QUINE ON "TRANSLATION AND MEANING":

A CONSIDERATION OF

THE INDETERMINACY THESIS

John R. Hofer

Problem

In Word and Object, W. V. Quine presents a thesis of indeterminacy in radical translation. This paper will be a critical consideration of that thesis as it is presented in chapter two of Word and Object.

In the introduction, critical analysis done by Quine antecedent to Word and Object will be presented. This earlier work relates primarily to his work on theories of meaning. Secondly, a brief recapitulation of Quine's indeterminacy thesis will be presented. This recapitulation will be followed by three criticisms of that thesis. And finally, I will consider the cogency of the three criticisms and conclude with a few remarks of my own.

Introduction

In the preface to Word and Object, Quine states that language is a social art whose acquisition depends upon the available intersubjective cues as to what one should say and when. Because of this intersubjectivity, there exists no ground for collating linguistic meanings except through the dispositions of men to respond overtly to observable social stimulations. "An effect of recognizing this limitation is that the enterprise of translation is found to be involved in a certain systematic indeterminacy."[1] To fully appreciate this problem of indeterminacy, it is necessary to understand previous analysis by Quine on meaning in general.

At the center of Quine's philosophical position lies his attack on accepted philosophical views about meaning.[2] His attack on these accepted views revolves primarily around an objection to two clusters of views on meaning: the analytic-synthetic distinction, and the postulation of intensional objects and objects of psychological attitudes. The main import of these two clusters is that "sentences of a language have a definite meaning apart from any proposed scheme of translation from that language, such that if two quite

different ways of translating the language are
proposed, at most one of these can be correct."[3]
And further, "any theory of meaning adequate to
account for translation, ambiguity, objects of
psychological states, etc., must permit an analytic-
synthetic distinction."[4]

In denying the analytic-synthetic distinction,
Quine is not only saying that there is no clear,
sharp distinction, but rather the more radical
assertion that "nothing is analytically true."[5] The
analytic-synthetic distinction resembles the witch-
nonwitch distinction which does not distinguish
anything, simply because there are no witches. This
is important because the "ascription of analyticity,
like the ascription of witchcraft, commits one to an
incorrect explanatory claim."[6] Mere philosophical talk
about analyticity no more shows that there is such a
thing as analyticity than mere talk about witches shows
that there exist witches. It is also impossible to
introduce the analytic-synthetic distinction through
ostensive teaching by presentation of paradigm cases,
in the same way it is impossible to teach the witch-
nonwitch distinction ostensively. There is just simply
no way to introduce the distinction.[7] The analytic-
synthetic distinction, intensional objects of
psychological states, meanings, and propositions, "in
short meanings as conceived by certain linguistic
philosophers . . . is no better off than witches, the
ether, phlogiston, or God; and God is dead."[8]

Quine's denial of the analytic-synthetic
distinction rests primarily on the view that there are
simply no analytic truths, and his main objection to
propositions, meanings and intensional objects is that
their proponents hold "bad empirical theories."[9]
The main problem for a person defending the notion of
analyticity is showing how obviousness is a sign of
truth or knowledge by virtue of meaning. The
conventionalist's attempt to answer this has resulted
in the assertion that meaning is determined by con-
ventional usage or arbitrary assignment of meaning.
The result of this has been a circularity or infinite
regress in logic, because to "understand and apply
conventions that give meaning to logical words one
would already have to understand some logical words."[10]
Hence, conventionalism must fail to account for know-
ledge of truth via knowledge of meaning "since
knowledge that something is true according to one's
conventions . . . is not sufficient for knowledge
that it is true."[11]

At best the notion of absolutely a priori
knowledge and absolutely necessary truth is obscure.
We can always conceive of any statement failing to
hold and can always imagine circumstances which
would cause us to give up any view. The limits of
what can be conceived can change one's attitudes
about analyticity. For instance, one might believe
that the statement "All cats are animals" is an
analytic truth in the full-blooded sense of analytic.
But the new knowledge that some cats are robots might
change one's attitude toward the analyticity of the
former universal statement. In another case, a person
might believe that the proposition "Red is a color"
is analytic. But where it is found that the color
red is dependent on high frequency sound so that
a deaf person might see grey instead of red, one's
attitude toward the analyticity of the proposition
would become negative.[12]

