INDETERMINISM AND ANTIREALISM

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Antirealism is a manifestation of the irrepressible urge in western philosophy to insure that whatever is real can be known: antirealism attempts to achieve this by reading out of existence whatever it decrees lies beyond the scope of human knowledge. So Parmenides should be counted an early and extreme antirealist, since he declared that the globular, homogeneous, changeless One was all that was real on the ground that it was the only possible object of knowledge. Plato must, of course, be counted an antirealist, since he held that the physical world, and all in it, is less than real because it can not be known. Most reductive isms I see as forms of antirealism: idealism, pragmatism, empiricism, materialism, behaviorism, verificationism. Each tries to trim reality down to fit within its epistemology. Each of these positions offers consolations: ordinary objects like tables and dinnerware are real, we are told, but exist only in the mind; physical objects are nothing but permanent possibilities of sensation; mental states are nothing but patterns of behavior; intentional phenomena are nothing but physical events and objects, etc. We are allowed the terminology of our old ontology as long as we agree to accept only what can be hobbled together out of entities or experiences we can for certain know. But these sops to skepticism should not deceive us; antirealisms remain sour grape philosophies. Their motto is: if you can't grasp the grapes (in some approved sense), they aren't just sour; they were never there in the first place. For reasons I shall mention presently, some antirealisms are better expressed in terms of epistemic limitations on the concept of truth. Thus it may be held that when our epistemic faculties are deficient with respect to determining the truth or falsity of some sentence, we should rule that the sentence has no truth value, or that we should employ some reduced sense of truth. The outcome is the same: the real or the true is cut down to the size of a favored form of knowledge.

I do not see realism as the alternative to antirealisms. We can reject one or another version of antirealism on the grounds that the arguments for it fail without having to endorse some vague position called realism. One common characterization of realism is this: there is something in or about the world that makes our utterances or assertions or thoughts true when they are true, whether or not we have the power to determine their truth. Most criticisms of this formulation fasten, understandably, on the difficulty in spelling out what "power" and "determine" mean in this context. But I don't think we need to get in this deep, since I do not think we understand the prior claim that there is something in or about the world that makes our thoughts or assertions true when they are true. The fact is that no one has ever been able to say in a non-trivial way what sort of "thing" it is that makes a sentence (or other truth bearer) true. Some sentences or utterances or beliefs are true, and there are a lot of things in the world, but it explains nothing to say that the things "make" the truth vehicles true. The result is that realists are left holding the concept of truth, but can't explain how reality accounts for it. The failure of correspondence theories to give substance to the concept of truth at the same time demonstrates the vacuity of characterizations of realism in terms of correspondence.

In this paper I want to discuss a special brand of antirealists, those who throw doubt on the "reality" of mental states and events in the light of the indeterminacy of translation or interpretation. I am equally concerned with those who argue that if we accept the indeterminacy of interpretation, then we must be in doubt about the status of propositional attitudes -- or at least the status of attributions of propositional attitudes. Since I accept the thesis of the indeterminacy
of interpretation, I would be aggrieved to find that it entails some sort of antirealism. But I do not think it does, as I shall try to explain. I neither think that indeterminism shows that propositional attitudes are less than fully real (whatever that may mean) nor that we must modify the concept of truth when we come to talk of propositional attitudes. In other words, many of our beliefs and statements about what people believe, intend, desire and hope for are true, and they are true because people have those attitudes.

