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THE PRINCIPLE OF CHARITY AND THE PROBLEM
OF IRRATIONALITY (TRANSLATION AND THE
PROBLEM OF IRRATIONALITY)*

ABSTRACT. Common formulations of the principle of charity in translation seem to undermine attributions of irrationality in social scientific accounts that are otherwise unexceptionable. This I call "the problem of irrationality". Here I resolve the problem of irrationality by developing two complementary views of the principle of charity. First, I develop the view (ill-developed in the literature at present) that the principle of charity is preparatory, being needed in the construction of provisional first-approximation translation manuals. These serve as the basis for explanatory accounts and associated refinements in the translation manual. In developing such explanatory accounts, the principle of charity is no longer constraining. Thus, the principle of charity applies only in the early stages of constructing translation manuals, and there is no problem of irrationality in the later stages of constructing translation manuals. Second, I reduce the principle of charity, where it does apply, to a special case of what I call "the principle of explicability": so translate as to attribute explicable beliefs and practices to the speakers of the source-language. I show that the appropriate formulation of the principle of charity counsels just what the principle of explicability requires in the early stages of social scientific investigation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The principle of charity in translation is best treated as a proposed codification of the methodology for constructing translation manuals. There are various formulations, of the principle. Their common characteristic is that they urge the translator to end by counting the source-language speakers as correct, either quite generally or in some specific set of utterances. The topic of this paper is the principle of charity and the epistemic status of the claim, often derived from that principle, that any translation manual which leads us to attribute irrational beliefs (or contradictory beliefs in particular) to the subjects of our investigations is inadequate (or is less likely to be adequate than otherwise). If correct formulations of the principle of charity support this derivative claim, then attributions of irrationality in psychology and the social sciences are improper (or are less likely to be proper than otherwise), being based upon evidence derived from a suspect translation manual. It is requisite, then, that such attributions be withdrawn (or held in abeyance) and that the attempt be made to

revise the translation manual towards the end of attributing rationality instead. In this way, the principle of charity is taken to legislate against the possibility of irrational belief or behavior (or to make all attributions of such suspect), and this in spite of the substantial evidence for their fairly frequent occurrence. More disagreeably still, irrationality is ruled out (or militated against) not so much on empirical as on purely methodological grounds. That cogent considerations should seem to lead to such results, I call the "problem of attributions of irrationality", or simply, the "*problem of irrationality*".

As is reflected above, the problem of irrationality varies in seriousness with the strength of the formulation of the principle of charity settled upon. Minimally, it involves taking attributions of obvious inconsistency to be evidence against the sponsoring translation manual. Thus, a formulation of the principle of charity gives rise to the problem of irrationality if it supports the following claims:

Attributions of irrationality, at least of obvious inconsistency, detract from our confidence in the translation manual upon which they are based. Thus, such attributions count as evidence against psychological and social scientific accounts.

Among the writers who have discussed some principle of charity (under various rubrics) and who have concluded that attributions of irrationality, and of obvious inconsistency in particular, count against translation manuals on which they are based, are Donald Davidson, Martin Hollis, Stephen Turner, Peter Winch, and, on some readings, W. V. Quine.¹ This conclusion seems incompatible with what we know about ourselves and our own society. For not only do we attribute relatively obvious irrationality to individuals encountered on the street and in the psychological laboratory – a result which most of the above writers would be able to tolerate² – but we also occasionally use attributions of obvious inconsistency in explanatory accounts of large-scale social and political phenomena, such as religious behavior, voting behavior, and political toleration. Any account of the methodology of translation and interpretation that rules out, or undermines, apparently successful explanatory accounts deserves careful, critical, scrutiny before being accepted.

Most writers recognize it would not be surprising or disturbing if there were, implicit within a complex belief system, inconsistencies for which no "proof" had been found. This leads them to count only attributions of "obvious inconsistency" as evidence against the spon-

soring translation manual.³ My concern is that even this does not sufficiently restrict the principle of charity. I am particularly interested in the status of attributions of obvious violations of basic norms of rationality, such as are codified in the first-order predicate calculus and in decision theory.

I argue in the next section that the problem of irrationality arises from a failure to appreciate the limitations upon the principle of charity following from the justifications for that principle's use in constructing translation manuals. In the third section I argue that the principle of charity, where it applies, is properly subsumable under a more fundamental principle that applies throughout the construction of translation manuals: so translate as to maximize the explicability of beliefs and actions attributed to subjects. I show that this "principle of explicability" allows us to attribute irrationality to our subjects in certain situations. I do not conceive of this paper as repudiating the principle of charity so much as refining present formulations of that principle.

2. PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION MANUALS AND THE PRINCIPLE OF CHARITY AS PREPARATORY

I begin with the following rough distinction between the earlier and later stages in the construction of translation manuals. In the early stages, a rudimentary translation manual is constructed that is adequate to translating a wide range of sentences in "everyday usage".⁴ In these early stages of inquiry the principle of charity is, in practice and in principle, necessary. I call a rudimentary translation manual that is adequate to most everyday contexts a "first-approximation translation manual"; I call the results of the application of such a translation manual "first-approximation translations".

As the first-approximation translation manual is used in the investigation of the society studied, we may be led to attribute apparently awkward sets of beliefs or even apparent inconsistencies to the source-language speakers. We might for example find ourselves attributing to them beliefs expressed using indicative sentences such as 'Twins are birds',⁵ or 'We are red macaws'.⁶ Or we might find ourselves attributing an inconsistency at the level of first-order logic in certain of their beliefs, as E. E. Evans-Pritchard seems to do when discussing the Azande.⁷ When the first-approximation translation

manual leads us to such attributions, alternative suggestions for modifying, or refining, the manual are often advanced. I will refer to the results of such fiddling to "fine tune" a first-approximation translation manual as a "refined translation manual", or simply as an "R-translation manual", and to the results of its application as "R-translations".⁸

It is important to note that, according to the received view, the principle of charity continues to constrain the translator in *all* phases of his or her work: both in the construction of first-approximation translation manuals and R-translation manuals. Thus, for example, Hollis discusses the anthropological study of ritual and myth as being, to the end, so constrained.⁹ Quine seems to share this general approach.¹⁰ Davidson believes that the principle of charity is constraining in interpreting the utterances of those for whom we already have a basic translation manual. It even constrains us when we have a durable homophonic first-approximation translation manual, for example, in our interpretation of subjects of psychological experiments and intimate friends.¹¹ This commitment to the application of the principle of charity in all stages of constructing translation manuals is the target of my central argument.

