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RADICAL TRANSLATION, NATURALISM,
AND THE PRINCIPLE OF CHARITY IN W.V. QUINE

Abstract

In dealing with the problem of the intersubjectivity of stimulus meanings and stimulations, W.V. Quine has recently pointed out the importance of empathy in radical translation and in the learning of language. In this paper difficulties of the Quinean naturalistic views on meaning and knowledge are first discussed; in this connection Quine's theory of radical translation is contrasted with Davidson's theory of radical interpretation, and "externalist" objections of Davidson to the notion of (private) stimulus meaning are outlined. Then it is shown that in practical psychology and its method, empathy, Quine finds a solution to the problem of the intersubjectivity of stimulations. The empathic approach to radical translation and, more generally, to the problem of the ascription of beliefs turns out to be a part of the so-called principle of charity. Analogy between the principle of charity and empathic understanding (*Verstehen*) allows, finally, to clarify the differences between Quine's version of this principle and that of Davidson, in particular as they relate to the widely discussed problem of the attribution of error and false beliefs.