

THREE

MEANING WITHOUT ANALYTICITY*

In a series of interesting and influential papers on semantics, Hilary Putnam has developed what he calls a “post-verificationist” theory of meaning.¹ As part of this work, and not I think the most important part, Putnam defends a limited version of the analytic-synthetic distinction. In this paper I will survey and evaluate Putnam’s defense of analyticity and explore its relationship to broader concerns in semantics. Putnam’s defense of analyticity ultimately fails, and I want to show here exactly why it fails. However, I will also argue that this very failure helps open the prospect of a new optimism concerning the theory of meaning, a theory of meaning finally liberated from the dead weight of the notions of analyticity and necessary truth. Putnam’s work, in fact, makes valuable contributions to such a theory.

1. Trivial Analyticity

To see Putnam’s defense of analyticity in context, it is crucial to notice that he is largely sympathetic to Quine’s attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction. To Putnam, Quine’s criticisms in “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” were both “powerful and salutary.” “The distinction,” he says, “had grown into a veritable philosophical man-eater: analytic equaling necessary equaling unrevisable in principle equaling whatever truth the individual philosopher wishes to explain way.”² The notion of analyticity needed to be pruned down to size, and Quine’s criticism had an appropriate effect. Putnam agrees with Quine that the analytic-synthetic distinction does not have the massive epistemic significance once attached to it. In particular it will not provide “foundations” for knowledge by distinguishing purely factual matters from necessary truths or linguistic rules—to function as an unalterable framework for knowledge. Putnam writes of “the silliness of regarding mathematics as consisting in some sense of ‘rules of language’.”³ He argues for a refutation of conventionalism⁴ and holds that “there are no *a priori* truths.”⁵ So much, then, for the linguistic theory of the *a priori*.

These points fit quite nicely into a Quinean perspective, but Putnam’s work also departs from Quine’s views in quite important ways. Thus, Putnam is a critic of behaviorism, a defender of his

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1. The crucial papers are collected in Putnam, Hilary 1975, *Philosophical Papers, Mind, Language and Reality*, Vol. 2.
2. Putnam, Hilary 1975, “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’ ” in Putnam 1975, *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 2, p. 253.
3. Putnam, Hilary 1962, “The Analytic and the Synthetic.” Reprinted in Putnam 1975, *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 2, see p. 42.
4. Putnam, Hilary 1975, “The Refutation of Conventionalism,” reprinted in Putnam 1975, *Philosophical Papers* Vol. 2.
5. Putnam 1975, p. xvii.

own version of the analytic-synthetic distinction, and he expresses, at times, a constructive attitude concerning the theory of meaning which is a central and formative departure from Quine's views.

In "The Meaning of 'Meaning'" (1975) Putnam repeats his contention that Quine's attack on analyticity "went too far." On the view expressed, "some limited class of analytic sentences can be saved."⁶ This claim reiterates those found in "The Analytic and the Synthetic" (1962), published thirteen years earlier. "Quine is wrong," Putnam had written; "There are analytic statements: 'All bachelors are unmarried' is one of them." But though Putnam claims that "there is an analytic-synthetic distinction," he also says that it is a "rather trivial one."⁷ That is to say, it will not do important epistemic work. Understanding why Putnam makes these claims will require a close look at the connection between Putnam's work on 'meaning' and his notion of analyticity.

One key to Putnam's views on meaning and analyticity is the notion of revisability. Those who reject the notion of analyticity tend to substitute talk of conservatism as a methodological principle or criterion of theory acceptability. Much that once was reckoned "true in virtue of meaning alone" will now be characterized as only relatively immune to revision due to some crucial role in accepted theory. But Putnam retains the notion of unrevisability (1962, 1975). Analytic truths are, he says, unrevisable, but this unrevisability of analytic truths is not *simply* a function of there being linguistic rules to the contrary. "Linguistic obligatoriness," he writes, "is not supposed to be an index of unrevisability or even of truth." In consequence, "we can hold that 'tigers are striped' is part of the meaning of 'tiger'—without being trapped into the problem of analyticity."⁸ Though feature F is part of the meaning of a word X, it does not follow, for Putnam, that 'All X's are F' is analytic—or even true. Not everything that is a matter of meaning is therefore true in virtue of meaning. Analyticity is a rather special characteristic, arising as a consequence of the meanings of words, but only in special circumstances. Thus, we cannot dispute Putnam's claim that 'tigers are striped' is part of the meaning of 'tiger' by pointing to albino tigers or the possibility of genetic mutations among tigers. Rather than being linked in the usual way to 'meaning', 'analyticity' is directly linked to 'unrevisability'. A decisive question, then, concerns the grounds for the claim that some matters of meaning are unrevisable. Answering this question will bring up very central elements of Putnam's views on semantics. Before proceeding, however, I want to comment briefly on some points which have already emerged.

