



Quine on Charity and Rationality

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Abstract

W. V. Quine borrows the principle of charity from Neil Wilson, but modifies and enriches its content to fit into his naturalistic philosophy and epistemology. While Wilson ties this principle to the notion of truth, Quine's attempts in finding a ground for it lead him to the concept of common rationality shared by all human beings, which is ultimately what makes communication, as the basis of our social life, possible. According to the paper's argument, three other expressions, that is, the principles of psychological plausibility, empathy, and projection, which Quine uses in the contexts akin to that of the principle of charity, are not but different terms for one basic idea. Given the ties between the principle of charity and rationality, Quine's wide use of the principle and its affiliated notions proves that rationality is a central, often neglected, idea in his philosophy. The paper begins with an introductory account of the brief explanation Wilson gives of the principle of charity. Then it spells out four concepts or principles of charity, psychological plausibility, empathy, and projection showing how these four notions or principles basically express the same thing. Examining the relation of these last three principles with the principle of charity and rationality, the paper's main objective is to highlight the centrality of common rationality in Quine's philosophy, despite the common view that Quine is purely engaged with semantical aspects of Language.

Keywords: rationality, the principles of charity, psychological plausibility, empathy, and projection, Truth.

Introduction

We are living in a world that, besides the silent objects, is inhabited by fellow human speakers, or other minds. In our treatment of, confrontation and communication with people, which constitute the very foundation of the human society, we basically use means which convey meaning in its various forms. We are lacking in direct access to the contents of other people's minds and their intentions. As far as we reach our hands out, the most we achieve are only other mind's words, sentences, behaviors, facial expressions, and bodily gestures in particular circumstances. The problem is how, despite these limitations, to make sense of them, or in other words, how to infer from those signs the contents of other minds. It is in this context that W. V. Quine introduces his theories of indeterminacy of meaning and reference (or indeterminacy of translation and inscrutability of reference), suggesting that we can not specify a single meaning or reference for speaker's words. Accordingly, it is possible to construct alternative translation manuals for translating one language into another, say Persian into English, such that for any fairly extended passage of the language being translated, the manuals will yield different translations, different to the point that in multiple instances a sentence of the language being translated will go over into a true sentence of English on one scheme and a false sentence of English on the other scheme.

Commentators mostly suggest that indeterminacy is an ontological matter, not an epistemological one, and has nothing to do with understanding (see Hylton, 2007: 201-202). Quine, nevertheless, doesn't disregard the problem of how people understand each other despite these indeterminacies. The solution, mostly neglected by commentators, for the possibility of understanding and communication among people is introduced through a principle called "the principle of charity" (hereafter PC), borrowed from Neil Wilson. Quine indeed uses the expression "charity" just a few times. He, however, expresses the same idea implied by PC through referring to and employing three different expressions, that is, psychological plausibility, empathy, and projection. PC and these affiliated principles or notions are introduced and developed in Quine's, and following him Donald Davidson's, philosophy to show how the common process of translation and interpretation works and has to be justified. The main objective of the current paper is to investigate the exact relation of these four principles and their common justifying ground, i.e. rationality. The paper's final take on the matter shows that the principle of charity and its affiliated principles can be construed in a way that connects Quine's theories of indeterminacy to rationality, philosophically establishing why and how, despite the prevailing indeterminacies, people don't have any serious problem in their everyday communication and understanding. Furthermore, the unity of the different guises of PC and the importance and centrality of rationality in Quine's philosophy show why the transition from the indeterminacy theories to an anarchistic interpretation of his philosophy is not permissible (see Rosenberg, 2000: 172-173; Nersessian, 1979).

The paper begins with an introductory account of the brief explanation Wilson gives of PC, which is "a very straightforward statement of a Description Theory of Proper Names" (Sundholm, 1981: 264). Here is the first time that the principle under this title emerges in the literature. Then we spell out four concepts or principles of charity, psychological plausibility, empathy, and projection in Quine's philosophy respectively. The paper's objective is to show, both in the sections discussing these notions individually and the conclusion, that these four notions or principles refer to one common ground in Quine's philosophy: rationality. Considering rationality as the hidden thought implied by this fourfold principle, we can demonstrate, because of Quine's wide use of this principle, that rationality plays a substantial role in Quine's philosophy.

