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REPLY TO W. V. QUINE

It is indeed true that much of my paper was written on the assumption that indeterminacy of translation must require that a sentence of one language must be capable of going over, under divergent translations, into two sentences of another language judged, respectively, true and false by speakers of the second language. Quine's suggestion is that the indeterminacy thesis would hold even if the only cases of divergent translation were ones such that the translated sentence would go over into two sentences about which both of the speakers of the second language were agnostic, but the exclusive disjunction of which they regarded as true. On such a restriction of the indeterminacy thesis, much of the discussion in the earlier part of my paper becomes irrelevant.

Even if it has only succeeded in eliciting that restriction, however, I do not think that it was a waste of time: for not only has such a restriction not been explicit in any of the previous expositions of the indeterminacy thesis, but much that those expositions contain is incompatible with it; namely, all those passages in which it is said that there is no substantive distinction between someone's holding one belief and attaching a corresponding meaning to the sentence that expresses it, and his holding a contrary belief and attaching a different meaning to the same sentence. (The most striking case is that in which we are concerned with two speakers of the same language, and asking whether their beliefs differ, or only the meanings they attach to some sentence of the language: but it will, equally, be relative to the scheme of translation from a radically foreign language whether we attribute to the community that speaks it beliefs different from or coinciding with our own.) For, if, in a case of the kind Quine suggested, the translated sentence is one about which speakers of the first language are themselves agnostic, then no divergence of belief between the speakers of the two languages can be in question; while, if it is one which they believe true, then there is such a divergence (in that speakers of the second language are agnostic about something believed by speakers of the first one), irrespective of the translation schema adopted.
Quine, in making his suggestion, agreed that the sentences in question must be theoretical sentences. That is, there cannot be, for any one of them, an agreed way of conclusively establishing it as true: if there were, we could imagine that it was so established, and then the case would reduce to one of the kind discussed in the first half of my paper. Now, at one point in the paper, I did indeed envisage just the possibility Quine suggested, namely (on p. 379) in the passage:

However, the reply might continue, there is no necessity that a translation from \( L \) into \( M \) should map a theoretical sentence of \( L \) on to a sentence of \( M \) for which there is a means of conclusively establishing it as true agreed by all \( M \)-speakers, and hence that such a translation should be inexact in the sense alleged. On the contrary, a translation will map the sentence on to an equally theoretical sentence of \( M \). The indeterminacy arises from the fact that there will be distinct coherent ways of mapping theoretical sentences of the one language on to theoretical sentences of the other.

However, in the paper, the rebuttal of this putative reply to the foregoing argument is long delayed, some remarks about Quine's extension of the indeterminacy thesis to the case of two speakers of the same language being interposed; the topic is taken up again on p. 382, and not concluded until p. 384, and I have therefore only myself to blame that I did not succeed in conveying the course of the argument.

In the paper I concede the underdetermination of theory, specifically, that there may be empirically equivalent but incompatible theories, but deny that it is possible to infer from this any indeterminacy of exact translation. To say that theory is underdetermined is to say that theoretical sentences have a certain indeterminacy of meaning; exact translation precludes the mapping of such a sentence on to one that is more determinate in meaning. Thus I should simply deny that Quine's suggested case can occur. There may be two distinct theoretical sentences of a language \( M \); but, if there is sufficient difference between them for them to be recognised as incompatible, then either no translation which mapped a given sentence of \( L \) on to either of them would be an exact translation, or else there will be a ground for preferring one rather than the other as the correct translation.

It is rather difficult to give an example of something's *not* being possible, but I will try. Suppose that the sentence \( S \) of \( L \) uses a theoretical expression which involves that certain bodies are related by a partial ordering, and says that one particular body stands in that partial ordering relation to another particular body. \( T \) is a sentence of \( M \) using a corresponding