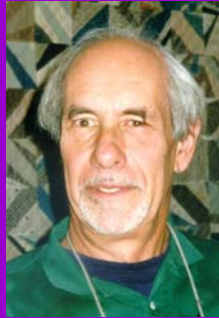
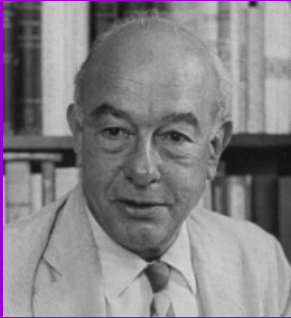


Web of Belief



Willard Quine (1908-2000) Joseph Ullian (1930-)

Descartes' Architectural Metaphor

Math
Geom.

Phys obj's
exist

Mind
≠
Body

C & D perceptions
are accurate

God exists

I exist (as a thinking thing)

Quine's



Web
Metaphor



Tree branches
=
World of experience

Web
attachments
=
Observation
sentences

What do you see?

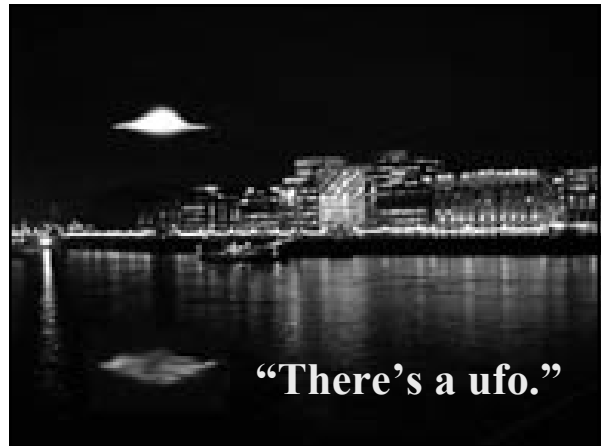


Observation Sentences

- Man with a hat putting a white envelope into a mailbox.
- Dean of the law school mailing a birthday check to his daughter in Belgium.
- First sentence *is* an observation sentence, second one is *not*.
- Observation sentence: all competent language-users who witness the event will agree whether the sentence is true or not.
- Observation sentences can be false.

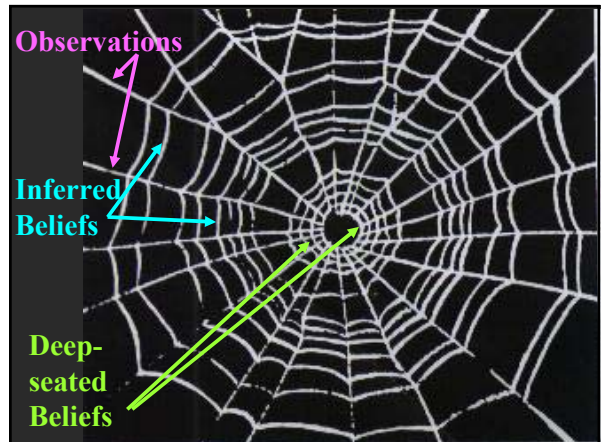
Observation Sentences

- Observation sentences formulate our beliefs that most directly tie us to the world:
- “There’s a buzzing sound.”
- Not: “Dad is sawing.”
- “Here’s a white patch of color.”
- Not: “Here’s my pen.”



Non-Observation Sentences

- Starting with observation sentences, I form new beliefs by drawing inferences:
- From: “I hear a buzzing sound.” and other information I might get: “Dad is sawing.”
- From: “I see a white patch of color.” and other information I might get: “Here’s my pen.”