We cannot vindicate the theory of analyticity by
simple talk about meaning, synonymy, and definition.
"Instead one must explicitly justify the explanatory
claim involved in 'equivalent by virtue of meaning.'"[13]
The explicit conventional definition is that when we
introduce a new expression into the language by
defining it to be equivalent with an older expression,
the two expressions are equivalent by virtue of meaning.[14]
However, the problem with such a definition is how it
can ensure equivalence. Postulation can be of help
in partially specifying meaning when one wants to
introduce a new theory or explain an old one, but
such postulation does not itself ensure truth. It is
possible for two people to introduce the same theory
in entirely different ways such that the synthetic
statements of the two theories are equivalent "by
definition plus logic according to the other, although
the corresponding terms in the presentation of the
theory will not for that reason differ in meaning.
Therefore, definition does not hold the key to
analyticity."[15] And moreover, "the ascription of
analyticity commits one to an explanatory claim
. . . that something can be true or knowable by
virtue of meaning."[16]

Quine also argues against the notion of intensional
objects which maintains that two sentences are
equivalent by virtue of meaning if they express the
same psychological attitude or belief; psychological
attitudes are attitudes toward propositions and belief
is the acceptance of a proposition.[17] Such a view
offers no explanation of equivalence by virtue of

meaning: first, because a person does not accept a
sentence because of a proposition he accepts or a
meaning expressed by that sentence, and second because
philosophers who argue this way use a duplicitous form
of meaning which muddles the ordinary use of the
expression "means the same as." For instance, the
ordinary usage would maintain that the sentence
"Nixon traveled to Vietnam" means the same as the
sentence "The president traveled to Vietnam"; the
linguistic philosopher does not want to maintain this,
although we would say he did in the ordinary sense
of "means the same as." Therefore, a theory of
propositional attitudes fails to account for the
ordinary use of "means the same as" since it would
find the two examples unequivalent in the common
usage.[18]

In the translation, the dispute over meaning
becomes more complicated, and there appears an
indeterminacy which is inherently present in the nature
of language itself. Many philosophers have argued
that translation consists in finding a sentence in
one language which expresses the same meaning or
proposition as another sentence in another language.
One cannot proceed without the background of a
general scheme of translation. Without such a scheme,
the notion of translation is indeterminate.[19] The
indeterminacy of translation can be compared to the
indeterminacy of translation between number theory
and set theory.

Following Von Neumann one may identify each
(natural) number with the set of all smaller
numbers. Following Zermelo one may identify
each number with the unit set of its predecessor.
Either series of identifications permits
translation of all sentences of number theory;
and apart from some such general scheme of
translation, it makes no sense to ask what is
the correct translation of an isolated statement
of number theory or what is the correct way to
identify number with sets.[20]

The indeterminacy exists because there may be several
possible different schemes for translating number
theory into set theory which satisfy all reasonable
conditions, and yet generate non-equivalent translations.
Consider the following statement: "The number two has
one member." Apart from any set theory the statement
is neither true nor false. But according to Von
Neumann's set theory the statement is true and

according to Zermelo's set theory the statement is
false. From this Quine concludes that we are not
free to think of translation apart from a general
scheme of interpretation; "radical translation is
always indeterminate; and consequently the postula-
tion of meanings or propositions is not vindicated
by the possibilities of translation from one
language into another."[22]

There is, to be sure, an intimate connection
between psychology and translation, because a good
scheme of translation is one that attributes to
people "beliefs, desires, etc., that are similar to
our own and arise in ways similar to the ways in
which our beliefs, desires . . . arise."[23] Transla-
tion does not require the existence of prior relations
of meanings between sentences of different languages
apart from some proposed scheme of translation. The
fact that a person of our language will accept a
sentence in another language "does not represent an
underlying propositional attitude such that, apart
from a presupposed scheme of translation, the same
attitude could be said to underlie our acceptance of
a sentence in our language."[24]

Throughout radical translation a type of onto-
logical indeterminacy also obtains. This ontological
indeterminacy is revealed when the field linguist
approaches an alien culture equipped with his own
predispositions about what objects really exist in
the world. The field linguist's talk about objects
is not just a trait of human behavior, but in the
situation of translating alien sentences and expressions,
he is necessarily bound to adapt any alien pattern to
his own. In translating those alien sentences into
his own, he is bound to apply his conceptual scheme
to their language, imputing to them the existence of
identical objects which his own ontological scheme
recognizes.

