

Quine's Semantic Quandary

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Abstract

In his essay "Ontological Relativity," Quine has argued that the thesis of inscrutability can and should be applied generally, *i.e.*, it is indeterminate whether anyone's any term refers to one kind of things as opposed to others. He has further claimed that the generality of the applicability of the thesis seems to force us into a quandary: the absurd position that there is no referential difference between any terms. The intention of Quine's advocacy of the argument is not clearly elucidated in the text. It has been suggested that the aim of Quine's argument is twofold: on the one hand, it is to show that the derivation from the inscrutability of reference to the unacceptable semantic quandary is invalid if the concept of reference is conceived "relatively"; on the other, the derivation will go through if the concept is understood "absolutely." This paper, however, argues that the quandary is not merely a seeming, but an inevitable consequence of the inscrutability thesis even as the concept of reference is conceived relatively.

Key Words: Quine, the inscrutability of reference, ontological relativity, absolute reference