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Quine's Naturalized Epistemology and the Third Dogma of Empiricism

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Abstract

This essay reconsiders Davidson's critical attribution of the scheme–content distinction to Quine's naturalized epistemology. It focuses on Davidson's complaint that the presence of this distinction leads Quine to mistakenly construe neural input as evidence. While committed to this distinction, Quine's epistemology does not attempt to locate a justificatory foundation in sensory experience and does not then equate neural intake with evidence. Quine's central epistemological task is an explanatory one that attempts to scientifically clarify the route from stimulus to science. Davidson's critical remarks wrongly assign concerns to Quine's view that it does not have and further obscures the status of his naturalized conception of epistemology.

Several philosophers, most notably Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty, have criticized Quine's naturalized conception of epistemology for its alleged commitment to the dualism of scheme and content, what Davidson famously called the "third dogma of empiricism."[1] The fundamental problem with this dualism, at least for Davidson, is the way it encourages taking unconceptualized empirical input (the content side of this division) as evidence for our totality of beliefs (the scheme side of the division). Quine's naturalized epistemology is then presented as mistakeningly offering sensory input as evidence for our system of beliefs, something that Davidson argues "non-propositional experience" simply cannot do. In apparent opposition to this reading, Roger Gibson (1999) remarks that

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Quine does not equate experience with sensory input, further suggesting that he does not then appeal to any sort of sensory given as the ultimate evidence for our beliefs. Related concerns are offered by Peter Hylton (1997) when he defends Quine's adherence to the scheme–content distinction by noting its connection to his scientific worldview rather than with any concern in locating an empirical foundation for human knowledge. The central issue then turns on how we are to understand Quine's apparent advocacy of the scheme–content distinction and, more significantly, whether this commitment leads to the disastrous errors suggested by Davidson. This essay deals with this specific interpretive issue by readdressing the motivations behind Quine's commitment to the third dogma of empiricism. My main interpretive claim builds on the suggestive remarks made by both Gibson and Hylton when they locate the motives for this distinction within Quine's acceptance of a scientific perspective in epistemology. However, unlike these commentators, I provide a more detailed account of Quine's adherence to this dualism, one that highlights its connections to his conception of naturalized epistemology and that is directly situated within the context of Davidson's critical remarks. More specifically, I argue that Quine's core project in epistemology, of which the scheme–content distinction forms a part, should not be understood as concerned with isolating some sensory foundation in experience that serves to justify our system of beliefs. We should rather view Quine's main epistemological task as an explanatory one aimed at providing a scientific account of how humans are capable of moving from sense experience to scientific knowledge of the world. It is from within this account that the scheme–content distinction emerges as a basic scientific finding about the structure of human knowledge and that then helps to further clarify the route from sensory stimulation to our more advanced scientific pronouncements. Quine's concern with the "evidential support" for science, as he sometimes describes it, refers to this explanatory project and not the attempt to locate the ultimate "evidence" for science within some sensory foundation.

I begin with a discussion of the Davidson–Quine dispute over the status of this third dogma within Quine's naturalized epistemology. This will allow us to recognize not only Quine's explicit commitment to the scheme–content distinction, but also how the debate itself is largely inconclusive. Quine does not explicitly address Davidson's critical remarks nor does he clearly indicate the explanatory task of his epistemology. I then consider in more detail the nature of Quine's core epistemological project and how it should be read as promoting the specific explanatory aim described above. I further demonstrate how this explains his lack of concern with Davidson's specific worry over evidence, and how this indicates where such issues are properly located within Quine's account. Lastly, I conclude that

Davidson's critical remarks reflect a misunderstanding of the basic project that supports Quine's advocacy of the scheme–content distinction, and attribute motives to his view that it does not have. In the case of at least Quine's naturalized version of empiricism, Davidson's critical attribution of the third dogma fails to fully appreciate his scientific reformulation of the epistemological tasks of empiricism.