This ontological indeterminacy is not fully
appreciated until it is recognized that there can
be exhaustive knowledge of the stimulatory conditions
for every utterance in an alien language and still
be no knowledge of what objects "the speakers of that
language believe in."[26] In gaining empirical evidence
against the existential statements, knowledge of
stimulatory conditions

    does tend to settle what is to count as empirical
    evidence for or against the truth of the sentence.

If we then go on to assign the sentence some
import in point of existence of objects, by
arbitrary projection in the case of the heathen
language or as a matter of course in the case of
our own, thereupon what has already been counting
as empirical evidence, for or against the truth
of the sentence comes to count as empirical
evidence for or against the existence of the
objects.[27]

In the last analysis, one cannot conclude that
what there is necessarily depends on words. Our
acceptance of an ontology is similar to our acceptance
of a scientific physical theory. Insofar as we are
reasonable, we accept the scheme which is the
simplest, and which orders the fragments of raw
experience into the most coherent pattern or whole.[28]
In radical translation, the field linguist accepts
the ontology which best explains the raw material
involved. For the sake of simplicity, he assumes that
the native's ontology is not much different from his
own. It is at this point that Word and Object begins.

I

"Translation and Meaning"

Quine considers the question of just how much
sense can be made of language in terms of its stimulus
conditions, "and what scope this leaves for empirically
unconditioned variation in one's conceptual scheme."[29]
This unconditioned variation can be visualized as two
men alike in all of their dispositions to verbal
behavior under all possible stimulations and "yet
the meanings or ideas expressed in their identically
triggered and identically sounded utterances . . .
diverge radically . . . in a wide range of cases."[30]
This means that manuals for translating a language
could be devised in different ways such that they
are compatible in terms of speech dispositions and
yet incompatible with one another: i.e., could come
up with different translations of certain sentences.[31]
Radical translation is the locus for Quine's dis-
cussion of the unconditioned variable in language.

Radical translation is translation between our
language and presently untouched and unrelated
language. The field linguist is out to penetrate
this language without the aid of an interpreter.
The only tools at his disposal are the stimulatory
influences upon the native and the behavior which
the native exhibits in response to the stimulatory
influence, vocal and otherwise. The correlations

obtained from this observation render meanings of the
stimulus type, and it is in this way that the field
linguist attempts to construct translations of all
possible native sentences.[32]

The linguist begins by translating the most
conspicuous utterances. If a rabbit scurries by and
the native utters "Gavagai," the linguist might
understand the utterance as an occasion sentence
roughly translatable into our language as "A rabbit"
or "Lo a rabbit." Assuming that the linguist has
mastered the native's method for assent and dissent,
he can query the native to find out whether or not
his hypothetical translation of "Gavagai" is correct.
The general law under which the linguist operates is
that the native will assent to "Gavagai" under the
same circumstances to which we would assent to
"Rabbit" or "Lo a rabbit"; the same would hold for
dissent. Usually the linguist will decide questions
of causality by intuitive judgment based on the
stimulus response of the native, but in his testing
he can become more formal by asking sentence S and
then quickly asking S again with an added variable Q,
which, if it prompts a dissent the second time, can
be assumed to be the variable that did the prompting.[33]
This is the general approach of the linguist in
radical translation.

It is at this point that the linguist must
construct a crude machine of empirical meaning.
Meaning is the thing that the two languages are to
share and at the onset everything hinges on the
correlation with nonverbal stimulations. The
affirmative stimulus meaning for the sentence
"Gavagai" for a particular speaker is the "class of
all the stimulations . . . that would prompt his
assent."[34] The negative stimulus meaning is the
class of all objects which would for any particular
speaker prompt his dissent. The full stimulus
meaning is then the ordered pair of the two. "Fully
ticketed . . . a stimulus meaning is the stimulus
meaning modulo n seconds of a sentence S for a
speaker A at time T."[35] Stimulus meaning sums up
the speaker's disposition to assent to or dissent
from a sentence in response to certain stimulations.[36]

Occasion sentences are important for the
linguist's use of stimulus meaning. Occasion
sentences as opposed to standing sentences are
sentences such as "Gavagai" or "Red." These are
sentences which command "assent or dissent only if
queried after an appropriate prompting stimulation."[37]

