

# INSCRUTABILITY AND CORRESPONDENCE

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“Reference itself proves behaviorally inscrutable.”<sup>1</sup>

Most of us consider it a sensible enterprise to examine the relationship between words and things and the correspondence theory has been at the center of such examinations. It is this theory which Quine objects to in the above citation. The nature of Quine's argument, however, leads many astray. He provides a *reductio* argument against the correspondence theory and maintains that the consequence of this *reductio* is an “ontological relativity.” Many who examine Quine's view fail to recognize the *reductio* character of this argument and thus try to avoid this relativism by offering a modified correspondence theory.

In this paper I clarify Quine's *reductio* argument. First, I examine a recent attempt by a correspondence theorist, Hartry Field in “Quine and the Correspondence Theory,”<sup>2</sup> to avoid the relativity and inscrutability Quine argues for while defending the notion of a correspondence theory. Such a defense fails and in the second section I clarify this fact and show how Quine's *reductio* argument applies to all correspondence theories. A thoroughgoing application of this *reductio* forces one to cease asking “absolutistic” questions about reference and truth and I clarify this by considering an argument of James Cornman, in his “Reference and Ontology: Inscrutable But Not Relative.”<sup>3</sup> Cornman also fails to see the *reductio* character of Quine's argument and, thus, he too fails to see its full force. In the final section, I clarify what Quine finds to be the fundamental philosophical mistake in the correspondence theory and briefly characterize the relativism which he maintains is a consequence of the *reductio* argument. No attempt is made to defend the relativism completely here, only the first step in such a defense, an understanding of the problems of the correspondence theory, is offered. The virtue of such clarity is that it allows us to understand why Quine offers the relativism he does. Given the misunderstandings of this initial argument, such clarity is certainly desirable.

## I.

A traditional correspondence theory holds that for “The cat sat on the mat” to be true, there must be objects  $x$ ,  $y$ , and a relation  $R$  such that ‘cat’ denotes  $x$ , ‘mat’ denotes  $y$ , and ‘sitting upon’ signifies  $R$  while  $x$  bears  $R$  to  $y$ . The central feature of the correspondence theory is the utilization

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of correspondence relations between words, actions, or beliefs on the one hand, and nonlinguistic entities on the other to explain reference, truth, and meaning. According to the correspondence theorist, the correct analysis of these notions consists of a specification of the relationship between the words and the things which is determinate. S/he would specify what the “objects” are which we refer to with our actions, words, or beliefs and how these “objects” license our discourse.

Quine argues that if one accepts the correspondence model with its talk of relations and relata, one finds that no sense may be made of reference, truth or meaning. The problem with the correspondence theory is one of wealth rather than one of poverty. In seeking the determinate relations between words, actions, or beliefs, and non-linguistic objects Quine discovers that many alternative relationships suggest themselves as candidates. Furthermore, he argues that there is no behavioral justification for a choice among these alternatives. Since the correspondence theorist would make such a choice, and since there is no (behavioral) warrant for such a choice, Quine concludes that reference proves itself inscrutable. That is, one cannot tell which relationships are to hook up terms and things, and, hence, one cannot tell which things are referred to by a term.

Quine’s best known argument for the inscrutability of reference is his thesis that semantics is radically indeterminate. This indeterminacy thesis is introduced by the well-known gavagai example. We are to imagine a heretofore undiscovered tribe and consider the three native utterances “gavagai,” “potrzebie,” and “glub.” Since one is provided with the observations of the natives’ behavior and environment only (they are a new phenomenon for us), there is no fact of the matter as to whether:

- (i) “gavagai” signifies the set of rabbits, “potrzebie” the set of dinosaurs and “glub” the identity relation; or
- (ii) “gavagai” signifies the set of all undetached rabbit parts, “potrzebie” the set of undetached dinosaur parts, and “glub” the paridentity relation (that is, the relation of being undetached parts of the same object) (QCT, pp. 201-202).

The point of alternatives (i) and (ii) is that each codifies a different manual of translation. These manuals are distinct and incompatible—one says that the natives talk about rabbits and the other says they refer to rabbit stages. Moreover, each is consistent with the observations we may make. The search begun to find determinate relations between words, actions, or beliefs on the one hand, and nonlinguistic things on the other results in two differing and incompatible candidates. Since there is no behavioral evidence which would dictate a choice, and since behavioral evidence is all that counts, we are unable to determine what the natives are referring to. Their reference is inscrutable behaviorally.