1. Davidson and Quine on the Third Dogma

In his "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," Davidson famously introduced the third dogma of empiricism by offering this general characterization of the dualism: "The idea is ... that something is a language, and associated with a conceptual scheme, whether we can translate it or not, if it stands in a certain relation (predicting, organizing, facing or fitting) to experience (nature, reality, sensory promptings)" (1974, 191). Elsewhere he further indicates that Quine's specific formulation of this apparent dogma is elaborated in accordance with his chief concern over how, on the basis of sensory stimulation, we are able to arrive at our current scientific theory. Among the many passages[2] where he finds evidence of this dualism, Davidson emphasizes Quine's "distinction between report and invention, substance and style, cues and conceptualization" and his further remark that

> we cannot strip away the conceptual trappings sentence by sentence ... but we can investigate the world, and man as part of it, and thus find out what cues he could have of what goes on around him. Subtracting his cues from his worldview, we get man's net contribution as the difference. This difference marks the extent of man's conceptual sovereignty—the domain within which he can revise theory while saving the data. (1960, 5)

Here, Davidson finds the clear presence of a scheme–content dualism with Quine's explicit emphasis on the difference between our worldview and cues, our theory and its data (Davidson 1989, 161). The further issue concerns exactly why this distinction should be seen as detrimental to Quine's epistemology. For Davidson, the main problem concerns the view of justification and evidence that is suggested by Quine's position and that emerges from this emphasis on the division between scheme and content.

> The general position is that sensory experience provides all the *evidence* for the acceptance of sentences (where sentences may include whole theories). A sentence or theory fits our sensory promptings, successfully faces the tribunal of experience, predicts

> future experience, or copes with the pattern of our surface irritations, provided it is borne out by the evidence. (1984, 193)

The central issue here emphasizes how accounts that adhere to this sort of division between theory and data are inclined to seek justification for our beliefs through comparison with this data. Such views attempt to confer a level of justification to our scheme of beliefs by their answerability to whatever is given in experience, in Quine's case, the sensory promptings that serve as our ultimate "take" on what happens in our surrounding scene. Consequently, Quine's advocacy of the third dogma results in what Davidson calls the "ultimate source of evidence" for our knowledge of the world consisting of the stimulation of our sensory surfaces (1989, 161–62).

Davidson's main critical point wonders whether sensory input can properly play this evidential role.[3] In his "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" (1990), he further explains how the attempt to ground our beliefs within what is empirically given is motivated by the thought that it is sensations that connect our beliefs and the world, further enabling them to then justify our beliefs because we are aware of them. However, the main problem with this approach is that "justification seems to depend on the awareness, which is just another belief" (2001b, 142). Since it is only beliefs themselves that are capable of providing evidential support, our sensations are revealed as playing no important epistemic role with regard to the justification of our beliefs. The relationship between sensations and belief should be understood only in causal terms and cannot without confusion be understood as providing evidence.

> This causal relation cannot be a relation of *confirmation* or *disconfirmation*, since the cause is not a proposition or belief, but just an event in the world or in our sensory apparatus. Nor can such events be considered in themselves evidence, unless, of course, they cause us to believe something. And then it is the belief that is properly called the evidence, not the event. (1982, 486)

Now it is here that Davidson claims Quine's naturalized epistemology makes a fatal error, since by claiming that knowledge is epistemologically grounded in some ultimate source of evidence it wrongly assigns a justificatory role to sensation. Quine's use of observation sentences—sentences keyed to stimulations that all speakers will assent to in response to the same stimulations—is precisely for Davidson an attempt to utilize sensations so they can serve as justificatory vehicles.

But this runs counter to the point we have just seen, that sensations only play a causal role in the production of our beliefs. It is on the basis of this claim that Davidson famously concludes that "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except

another belief" (2001b, 141). His argument for this claim is a familiar one and emphasizes how sensory or neural input lacks propositional content and, thus, cannot stand as a potential reason for a belief:

> The reason sensations, percepts and sense-data cannot provide epistemic support for beliefs is simple: reasons have to be geared conceptually to what they are reasons for. The relation of epistemic support requires that both relata have propositional content, and entities like sensations and sense-data have no propositional content. (1997, 22)[4]

Appeals to the sensory given, even in terms of Quine's more scientifically acceptable neural intake or input, does not provide the needed content required for serving as a reason. Neural input then remains epistemologically irrelevant for the question of evidential support for our beliefs. Davidson thus concludes that any attempt to ground knowledge on some form of non-propositional "experience" is untenable, and since Quine's naturalized epistemology fails to recognize this, it too fails to adequately deal with the question of epistemic justification.