The synonymy of stimulus meaning between such
sentences has serious short-comings. The main
problem is that the speaker's assent to or dissent
from an occasion sentence, might be prompted by
collateral information either not known or available
to the linguist. However, stimulus meaning is the
only path open to the linguist. He has to translate
by approximation of stimulus meaning and not by
identity. His assumption is that people who live
in rabbit country have a term for an enduring entity
called rabbit. He will test this term to make sure
that it is not being used for "white" or "animal,"
and this is the best he can do.[38]

The synonymy of sentences turns on the considera-
tion of assent, but this is not the situation with
terms. The stimulus synonymy of sentences does not
mean that the terms are co-extensive or true of the
same things. In considering the term "gavagai," one
does not know whether the objects to which this
term refers is a whole enduring rabbit, a rabbit
part, a phase of a rabbit or rabbithood. Further,
nothing is to be clarified by pointing. Point to a
rabbit and you point to a rabbit phase, a part of a
rabbit, and to rabbithood. When the linguist jumps
from stimulus meaning to synonymy between the terms
"rabbit" and "gavagai," he does so under the assump-
tion that the native is enough like us to have a
short general term for rabbits and not a term for
parts or phases of rabbits.[39]

Using the selective method of assent to and
dissent from certain sentences, the linguist may
obtain the translation of observation sentences,
sentences whose behavioral definition turns on
"similarities of stimulus meaning over the community."[40]
Truth functions can also be translated along with the
recognition of stimulus-analytic and stimulus-
contradictory sentences--stimulus-analytic sentences
being sentences to which one would be prepared to
affirm come what stimulation may, and stimulus-
contradictory sentences being the same except only
negatively.[41] The question of intrasubjective
synonymy for native occasion sentences can be
raised but not translated; we cannot equate terms
through intrasubjective stimulus synonymy except in
our own language which presupposes more than the
linguist has at his disposal. A bilingual does not
know the synonymy of terms, say "bachelor" and
"unmarried man," although there are synonymous
occasion sentences for individual English speakers;
"still either term to the exclusion of the other

might, so far as he knows, apply not to men but to
their states or parts or even to a scattered concrete
totality or an abstract attribute."[42]

The only way to pass beyond these limitations set
up by the methodology of assent and dissent is
through the use of analytical hypotheses.

It is only by such outright projection of
prior linguistic habits that the linguist can
find general terms in the native language at
all, or, having found them, match them with
his own; stimulus meanings never suffice to
determine even what words are terms, if any,
much less what terms are co-extensive.[43]

The analytic hypotheses are a means of catapulting
the linguist into the native's language by means of
his language's inertia. Even the bilingual linguist
must proceed with the aid of such analytical
hypotheses in attaching functions to native terms.
The sentence translations are to include the earlier
translations of truth functions and observation
sentences. The sentences which are stimulus-
analytic and stimulus-contradictory in the alien
language are to carry into English sentences which
are likewise stimulus-analytic and stimulus-contra-
dictory, according to stimulus synonymy.[44]

In the native to English dictionary, the
semantic correlation beyond independent evidence is
supported solely by analytical hypotheses. And that
these "unverifiable translations proceed without
mishap must not be taken as pragmatic evidence of
good lexicography, for mishap is impossible."[45]
The indeterminacy of translation becomes apparent,
because

one has only to reflect on the nature of
possible data and methods to appreciate the
indeterminacy. Sentences translatable outright,
translatable by independent evidence of
stimulatory occasions, are sparse and must
woefully under-determine the analytical
hypotheses on which the translation of all
further sentences depends. To project such
hypotheses beyond the independently trans-
latable sentences at all is in effect to impute
our sense of the linguistic analogy unverifiably
to the native mind.[46]

Rival systems of analytical hypotheses can

accomodate the complete domain of speech behavior
to perfection and dispositions to speech behavior,
and yet have mutually incompatible translations of
any number of sentences immune to independent control.
It is possible that one linguist through the use of
analytical hypotheses might translate a particular
native construction as meaning "are the same"; on
this belief he might question his informant about
the sameness of gavagais at different times, and
conclude that "gavagai" was the native term for our
term "rabbit" and not a stage of a rabbit. However,
if another linguist translated the same native
construction as "are stages of the same animal,"
the same querying of the native from time to time
would yield the position that the native term
"gavagai" meant rabbit stages. Both of these
hypotheses can be presumed possible.[47]