1) Background: Wilson and the principle of charity

As Quine indicates (see Quine, 1960: 59; also Quine, 1969a: 46), Neil Wilson is the first to use the principle of charity under this title. He introduces this principle in a context, that of an investigation into the nature of individuals, seemingly different from the contexts employed by Quine and Davidson later. According to Wilson, this principle guides us to determine which referent, among different possible referents of a proper name in various assertions of a speaker, is more plausible to be intended by him when choosing each different referent renders some of his assertions true and some others false. Suppose that a person, named Charles, makes the following assertions using the proper name Caesar:

- 1) Caesar conquered Gaul.
- 2) Caesar crossed the Rubicon.
- 3) Caesar was murdered on the Ides of March.
- 4) Caesar was addicted to the use of the ablative absolute.
- 5) Caesar was married to Boadicea.

What is the designatum of the proper name Caesar in the above statements? Our historical knowledge of Rome informs us that in the early four statements it refers to Julius Caesar, and in the fifth one it refers to Prasutagus, who was the husband of Boadicea. Here we have two options: either 1) to select Julius Caesar as the designatum the speaker of the above statements intends and thus making four of his statements true and one false or 2) to select Prasutagus as the designatum he intends and thus rendering one of his statements true and all the rest false. Note that no other option is conceivable because, for Wilson, an individual can be regarded as a referent only when it makes at least one statement true, and this way an informative sentence about that individual came into existence. (Wilson, 1959: 532). So, in such a situation we

act on what might be called the Principle of Charity. We select as designatum that individual which will make the largest possible number of Charles' statements true. In this case it is the individual, Julius Caesar. We might say the designatum is that individual which satisfies more of the asserted matrices containing the word "Caesar" than does any other individual (Wilson, 1959: 532).

And

How does an individual manage to get itself hooked onto by an individual constant? The answer now lies before us. *It does so by having those characteristics in virtue of which it satisfies more of the asserted matrices containing the constant in question than does any other individual* (ibid: 535)

Accordingly, it can be concluded that the result of applying Wilson's version of PC would be an interpretation or understating of other's statements so that it maximizes their truth or the number of their true sentences as far as possible (see Wilson, 1970:300). Wilson, however, doesn't provide any ground for why we should follow this principle, and, as we will see, what attracted Quine's attention is not that much Wilson's theory as the ground that can be offered for it.

2) Quine's formulations

A theme to some extent similar to PC as described by Wilson can be found in Quine's thought, although in four different expressions and with seemingly different roles that each one plays in his works. These are the principles or notions of "Charity", "Psychological Plausibility", "Empathy" and "Projection". In the following sections, we will investigate the significance and implications of each one showing that, at bottom, they express the same underlying idea. And this underlying idea, as it unfolds through our discussion, is the common ground of rationality.

2-1) the Principle of Charity

Quine borrows “the principle of charity” from Wilson and makes use of it, particularly in cases of translating truth functions, observation sentences, and analytical hypotheses. He uses it, first of all, in translating truth functions, such as negation, logical conjunction, and alternation, in the radical translation situation where a linguist attempts to construct a systematic method of translating the language of a group of people without any prior knowledge of it. In the case of negation, for example, if we know that a sentence is true, its negation necessarily and logically will be false. Also, the conjunction of a sentence with its negation will necessarily be false. Thus, if in a situation two words, which are supposed to be translations of the expressions we usually use for affirming or denying respectively, are employed by a speaker in a conjunction about one sentence at the same time, then we should presume that either 1) he is employing these two words in a sense different from what we mean by our words for affirming or denying, or 2) he does mean alteration rather than conjunction. By such presumptions we don't need to suppose that he is such an idiot to assert and deny a sentence at the same time. So, in the middle of a discussion about “a heterodox logic in which all the laws which have up to now been taken to govern alternation were made to govern conjunction instead and vice versa”, Quine writes:

Clearly we would regard his deviation merely as notational and phonetic. For obscure reasons, if any, he has taken to writing 'and' in place of 'or' and vice versa. We impute our orthodox logic to him, or impose it upon him, by translating his deviant dialect.

Could we be wrong in so doing? Could he really be meaning and thinking genuine conjunction in his use of 'and' after all, just as we do, and genuine alternation in his use of 'or', and merely disagreeing with us on points of logical doctrine respecting the laws of conjunction and alternation? Clearly this is nonsense. There is no residual essence of conjunction and alternation in addition to the sounds and notations and the laws in conformity with which a man uses those sounds and notations.