Quine's response to these charges openly acknowledges his adherence to the third dogma, but rather than viewing this commitment as dogmatic, he takes it as central to a proper naturalist rendering of the evidential support of science.

> The third purported dogma, understood now in relation to ... warranted belief, remains intact. It has a descriptive and normative aspect, and in neither aspect do I think of it as a dogma. It is what makes scientific method partly empirical rather than solely a quest for internal coherence. It has indeed wanted some tidying up, and has had it. (1981, 39)

The "tidying up" that Quine refers to is his own naturalized account of the relation between evidence and scientific theory, which he argues is a more scientifically acceptable account of the connections between sensory input and the theoretical statements of advanced science. The rest of Quine's reply expands on this general theme, indicating the naturalist motives that underlie his core epistemological project and further explaining how these motives have lead to the main changes in his developing epistemological perspective. What these remarks show is that the main lines of Quine's philosophical development do not result in any significant change of outlook, but highlight his underlying interest in presenting a more satisfactory naturalistic depiction of the metaphorical statements found in his earlier "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1953). In that article, Quine had described our system of scientific knowledge as a "man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along

the edges" where his use of "experience" was left unexplained (1953, 42). By *Word and Object* (1960), Quine's naturalist aspirations are made more explicit with his construal of experience in terms of the triggering of nerve endings, or the more recent "neural intake." The distinction between scheme and content or scientific theory and evidence, which Quine openly admits is found within his conception of epistemology, is part of his continued emphasis on the "empiricist discipline" required for an adequate theory of knowledge (1981, 40). While this reply settles the question of Quine's commitment to the scheme–content distinction, it fails to sufficiently clarify the grounds of this commitment, nor does this admission explicitly address Davidson's worry over "ultimate evidence." More specifically, Quine does not clarify the status of his project when he describes it as concerned with the "theory of evidence" (1981, 39). As a result, those critics who find no room for normative concerns over justification within Quine's project would appear to be vindicated and the sort of problem Davidson raises for Quine's account would seem to remain.[5]

However, Quine's remarks do indicate certain lines of thought that are central to his conception of epistemology and when further clarified can help address these issues. His adherence to the scheme–content distinction is presented as part of his more general commitment to empiricism, where Quine takes empiricism itself as a finding of science. For him, our best scientific theories confirm that all the evidence for science comes through the senses and, thus, further supports the acceptance of a scheme–content distinction, or divide between theory and evidence as fundamental to the structure of human knowledge.[6] Importantly, Quine does not think these claims are assumptions in need of further independent philosophical support. Rather, they constitute the inherited results of prior scientific theorizing, which we now find ourselves working with as we attempt to make further contributions to the ongoing progress of human knowledge. What this then suggests is that Quine's commitments to empiricism and the scheme–content distinction are based on his acceptance of a scientific perspective within epistemology and do not stem from any philosophical interest in locating an empirical foundation for scientific knowledge.

This point gains further support from Quine's general silence concerning Davidson's worry over the status of evidence and justification. Quine conceives of his project as demonstrating how we have moved from stimulus to science and, in turn, how scientific theories gain support through their ability to predict future experience. His commitments to empiricism and the scheme–content distinction are part of this scientific project, themselves accepted as receiving support from science and as contributing to this scientific clarification of the connections between our sensory surfaces and scientific discourse. Quine

does not show any interest in isolating a sensory foundation that serves as the ultimate justification for our beliefs because this task is not part of his scientific commitment to empiricism and the scheme–content distinction. This view of empiricism contrasts sharply with Davidson's, who takes the connection between empiricism and the scheme–content distinction as tied to the pursuit of a sensory foundation in experience. Davidson's failure to note this disparity between his and Quine's understandings of empiricism is precisely why his criticism of Quine's view fails. It leads him to attribute epistemic aims to Quine's project that it does not share with his own conception of empiricism and its alleged third dogma.

