

Remark 1. In this handout I refer both to *Ontological relativity* and *Things and their place in theories*.

INDETERMINACY OF MEANING AND REFERENCE. Quine begins the discussion with the naturalistic premiss: there are no meaning *entities* out there. To believe there are is to believe in the myth of a museum. More specifically: meanings are not to be identified with mental ideas. Instead, we have to endorse a naturalistic method in discovering meaning. This results in a behaviourist premiss: meaning should be gleaned from behaviour, from the various speech acts that people make.

Once this premiss is granted, indeterminacy follows. There can be no identity between meanings of the different expressions. The problem is *not* that we cannot *know* what the real meaning of an expression is, and that, therefore, we don't *know* the identical meanings of two expressions. The problem is that the whole idea of the sameness of meaning is bogus.

This thesis of meaning sameness is clearest in the procedure of translation. Quine in fact distinguishes between two kinds of cases—those that require a grasp of the principle of individuation, and those that do not.

In the latter case, such as with the predicate 'red', there is the procedure of 'simple ostension'. We point repeatedly at red objects (cars, pools of blood, nail varnish) and describe them as 'red'. It is not trivial for the trainee to understand that we are describing exactly the colour of the object, rather than, say, its shape. But this can be done given sufficient number of trials. In addition, we should postulate the availability of innate capacities for privileging some features of the environment at the expense of others (the trainee may be uncertain whether 'red' describes shape or colour or length, but not just any possible feature of the object). In any event, Quine argues, there is no more involved here beside the general problems of inductive learning.

Remark 2. The postulate of innate capacities is significant. . .

In the former case, where individuation is required, the ostension procedures are much more involved (Quine calls them 'individuating words'). Thus suppose we wish to translate the term 'tavşan' from Turkish into English (this is our patriotic rendering of the 'gavagai' example).

We record our observations of the native Turkish speakers, and we see that they utter '... tavşan ...' in the presence of the object *we* call 'rabbit'. We further manage to isolate the truth-conditional correlations between the utterances '... tavşan ...' and '... rabbit ...'. That is, the natives tend to assent to the former whenever we assent to the latter, and dissent from the former whenever we dissent from the latter. Hence we can form a hypothesis:

(5-1) 'tavşan' is to be translated as 'rabbit'.

The problem now is that the same set of behaviours can be correlated with more than one expression in the native language (Turkish), thus with more than one meaning. Let us look at one specific argument Quine gives for this conclusion (proxy functions postponed until later).

DIVIDED REFERENCE. Why should sameness of meaning be bogus? Could we not declare together: 'By "tavşan" I mean a rabbit' and point to the rabbit in front of us?

Quine's objection may be put thus:

(5-2) Ostension cannot settle the sameness of meaning of the terms requiring individuation.

Thus 'tavşan' can stand for 'undetached rabbit part' or 'rabbit stage'. Suppose we move a rabbit (or should we say, 'some object'?) in the presence of the native speaker, point at that rabbit (or rather, at *that*), and the following dialogue (5-3) ensues.

(5-3) a. Translator: Bu ve bu aynı mı?

b. Native: Evet.

Presumably this test will rule out the translation of 'tavşan' as 'rabbit stage'. But this depends on our translation of 'aynı'. If it is translated not as 'same as', but as 'same stage as', then the alternative translation is not ruled out. Thus ostension, for it to be successful in excluding indeterminacy of reference, has to presuppose translation of auxiliary terms—which would be viciously circular.

DEFERRED OSTENSION A special case is mentioned for the alternative translation ‘rabbithood’. This is an abstract term. Thus ostension might be thought to work well there, since a native would not be tempted to point to rabbithoods. But this ignores the possibility that the native points to rabbits as we point to the inscription $\langle 2 \rangle$ to refer to the natural number 2.

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