The line of argument I now present resolves the problem of irrationality at the level of R-translation by attending to differences between the earlier and later stages in constructing translation manuals. I show that while the principle of charity is constraining in the early stages of constructing translation manuals, it is not constraining in the later stages, where we become involved with R-translation. In effect, it does not apply there. Thus, in the construction of R-translation manuals, the principle of charity does not dictate avoidance of attributions of obvious inconsistency to the speakers of the source-language. Instead, in R-translation, the concern for attributing explicable beliefs and actions, which is repeatedly exhibited in actual social scientific studies, controls and may lead us to explanatory accounts that include attributions of obvious inconsistency.

One view of the principle of charity is that it is, in an important sense, *preparatory*. Davidson formulates this position when he remarks that the charitable method he advocates, "is not designed to eliminate agreement, nor can it; its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible, and this depends entirely on a foundation – *some* foundation – in agreement".¹² This is, I think, correct: the charitable develop-

ment of a first-approximation translation manual is undertaken in order to make meaningful disagreement possible. We want to be able to identify where we agree and disagree; we want to be able to investigate variations in beliefs – how beliefs, patterns of beliefs, and the courses of their development, vary with the natural and social environment. To do this we must first construct a first-approximation translation manual with which we can identify apparent disagreement worthy of further investigation. Thus, the principle of charity in application to the earlier stages of translation is preparatory to subsequent investigation and explanation.

Quine's and Hollis' discussions of the principle of charity bring out the manner in which the principle is compelling in the early stages of constructing a translation manual. Quine argues with particular forcefulness that there are, among others, two sorts of behavioral evidence for the construction of translation manuals: observation sentences (paired according to stimulus meaning) and truth-functional operators (identified by patterns of assent and dissent). In breaking into the language – in beginning to construct a translation manual for the language – we must make use of such evidence in the only plausible way, a way that is on the whole charitable.¹³ Hollis follows suit, citing Quine and writing of the need to find a way into the maze that is the source-language and of the need to establish a bridgehead of agreement for further translation.

Of course, any adequate (or roughly adequate) translation manual will provide for the translation of more than observation sentences and truth-functions. Quine, Davidson, and Hollis discuss the generally charitable treatment of other utterances in constructing first-approximation translation manuals.¹⁴

Constructing R-translation manuals proceeds against a background of first-approximation translation manuals that are *generally successful* in satisfying charitable constraints. I emphasize that later stages are concerned with refining a “generally successful” first-approximation manual because, although constructing such a first-approximation is constrained by a weighted global principle of charity,¹⁵ first-approximation translation manuals are not so “successful” as to dispense with all attributions of error, nor should they be.

The reason that successful first-approximation translation manuals do not dispense with all attributions of error is that first-approximation translation manuals, as their label indicates, are provisional. They

serve as a basis for further work, although not necessarily further charitable development. As Davidson notes, when using the principle of charity “[n]ot all the evidence can be expected to point in the same way”.¹⁶ Accordingly, unless we go on modifying our translation manual in extraordinary ways, we will find we are led by our manual to attribute errors to the speakers of the source-language. But such extraordinary elaboration is not appropriate in constructing first-approximation translation manuals. These are manuals that have been developed, according to a weighted principle of charity, to a point where attributions of egregious error can be taken seriously. At some point, our success in the tasks noted above will result in a translation manual that provides for the (more or less) charitable translation of a wide range of source-language constructions (in addition to observation sentences and truth-functions). It is only against the background of such translation manuals that attributions of egregious error or obvious inconsistency can be troubling. There are two reasons for this: (1) the identification of putative, flagrant error or conspicuous inconsistency can be made sufficiently precise and well-grounded to warrant investigation only using such a manual, and (2) well-grounded information needed for the investigation of such attributions of error (for explicability) is accessible only through such a manual.

Attributions of egregious error and obvious inconsistency do raise questions about the adequacy of the translation manual on which they are based, but ones that I believe can be answered without ultimately undermining our confidence in the translation manual. Certain sorts of beliefs are initially surprising in that they are not generally expected, although *upon further examination* it may turn out that they are to be expected under the circumstances. Such (initially) *anomalous* beliefs call for further investigation in order to determine whether they are ultimately explicable or not. Attributions of egregious error generally comprise one type of anomaly. Attributions of surprising correct beliefs – say, for example, knowledge of parts of atomic physics possessed by a “primitive” tribe – comprise another type. It is with respect to a particular attribution of anomalous beliefs that translation manuals become first-approximation manuals. To designate a translation manual a “first-approximation” does not indicate that it will subsequently be changed in the face of attributions of serious error (or other anomalous belief). It indicates, rather, that the translation

manual provides the context within which such putative error (or anomalous belief) can be examined.

There does not seem to be any precise way to specify how much or just where agreement must be provided under translation before a translation manual can serve as a first-approximation translation manual. This varies relative to the attributed beliefs to be explained and the sorts of information necessary to provide an explanatory account of them. Typically, the translation manual must be generally successful in charitably translating observation sentences, truth-functions, low-level empirical generalizations concerning technological matters, and occasion sentences and low-level generalizations concerning kinship and status relations.

More generally, it is clear that first-approximation translation manuals must be sufficiently developed to provide for the charitable translation of a wide range of native utterances. This is because most attributions of error that prompt significant further investigation involve translation of source-language utterances beyond observation sentences and truth-functions. Typically the translation of several standing sentences and various logical constructions beyond truth-functions is involved. Furthermore, constructing a translation manual for such utterances is a holistic task, as has been persuasively argued by Davidson and Quine.¹⁷ Thus, confidence that a translation manual provides for the translation of sentences "not conveniently linked to observable circumstances" turns upon general success in construing the source-language speakers as expressing plausible messages. Without such confidence in the translation manual, when the putative error involves sentences beyond observation sentences and truth-functions, the investigator will justifiably decide that there is no "probable cause" to believe that egregious error or inconsistency has been committed, and will not embark on further investigation.

The importance of having a well-founded first-approximation translation manual is not simply that it provides us a reason for taking seriously, and investigating, putative egregious error or obvious inconsistency. Only by using the first-approximation translation manual can we acquire much of the evidence in terms of which the ensuing explanatory endeavor proceeds. This is seen in Melford Spiro's and Edmund Leach's controversy concerning the construal of utterances by the Tully River Blacks regarding human procreation.¹⁸ By relying

on many of the same sources, Spiro and Leach in effect rely on much the same first-approximation translation manual as the basis for their separate attempts to construct explanatory accounts of the beliefs of the Tully River Blacks regarding procreation in humans. Leach's challenge to Spiro is framed in terms of information accessible only through using first-approximation translation manuals for various languages. Only using such a manual is it possible to have reasonably settled, as data for any account, such facts as that the Tully River natives say that hunting bull-frogs is one possible antecedent to human pregnancy, or that the natives also attribute pregnancy in animals to copulation, or that the natives cite these differences as indications of the special status of human beings, or that there are groups with whom they interact whose members cite copulation as the cause of human pregnancy. That Spiro accepts essentially the same manual is testified by his acceptance of these data as common ground in the controversy. Thus, not only the puzzling beliefs, but also much of the data from which an explanatory account for the puzzle is to be constructed, come by way of a commonly accepted first-approximation translation manual. In short, R-translation depends upon such a basis.