According to Quine, we cannot put an orthodox logic aside and stay silent in front of “someone who rejects the law of non-contradiction and so accept an occasional sentence and its negation both as true”, that is, 'p.~p'. Such a person only thinks that he is talking about negation, '~', 'not'; but in fact “the notation ceased to be recognizable as negation when he took to regarding some conjunctions of the form 'p.~p' as true, and stopped regarding such sentences as implying all others. Here is the deviant logician's predicament: when he tries to deny the doctrine he only changes the subject.” Quine, then, continues,

Take the less fanciful case of trying to construe some unknown translation language on the strength of observable behavior. If a native is prepared to assent to some compound sentence but not to a constituent, this is a reason not to construe the construction as conjunction. If a native is prepared to assent to a constituent but not to the compound, this is a reason not to construe the construction as alternation. We impute our orthodox logic to him, or impose it on him, by translating his language to suit. We build the logic into our manual of translation. Nor is there cause here for apology. We have to base translation on some kind of evidence, and what better? (Quine, 1986: 81-2).

“The maxim of translation”, Quine says elsewhere, “underlying all this is that assertions startlingly false on the face of them are likely to turn on hidden differences of language” (Quine, 1960: 59). In other words, such assertions are more likely to have meanings different from their apparent ones than to be really false. The insight, or as Quine calls it, “the common sense” behind the maxim, which makes it possible for the maxim to be applied even to the cases beyond truth functions and in situations other than one of radical translation, is that “one's interlocutor's silliness, beyond a certain point, is

less likely than bad translation - or, in the domestic case, linguistic divergence" (*ibid.*) It is, indeed, this avoidance of supposing others to be silly that lies at the basis of reaching to determinate translations of truth functions, since in translating the sentences made by a person we don't have to assume that he would be so silly as to affirm and deny the same thing:

That fair translation preserves logical laws is implicit in practice even where, to speak paradoxically, no foreign language is involved. Thus when to our querying of an English sentence an English speaker answers 'Yes and no', we assume that the queried sentence is meant differently in the affirmation and negation; this rather than that he would be so silly as to affirm and deny the same thing. Again, when someone espouses a logic whose laws are ostensibly contrary to our own, we are ready to speculate that he is just giving some familiar old vocables ('and', 'or', 'not', 'all', etc.) new meanings. This talk of meaning is intuitive, uncritical, and undefined, but it is a piece with translation; what it registers is our reluctance under such circumstances to "translate" the speaker's English into our English by the normal tacit method of homophonic translation (*ibid.*).

Here, in a footnote, Quine quotes Wilson, alluding to the similarity of his maxim to PC without any further comment. The maxim of translation Quine articulates here is a principle with two levels. In the first level, this principle prevents us from ascribing sentences to the speaker which are startlingly false. In other words, according to this principle, we don't have to represent the speaker as someone who denies the sentences on their truth there is common agreement or consensus and thus they can be called "obvious", as Quine defines it:

I must stress that I am using the word 'obvious' in an ordinary behavioral sense, with no epistemological overtones. When I call '1+1=2' obvious to a community I mean only that everyone, nearly enough, will unhesitatingly assent to it, for whatever reason; and when I call 'It is raining' obvious in particular circumstances I mean that everyone will assent to it in those circumstances (Quine, 1986: 82).

On the basis of this principle, therefore, we don't have to assume that our speaker is intending to deny the obvious or, to formulate conversely, we have to assume that the speaker is affirming the obvious. The second level of this principle is deeper and articulated in the form of the common sense underlying the first level as its ground: we don't have to assume the speaker to be silly (and whoever denies the obvious is silly). Quine, here, doesn't directly appeal to the common rationality among human beings; however, by denying silliness he alludes to this common ground. The denial of silliness from human beings is indeed the negation of irrationality or the negation of the negation of rationality from them. We can conversely formulate it as: "We have to assume the speaker to be rational."

In both positive and negative formulations of these two levels, the expressions, "it is more likely" or "it is not more likely", and therefore the adverbial phrase "as far as possible" are contained: "as far as possible we don't have to assume the speaker to deny the obvious" and "as far as possible we have to avoid assuming that the speaker is silly". In order to compare Quine's formulation with Wilson's, the following formulation, which is closer to Wilson's phrasing, can be helpful:

We have to attempt to maximize the affirmation of the obvious truths and the rationality existing in the speaker's statements as far as possible.

This turns out to be different from Wilson's formulation in two aspects: first, "maximizing truth" is replaced by "maximizing the obvious truths" and, second, "maximizing rationality" is added as the ground to the principle. That is why, comparing himself with Davidson, Quine, in "Where do we disagree?", endorses the idea that, unlike Davidson who seeks to maximize truth, he is primarily concerned to maximize rationality (see Quine, 1993: 76).

