rightarrow some type of qualitative characterization in mind

Kripke's gives us reason to abandon descriptive knowledge \rightarrow phil. mind acct

[presents, dossier of things - what it is to think about an object/secure subject matter
cognitive]

relevant to phil. of perception in some time period

mental representations & their context - "of-ness"

\downarrow \swarrow
representation is of X b/c X played a particular causal role in forming the representation

one way of reading Evans: not committed to the determinant of cognitive reference is causality itself

more a matter of speaker/user's intention

Searle etc. - can have names w/o communicative causal chains a la Kripke (island example)

when Kripke is right, speakers intend to use names to refer to the same thing as who they heard it from did
that is a description of some form!

e.g. my intention w/ "Aristotle" is to refer to whoever Chris Bobonich is referring to

still my resolve that ultimately decides what I refer to - not just a natural causal fact (Searle, Evans)

optimistic: we have some cognitive reference capacity that isn't descriptive knowledge

settled by weighted most of items in dossier

Putnam on natural kinds

natural account of kind terms goes back to ancients/Locke

\nearrow see "Locke on real vs nominal essences" slide

distinction b/w extension & intension

\hookrightarrow why those things have predicate true of them (e.g. 'what it takes')

\hookrightarrow what things have the predicate true of them

hearts & kidneys: same extension but different intensions

chocolates & venoms are different natural kind terms

\hookrightarrow always (necessarily) picks out creatures w/ kidneys

but the extension can differ in possible worlds

\hookrightarrow first take an intension: up to conventions to establish meaning of a term - necessity/sufficiency conditions for the term applying (to the actual + possible extensions)

Locke's nominal essences: we define in terms we understand

"kind-membership"

("to be a banana is to participate in bananahood" "and we didn't have a definition of bananahood in 1750"

This is how we understand

\hookrightarrow this would be "real essence theory" as opposed to characteristics we conventionally cashify

the terms themselves!

\hookrightarrow possibly unknown/unknowable underlying features

w/ this, how are we supposed to understand our meaning of the word banana?

Ruthein's more cautious/complex view

ultimately distinguishing:

1. understanding of a term "grasps" something psychologically

\checkmark \hookrightarrow what we grasp determined by psychological state

we potentially cannot access the underlying real essence

further, how do we differentiate b/w 2 species using only real essences?

what are the "alterations" that persist kind-membership?

\hookrightarrow psychological contribution "in my head"

to settling the intension

2. extension-determining intension: the necessity/sufficiency conditions for kind membership

short version Putnam says "we don't need to understand this" (contra Locke)

psychological intension underdetermines the same term's extension-determining intension

Kripke's "descriptive theory of meanings of kind terms" (see slides)

a priori for speaker S that " X is a K iff X has a weighted most of C "

this also expresses a necessary truth (and so determines extension-determining intension)

→ Kripke-style arguments against:

nodal argument: contingent that, e.g., individual tigers have all or most of C_{tiger}

extension-fixing: if you're just wrong about what members of a term are, your term might apply but your cluster won't apply to anything

e.g. Anaximander about stars being "holes in a sphere"

epistemic: we could be mistaken or deceived e.g. that lemons are naturally yellow — it's not a priori

Twin Earth argument

psychological states not enough to determine meanings

1700 Oscar only knows 'surface' features of water

doesn't know the deep truths about water's composition, e.g. molecular structure

on Twin Earth, 1700s Twoscar has the same psychological intension

the thing that has prompted the use of "water" on Twin Earth is substance XYZ

If Oscar encountered XYZ, he would falsely proclaim "this is water"

↓
e.g. Putnam's claim: this is not water

"water" is not defined by easily-known surface features (even in 1700) — they do not give extension-determining intension

why should Oscar care?

↓
these features can't tell real water from fake water

Oscar and Twoscar have the same psychological state w.r.t. water

What gives Oscar's and Twoscar's "water" different extensions is not in their minds, but in their environments

is the identity via chemical composition just sort of arbitrary?

what determines the extension of water is "consisting of H₂O"

water exhibits "sample dependence"

"loose talk," e.g. saying a glass of

↓

water is "water" even though there's fluoride

the real essence of encountered samples of water/what it is to be water

we don't have to understand the underlying

in it, the table is "flat," Italy is "shaped like a

nature — can use a name for a kind w/o

boot" — are we being imprecise, or is a glass of water a paradigmatic example of how our linguistic community uses "water"?

understanding the kind-membership conditions exactly

boot

↳ contrast: you run a

current through water to produce

hydrogen gas

or "electricity splits water into

hydrogen and oxygen gases"

(maybe an example that doesn't rely on molecular vocabulary)

indexicality & sample dependence (from David Kaplan "On Demonstratives")

indexicals are context-sensitive: stable meanings, but their contexts shift from utterance to utterance

↙
or character

the character is the rule that determines content via aspects of the utterance's context