In order to provide additional support for these interpretive remarks, we need to discuss the relevant details of Quine's naturalized account of knowledge. This will help further highlight the nature and status of his central explanatory aims and indicate the way Davidson's criticisms fail to engage with Quine's own conceptions of naturalized epistemology, empiricism, and the scheme–content distinction.

2. Naturalized Epistemology and Evidence

The main features of Quine's naturalized account of knowledge are quite familiar.[7] He has recently offered this brief encapsulation of his project: "The business of naturalized epistemology, for me, is an improved understanding of the chains of causation and implication that connect the bombardment of our surfaces, at one extreme, with our scientific output at the other" (1995b, 349). Understanding the import of such remarks requires noting how they highlight the main explanatory task of epistemology as Quine conceives it and further clarifying the status of the claims made in the name of this project. Naturalized epistemology is presented here as providing an improved scientific account of the connections between the activation of our sensory surfaces and our theoretical discourse about the world. In seeking to provide this account, Quine reformulates the core epistemic question by describing it in terms that he takes to be responsive to the methodological and evidential standards found in the empirical sciences. His general elaboration of these connections emphasizes the way observation sentences are learned through direct association with their stimulus conditions. Clarifying how theory is related to such expressions is a matter of examining the way various hypotheses are introduced and tested within the context of experimental method.[8]

For present purposes, the important issue involves the way Quine understands his project as consisting of a scientific reformulation of the concerns that remain relevant for epistemology. Quine implements his explanatory task by attempting

to comply with the very intersubjective methods found in empirical science itself. Set up in such terms, epistemology must now become responsive to the demand for external evidence, where "external" points to the possibility of applying the third-person objective method that characterizes sound empirical reasoning. It is such empirical constraints that he thinks all epistemological hypotheses must now be subject to. From this perspective, Quine views his *own* claims as scientific hypotheses that stand or fall through adherence to the same empirical standards of testability that are found in science more generally. We can then appreciate how the various technical terms that form part of this project, such as "observation sentence," "neural intake" and others, are all chosen for their perceived ability to adhere to such methodological requirements. The clarification of the links from stimulus to science requires scientifically acceptable counterparts in the form of "stimulations," "the triggering of sensory receptors" and "observation sentence."[9] The usual philosophical concepts of "experience," "sense data," and "the external world" do not permit the formulation of hypotheses that can be subjected to the type of empirical inquiry promoted by Quine's naturalized conception of epistemology. Clarity, increased precision, and the need for external evidence all contribute to the prediction of observable consequences, and it is then such requirements that Quine thinks we must strictly adhere to in developing a naturalized account of knowledge. By setting up our account of knowledge in scientific terms, we leave behind the unchecked speculations of the past and enjoy the same methodological and evidential advantages found in the natural sciences.

It is these philosophical motives that underlie Quine's presentation of "naturalized epistemology" as a scientific clarification of the evidential relation between scientific theory and its sensory evidence. Davidson is clearly correct in noting the way Quine's emphasis on the division between stimulus and science corresponds to the scheme–content distinction found in his third dogma of empiricism. Moreover, we have seen Quine's own explicit acceptance of the distinction as central to his version of empiricism and naturalized epistemology. However, the central question concerns whether the presence of this division leads Quine's naturalized epistemology into the problem of "ultimate evidence," where sensory input is meant to serve as justification for what we believe. I have already indicated some reasons for why the main explanatory task of Quine's epistemology conflicts with this general understanding of his project. However, part of the problem stems from Quine's own characterization of his view, since as we have seen, he does at times describe it as concerned with the evidential support of science (see Quine 1992). One can imagine Davidson wondering how this appeal to neural input clarifies the evidential support of science, when it is simply mistaken to view neural input as capable of serving as evidence.