In his *Philosophy of Logic*, Quine introduces a maxim that can be treated as a moderate articulation of PC, “save the obvious”:

Logic is built into translation more fully than other systematic departments of science. It is in the incidence of obviousness that the difference lies.... It behooves us, in construing a strange language, to make the obvious sentences go over into English sentences that are true and, preferably, also obvious; this is the point we have been noting. Now this canon-'Save the obvious'-is sufficient to settle, in point of truth value anyway, our translations of some of the sentences in just about every little branch of knowledge or discourse; for some of them are pretty sure to qualify as obvious outright (like '1 + 1 == 2') or obvious in particular circumstances (like 'It is raining') (Quine, 1986: 82).

According to this canon, therefore, we have to translate the obviously true sentences of the native to the true and preferably obvious sentences in our language (see *ibid.*). Every logical truth is obvious and thus eligible for the application of this canon:

We would do this because of our convention “Save logical truth”. This convention of translation safeguards logical truth, nominally, against or through all behavioral vicissitudes. ... This general policy of translating the obvious (that is, what is assented to as a matter of course) into the obvious is a policy that comes to a head in the logical truths, because of a combination of two circumstances. One circumstance is that the logical truths are all either obvious in the above sense or else potentially obvious, in the sense of being derivable from the obvious by individually obvious steps. The other circumstance is that the translator can deal with them wholesale by abstracting shared skeletal forms. We see, then, how it is that “Save logical truth” is both a convention and a wise one (Quine, 1969b: 317).

Also, this canon, as Quine points out, applies to the observation sentences like ‘it is raining’ when it is raining. Such a sentence is obvious in particular circumstances of raining since everyone assents to it. So if a native doesn’t give his assent to a sentence in his own language when it is raining, we cannot translate that sentence as “it is raining”, whatever it be (Quine, 1986: 82). When truth functions are at issue, the thought behind using PC is that there is common consensus about the logical obvious truths among all human beings and thus their denial could amount to accusing the native or the speaker of irrationality. So in translation, we are allowed to impose our logic on the speaker and presume that he has a certain logic akin to our own. Similarly, the denial of the obvious observation sentences leads to accusing the speaker of irrationality.

To illustrate this principle, let’s put it into practice. Suppose that on a beautiful rainy day, I am enjoying spending time among a tribe whose language I am not thoroughly familiar with. While I am drinking a hot cup of tea in the rain, the normal native speaker looks at the clouds, extends his hands under the rain, and says something which seems to be like “it is not the case that it is raining right now”. Now in understanding or translating the words used by the speaker into my language, there are a few possible options:

1) To accept that the native speaker is somehow confused and making a mistake, which is, given the obviousness of the rainy weather, very implausible.

2) To accept that the native speaker is silly and hence irrational and even a non-human, since he is denying an obvious observation sentence which every rational being would assent to it.

3) To accept that our understanding of the native’s words is missing in something. Maybe he is forecasting the weather for two hours from now, or he might have meant something else by the words we have translated as “rain”, maybe he means something like snow or other similar possibilities.

The first, as it is indicated, is implausible and PC guides us through the two other options to go for the third, and thus to be cautious about understanding the native’s words instead of accusing him of being non-human or silly.

In *Word and Object*, Quine mentions PC, once more in a footnote, and again in the situation of radical translation. Here, after specifying different kinds of words and sentences from which the radical translator can give a determinate translation in his own language, i.e. truth functions and observation sentences, Quine allows the radical translator to offer different analytical hypotheses for translating other sentences, provided that these translations conform to the prior translations of truth functions and observation sentences (see Quine, 1960:68). For the analytical hypotheses to be plausible, Quine adds another condition: “For certainly, the more absurd or exotic the beliefs imputed to a people, the more suspicious we are entitled to be of the translations” (ibid: 69).

The condition of conformity to truth functions and observation sentences points to the first level of Quine’s version of PC, which is the maxim of “save the obvious”, and the latter condition to the second level of PC, that is to avoid accusing a person of irrationality. The difference between these two conditions seems to be embedded in one subtle point. Earlier in *Word and Object*, Quine warns us not to ascribe “silliness” to a person, here not to ascribe “absurd or exotic beliefs” to him. The latter expression can probably be understood in two senses:

- 1) It defines what he means by silliness or a silly person: he is someone who denies the obvious, that is, who have absurd or exotic beliefs.
- 2) It adds something to Quine’s first articulation of PC: We have to, as far as possible, avoid assuming the speaker or our interlocutor to be silly (namely, someone who denies the obvious and believes in the absurd) or have exotic and strange beliefs.

As we will see in the course of our discussion, Quine’s words make the second sense more probable.