There is deep significance in Putnam's weakening of the traditional connection, in the theory of meaning, between 'meaning' and 'truth'. This point will become somewhat clearer in the following section where Putnam's notion of linguistic stereotypes is discussed. For now, certain general remarks are called for to provide some perspective. 'Truth' is closely tied to 'extension' by Tarski's theory where 'truth' (of a sentence in a particular language) is defined in terms of the basic semantic notion of satisfaction. The extension of 'tiger', for instance, is just the class of objects which satisfy 'tiger', i.e., the class of objects *of which* 'tiger' is true. Further, there is good reason to maintain, with Putnam, that when we ask for the meaning of a word like 'tiger' we are partly

6. Putnam 1975, p. 253.

7. Putnam 1962, "The Analytic and the Synthetic," p. 36.

8. Putnam 1975, p. 256.

concerned to know the extension, or reference, of the word. However, as Putnam has emphasized in criticism of Davidson's truth-based semantics, there is also good reason to think that any story concerning extension alone is not the full story concerning meaning. "For many words," Putnam argues, "an extensionally correct truth definition can be given which is in no sense a theory of meaning of the word." Consider, for instance, the following, which might appear as part of a Davidsonian semantics for English:

'Water' is true of x , if and only if x is H_2O

Concerning a pre-scientific community, it is reasonable to suppose that "most speakers don't know that water is H_2O ." Thus, "this formula in no way tells us anything about the meaning of the word 'water'."⁹ In giving a characterization of the meaning of 'water', part of what we want is to capture an element of the speaker's linguistic competence—those crucial elements of the overall belief system which encapsulate how the community speaks (or thinks) about water. Once it is recognized that what people commonly believe—as a matter of the meaning of their words—may yet be false, then it becomes extremely implausible to hold that a theory of meaning need only proceed in terms of the actual extensions of expressions. Although extension is crucial to meaning, what is more to the point when it comes to speaker's competence is purported reference.¹⁰ Putnam's weakening of the traditional connection between 'meaning' and 'truth' is an important advance. Matters of meaning, for instance 'tigers are striped' need not be true. (Though, of course, they may be true.) Yet, the importance of this point leaves it all the more problematic why Putnam regards some statements as analytic. We need to look further and see what this "trivial analyticity" consists in for Putnam.

2. Meaning and Stereotype

Putnam introduced the notion of linguistic stereotype in lectures during 1968. But the fullest development of the notion is found in "The Meaning of 'Meaning'." There Putnam states that "the theoretical account of what it is to be a stereotype proceeds in terms of the notion of linguistic obligation."

9. Putnam 1975, p. 259.

10. The concept of purported reference is developed in Callaway 1981, with particular attention to names. Purported reference of names, in relation to a theory, is there defined within the confines of extensional or referential semantics, in simulation of Frege's notion of sense. Putnam's stereotypes can be understood as characterizations of the purported reference of expressions, if we treat the stereotype as a standard social theory (approximating to an axiom system) concerning the domain. Linguistic competence, conceived of in terms of syntactic competence plus knowledge of stereotypes can thus be thought of as a minimal socially shared "theory" used for purposes of communications and held in relative isolation from scientific developments and other information regarded as inessential for purposes of communications. A problem will remain as to how to individuate such a "standard social theory" (i.e., the distinction between "meaning" and "matters of fact and belief." But I do not see this problem as fatal to semantic theory. See the discussion in Callaway 1981, "Semantic Theory and Language," above.

What it means to say that being striped is part of the (linguistic) stereotype of ‘tiger’ is that it is obligatory to acquire the information that stereotypical tigers are striped if one acquires ‘tiger’, in the same sense of ‘obligatory’ in which it is obligatory to indicate whether one is speaking of lions in the plural or lions in the singular when speaking of lions in English.¹¹

It is clearly possible that the rules of English pluralization may change, or have exceptions (in certain dialects?). Consider ‘Lion is quite prevalent in this country’ or ‘There was no lion to be seen’. We can imagine the frequency of such usage increasing in some community to the final exclusion of the standard alternative. In the same way, we can imagine the ‘obligatory’ character of ‘tigers are striped’ might well fade away under some circumstances, or not exist among certain speakers of English.