Field develops an account of correspondence relations which is to take this indeterminacy into account:

For instance, the difficulty with the relation of signification was that we had to choose *between* saying that “gavagai” signified the set of rabbits and saying that “gavagai” signified the set of undetached rabbit parts, and that according to the indeterminacy thesis there is no physical basis for a choice. So to avoid having to make such a choice, why not introduce a new correspondence relation—call it “partial signification”—and say that the term “gavagai” bears this correspondence relation *both* to the set of rabbits *and* to the set of undetached rabbit parts? (Each of these sets will then be called partial extensions of the term “gavagai”; so even though the term has no extension, it has a number of different partial extensions) (QCT, pp. 203–204).

Field would define truth, reference, and meaning for his more generalized correspondence theory in terms of this notion of partial signification. According to him it is fairly clear that a term like ‘rabbit’ refers to some kind of “rabbitish entity” whether it be rabbits, undetached rabbit parts, or both. In place of the traditional notions of denotation and signification which fall prey to the referential problems indicated by the gavagai example, Field proposes substitution of the notion of partial signification. While the referent of ‘gavagai’ can not be pinned down to either rabbits or rabbit parts, it can be considered to be defined by both these sets because of the functional dependence of both ‘rabbit’ and ‘rabbit part’ on the term ‘is identical to’. That is, since the referent of a term can no longer be isolated and identified as a single thing, he proposes correspondence relations which identify more complicated things or sets of things as the referent(s) of terms.

These new correspondence relations depend upon a distinction between “dependent” and “independent” terms. The latter provide a basis for the former. Thus, ‘is identical to’ is the basis for both ‘rabbit’ and ‘rabbit part’. The latter two are dependent, while the former is independent. Given this independent term, we can gather together the dependent terms and thus speak meaningfully of partial significations:

A central concept we must employ is that of one term . . . being the basis of another . . . . We do not have to require in general that the basis always is independent, but we do have to require that if a term has a dependent term as its basis, then either the basis of the basis is independent, or the basis of *that* is independent . . . . Call this the *grounding requirement* (QCT, p. 217).

Field’s strategy, then, for avoiding the indeterminacy should be clear. He would recognize that simple correspondence relations are clearly impossible given the indeterminacy thesis. There can be no rationale for a choice between the various candidates such as (i) and (ii). This, however, does not preclude the notion of correspondence relations altogether. What is necessary is that all the candidates for the correspondence relation be drawn together and that we adhere to the notion of partial signification. The competing alternative manuals of translation of the native utterances may be gathered together in this fashion because the various divergent alternatives will be dependent

upon some central term, in Field's example a term of individuation and identity.

Underlying this approach is the following scenario. We are able to observe the natives and their environment. We can not determine, however, whether they refer to rabbits or to rabbit stages. Thus, we come to say that 'gavagai' has (at least two) partial extensions. The choice between these is dictated by the choice of the identity and individuation term. Relative to treating 'glub' as the identity relation the term 'gavagai' has to mean rabbits and not rabbit parts; while if we treat 'glub' as the paridentity relation the reverse is the case. Therefore, 'gavagai', 'potrzebie', etc., are dependent terms and the term 'glub' is independent. The extensions of the former terms are a function of the extension of the later. A successful correspondence theory must take this notion of functional dependence into account.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the correspondence theory is shown to be in need of alteration but not rejection on the basis of the indeterminacy argument. Having established that the correspondence theory is not threatened in a central manner by Quine's argument, Field goes on to examine the Quinean notion of ontological relativity. According to him, since Quine believes that his argument will not allow for any correspondence relations whatsoever, he is forced to adopt a relativism in accounting for reference, truth, and meaning—a relativism which substitutes word-word relations for the word-world relations allowed for by the correspondence theory:

On Quine's view there is no need to abandon all talk of what a foreign term like "*gavagai*" signifies: what we must do however is say that *relative to the obvious translation manual* it signifies the set of rabbits, and that *relative to the unobvious but nonetheless acceptable manual* it signifies the set of undetached rabbit parts. The central role that translation manuals play in Quine's semantics reflects the doctrine of ontological relativity: the view that it makes no sense to speak of "absolute" correspondence relations between words and extralinguistic objects, and that what does make sense is to say how one language or theory is translatable and retranslatable into another (QCT, pp. 205-206).

