

Quine on Ethics

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1. INTRODUCTION

W.V. Quine has expressed a fairly conventional form of non-cognitivism in those of his writings that concern the status of moral judgments. For instance, in Quine (1981), he argues that ethics, as compared with science, is ‘methodologically infirm’. The reason is that while science is responsive to observation, and therefore ‘retains some title to a correspondence theory of truth’ (p. 63), ethics lacks such responsiveness. This in turn leads Quine to contrast moral judgments with judgments that make cognitive claims (i.e., judgments that are true or false). In Quine (1986), he argues that ‘[m]oral judgments differ [...] from cognitive ones in their relation to observation’ (p. 664).¹

Quine’s argument for the claim that moral judgments are not responsive to observation, and therefore lack cognitive content, involves two main premises. First, no moral judgments qualify as observation sentences.² Second, moral judgments contribute nothing to theories that are testable against *non-moral* observation sentences.³ In what follows, I accept the second claim, and focus mainly on the first. I shall argue that both the plausibility of this claim, and its relevance to the view that moral judgments lack cognitive content, may be questioned, even if we grant that moral judgments contribute nothing to theories that are testable against non-moral observation sentences.⁴

2. OBSERVATION SENTENCES

If consistency over time is a desirable trait of a philosopher, there is ground for complaint against Quine, at least as far as the notion of an observation sentence is concerned. Quine has offered a multitude of

suggestions as to how observationality should be defined. Only some of these can be surveyed here.

In the case of one condition of observationality, however, he has remained loyal. Observation sentences are *occasion sentences*. They are accepted on some occasions, and rejected on others.⁵ Typical examples are ‘It’s raining’, ‘That’s a rabbit’, and so forth. But this is just a necessary condition. Some occasion sentences are not observational (e.g., ‘He’s a bachelor’). So we need to know what further conditions must be met.

It is important to notice that Quine really deals with two distinct notions of observationality. He offers one definition of observationality for a single speaker, and another of observationality for a group. In Quine (1981), he gives the following definition of the former notion:

If querying the sentence elicits assent from the given speaker on one occasion, it will elicit assent likewise on any other occasion when the same total set of receptors is triggered; and similarly for dissent. This and this only is what qualifies sentences as observation sentences for the speaker in question [...].⁶

Quine’s suggestion could be stated in terms of the notion of *stimulus meaning*. The stimulus meaning of a sentence for a given individual is the ordered pair of the set of all stimulations that would prompt her to accept the sentence and the set of all stimulations that would rather prompt dissent,⁷ where the *stimulation* an individual undergoes on a particular occasion is the (temporally ordered) set of all those of her sensory receptors that are triggered on that occasion.⁸ According to the present suggestion, then, a sentence is observational for a speaker A only if its stimulus meaning for A is somewhat stable over time (from occasion to occasion).⁹

But unless we take the term ‘stable’ very lightly, this requirement is too strong. For consider the sentence ‘That’s a rabbit’, and imagine a person following a rabbit through the bushes.¹⁰ It is plausible to assume that the stimulus meaning of ‘That’s a rabbit’ for this person might

continuously change during her chase (in the course, we may say, of her learning more about the particular rabbit), so that, at the end, a poor glimpse would prompt assent, even if it would have left her undecided at the beginning. Still, 'That's a rabbit' is classified by Quine as typically observational.¹¹

In more recent writings, however, it turns out that Quine does not, after all, take stability of stimulus meaning to be a prerequisite of observability. In these passages he suggests that in order for a sentence to be observational for a single speaker, it is sufficient that she is disposed to assent to the sentence (or dissent) immediately and unreflectively on the spot, when certain receptors are triggered.¹² For instance, in Quine (1993), he says that '[w]hat qualifies sentences [...] as observational for a given individual is just his readiness to assent outright on the strength of appropriate neural intake' (p. 108). This is what I in what follows take to be Quine's current view on observability for a single speaker.

Let us say that if a sentence is observational for a given speaker *A*, then it satisfies Quine's *subjective* condition for *A*. Quine employs this condition in defining observability for a group. But he also imposes a *social* condition. The social condition is satisfied by a given sentence with respect to a certain a group if, on any occasion, it would command the same verdict from all members of the group.¹³ In Quine (1992), the complete definition is stated as follows: A sentence is 'observational for a group if it is observational for each member, *and* if each would agree in assenting to it, or dissenting, on witnessing the occasion of utterance' (p. 43).