It will be objected in some quarters that what we are imagining here is simply a language other than standard English, or perhaps a dialect of English—with some other obligatory features. A standing difficulty with this position is that it merely shifts the problem. At first concerned with what is genuinely obligatory, we are now left wondering about the identity conditions of ‘languages’ and ‘dialects.’ The temptation will be to distinguish genuine linguistic obligatoriness by simply multiplying dialects *ad hoc*.

While this is an important kind of problem, it is not peculiar to Putnam’s semantics, and I do not wish to dwell on it here. Putnam has some interesting suggestions regarding the problem in his paper, “Some Issues in the Theory of Grammar,” (1961) where he criticizes the view that no distinction can be made between ‘deviant’ and ‘non-deviant’ statements.¹² However, if one hopes to characterize the analytic-synthetic distinction in terms of ‘unrevisable linguistic obligation’ it is best to notice the problematic character of ‘linguistic obligation’ at the outset. Even if linguistic obligatoriness is not a direct indication of analyticity, on Putnam’s view, still it is presumably a necessary condition.

Putnam’s major proposal toward defining ‘meaning’ is to specify a “normal form” for the description of word meaning.

The normal form description of the meaning of a word should be a finite sequence or ‘vector’, whose components should certainly include the following...: (1) the syntactic markers that apply to the word, e.g., ‘noun’ ; (2) the semantic markers that apply to the word, e.g., ‘animal’, ‘period of time’ , ; (3) a description of the additional features of the stereotype, if any; (4) a description of the extension.¹³

Each of the components of the vector “represents a hypothesis about the individual speaker’s competence, except the extension.” Putnam provides the following example: ‘WATER’

11. Putnam 1975 , p. 256.

12. Reprinted in Putnam 1975, pp. 85-106.

13. Putnam 1975, p. 269.

SYNTACTIC MARKERS	SEMANTIC MARKERS	STEREOTYPE	EXTENSION
mass noun; concrete	natural kind liquid	colorless; transparent;	H ₂ O (give or take impurities) tasteless; thirst-quench; etc.

We should think of the stereotype as given under the two middle headings, and including perhaps elements under the first heading, but not including the description of the extension. A hypothesis concerning the extension of a word though required for the account of word meaning, is not part of the task of specifying the stereotype associated with the word. The description of the extension does not pertain to the ordinary speaker's linguistic competence, though it may agree with the opinion of experts in the community under study.

While Putnam borrows the term 'semantic marker' from Katz and Fodor, his usage is importantly different. In particular, Putnam's stereotype is not supposed to give necessary and sufficient conditions for the extension of the word., while Katz and Fodor did aim for this in terms of the combined force of their categories of 'markers' and 'distinguishers'.¹⁴ On Putnam's account of it, meaning does determine extension—though stereotype does not, or usually does not. Trivially, the four kinds of entries determine the extension of the word since the entry under 'extension' does so independently. But the first three kinds of entries are not required to determine the entry under 'extension'. Thus, for Putnam, to give the meaning of a word (or the meaning of this kind of word) we must indicate the stereotype, and also the actual extension of the word. If Putnam's 'linguistic stereotype' is compared with Frege's notion of 'sense,' then a crucial point of difference with the Fregean tradition might be put as the claim that 'sense' does not determine reference—or at least that sense does not completely determine reference. Although some Fregeans are willing to stipulate the point, the larger tendency has been to ignore it.

Even if we consider everything we know about water, making no distinction at all between matters of meaning (or stereotype, i.e., the ordinary speaker's competence) and matters of fact (for instance the tests which experts use to fix the extension of 'water')—still considering even all this information—it is possible to reinterpret the predicates of this theory over a distinct domain. Essentially this is Quine's point where he argues for "the inscrutability of reference."¹⁵ But Putnam (along with Quine) does not reject the notion of reference or extension on these grounds. Instead, in the end, we must acquiesce in "the mother tongue"—or at least in our own best theory—indicating the extension of a word from the perspective provided. It is, of course, a pointless exercise to merely imagine distinctions our own best theory does not make, or possible reinterpretations of our theory, and on such grounds remain agnostic concerning the reference of our words. Putnam carries

14. See Katz, J. J. and Jerry Fodor 1963, "The Structure of Semantic Theory."

15. Quine, W.V. 1969, "Ontological Relativity," in Quine 1969, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, p. 51.