Three considerations seem to stand in the way of accepting this thesis. The first is a form of scientism. The propositional attitudes do not seem suited to incorporation into a unified scientific view of the world. Thus Quine has said, that "the essentially dramatic idiom of the propositional attitudes" has no place in serious science, or, again, that our mentalistic vocabulary is "stubbornly at variance with scientific patterns". I think Quine is right in holding that the mentalistic vocabulary cannot be reduced to or incorporated into the vocabulary of physics, or of any of the other "hard" sciences. One reason for this irreducibility springs from the fact that any correct account of an agent's beliefs and other attitudes must take account of the normative element inherent in cognitive contents. One attitude has logical relations with others; these relations, though distorted and deranged by the limits of our powers, nevertheless serve to locate, and thus identify, the contents of our thoughts. When we treat the world as mindless, as in the natural sciences, nothing corresponds to this dimension of the mental. A less often noticed property that sets our talk of mental states apart from the vocabulary of the advanced sciences is its dependence on causal concepts. Ordinary physical talk, like psychological talk, is full of causal concepts: the notion of a catalyst is as causal as the notion of an intentional action. The difference lies in the promise, intrinsic to physics, but irrelevant to psychology, that the causal concept can, with time and research, be supplanted by an account of the mechanism which will explain what the clumsy causal notion merely finessed. The laws of physics may, if we please, be called causal. The point is that they do not employ causal concepts. The concentration of psychology on the causal role of reasons rules out any hope that the basic mental concepts can be fitted into a closed system of laws. There is one more (much debated) consideration which militates against the nomological or definitional reduction of mental concepts to those of physics, namely, the fact that propositional attitudes and related events and states are in part identified in terms of their causal and other relations to events extraneous in time and place to the agent they characterize. Thus it is held, correctly in my opinion, that the history of an individual's learning and use of words and concepts is in central cases necessarily a factor in determining what the words mean, and the contents of the concepts. I also think interpersonal communication plays a necessary role in the possibility and nature of thought. If externalisms of these sorts are indeed dominant and unavoidable features of the mental, the impossibility of incorporating psychology into a unified scientific theory of the world is clear.

These remarks are no more than reminders of why many philosophers, including me, are convinced that psychology, as long as it is taken to include the concepts of intentional action, belief, perception, and the affective attitudes, cannot be made part of physics or any other "natural" science. The question here is not whether we are right in this opinion, but whether, if we are, we should question the ontological status of the propositional attitudes.

Quine has said that he agrees with my token-token version of monism, which holds that each object or event identified in mental terms is identical with an object or event identifiable in
physical terms, though the *classes* staked out by the mental vocabulary cannot be equated by definition or strict laws with classes definable in the physical vocabulary. This position, which I call anomalous monism, comes close to reconciling most, though not all, of Quine's declarations about propositional attitudes. Anomalous monism makes sense of the claim that attitudes are dispositions to behave in certain ways, which are in turn physiological states, which finally are physical states, as well as the claim that intentional descriptions are not reducible to behavioral or physical descriptions, and so are not suited to incorporation into any strict system of laws. The mental vocabulary is practical and indispensable, but it is not made for the most serious science. Anomalous monism does not suggest that mental events and states are merely projected by the attributor onto an agent; on the contrary, it holds that mental events are as real as physical events, being identical with them, and attributions of states are as objective. Quine's description of attitude attributions as dramatic portrayals does not imply that there is nothing to portray.

The fact that the mental vocabulary is not fit for inclusion in sciences like physics or physiology cannot in itself be taken as impugning the reality of the states, events and objects it is used to describe. A perfected physics must comprehend every object and event, but this is an ontological and nomological requirement that defines the aim of physics: it says nothing about the interests that may demand other ways of characterizing things.

I have not yet touched directly on the issue of the indeterminacy of translation (or interpretation, as I prefer to call it). If the thesis of indeterminacy holds, doesn't this imply that propositional attitudes are less than real? Quine may be thought to hint as much when he says "Brentano's thesis of the irreducibility of intentional idioms is of a piece with the thesis of indeterminacy of translation" since "[to] accept intentional usage at face value is...to postulate translation relations as somehow objectively valid though indeterminate in principle relative to the totality of speech dispositions"ii Doesn't this say that accepting the mental idiom means postulating something for which there is no empirical evidence -- something that we therefore have no reason to believe exists?

In any case, whether or not Quine's views entail that there is something unreal about the propositional attitudes, it is an idea common to a number of philosophers that indeterminism does undermine the reality of mental states. Fodor and others have thought this constitutes a reductio of indeterminism; Daniel Dennett, on the other hand, endorses indeterminism, but agrees that it subtracts from the reality of mental states. I argue against the inference. I see no way around indeterminism, but think it leaves the reality of the mental untouched.