> Thus the analytical hypotheses, and the grand
> synthetic one that they add up to, are only in
> an incomplete sense hypotheses . . . The point
> is not that we cannot be sure whether the
> analytical hypothesis is right, but that there
> is not even, as there was in the case of
> 'Gavagai', any objective matter to be right or
> wrong about.[48]

When we speak meaningfully about the truth or
falsity of a sentence, we do so only within the
bounds of some conceptual scheme or theory. And in
similar fashion, Quine maintains that "we may
meaningfully speak of interlinguistic synonymy only
within the terms of some particular system of
analytical hypotheses."[49] Our success with the
translation of Frisian into English and Hungarian
into English are examples of success which have
contributed to the illusory view that "intertrans-
latable sentences are diverse verbal embodiments of
some intercultural proposition or meaning, when they
are better seen as the merest variants of one and
the same intracultural verbalism."[50] At the heart
of the matter, there lies basically an indeterminacy
of correlation, because there is a paucity of ground
for comparison or "less sense in saying what is good
translation and what is bad--the further we get away
from sentences with visibly direct conditioning to
non-verbal stimuli and the farther we get off home
ground."[51] And further:

> To the same degree that the radical translation
> of sentences is under-determined by the totality

of dispositions to verbal behavior, our own
theories and beliefs in general are under-
determined by the totality of possible sensory
evidence time without end.[52]

In summation, Quine adds that the principle of
indeterminacy requires notice, because translation
progresses a little at a time and sentences are
believed to be conveyors of meaning severally. And
this is "plainly illustrated by the almost univeral
belief that the object references of terms in
radically different languages can be objectively
compared."[53]

II

Criticisms

In this part of the paper, three criticisms
which have been directed against Quine's indeterminacy
thesis will be considered. For convenience, I have
given each of the three arguments a name, and the
presentation of that argument will be the same as
the name's order. They are: 1) Non-denial of
Intuitive Semantics, 2) Inadequacy of Stimulus
Meaning, and 3) The Dilemma.

Non-denial of Intuitive Semantics   In a critical
article, Charles Landesman claims that Quine's
thesis is a challenge to intuitive semantics, but that
the way the thesis is stated does not support a
denial of intuitive semantics, but rather, leads to
a less interesting type of general scepticism.[54]

In developing his remarks, Landesman recognizes
three formulations of the indeterminacy thesis. The
first is that the thesis of "indeterminacy finds the
very process of determining the various meanings
itself problematic, because for any given set of
analytical hypotheses, there is another set compatible
with the behavioral evidence."[55] This is normal
inductive uncertainty. The second formulation is
that the "behavioral evidence relative to which the
indeterminacy exists is all the evidence there is."[56]
And finally, the third formulation is that for all
analytical hypotheses there is just no objective
matter to be right or wrong about.[57]

Against the first formulation, Landesman argues
that inductive indeterminacy exists in any behavioral
theory and is quite ordinary. However, he feels that
Quine is not advocating this type of thesis, but is

attempting something a bit more radical.[58] The second
formulation is a bit more complex.

In the second formulation, the linguist is
forced to invoke the principle of simplicity in
deciding between analytical hypotheses. The question
which is crucial in this instance is whether or not
there is evidence for the support of these principles
of simplicity--principles like: 1) people do not
usually believe explicitly in contradictory things;
2) human beings have similar syntactical devices;
3) a whole object is usually an expression capable
of one word structure; and 4) if people have a whole,
enduring object in their environment, then they usually
have a one word term for it.[59] Landesman feels that
if we can find evidence for these principles, then
the second formulation of the thesis of indeterminacy
is false. We must ask if we can apply these
principles to other languages without first learning
the language, and if there is evidence to justify our
extension of these principles in learning a new
language.[60]

Landesman concludes that such evidence is not yet
available, but that there is still "no good reason
to believe that the inference from behavioral evidence
to the analytical hypothesis is direct; it is just
as likely to be mediated by hypotheses referring
to underlying physiological and/or psychological
mechanisms."[61]

In summation, Landesman claims that an incom-
patibility obtains between the three formulations of
the indeterminacy thesis.

