

QUINE AND THE INTEGRATIONAL SIGN

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Two questions I should like to address in this paper are, first, what is the integrational doctrine which is at issue, and second, why should Quine be brought in as relevant to it?

The integrational doctrine is summed up in two axioms which I take from Roy Harris:

- (1) What constitutes a sign is not given independently of the situation in which it occurs or of its material manifestation in that situation.
- (2) The value of a sign is a function of the integrational proficiency which its identification and interpretation presuppose. (Harris 1990 [1984]: 225)

I take axiom (1) to show some parallels to Quine's doctrine of the bound variable. This doctrine is usually summed up in the phrase 'To be is to be the value of a bound variable'. What does this mean, and in what way is it (a) congenial to the integrational doctrine and (b) uncongenial to it?

To begin at the end rather than at the beginning, Quine believes that 'studies in the semantics of reference can only be directed toward substantially the same language in which they are conducted' (Quine 1960: back cover). And even more generally, he holds that there is no higher or prior Cartesian philosophical vantage point from which, outside of our language, to judge of such things as the meaning of terms in our language.

What is Quine's view of our language? One thing he says is the following: 'We persist in breaking reality down somehow into a multiplicity of identifiable and discriminable objects, to be referred to by singular and general terms. We talk so inveterately of objects that to say we do so seems almost to say nothing at all; for how else is there to talk?' (Quine 1969: 1). The view Quine is tending toward in this quote is that we cannot get outside our own conceptual scheme in order to see what other ways there might be of talking. For to do so would *ex hypothesi* put us face to face with sentences of a different language, which we would in turn have to try to understand, or translate back into our own language. Is this a quite simple proposal? To show that it is not Quine invites us to imagine 'a newly discovered tribe whose language is without known affinities' (*ibid.*). It is our task to learn this language. In order to do this, we will need to observe 'what the natives say under observed circumstances'. Our method comprises three procedures. First, we choose a starting point by deciding to compile terms for surrounding objects. Second, we need a basic connecting device for the two languages, a tool which will allow us to say that two items are equivalent. This device is prompting and assent. That is, the

native is prompted, and can be relied on to assent, or dissent. For example, let us assume that when we are with one of the natives an object saliently comes into view. We prompt the native, if necessary, and the native produces an utterance which contains an isolable segment which could, say on the basis of some previous observations, be taken as in some sense co-salient with the object. Our third procedure is to take this isolable segment and to gloss it using the term in our language which we would take to apply to the object.

Quine's point in this exercise is (a) to grant that the translation into our language which involves the mere, albeit indeterminate, drawing of attention to the salient object can be considered objective, but (b) to reject the conclusion that we are objectively justified in positing, for the native, the object which we have applied our term to in the translational procedure. The reason we are not justified in doing so is that our own positing of objects is not arrived at by correlating an isolated term with an isolated object. Rather, it is only our whole language which provides us with an apparatus by reference to which we are in a position to do such things as positing at all, when saliently stimulated by our sensory surroundings. Thus, we are back in our own world of objects – not because there just *are* objects, but because we objectify thus within our conceptual scheme – and because of this we are unjustified in positing the same objects for the native. And therefore, by extension, we cannot reliably imagine what it would be like to get outside our conceptual scheme, for example from the vantage point of a prior philosophy.

The translational point applies equally to our own language. That is, once again to simplify, our own ontology is indeterminate. This is illustrated by the seemingly simple example of not always equating an interlocutor's words with our own. To quote Quine again, 'sometimes we find it to be in the interests of communication to recognize that our neighbor's use of some word, such as 'cool' or 'square' or 'hopefully', differs from ours, and so we translate that word of his into a different string of phonemes in our idiolect... We will construe a neighbor's word heterophonically now and again if thereby we see our way to making his message less absurd' (ibid.: 46). In fact, Quine imagines an even more radical situation, in which, given an interlocutor's discourse within which he refers to objects, we can systematically reconstrue that interlocutor's references to those objects as references to non-equivalent objects, while the interlocutor's verbal behavior – i.e. his disposition to assent and dissent – remains unchanged. And, finally, even the interactional model can be discarded and the point about indeterminacy remain. That is, we can construe even our own ontology as indeterminate. As Quine remarks, 'reference would now seem to become nonsense not just in radical translation but at home' (ibid.: 48).

Quine's solution to this apparent problem is for us to picture our language in a certain way. That is, in our language we possess terms for objects of various kinds, but also 'two-place predicates of identity and difference, and other logical particles' (ibid.) In short, we are invited to picture our language as consisting, not of labels for things, but of a referential apparatus which we use to refer to things of all kinds. This apparatus, then, constitutes a frame of reference, relative to which we can talk meaningfully of objects. This is Quine's doctrine of ontological relativity, summed up in the phrase: 'reference is nonsense except relative to a coordinate system' (ibid.) And it is in turn against the background of this theory that the doctrine of the bound variable makes sense. For to bind a variable is to gather it into a coordinate system of devices within which the variable can be taken to range referentially over certain objects.

Thus ultimately for Quine the project of what he calls regimentation, that is, the setting up of a logical language, is the project of clarifying our ontology in so far as is possible. This is not to get outside of language, since a regimentation uses devices which we use in our everyday language; nor does it replace the items of everyday language with items that are equivalent, or synonymous. Rather, it selectively clarifies what needs clarifying, and makes explicit what was hitherto vague. In essence, it doesn't do the same thing in different form, but does something new.