Field maintains that this notion of signification relative to translation manuals will not work as an alternative to the correspondence theory. It requires that Quine readopt the rejected notion of "absolute" signification. This is so because before one can make sense of signification relative to a given manual of translation the signification of that manual must be known. Yet this is exactly what Quine does not do. He says that one can not establish signification relations or any other correspondence relations between words and things—only word-word correlations are available. Quine maintains that nonrelativistic queries (e.g., those seeking word-world correlations) are like asking for absolute position or velocity rather than for the relativized notions. For Quine, our background language (the language one uses—one's home language) is to function as the frame of reference which we appeal to in our studies, and all denotation and signification is relative to this language. This relativism, as Field sees it, merely avoids the issue:

. . . whereas the relativized predicate “ $x$  has a velocity  $v$  relative to  $y$ ” is definable in terms of the spatial relations between  $x$  and  $y$  (viz., as the time derivative of the distance), the relativized predicate “ $T_1$  denotes  $x$  relative to  $T_2$ ” is not definable in terms of the linguistic relations between  $T_1$  and  $T_2$ . In fact . . . there is not hope of defining this last predicate at all unless we can establish a relation either between  $T_1$  or  $T_2$  on the one hand, and  $x$  (and no other object than  $x$ ) on the other. But this is just what the indeterminacy thesis precludes us from doing (QCT, p. 208 note).

If Quine’s relativism is to make any sense, he will have to establish clearly (and uniquely) the reference of the background language. Either  $T_1$  or  $T_2$  will need to be tied to  $x$  determinately via correspondence relations. Yet this is to presuppose the very notion of “absolute” correspondence relations which Quine would reject.

Thus, Field finds Quine’s response to the indeterminacy argument inadequate. The notion of signification relative to various manuals of translation and the notion of a background language (which are intended to provide sense to the notions of signification and denotation in light of the indeterminacy argument) rely upon the very notion of absolute signification they are to replace. Thus “absolute” correspondence relations are inevitable.

## II.

Quine’s *reductio* argument is introduced by the gavagai case discussed above. The process of examining a heretofore undiscovered linguistic community (radical translation) indicates the inscrutability of their terms and belies the traditional correspondence relations.<sup>5</sup> Quine’s argument, however, does not stop at this point. In “Ontological Relativity” he carries his argument two steps further before he arrives at the nonsense which concludes the *reductio*.

First, he asserts that this inscrutability is to be found in our ordinary discourse in English. He argues that there is nothing which forces us to translate our neighbor’s utterances into similar phonemes “in our own mouths.” The rendering of others’ words in this identical fashion he terms homophonic translation. Not only is it true that one occasionally disregards this method of translation (viz., “That’s cool”), but:

. . . we can systematically reconstrue our neighbor’s apparent references to rabbits as really references to rabbit stages, and his apparent references to formulas as really references to Gödel numbers and vice versa. We can reconcile all this with our neighbor’s verbal behavior, by cunningly readjusting our translations of his various connecting predicates so as to compensate for the switch in ontology. In short, we can reproduce the inscrutability of reference at home. It is of no avail to check on this fanciful version of our neighbor’s meanings by asking him, say, whether he really means at a certain point to refer to formulas or to their Gödel numbers; for our question and his answer . . . have lost their title to homophonic translation. The problem at home differs none from radical translation . . . except in the willfulness of this suspension of homophonic translation (OR, p. 47).

We are not ordinarily willing to engage in this suspension of homophonic translation. This fact, however, does not firmly establish the denotation of our neighbor’s discourse. The systematic reconstrual

imagined by Quine introduces the same inscrutability of reference which arose in the gavagai case. Given that one is limited to one's observations of the neighbor's linguistic behavior and environment, the behavioral evidence available is not adequate for the distinction we wish to draw between the normal or homophonic translation and the more convoluted variety proposed above. As in the gavagai case, one is presented with several choices and no grounds for making a choice. The determinate relations of correspondence which one desires are insupportable on the available evidence.

Quine carries this argument one step further. He asserts that the inscrutability applies to oneself. He invites his readers to consider their own sets of terms. Just as it is possible to discard the homophonic translation in the case of one's neighbor, so it is possible to consider a complete reconstrual of one's own denotations—a reconstrual which fully accords with all one's speech dispositions. This reconstrual which has one refer to rabbit parts, or rabbit stages, when one would normally insist that the reference is to rabbits, to Gödel numbers rather than formulas, etc., is fully in accord with the behavioral evidence; and on the basis of this fact, it is impossible to decide between the various alternatives. One can not tell what it is that one is referring to.