Quine often points out that a sentence may be observational for a group that is smaller than the group of *all* competent speakers of the language to which it belongs,¹⁴ where membership in the wider group is conceived in terms of 'fluency of dialogue'.¹⁵ Thus, 'Hydrogen sulfide is escaping' may qualify as observational for the group of all English-speaking chemists even if it is not observational for all speakers of English. However, Quine is still inclined to attach a special significance to sentences that are observational for the wider group. One reason appears

to be that by requiring that the social condition is satisfied for the entire linguistic community, Quine filters out sentences the verdicts upon which do not only depend on stimulation but also on idiosyncratic bits of collateral information (e.g., ‘He’s a bachelor’).¹⁶ Accordingly, Quine insists ‘on adhering to the broad linguistic community for the philosophical criterion, thus not counting the specialist’s recondite sentence as an observation sentence in the strict sense’.¹⁷

Closely related to the social condition is another trait that Quine thinks is characteristic of observation sentences, namely that such sentences can be learned by *ostension*. In fact, sometimes Quine seems to think that this condition is more basic than the social condition. In Quine (1975), he writes:

The really distinctive trait of observation terms and sentences is to be sought not in concurrence of witnesses but in ways of learning. Observational expressions are expressions that can be learned ostensively. [...] The behavioral manifestation of observability, then, namely, the ready concurrence of witnesses, serves merely as a rough practical criterion (p. 316).

Notice that the claim that learnability by ostension is the distinctive trait of observation sentences conflicts with the view that a sentence qualifies as observational only if it satisfies Quine’s social condition for the entire linguistic community. To learn a sentence by ostension is, roughly, to be conditioned to associate it with, and to accept it in, certain observable circumstances, a process that is enforced and encouraged by veteran speakers of the language.¹⁸ Now, consider the one word sentence ‘Mama’.¹⁹ This sentence is often learned by ostension.¹⁹ However, it does not satisfy the social condition for any substantial group, since we all have different mothers. I shall return to this conflict and its implications.

3. ARE THERE MORAL OBSERVATION SENTENCES?

Whether there are any moral sentences that qualify as observation sentences might seem to depend on which sentences we count as moral.

However, Quine does not make any attempt to delimit these sentences in any precise way. He simply focuses on some examples that he takes to be paradigmatic, and I shall follow his example.

Obviously, some moral sentences are also occasion sentences—consider sentences such as ‘He’s wicked’, ‘That’s morally bad’, and so forth. It seems equally obvious that many moral occasion sentences satisfy Quine’s *subjective* condition for many individuals. The subjective condition is satisfied by a given sentence and a given individual if it commands her outright assent, or dissent, when she is appropriately stimulated. Now, consider (to use one of Quine’s own examples) the sentence ‘That’s outrageous’. If a person is well brought up, then she will be prompted to accept this sentence when confronted with the scene of a man that tortures a child, and prompted to dissent when confronted with most other scenes.²⁰ Of course, second thoughts and further investigation may, *after* the event of stimulation, lead the person to reevaluate her initial verdict (maybe the observer is a utilitarian, with strange ideas about how to maximize happiness). But, as Quine frequently points out, the same holds for *all* observation sentences.²¹

Nevertheless, the idea that there are moral sentences that satisfy the subjective condition can be questioned. According to one objection, even if an individual might be prompted to accept ‘That’s outrageous’ by some stimulations, and prompted to reject it by others, many stimulations would leave her undecided. For instance, suppose that she is confronted with the scene of a man who hits another man. Since she might be uncertain of whether the man in question only tries to defend himself against an unjustified attack, it might not command a verdict upon ‘That’s outrageous’.

But the same holds, again, for all occasion sentences. Consider, e.g., the sentence ‘That’s red’, a sentence that Quine classifies as typically observational.²² It seems clear that there are, for any individual, borderline cases that would neither prompt assent, nor dissent. Thus, it is clearly implausible to require that a sentence is observational for an individual only if no stimulations would leave her undecided.

