

IV QUINE'S TWO DOGMAS

Overview

Sections I – IV: Looking for a reductive account of the analytic synthetic divide (the existence of which is the First Dogma), and failing to find one. The best that can be given is a tight circle of interdefinitions involving analyticity, meaning, synonymy, substitutability, necessity.

Section V: Rejecting the Second Dogma, that every meaningful (synthetic?) statement is reducible to experience.

Section VI: Sketching an empiricist alternative.

Section I

An analytic statement is true in virtue of its meaning.

What is meaning?

Distinguish meaning from extension for both terms and predicates.

[Digression on essence]

Make do with sameness of meaning, rather than trying to identify meanings themselves.

Distinguish logically true statements ('Either Harry is a bachelor or it is not the case that Harry is a bachelor') from those that are analytic but not logically true ('Bachelors are unmarried').

The latter class pose the problem.

Section II

Perhaps we can turn all analytic statement into logical truths by definition.

But who gives the definitions? Not the lexicographers: they merely report them. So there have to be preexisting synonymy relations for them to report on. (Unimportant class for which this is not true: stipulative definitions.)

Section III

Perhaps two terms are synonymous iff they can be interchanged in all contexts *salva veritate*.

But is this sufficient for synonymy? Mere sameness of extension is not sufficient: 'creature with a heart' and 'creature with kidneys' have the same extension. But in order to have a test to draw these apart we need to consider sentences like:

Necessarily all creatures with a heart are creatures with a kidney

But that is just tantamount to the claim that 'All creatures with a heart are creatures with a kidney' is analytic.

Section IV

Could we define analyticity in terms of logical rules? That is ok for an artificial formal language. But it does it help with natural language? No.

General worry about Quine's approach so far: why does our inability to give an analytic reduction of a concept show that it is somehow illegitimate? (Compare knowledge) Does Quine have some independent reason for thinking that the notion of the analytic is worrisome?

Some hint is given from the passage at the end of Section IV. There Quine concedes that whether a given statement is true is a function both of what its words mean and of how the world is. However, he asks whether these two contributions can be neatly divided. If they could, we could identify the class of sentences for which the contribution of the world was zero; and these would be analytic. So this throws doubt on the supposition that we can divide the contribution of meaning from the contribution of the world.

Section V

Radical reductionism (the Second Dogma)

Word version: every word must correspond to an experience

Sentence version: every sentence must be reducible to an experience (or set of experiences that would verify it, and a set that would confirm it).

Problem:

Our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body. (72)

For example: what experience would verify the sentence that there are centaurs (rather than that we are hallucinating)? Compare Hume on miracles.

There is no dividing of the factual and linguistic component in any one sentence. At best the distinction needs to be drawn for the whole of science.

Section VI

The web of belief: a network of claims, some of which we are more likely to revise in response to evidence than others, but all of which could be revised (except perhaps the unimportant class of stipulative definitions; Quine does not return to them). No sentence is entirely empirical. Houses are just as much theoretical posits as electrons. Finally there is a brief endorsement of pragmatism. What does Quine mean by this: that it is up to us how to revise our theories in the light of recalcitrant experience? ('a question not of matters of fact, but of choosing a convenient language form' 75) That there is nothing more to truth than having a theory that works?