Here nonsense seems to have arisen as the consequence of Quine's argument. This is as it should be for he has offered a *reductio*. It is impossible to tell what one is referring to, as long as the correspondence theory is the model for reference. Quine puts his point in the following manner:

We begin to appreciate that a grand and ingenious permutation of these denotations, along with compensatory adjustments in the interpretations of the auxiliary particles, might still accommodate all existing speech dispositions. This was the inscrutability of reference, applied to ourselves, and it made nonsense of reference. Fair enough; reference is nonsense except relative to a coordinate system. In this principle or relativity lies the resolution to our quandary (OR, p. 48).

Thus, it is in this nonsense that Quine sees both the resolution of the problem of reference and the final blow to the notion of correspondence relations (whether partial or whole).

Correspondence theorists first distinguish linguistic and nonlinguistic objects and attempt to construct determinate correspondence relations between them which explain reference. Quine points out, however, that once this distinction is allowed, it is always possible to attribute several distinct relations rather than one. This richness is an indication of the poverty of the correspondence theory since the various distinct possibilities are all on an equal evidential basis yet are referentially incompatible. Thus, there are no grounds upon which one may assert that one alternative is correct—yet the theory requires unique, determinate relations. Therefore, the acceptance of the correspondence theory (which was to explain reference) leaves us incapable of explaining reference. Its richness of alternative, incompatible cor-

correspondence relations makes reference (behaviorally) inscrutable. This is the *reductio*.<sup>6</sup>

Field would circumvent Quine's argument by broadening the correspondence relations. The difficulty with his proposal lies in his demand for a basis predicate—in his grounding requirement. If one considers a case like the gavagai case and discovers the basis predicates Field desires, it is always possible to devise still other reconstructions which have these same predicates as dependent predicates. That is, Field tells us that “. . . if 'is identical with' were a word for identify, then 'rabbit' would signify the set of rabbits, and that if 'is identical with' were a word for paridentity, then 'rabbit' would signify the set of undetached rabbit parts” (QCT, p. 216). But what picked 'is identical with' out for special attention? What makes it a likely basis? Upon it the relationship of partial signification and denotation may rest, but what does it rest upon? As he notes, we need not require that each basis predicate be “independent,” but if a basis of several terms is itself “dependent,” it must rely upon a basis which is, ultimately, independent. How are independent bases recognized? Such terms would have to be ones where there were no alternatives—no multiplicity of possible word-world relations.<sup>7</sup>

This grounding requirement functions to reduce the richness of the alternative theories or possible referents to a singularity. It is precisely this move which the indeterminacy thesis questions—Quine denies that there are *any* independent or basis terms in the sense required by the grounding requirement. The whole point of the radical translation case was that we have no “logical” beginning point—just because the whole matrix of linguistic behavior is new to us. We are restricted to behavioral evidence here—a restriction which Quine continues to recommend in the cases of our neighbors and ourselves. This evidence is inadequate to the task of specifying determinate correspondence relations.

It may, indeed, clash with our inclinations to construe 'gavagai' or 'is identical with' in the “undetached” manner rather than as “normal.” Yet this is not to the point. The point is that all such alternatives are on an evidential par. The choice between them is underdetermined. But there is more than normal scientific underdeterminacy of theory by evidence at stake here. What is to be noted is that the notion of determinacy is not merely an elusive goal, rather it is a nonsensical one. One begins by maintaining that there is such determinacy and that a correct analysis of truth, meaning, and reference relies upon the specification of determinate and unique relations of denotation or partial denotation. One discovers that, in attempting to specify such relations and relata, there is a richness of alternatives and no procedure to reduce this chronic richness to a singularity. Determinacy is not to be had. Nor does it help to expand the sort of “things” one considers as relata here, the richness still results. The determinate correspondence relations provided for by the correspondence theory are not forthcoming and they are not because the very notion of correspondence relations provided for by the theory

allows for a plurality rather than a determinacy. This, then is the indeterminacy—the statement that there is no such sort of relation between words and world. It is not merely that the theory is underdetermined by the evidence, but that the relation of determinacy does not apply in this case. The relation between words and world is not one which may properly be characterized by correspondence relations (whether partial or otherwise).<sup>8</sup>

But positively, Quine argues that reference is behaviorally inscrutable and that this is the case whether one is discussing others or oneself. Thus, reference is essentially relative:

It is meaningless to ask this absolutely; we can meaningfully ask it only relative to some background language. When we ask, “Does ‘rabbit’ really refer to rabbits?” someone can counter with the question “Refer to rabbits in what sense of ‘rabbits?’” thus launching a regress; and we need the background language to regress into. The background language gives the query sense, if only relative sense; sense relative in turn to it . . . (OR, pp. 48-49).