Quine's remarks may also seem to challenge my interpretation of his project as largely explanatory. The key here is to understand how his concern with the "evidential support" of science forms one part of his larger explanatory project. In order to see this, we should reconsider Quine's use of the term "evidence," beginning with his recent reflections on this issue:

> "Evidence" is a term that I have used informally in introductory or summary formulations. I have not found it useful in more detailed inquiry. But let me now see what, more precisely, I would make of it. My stated overall problem has been the quasi-epistemological problem, within natural science, of man's construction of natural science on the datum base of neural intake. The intake is not what we are aware of and infer from, but it does encompass our "information," in the computer engineer's sense, as to what is going on around us. It is perhaps a candidate for the title of evidence, but it does not meet Davidson's dictum that only a belief can be evidence for a belief. The runner-up for the title is the observation sentence that has been conditioned to that neural intake. Evidence in this sense meets Davidson's condition. (1997, 575–76)

This passage illustrates several important points. Quine's use of "evidence" is generally confined to summary statements of his position, but the concept itself is too unclear for the more precise scientific formulations required of his naturalist project. That Quine adopts this attitude is not surprising, given both the motives and main task that are central to his project. In attempting to explain the connections between stimulation and science from a scientific perspective, the term "evidence" is too unclear to serve as part of a well-formed empirical hypothesis about human knowledge.[10] However, within his own scientific account of knowledge, Quine does think that his scientific analogue "neural input" can be thought of as evidence in the sense of the causal source of our information about what is around us, but he explicitly recognizes that this does not meet Davidson's standards.[11] Neural intake does not justify our beliefs, since we are not aware of it, nor can we infer anything from it. As Quine acknowledges in his earlier response to Davidson, "few people, statistically speaking, know about their nerve endings" (1981, 40). This type of "evidence" is purely causal and is therefore of a piece with Quine's naturalistic rendering of the causal connections between our sensory surfaces and theory.[12] His emphasis on this causal form of evidence indicates that while he still thinks it useful for his own project, his debates with Davidson have made clear to him that such "evidence" conflicts with Davidson's own view of evidence.[13]

An additional type of evidence is revealed once we consider the causal connections between observation sentences and neural input. Observation sentences are linked through causal

conditioning to our neural input, and Quine stresses that they can meet Davidson's standard of evidence because we are aware of them and they can then justify our beliefs. This is best seen with Quine's understanding of the inferential connections between observation sentences and theoretical sentences, and how these connections reveal themselves within experimental method. This process is captured with what Quine calls "observation categoricals," whenever this, that constructions that link two observation sentences, where the first indicates the experimental condition and the second suggests a prediction. They then express the general expectation that whenever one observation sentence holds, the other will also (Quine 1995a, 25). Simple examples might include: Whenever there is a raven, it is black, or, Wherever there is smoke, there is fire. For Quine, these constructions highlight the way in which evidence for a respective hypothesis is to be found: "The scientist deduces from his hypotheses that a certain observable situation should bring about another observable situation; then he realizes the one situation and watches for the other. Evidence for or against his set of hypotheses ensues, however inconclusive" (2000a, 411). The consequences predicted by the observation categorical indicate how observation sentences through their conditioning to stimulus conditions yield evidence for our hypotheses about the world.[14] Once uttered, observation sentences become objects of awareness and can then serve to support or discredit a respective prediction and hypothesis. We remain unaware of our neural input, or sensory stimulation, but this neural activity causes us to believe *that* something is the case, which is then further expressed with the utterance of an observation sentence. So sensory promptings cause us to have beliefs that have the same *content* as the asserted observation sentence, which is what then further serves as evidence supporting our respective belief. This would seem to meet all the requirements that Davidson places on an adequate conception of evidence, since we have awareness of observation sentences that serve to both justify and express the content of our beliefs. Moreover, since observation sentences have content, they can serve as a reason for our beliefs whose content they also share. Davidson's strictures on evidence are than addressed by Quine's use of observation sentences as the locus of evidence for our beliefs about the world.[15]

This approach to the problem of evidence is then in line with Quine's general explanatory aims in epistemology. He does not begin by accepting any preconceived philosophical understandings of the troublesome terms "justification" and "evidence" but attempts to formulate the question in what he takes to be scientifically acceptable terms. His interest in the evidential support of science includes an account of the causal chains from our stimulatory surfaces to our scientific pronounce-

ments *and* an explanation of how our expectations and predications are supported or rejected through observation. Providing an explanation of the way our predictions are related to observation is one central facet of Quine's attempt to scientifically clarify the steps from sensory stimulation to the creation of successful scientific theories of the world. Nevertheless, his account does retain the resources needed to accommodate certain philosophical understandings of justification, most notably, Davidson's conception of evidence.