Another example of this dual importance of first-approximation translation manuals in R-translation is provided by Evans-Pritchard's discussion of what he calls "the futility" of Zande magic. Of course, this futility, which includes both contradictions within Zande beliefs about witchcraft and the empirical falsity of their generalizations, is identified using a first-approximation translation manual. Many of Evans-Pritchard's twenty-two reasons for the Azande failing to perceive the futility (and thus continuing to use magic) also depend upon his first-approximation translations. His reason (7), for example, is, in effect, a generalization regarding the flow of information: the flow of information is limited with the result that only an observer pooling data from various sources will note the inordinate variation, bias, and disagreement in Zande beliefs concerning instances of witchcraft and magic.¹⁹ This generalization (together with the illustrations that Evans-Pritchard provides) depends on numerous translations using the same translation manual that was used to identify the apparent futility of Zande beliefs.

Given a first-approximation translation manual that leads to attributions of apparently irrational belief and provides information for explaining them, the investigator no longer requires the principle of

charity. In these later stages of constructing the translation manual – in “constructing an R-translation manual” – construing the source-language users as correct or consistent is beside the point. With access to generally correct information regarding the beliefs of source-language speakers,²⁰ the time has come to get on with the social scientific business at hand: explanation. Accordingly, the constraints of the principle of charity, understood as an unreduced requirement that we find the source-language speakers correct and consistent, dissipate in later stages of constructing translation manuals. In these later stages, the principle of explicability guides the investigator.

Social scientific practice evidences this primary concern with explanation in R-translation. Consider, again, the Spiro–Leach controversy. Agreeing on a first-approximation translation manual, Leach and Spiro can argue over refinements. Leach argues for modifications in the manual in order to construe the Tully River Blacks as symbolically expressing aspects of their social structure. He believes that taken literally the native’s beliefs are inexplicable.²¹ Spiro argues otherwise, preferring to take the native’s beliefs literally (given the first-approximation translation manual) and to attempt explanations of those beliefs.²²

Similarly, Leach is willing to attribute inconsistency to the Kachin when providing an explanatory account of their beliefs in terms of the political and social uses of religious utterances and rites.²³ Robin Horton attributes errors including inconsistency to adherents of traditional religions in the course of providing explanatory accounts of such phenomena primarily at the level of the sociology of knowledge.²⁴ This primary concern for explanation is justifiable, while a continued concern for charity in translation, as a constraint that would undermine otherwise explanatory accounts, is unjustifiable. To opt for the latter would be to forget the preparatory role of the principle of charity in developing first-approximation translation manuals as provisional bases from which to construct R-translation manuals. When engaged in this later task, the concern is with explanation.

This is not to say that we can come to understand the source-language users as generally indifferent to logical truth and inconsistency, as possessing a “pre-logical” mentality. I do believe that Quine’s and Hollis’s arguments concerning logic under translation are sufficient to rule this out. But the issue here is the proper treatment of limited domains of discourse where the use of a translation manual

based on the general pattern of utterances within the language leads to attributions of inconsistency. My point is that when such an attribution of inconsistency can be incorporated within an explanatory account, the inconsistency of the attributed beliefs does not count as evidence against the translation manual by which they are identified.

The view I am advancing situates the construction of translation manuals within the context of the ongoing social and psychological sciences. We are to construct translation manuals so as to construe the speakers of the source-language as, so far as possible given our present theories, holding explicable beliefs and performing explicable actions. On this view, R-translation manuals are integral parts of low-level explanatory theories. Here R-translation manuals play an important role in the ongoing development of social-scientific and psychological theory. Translation manuals are needed for the cross-cultural application of more general theory. In application, a global theory comprised of a translation manual and some social-scientific and psychological theory is put to test. If the account is not adequate or explanatory, then modifications are needed either in the translation manual, the other theoretical components, or both. If the account is successful, then the components are together supported.

Adequate translation need not lead us to construe our subjects as rational, for psychological theory and social-scientific theory are composed of more than decision theory and serve more purposes than of rationalizing explanation. This, I believe, is where Turner and Putnam go wrong.²⁵ Thus, theories concerning the behavior of the human organism under the stress of various social and economic conditions can have an important role in translation-*cum*-explanation.²⁶ Theories having to do with inductive errors are also clearly relevant. Thus the work of cognitive psychologists such as that discussed by Nisbett and Ross²⁷ could usefully be employed in accounts both attributing to and explaining egregious inductive error by the speakers of some source-language. Jon Elster has made use of such cognitive psychological results in an attempt to provide the micro-foundations for a theory of ideology.²⁸ This could prove useful in the explanation of egregious errors and incompatibility within belief systems of various peoples. The flexibility of oral traditions can be relevant to the persistence of traditional belief systems; thus Horton appeals to recent anthropological results concerning such flexibility in the course of his account of traditional religions.²⁹ Versions of a

theory of psychological needs have commonly been used by a diverse group of anthropologists in theories of magic.³⁰ The list can obviously be extended, but the point has already been made: once R-translation is understood as an integral part of the social-scientific and psychological explanatory endeavor, and we recognize the range of theory relevant to R-translation, we see that the principle of explicability that guides R-translation can lead us to attribute flagrant error and conspicuous inconsistency to the speakers of the source-language.

The principle of explicability is not a recommendation that we hide our faces in the sand upon encountering phenomena we cannot explain. This is to say, it does not constitute a recommendation that we force the phenomena we observe into conceptual molds they do not fit, awkwardly making them out to be something we can explain and ignoring anomalies. Instead, it says that where our best scientific theories are up to explaining the phenomena, we should construct translation manuals so as to make use of those theories. But where our present theories are not up to the task of explaining the phenomena in conjunction with some translation manual or other, we should seek to formulate new, testable, theories. As different theories are formulated and receive substantial confirmation, we will want to revise further our R-translation manuals to take advantage of what then become our best theories. If the revisions are successful, and the relevant phenomena are explained, then the new theories receive further confirmation.

Where an R-translation manual is grounded in an account that makes use of theories with little confirmation, or where the resulting account seems, on the whole, unexplanatory, even if it is the best we have, little confidence is to be placed in the translation manual. Thus, far from advocating the evasion of recalcitrant phenomena, my view holds that when we cannot translate so as to construe our subjects as explicable, we should both seek to construct new theories and place commensurately less confidence in our R-translation manuals in the meantime. This view is forward-looking: it sees translation as a part of social and psychological science and science as the fallible and self-correcting search for explanation.