There can be no ground or justification for correspondence relations. Any attempt to treat one set of relations as privileged—any assignment of one set of relations as ultimate, independent, or basic ones—ignores the fact that other relations are equally entitled to this role. Correspondence relations are unable to do the determinate job they are assigned and, thus, we are forced to recognize that reference is relative.

James Cornman, in his “Reference and Ontology: Inscrutable But Not Relative,” maintains that we can hold to the inscrutability established by Quine without being forced to accept this ontological relativity.<sup>9</sup> From the fact that we are unable to determine whether alternative (i) or (ii) obtains, Cornman notes, there are three possible inferences:

In general, if there is no way to determine whether *a* has relation *R* to *b* or to *c*, given that all relevant evidence and tests for theories do not determine a theory that yields one result or the other, then one of three things is true: Either *a* having *R* to *b* is the same as *a* having *R* to *c*, or they are different but there is no way to discover to which entity *a* is related, or it is mistaken to claim *a* has relation *R* to something, because there is nothing that has such a relationship (INR, p. 367).

According to him it is only when one adds “positivism” to inscrutability that one is led, as Quine is, to the third alternative. If we hold to a verificationist theory of meaning then our inability to settle the question between (i) and (ii), given all the evidence, forces us to conclude that the question is a senseless one.

Cornman questions whether we should accept the positivistic premiss. With Carnap he would draw a distinction between “internal” and “external” questions.<sup>10</sup> “Internal” questions are questions about the application of rules which are accepted by a group of individuals. Such questions are, indeed, relative—they make sense only relative to a background of accepted rules and practices. “External” questions, on the other hand, deal with the advisability of the adoption of a given set of rules. In asking such questions we are no longer asking relative



questions. We may have all the evidence and be unable to determine whether  $aRb$  or  $aRc$  obtains. Nevertheless, there is a fact of the matter.

Cornman recognizes that Quine rejects Carnap's distinction between "internal" and "external" questions. However he maintains that Quine's "positivism" is at the basis of this denial (INR, p. 370). If it is denied, one may accept all the arguments for inscrutability without accepting the relativity of reference. Meaningful "external" questions (which ask whether  $aRb$  is different from  $aRc$  and which sort of thing  $a$  is related to) are possible:

There is a difference between "Should we use ' $R$ ' in language  $L$ ?" and "Are there  $R$ 's?" that . . . requires only a distinction between practical questions and factual questions. This is the basis for the contrast Carnap urges (INR, p. 369).

I believe it is the asking of such questions which prompts Quine to offer his account of the radical translation situation. We are to imagine we are confronted with a situation wherein we have no clues or cues as to the behavior of the natives. What, then, do we have to go on as we attempt to comprehend their activities? Here, Quine points out, the behavioral evidence is all we have and it yields indeterminacy. His verificationism, then, is not an extraneous philosophical hypothesis added to his inscrutability argument, rather it is a limitation he is forced to accept in considering how we determine reference in the case of radical translation. In carrying the indeterminacy home to our linguistic neighbors and to ourselves Quine maintains that we must carry this evidential restriction along. Still Cornman seems right here: shouldn't one say that while we can't (even in principle) determine which alternative obtains, we can still ask the question?

Quine's *reductio* argument is offered to show the senselessness of such "external" questions. The correspondence theorist would talk of word-world relationships. 'Cats' and cats, 'mats' and mats are the sorts of pairs s/he would offer to ground truth and reference. The indeterminacy argument shows that alternative sets of relationships exist and that this multiplicity is chronic. The second alternative offered by Cornman offers scant comfort to the correspondence theorist for the anchoring function is obviated by the multiplicity of incompatible relationships. The "external" questions as to the distinctness or correctness of evidentially equivalent alternative models of translation or referential models do not address the needs which are to be met.

The multiplicity of equally adequate but incompatible answers coupled with our complete lack of warrant for a choice among them indicates that there is something wrong with the "external" questions themselves.<sup>11</sup> The indeterminacy argument does not show that these questions have many answers and that we are unable to determine the correct answer in each case. Rather, the argument states that the richness of alternatives belies the meaningfulness of these questions. Determinate relations are not available but are required by the

correspondence theory which asks such questions as it seeks to characterize reference.