The first part does not entail the third:
that there is a translation indeterminacy
relative to the behavioral evidence leaves
open the possibility that there is none relative
to other evidence. Nor does the second entail
the third: that there is only behavioral
evidence leaves open the possibility that the
indeterminacy is one of knowledge and not of
reality. Certainly the claim that the only
evidence for radical translation is behavioral
does not of itself entail that there are not
propositions or mental meanings.[62]

Contrary to what Quine suggests, one cannot use the
thesis of indeterminacy to argue against the existence
of abstract entities or mental meanings. The first
two formulations offer no evidence, and the last

formulation presumes the very proposition it is
trying to prove. In the final analysis, the thesis
of indeterminacy "does not provide a sufficient
reason for rejecting intuitive semantics."[63]

Inadequacy of Stimulus Meaning   In his critical
article on Quine's notion of stimulus meaning, Paul
Ziff notes that although Quine wants to argue against
the notion of mental meanings, his replacement of
such entities with his idea of meaning as disposition
is no better off. Quine's locus of meaning is the
ocular realm, and to treat meaning in this realm he
has devised stimulus meanings. Ziff attempts to
show that this "peregrine proxy" is a philosophical
cul de sac.[64]

According to Ziff, the most fanciful feature of
Quine's stimulus meaning theory is the notion that
speakers have dispositions to assent to or dissent
from sentences. This notion is attributed to Quine's
supposed belief that such dispositions are somehow
built-in structural traits. If one accepts this
notion of dispositions to assent or dissent, then the
"proliferation of dispositions in language learning
would proceed at an appalling pace."[65] Take an
example: suppose that a certain person K has a
disposition to assent to or dissent from the occasion
sentence "Bread" and another disposition to assent
to or dissent from the occasion sentence "Butter,"
under Quine's thesis it can be wondered whether or
not this person K would require yet another disposition
for the sentence "Bread and Butter." Ziff states
that there is no more reason to assume this than
there "is to suppose that for each problem it can
cope with a computer must somehow have a distinct,
corresponding structural feature."[66]

On the other hand, if we assume the validity of
dispositions, it would be very hard to uphold the claim
that stimulations are what activate the dispositions.
For one could say that presently as I sit at my desk, I
am having a certain kind of non-zebra stimulation,
and a non-tiger stimulation, and so on to infinity
for other no less exotic animals. It can be asked
whether or not these stimulations activate me to
assent to such statements as "Not one zebra" and
"Not two zebra." At best, such a proposal is odd.
However, Ziff thinks that this criticism can be
amended to say that stimulations activate dispositions
only under appropriate circumstances and this is when
the linguist is querying me.[67]

Quine wants to construe an informant's overt
linguistic behavior as a response to stimulus of some
sort; Quine assumes that the informant is responding
to ocular stimuli. However, stimulus is a very complex
thing and the study of psychology has shown that there
are instances of filtration, amplification and some
type of storage present in stimulation. It has been
shown that some subjects who have undergone hypnosis
were able to report details of a stimulus which they
were unable to report before hypnosis.[68] And further,
stimulations

> may also be referred to some sort of dynamic
> storage and thus rendered immediately available
> for processing. But in consequence they may be
> subject to further processing in connection with
> the processing of other stimulations. Staring
> out of a window, I see a small animal dash by.
> What was it? I do not know. Someone asks, "Was
> that a rabbit?" and on hearing the query I at
> once reply, "Yes, of course," for of course I
> then see that it was. Can one ignore all of
> this? Quine does.[69]

Quine wants to correlate sentences with stimula-
tions, but there does not seem to be any linguistic
significance in such a correlation. Such a correlation
would let in a host of seemingly insignificant
variables in determining meaning. With decaying
eyesight, there might be a modification in the
stimulus. Is one to assume that this difference in the
stimulus would lead to a difference of meaning? "Must
linguistics and opthalmology merge?"[70] There is also
the possibility that an angry informant, upon being
upset by the constant questioning of the linguist,
might first assent to sentence S, and then a second
time when given the same sentence S dissent. According
to Quine's stimulus meaning, the meaning of S would
have changed in the course of the two queries.[71]

Quine's concept of stimulus meaning is just not
experimentally designed. The switch from assent to
dissent can be explicated in terms of processing
stimulations and focussing attention; linguistic
change is not needed to account for the switch. The
"instability of stimulus meaning is not indicative of
linguistic flux. It is indicative of the utter
inutility of that concept for semantic analysis."[72]