These remarks can be usefully compared with Quine's early programmatic statement of his view and the reaction that ensued: "Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science ... a conspicuous difference between old epistemology and the epistemological enterprise in this new psychological setting is that we can now make free use of empirical psychology" (1969, 82–83). Here, Quine is explicitly rejecting any philosophical autonomy for epistemology distinct from science by advocating the use of empirical resources in addressing our epistemological concerns. This relocation of epistemology within science has led many to interpret Quine as forgoing any concern with the critical evaluation and justification of our epistemic practices and, instead, as favoring a psychological description of how we have acquired our current beliefs. We have seen reasons for why this conclusion is mistaken. While some of the fault here must lie with Quine's own exposition of his position, it is clearly not his intention to remove such concerns from the province of epistemology.[16] Instead, he seeks to reformulate them as a scientific question to be addressed within his own explanatory account. Once reformulated, the issue becomes one of accounting for how our hypotheses and predications acquire evidential support through their contact with observation.

However, this does further indicate that Quine rejects one type of philosophical concern over justification, where one attempts to justify science from some philosophical standpoint outside of science. His naturalism famously rejects this possibility, resulting in what we have seen as the justification of science becoming a problem for science and, therefore, a problem for naturalized epistemology. We should include in this rejection various empiricist attempts to validate science by locating its "ultimate" source of justification within some empirical foundation. Quine thinks that no such philosophical support for science is needed; it is sufficient to demonstrate—in scientific terms—the "sensitivity" of theories and hypotheses to empirical data. His core project in epistemology then focuses on clarifying how science actually proceeds in developing theories that remain responsive to observation. One of his most explicit statements concerning how he conceives the problem of evidence is captured in this passage:

> Some of my readers have wondered how expressions that are merely keyed to our neural intake, by conditioning or in less direct ways, could be said to convey evidence about the world. This is the wrong picture. We are not aware of our neural intake, nor do we deduce anything from it. What we *have* learned to do is to assert or assent to some observation sentences in *reaction* to certain ranges of neural intake. It is such sentences, then, thus elicited, that serve as experimental checkpoints for theories about the world. (1993, 110–11)[17]

These remarks emphasize points that we have already noted in discussing Quine's treatment of the question of evidence. He locates evidence for our predictions with observation sentences, which are causally tied to our sensory receptors, and once uttered, can serve as an object of awareness supporting or refuting our prediction. Clearly, this conception of the problem is not engaged in any large scale justification of science, nor does it aim to isolate an empirical foundation for scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, Quine thinks that it provides us with all the justification or evidential support that one should want from a proper epistemological account. For him, all questions concerning the evidential support of science are to be handled from within science, and this results in locating the evidence for our hypotheses within the observation sentence that is keyed to our neural input.

3. Empiricism and the Third Dogma

This overview of Quine's core explanatory project in epistemology has indicated how it attempts to address the evidential support of science from *within* science rather than from a philosophical standpoint outside it. We can now consider how this understanding of Quine's view more directly responds to Davidson's critical remarks, and what this further suggests about both the status of empiricism and the presence of the scheme–content distinction within Quine's conception of epistemology.

We have just seen that Quine's scientific understanding of the evidential support of science does not locate justification or evidence at our sensory surfaces but finds it with the observation sentence that is conditioned to our sensory input. This speaks decisively against Davidson's claim that a commitment to the scheme–content distinction leads Quine to identify evidence with neural intake. By not equating neural input with evidence, Quine further demonstrates a general lack of interest in any attempt to locate the empirical given.[18] As we have seen, Quine thinks that it is enough to scientifically clarify the way theories are themselves responsive to observation. When noting the way Quine replaces "experience" with his more technical alternative

"neural intake," we should further realize that this strategic move is not part of what Davidson takes to be a central feature of the empiricist project, namely, the search for the empirical given, or the "ultimate" source of our evidence for our beliefs. It is rather, as we have already seen, a part of Quine's scientific clarification of the evidential relation between scientific theory and sensory data. Quine does not fall prey to the question of empirical giveness or "ultimate evidence," since he is not engaged in an epistemological project designed to elucidate the nature of justification by locating its foundation in experience. Instead, he is seeking a scientific clarification of the relationship between our sensory stimulation and our theoretical organization of this stimulation, where this includes a discussion of how hypotheses gain support from experience. Importantly, once we have clarified how the creation and testing of scientific theories rests on this sensory basis, we will have provided science itself with all the evidential support that is required.