A second objection is provided by Jay Campbell. Campbell argues that the reason why moral sentences do not qualify as observational is that moral occasion sentences are not conditioned to *distinctive* ranges of sensory intake. Campbell writes:

Some sensory stimulation is necessary to prompt a moral occasion sentence (since it is an occasion sentence), but no *distinctive* pattern of stimulation is associated with it. The specific pattern of triggered receptors is clearly *incidental* to the utterance of the sentence. To see this, consider the moral occasion sentence ‘That’s evil’. Evil, even patent evil, can be manifested in such a diverse variety of actions and types of actions that no distinctive patterns of *sensory* receptors can be associated with the sentence in such a way that ‘That’s evil’ would be affirmed *when and pretty much only when* those sensory receptors are triggered.²³

It is not easy to see what is the gist of Campbell’s argument. Campbell is of course right in saying that evil can be manifested in different ways. This means that the stimulations that might prompt an individual to accept ‘That’s evil’ are likely to be very dissimilar (in the sense that they may involve different sets of receptors). But Quine has never said that the stimulations that prompt an individual to accept an observation sentence must be, as he puts it, ‘receptually similar’.²⁴ For instance, consider the sentence ‘That’s a rectangle’. This sentence is likely to be prompted by stimulations that are very dissimilar, since ‘the retinal projection of the rectangle will range from a rectangle to various extremes of trapezoid and parallelogram’ (Quine (1995), p. 19). However, it can still qualify as an observation sentence.²⁵

Campbell suggests that in the case of ‘That’s evil’ there is no distinct set of sensory receptors such that an individual is disposed to accept this sentence ‘*when and pretty much only when* those sensory receptors are triggered’. Perhaps his point is that whether a given stimulation would prompt a speaker to accept ‘That’s evil’ is likely to change over *time* (since her views about what *is* evil might change). However, as we saw,

stability or constancy of stimulus meaning could not, plausibly, be seen as a requirement of observationality. Thus, Campbell's objection fails to show that no moral occasion sentences satisfy Quine's subjective condition.

Consider next the view that the distinctive trait of observation sentences is that they can be learned by *ostension*. It seems to me that this condition is also met by many moral occasion sentences. Indeed, I suggest that this is the *normal* way for a child to learn her first moral sentences, such as 'That's not allowed', and so forth. A child normally learns such sentences by learning to accept and reject them in the kind of circumstances in which her parents accept and reject them. Of course, these may not be the same circumstances as those in which *other* members of the linguistic community are disposed to accept and reject them. But, as we saw in the case of 'Mama', this does not show that they were not learned ostensively.

The same holds, obviously, for the fact that the child, when growing older and wiser, will on some occasions disagree with her parents about the verdict on a sentence such as 'That's not allowed'. In comparison, consider a child who is taught by her mother to accept the sentence 'That's a fish' in the presence of whales as well as fish. The fact that she eventually will surpass her mother's level of sophistication, and reject the sentence in the presence of whales, does not show that she did not initially learn it by ostension.

However, when Quine defends the claim that no moral sentences are observational he does not appeal to the claim that observation sentences are learned by ostension. Indeed, he seems to think that the question of whether moral judgments are cognitive has nothing to do with the way moral sentences are learned: 'The divorce of science from moral values is a sophisticated manifestation, reflecting no significant quirk in language learning.'²⁶ Instead, he appeals to the *social* condition. In Quine (1986), he writes:

An observation sentence is an occasion sentence that commands the same verdict from all witnesses who know the language. Consider,

then, the moral occasion sentence ‘That’s outrageous’. In the hope of getting it to qualify as an observation sentence, let us adopt an unrealistic ‘best-case’ assumption about our linguistic community, to the effect that all speakers are disposed to assent to ‘That’s outrageous’ on seeing a man beat a cripple [...] or commit any other evil that can be condemned on sight without collateral information. [...] Would ‘That’s outrageous’ then qualify as an observation sentence? It would still not, simply because it applies also and indeed mostly to other acts whose outrageousness hinges on collateral information not in general shared by all witnesses of the acts (p. 664).

Quine’s point is, thus, that even if there is *some* occasion on which ‘That’s outrageous’ would command the same verdict from all members of the linguistic community, there are numerous occasions on which it would *not* command agreement. Thus, ‘That’s outrageous’ does not satisfy the social condition for the group of all speakers ‘who know the language’.

Quine is probably right in thinking that there are no moral judgments that satisfy the social condition for the group of all competent speakers of the language to which these judgments belong. But notice that this does not mean that there is no *subset* of the group of all competent speakers for which the social condition could be satisfied by some moral judgments, just as, say, ‘Hydrogen sulfide is escaping’, may satisfy the social condition for the group of all English-speaking chemists. For instance, consider families, religious sects, political parties, and other groups where there is a strong tendency towards consensus concerning moral issues. For *such* groups, some moral sentences might qualify as observational, given Quine’s definition of observationality for a group.