It is mistaken to offer a causal account of
linguistic behavior. The most philosophers can hope

for are tentative regularities which must be examined
within the context of analysis for an entire language.
But Quine's concept of stimulus meaning is cast in such
a causal mold; "thus it faces the wrong way: it looks
from conditions to speakers, instead of from speakers
to conditions. And it is inflexible. In consequence
it is useless."[73]

The Dilemma   In this third criticism, Stephen Davis
argues that Quine is presenting a private worlds
thesis when he advocates his special theory of
indeterminacy. The private worlds thesis is not
something for which Quine argues directly, but it is
an analogue of the theory of indeterminacy.[74] Such
a theory of private worlds leads to grave consequences,
because it follows "that we are unable to understand
any people who lie beyond our linguistic and social
continuum."[75] However, Davis attempts to frustrate
Quine's concluding such "grave consequences," because
he feels there is a basic weakness in Quine's approach.

Davis interprets Quine as saying that different
types of analytical hypotheses produce different types
of translations, and that the indeterminacy of transla-
tion occurs because we have no way of choosing between
these varying schemes of analytical hypotheses; "there
is no way to determine what the translation of a
language should be."[76] For this argument to make any
sense, translations of Quine's native term "gavagai"
must have different meanings: i.e., two linguists
using different analytical hypotheses come up with
different interpretations of the term and still fulfill
all the same behavioral criteria. "However, according
to Quine's behavioral criterion for synonymity they
mean the same and supposedly this criterion is the
only one available to determine synonymity."[77] This
produces a destructive dilemma for Quine. If the terms
are synonymous (according to Quine's behavioral
criterion), then they are not alternative translations.
And it follows that any one of the terms is the same
and correct. Therefore, there is no indeterminacy of
translation as Quine puts the thesis forward.[78]

Quine "can either accept the result of his
behavioristic criteria produces when applied to terms
or regard them as inapplicable to terms. Both
alternatives are fatal to the argument for transla-
tional indeterminacy."[79] If Quine accepts the first
option, then his indeterminacy thesis is without
meaning, because terms treated by different analytical
hypotheses which meet the same behavioral criteria will
all mean the same thing. If Quine accepts the second

option, he is left without an argument for "it is only the application of the criterion (behavioral) to terms in the first place which provides support for translational indeterminacy."80 In the first alternative, Quine's thesis is meaningless, and in the second it is inconsistent.

III

Conclusion

The three criticisms have, I think, substantially shown the following: 1) Quine's attempt to deny intuitive semantics has failed; 2) Quine's advance over older theories of meaning via his concept of · stimulus meaning has led to an incomprehensible linguistic flux of meaning; and 3) the way Quine states his thesis has led to a fatal dilemma which destroys the cogency of the thesis as stated.

At a higher level, the indeterminacy thesis does not make sense, because it leads to a general and indiscriminate scepticism which cannot make sense of language. If meaning is as Quine says it is, a combination of stimulus meaning and analytical hypotheses, then indeterminacy may occur inter- or intralinguistically. The indeterminacy occurs at the point of selection of analytical hypotheses, and such selection is determined solely on the principle of simplicity. But if this is so, to what criterion do we appeal within our own language to determine which set of analytical hypotheses another person or group of persons has assumed? If stimulus meaning can only take us so far and cannot decide what objects there are, to what then can we appeal to substantiate existential claims, much less meaning claims?

Most clearly, there does not seem to be any such criterion. The further we move away from sentences which have direct empirical content, the more reliance we must place upon analytical hypotheses. In very abstract conversation, I must assume via analytical hypotheses that what you mean by certain words is what I mean when I use those words. But this is further complicated because sentences at the occasion level are themselves indeterminate as to what they actually refer to; and if this is the case, reduction of highly abstract language to observation or occasion sentences will not relieve the indeterminacy. Remember, point to a rabbit and· you point to a phase of a rabbit, a part of a rabbit and to rabbithood.

How much more indeterminate language must be, the
further we move away from such observation and occasion
sentences! But what is worse, the only means we have
of determining differences in analytical hypotheses
is through language itself. We are thus caught in an
inextricable loblolly of indeterminacy which can
decide nothing.

