C. I. LEWIS AND THE PARADOXES OF TRANSLATABILITY

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In the reply to his critics in the Schilpp volume, C. I. Lewis makes the remark:

> The considerations of logical theory, relevant to analytic knowledge, are intrinsically antecedent and needed for support of the more purely epistemological argument: they were put in Book I. I now think I overdid this business of separating the logical from the epistemological, and that in result the connection between Book I and Book II was never well made.[1]

And it is surely the case that the extensive logical groundwork of Book I of Lewis's *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation (AKV)* does seem to be of very little use in the epistemological system set out in Book II of that work. It could be that this is merely a difficulty in structuring a work with the philosophical scope of *AKV.* But I want to maintain here that the problem runs deeper than that. I believe that the gap between Book I and Book II represents a problem in the empiricist position that neither Lewis nor his critics ever fully appreciated. It is a problem in the relation between the verificationist theories of meaning and knowledge, which problem I would label the "paradox of empiricist translatability."

Simply put, the paradox is this: on the one side is the empiricist premise that all empirical knowledge rests ultimately on the findings of sense, while on the other side it seems impossible to actually "translate" sensation statements into statements about empirical objects. Now, the difficulties of the empiricist translatability thesis have been widely discussed, with both in the critical literature on Lewis and regarding empiricism generally.[2] But, to my knowledge at least, two very intresting points have been neglected in that discussion. First, the paradox turns up in *AKV* as an ambiguity in the notion of a termanating judgment. The terminating judgments of Book I (following the thoughts of Lewis's earlier work, *Mind and the World-Order*) are analytically connected to empirical judgments, while those of Book II are not. This ambiguity, I think, rather straightforwardly dramatizes the gap between the verificationist theories of meaning and knowledge. Secondly, and more broadly, the paradox of translatability is only one of a family of such paradoxes which turn up in any number of traditional philosophical problems, such as the "mind-body" problem, the "is-ought" controversy, and in accounts of the cognitive status of theoretical entities in

science. In each one of these long standing problem areas, a paradox arises in the attempt to establish meaning connections between sets of terms that refer to different categories of entities. I shall begin, then, with a discussion of the ambiguity in the notion of a terminating judgment and move from there to consider some characteristics of the family of paradoxes of which the paradox of empiricist translatability is a member.

In *Mind and the World-Order (MWO),* Lewis states that

> The purely conceptual element in knowledge is, psychologically, an abstraction. It is a pattern of relation which, in the individual mind, is conjoined with some definite complex of sense qualia which is the referent or denotation of this concept and the clue to its application in presented experience. These two together, the concept and its sensory correlate, constitute some total meaning or idea for the individual mind.[3]

But then he also states in the same context that a pure concept will be defined as "that meaning which must be common to two minds when they understand each other by the use of a substantive or its equivalent" (1929, p. 70). In these two passages we can see the makings of the later ambiguity regarding terminating judgments in *AKV.* For Lewis, in *MWO,* is quite clear in his assertion that the pure sensory element—the given complex of qualia—is a psychological event which does not yield itself to comparison with the sensory experiences of others. You and I can never know if our respective experiences of red are the same. So obviously there must be a sense in which the denotation or reference of the concept ranges beyond the subjective world of my sensations. Lewis refers to the concept as a "definitive structure of meanings" (1929, p. 89) and leaves little doubt that in fact he is talking about concepts of objects. He says, for example, that "The classification of what is presented and the predicted relationship of it with further experience are one and the same thing. This implicit prediction is at once a general principle and our concept of the object" (1929, p. 70).

Clearly, for Lewis my concept of an object involves a projection of experience; but the community of concepts among minds demands that such projection is not purely qualitative. In short, the projection of experience that Lewis describes throughout *MWO* must be conceptual. Relations between concepts are analytic and a priori. Relations between concepts and qualia are synthetic and a posteriori. Qualia are the clue to the application of concepts, but neither entail them nor are entailed by them. Finally, Lewis states with regard to these general principles that they represent,

> a sort of purposive attitude taken in the interest of understanding and intelligibility with which we confront the given. [They] . . . do not preclude any imaginable or unimaginable content of experience in the future, but only preclude our interpreting it in a fashion contrary to our predetermined attitude or bent (1929, p. 228).