First, let me defend the passages from Quine which I just quoted, and which seem to aver that "intentional usage" has no empirical content. There is a confusion here that may in part be Quine's fault, but it is easy to resolve. If by "intentional usage" Quine means talk of meanings and propositions as hypostatized by philosophers, it is true that he rejects these as without empirical or explanatory content. But it does not follow that ordinary attributions of attitudes, including interpretations of speech, are empty. Indeed, how could they be if mental talk is, as Quine allows, something we cannot do without?

There are, I think, two things that above all tempt us to suppose that there cannot be any indeterminacy about what we mean by our words or what we think. One is first person authority, the fact that there is a presumption that we know what we think in a way no one else can. The other is engendered by the semantics of the sentences that are used to attribute attitudes. Let me
take the second point first, and let me stick to belief sentences for simplicity. It is obvious that there is a potential infinity in the number of beliefs that might be assigned to someone, and it is clear that there is a potential infinity of sentences available, for we can create a well-formed sentence by putting any of an infinity of sentences after the words "Agnes believes that...". But the only viable semantic devices we have available to accommodate this situation involve taking "believes" (or "believes that") as a relational verb, and treating what follows as a singular term or description. The singular terms can't all be unstructured proper names; there aren't enough such. So if what follows "believes" or "believes that" is a singular term, a demonstrative device must be at work; otherwise we must have descriptions. But in either case, there must be an infinite store of entities to be picked out. Once we have picked the appropriate entity, though, we have, as attitude attributors, assigned a content to the belief.

It is natural, perhaps, to suppose that the entity we refer to in order to specify the content of a belief is the object of the belief, an entity which the believer entertains or grasps, the thing the believer believes. Given the relational semantics of sentences about beliefs (and, of course, the other attitudes), and the natural assumption that the entity that identifies the belief is the object grasped by the believer, we are virtually forced to conclude that the entity designated must be unique. For if more than one entity would do equally well in specifying the same state of belief, which entity should we say the believer grasps, or how can we say that the believer knows what he believes?

This conundrum can be solved by giving up the idea of treating the grammatical objects in belief sentences as terms that name psychologically real objects, objects known to or entertained by or grasped by the believer. The only object required for the existence of a belief is a believer. Having a belief is not like having a favorite cat, it is being in a state; and being in a state does not require that there be an entity called a state that one is in. All that is necessary for the truth of an attitude attribution is that the predicate employed be true of the person with the attitude.

Dummett deserves credit for characterizing antirealism in terms of truth rather than of reference, in terms of sentences rather than of names or descriptions. For the real issue about sentences that attribute mental states is not ontological; beliefs are not entities, nor do the "objects of belief" have to be objects. The real issue is whether or not attributions of attitudes are objectively true or false.iii

I see the attribution of attitudes as analogous in many ways to the measurement of various magnitudes. We can assign numbers to keep track of the sizes, weights and speeds of objects provided the objects exhibit a pattern of the appropriate kind. We do not suppose there are empirical entities called weights or sizes or speeds that objects have. As Carnap pointed out long ago, we should not think of the sentence "This box weighs 8 pounds" as identifying two entities called "the weight of this box" and "8 pounds", but rather as identifying the weight of the box in pounds with the number 8. Thus the ontology required consists of the objects that have weights, and the numbers. The numbers are not part of the weighty objects; they do not belong to the empirical world but to us, who need them in order to keep track of certain relations among objects. In the same way, the entities to which we relate thinkers when we attribute beliefs and other propositional attitudes to them are not in the thinkers -- not even in their minds, or before their minds. Having a belief is just exemplifying a property, having a certain predicate true of
one; but in order to have enough predicates for all the beliefs we may wish to distinguish, we must construct the predicates by using a relational verb and filling in one of the places with a reference to an object drawn from some infinite store. One such predicate is "x believes that snow is white".