Finally, let me mention one further aspect of the principle of charity relevant to its preparatory role, namely its being weighted according to empirical considerations. Not only is the principle of charity a preparatory concession, necessary in the early stages of constructing a

translation manual, but the weighted principle of charity as formulated by Hollis, Quine and Davidson is a matter of picking or tailoring occasions for that concession under the guidance of empirical considerations.

While there are variations in their weightings of the principle of charity, all three of the above mentioned thinkers weight the principle similarly and provide similar reasons for their weightings. Their reasoning, which seems to me correct, is most explicit in Quine and Davidson's writings. Both argue that certain sorts of error are, as an empirical matter, quite unlikely, and that the principle of charity should be weighted accordingly.³¹ Thus, in cases where the likelihood of error is low, we can afford to indulge the methodological need to be charitable without significantly biasing the results.

Thus, the translator following the weighted principle of charity in constructing a first-approximation translation manual is led to construe the speakers of the source-language as commonly correct in cases where correct judgment and reasoning is likeliest on empirical grounds. The result is also that, on the whole, attributions of error are confined to cases where correct judgment is unlikely, where we have little reason to expect correct judgment or reasoning, and may have good reason to expect error. A translation manual constructed according to such a weighted principle of charity performs *both* of the preparatory tasks of first-approximation translation manuals admirably. Insofar as such a manual leads us to attribute agreement where agreement is to be expected, our confidence in the manual is grounded (using a minimum of charitable constraint). At the same time, such a translation manual leads us to attributions of error that typically do not fly in the face of our best theories.

3. THE REDUCTION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF CHARITY TO THE PRINCIPLE OF EXPLICABILITY

In the preceding section, I elaborated one view of the principle of charity according to which that principle is preparatory, having application only in the development of first-approximation translation manuals. However, this view – in which charity in translation is understood as an unreduced constraint on the construction of translation manuals – is not the most fundamental view of the principle of charity possible. In this section I show that the weighted principle of

charity can be understood as a special case of the principle of explicability; it is reducible to the application of the principle of explicability in the construction of first-approximation translation manuals.

Of course, translating charitably, where this is understood simply as maximizing agreement, is not the same as translating so as to construe what the speakers of the source-language say as explicable. I do not attempt to reduce such simple (and simple-minded) charity in translation to the application of the principle of explicability. Descriptively and normatively, a weighted principle of charity – directing the translator to *optimize*, rather than maximize, agreement – is used in constructing such translation manuals. I reduce only the weighted principle of charity to the principle of explicability.

The view that the weighted principle of charity is a fundamental constraint on the construction of translation manuals (even first-approximation translation manuals) had already begun to show signs of yielding to a reduction in the last part of the previous section. There I noted that an appropriately weighted principle of charity was informed by empirical knowledge of where error is to be expected on the one hand and where correct judgment on the other. The principle of charity should be weighted most heavily where we know that the speakers of the source-language are most often correct. Attributions of error will count most heavily against a translation manual when the error is of a sort that is unlikely. On the other hand, the principle of charity should be least heavily weighted in cases where we can expect error. Thus, attributions of error will count least against a translation manual when the error is of a sort that is likely. The following points are central to the general reduction of the weighted principle of charity to the principle of explicability: if the empirical knowledge on which the weighting of attributions of error is based is sufficient to support explanations, then the errors attributed to the speakers of the source-language will often be explicable in terms of that knowledge. For then the translation manual that is constructed will lead us generally to attribute error where it is expected according to an explanatory theory. The actual explanation of attributed error may need to wait on the acquisition of further information, which can serve as initial conditions. But the errors attributed to subjects will primarily be of sorts that we can explain in terms of the theories used in weighting attributions of error.

If the empirical basis for weighting attributions of error is of a less developed sort that supports little in the way of explanations, but that is nevertheless generally correct, then the errors attributed to the speakers of the source-language will often be explicable in terms of some successor theory. In such cases, by applying an appropriately weighted principle of charity, if we do not so translate that we attribute explicable beliefs to speakers of the source-language, we at least so translate that the attributed beliefs will relatively often prove explicable on further investigation.

It may be that, in addition to being too ill-developed to be explanatory, our best present theories are not more likely correct than mistaken, but only more likely correct than any alternative theory we can presently formulate. Still, in following such theories in weighting the principle of charity, we are maximizing our chances (given our present alternatives) of attributing ultimately explicable beliefs to the speakers of the source-language.

Generally, then, the appropriately weighted principle of charity leads us to construct manuals of translation that construe source-language users in ways that are most likely to prove explicable right and explicable wrong.

Notice that the beliefs attributed to the speakers of the source-language when using a first-approximation translation manual complying with the weighted principle of charity may be only *prospectively* explicable. This may happen for either of two different reasons, both of which are significant in the earlier stages of constructing a translation manual. One has to do with limitations in our best present theories, the other with limitations in the information available to the investigator at a given point in his inquiry.

First, certain attributed beliefs may be only prospectively explicable because our best theory of such beliefs is too ill-developed to be explanatory, although we believe it to be correct as far as it goes, or believe it more likely correct than any other presently constructible alternative theory. To seek to attribute explicable errors, and to settle for attributing errors that are only prospectively explicable due to the limits of our present theories, is to work within our best present theories. At the very least, in so doing we are maximizing our chances of using a theory that is "correct as far as it goes", and, indirectly, of attributing ultimately explicable beliefs to the speakers of the source-language.

Consider the following example of a prospectively explicable error. We may have noted that, instead of multiplying probabilities, people tend to average probabilities in casual contexts, unless trained to do otherwise. This observation itself constitutes an ill-developed theory. But, by itself, it could hardly be considered an explanatory theory. Still, if it is the best information that we have, we do well to use it in weighting the principle of charity. A translation manual might then be constructed that would readily attribute such inductive errors to speakers of the source-language. Suppose then that we are led by this manual to attribute the following error to our informants: an individual judged very likely to be a Republican but rather unlikely to be a lawyer is judged moderately likely to be a Republican lawyer. Were the rough generalization all we had, then the attributed inferential error would be only prospectively explicable. However, recent advances in cognitive psychology seem to yield explanations for such errors. Nisbett and Ross argue that such errors (and many other inferential errors) can be explained in terms of the overuse of certain useful "heuristics".³² If their new theory holds up under testing, what was once only a prospectively explicable error will have become an explicable error.

Second, certain beliefs may be only prospectively explicable because they are not explicable without the help of information unavailable until there is further development and application of the translation manual. This is, of course, particularly characteristic of the early stages of constructing a translation manual. Here, regardless of the explanatory power of our present theories, we often lack the information needed to apply them.