Quine doesn’t tend to use the expression “charity” in his works. As we saw, in *Word and Object*, where he first introduces this theme into his philosophy, he mentions PC just in two footnotes to point out the similarity of his principle with Wilson’s version of it.¹ Perhaps one of the reasons why Quine doesn’t use the expression “the principle of charity” in the text of *Word and Object* is that the second chapter of the book, “Meaning and Translation”, which is where he discusses PC, had already been written as a paper, “Translation and Meaning”, in 1959. This year is the same year that Wilson’s paper was published. The comparison of the chapter with Quine’s original paper, which seems to be written without his knowledge of Wilson’s paper, shows that in the paper Quine is, in fact, trying to confront the possibility, already considered in his “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, of revision of logical laws and even of a logic which is not based upon the law of the excluded middle (see Quine, 1980: 43). These two possibilities lead to another one, that of the existence of people with a “prelogical mentality” who are supposedly said “to accept as true certain sentences translatable in the form ‘p and not p’”, that is, certain contradictory statements (Quine, 1960: 58). It seems that in the original paper Quine is primarily concerned to refuse these possibilities rather than having something like PC in mind. The argument he provides here is basically rested upon an impossibility: that of determining whether 1) the foreign speaker really has an alternative logic contrary to our own, or 2) we just recognized logical functions in his language mistakenly. Such an impossibility also exists even if we consider the above possibility in our language and want to determine whether 1) someone from our speech community has invented or discovered a different logic with logical laws contrary to our logical laws, or 2) he is just putting the old words of “and”, “or” and “not” into new and irrelevant uses. It is true, Quine adds, that “we *can* meaningfully contemplate changing a law of logic, be it the law

1. Conversely, Davidson, especially in his early works, almost always uses the expression of “the Principle of Charity” whenever he employs this principle.

of excluded middle or even the law of contradiction. But this is so only because while contemplating the change, we continue to translate *identically* 'and' as 'and', 'or' as 'or', etc." (Quine, 1959: 105-6). In the new version of the paper, as it is reprinted in *Word and Object*, he doesn't consider the above argument in detail, just he finds it sufficient to say that our inclination to giving some familiar old vocables ('and', 'or', 'not', 'all', etc.) new meanings instead of ascribing a different logic to the speaker is something "intuitive, uncritical, and undefined" and "a piece with translation" (Quine, 1960:59). That is why he, a few pages later, says that "the myth of the prelogical people marks only the extreme" (*ibid.*: 69)

The article *Ontological Relativity* is the only place where he uses the expression "the principle of charity" inside the text and again with a reference to Wilson as "what Neil Wilson has called the 'principle of charity'", although this time not in the context of the radical translation from a foreign language (Quine, 1969a: 46). Here he extends the applicability of PC, pointing out the idea that "the resort to a remote language was not really essential. On deeper reflection, radical translation begins at home", and even when we are talking with our fellow English speakers we are always engaged in the process of translating and interpreting his words and sentences. In this kind of translation, we employ two principles together: the principle of homophony and PC.

Must we equate our neighbor's English words with the same strings of phonemes in our own mouths? Certainly not; for sometimes we do not thus equate them. 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. Our usual domestic rule of translation is indeed the homophonic one, which simply carries each string of phonemes into itself; but still we are always prepared to temper homophony with what Neil Wilson has called the "principle of charity." We will construe a neighbor's word heterophonically now and again if thereby we see our way to making his message less absurd (Quine, 1969a: 46).

As it is clear in the passage, PC has the upper hand over the principle of homophony and whenever needed, the latter should be modified to meet the implications of the first. Indeed, PC also reveals why we are always engaged in the process of translating even when we are listening to the speech of persons from our speech community. The noticeable distinctive point that Quine adds here to his explanation of PC is that our main reason for employing it is to keep communicating, which is precisely the same reason why we are, in the first place and as far as possible, forced to use the principle of homophony. That is why "[h]omophonic translation is implicit in this social method of learning. Departure from homophonic translation in this quarter would only hinder communication" (*ibid.*) Also the same is the case with ascribing the absurd or exotic sentences to the speaker. The primary purpose of translating and using language is to communicate. Unless we assume that the person we are talking with or going to talk is a rational one and speaks and behaves in a rational way, any communication will be rendered impossible.