One virtue of this analogy is that it makes clear why different assignments of objects can capture all the relevant information about a situation without compromising the truth or "reality" of the situation. No one thinks the fact that we can register weight in either pounds or kilograms shows that there is something unreal about the weight of an object: different sets of numbers can be used to keep track of exactly the same facts. Suppose the fact is that A weighs the same as B; then the number assigned to measure the weights of A and B is the same number, whether we measure weight in pounds or kilos. Suppose the fact is that C weighs twice what D does; then the number assigned to measure the weight of C must be twice the number assigned to measure the weight of D, whether the weights are given in pounds or kilos. All that is necessary is that the entities we use to keep track of how much things weigh have a structure in which certain features of the objects weighed can be represented, and numbers can do this in an infinite number of different ways.

Another virtue of the analogy is that it makes clear why Quine is justified when he insists, against Chomsky and others, that the indeterminacy of translation is distinct from the underdetermination of theories by all possible evidence. There is a question, to be sure, whether underdetermination in Quine's sense can occur, for it requires that there be empirically equivalent, but incompatible theories. Indeterminacy is not like this: the empirically equivalent theories it accepts as equally good for understanding an agent are not incompatible, any more than the measurement of weight in pounds or kilos are incompatible theories of weight.

What objects can we use to keep track of the attitudes? Clearly they must constitute approximately as complexly figured a field as the individual attitudes themselves. The most conspicuous features of the individual attitudes are their basically rational structures (if someone believes that everything is white, that person has a belief that entails that snow is white), and their relations to the world (the belief that snow is white is true if and only if snow is white).

Entities that have these required properties are our sentences, and it is not clear that any other set of entities will do as well. In any case, there is a sense in which our standard attributions of attitude do use the sentences of the attributor to specify the contents of the attributed attitude. By this I mean no more than that we must use a sentence of our own after such words as "Joan believes that..." to identify Joan's belief. Now we must ask which properties of the sentence are relevant to the identification of the belief, just as we ask which properties of numbers are essential to their role in recording weights. It is obvious that the property of having a truth value is not enough. The syntax would be more than enough if it were not for the fact that the same sentence can be used to mean quite different things, depending on the interpretation (the same sentence may belong to different languages or idiolects, or it may be ambiguous). Because of this difficulty, I have suggested that we take the actual utterance (or inscription) provided by the attributor as the object to which he is referring to give the content of an attitude. So I proposed a paratactic account of attitude-attributing sentences, in which the "that" of "Joan believes that..." is to be taken as a demonstrative referring to the utterance that follows. The utterance has a unique syntax, and can be taken to resolve the question of the appropriate
language and idiolect, to have eliminated ambiguities, and to have provided the parameters needed to fix indexical references. As a rough equivalent of the paratactic account, we could think of the content sentence as enclosed in quotation marks, with the language and other features of the speaker and context understood. This second idea does better at capturing the intuition that attitude-attributing expressions are single sentences.

It should not surprise us that what we can say and understand about the propositional attitudes of others should be what we can capture by matching up our own sentences (or utterances; I shall not bother to distinguish) to those attitudes. This does not mean, of course, that someone else may not think things I cannot; but then that is bound to be something the content of which I cannot express either. I do not want, either, to rule out altogether propositional thoughts I have but cannot express. It is enough for my argument that when we can express a thought, our own or that of another, we must fall back on the basic device of representing it in the fabric of our sentences. Our sentences provide the only measure of the mental.

What follows for indeterminacy? Everyone is apt to agree that sometimes quite distinct sentences of the same reporter may be used to attribute exactly the same thought, so some degree of indeterminacy comes automatically with the redundancy of language. But the indeterminacies of which Quine speaks, and most of which I accept, are another matter, for they suggest that sentences that no one would take to be even roughly synonymous may nevertheless be used to specify the same thought.

For the sake of the record, let me say briefly where Quine and I differ and agree on these matters. Both of us take as the basic evidence for interpretation a person's attitudes towards various utterances and the circumstances that cause these attitudes. Quine takes certain patterns of assent and dissent to yield the interpretation of the truth functional sentential functions, and so do I; but I go on, as Quine does not, to use the same method to locate the devices for quantification and cross reference. Thus I do not, like Quine, see the internal structure of the simplest sentences as indeterminate. We both assume that the observed range of phenomena which prompt assent and dissent to certain sentences allow us to connect those sentences to events and objects in the world. As for sentences less directly tied to the readily observable, I think we can often do better than Quine believes, because I hold that we can use our ability to detect degrees of evidential support between sentences as a key to correct interpretation. There remain two important kinds of indeterminacy on which we agree: indeterminacy due to what Quine calls the inscrutability of reference, and indeterminacy that results from the blurring of the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic.