For example, we have various ill-developed theories – generalizations – in which we account for some inferential errors in terms of strong motivational structures such as vested interests and emotional needs or desires. However, information regarding interests and desires often requires substantial translation or interpretations. Accordingly, in the early stages of constructing a translation manual, we will frequently be unable to bring such theories into play. If these ill-developed theories give rise to explanatory successor theories, these will probably also prove, on the whole, inapplicable in the early stages.

The weighted principle of charity, then, leads us to construe the speakers of the source-language as holding beliefs that are either explicable or relatively likely to prove explicable. This is the basis for

the general reduction of charity in translation to the principle of explicability. Constructing a translation manual charitably is just what the principle of explicability requires in the early stages of constructing translation manuals. In such contexts, the investigator often lacks sufficient information to provide much in the way of explanation for a judgment, correct or erroneous. Accordingly, the principle of explicability directs the investigator to translate in such contexts in a way that holds the greatest prospect of leading to explanations. To do this, the investigator begins with broad sorts of sentences, such as observation sentences, where there are good reasons to believe that the speakers of the source-language are generally correct. In such basic cases, where error is likely to prove inexplicable and correct judgment explicable, the investigator strives to attribute correct beliefs. The result is also to concentrate attributions of error in sorts of utterances and cases where we have found error most readily explicable, or where we expect most error. Thus, the weighted principle of charity is a version of the principle of explicability.

In the remainder of this section, this reductive view of the principle of charity is examined in greater detail by considering the treatment of two sorts of utterances that are central in the early stages of constructing a translation manual: observation sentences and truth-functions.

3.1. *An Illustration: The Treatment of Observation Sentences*

Consider charity in providing for the translation of observation sentences. One charitable procedure is the one Quine discusses: matching observation sentences by stimulus meaning. In the earliest stages of constructing a translation manual, this is what is done and what should be done (subject to qualifications I discuss below). It is charitable insofar as we are commonly correct in assenting to and dissenting from observation sentences within the source-language.

When we consider how observation sentences are paired according to stimulus meaning, we see that this is not the fully mechanical process it might first appear to be. It involves a good amount of extrapolation from limited samples on the basis of psychological considerations. Several important points may be noted separately, then put together in an account of pairing observation sentences. First, in pairing observation sentences according to the ranges of stimuli that dispose the speakers of the languages to assent to and to dissent from

them, the translator relies on a very limited sample of the speech behavior of source-language speakers, and of course, such samples constitute very limited indications of speech dispositions. Second, within the sample there may be mistakes by speakers of the source-language. Third, the stimulus meanings of both target-language and source-language observation sentences include stimuli that would induce mistaken assent and mistaken dissent. Fourth, we often are able, sometimes in common-sense terms, sometimes in more sophisticated psychological terms, to account for such mistakes as perceptual illusions, the results of inattention, and so on.

In order to pair observation sentences by matching similar stimulus meanings, the translator must work from reconstructions, or educated guesses, as to the stimulus meanings of the relevant sentences. The needed reconstructions are provided only with the help of more or less explicit knowledge of likely perceptual error and success. Using a theory of perception and beginning with the sample of verbal behavior, the investigator must arrive at both a pairing of observation sentences and an associated reconstruction of stimulus meanings. This will involve tentatively pairing sentences and testing these pairings in terms of expected (correct and incorrect) utterances, given our theories of perception.

Because the stimulus meaning of observation sentences includes (deceptive) stimuli that provoke mistaken assent and dissent, the investigator who pairs observation sentences according to stimulus meaning will rightly provide for the translation of the speakers of the source-language as mistaken in roughly those cases where the speakers of the target-language would be mistaken. But it is important to notice that the error so provided for will generally be (presently or prospectively) explicable. Basically, this is so because stimulus meanings for paired sentences are reconstructed from behavioral samples using (naive or sophisticated) psychological theory. More fully, deceptive stimuli are included in the stimulus meaning of source-language utterances in part on the basis of the translator's sample of speech behavior and in part on the basis of knowledge of perceptual error. If this knowledge of perceptual error is adequate for accurately reconstructing stimulus meanings from samples of behavior, then the source-language speakers will be disposed to just those utterances we expect, and their errors will be just those we expect, given our knowledge of perceptual error. Thus, the perceptual errors that do

come to be attributed to source-language users on the basis of the constructed translation manual will be explicable in terms of the same knowledge of perceptual error that went into the construction of the translation manual.

Adapting Quine's example, suppose that the investigator pairs a source-language sentence, 'Gavagai', with the one-word English sentence 'Rabbit'. If properly done on the basis of accurately reconstructed stimulus meanings, the source-language users will assent to 'Gavagai?' in the presence of a sufficiently realistic rabbit facsimile placed in the bush, as would English speakers. Of course, the investigator probably does not test this implication of his translation manual. But this and other deceptive stimuli are included in the stimulus meaning of 'Gavagai' as reconstructed. Equating 'Gavagai' with 'Rabbit' will provide for occasional attributions of error in less contrived situations as well, some of which are likely to obtain. And given the supposed accuracy of the reconstructed stimulus meanings, the speech behavior of speakers of the source-language will be construed as erroneous in such situations. Whatever knowledge led the investigator in his reconstruction of the stimulus meaning can be employed to give an explanation of such errors, provided that that knowledge is sufficiently developed to ground explanatory accounts.

The above account must be qualified in two ways. First, a role for ill-developed theories and prospective explicability should be recognized, for translation and science are programmatic and self-correcting. Second, room must be made in the basic account for the knowledge of differences in susceptibility to perceptual errors based in differences in acquired acuteness. Hunters may be less susceptible to the trickery of fake rabbits than city folk, and jewelers less readily taken in by simulated diamonds than others. This shows that the general rule of pairing observation sentences according to stimulus meaning is not itself fundamental, as Quine also recognizes.³³ The proper treatment of observation sentences in the construction of a translation manual is *not* completely charitable, *nor* is it simply a matter of matching sentences according to stimulus agreement: it is rather a matter of matching sentences according to stimulus meanings whose differences are limited to explicable ones. Accordingly, we can attribute errors, or the tendency to error, differently to speakers of the source-language and speakers of the target-language, if there are situations where, according to our theories of perception, this is to be

expected given different backgrounds. Here we see that the most fundamental consideration in providing for the translation of observation sentences is the explicability of what is attributed to the speakers of the source-language.

To summarize, in dealing with observation sentences the translator seeks to match stimulus meanings, allowing for explicable differences between communities. Doing so involves the use of a more or less explicit theory of perception both in reconstructing the stimulus meanings of sentences from samples of behavior and in allowing for differences in susceptibility to perceptual errors across communities. The resulting translation manual will lead us to attribute errors to source-language speakers, if their speech dispositions are as we suppose in constructing the translation manual. Most important for purposes of this paper, those errors will also generally be explicable in terms of our theory of perception. If our theory is too underdeveloped to support explanations, then we will seek some better, successor theory (supposedly supporting many of the same attributions) to explain the errors attributed to the speakers of the source-language. Accordingly, the weighted charitable procedure used in providing for the translation of observation sentences leads the translator to attribute (presently or prospectively) explicable beliefs and utterances to the speakers of source-language observation sentences.