If this thing before me is a cube, then I can expect that whatever future experiences of it I might have, they will not be appropriately interpretable under the concept of roundness. And if I should subsequently experience a complex of qualia correlated with roundness, then I might decide this is not a cube, or take it to be a context of illusion. But what I definitely will *not* do is revise my belief that "cubical" entails "non-round." This is a connection of meaning—a conceptual connection—which no passage of sensory experience can disconfirm or refute. And it is this relation of meanings which I believe Lewis has in mind in Book I of *AKV,* in his discussion of the intension of a term. He says there:

> As suggested by the derivation of the word, the intension of a term represents our intention in the use of it; the meaning it expresses in that simplest and most frequent sense which is the original meaning of "meaning"; that sense in which what we mean by "*A*" is what we have in mind in using "*A*", and what is oftentimes spoken of as the *concept of A*. We shall wish to preserve this original sense of "intension" and, specifically, to identify it with the *criterion in mind* by which it is determined whether the term in question applies or fails to apply in any particular instance.[4]

This sort of criterion in mind is what Lewis calls a "sense meaning." And, as he later tells us, "The sense meaning of any verifiable statement of objective fact, is exhibitable in some set of terminating judgments." (1946, p. 211). It is one of Lewis's central claims that terminating judgments are entailed by statements of objective fact, or non-terminating judgments. This is at the heart of his verificationist theory of meaning. That is, the meaning of the statement of objective fact is expressed through the set of terminating judgments it entails. And when we reach the end of Book I of *AKV,* everything that Lewis has told us about sense meanings can be interpreted consistently with the account of concepts in *MWO* as described above.

It is not until Book II that Lewis begins his discussion of terminating judgments specifically. He tells us there that not only do terminating judgments express the meanings of objective statements, but also state their conditions of confirmation. He states that a terminating judgment is

> a judgment that a certain empirical eventuation will ensue if a certain mode of action be adopted. Such judgments may be decisively verified or found false by adopting the mode of action in question and putting them to the test. And it is by such conclusive verification of terminating

judgments, constituent in the meaning of it, that the objective belief—the non-terminating judgment—receives its confirmation as more or less highly probable (1946, p. 211).

Here we have reference to a specific passage of sensory experience—the very thing ruled out by the notion of sense meaning in Book I. It is this second sort of terminating judgment that Lewis goes on to use in his discussion of probability. And once again we can look back to *MWO* to see the ambiguity in the making. There Lewis states,

when we make the judgment, "This is round," what we suppose ourselves to know requires two propositions to express it fully: (1) "If this is round, then further experience of it will be thus and so (the empirical criteria of objective roundness)" and (2) "This present given is such that further experience (probably) *will be* thus and so." The first of these is a priori; the second is our statement of the probable empirical truth about the given object (1929, pp. 284-85).

It is propositions of the first sort that turn up in Book I of *AKV* as the terminating judgments expressive of sense meanings, and propositions of the second sort that appear in Book II as expressive of confirmation conditions.

That these represent different sorts of judgments becomes clear at the point at which Lewis attempts to defend the entailment relation between non-terminating and terminating judgments of the second sort. Lewis speaks of a translation between the two in a passage clearly revealing the ambiguity between the two sorts of terminating judgments:

If the suggested account should be correct, then the judgment of objective fact implies nothing which is not theoretically verifiable. And since any, even partial, vertification could be made only by something disclosed in *some* passage of experience, such an objective and non-terminating judgment must be translatable into judgments of the terminating kind. Only so could confirmation of it in experience come about. If particular experiences should not serve as its corroborations, then it cannot be confirmed at all; experience in general would be irrelevant to its truth or falsity; and it must be either analytic or meaningless (1946, p. 181).

(One can't help but notice that his reference to *some* passage of experience has the same indefinite character as Kant's reference to *some* set of categories in the Transcendental Deduction.) Clearly he is relying on the a priori connections of the type one judgments while talking about the a posteriori

connections of type two. For translation between statements referring to empirical objects and statements referring to particular passages of sensory experience is out of the question. The basis of any translation is ultimately some identity of referents. For example, it is possible to translate from German to English only insofar as we are aware of the metalinguistic fact that "buch" refers to the same set of objects as "book." But by hypothesis there is no such identity of reference between non-terminating and terminating judgments if the former refer to physical objects and the latter to particular presentations of the given. Rather, the only way that translation can make sense is if we take the terminating judgments to refer to a kind of empirical concept. And this Lewis cannot square with what he wants to say about confirmation.

Chisholm raises this sort of issue in his article, "The Problem of Empiricism,"[5] but fails to notice that Lewis has more than one sort of terminating judgment. Also, he bases his attack on the impossibility of describing observation conditions in the sensation language of Lewis's expressive statements, ignoring the more fundamental problem of attempting to translate between two languages with no identity of referents.