We might describe his general attitude and approach to the problem in these terms. Quine wants to provide a fully naturalistic and scientifically acceptable account of the evidential support of science, but such a project requires appealing to the relevant empirical details of the evidential relations between observation and theory *whether* we are aware of these details or not. In attempting to scientifically improve our understanding of the question of evidential support, a belief's justificatory status may be the result of more than simply its evidential relations to other beliefs. Nondoxastic perceptual, sensory, and memory states may also be highly relevant in the development of a theory of knowledge that is responsive to the empirical demands found with natural science.[19] This does not preclude addressing the question of evidence promoted by Davidson, which enables us to make sense of critically evaluating our respective beliefs. But it does suggest that a full theory of the evidential support of science will need to meet more than the demands set by Davidson's conception of evidence. From within Quine's perspective, Davidson's dismissal of neural input as epistemologically significant is puzzling, since despite the nondoxastic status of sensation, any empirical details concerning the nature of our "sensory surfaces" will remain important in providing an empirically detailed and adequate account of both the acquisition and testability of our scientific theories.

What these remarks show is that Quine's acceptance of the scheme–content distinction does not lead to his confusing sensation, or neural input, with the conception of evidence and justification required by Davidson. Moreover, he agrees that neural input is incapable of serving as a reason for a belief. Davidson's insistence that neural input is of no use for our concerns over epistemic justification misses the full import of Quine's motivations within epistemology because it fails to note how neural

input contributes to Quine explanatory project in epistemology. Rather than taking sides on this issue, Quine begins by noting the way neural input as "evidence" is responsive to his aims as an epistemologist, but continues by further indicating where he would locate Davidson's conception of evidence within his naturalized account of knowledge.[20] Quine adopts a conciliatory tone with regard to the question of evidence, while Davidson seems to retain a conceptually closed and rigid attitude toward the problem.

This fixed attitude stems from Davidson's understanding of empiricism and its relation to the scheme–content distinction. It is, after all, this infamous third dogma of empiricism that Davidson argues leads to the epistemological search for a justificatory foundation in experience. And we have seen that it is this reading of the consequences of this distinction that results in his critical stance toward Quine's project. But Quine's acceptance of empiricism and the scheme–content distinction has none of the foundationalist motivations or specific concerns over justification found in Davidson's critical remarks. The source of both of these commitments is to be found in Quine's adoption of a scientific perspective in epistemology. We have noted that he takes the truth of empiricism to be a scientific finding and that the scheme–content distinction follows as a basic corollary of this commitment. Quine's insistence on a distinction between theory and evidence is grounded in science itself, since he thinks our best scientific understanding recommends we note a difference between our scientific theorizing and the evidence for this theory. This division between scheme and content or theory and evidence is then based on his scientific worldview, where scientific theories explain that all our knowledge is based on sensory stimulation, thereby marking a divide between human-made theoretical attempts to explain the data and the data itself.[21] Examining Quine's emphasis on these elements of his view requires noting how they are situated within his scientific perspective on epistemological issues. His philosophical commitments remain scientific ones that exist as part of a larger overall scientific theory that receives its support through the very sensory channels that Quine seeks to clarify with his own epistemological project. Davidson's criticisms do not then engage with the real source of Quine's commitments to this view and, thus, do not see how they are connected to his different set of explanatory concerns. With regard to Quine's naturalized conceptions of epistemology and empiricism, Davidson's critical attribution of the third dogma fails to fully appreciate their role within Quine's scientific reformulation of the epistemological tasks of empiricism.[21]

Notes

[1] Davidson first makes this charge in his "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (1974). Rorty's critical remarks can be found in his 1991 (51, 145). For a detailed reply to Rorty's criticisms of Quine, see Hylton 1997.

[2] For Davidson's further references to Quine's view, see his 1974 and 1990. The quote given here is discussed by Davidson in his 1989 (161).