The treatment of observation sentences in the construction of translation manuals is a particularly striking instance of the weighted principle of charity's leading to attribution of explicable beliefs. Here theories of perception obviously play an important role in the recognizably charitable procedure for dealing with observation sentences, a role that quite directly insures the (present or prospective) explicability of the errors and successes that come to be attributed under translation. In providing for the translation of many other broad sorts of utterances, our knowledge of explicable error does not play a direct role in the procedure for treating utterances of the broad sort. In such cases, knowledge of error and success applies more crudely. In these cases, our knowledge of the likelihood of error and success leads us to "weight disagreements" according to the broad sort of utterance involved.

As I have explained, this weighted charitable treatment of broad sorts of utterances in constructing a first-approximation translation manual is central to my general reduction of charity in translation to

the principle of explicability. The treatment of truth-functions exemplifies this basic and central case.

3.2. *An Illustration: The Treatment of Truth-Functions*

The treatment of truth-functions in constructing a translation manual is more simply charitable than is the treatment of observation sentences. In providing for the translation of truth-functions, prevailing patterns of assent and dissent are matched with the truth-conditions for truth-functions (allowing, of course, for the sorts of ambiguity familiar to English speakers). To take a simple case, a source-language particle will be construed as the sign for conjunction if it is found that the source-language users almost universally assent to a compound sentence comprised of that particle and two sentences just in case they assent individually to both the sentences used in the compound sentence.³⁴ This charitable search for a good fit, maximizing agreement on truth-functions, is tempered in one major way: such fit is at a premium within a range of less complex source-language utterances (or sets of utterances); it is less important in dealing with complex utterances. The procedure described here is a matter of assigning a high negative weight to attributions of error involving the general sort of utterance, truth-functions, subject to one major qualification concerning complexity and simplicity. I believe that we can discern the principle of explicability in this weighted charitable treatment of truth-functions.

To begin with, truth-functions are behaviorally quite simple and dispositions to the prevailing patterns of assent and dissent are effectively instilled. In this situation, we can either fit such patterns with the truth-conditions for truth-functions so as to construe the source-language users as almost always correct, or fit patterns and truth-conditions so as to construe them as very widely mistaken. The fact that the source-language speakers have evidently learned their lessons well does not alone decide for us which option to take. However, the charitable option is the obvious choice for the following reasons.

So to translate as to construe the source-language speakers as widely mistaken, although they have learned their society's truth-functional patterns well, would be to construe them either as mistaken concerning the meaning of their own truth-functional constructions or

as suffering from a systematic logical incompetence (or both). As Quine observes of a similar case of perverse translation, to so construct our translation manual "reduces to nonsense when we reflect that there is nothing in meaning that is not in behavior".³⁵ When patterns of assent and dissent associated with certain source-language particles fit the truth-conditions for truth-functions, there is no behavioral basis for an uncharitable construal of these source-language constructions. To construct a translation manual uncharitably here would be unmotivated, and pointless.

This is a fine response, as far as it goes. But it only shows that there is no reason not to be charitable and that, consequently, to translate truth-functions uncharitably would be entirely gratuitous. More can be said. There is also a reason *not* to translate uncharitably. Put simply, to be uncharitable would be much more trouble than it is worth.

What leads us to choose the charitable option in translating truth-functions is the realization that a translation-*cum*-explanation for source-language speakers' behavior will be much more readily obtained when following the charitable option. This is because the representation of behavioral associations is the job of translation manuals *and* sociological and psychological theories. Choosing the charitable option, the theories we have developed for use on ourselves become available to account for minor deviations. Choosing the uncharitable option, we find what seem to be their extraordinary mistakes inexplicable, unexpected. We have no theories that will begin to take up the burden such a translation manual would place upon the theoretical components of translation-*cum*-explanation. Our theories would not combine with such an uncharitable translation manual to represent the associations we must represent.

We could, of course, attempt to develop theories that combined with uncharitable translation manuals (for truth-functions) to provide representations of the behaviors found in the full range language communities. Rather than embarking on such an unpromising and unmotivated attempt to construct wholly new psychological theories to explain putatively pervasive truth-functional logical errors, we choose to make use of present theories and their descendants. Thus, we choose the basically charitable option for dealing with truth-functions.

Notice that the above argument for constructing a translation manual so as to translate truth-functions charitably is grounded in the

exigencies of constructing explanatory accounts (translation-*cum*-explanations) given our present and foreseeable stock of theories. This argument is of a piece with the view that charity in developing a first-approximation translation manual is preparatory, and with the general argument for the reduction of the principle of charity to the principle of explicability provided at the beginning of the present section.

Attention to the limits of our ability to account for truth-functional errors also uncovers the reasons for the one distinction in truth-functional utterances that is made in providing for their translation. We have relatively few ways of explaining truth-functional errors. One is to appeal to the complexity or length of the sentences or arguments in question, where they *are* complex or long. The length and complexity of truth-functional utterances can be gauged even in the early going. Thus, the relative explicability of error in such cases can be built into the charitable procedure used. By seeking to maximize agreement in simple cases, truth-functional errors attributed under translation come generally to be localized in cases involving complex utterances or sets of utterances. Again, this is as it should be according to the principle of explicability.

Other ways of explaining truth-functional errors include noting stressful circumstances in which the sentence or argument is encountered or contrived, and noting loyalties or biases. Significantly, such accounts of truth-functional error must often be supported by information about the reasoner that is not accessible in the early stages of constructing a translation manual. Accordingly, such explanations of error are not readily built into a weighted principle of charity for treating truth-functions. However, such accounts typically support explanations only of limited, or isolated, deviations from the general pattern being treated as indicative of the correct usage. Such effects can be ignored in charitably settling upon the basic translations for source-language truth-functions by attention to the prevailing patterns of assent and dissent. Thus, aside from the weighting by complexity, the principle of charity for dealing with truth-functions is a matter of maximizing agreement.

Once an approximate fit between truth-conditions for truth-functions and patterns of assent to and dissent from sentences involving source-language particles is established, and the source-language truth-functions are identified accordingly, errors will come to be

attributed to certain individuals and, perhaps, in certain contexts, to many or most individuals. Most, but not all, of such apparent truth-functional errors will occur in cases where the utterances (or sets of utterances) are long or complex. As the translation manual is developed further, we will be able to bring to bear information having to do with stresses and biases in attempts to explain such errors (especially those where complexity or length is not a prominent factor). As explained in Section 2, this is to become involved in R-translation.