Anyway, the important upshot of the discussion in this section can be stated as follows: On the one hand, if the distinctive trait of observation sentences is that they can be learned by ostension, then some moral judgments are observational. On the other hand, if a sentence is observational in the relevant sense only if it satisfies the social condition for the group of all competent speakers of the language, then there are, probably, no moral observation sentences.

4. DOES IT MATTER?

Does this conclusion vindicate Quine's non-cognitivism? The answer depends, it seems to me, on whether *any* sentence satisfies the social condition for the entire linguistic community. If *no* sentence satisfies this condition, Quine's position collapses into some form of global non-cognitivism, which is clearly an undesirable implication for Quine.

In my view, it is obvious that no sentence satisfies the social condition for the entire linguistic community, even if we disregard the verdicts of those who for some (independent) reason may be classified as deviants. For instance, consider the sentence 'That's red'. Even in the case of such a sentence, there are surely borderline cases that different speakers are likely to disagree about.²⁷ Moreover, even in the case of 'That's a rabbit', there are differences in collateral information that may prompt different speakers to give disagreeing verdicts. For instance, some speakers may know a particular rabbit very well, and therefore, unlike others, recognize it even under unfavorable conditions (say, from a long distance, when the lighting is bad, and so forth).

There are also more general considerations that may be adduced in support of the claim that no sentences are likely to satisfy the social condition for the entire linguistic community. The receptors of some persons are more sensitive than those of others, and some persons are better trained to recognize some objects (rabbits, etc) than others, and some have more trust in their ability to distinguish certain objects than others (some people are simply more self confident than others), and so forth. Especially on occasions on which the conditions are unfavorable, such differences are likely to prompt different speakers to reach disagreeing verdicts concerning just about *any* occasion sentence.

Thus, Quine faces a dilemma. If he sticks to the view that a sentence is observational in the relevant sense only if it satisfies the social condition for the entire linguistic community, it follows that *no* sentence is observational. If he drops this requirement, we have no ground for thinking that no moral sentence qualifies as observational. In either case,

Quine's argument fails to show that there is a special problem about cognitivism in ethics.

Quine would probably respond that observationality is somewhat a matter of degree, and that even if no sentences *strictly* satisfy the social condition for the entire linguistic community, the occasions on which many non-moral sentences would command disagreeing verdicts are much more *rare* than in the case of any moral occasion sentence. Or he would perhaps say that the largest subgroup of the linguistic community for which the social condition *is* strictly satisfied is, in the case of many non-moral occasion sentences, *larger* than any subgroup for which the social condition is strictly satisfied by any *moral* occasion sentence. And this difference *in degree* makes, according to Quine, *all* the difference:

The sentence 'It's raining' [...] almost never hinges on information not shared by present witnesses, and the sentence 'That's a rabbit' does so only seldom. These two consequently qualify well enough as observational, a status that is somewhat a matter of degree. 'He's a bachelor', at the other extreme, depends on collateral information that is seldom widely shared. 'That's outrageous' is intermediate between 'That's a rabbit' and 'He's a bachelor'. [...] Moral judgments differ thus from cognitive ones in their relation to observation. (Quine (1986), p. 664)

But *why* would such a difference in degree show that moral judgments are not cognitive? This might seem to depend on why Quine assigns a special role to observation sentences.

It is tempting to attribute to Quine the following reasoning: A sentence has cognitive content only if the acceptance of this sentence could somehow be *justified* or *warranted*. On Quine's empiricist view, the ultimate source of justification is sensory stimulation. However, only in the case of observation sentences can such stimulation *directly* justify acceptance. *Other* sentences are justified (or *we* are justified in accepting other sentences) only in so far as they obtain support from observation sentences. This is why a moral sentence has cognitive meaning only if it is

either itself an observation sentence or somehow contributes to a theory that is testable against such sentences.

However, if we assume that a sentence is observational in the relevant sense only if it satisfies the social condition for the entire linguistic community, or some substantial subgroup, then this account of justification has certain implausible implications. The reason is that, given the present view of observability, sentences such as 'That's a rabbit' and (possibly) 'That's the present president of the USA' qualify as observational,²⁸ whereas sentences such as 'There's mama', 'I feel a nibble', and 'There's my left hand' do not, since they do not satisfy the social condition for any substantial group. Thus, it follows from the view of justification under consideration that while the acceptance of 'That's a rabbit' may be justified directly by the prompting stimulation, an individual's acceptance of the sentence 'There's my left hand' is justified only if she has supporting evidence in the form of other sentences. Such an implication is clearly unreasonable. The difference between these sentences does not warrant such a conclusion.