The external questions make sense only when one ignores the *reductio* argument. This argument itself relies upon “positivistic” (I think “pragmatic” would be more appropriate) considerations and if these evidential limitations are accepted, the *reductio* runs its course and absolute queries of reference are without sense. If one accepts the argument for inscrutability, Quine maintains, one is stuck with the consequence that “external” questions no longer make sense.

In short, Quine’s reply to Cornman’s defense of the second alternative would be that the distinctions between “internal” and “external” questions (factual and practical questions) is one which requires an absolutistic notion of truth and reference. He has argued against such an assumption and would accept the relativistic consequence. No added positivistic premiss is required, rather only a realization of the *reductio* character of the senselessness of talk like that involved in Cornman’s alternative.

### III.

Cornman would accept the inscrutability of reference but deny its relativity. He would do so by denying the “positivistic” or verificationistic premiss which he feels Quine adds to his inscrutability argument to yield relativism. He is led in this direction because he fails to recognize the *reductio* character of Quine’s argument. Quine maintains that his argument establishes that absolutistic referential queries (external questions) are senseless. This claim is, in part, based upon his acceptance of a form of verificationism. However this acceptance occurs at the level of the inscrutability argument. The *reductio* argument notes that the supposition of correspondence relations between words and world yields a chronic multiplicity and, ultimately, an inability to account for reference. The notion of correspondence relations and external questions, then, is to be rejected. The consequence of this is an acceptance of a relativism. This relativism is stated concisely in this passage:

We can improve our conceptual scheme, our philosophy, bit by bit while continuing to depend upon it for support; but we cannot detach ourselves from it and compare it objectively to an unconceptualized reality. Our standard for appraising basic changes of conceptual scheme must be, not a realistic standard of correspondence to reality, but a pragmatic standard.<sup>12</sup>

The correspondence theory relies upon the notion of an objective comparison of one’s ideas, concepts, or conceptual scheme to an unconceptualized reality or set of independently real objects. Behind the discussion of such relations of correspondence lies the notion that one can somehow transcend one’s own set of ideas (one’s conceptual scheme) and examine externally and objectively such relations. Quine

holds that it is impossible for us to detach ourselves from our present scheme.<sup>13</sup>

This does not mean that we must discard the distinction between scheme and reality. What we must discard is the perspective of “first philosophy” and the vantage point on reference sought by the correspondence theorist. Deprived of an external vantage point from which questions of reference and truth might be settled we are forced into the position of Neurath’s sailors who must rebuild their ship while at sea.<sup>14</sup> That is, the immediate consequence of the *reductio* argument is a confinement to our conceptual scheme which renders senseless such questions as “What (absolutely speaking) does ‘rabbit’ mean?” In place of word-world queries we are to settle for word-word queries.

To view this relativism as a phenomenalistic position (which maintains that reality is unknown, and that all one may aspire to attain is “convenient fictions”) is a mistake however. From an epistemological point of view, the posits of a conceptual scheme seem to be merely posits. One must not, however, forget that this is the case only relative to the epistemological point of view:

To call a posit a posit is not to patronize it. A posit can be unavoidable except at the cost of other no less artificial expedients. Everything to which we concede existence is a posit from the standpoint of a description of the theory-building process, and simultaneously real from the standpoint of the theory that is being built. Nor let us look down on the standpoint of the theory as make-believe; for we can never do better than to occupy the standpoint of some theory, or other, the best we can muster at the time.<sup>15</sup>

The crucial point here is that we are always theorizing from the standpoint of an accepted conceptual scheme. We do not build theories from scratch, rather, we rebuild and change our present scheme. Its posits are not hypothetical, make-believe substitutes for concepts which would adequately copy or correspond to reality. Rather, these posits embody what we mean by ‘real’:

Unbemused by philosophy, we would all go along with Dr. Johnson, whose toe was his touchstone of reality. Sheep are real, unicorns not. Clouds are real, the sky (as a solid canopy) not. Odd numbers are perhaps real, but prime even numbers other than 2 not. Everything, of course, is real; but there are sheep and there are no unicorns, there are clouds and there is (in the specified sense of the term) no sky, there are odd numbers and there are no even primes other than 2. Such is the ordinary usage of the word ‘real’, a separation of the sheep from the unicorns.<sup>16</sup>

This held theory, then, is the repository of our distinctions between myth and reality. It is slowly acquired during a lengthy socially controlled process wherein certain beliefs, dispositions, and distinctions are inculcated in the individual. Among other things, a language is learned. In learning the various terms and phrases involved each individual comes to hold a theory of reference.