2-2) the principle of psychological plausibility

Based on what has been said so far, it should have become clear that Quine doesn't explicate PC in terms of maximizing the truth in the subject's sayings, as Wilson does. This point makes some interpreters maintain that in Quine's philosophy PC signifies maximizing agreement rather than the truth. For example, Harman seeks to connect Quine's version of the PC with Dilthey's *Das Verstehen* (Harman, 1990). Pointing to the

similarity between his view and the concept of *Das Verstehen*, Quine disagrees with Harman on this interpretation, replying him that in translation

what we want to maximize in the general case is not truth, or agreement with us on the part of the native, but psychological plausibility according to our intuitive folk psychology. We are observing all the activities of our informants and their community that we can, insofar as they seem relevant. In view of the things that they do, we are perhaps prepared to adopt the hypothesis of animism with regard to them. This may provide more useful translation than we might get by trying to maximize truth. Even at the start in observation sentences we are looking for the likeliest course of behavior. The folk psychology involved is very much a matter of empathy, and does connect with hermeneutic line of Dilthey and others (Quine, 1990b: 158).

The principle of psychological plausibility allows the linguist to translate the native speaker's sentences into apparently false sentences in his own language, such as animistic statements about things, in case that, given the native's strange rituals and taboos, such translation is more rational than translating those into true sentences in our own language (see Quine, 1960: 77). Here the distinction between the absurd and exotic beliefs pops up. Animism or, for example, that "certain islanders are said to speak of pelicans as their half-brothers" (ibid.), is an exotic belief, which we also believe to be false, while negating that "it is raining" in the particular circumstances of rainy weather is an absurd belief, which is also false. Making contradictory statements or denying the obvious is a matter of uttering absurd beliefs that rationality demands us to avoid. However, the avoidance from attributing exotic beliefs to someone is relevant to the agreement between his systems of beliefs (as the speaker) and mine (as the translator) and the agreement between his worldview and mine. In the current case of animism or that "pelicans are the islander's half-brother or totem associate", we attribute a seemingly exotic and false belief from our point of view to the speaker in order not to attribute an absurd and false belief from our common point of view, since by attributing animism or pelican's being the islander's half-brother we are attributing an ultimately more coherent system of beliefs to him than by denying this attribution. In other words, it is more rational and plausible to attribute exotic beliefs to someone than to attribute absurd ones when it is possible for us to attribute either the first or the latter to him.

Ascribing false (or in our view, irrational) beliefs to the native speaker or, as in Quine's example, to the islander, is rested upon the fact that this ascription is "more rational" for us than ascribing true and rational beliefs to him. So, PC, as we described in the previous section, demands us not to ascribe false and irrational beliefs from our point of view to the speaker, and the principle of psychological plausibility demands us to attribute false and irrational beliefs from our point of view to the speaker. Both these demands are underlain by the acceptance of common rationality. In other words, even recognizing and ascribing irrationalities are made and permissible in virtue of common rationality. With this explication in mind, we can interpret the principle of psychological plausibility not as much a brand new principle as another version or formulation of PC as it is understood by Quine.

2-3) the principle of empathy

Besides employing PC, directly and indirectly, Quine introduces another concept that is closely related to PC: the principle of empathy. In the passage already quoted from Quine (in 1990b: 158), we saw that Quine connected the principle of psychological plausibility with empathy. These two principles are also mentioned together in the following passage:

The point in Word and Object was that the choice is not clinched by stimulus and response. But the translator wisely depends on empathy, on folk psychology, on projecting himself into the native's sandals. We assume others are like us until, getting evidence perhaps of weird animistic beliefs, we start making allowances and changing things (Quine, 1990c: 292).

The above hint to Word and Object refers to where he discusses PC in that book, which might mean that he also connects psychological plausibility and empathy with PC. Empathy, here defined as “projecting himself into the native's sandals”, is mainly applied in the case of translating the observation sentences. Having offered a few definitions for observation sentence in “Ontological Relativity”, Quine finally appeals to the concept of “community-wide acceptance” and defines it as: “An observation sentence is one on which all speakers of the language give the same verdict when given the same concurrent stimulation” (Quine, 1969a: 86-7). According to this definition, an observation sentence is one that is agreed on by all members of a speech community on the condition that all receive the same stimulation.

But the above definition of the observation sentence is not without its problems. The problem lies in the expression “receiving the same stimulation”. Since no one has access to another's sensory receptors as they are private, it is impossible to say that all have received or shared the same stimulation. Thus the stimulations are private, as well. The fact of our having the same stimulation is a matter of intersubjectivity and is impossible to be approved by appealing to subjective sensory receptors. To solve this problem, Quine says, “Davidson proposed providing for intersubjective likeness of stimulation by locating the stimulus not at the bodily surface but farther out, in the nearest shared cause of the pertinent behavior of the two subjects” (Quine, 1992:41). In Davidson's own words:

The location of a stimulus is, of course, notoriously ambiguous. We can place it almost anywhere in the causal chain that leads from far outside to various parts of the central nervous systems. Quine offers us a choice between two of possible locations: at the sensory receptors, or at the object and events our observations are typically about. There is no contradiction, needless to say, in acknowledging the role of any and every relevant causal factor in giving an account of learning, language learning included. But it makes a vast difference whether meaning and evidence are tied to the proximal or the distal stimulus (Davidson, 1990: 72-73)