I have repeatedly shown, both by general argument and by examining the treatment of two important broad sorts of utterances, that the weighted principle of charity, as applied in the construction of a first-approximation translation manual, leads to just the results indicated by my principle of explicability. However, the reduction of the weighted principle of charity to the principle of explicability does not depend simply on the fact that these principles counsel the same things in the construction of first-approximation translation manuals. It is also supported by the realization that the weighted principle of charity follows where the principle of explicability and our empirical theories lead. This is illustrated by the treatment of truth-functions. The generally charitable treatment of truth-functions can be understood as dictated by the search for combinations of translation manuals with our scientific theories that adequately represent the behavioral associations in source-language communities. The weighting of the principle of charity in dealing with truth-functions of differing complexity is the result of allowing for attributions of errors where they can most readily be explained.

As we move beyond truth-functions to the weighted charitable treatment of various other sorts of utterances, modifications in the basic charitable procedure begin to accumulate. As the modifications or weightings accumulate, it becomes at best inelegant to view the principle of charity as a fundamental statement of the constraints on the construction of translation manuals. The weighted principle of charity becomes a sort of methodological equivalent of Ptolemaic astronomy. A more perspicacious view is achieved by stating the fundamental constraints on translation in terms of the desideratum that induces modifications in other (less fundamental) constraints. Thus, the principle of charity comes to be understood as a special case of the principle of explicability.

Summarizing, I have presented a general argument for the reduction of the principle of charity to the principle of explicability. This is followed and illustrated by a detailed discussion of the charitable treatment of two important broad sorts of utterances – observation sentences and truth-functions – in constructing first-approximation translation manuals.

The general reduction of the principle of charity to the principle of explicability turns on the way the appropriate weighting of the principle of charity reflects our knowledge of the likelihood of successes and errors. This weighting not only reflects empirical knowledge, but also results in the construction of translation manuals that tend to lead us to attribute explicable error and success to the speakers of the source-languages. This result obtains because the appropriate weighting of attributions of error leads us to concentrate these attributions in the sorts of cases where errors are most readily explained. The result is just that called for by the principle of explicability. (Of course, given the present status of psychology and the social sciences, room must be made for the provisional use of theories that are too ill-developed to provide explanations. However, this requires no more than a recognition of the provisional character of translation manuals as well as of the psychological and social sciences themselves).

The treatment of truth-functions in the construction of a first-approximation translation manual illustrates how attributions of errors involving a broad sort of utterance come to be weighted according to our knowledge of the likelihood of errors. In some cases knowledge of the antecedents of, and the relative likelihood of, errors and successes does more than determine a weighting of disagreements according to the broad sorts of utterances involved. Such knowledge can play a role in the process of constructing the translation manual. This is seen in the treatment of observation sentences, where theories of perception have an important role in reconstructing and matching relevantly similar stimulus meanings. In such cases, the theories that lead us to construe the source-language users as mistaken also serve to explain the errors that come to be attributed under translation. Or, they do so insofar as they are sufficiently developed to support explanations. Thus, not only is the weighted principle of charity preparatory – needed in the construction of first-approximation translation manuals that provide the basis for explanatory accounts at the level of R-translation – but it is itself a special case of the principle of explicability.

To apply the weighted principle of charity in the construction of first-approximation translation manuals is to construct, as best as one can in the early going, a translation manual suitable for translating the source-language speakers as holding explicable beliefs and performing explicable actions. Accordingly, it would be nothing less than absurd to see the principle of charity as undermining otherwise explanatory accounts in which obvious inconsistency or other egregious error is attributed to the speakers of the source-language.

NOTES

* I am grateful to Robert Barrett, Roger Gibson, and Paul Roth for their generous assistance.

¹ Hollis, M.: 1982, 'Reason and Ritual', *The Limits of Irrationality*, in *Rationality*, pp. 214–30; 'The Social Destruction of Reality', in M. Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and Relativism*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp. 67–86; D. Davidson: 1984, 'Truth and Meaning', in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, pp. 17–36; 1984b, 'Radical Interpretation', in *Inquiries into Truth and Meaning*, pp. 125–39; 1980, 'Towards a Unified Theory of Meaning and Action', *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 11, 1–12; 1976, 'Paradoxes of Irrationality', *Review of Metaphysics* 29, 289–305. Davidson believes that there are better forms for a theory of meaning to take than the form of a translation manual, thus he discusses theories of meaning and of interpretation rather than translation manuals. The distinctions he draws between his Tarski-style theories and translation manuals are not of importance for my concerns here (see Davidson, 'Radical Interpretation', p. 129). I believe that the arguments that I develop apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to charity in the construction of Davidsonian theories of meaning. Accordingly, I will generally use the familiar rubric of translation: Quine, W. V. O.: 1960, *Word and Object*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp. 57–60, 69; 1970, *Philosophy of Logic*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, pp. 80–83; 1970, 'Philosophical Progress in Language Theory', *Metaphilosophy* 1, 2–19. Turner, S.: 1980, *Sociological Explanation as Translation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Winch, P.: 1964, 'Understanding a Primitive Society', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1, 307–24.

² Davidson seems to be an exception. (Davidson, 'Paradoxes of Irrationality'.) For my purposes here, "irrationality" is the violation of basic norms of rationality, such as are codified in the first-order predicate calculus and in decision theory. Whether or not there is some more refined and normative sense of "rationality" is not my concern here. My concern here is with the tendency to rule out attributions of (obvious) violations of basic norms of rationality.

³ Hollis, 'Reason and Ritual', p. 234; Quine, *Philosophy of Logic*, pp. 82–83.

⁴ The phrase is Hollis' ('Reason and Ritual', pp. 222–23). The class includes logical truths, most observation sentences, and a good deal more.

⁵ Evans-Pritchard, E. E.: 1956, *Neur Religion*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 131.

⁶ Crocker, C.: 1977, 'My Brother the Parrot', in J. D. Sapir and J. C. Crocker (eds.),

The Social Uses of Metaphor: Essays in the Anthropology of Rhetoric, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, p. 192.

⁷ According to Evans-Pritchard, the Azande believe that witchcraft is a biologically inherited trait, passed along from father to son and from mother to daughter. However, this theoretical belief is contradicted by the limited willingness to attribute witchcraft to entire clans. The apparent contradiction cannot be resolved by Zande appeals to bastardy, which are evidently not sufficiently extensive (nor persuasive). It may be that the contradiction was not originally obvious to the Azande. However, the contradictions were made obvious, at least to a limited number of Azande, by Evans-Pritchard's intervention. He discussed the problem with his informants and he reports that, "Azande see the sense of this argument but they do not accept its conclusions, and it would involve the whole notion of witchcraft in contradiction were they to do so". (Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft Among the Azande*, p. 24.) But the recalcitrant fact is that the Azande see the sense of the argument, and see that their beliefs lead to contradictions, yet apparently do not modify their beliefs about the inheritance of witchcraft. Short of getting someone to assent to a sentence of the form '*p* and not *p*', it is hard to imagine a clearer case of someone persisting in logical inconsistency once it has become obvious.