Anyway, in Quine's naturalized epistemology, the notion of justified belief has no essential role, and in spite of the numerous passages in his writings that suggest otherwise,²⁹ he has recently denied that stimulation provides a source of justification for observational beliefs.³⁰ Moreover, in explaining why the absence of moral observation sentences shows that moral judgments are not cognitive, Quine appeals really to another consideration that he thinks justifies assigning a special role to observation sentences, namely that such sentences provide a common ground on which scientists could meet when they disagree about theory.³¹

Quine seems to reason as follows: It is the fact that observation sentences provide a common ground that explains why the responsiveness of scientific theory to such sentences makes science objective.³² Since no moral sentences qualify as observation sentences, there is no common ground by appeal to which disagreements over moral issues could be resolved. This is why ethics is not objective. Or as Quine puts it: 'Natural science owes its objectivity to its intersubjective

checkpoints in observation sentences, but there is no such rock bottom for moral judgments.³³

However, the fact that no moral occasion sentences qualify as observational (or that all moral occasion sentences are *less* observational than some non-moral sentences) does *not* imply that there is no common ground by appeal to which disagreements over moral issues could be resolved. The obvious reason is that *other* sentences could, and often do, provide such a common ground.

For instance, most people accept sentences such as ‘It is wrong to torture babies’ and ‘Slavery is wrong’. Such sentences provide intersubjective checkpoints in the sense that if a moral view or theory could be shown to conflict with these sentences, this would generally be conceived as a decisive argument against the theory. Of course, some people (e.g., utilitarians) would ultimately decide to hold on to the theory and disregard the recalcitrant judgments. But, as Quine often points out, it is precisely in the same, tentative, way that observation sentences function as checkpoints.³⁴

Obviously, also in the natural sciences does the common ground involve other sentences than observation sentences. For instance, at any point in the history of science, the common ground involves various auxiliary assumptions necessary for deducing observation sentences (or observation categoricals) from current theories, as well as judgments about what makes a theory preferable to others. Unless there were a vast number of such uncontested background assumptions, scientific progress would be impossible, given holism and the underdetermination of theory by observation.

But there is, perhaps, a difference in degree. Maybe the common ground in science is wider and firmer than that in ethics, and maybe this explains why (further) agreement is more readily achieved in science than in ethics. However, even if we grant that claim, it is still not clear that moral judgments do not make cognitive claims. For instance, if the fact that agreement is more readily achieved in science than in ethics could be plausibly explained in a way that is consistent with ethical cognitivism, this fact would not support Quine’s position. Thus, we need an argument

to the effect that such explanations are inferior. And Quine has provided no such argument.

5. CONCLUSION

In sum, then, Quine's main argument for his non-cognitivist view on ethics is that no moral judgments qualify as observation sentences. I have argued that if the distinctive trait of observation sentences is that they can be learned by ostension, as Quine sometimes has suggested, then this claim is probably false, while if a sentence is observational in the relevant sense only if, on any occasion, it would command the same verdict from all competent speakers, it is probably true. However, given the latter view of observationality, *no* sentence, moral or otherwise, is observational. Thus, in either case, Quine's argument fails to show that we should be non-cognitivists about ethics and cognitivists about other discourses.

Of course, even if no sentence *strictly* satisfies the social condition for the entire linguistic community, there might be differences in degrees. There might be *more* agreement about some non-moral occasion sentences than about any moral sentences. Quine appeals to this view in support of the claim that there is no, or less, common ground by appeal to which disagreements could be resolved in ethics as compared with science. The absence of such a common ground might, partly, explain why (further) agreement, and progress, is more readily achieved in science than in ethics. But if this in turn shows that moral judgments are not cognitive is far from clear.

Of course, the fact (if it is a fact) that agreement is more readily achieved in science than in ethics provides a challenge to ethical cognitivists, in the sense that they must show that cognitivism can somehow account for this fact in a satisfactory way. This is just the traditional argument from moral disagreement or diversity. However, Quine's reasoning goes really no further than to point out that it *is* a challenge. So if we want to probe deeper, we must go elsewhere.³⁵

NOTES

As for the relationship between cognitive meaning and truth conditions, Quine writes: ‘Setting aside emotive or poetic meaning, and looking only to the cognitive meaning of declarative sentences, we may say that the meaning of a sentence consists in its truth conditions.’ (Quine (1987), p. 764.)

¹ See also Bergström and Føllesdal (1994), esp. pp. 202ff.

² I use the phrases ‘moral judgments’ and ‘moral sentences’ interchangeably throughout the paper.