The thesis of the inscrutability of reference says there is no way to tell which way of connecting words with things is the right way; if one way works, there will be countless others that do as well. From a technical point of view, this means that for the standard satisfaction relation (satisfaction is a sophisticated form of reference relation) we can substitute endless other relations without altering the truth conditions of any sentence or the logical relations among sentences. Since all the evidence for interpreting language must come at the sentential level (for only sentences have a use in communication), the result is that there can be no evidence that one of the satisfaction (or reference) relations is the right one.

Here is an example. Suppose satisfaction relation S maps the word "Rome" onto Rome, and the predicate "is a city in Italy" onto cities in Italy. Then the truth definition will show that
the sentence "Rome is a city in Italy" is true if and only if Rome is a city in Italy. Now consider another satisfaction relation S', which maps the word "Rome" onto an area 100 miles to the south of Rome, and the predicate "is a city in Italy" onto areas 100 miles south of cities in Italy. The truth definition will now say that the sentence "Rome is a city in Italy" is true if and only if the area 100 miles south of Rome is an area 100 miles south of a city in Italy. The truth conditions are clearly equivalent. The thesis of the inscrutability of reference contends that there can be no evidence that S is any better than S' for interpreting the sentence "Rome is a city in Italy". There is no telling what a sentence is "about", or what someone is thinking about.

How can this be? Surely Rome and an area 100 miles to its south are not the same entity. True enough; however, any differences we conventionally think of as differences in the reference of names or the extensions of predicates will be preserved by any correct satisfaction relation. The fact that there is no empirical difference between the interpretations yielded by S and by S' doesn't entail that the person being interpreted can't tell the difference between Rome and an area 100 miles to the south; but it does entail that there is no saying which one his word "Rome" refers to. Correct interpretation keeps track of a complex pattern, and locates particular sentences and attitudes within it. But the counters we use to represent this pattern, namely our sentences, can represent it in more than one way.

If the two interpretations of someone's utterance of "Rome is a city in Italy" are equally correct, why is it that we feel that one is the "right" one? The complete answer is, I think, complex, but the simple answer is that we accept the standard, and in this case easiest, method of word-for-word translation. Of course, when the homophonic translation manual is one of the available manuals, we will use it; and in interpreting a language for which no homophonic manual is available, we will use the conventional, and for the most part shortest, available method. This does not mean that other interpretations are wrong: S' provides as correct an interpretation of "Rome is a city in Italy" as S.

To someone who objects, "But `Rome' doesn't mean `area 100 miles south of Rome'", the right answer is: individual words don't have meanings. They have a role in determining the truth conditions of sentences, and this role is captured by S' as surely as it is by S.

Still, this answer leaves something out, which is the necessity, in assigning contents to an agent's speech or attitudes, of sticking to some one method of interpretation. It will falsify "Rome is a city in Italy" to interpret it as true if and only if Rome is in an area 100 miles south of a city in Italy; and it will destroy the entailment relations among sentences to use one method of interpretation for one sentence and another method for another sentence. Just as we must indicate whether the numbers we are using to measure temperature place the temperature on the Fahrenheit or the centigrade scale, so we must indicate which method of interpretation we are using (S or S', for example). One of the conveniences of sticking to the same method is that we can leave the indication of the method tacit. (Somewhat similarly, if I say "It must be 70 in this room", you will naturally understand me to be using the Fahrenheit scale.)

There is a further objection which many people feel is fatal to the thesis of indeterminacy. The claim is that indeterminacy undermines first person authority. Such people want to say, "Maybe Quine's empirical criteria can't rule out the use of alternative methods of interpretation for others, but I know that I mean Rome by my word `Rome' and not the area 100 miles south of Rome". This remark is correct, but it doesn't conflict with indeterminism. The
reason it is correct is that the speaker does not identify Rome and an area 100 miles to the south of Rome. When a person is making such self-attributions, we know that words in the metalanguage play the same roles as those words do in the object language, for object language and metalanguage are one and the same. First person interpretations are necessarily tied to the homophonic translation manual (which is to say translation has no place here).