For us the distinction between “real” and “imaginary” beings is one which cuts across cats and unicorns. Were we, upon an archaeological

dig, to uncover the bones of a winged horse, then this distinction would, in part, come into question. Note, however, that the whole distinction would not (necessarily) come into question—we would not have qualms about saying, for example, that we had used real shovels. While we may query the referentiality or truth of various components of the scheme, the scheme itself cannot be so questioned—for it is the standard which we need and use to make such pronouncements.

According to Quine, our conceptual scheme is a complex array of statements and dispositions to affirm. It is continually exposed to multiple challenges supplied by the demands for simplicity, conservatism, adherence to accepted standards, and revisions in the face of failures of prediction and explanation. These forces may bring about changes in the held theory. The correspondence theorist would evaluate the changes by determining what relations did, in fact, obtain. World-word correlations would, then, be examined. As the initial citation in this section indicated, Quine would evaluate such changes pragmatically.

Lacking the ability to judge word-world relations we must, Quine maintains, settle for a relativistic evaluation—one which provides us with standards which we may utilize to settle questions of truth and reference. As theory-builders, or epistemologists, we recognize that this held theory is subject to change and improvement. However the changes must be ones which alter one aspect of the held theory while preserving still other aspects. This duality is forced on us by the *reductio* argument which shows the deficiencies in the correspondence theory.

The consequence of the *reductio* argument then is a new perspective on the enterprise of the epistemologist. The recommendation is that we recognize that each individual is both a theory-holder and a theory-builder and that we recognize that it is in the held theory that our roots of reference lie. Rather than studying the correspondence relations between the word and world we are left with the task of examining our terms and their reference from within. Individuals who investigate their conceptual scheme from within recognize that they must perform a complex juggling act balancing roles as both an epistemologist and theory-holder. While they recognize the function of conceptual schemes and the fiction of the posits (*qua* epistemologists), and the fact that these may change (*qua* scientists), they must not ignore the role which provides the coin of epistemology (the distinction between myth and reality which they have *qua* theory-holders) and the procedure of science with their sense. The theory they hold both makes these investigations possible by grounding these notions and it restricts the investigations by denying sense to any transcendent investigation requiring instead that the investigations be conducted from within.

Quine's relative empiricism, then, would avoid the traditional correspondence theory and its emphasis on one's role as a theory-builder. He also stresses one's status as a theory-holder. It is this role that assigns sense to the notions of truth and reference. This status is one

that is subject to scientific investigation and the epistemologist is one such investigator. According to Quine, paradox, nonsense, and philosophical error arise when we ignore the duality of the roles which are imposed upon us by our status as both theory-builders and theory-holders. A forthright recognition of this duality, however, generates an unavoidable relativism.

I have not undertaken a defense of this relativism—that is a long story in its own right. However the denial of the correspondence theory, surely, plays a large role in such a defense and it is this denial and its consequence which I have attempted to clarify here. A fullfledge defense of this relativism would involve a discussion of many other arguments both for and against Quine. But if the correspondence theory survives the *reductio* argument such additional considerations would not have the force Quine attributes to them. Thus an understanding of this *reductio* argument is a necessary first step to an understanding of what Quine is about.<sup>17</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Quine, W. V., "Ontological Relativity," in Quine's *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1969, p. 35. All further citations to this article are indicated by "OR" and the page number in the body of the text.

<sup>2</sup> Field, H., "Quine and The Correspondence Theory," *The Philosophical Review*, LXXXIII (1974), pp. 200-228. All further citations to this article are indicated by "QCT" and the page number.

<sup>3</sup> Cornman, J., "Reference and Ontology: Inscrutable But Not Relative," *The Monist*, LIX (1976), pp. 353-372. All further citations to this article are indicated by "INR" and the page number.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Leeds (in his "How to Think About Reference," *Journal of Philosophy*, LXX (1973), pp. 485-503) offers a similar defense of the correspondence theory in the face of Quine's arguments. According to Leeds a theoretical term is "incomplete" if it has elementary inequivalent models. He notes that the indeterminacy thesis shows that "refers" is incomplete. Faced with this fact he argues that we settle for a notion of "reference schemes" which incorporate all the various adequate translational manuals. Leeds maintains that this plurality does not seriously affect the issue of word-world relations of correspondence. It does indicate that we will make arbitrary choices among the various adequate alternatives, but this does not establish that no alternative is correct. The reply to his defense is similar to that offered in the second section below to Field's views. Cf., also footnote 8 below.