³ If any of these assumptions were false, then Quine’s views on cognitive meaning would imply that moral judgments are indeed cognitive. For instance, a moral judgment would count as cognitive if it would be an essential member of a set of sentences that implies, and therefore is testable against, certain compounds of observation sentences (‘observation categoricals’), or if it were ‘suggested by considerations of simplicity and symmetry and [...] can be useful indirectly in suggesting further hypotheses which do admit of testing’. (See Bergström and Føllesdal (1994), p. 203.)

⁴ Quine’s argument has been defended by Roger Gibson and Jay Campbell, and attacked by Owen Flanagan. See Gibson (1988), Campbell (1996), Flanagan (1982), and Flanagan (1988). Notice that Flanagan’s criticism differs substantially from the criticism I develop in this paper.

⁵ See, e.g., Quine (1960), pp. 35f, and Quine (1981), p. 3.

⁶ P. 25. The definition is employed also in Quine (1992). See pp. 40-3.

⁷ See, e.g., Quine (1960), p. 32f, and Quine (1992), p. 3.

⁸ See, e.g., Quine (1992), p. 2, and Quine (1995), p. 17. A person is said to undergo the *same* stimulation on two different occasions if and only if the same of her receptors are triggered on both occasions (and in the same temporal order).

⁹ In Quine (1981), he also states the definition as follows (p. 26): ‘What qualifies a sentence as observational is [...] just that the sentence [...] commands assent consistently or dissent consistently when the same global sensory stimulation is *repeated*’ (my italics).

¹⁰ This example is provided by Donald Davidson. See Davidson (1994), p. 192.

¹¹ See, e.g., Quine (1973), p. 40.

¹² See, e.g., Quine (1992), p. 3, and Quine (1996), p. 162. Notice that Quine thinks that this condition admits of degrees. Previously, this led Quine to think that also observability is a

matter of degrees (see, e.g., Quine (1981), p. 25, and Quine (1993), p. 108). However, recently he seems to have changed his mind on this point (see Quine (1996), p. 162).

¹³ See, e.g., Quine (1993), p. 109, and Quine (1995), p. 22.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Quine (1992), p. 6, and Quine (1995), p. 44.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Quine (1973), p. 39, and Quine (1969), p. 87.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Quine (1969), pp. 85ff.

¹⁷ Quine (1973), p. 41. See also Quine (1969), p. 88, Quine (1990), p. 2, and Quine (1992), p. 6.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Quine and Ullian (1970), pp. 24f, Quine (1973), pp. 41-5, and Quine (1992), p. 5.

¹⁹ At least, it is clear that Quine regards it as typically observational. See, e.g., Quine (1992), p. 5, Quine (1993), pp. 113f, and Quine (1994b), p. 172.

²⁰ In order to simplify the exposition, I formulate this reasoning in terms of ‘scenes’. But it could, of course, equally well have been formulated in terms of patterns of sensory stimulation.

²¹ See, e.g., Quine (1996), p. 163.

²² See, e.g., Quine (1960), p. 44.

²³ Campbell (1996), p. 11, n. 31.

²⁴ Two stimulations are ‘receptually similar’ to the extent that ‘they comprise more or less the same nerve endings in more or less the same order’ (Quine (1995), p. 17).

²⁵ Nor has Quine, of course, required that the stimulations that prompt a speaker to *dissent* to an observation sentence should be receptually similar.

²⁶ Quine (1973), p. 52.

²⁷ This is acknowledged by Quine. See, e.g., Quine (1975), p. 316.

²⁸ Of course, it is doubtful if all competent English-speakers would recognize the present president of USA by sight, but it would at least command more agreement than, say, ‘There’s my hand’.

²⁹ In Quine (1969), he writes: ‘The stimulations of his sensory receptors is all the evidence anybody has to go on, ultimately, in arriving at his picture of the world’ (p. 75).

³⁰ See, e.g., Quine (1993), pp. 110f, and Quine (1994a), p. 502. See also Gibson (1994), p. 458.

³¹ See, e.g., Quine (1960), p. 44, and Quine (1973), pp. 37, 39f.

³² See, e.g., Quine (1992), p. 5.

³³ Quine (1986), p. 664.

³⁴ See Quine (1996), p. 163. See also Quine and Ullian (1970), p. 29, Quine (1973), p. 41, Quine (1981), p. 71, and Quine (1994a), p. 502.

³⁵ I thank Lars Bergström and Peter Pagin for valuable comments.

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