[3] Davidson (2001a, 286) has recently mentioned that it is this point that constitutes his central argument against empiricism, which is why it is my main focus here. I thus pass over Davidson's further worries about the skeptical consequences of Quine's adherence to the third dogma. For some useful discussions of this issue see Bergström 2001, Gibson 1995, Ramberg 2001, and Tersman 2001. Davidson's depiction of "experience" and its role in justification is widely disputed. Philosophers such as McDowell (1994) and Pryor (2000) develop alternative views of perceptual experience where it proves capable of justifying our beliefs. My discussion should not then be read as an endorsement of Davidson's overall framing of these issues.

[4] Also see Davidson 2001a, 286. When stated in such terms, Davidson appears to be making a conceptual point concerning the proper use of terms such as "evidence" and "justification." While this issue cannot be pursued further here, this framing of the problem suggests a basic conflict with Quine's insistence on the empirical formulation of philosophical questions and hypotheses.

[5] Of the many commentators who have raised this charge against Quine, several prominent ones would include Bonjour 1998, Kim 1993, and McDowell 1994. My 2004 defends an interpretation of Quine's epistemology that emphasizes its normative elements.

[6] For Quine's claim that empiricism is a finding of science see his 1966 (239) and 1969 (75).

[7] For a recent overview see Quine's 1995c.

[8] Quine's early programmatic statement of this project is found in his 1969. He provides further details in his 1975, 1992, 1995a, and elsewhere.

[9] In order to avoid possible confusion over his use of "stimulation" or "stimulus," Quine now favors "neural intake" as his naturalistic counterpart to sensory experience. This makes clear his continuing interest in locating the relevant stimulus at the subject's surfaces rather than with objects in the subject's surrounding environment.

[10] This explains Quine's agreement with Davidson that in his theory of evidence, "evidence" is not clarified and plays no role (Quine 1990).

[11] For more on these differing senses of "evidence," see Quine and Ullian 1978 (14–15) and Koppelberg 1998 (263–64).

[12] Quine makes a distinction between neural input as strictly causal and observation sentences as containing processed information in his "Grades of Theoreticity" (1970, 3).

[13] In response to Gibson, Quine notes that Davidson's critical remarks on his use of evidence led him to "fight shy of the word" (1994, 502). He makes similar comments in a recent reply to Grayling (2000a, 411).

[14] Quine is explicit on this point in his "Response to Lehrer" (2000b, 412).

[15] Here I am indebted to remarks from Jonathan Adler.

[16] For an account of Quine's project in large harmony with my own, but which does not stress its connections to the third dogma, see Johnsen 2005. Johnsen argues that Quine never abandoned normative epistemology although his presentation unfortunately makes it look that way (2005, 79).

[17] Gibson takes this passage as demonstrating that Quine is not committed to the empirical given within his naturalized account of knowledge, but he never fully explains why this is the case, nor does he indicate how this point is connected to the scheme–content distinction. The remarks that follow are intended to pursue these issues in more detail.

[18] Hylton also emphasizes that sensory stimulations are not given, but simply happen to us. They do not then form part of an epistemic, justificatory relation (1997, 78).

[19] Koppelberg also makes this point in his 1990 (209).

[20] After reaching similar conclusions concerning Quine's view of evidence, Koppelberg wonders further whether Quine accepts what he calls Davidson's "doxastic requirement" on justification (1998, 264). Given the interpretation defended here, we should recognize that for Quine the question does not simply involve a choice between Davidson's conception of evidence and Quine's own emphasis on the value of neural input. Rather, as we have seen, Quine's naturalized conception of epistemology finds room for both conceptions of evidence, and to this extent he accepts Davidson's doxastic requirement. However, this cannot be the entire story with regard to evidence, since it remains important to consider the causal notions of evidence required to meet Quine's interest in scientifically clarifying the relation between stimulus and science. The point that needs emphasizing is that rather than taking a side on this issue, Quine demonstrates how he thinks the demands of *both* conceptions of evidence can find a place in his naturalized account of knowledge.

[21] Hylton makes this same point in criticizing Rorty's use of the scheme–content distinction as a basis for attacking Quine's naturalized epistemology (1997, 80).

[22] I am grateful to Jonathan Adler for his comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

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