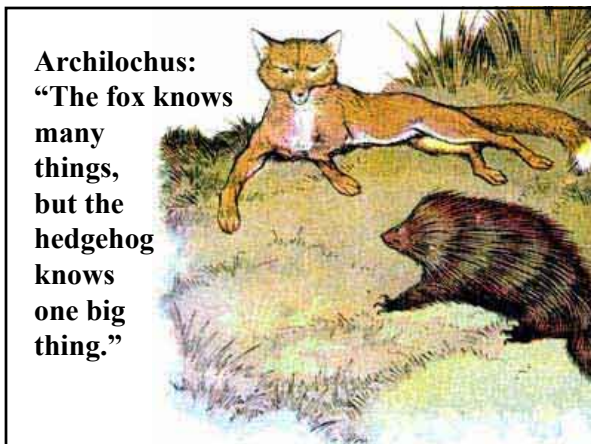
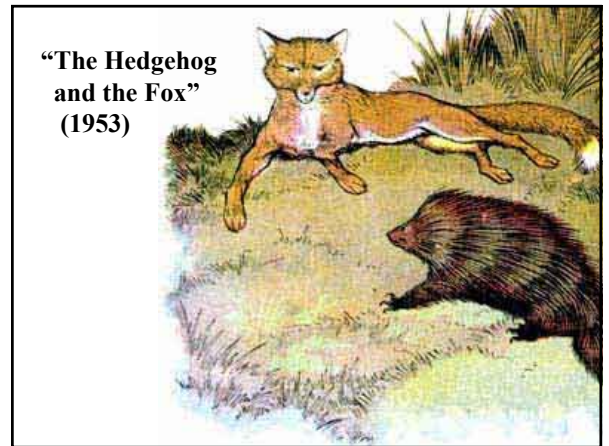
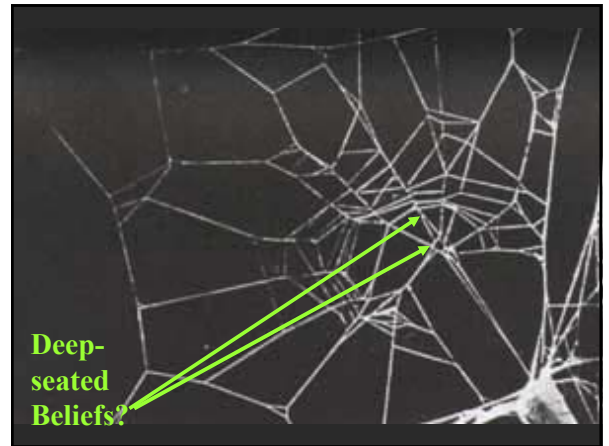
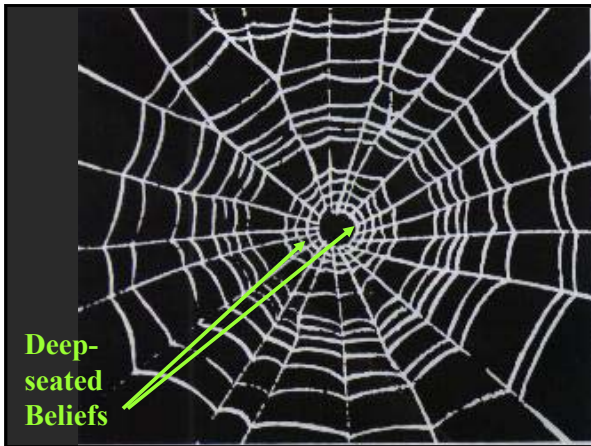


What are Deep-seated Beliefs?

- Far removed from direct experience.
- Play a central role in my thinking.
- Belief in God?
- Belief that people are basically good?
- Belief that you are a failure?
- Others?
- Major, career, marriage, children.

What are Deep-seated Beliefs?

- Can these beliefs change? How?
- Conversion experiences.
- How does this look using the web metaphor?



Belief

- Evaluate by standard of “reasonable” rather than “absolutely certain.”
- I *know* something if (p. 13):
 - I *believe* it.
 - It is *true*.
 - I have *firm grounds/good evidence* for my belief.
- More useful for science and everyday life than Descartes’ standard.

Belief

- What is a belief? (p. 10):
 - Not an feeling
 - Not an activity
 - Disposition: to react in certain ways in certain circumstances.
- Can a computer-robot have a belief?



Belief

- How do we form/change beliefs?
- Some by observation.
- Most by inference.
- What set of beliefs best fits together?

Belief

- Detective story (p. 17):
 - Abbott, Babbitt and Cabot are the only suspects in a murder case.
 - Abbott has an alibi (registered in a hotel far away at the time).
 - Babbitt has an alibi (brother-in-law says he was with him, far away).
 - ∴ Cabot did it?

Belief

- Detective story (p. 17):
 - Abbott, Babbitt and Cabot are the only suspects in a murder case.
 - Abbott has an alibi (registered in a hotel far away at the time).
 - Babbitt has an alibi (brother-in-law says he was with him, far away).
 - Cabot has an alibi (shown on TV).
 - *Can't all be true.*

Belief

- Detective story (p. 17):
 - Which of the four statements will we give up?
 - Look for other suspects?
 - Reexamine the alibis of the current suspects.
 - Reject or withhold judgement on at least one of the statements.

Belief

- Reject or withhold judgement on at least one of the statements:
 - Theism: Belief that God exists.
 - Atheism: Belief that God does not exist.
 - Agnosticism: Withhold belief as to whether or not God exists.

Belief

- “Abe Lincoln was the greatest president.”
- “I don’t believe that.”
- Opposite belief: “I believe that is false.”
- Withhold judgement: “I don’t have a belief about that one way or the other.”

Belief

- Are there any guidelines for what beliefs to adopt?
- Not “absolute certainty”.
- The “Virtues” of hypotheses.
- Next time: Chapters 5, 6 & 8 in *The Web of Belief*.