this point over into the general case where we are interpreting the words of others. Especially if we make distinctions that they do not make, it is perfectly in order to take notice of this by indicating the actual extensions of their words—by our best lights. It is to be counted as an advantage, then, that Putnam’s theory does not require that stereotype determine extension. For, only given this point do we come to be able to indicate both the purported reference and the actual reference of a speaker’s words. As Putnam has said, “concepts which are not strictly true of anything may yet refer to something.”¹⁶ The same kind of point may be made where the stereotype is correct as far as it goes, but only determinately specifies an extension (i.e., only determinately specifies an extension relative to the way that our best theory determinately specifies an extension). On Putnam’s view, this is the normal situation we find ourselves in when describing the meaning of English words in English.

Nor need underdetermination of extension by stereotype (or even underdetermination of reference by theory) count against the very possibility of a theory of meaning—as on Quine’s view where he argues from the “inscrutability of reference” to the indeterminacy of translation. For though linguist systems and theories serve to specify the extensions of the expressions employed only determinately (again, determinately *relative* to some new system of distinctions which may still be uncovered), still such a level or degree of discrimination of the system is something objective which can be characterized—relative to our best theory. Or, at least, the “inscrutability of reference” provides no conclusive grounds to the contrary.

If the meaning of a word is given by its normal form description, then we must expect such normal form descriptions to tell us something about word synonymy—and analyticity—on Putnam’s view. Although the obligatory features entering into the normal form description of the meaning of a word do not themselves guarantee analytic connections, or even truth, still if there is to be any analytic truth on Putnam’s account, it must be because some of what is obligatory is also unrevisable. Could this be so, given Putnam’s theory?

As we saw above, the specification of the extension of ‘water’ as H₂O “does not mean that knowledge of the fact that water is H₂O is being imputed to the individual speaker or even to the society. It means that (we say) that the extension of the term ‘water’ as they (the speakers in question) use it is in fact H₂O.”¹⁷ It does *not* follow, then, that if any other word ‘X’ has the same meaning as ‘water’ that the extension of ‘X’ must be specified by the use of the expression ‘H₂O’. For ‘X’ to have the same meaning as ‘water’ it is only necessary that the stereotypes agree and that the extension of ‘X’ be *in fact* the same as the extension of ‘water’. Even supposing that the meanings of ‘water’ and of ‘X’ are unrevisable, and that ‘X is water’ is analytic, there is absolutely nothing in Putnam’s account that will guarantee that anyone will ever know that ‘X is water’ is analytic. For there is nothing in Putnam’s account to guarantee that the coextensiveness of ‘water’ and ‘X’ is known, or will ever be discovered. Thus, the synonymy of the two words need never be recognized. Putnam’s theory will not support anything very close to the traditional analytic-synthetic distinction, because he rejects the category of *a priori* truth. This kind of conclusion

16. Putnam, Hilary 1973, “Explanation and Reference,” in Putnam 1975, p. 197.

17. Putnam 1975, p. 269.

concerning whether one will know that ‘X is water’ is analytic holds, moreover, even in cases where a single speaker has these two words in his vocabulary.¹⁸ In short, Putnam’s theory allows for a “false negative” result in the detection of analyticity.

The theory also allows the possibility of a “false positive” result in the detection of analyticity. To see why, suppose that the normal form descriptions of two words X and Y are identical, except for the descriptions of the extensions of the two words, and suppose further that the descriptions of the extensions are believed to be coextensive. We would then conclude that the words X and Y are synonymous. Could this synonymy claim be unrevisably correct? The answer must be “no,” given the considerations traced so far. From the fact that X and Y are believed to be co-extensional (in accordance with our best current theory) it does not follow of course, that the two words are co-extensional. We may imagine, for example, a linguistic group which treats the words ‘mass’ and ‘weight’ as synonymous. If we characterize the meaning of their words, being ourselves ignorant of the difference between mass and weight (just imagine we are ignorant of Newtonian physics), then, in such a condition of ignorance, it will be reasonable to hold that the words ‘mass’ and ‘weight’ are actually synonymous and co-extensional. But physical theory since Newton tells us that mass and weight are quite distinct. The consequence of these considerations is that the linguist’s judgment concerning synonymy (and analyticity) are open to revision in the light of any theoretical or empirical development—including those taking place entirely outside linguistics. Since we are to decide on the extensions of a speaker’s words in light of our own best theories, any hypothesis concerning extensions—and thus synonymy—is open to revision on the grounds governing the development of our overall theory of nature. Putnam’s account of word meaning creates so many problems for the analytic-synthetic distinction that it is difficult to see how an unrevisable synonymy could ever be reasonably ascribed.