It should not be concluded from the fact that a person is restricted to a unique way of interpreting himself (if this can be called interpretation: it would be better to say that aside from pathological cases, our way of interpreting others has no application to ourselves) that therefore his words have unique reference. All that the agent has discovered in our example is that his phrases "Rome" and "the area 100 miles south of Rome" cannot be substituted for one another in his language, and this does not fix the reference of either expression. By the same token, the fact that the reference of his words is not fixed doesn't show that he doesn't know what he means or thinks. The different ways of interpreting his speech, or of representing his thoughts, mark no difference in the contents of his attitudes, so there is nothing he fails to know if he doesn't know which way of representing his thoughts is the right way; since there is no one right way, there is nothing more for him to know.

Not all cases of indeterminacy depend on the possibility of systematically altering the satisfaction relation in ways that do not affect the truth conditions of sentences; there can be indeterminacies that affect truth values. These indeterminacies arise if one accepts Quine's claim (as I do) that there is no principled way to make a clear distinction between the analytic and the synthetic. Here it is easy to give examples. I find that I very often disagree with other people over whether to call the color of some object green or blue. The disagreement is consistent: there is a fairly definite range of cases where I say green and they say blue. We can account for this difference in two ways: it may be that I (or most other people) are wrong about the color of certain objects, or it may be that I don't use the words "blue" and "green" in quite the way others do. There may be no way to decide between these two accounts; by making compensatory adjustments elsewhere in one's interpretation of my sentences and beliefs one can accommodate either story. But on one account certain of my pronouncements about colors are false, while on the other they are true. And on both accounts, I know what I think: I think the things I call green are green and the things I call blue are blue; neither account of what I mean and think threatens this first person knowledge.

Where the criticisms I have been discussing suggest that if one accepts indeterminism one is treating meanings and mental states as less than totally real, Daniel Dennett has refreshingly complained that on my view intentional states are too real. \textsuperscript{vi} Dennett sees clearly why my view, which compares rival theories of interpretation to different ways of representing length or temperature in the numbers, can't in itself call into question the reality of what is represented. But he thinks two different systems of belief attribution to an individual may differ substantially, even to the point of yielding different predictions of behavior, and yet nothing would establish that one system and not the other described the person's real beliefs.

Here I think the issue of prediction is something of a red herring. No system of attitude attribution, no matter how complete, yields any prediction of actions without a theory, and it is certainly possible to differ on predictive theories in psychology. It is clear that no plausible predictions will be forthcoming without a quantitative description that specifies degrees of belief
(subjective probabilities) and relative strength of desires. But even supposing we could give a complete description of all the attitudes and their strengths for a given individual at a time, there is no reason to suppose that there exist strict laws to predict what the individual will do next -- and good reasons to suppose there are no such laws. What sort of evidence can Dennett appeal to, then, to show that equally justified systems for attributing attitudes are incompatible? The fact that different systems result in different predictions proves nothing, since the same system can be used to support different predictions.

Dennett's idea is that what is real is behavior, and intentional states are patterns in this behavior. The patterns aren't defined in terms of the behavior -- they are perceived by an observer when the observer takes the "intensional stance". The value of the patterns is that they reduce a vast, by us indescribably complex, physical situation to something we can grasp, and something on the basis of which we can make rough predictions. The patterns are in some (reduced) sense real, though abstract; and different people may perceive different patterns in the same behavioral field. Some of these patterns may do better at predicting or understanding some phenomena, other patterns do better at predicting or understanding other phenomena. All these patterns are "real", but when they are different there is no saying which represent the real attitudes of the targeted agent.

