Putnam, Chapter 1 - Meaning and Mentalism

Putnam relates the word “intentionality” to the following:
1. the fact that words, sentences and “representations” have meaning
2. the fact that representations refer to actually existing things
3. the fact that representations may refer to non-existing things
4. the fact that a state of mind may have a “state of affairs” as its object, e.g.
   “She believes that he is trustworthy,” “She fears that there won’t be food in the house.”

Oxford English Dictionary (OED):
**Intentionality**
The quality or fact of being intentional.

**Intentional**
A. adj. 1. Of or pertaining to intention or purpose; existing (only) in intention.
   2. Done on purpose, resulting from intention; intended.

**Intention**
obsol. 1. The action of straining or directing the mind or attention to something; mental application or effort; attention, intent observation or regard; endeavour.
   4. The action of intending or purposing; volition which one is minded to carry out; purpose.

**Intent**
[ME. had two forms: (1) entent, intent, a. OF. entent intention, application:—L. intent-us a stretching out, in late L. attention, intention, f. intent-, ppl. stem of intendere to intend; (2) entente, intente, a. OF. entente intention, thought, desire, purpose, etc.:—pop.L. *intenta n. from fem. of intentus pa. pple. (analogous to ns. in -ata, etc.), from same vb. In ME. entent appears to be more frequent, and entente disappears before 1500; but in the pl. ententes, the two forms were indistinguishable, and it is not possible to separate them in sense. The form with in- is rare before 1400, while en- is rarely found after 1550. They were equally common c 1500.]

1. The act or fact of intending or purposing; intention, purpose (formed in the mind).
   Formerly also, in more general sense, Will, inclination; that which is willed, pleasure, desire (cf. 4). Now chiefly in legal phraseology, and in the expressions with intent to (hurt, etc.), with good or malicious intent, etc.

Can computer models/states identify intentionality? Can intentionality be **reduced** to a computer state?
Is talk of intentionality so much **folk psychology**?
Brentano’s thesis—intentionality won’t be reduced and won’t go away. What does it mean?

Does a name confer some special status even though it refers to different things? E.g. **red**
tertiary property—affects other things; the disposition to emit and absorb certain wavelengths secondary property—a disposition to affect our minds
primary property—a thing in itself

Redness can’t be defined by physical properties, i.e. nondispositional properties
Unless we consider a disjunction of properties, e.g. a red star or a red apple or a red nose ...

Putnam argues that this example proves the intentional ≠ the physical
Thought can’t be reduced to a physical (scientific) description
But we can’t dismiss thought as folk psychology either!

Putnam suggests Wittgenstein’s discussion of game is a better example of intentionality.
Is there any property that all games have in common?
What is the difference between ordinary language and philosophical language (Hume)?
Words like “game” have ... a flexibility, an “open texture” ... which no determinate disjunction of completely determinate properties can reproduce.

Putnam wants to show that “the phenomenon of open texture runs far beyond the mere looseness of conventional application” i.e. vagueness.
“it is precisely the open texture of reference that defeats the classical philosophical pictures.”

This view forces us to give up traditional assumptions about Appearance and Reality:
1. that the real is “under” or “behind” our everyday experiences
2. that there is One in the Many
3. every phenomenon has an “ultimate nature”

Putnam is partly reacting to the views about innate ideas of Fodor and Chomsky
Discussed in Fodor’s book The Language of Thought
“semantic representations” in the mind/brain are innate and universal, a lingua mentis
All of our concepts can be decomposed into such semantic representations.

These ideas lead to a picture of the mind as a Crytographer:
Mentalese —> ordinary language —> Mentalese
Speaker | encryption | Hearer | decryption

The computational model (Functionalism) attempts to make belief-desire psychology “scientific”
It reduces beliefs and desires to “functional states” of the brain
It turns thought into a simple mental calculation—determinant, closed texture
 e.g. a “belief register” and a “desire register” => action of going to supermarket for milk

**Three reasons why mentalism can’t be right:**
1. Meaning is holistic
   “meaning holism” arose as a reaction to logical positivism (every term can be defined)
   Largely the work of W. V. Quine (Word and Object)
Positivists identify sentence meaning with its **truth conditions** (the experiential situations the sentence asserts).

The problem is that sentences cannot be tested in isolation; sentences meet the test of experience “as a corporate body”.
The “**nonmonotonicity**” of the logic of everyday discourse—asserting “Hawks fly” does not commit you to asserting that every hawk flies.
Meaning holism undermines the usefulness of definition; most terms cannot be defined “revision can strike anywhere”—*momentum* originally defined as “mass times velocity”
This is strange because we are not used to thinking of meanings as “historic entities”. Experience helps us decide when there is enough continuity through change.

2. Meaning is in part a **normative notion**
Testing a scientific theory can’t be done through examining the definitions of its terms
Scientific investigation involves a number of intangible operations:
estimating simplicity and weighing new observations against previous beliefs.
Decisions about “meaning” e.g. the “same meaning” are just as complex, e.g. “momentum”, “electron”
We require a degree of “**charity**” to interpret word meanings; meanings “are preserved under the usual procedures of belief fixation and justification.”

3. Concepts depend on our physical and social environment
Are the concepts for *carburetor*, *bureaucrat*, *quantum potential*, *warp drive*, etc. innate?

4. Connections between 1, 2 and 3
Changes in definitions (1) do not result in changes in meaning (2)
Meaning holism (1) also blocks deriving complex terms from a set of primitives to save (3)
MIT mentalism is blocked by 1, 2 and 3 acting together