Putnam envisages only a scaled down version of the analytic-synthetic distinction, linked to a fundamentally revised notion of linguistic meaning. But the problems sketched in this section serve to suggest another theoretical option: a concept of meaning completely divorced from any version of the analytic-synthetic distinction. Such a concept of meaning deserves serious investigation if only because it is an option to which semantic research has so often been blind. Quine’s critique of ‘meaning’, though motivated and seemingly forced by his rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction, may have been aimed too widely.¹⁹ If so, we certainly need to take serious notice of this point. Putnam’s distinction between stereotype and extension, that is, his weakening of the traditional connection between ‘meaning’ and ‘truth’, could become an essential element of such an approach to semantic theory. The prospect is that the analytic-synthetic distinction may finally be allowed to die. If matters of meaning are thought of as elements of ordinary speaker’s competence, then the distinction between ‘matters of meaning’ and ‘matters of fact and belief’ stands some chance of an empirical resolution: meaning becomes the least common denominator of

18. Cf. Putnam 1975, p. 270.

19. See Quine, W.V. 1974, “First General Discussion Session,” *Synthese* 27, p. 493: “What I’ve really been concerned with or motivated by in this stuff about translation and indeterminacy hasn’t been primarily translation but cognitive meaning and analyticity and the like.”

belief. This is a possibility if matters of meaning (stereotype) may be false, and stereotype is not assumed to determine extension. But on such an account there is little reason to think that matters of meaning ever determine unrevisable truth. For truth does depend upon extension.

3. Law-cluster Concepts

In “The Analytic and the Synthetic” (1962) Putnam defended his limited form of the distinction in terms of a further distinction between “arbitrary stipulation” or “linguistic convention” and “systematic import.” Speaking of many borderline cases between the analytic and the synthetic, he characterizes them as follows:

What these statements reveal is something like different degrees of something like convention, and different kinds of systematic import. In the case of ‘All bachelors are unmarried’ we have the highest degree of linguistic convention and the minimum degree of systematic import. In the case of the statement ‘There is a past’ we have an overwhelming amount of systematic import—so much that we can barely conceive of a conceptual system which did not include the idea of a past.²⁰

Putnam disputes the claim that the existence of the past is analytic, that is, he will not agree that it is self-contradictory to hold that the earth came into existence five minutes ago, complete with memory traces and etc. But he is willing to say that such hypotheses are “more than empirically false.” “It is not empirically false,” he says, if one means by ‘empirically false statement’ a statement which can be confuted by isolated experiments.”²¹ The point here and Putnam’s concept of systematic import hark back to Quine’s thesis that “our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body.”²² Thus, ‘There is a past’ is not particularly relevant to isolated experiments or observations, but plays a very important role in systematizing our overall theory of nature. To revised this statement would require changes throughout scientific theory and common belief. Thus we justifiably resist such a revision on grounds of conservatism. A statement P which cannot reasonably be revised on the basis of isolated experiments or observations, may yet be revised if we develop a rival theory which gives a better explanation. The alternative theory might be simpler, more comprehensive, or integrate better with other theories. In general, competitive criteria of acceptability need to be invoked to overcome the conservative attachment to the established theory. Acceptance of an alternative theory containing not-P, or not containing P, may well lead to a revision of the truth-value of P.

As examples of such revisions, Putnam discusses “definitional” principles in Newtonian physics and the changes brought about by relativity theory; he also discusses the changes in the status of geometrical principles which followed the development of non-Euclidean geometry. “Einstein was to revise,” he says, “principles that had traditionally been regarded as definitional in character.”

20. Putnam 1962, “The Analytic and the Synthetic,” p. 39.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

22. Quine 1951, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” p. 41.

Einstein as we all know, changed the definition of ‘kinetic energy’. That is to say, he replaced the law ‘ $e = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$ ’ by a more complicated law.²³

Before Einstein, ‘ $e = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$ ’ had been used to provide countless predictions in experiments where the definition was not itself treated as being at risk. The definition had figures as a “framework principle.” In order to effectively challenge it, to understand how it could be thought false, an alternative framework—relativity theory—was needed.