According to his thesis of radical indeterminacy--
a thesis he must uphold to avoid the criticism of
advocating a mundane, normal, inductive indeterminacy--
Quine not only fails to deny intuitive semantics and
present a more adequate view of meaning, but, more
seriously, he eradicates the efficacy of language to
mean anything at all! Quine's thesis does not make
sense of everyday use of language where we quite
adequately make existential discernments about what
objects another person believes in, and where we make
perfectly valid assumptions about the meaning another
person imputes to a term. Such a criticism--not being
able to make sense out of what we can do in everyday
use of language--is one with which Quine would have
to agree, or face the charge of inconsistency, because
it is just such an argument he uses in criticising the
linguistic philosophers' notion of intensional objects.[81]

In conclusion, Quine's thesis as it appears in the
weaker form of normal inductive indeterminacy is
uninteresting. As the thesis appears in the stronger
and more radical form, it is false, because it cannot
account for what we are able to do in everyday use of
language. Therefore, Quine's thesis is either un-
interesting or false. Either way, the thesis of
indeterminacy does not do what Quine wants it to do.

Tulane University

NOTES

[1]W.V. Quine, Word and Object (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1960), p. ix.

[2]Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," Philosophical Review, LX (1951), 20-43.

[3]Gilbert Harman, "Quine on Meaning and Existence," Review of Metaphysics, XXI (Sept.-June, 1967-68), 125.

[4]Ibid.   [5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.   [7]Ibid., pp. 125-26.

[8]Ibid., p. 127.   [9]Ibid., p. 127.

[10]Ibid., pp. 129-30.   [11]Ibid., p. 131.

[12]Ibid., p. 139.   [13]Ibid., p. 139.

[14]Ibid., p. 140.   [15]Ibid., pp. 140-41.

[16]Ibid., p. 141.   [17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., p. 142.   [19]Ibid., p. 143.

[20]Ibid.   [21]Ibid., p. 144.

[22]Ibid.   [23]Ibid., p. 145.

[24]Ibid., p. 147.

[25]W.V. Quine, Ontological Relativity and Other Essays (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 1.

[26]Ibid., p. 11.   [27]Ibid.

[28]W.V. Quine, "On What There Is," in Contemporary Readings in Logical Theory, ed. by Irving M. Copi and James A. Gould (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 176.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Quine, Word and Object, p. 26.

[31]Ibid., p. 27.   [32]Ibid., p. 28.

[33]Ibid., pp. 29-30.   [34]Ibid., p. 32.

NOTES

[35]Ibid., p. 33.   [36]Ibid., p. 34.

[37]Ibid., pp.35-6   [38]Ibid., pp. 37-40.

[39]Ibid., pp. 52-53.   [40]Ibid., p. 45.

[41]Ibid., p. 66.   [42]Ibid., p. 54.

[43]Ibid., p. 70.   [44]Ibid., p. 68.

[45]Ibid., p. 71.   [46]Ibid., p. 72.

[47]Ibid.   [48]Ibid., p. 73.

[49]Ibid., p. 75.   [50]Ibid., p. 76.

[51]Ibid., p. 78.   [52]Ibid.

[53]Ibid., pp. 78-9.

[54]Charles Landesman, "Scepticism About Meaning: Quine's Thesis of Indeterminacy," Australasian Journal of Philosophy, XLVIII (Dec., 1970), 334-35.

[55]Ibid., p. 325.   [56]Ibid., p. 326.

[57]Ibid., p. 331.   [58]Ibid., pp. 325-26.

[59]Ibid.   [60]Ibid., p. 329.

[61]Ibid., p. 330   [62]Ibid., p. 333.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Paul Ziff, "A Response to Stimulus Meaning," The Philosophical Review, LXXIX (Jan., 1970), p. 63.

[65]Ibid., pp. 65-6.   [66]Ibid., pp. 66-7.

[67]Ibid., p. 67.   [68]Ibid., p. 69.

[69]Ibid., p. 70.   [70]Ibid., p. 71.

[71]Ibid., p. 67.   [72]Ibid., pp. 72-3.

[73]Ibid., p. 73.

[74]Stephen Davis, "Translational Indeterminacy and Private Words," Philosophical Studies, XVIII (Jan.-Feb., 1967), p. 43.

114

NOTES

[75] Ibid., p. 40.   [76] Ibid., p. 41.

[77] Ibid.   [78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.   [80] Ibid., pp. 41-2.

[81] Quine argues that the linguistic philosophers do not make sense out of the ordinary usage of the phrase "means the same as." (See supra, pp. 97-98.)