Two Dogmas of Empiricism by W.V. Quine

Main Points

Denies the philosophical **explanatory value** of the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic. "for all it's a priori reasonableness, a boundary between analytic and synthetic statements simply has not been drawn. That there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith." (342)

Denies the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic not based on any difficulty of applying the distinction, but on the grounds that the distinction is based on other notions (self-contradictoriness and meaning) that are themselves in need of justification.

Argues that the concept of analyticity is dependent upon the notion of meaning. Examines various approaches to meaning and concludes that they really depend on the notion of synonymy or definition, the former of which depends upon analyticity and the latter which begs the question. (339)

Challenges the view of logical positivism that statements can be evaluated for meaningfulness in isolation and in the absence of context. Argues, instead, for a kind of semantic holism, such that statements are evaluated as part of a theory.

"I am impressed also, apart from prefabricated examples of black and white balls in an urn, with how baffling the problem

has always been of arriving at any explicit theory of the empirical confirmation of a synthetic statement. My present suggestion is that it is nonsense, and the root of much nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement. Taken collectively, science has its double dependence upon language and experience; but this duality is not significantly traceable into the statements of science taken one by one.

Russell's concept of definition in use was, as remarked, an advance over the impossible term-by-term empiricism of Locke and Hume. The statement, rather than the term, came with Russell to be recognized as the unit accountable to an empiricist critique. But what I am now urging is that even in taking the statement as a unit we have drawn our grid too finely. The unit of empirical significance is the whole of science." (345)

Challenges the reductionism of the empiricism advocated, primarily as a result of the fact that sentences cannot be evaluated in isolation from the theory in which they are generated. (342)

Sees the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic to be intimately tied to its program of reductionism

The dogma of reductionism survives in the supposition that each statement, taken in isolation from is fellows, can admit of confirmation or information at all. My countersuggestion, issuing essentially from Carnap's doctrine of the physical world in the Aufbau, is that our statements about the external world

> face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only
> as a corporate body. (344)

Challenges the view that the work of science can be clearly distinguished from the work of metaphysics (and supported as verifiable, in contrast to it).

Ties in the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic with the rigid distinction logical positivists make between metaphysical questions and hypotheses of science.

> Carnap has recognized that he is able to preserve a double standard for ontological questions and scientific hypotheses only by assuming an absolute distinction between the analytic and the synthetic; and I need not say that this is a distinction which I reject. (348)

Argues for a kind of continuity between science and metaphysics. Says 'As an empiricist, I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately, for predicting future experience in the light of past experience.   Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries – not by definition in terms or experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer. . . . But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits…. Science is a continuation of common sense, and it continues the common-sense expedient of swelling ontology to simplify theory.

OUTLINE

Modern empiricism has been conditioned by two dogmas:
<u>the distinction between truths that are analytic and the synthetic</u> and
<u>reductionism</u>: the belief that every meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms that refer to immediate experience.

<u>Main thesis</u>: both of these notions are ill founded.

I. Background for analyticity,

<u>Leibniz</u>: distinction between truths of reason (true in all possible worlds) and truths of fact.

<u>Hume</u>: distinction between relations of ideas and matters of fact

<u>Kant</u>: distinction between the analytic (non-self contradictory) and the synthetic

Problem

> The notion of self contradictoriness stands in the exact same need of clarification as that of analyticity itself. These two notions are the two sides of a single dubious coin. (331)

<u>Kant</u>: analytic if it attributes to its subject no more than is conceptually contained in its predicate

Two drawbacks of this definition:

(1) is limited to statements of the subject predicate form and

(2) appeals to a notion of containment left at a metaphorical level

A statement is analytic when it is true by virtue of its **meaning** and independently of fact

Conclusion: The notion of analyticity is based on the notion of meaning.

Question: what is meaning?

ARGUMENT: Meaning is not just naming or reference (Frege)

Example 1: singular terms

     Morning star is the Evening star is true because a matter of fact, not by virtue of their meaning.

