

Verificationism, Part IA: Meaning.

Lecture IV, Quine's *Two Dogmas of Empiricism*, 24th November.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Recall that an analytic statement is one which is true (or false) in virtue of meaning alone. For instance, 'No bachelor is married' or 'All bachelors are unmarried'. Typically, what a sentence S means and how the world is both play a role in whether S is true. In the case of analytic sentences, the world plays no role.

1.2. Last week, we discussed Quine's arguments against the verificationist attempt to ground all *a priori* knowledge in terms of analyticity in (Quine, 1976 [1935]). This week, we look at Quine's arguments against various ways of understanding analyticity. Quine's view is often described as one in which no sense can be given to 'analytic' and thus there are no analytic truths. As we'll see, this is not quite right. Quine does offer a definition after finding previous attempts inadequate. But this understanding of analyticity combined with Quine's other views, particularly *confirmational holism*, entails that there are no analytic truths.

2. Analyticity and Synonymy

2.1. The two dogmas of Quine's 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' are (i) a form of reductionism in which we can reduce all statements to statements about sense-experience and (ii) the doctrine that some statements are analytic. Let's focus on (ii). Quine notes that there are two kinds of analytic truths. The first are *logically true*:

(1) All unmarried men are unmarried

The second kind of analytic truths are not logically true. For instance, we have the classic analytic truth:

(2) All bachelors are unmarried

2.2. For Quine (1) is unproblematic because we have an unproblematic notion of *logical truth*. 'If we suppose a prior inventory of *logical* particles, comprising 'no', 'un-', 'not', 'if', 'then', 'and', etc., then in general a logical truth is a statement which is true and remains true under all reinterpretations of its components other than the logical particles.' (Quine, 1951: 23)

2.3. So, (1) is true because 'All untethered ropes are untethered', 'All dogs are dogs', 'All supercalifragilisticexpialidocious chickens are supercalifragilisticexpialidocious chickens, and so on are *all* truths. That is, in (1) 'unmarried' and 'unmarried' can be replaced uniformly and (1) remains true. (2) is different. (2) is thought analytic because we transform (2) into a logical truth by replacing synonyms for synonyms. Thus, we can make sense of analytic statements only if we can make sense of *synonymity*.

2. Synonymity and Interchangeability *Salva Veritate*

2.1. One might define synonymy in terms of interchangeability *salva veritate*. That is, if 'bachelor' and 'unmarried' are synonymous then we can change out one for the other in any context without affecting the truth value of the sentence. But Quine notes immediately that this thesis won't work. For instance:

(3) She has a Bachelor of Arts \Rightarrow She has a unmarried of Arts.

(4) 'Bachelor' is an eight letter word \Rightarrow 'Unmarried' is an eight letter word.

2.2. We might dismiss (4) by arguing that "Bachelor" picks out 'Bachelor' and is distinct from 'Bachelor'. We might dismiss (3) by presupposing some adequate definitions for notions like 'word' or 'predicate'. Thus, we could note that two sentences like the following do not strictly speaking *share* a predicate.

(3') Any graduate of the Philosophy Tripos **is a Bachelor of Arts**.

(5) Any graduate of the Philosophy Tripos **is a bachelor**.

However, even with such qualifications, Quine argues that understanding synonymy in terms of interchangeability *salva veritate* means that whether two predicates are synonymous depends problematically on the language in which we embed them. Consider, for instance, the following sentences.

(6) Everything is renate iff it is cordate.

(7) Necessarily, all renates are cordates.

(6) is true. So, in a language without the means of expressing necessity, i.e., without 'Necessarily ...', 'renate' and 'cordate' are interchangeable *salva veritate*. Thus, (6) is analytic in the weaker language.

2.3. What about analysing synonymy in terms of interchangeability *salva veritate* in a language *with* a modal operator? For Quine—and for the verificationists—necessity is to be explained in terms of analyticity. So we can't then non-circularly explain analyticity in terms of necessity.

3. **Confirmational Holism**

3.1. Quine doesn't think that 'analytic' is meaningless. But he does think that there are no analytic truths. To understand this claim, we need to understand two Quinean ideas.

Quinean Analyticity (QA): An true analytic sentence is one which cannot be falsified, at least in the weak sense. That is, there are no possible experience which rule it out.

Confirmational Holism (CH): Statements are not confirmed or falsified in isolation. Rather, an observation always falsifies a collection of statements. The question of *which* particular statement we give up in the face of falsifying observation is not determined, but is a pragmatic matter.

(CH) is closely related to what is called Duhem's Thesis. Consider doing an experiment to test a certain theory T . We make observations and hold fixed various other claims distinct from T —claims about lab and equipment conditions, about the nature of the observation, even 'fixed' matters like basic arithmetic. If we observe something counter to the theory, we can of course conclude $\neg T$. But, as Quine and Duhem note, we can preserve T in the light of evidence and reject some other claim instead. Crucially, *nothing* is unrevisable.

3.2. For Quine, our beliefs about the world form a *web*. At the periphery of the web are observational claims and at the center of the web are claims which are harder to dismiss: truths of arithmetic, logic, etc.. Although central beliefs are *harder* to dismiss in the face of observation, they are not impossible. The way we revise our beliefs is constrained so that we make the most conservative adjustments possible in the light of evidence. Revising our beliefs about $2 + 2 = 4$ will have a web-wide knock on effect and thus we shouldn't revise such a belief unless the evidence strongly told against it. However, Quine does not rule out that there could be such evidence. Even central beliefs are revisable.

3.3. For Quine, there are no analytic statements because such statements should be thought unrevisable (QA) yet no statement is truly unrevisable, since our beliefs form a web and falsification is holistic. Some beliefs are harder to revise, but no belief is truly unrevisable—including analytic truths.

References

Quine, Willard V. O. (1951). Two Dogmas of Empiricism. *Philosophical Review* 60, 20–43.

Quine, Willard V. O. (1976 [1935]). Truth by Convention. In: *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press, 77–106.