

This paper uses a historical example (a jury had to decide whether whale oil was fish oil) to raise metasemantic questions. Should we say that the meaning of “fish”, prior to modern anatomical thinking, ensured that its extension included whales? If so, did the new anatomy involve a change of meaning? In which case was no earlier belief shown to be false? Or did the earlier meaning of “fish” exclude whales? In which case, on what features of the use of the word (invariably applied to whales) did this meaning supervene?