Hume regarded it as impossible to imagine straight lines except as conforming to the principles of Euclidean geometry. That parallel straight lines do not meet was, for Hume, a consequence of the “relations of ideas.” Thus physical space could only be thought of as being Euclidean. This concept of space as governed by the principles of Euclidean geometry was, obviously, not something that could be easily tested by isolated experiments. An entirely new framework of principles had to be developed including, first of all, the mathematics of non-Euclidean geometry.

What these examples tend to show is that “conceivability” is context relative. The development of knowledge and theory may render conceivable what was heretofore inconceivable. Paradoxically (given his advocacy of the analytic-synthetic distinction) Putnam has pressed this kind of point eloquently and quite forcefully.

In contrast with such examples, and the conclusion they suggest, Putnam maintains that ‘all bachelors are unmarried’ is an analytic statement. His argument depends upon his thesis that the kinds of changes which affected the energy definition and the postulate of parallels were only possible because the relevant concepts are “law-cluster concepts.” The idea is explained as follows:

In analogy with the idea of a cluster concept, I should like to introduce the notion of a *law-cluster*. Law-cluster concepts are constituted not by a bundle of properties...but by a cluster of laws which, as it were, determine the identity of the concept. The concept ‘energy’ is an excellent example.²⁴

Given the character of such law-cluster concepts, analytic principles involving them are “difficult.”

The reason it is difficult to have an analytic relationship between law-cluster concepts is that such a relationship would be one more law. But, in general, any one law can be abandoned without destroying the identity of the law-cluster concept involved...²⁵

What is crucial here is the way that Putnam’s view of the revisability of scientific definitions is tied up with the notion of concept identity. Scientific definitions may be revised, without a change in meaning of the relevant concept, because the identity of such a concept is constituted by an entire cluster of laws, with no single law being necessary for concept identity or synonymy. Given such a notion of concept identity, Putnam has an effective reply to the charge that a principle, such as the definition of kinetic energy, was and remains analytic, and that contempo-

23. Putnam 1962, “The Analytic and the Synthetic,” p. 44.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

rary science simply makes use of an entirely different concept. This “law-cluster” account of concept identity contrasts, to some degree, with Putnam’s later account of concept identity in terms of stereotype and normal form meaning description. It is difficult to imagine, for instance, that the everyday stereotype associated with ‘energy’ involves any laws at all. But it should also be noticed that Putnam’s account of synonymy, in terms of words having the same stereotype, and the same extension, is not totally inconsistent with this law-cluster account of concept identity. For it is only reasonable to hold that Newtonian ‘energy’ and Einsteinian ‘energy’ are co-extensional because of a considerable continuity in the laws employing the concept of energy. Given either notion of concept identity, Putnam can allow a revision of definitional principles without a change in meaning of the concept involved. So it is clear that he has an effective criticism of the stronger, traditional version of the analytic-synthetic distinction. Law-cluster concepts are insulated from meaning change by their “systematic import.”

Since Putnam regards ‘bachelor’ as a “one criterion word” it follows, on his account, that ‘All bachelors are unmarried’ is analytic. If being an unmarried man is the only criterion of the application of the word ‘bachelor’, then to reject the analyticity of ‘All bachelors are unmarried’ one must change the meaning of the word.²⁶ Since ‘bachelor’ is a “one criterion word” it, unlike ‘energy’ lacks “systematic import.” The truth of ‘All bachelors are unmarried’ is thus a matter of stipulation.

The crucial premise of Putnam’s argument is his claim that “if we ask what the meaning of the word ‘bachelor’ is, we can *only* say that ‘bachelor’ means ‘unmarried man,’ whereas if we ask for the meaning of the term ‘energy’ we can do much more than give a definition.”²⁷ Holding ‘All bachelors are unmarried’ immune from revision “can do no harm” Putnam says, “because *bachelor* is not a law-cluster concept...it is not independently ‘defined’ by standard examples, which might only contingently be unmarried men.”²⁸ Though it is conceivable that ‘bachelor’ might *become* a law-cluster concept, in the absence of reasons to believe that it *will* become a law-cluster concept, Putnam maintains that we may hold ‘All bachelors are unmarried men’ immune from revision. The exact position here is rather subtle, and it is best to quote Putnam directly:

It is perfectly rational to make stipulations to the effect that certain statements are never to be given up, and those stipulations remain stipulations to that effect, notwithstanding the fact that under certain circumstances the stipulations might be given up.²⁹

Surely, stipulations to the effect that certain statements are never to be given up remain such, even if they are given up. But given that such stipulations *may* have to be given up (that is, given that we are never in a position to guarantee that a given statement will not need to be given up), why it is “perfectly rational” to make such stipulations in the first place? Putnam says that it is rational to hold ‘All bachelors are unmarried’ immune from revision on the basis of the

26. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

empirical finding that “there are no exceptionless laws containing the word ‘bachelor’.”³⁰ But, if it is conceivable (even if unlikely) that such laws may be found, then surely it is *more* reasonable to simply hold ‘All bachelors are unmarried’ *true*. Why should anything more be either helpful or necessary? Putnam gives no sufficient answer to this question, and this, I think, is the essential reason why his defense of analyticity fails. Without the epistemic guarantee once thought to be provided by doctrines or theories of the *a priori*, the notion of analyticity is pointless.

Putnam lists two advantages of the analytic-synthetic distinction and “strict synonymy” within a language: brevity and intelligibility.³¹ But the advantage of brevity is provided by any definition of a longer expression by a shorter one, so that the definition need not be regarded as immune from revision to provide the advantage of brevity. It is worth pointing out that it is perfectly consistent to be extremely conservative concerning a particular definition (say, ‘p & q’ for ‘ $\sim(\sim p \vee \sim q)$ ’) without ever invoking the notion of analyticity. So, where supposed analyticity leads to definitions with the advantage of brevity, so does theoretical conservatism. As for intelligibility, a similar point holds. If some of the statements of a language are immune from revision, then says Putnam, “different speakers of the same language can to a large extent understand each other better because they can predict in advance at least some of the uses of the other speaker.” Conservatism concerning definitions and central principles will serve to provide this advantage as well. Nor should we ask for more than a defeasible conservatism, if there is a chance that a particular definition or statement may need to be given up. From the standpoint of methodology, I repeat, the notion of analyticity is pointless.

Putnam claims that analytic statements are “true because accepted as true.”³² But he also says, concerning the stipulation that certain statements are to be held immune from revision, that “under certain circumstances the stipulations might themselves be given up.”³³ He even allows that statements such as ‘All bachelors are unmarried’ might be given up in the lights of new empirical-theoretical developments (i.e., in the unlikely case that laws making use of ‘bachelor’ are eventually found). But, if so, then it is hardly consistent to hold that the statement is analytic, that is “true because it is accepted as true.” Surely, given what we have seen so far, it is much more reasonable to simply hold the statement *true*, subject to unlikely revision.

What Putnam has apparently pointed out is an important distinction between purportedly analytic statements forming part of a larger system—where the relevant concept has systematic import—and purportedly analytic statements which lack such systematic importance. But it is not clear that this distinction will effectively support even Putnam’s trivial notion of analyticity.

Suppose that Putnam is correct in his claim that there are no exceptionless laws including the word ‘bachelor’. It does not follow that “we can only say that ‘bachelor’ means ‘unmarried man’.” On the contrary, it can be plausibly maintained that ordinary speakers of English have a

30. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

quite elaborate stereotype associated with the word 'bachelor'. For example, bachelors are often suitors, and they are commonly quite active socially. Moreover, bachelors are genuinely available for marriage and for dating "with good intentions." This is true even of "confirmed bachelors." Though perhaps not very interested, they are, in spite of that, still genuinely available. To say of someone that he is a bachelor is commonly a way of indicating that person's availability, and this fact, combined with social taboos against infidelity and aversions to promiscuity, goes a long way toward explaining the resistance to revision shown by the statement 'All bachelors are unmarried.' (In places, Putnam says that 'bachelor' means 'a man who has never been married,' but it is doubtful that such a definition accords very well with American usage—except in areas which are very conservative concerning the sanctity of marriage. Elsewhere, once divorced a man may again claim his bachelorhood—without really misrepresenting himself.

To use Wittgenstein's phrase, the word 'bachelor' is enmeshed in an elaborate language game, associated with courtship practices, pairing, moral sensibilities, and assurances of genuine availability. Thus, to imagine a revision of 'All bachelors are unmarried' is to imagine some significant change in the associated social practices. Conservatism regarding 'All bachelors are unmarried' is conditioned by that conservatism of mores and morals which tells us that only the unmarried are genuinely available. The conclusion I want to draw from these considerations is that 'bachelor' is not a 'one criterion word' any more than 'energy' is. The word 'bachelor' also has systematic import, although in this case, we are concerned with a framework of moral notions and social practices. Even though this framework is not of the scientific sort which Putnam's papers lead one to expect or to look for, there does appear to be a framework which is highly relevant to the meaning of 'bachelor' in English. Once having identified this framework we come into a position of being able to imagine an alternative—where 'All bachelors are unmarried' might be revised. Gilbert Harman has remarked, "in this era of unstable marriages there are many bachelors who are still technically married."³⁴ Where conservatism concerning marriage appears a lost cause, we might expect bachelors to be identified by their behavior and their availability.