⁸ This broad usage of 'translation' is becoming quite common. My thinking here is informed by Stephen Turner's writings and by D. Føllesdal: 1981, 'Understanding and Rationality', in H. Parret and J. Bouveresse (eds.), *Meaning and Understanding*, de Gruyter, New York.

⁹ Hollis, 'Reason and Ritual', p. 234.

¹⁰ Quine, *Word and Object*, p. 69.

¹¹ Davidson, 'Towards a Unified Theory of Meaning and Action'; 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, pp. 183-98, 195-96.

¹² Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', pp. 196-97. See also, Quine, 'Philosophical Progress in Language Theory', p. 17.

¹³ Quine, *Word and Object*, pp. 68-72.

¹⁴ Quine, 'Philosophical Progress in Language Theory', p. 15; Hollis, 'Reason and Ritual', pp. 232-34; Davidson, 'Thought and Talk', p. 169; 'Radical Interpretation', pp. 134-35.

¹⁵ Versions of the principle of charity typically include the provision for its being weighted so that some attributions of error count against the sponsoring translation manual more heavily than others. The weighting of the principle of charity according to the others is discussed in the last part of the present section and in Section 3.

¹⁶ Davidson, 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning', p. 152.

¹⁷ Quine, 'Philosophical Progress in Language Theory', p. 15; Davidson, 'Radical Interpretation', pp. 134-35.

¹⁸ The Tully River Blacks are reported by W. E. Roth to list four antecedents to (or "causes" for) pregnancy in humans. (Roth, W. E.: 1903, 'Superstition, Magic and Medicine', *North Queensland Ethnographical Bulletin* 5, 22; quoted in Spiro, M.: 'Virgin Birth: Parthenogenesis and Physiological Paternity', p. 242.) None of the four involves sexual relations. However, the natives are able to provide a rudimentary account of the biological basis of pregnancy in animals. Leach adopts the case as an example of symbolist reinterpretation. According to Leach:

The modern interpretation of the ritual described would be that in this society the

relationship between the woman's child and the clansmen of the woman's husband stems from the public recognition of the bonds of marriage, rather than from the facts of cohabitation, which is a very normal state of affairs. (Leach, E.: 1961, 'Golden Bough or Gilded Twig?', *Daedalus*, p. 376.)

Spiro holds rather that "the aborigines are indeed ignorant of physiological paternity, and that the four statements quoted by Roth are in fact proffered explanations for conception". (Spiro, M.: 1966, 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation,' in M. Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, Tavistock, London, pp. 85-126, 112.)

Leach objects strongly to Spiro's alternative interpretation, suggesting that it is not only wrong but, as an attribution of ignorance, also highly offensive. (Leach, E. (ed.): 1969, 'Virgin Birth', in *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays*, Jonathan Cape, London, p. 92.) However, it turns out that Leach would discriminate among attributions of ignorance, ruling some out, but not others. Leach would not insist that attributions of ignorance regarding molecular biology or atomic physics are attributions of irrationality. Leach's central objection to Spiro is that he finds it "highly implausible on common-sense grounds that genuine 'ignorance' of the basic facts of physiological paternity should anywhere be a cultural fact". (Leach, 'Virgin Birth', p. 93.) Thus, for Leach, those attributions of ignorance that constitute objectionable attributions of irrationality are those that seem improbable, given our *common-sense psychology*. Leach objects not to attributions of ignorance but to attributions of *inexplicable* ignorance.

¹⁹ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft Among the Azande*, p. 476.

²⁰ In this paper, I generally speak of translation manuals being "adequate" and "well-grounded", and of "confidence" in translation manuals. However, I do, at a few places, use the natural (but seemingly more realistic) formulations, talking of translation manuals "being basically correct", and of confidence in a translation manual as "on the whole correct". The reader may wonder what confidence in adequacy or in correctness amounts to in this context. The answer, I believe, is that the investigator who has a first-approximation translation manual of the sort discussed here can be confident that he or she is on as promising a road to the construction of explanatory accounts as possible, given present theories and prospective successor-theories. (See Section 3.)

²¹ Leach, 'Virgin Birth', pp. 94-95.

²² Spiro, 'Virgin Birth, Parthenogenesis and Physiological Paternity', pp. 255-57.

²³ Leach, E.: 1954, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, Athlone Press, London.

²⁴ Horton, R.: 1970, 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', in B. Wilson (ed.), *Rationality*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 131-71; 1982, 'Tradition and Modernity Revisited', in M. Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and Relativism*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp. 201-60.

²⁵ Turner, *Sociological Explanation as Translation*; Putnam, H.: 1978, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, p. 41.

²⁶ See, for example, Jahoda's discussion of Colin Turnbull's account of the Ik. (Jahoda, G.: 1982, *Psychology and Anthropology: a Psychological Perspective*, Academic Press, New York, pp. 102-105.)

²⁷ Nisbett, R. and Ross, L.: 1980, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs. Stephen Stich and Christopher Cherniak have appealed to this literature in their arguments against an ideal rationality

requirement in psychology. Stich, S.: 1985, 'Could Man be an Irrational Animal', *Synthese* 64, 115–35. Cherniak, C.: 1981, 'Minimal Rationality', *Mind* xc, 161–83.

²⁸ Elster, J.: 1982, 'Belief, Bias and Ideology', in M. Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and Relativism*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp. 123–48.

²⁹ Horton, 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', and 'Tradition and Modernity Revisited'.

³⁰ Malinowski, B.: 1931, 'Culture', in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Routledge, London, pp. 627–28, 634–36. Since Malinowski, the appeal to a psychological notion of needs has often taken on a more cognitive and less emotional caste, cf. Spiro, 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', p. 107; Beattie, *Other Cultures*, pp. 205–206, and Geertz, C. (ed.): 1973, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York, pp. 87–125, 100–103.

³¹ Quine, *Word and Object*, p. 59; Davidson, 'Radical Interpretation', p. 136.

³² Nisbett and Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment*, pp. 3–61, 141–50. The example is theirs as well (p. 146).

³³ Quine, *Word and Object*, p. 37.

³⁴ This case is somewhat more complicated when we consider abstentions as well as assent and dissent. See Quine: 1973, *Roots of Reference*, Open Court, LaSalle, IL, 75–78.

³⁵ Quine, 'Philosophical Progress in Language Theory', 16–17.

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