

Quine From “Two Dogmas” To “Ontological Relativity”

Philosophy 208: *The Language Revolution*
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The dogmas

D1. There is an analytic/synthetic distinction; and

D2. Reductionism: statements can be translated to terms which refer only to immediate experience.

- ▶ Quine concludes that the two dogmas are essentially the same.



Atomism and the Analytic/Synthetic Distinction

- Statements are confirmed individually, by the experiences we take to justify them or give them meaning.
- Atomism is essential to positivism.
- “The notion lingers that to each statement, or each synthetic statement, there is associated a unique range of possible sensory events such that the occurrence of any of them would add to the likelihood of truth of the statement...”
- “As long as it is taken to be significant in general to speak of the confirmation and infirmation of a statement, it seems significant to speak also of a limiting kind of statement which is vacuously confirmed, *ipso facto*, come what may; and such a statement is analytic.”

Quine Rejects the Analytic/Synthetic Distinction

- Compare
 - Bachelors are unmarried.
 - Bachelors are unhappy.
- They seem to differ in kind.
- Quine argues they differ only in degree of empirical confirmation.
- “It is obvious that truth in general depends on both language and extralinguistic fact. The statement “Brutus killed Caesar” would be false if the world had been different in certain ways, but it would also be false if the word “killed” happened rather to have the sense of “begat.” Hence, the temptation to suppose in general that the truth of a statement is somehow analyzable into a linguistic component and a factual component. Given this supposition, it next seems reasonable that in some statements the factual component should be null; and these are the analytic statements. But, for all its a priori reasonableness, a boundary between analytic and synthetic statements simply has not been drawn.”

Quine's Argument Against the Analytic/Synthetic Distinction

QD1. If there is an analytic/synthetic distinction, there must be a good explanation of synonymy.

QD2. The only ways to explain synonymy are by interchangeability salva veritate or definition.

▸ (Omitting the lame 'dictionary' definition)

QD3. But interchangeability can not explain synonymy.

QD4. And definition (meaning postulates) can not explain synonymy.

QD5. Thus, there is no good explanation of synonymy.

QDC. And thus there is no analytic/synthetic distinction.



REDUX

Meanings Skepticism

- The argument against synonymy entails a corollary: meanings themselves are called into question.
- Quine has Ockhamist concerns about meanings as spooky entities.
- First, if we are to posit an object, it must have clear identity conditions.
 - ▶ We must be able to determine when two meanings are identical.
 - ▶ Elsewhere, Quine urges that we should admit “no entity without identity”.
- Second, meanings are otiose.





- Meanings, e.g. Frege's propositions, inhabit a third realm, like mathematical objects (e.g. sets).
- Quine defends beliefs in sets, since they are construed extensionally, with clear identity conditions.
- Sets are identified with their members; two sets with exactly the same members are the same set.
- But, he believes that the empiricist can avoid intensional objects.
- We don't know when two meanings are the same.
- "There seems little hope of erecting a fruitful science about them. It is not even clear, granted meanings, when we have two and when we have one; it is not clear when linguistic forms should be regarded as *synonymous*, or alike in meaning, and when they should not."

Meanings are Otiose

- What we need from meanings is an explanation of synonymy and analyticity.
- If we can get these without meanings, then we don't need them.
- “A felt need for meant entities may derive from an earlier failure to appreciate that meaning and reference are distinct. Once the theory of meaning is sharply separated from the theory of reference, it is a short step to recognizing as the business of the theory of meaning simply the synonymy of linguistic forms and the analyticity of statements; meanings themselves, as obscure intermediary entities, may well be abandoned.”



ockham wielding razor

Meanings and Essence

- The spookiness of meanings is related to the spookiness of essences.
 - “Meaning is what essence becomes when it is divorced from the object of reference and wedded to the word.”
- For Aristotle, objects had essential characteristics, and accidental ones.
 - Persons had essential characteristics (e.g. rationality)...
 - ...and accidental ones (e.g. two-leggedness).
- This difference now supposedly goes into the meaning of a term.
 - The meaning of ‘biped’ includes being two-legged but the meaning of ‘man’ may not.
- Kripke’s rehabilitation of essences, and necessity, were of course unwelcome to Quine and Quineans.

Empiricism Without the Dogmas

- Quine presents skepticism about intensional objects: there are no meanings.
- Quine defends meaningfulness without meanings.
- Further, meaning is the property of a much larger unit than the word (as Locke and Hume held), or even the sentence (as Frege and the positivists held).
- The unit of significance, for Quine, is one's entire theory, the whole of science.

Confirmation Holism

sentences are confirmed or disconfirmed as a whole body

- Ayer characterized analytic statements as those onto which we hold come what may.
- In the absence of an analytic/synthetic distinction, there are no sentences that are immune from revision or abandonment.
- We can hold on to any statements we want, as long as we adjust our body of knowledge and the logical framework along with it.
- The claim that any sentence may be held immune from revision because no sentence is absolutely immune, is called confirmation holism.
- Confirmation holism follows from the failure of the analytic/synthetic distinction, and the identities of necessity with analyticity and contingency with syntheticity.
- One can also argue for confirmation holism from weaker premises.
- It is just a point of the logic of theory construction.

Semantic Holism

the unit of meaning is the entire language

- To find meaning, Quine appeals to the theory which best accounts for our sense experience.
- Quine compares our scientific beliefs to a giant web.
- Experience forms the boundary conditions on the web of belief.
- Peripheral statements are those most closely tied to sensory experience.
- Central statements are those about logic, mathematics, and the self, the guiding principles of science, highly theoretical statements.
- The web is like a field of force.
- Experience forces us to adjust and readjust the whole field, not one sentence at a time, but altogether.



Erik and Matt On Ontological Relativity