<sup>5</sup> One set of mistaken interpretations of Quine's argument stems from a failure to note what the indeterminacy argument proves. According to Quine in "On the Reasons For the Indeterminacy of Translation," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1970, pp. 178-183, this argument is really one for the inscrutability of terms. That is, it is but the first stage of the *reductio* argument detailed below. Many who attempt to interpret this argument end up misinterpreting it because they fail to note (or misconstrue) its point. Cf., also footnote 8 below.

<sup>6</sup> R. Double, in his "Quine and the Determinateness of Reference," *Kinesis* VII (1977) pp. 49-61, argues that there is a determinacy of reference forthcoming if one considers not only the speakers' behavior, but also their intentions. Thus the point noted above that reference is *behaviorally* inscrutable is most important. Quine, of course, would not agree that there is anything we could add to behavior here as we seek determinacy. The *gavagai* case is, I think, offered to bring to the fore just this point. In the radical translation situation we are without clues or cues as to the intentions, beliefs, sacred truths, etc., of the

natives and these cannot be of any aid as we seek determinate word-world relations for their "language." Quine, of course, would extend this evidential limitation to our nearer linguistic neighbors and to ourselves.

Field asserts that the dependent predicates are "... predicates whose extension is a function of the extension of another predicate ..." (QCT, p. 217). It is this functional dependency of the dependent predicate upon its basis which is to ground the relations of partial correspondence. This grounding requirement functions to guarantee that the basis predicate may not (ultimately) be itself a dependent predicate. This is most important for Field. If the ultimate basis of a predicate is itself a dependent predicate, then there is no way to specify the relations of partial correspondence; for the extension of the dependent predicate is a function of the extension of the basis predicate and if the extension of the basis predicate is indeterminate, there is no way to specify (even partially) the extension of the dependent term. Ultimately, then, there must be predicates which "have no alternatives"—where there is no multiplicity of word-world relations.

<sup>8</sup> One of the virtues of Field's argument is that it allows us to see clearly what Quine claims. Quine argues that the presupposition of determinate correspondence relations is one which leads to nonsense. The point is that (given the restriction to behavioral evidence) there is no sense to the notion of determinate correspondence relations. He is not asserting that either the predicates denote things of sort A or they denote things of sort B, and that we cannot tell which theory is the correct one because of the weakness of the evidence. Rather, he is asserting that, given the correspondence theory, the notion of the truth of the theory breaks down altogether—nothing can count as evidence. This theory, then, is a myth he would expose—one which presents a powerful, but terribly misleading picture of reference and truth. The indeterminacy is not merely normal underdeterminacy, it is additional. In the case of underdeterminacy it makes sense to ask of two theories, A and B, "Which is correct?" But here, in the case of the correspondence theory, Quine is questioning the very sense of the question. "The question whether ... the foreigner *really* believes A or believes B, is a question whose very significance I would put in doubt. This is what I am getting at in arguing the indeterminacy of translation" (Quine, in "On the Reasons For the Indeterminacy of Translation," *op. cit.*, pp. 180-181).

<sup>9</sup> Here, again, the argument of Leeds is relevant. Cf., footnote 4 above.

<sup>10</sup> A fuller discussion of this problem occurs in Quine's "On Carnap's Views on Ontology," in Quine's *The Ways of Paradox*, Random House, New York, New York, 1966, pp. 126-134.

<sup>11</sup> Cf., footnote 8 above.

<sup>12</sup> Quine, W. V., "Identity, Ostension, and Hypostasis," in Quine's *From a Logical Point of View*, Harper and Row, New York, New York, 1961, p. 79.

<sup>13</sup> In demanding the external point of view the correspondence theorist adheres to what Quine calls the "myth of the museum" (OR, p. 27). This myth is a mistaken underlying picture of reference and truth which encourages the correspondence theorist to seek determinate word-world relations. The cosmic exile which is encouraged by this myth is something he frequently inveighs against.

<sup>14</sup> Cf., Neurath, O., "Protocol Sentences," in Ayer, A. J. (ed.), *Logical Positivism*, Macmillan, New York, New York, 1959, p. 201; and Quine, W. V., *Word and Object*, M. I. T. Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Quine, W. V., *Word and Object*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Quine, W. V., "On Mental Entities," in Quine's *The Ways of Paradox*, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>17</sup> I would like to express my debt to Robert Barrett for the many insights into Quine's thoughts he provided, and to the referee for this Journal whose comments forced me to clarify my understanding of Quine's arguments. Neither individual was able to correct all my mistakes and I claim full responsibility for them.