So, Davidson's solution is to regard as the relevant cause of stimulation a worldly state of affairs, that is a distal cause, rather than a proximal cause at the boundary of the body. The merit of this suggestion is that things are not private and are available to everyone. But Quine holds a halfway position. He locates the cause of the stimulation in the sensory surface while saying that “Language is where intersubjectivity sets in.” (Quine, 1992: 44, see also Quine, 2004). Empathy here has the main role in providing this intersubjectivity. When the speaker utters a sentence in a situation, to understand this sentence the translator or interpreter supposes that what he would perceive and what he would say in case he was in the speaker's position. Considering this condition, he understands the speaker's sentence and evaluates its truth or falseness. As Quine says:

We all have an uncanny knack for empathizing another's perceptual situation [however ignorant of the psychological or optical mechanism of his perception]. The knack is comparable, almost, to our ability to recognize faces while unable to sketch or describe them (Quine, 1992: 44-5).

On the face of it, the function of empathy, in contrast to PC's function of maximizing the truth, is to maximize agreement or consensus. But Quine's account of the ground for the empathy and its possibility leads to the same ground of PC: that is, the common rationality. According to Quine, everyone, in the first place, has his own

subjective standards to perceive the perceptual similarity of his different situations. But what makes different subjects to realize the similarity among each other's situations, or, in other words, gives them the ability to empathize, is some "pre-established harmony" of perceptual similarity standards. To say that there is such a pre-established harmony of perceptual similarity standards, independent of the intersubjective likeness of receptors or sensations, is to say that if "two scenes trigger perceptually similar global stimuli in one witness, they are apt to do likewise in another" (Quine, 1995:21). And "the harmony is explained by a yet deeper, but more faltering preestablished harmony between perceptual similarity and the environment. This, in turn, is accounted for by natural selection" (Quine, 2004:170-1; see also Quine, 1995:21). He explains the role of natural selection in the formation of the latter harmony as follows:

We have, to begin with, an inductive instinct: we tend to expect perceptually similar stimulations to have sequels that are similar to each other. This is the basis of expectation, habit formation, and learning. Successful expectation has always had survival value Natural selection has accordingly favored innate standards of perceptual similarity which have tended to harmonize with trends in the environment. Hence the success, so much better than random, of our inductions and expectations (Quine, 2004:171).

So natural selection inculcates the individual's initial standards of perceptual similarity and because of "our shared ancestry and shared environment", these standards will tend to harmonize across a society. In virtue of this shared society and environment, "the changes in standards subsequent to birth will also tend to harmonize" (Quine, 1995: 21).

Accordingly, Quine, with his principle of empathy, attempts to offer a naturalistic account of our common rationality which makes it possible for us to assume that other subjects are also thinking and uttering sentences in a similar way. Quine introduces the expression of charity in almost his early years of philosophizing (1960's) while the expression of empathy doesn't appear in his works until his final years of philosophizing (1990's). However, they are to be regarded as two expressions of one underlying principle or notion. While the first emphasizes the negative aspect of that underlying notion, that is to avoid attributing irrational beliefs to other subjects, the latter is more positive in that it explains how we use our common rationality to achieve a better translation and understanding. Here Quine's main intention is to provide an objective, or rather intersubjective, ground for our subjective standards of perception of the world, and this way to provide a common horizon in which different subjects are allowed to ascribe their perceptual standards to each other.

2-4) The principle of projection

Quine, especially in *Word and Object*, makes use of another notion or principle, that of projection, which is very much akin to empathy. He applies this principle to the propositional attitudes and in particular to indirect quotations. In direct quotations of other's utterance "we report it almost as we might a bird call". In other words,

direct quotation merely reports the physical incident and leaves any implications to us. In indirect quotation, on the other hand, we project ourselves into what, from his remarks and other indications, we imagine the speaker's state of mind to have been, and then we say what, in our language, is natural and relevant for us in the state thus feigned. An indirect quotation we can usually expect to rate only as better or worse, more or less faithful, and we cannot even hope for a strict standard of more and less; what is involved is evaluation, relative to special purposes, of an essentially dramatic act (Quine, 1960: 200).