It is not easy to see how to judge this suggestion, and harder to grasp how it relates to the issue of realism. Surely not every pattern one perceives in behavior is a propositional attitude. But is any? Patterns, Dennett tells us, are abstractions, like centers of gravity. But then can they be beliefs and desires? Beliefs and desires, we like to think, are states of a physical body which can have causal consequences; abstractions, I assume, have no causal relations. Forces don't act on centers of gravity, but on the things that have centers of gravity, but forces certainly alter my beliefs and intentions. Do we perceive patterns? It seems to me not: what we perceive is something that has a certain pattern, and with luck (and the right stance) we may perceive that it has that pattern. So the question isn't whether patterns are real. Being no nominalist, I think patterns, like shapes and numbers, are as real as can be. But I do not see how the propositional attitudes of a person can be patterns. If we ask what exhibits the pattern, we can say it is the person, or we can say it is the observable behavior of the person. But in either case no issue concerning the ontological status of attitudes is at stake. If people or their behavior really do exhibit the patterns Dennett says they do, and for someone to have a propositional attitude is for that person to exhibit that pattern, then there is nothing ontologically or epistemically second grade about the attitudes.

It seems to me Dennett has confused two issues. One is whether the attitudes are entities, and here I think the answer is no, unless you suppose that states are entities. Otherwise one should simply talk of people having attitudes, which means that certain predicates are true of them. The second issue is whether there is a correct answer to the question whether or not someone has a certain attitude. This I take to be, not a question about vagueness or borderline cases, but a question whether there are objective grounds for choosing among conflicting hypotheses. Dennett has urged that the answer to the second question is that there are no such grounds; but I do not think he has given any reason to accept this answer.

Are there objective grounds for choosing among conflicting hypotheses? Especially in this case we have to ask what makes grounds "objective". The only ultimate source of objectivity
is, in my opinion, intersubjectivity. If we were not in communication with others, there would be nothing on which to base the idea of being wrong, or, therefore, of being right, either in what we say or in what we think. The possibility of thought as well as of communication depends, in my view, on the fact that two or more creatures are responding, more or less simultaneously, to input from a shared world, and from each other. We are apt to say that someone responds in "the same way" to, say, wolves. But of course, "same" here means "similar". Our grounds for claiming that a person finds one wolf similar to another is the fact that the person responds in similar ways to wolves. This prompts the next question: what makes the reactions similar? The only answer is, someone else finds both wolves and the reactions of the first person similar. This of course only puts the basic question off once more. Nevertheless, it is this triangular nexus of causal relations involving the reactions of two (or more) creatures to each other and to shared stimuli in the world that supplies the conditions necessary for the concept of truth to have application. Without a second person there is, as Wittgenstein powerfully suggests, no basis for a judgement that a reaction is wrong or, therefore, right.vii

This brings me to my last point. The analogy I proposed between measurement in the physical sciences and the assignment of contents to the words and thoughts of others is imperfect in an essential respect. In the case of ordinary measurement, we use the numbers to keep track of the facts that interest us. In the case of the propositional attitudes we use our sentences. But there is this difference: we can mutually specify the properties of the numbers: the numbers, like the objects we apply them to, lie, as it were, halfway between ourselves and others. This is what it means to say they are objective, that they are objects. It cannot be this way with our sentences. You and I cannot come to agree on the relevant properties of our sentences as a preliminary to using them to interpret others, for the process of coming to such an agreement involves interpretation of the very sort we thought to prepare for. It makes no sense to ask for a common standard of interpretation, for mutual interpretation provides the only standard we have.

We should not despair because we cannot provide a standard by which to judge the standard, a test for whether the standard meter bar is actually a meter long. Our conclusion should rather be: if our judgements of the propositional attitudes of others are not objective, no judgements are.
NOTES


ii. *Word and Object*, p. 221.

iii. There is, to be sure, the question whether meanings and propositions exist, but this I see as a matter of decision. If they exist, they are abstract entities, and need no more than defining. Once defined, it remains to be shown whether they do useful explanatory or descriptive work.


v. It should not be thought that by speaking of the relations between the attitudes and the world I am embracing a correspondence theory. A theory of truth of the sort I have in mind does depend on setting up a relation between certain words and objects ("satisfaction"), but it makes no use of objects to which sentences might correspond.