Lewis's real problem here is clearly expressible in terms of his own position in *MWO*. There he maintains, accurately I would say, that it is categorically inappropriate to assert that the Given entails or is entailed by anything. The Given is merely a sensory cue to the application of a concept —a relation discovered in experience, like the "real connections" expressed by terminating judgments. And in fact it is even a bit misleading to speak of "applying" concepts, if we take that to mean that they denote passages of sensory experiences. Concepts, as Lewis describes them in *MWO*, function to *explain* and *relate* experiences, but they do not denote them. The relation between concept and qualia is parallel to that between a theoretical term and a causal law statement in science. The former is postulated to explain the latter.

In his 1955 article, "Realism or Phenomenalism," Lewis clearly states the categorial distinction between the sensory given and objective properties. He says there, "The visual quale and the objective color of an object could not be identical because they belong to different categories of being."[6] But in that article he neither asserts nor denies the possibility of translation between terms referring to entities in these categories. And what I should want to go on and maintain is that in fact a metaphysical category is identifiable, in part at least, by the boundaries of the analytic relations between the terms referring to its constituent entities. In short, such boundaries are established when we are unable to draw meaning connections between terms or sets of terms.

Let me suggest a simple model for these notions. Let us think of the analytic relations between concepts in a particular metaphysical category as

a set of horizontal connections. And let us represent relations between concepts of different categorical sets as vertical connections. So the horizontal connections represent meaning relations and the verticals represent correlations of various sorts. Thus when we make a horizontal move we are reasoning, and when we made a vertical move we are postulating a correlation. Typically, this is the postulation of an identity of reference, for the purpose of giving an explanation—answering a "why" question. To begin with a very simple case, when we read Homer we find explanations of physical events given in terms of divine events. The reason the wind came up on this occasion was that Neptune wished to blow the ship of Ulysses to that island. Homer thus "makes sense" of the apparently random events of the weather by postulating an identity of reference between the physical concept, "wind," and the concept, "action of Neptune," from the category of divine events. Nothing horizontally entails that event of wind, so a vertical move is made to a level where further horizontal progress is possible. Horizontal moves at the new level concern Neptune's beliefs, actions, motives, and such which come to some conclusion which is then tied to a physical event via another reference postulation. (For example, the angry Neptune is stirring up trouble by bringing Ulysses together with this wood nymph, etc.)

Now, what I want to claim is that such identity of reference is never proven (that is, never a horizontal move) but always only postulated. This is the postulation I take to be involved in giving a scientific theory, or using mathematics in engineering. When we put up a bridge, for example, we postulate an identity of reference between mathematical entities and certain physical materials. We do this so that we may carry out calculations (that is, move horizontally) at the level of mathematical entities, then "translate" (vertically) the results of these calculations into correlated operations on materials.

Or consider the explanation of a chemical reaction. Nothing about the observable properties of gun powder entails that it will explode. In order to explain that, we postulate that the term "gun powder" refers to a substance also referred to by a particular atomic description which, in conjunction with various meaning connections in atomic theory, entails the atomic event correlated with the observable event of explosion.

There are a variety of further examples that could be given here. In particular, this analysis fits well, I believe, in discussions of the "Is-Ought" question and the Identity Theory of consciousness. But those cases are fairly obvious, so let me conclude with the suggestion that none of this should come as any surprise. If we simply look at the category of linguistic entities, the same sort of analysis emerges. In fact, Lewis himself gave this sort of account in the Modes of Meaning section of *AKV,* when he distinguished between linguistic and sense meanings. Linguistic meanings are

those that employ the relation of entailment, while sense meanings are based on correlations between qualia and concepts. Both are necessary for the application of language to a reality it is taken to describe. Lewis's only problem was in not sticking to his original intuitions about qualia-concept correlations. They're not really sense *meanings,* they're sense *references.*

NOTES

1. "Autobiography," in *The Philosophy of C. I. Lewis,* P. A. Schilpp, ed., Library of Living Philosophers, Vol. 13 (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 968), p. 20.
2. See for example, *The Problem of Knowledge,* A. J. Ayer (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1956), pp. 118-29.
3. *Mind and the World Order,* C. I. Lewis (New York: Dover Press, 1929), p. 115.
4. *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation,* C. I. Lewis (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1946), p. 43.
5. Roderick Chisholm, "The Problem of Empiricism," in *Journal of Philosophy, 45* (1948), pp. 512-17.
6. "Realism or Phenomenalism," *The Collected Papers of C. I. Lewis,* ed. by Goheen and Mothershead (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. 344.