This is also the same in the case of other propositional attitudes, “for all of them can be thought of as involving something like quotation of one's imagined verbal response to an imagined situation” (ibid.). To get a clearer understanding of this principle and its relation with the previous ones we discussed so far, the distinction Daniel Dennett makes, in a debate about “how to play this dramatic interpretation game”, between various principles of interpretation is worth noting here. Dennett distinguishes the principles of interpretation into two kinds. One is the “Normative Principle, according to which one should attribute to a creature the propositional attitudes it ‘ought to have’ given its circumstances,” and the other is the “Projective Principle according to which one should attribute to a creature the propositional attitudes one supposed one would have oneself in those circumstances” (Dennett, 1987: 342-3). In rather non-technical terms we can say that in the case of the Normative Principle, the interpreter supposes that the speaker is in his shoes, while in the case of the Projective Principle he places himself in the position of the speaker.

Under the Normative Principle, Dennett puts the various subvarieties of the principle of charity, such as those by Davidson, Lewis, and his assumption of rationality. Quoting a passage from Quine's *Word and Object* (1960: 59), Dennett admits that “in any event, it all grows out of Quine's discussions of the need for such a principle in any exercise of radical translation” (Dennett, 1987: 343). Under the Projective Principle, Dennett puts Grandy's principle of humanity, later vigorously defended by Stich. Quoting another passage from Quine's *Word and Object* (1960: 59), he points out that Quine is also “the father of this principle as well”, making the oppositions between them at most “a matter of emphasis” (Dennett, 1987: 343-4). Quine's own words also approve this interpretation:

Casting our real selves thus in unreal roles, we do not generally know how much reality to hold constant. Quandaries arise. But despite them we find ourselves attributing beliefs, wishes, and strivings even to creatures lacking the power of speech, such is our dramatic virtuosity. We project ourselves even into what from his behavior we imagine a mouse's state of mind to have been, and dramatize it as a belief, wish, or striving, verbalized as seems relevant and natural to us in the state thus feigned (Quine, 1960: 219).

Dennett's distinction and Quine's explanation reveal two points in particular. First, what Quine basically means by “projection” is the same as that he was later going to mean by “empathy”, that is to place oneself in the position of the speaker or subject. Second, there is no real gap between projection and empathy, on the one hand, and PC, on the other. It is seemingly true that in the case of the application of PC, we are imposing our patterns of mind on the speaker's mind, and in the case of projection and empathy, we put ourselves in the speaker's shoes. Their difference, however, is just a matter of standpoint or emphasis and, as a matter of fact, in both projection and empathy we ultimately impose our patterns of mind on the speaker's mind and judge him based on our standards. And even more, we sometimes do the same in the case of non-human animals lacking in mind or mental power.

3) Conclusion

Our discussion so far shows that:

1) Quine's conception of PC is to some extent different from that of Wilson in that he puts more emphasis on rationality than truth.

2) Quine, contrary to Wilson, also attempts to provide a ground for his version of PC. He builds the maximization of the obvious truths on the foundation of maximizing rational beliefs, and the latter, under the guise of our common rationality, on the natural selection principle. This way PC fits well into his naturalized epistemology.

3) The four principles of charity, psychological plausibility, empathy, and projection have almost the same meaning in Quine's philosophy and their common function is to establish the common rationality underlying communication, speaking and human relations, which in principle makes all these possible. Their differences, therefore, mainly depend on change of standpoint or emphasis.

4) Rationality is a key concept in Quine's philosophy. Its importance, however, has been almost neglected. Taking into account the significance of rationality, it is possible to present a more consistent interpretation of Quine's philosophy in general which, in turn, prevents us from making any room for the skeptical, anti-rational, and anarchistic interpretations of his philosophy.

Phrases are the tools, means, and instruments of the philosophers. Therefore, the building blocks of effective and efficient philosophy consist of their special terms and jargons. It is this connotative (attitudinal, affective, emotional) side of meaning which makes their language more impressive and interesting. The philosophers use not only the core meaning (denotative meaning) of the words but also they use the additional meaning of the words. In this way, they can tactically and strategically convince and persuade as well as attract their audiences (readers and hearers). It is important to mention that sometimes one key word can provoke lots of thoughts and ideas. Socrates used to spend his days in Athens's marketplace and pose different and difficult questions. For instance, he asked, what is justice? What is courage? What is wisdom? What is temperance? What is friendship? What is virtue? What is knowledge? Therefore, any key words like the above-mentioned ones instigated people to gather around him to think deeply and hard and discuss about them. Therefore, words sometimes become the means and ways of thinking and acting. It is the words that move us beyond our current knowledge and make us to discover ideas and concepts more profoundly. In this universe we always try to seek, learn, and understand everything. As Plato contends, "Education isn't what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes ... the power to learn is present in every soul ..." (Cooper, Republic, 518b-c).

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