In taking this view, Quine joins ranks with Dewey in espousing what he calls a 'naturalistic' view of language and a behavioral view of meaning. From this perspective, what is rejected is a 'museum myth' of word meanings according to which the meanings of a speaker's words are determinate in his mind, his 'mental museum', 'even where behavioral criteria are powerless to discover them' (ibid.: 29). And along with the museum myth, also rejected is an assurance of determinacy. Again to quote Quine:

When...we recognize with Dewey that 'meaning...is primarily a property of behavior', we recognize that there are no meanings, nor likenesses nor distinctions of meaning, beyond what are implicit in people's dispositions to overt behavior. For naturalism the question whether two expressions are alike or unlike in meaning has no determinate answer, known or unknown, except insofar as the answer is settled in principle by people's speech dispositions, known or unknown. If by these standards there are indeterminate cases, so much the worse for the terminology of meaning and likeness of meaning. (ibid.)

The rejection of determinacy and of the museum myth is congenial to the integrationist. As the singular term and the free variable of logic are replaced by the bound variable, so the segregational sign with its predetermined form and meaning gives way, for the integrationist, to the integrational sign which derives its value from its integration in the communicational situation. And as it is only the contextualizing of the variable within the coordinate system or referential apparatus which determines the variable's range of reference, so it is only the contextualizing of the integrational sign within the situation which gives it significance. For both Quine and the integrationist, the sign is radically contextualized.

If this is true, then does the integrationist follow Quine the whole way, and if not, where do they part company?

For Quine, the variable is determinate, i.e. ranges over a determinate set of objects, only in so far as it is bound, which means in so far as it is gathered into a language which has a referential apparatus, or, in other terms, in so far as it is interpreted against a background theory. Given this apparatus then, we can say such things as that 'it should...be possible to point to certain forms of discourse as *explicitly* presupposing entities of one or another given kind...and purporting to treat of them; and it should be possible to point to other forms of discourse as not explicitly presupposing those entities' (1961: 102). And furthermore,

Some criterion to this purpose, some standard of ontological commitment, is needed if we are ever to say meaningfully that a given theory depends on or dispenses with the assumption of such and such objects. ...such a criterion is to be found not in the

singular terms of the given discourse, not in the purported names, but rather in quantification. (ibid.)

The assumption here is that we have reached the bedrock of reference. That is, the existential and universal quantifiers provide us with a non-mediate access to the world of objects. In other words, to say ‘there is something x ’ is to make an ontological commitment by virtue of the determinate form and meaning of the sign. This is parallel in a way to the role that assent and dissent play in translation. That is, they can be assumed as given quite apart from the problem of indeterminacy. They are as it were a transcendent way into the foreign language, and there is no thought that the concepts of assent and dissent, as forms of cultural activity, are themselves subject to the indeterminacy of translation.

In this view, then, language is seen as ultimately anchored to the world by devices which themselves are not subsumed within the problematic aspects of the rest of the system, and it is here that the integrationist parts company with Quine. For the integrationist, the meanings of a speaker’s words, just as for Quine, are indeterminate, and are not to be imagined as part of the museum myth according to which fixed objects have fixed labels. And the integrationist agrees with Quine and Dewey, up to a point, that meaning is a property of behavior. It is with the terminology of dispositions, however, that a rift begins to be noticeable. For to say that meaning is implicit in people’s dispositions to overt behavior is to accept that the ‘prompting’ of a speaker of another language, or even of our own language – or even of ourselves – unproblematically results, i.e. apart from cultural, that is to say contextual, factors, in something called ‘assent’ or ‘dissent’, by virtue of previous conditioning. This an integrationist cannot accept. Rather, whether we are trying to communicate with a speaker of a language unrelated to any known language family, or with a speaker of our own language, or are just thinking, we in fact do not make use of any assumptions in the act of communication, apart from those which are themselves contextualised within that act. Instead, the situation itself creates its own parameters, which are not assumptive, but integrational. The model of assumptive parameters embodies the leap of faith necessitated by the attempt to connect units of our subjective experience, be they ideas or dispositions, with units of an external world. They are essentially *ad hoc* devices brought in to set a certain model of communication in motion. An integrational model does not need such devices, because it does not conceive communication as an enterprise of connection, but of integration; and integration is something out there for all communicators to take part in.

Quine takes great pains to show that in his project of regimentation the logical symbols and devices are not synonymous replacements for symbols and devices of ordinary language, but are used to clarify in new ways things that before were inexplicit or vague. In his slogan ‘to be is to be the value of a bound variable’ is encapsulated the view that only within a coordinate system or background theory can the references of our variables be determined. In other words, only in quantified discourse can our referential intent, our ontology, be disclosed. But this raises a question, which is whether quantification clarifies the referential intent of non-quantified discourse, or whether it discloses a referential intent for the the first time. Quine seems to be clear that quantified discourse does the latter; as he says, ‘we do not claim to make clear and explicit what the users of the unclear expression had unconsciously in mind all along’ (1960: 258). But if this is the case, then this indicates that either Quine is simply wrong, or referential intent and an explicit ontology are not essential to our language as we know it. With this Quine would doubtless agree; but the question might then be, ‘well, then why regiment?’

‘In choosing a language one chooses an ontology’. Does this mean that in choosing a regimented language we choose a rival ontology to our own, or that we choose a language game which involves positing an ontology for the first time? In the first case, to choose to regiment is to wish to get away from an ontology we consider unsatisfactory. In the second, we seek shelter in the comforting idea that there are objects in the world which can be reliably counted. In both cases, we accept a picture of language. It is that picture of language, in which the enterprise of isolating, segregating, and decontextualizing are seen as culturally desirable, that an integrational theory seeks to deconstruct.

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