This conclusion casts serious doubt on Putnam's notion of "one criterion words." Where there is serious resistance to revision (bordering, apparently, on immunity from revision) we have every reason to expect that such resistance to revision on the part of a statement is due to the role the statement has in some framework or other. But, if so, a change in the relevant framework may recommend considerably less conservatism regarding the statement. Putnam has not, then, demonstrated that there are cases where it is reasonable to hold a statement totally immune from revision.

34. Harman, Gilbert 1973, *Thought*, p. 105.

4. Semantics and the Contextually *a priori*

Putnam's defense of the analytic-synthetic distinction flounders on the difficulties of defending absolute immunity from revision—a kind of difficulty Putnam has himself eloquently helped to demonstrate. What remains, then, is a relative distinction. There are some statements we can quite easily imagine revising, and others that we can imagine revising only with great difficulty. Such characterizations are viable only in relation to a given state of knowledge and theory development. In general terms, since we cannot predict with any confidence how knowledge and theory will develop (or how social practices will change), the grounds for insisting on absolute immunity from revision appear entirely too slim.

In more recent papers, Putnam has apparently come to recognize this point. In “Realism and Reason,” published only shortly after “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’,” Putnam speaks of absolute unrevisability as a mere idealization:

In the foregoing, I used the idea of an absolutely ‘unrevisable’ truth as an idealization. Of course, I agree with Quine that this is an unattainable limit. Any statement can be ‘revised’. But what is often overlooked, although Quine stresses it again and again, is that the revisability of the laws of Euclid’s geometry, or the laws of classical logic, does not make them mere ‘empirical’ statements. This is why I call them contextually *a priori*.³⁵

To speak of a given statement as “contextually *a priori*,” we must assume, is to comment on the relative difficulty of revising the statement—relative to some assumed context. Since Putnam here agrees with Quine that absolute unrevisability is unattainable, obviously then, he has surrendered his notion of “trivial analyticity” as found in his papers from the sixties and seventies—through “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’.” Putnam has come to realize that the category of ‘one criterion words’ has too many problems to support the notion of unrevisable truth. He has moved on to a more thoroughgoing fallibilism.

Even in “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’,” there are signs of this development. “It seems,” he said in that paper, “that there is a strong tendency for words which are introduced as ‘one criterion words’ to develop a ‘natural kind’ sense, with all the concomitant rigidity and indexicality.”³⁶ Words having a “natural kind” sense, on Putnam’s view, are paradigms of words not synonymous with one specific description, and which do not enter into analytic statements. Thus his recognition of a tendency for “one criterion words” to develop into multi-criteria words is a step in the direction defended above—a step toward rejecting the notion of analyticity.

The crucial step was taken, however, where Putnam’s theory of word meaning cut the traditional links between meaning on the one hand (stereotype) and truth on the other. Since he rejects the assumption that stereotype (or speaker’s competence) determines extension, the notion of analyticity, according to which meaning determines truth, could only be a vestige.

35. Putnam, Hilary 1976, “Realism and Reason,” Presidential Address to the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, p. 138.

36. Putnam 1975, p. 244.

Having rejected the notion of the *a priori*, so that even “necessary truth” is not known *a priori* for Putnam, there is little alternative to the final rejection of the notion of analyticity. The notion of necessary truth also seems to be a mere vestige of classical modern epistemology. It has no genuine role to play. If ascription of necessary truth to a statement is dependent on a specific context of knowledge and theory, and we cannot be certain exactly how knowledge and theory will develop, then there is little point to retaining the notion of necessary truth at all. For necessary truth could only be ascribed to a statement subject to revision.³⁷

Given this point, contemporary philosophy seems on the way to a genuinely post-Quinean theory of meaning—meaning without analyticity or necessity. In Putnam’s terms we can say that the theory of meaning is a branch of empirical linguistic investigation which explores the “contextually *a priori*.”

37. Interestingly, there is no discussion of “necessary truth” in Putnam’s *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* 1978. But Putnam is at pains there to distinguish his realism from “metaphysical realism”—and this criticism of “metaphysical realism” might also be read as a criticism of Kripke’s notion of “metaphysical necessity.”