Example 2: abstract terms

     9 is the number of planets

Example 3: general terms (these do not name concrete or abstract objects but they are true of an entity or none or each of many)

Extension of a term: The class of all the entities of which a general term is true.

We must distinguish between the meaning of a term and its extension

     Creature with a heart has the same extension as creature with

a kidney, but they have different meanings

In the case of general terms, philosophers tend to identify meaning with **intension** and to contrast this with intension.

Conclusion: we must not confuse **meaning** with extension.

Question: What sorts of things are meanings?

The Aristotelian notion of essence is the forerunner of the modern notion of intension. But meaning belongs to language and essence to the thing in itself. "Things had essences for Aristotle, but only linguistic forms have meanings. Meaning is what essence becomes when it is divorced from the object of reference and wedded to the word." (333)

The two most probable candidates for intensions are
mental ideas and
Platonic ideas.

These notions are both problematic.
Conclusion: the notion of meaning is not helpful to understanding the notion of synonymy or analyticity.

> Once a theory of meaning is sharply separated from a 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. (333)

Conclusion: the notion of meaning has not proved helpful in trying to understand the notion of analyticity. Instead what is important is the notion of synonymy. Again we must return to the idea of analyticity

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There are two types of analytic statements:

No unmarried man is married. (True by logical form or logically true)

No bachelor is unmarried (can be turned into form (1) by substituting synonyms) (333)

The first of these is clear. The second of these mention the notion of synonyms, which Quine sets out to explain.

II. Definition

Some people think that the second type of analyticity can be reduced to the first by definition, by appealing to the lexicon or dictionary.

The dictionary maker is an empirical scientist who, in making the dictionary, had to appeal to the notion of synonymy, which itself is presumably judged in terms of linguistic behavior or usage.

Conclusion: The notion of synonymy is assumed in appealing to a definition. Hence we cannot explain analyticity without explaining synonymy.

III. Interchangeability

… A natural suggestion, deserving close examination, is that the synonymy of two linguistic forms consists simply in their **interchangeability** in all contexts without change of truth value (336)

what we are looking for is cognitive synonymy.

The sort of synonymy needed "merely such that any analytic statement could be turned into a logical truth by putting synonyms for synonyms. (337)

If we assume analyticity, we could define cognitively synonymous, we could say that "bachelors" and "unmarried men" are cognitively synonymous if and only if

(3) "All and only bachelors are unmarried men" is analytic.

But we need an account of cognitive synonymy that does not depend on analyticity. (337)

(5) Necessarily, all and only bachelors are unmarried men.

But the term "necessarily" already depends on the concept of analyticity.

Question: Is interchangeability a sufficient condition for cognitive

synoymy?

> There is no assurance here that the extensional agreement
> 'bachelor' and 'unmarried man' rests on meaning rather than on
> mere accidental matters of fact, as does extensional agreement
> of 'creature with a heart' and 'creature with a kidney.' (338)

> So we must recognize that interchangeaility *salva veritate*, if
> construed in relation to an extensional language, is not a
> sufficient condition of cognitive synonymy in the sense needed
> for deriving analyticity in the matter of Section I. If a language
> contains an intensional adverb 'necessarily' in the sense lately
> noted, or other particles to the same effect, then
> interchangeability *salva veritate* in such a language does afford a
> sufficient condition of cognitive synonymy; but such a language is
> intelligible only if the notion of analyticity is already clearly
> understood in advance. (339)

Answer: If the theory of meaning is **extensional**, then
interchangeability is not sufficient.

IV. Semantical Rules

V. The Verification Theory and Reductionism

Quine sees the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic to
be intimately tied to its program of reductionism, specifically, because
the methodology of reductionism is to confirm one sentence at a time.

The one dogma clearly supports the other in this way: 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. (345)

even in taking the statement as a unit we have drawn our grid too finely. The unit of empirical significance is the whole of science. (345)

VI. Empiricism Without the Dogmas

The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges…. But the total field is so undetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice