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Quine on denying analytic-synthetic distinction

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Abstract: This paper attempts to explain and examine Quine's critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction, a cornerstone of logical positivism, as presented in his seminal work "Two Dogmas of Empiricism". It reveals that Quine's rejection of this distinction, rooted in his objections to synonymy and collateral information, challenges the traditional epistemological divide between a priori and a posteriori experience. By rejecting the notion of analytic truth, Quine advocates for a dogma-free philosophy, eschewing rigid rules and principles in favour of a more flexible and contextual approach to meaning and knowledge. Therefore, Quine's critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction seeks to liberate philosophy from dogmatic assumptions, fostering a more nuanced and experience-driven inquiry into the nature of reality and human understanding.
Key words: *Analytic, judgment, synthetic*

Introduction:

The distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, as developed by Kant, is untenable from Quinean perspective. Quine's monograph, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," is renowned for its critique of analyticity and the analytic-synthetic distinction, a central tenet of logical positivism that distinguishes between logically true and factually true assertions. The analytic-synthetic distinction has a long history, dating back to Leibnitz, Hume, Kant and is also closely tied to logical positivism. However, Quine argues that this distinction is not tenable. Quine challenges two key doctrines of logical positivism: the analytic-synthetic distinction and the belief that certain propositions are immune to revision in light of future experience.[i] Quine's discussions with Rudolf Carnap, Nelson Goodman and Alfred Tarski led him to doubt the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments. He accepts the definition of 'analytic', but ultimately rejects it, denying that analytic statements are true by definition, a notion accepted by many analytic philosophers. Quine's objections center on synonymy and the problem of collateral information, arguing that there is no distinction between universally known collateral information and analytic truth. He also objects to analyticity and synonymy on the grounds of logical possibility, deviating from early Wittgenstein's view of meaning. Quine finds the notion of a space of possible worlds problematic as this notion fails to distinguish between universally believed truths and necessary truths. Consequently, Quine rejects the epistemological distinction between a priori and a posteriori experience, viewing it

as dogmatic. As a vigorous advocate of dogma-free philosophy, Quine seeks to establish a philosophy without rigid rules or principles; his critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction is part of this broader effort to create a dogma-free philosophical enterprise, where Quine not only challenges the Kantian distinction but also attempts to make his conceptual philosophy a dogma-free philosophical enterprise. According to Quine, philosophy has to be dogma-free philosophy. Thus, Quine tries to make philosophy a dogma-free philosophy, one that is free from rigid rules, principles and logical rules.

Objectives: The main objectives of the paper are:

(i) To explain Quine's critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction.

(ii) To examine the implications of Quine's rejection of analytic truth.

(iii) To understand Quine's advocacy for a dogma-free philosophy.

Methodology: The methodology of this paper involves a critical examination of Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", utilizing both primary and secondary literature, and employing a philosophical exegesis approach to scrutinize Quine's critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction and its broader implications.

Discussion and findings:

Before delving into the problem, it is essential to understand what Quine means by 'dogma'. Dogma is a philosophical presupposition or assertion that works as a principle and makes the statement universal and necessary. Let us clarify this point in light of Kantian analytic statements. While developing analytic propositions or judgments, Kant sets out two important features of analytic statements: *(i)* in all analytic statements, the predicate is overtly or covertly contained in the subject term, and *(ii)* the denial of an analytic statement leads to a self-contradiction. For example, 'All bachelors are unmarried' is an analytic judgment. In this judgment, the predicate term 'unmarried' is contained in the subject term 'bachelor' in the sense that the meaning of the term 'bachelor' is the same as the meaning of the term 'unmarried'. Accordingly, in this judgment, the predicate term has not added any new information regarding the subject term. Secondly, if anybody denies this judgment, they thereby involve themselves in a plain contradiction. According to Kant, this is true not only of this particular analytic judgment but also of all analytic judgments. That means the principle by which an analytic judgment is determined as universal and necessary. Any judgment that is determined by the principle of universality and necessity would be a dogma-oriented judgment.

Quine's philosophy challenges Kant's ideas on knowledge and science. He questions the a priori foundation of knowledge, especially in Kant's philosophy. Quine rejects Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. He wants to remove dogmas from philosophy, making it more empirical and pragmatic. Quine's philosophy serves as an antidote to unempirical philosophers, targeting dogma-oriented statements. He refers to philosophers who advocate such statements, like Kant, as unempirical philosophers. Quine was the first to counter these dogmas, ruling out the Kantian cleavage between analytic and synthetic statements, which he associates with dogma-oriented unempirical philosophy. In his revolutionary paper, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," Quine targets and opposes two dogmas, as stated at the beginning of the paper: "Modern empiricism has been conditioned in large part by two dogmas. One is a belief in some fundamental cleavage between truths which are analytic, or grounded in meanings independently of matters of fact, and truths which are synthetic, or grounded in fact. The other dogma is reductionism: the belief that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience. Both dogmas, I shall argue, are ill-founded. One effect of abandoning them is, as we shall see, a blurring of the supposed boundary between speculative metaphysics and natural science. Another effect is a shift toward pragmatism."[ii] Thus, it can be said that the analytic-

synthetic distinction is, according to Quine, the first dogma of empiricism. Quine rejects the analytic-synthetic distinction and dismisses it with no loss. In this regard, Quine attempts to describe intensional ideas, namely, sense, meaning, propositions, identity, synonymy, and analyticity, in terms of extensional ones, for example, reference and truth. In fact, Quine's tendency is to eliminate such intensional notions. Quine considers any importation of such intensional ideas into our theories as leading to circularity and obscurity. Thus, the shortcomings of the Kantian analytic-synthetic distinction can be further understood in light of this approach.

Kant defined analytic propositions similarly to Leibniz's "true in all possible worlds" and thereby suggests that the denials of analytic statements are self-contradictory. Quine claims that this definition has little explanatory value in terms of self-contradictoriness. Kant also insists that in an analytic statement, the attribute is pre-conceptually contained in the subject term. However, Quine identifies two major weaknesses in Kant's formulation of an analytic statement. In Quine's words, "it limits itself to statements of subject-predicate form, and it appeals to a notion of containment which is left at a metaphorical level."[iii] It is important to note that Quine accepts the definition of "analytic" as "true in virtue of meaning alone," as Kant and like-minded philosophers have supposed. Unlike them, however, Quine questions how we are to understand the idea of meaning and proceeds to discuss meaning. Quine's attack on analyticity, through an attack on the notion of meaning, is painstaking, as "meaning" is not to be identified with "naming." For Quine, meaning and naming or reference are distinct.[iv] Quine illustrates this distinction using Frege's example of "Evening Star" and "Morning Star," and Russell's example of "Scott" and "the author of Waverly." The phrases "Evening Star" and "Morning Star" refer to the planet Venus, but a speaker may not realize they have the same meaning. Similarly, "Scott" and "the author of Waverly" differ in meaning, not in naming. This distinction applies to abstract terms like "9" and "the number of planets," which refer to the same entity but differ in meaning. Thus, Quine's concern is with the sameness of meaning or entity highlighting the difference between the meaning of singular terms and the entity named.

Correspondingly, one can distinguish between the meaning of a general term and its extension. There is, however, a difference between a singular term and a general term. Unlike a general term, a singular term purports to name an entity, but "a general term is true of an entity, or of each of many, or of none. The class of all entities of which a general term is true is called the extension of the term."[v] According to this view, like a singular term and entity named, there is a contrast between the meaning of a general term and its extension, for example, "Creature with a heart" and "Creature with a kidney". Two expressions refer to the same exact entities in the world but have different meanings. This emphasis is an emphasis on meaning, especially on cognition. Thus, "creature with a heart" is a creature with a kidney is not analytic. Though they have the same extensions, they do not have the same meanings. Quine contends that the expressions "Creature with a heart" and "Creature with kidneys" may be interchanged *salva veritate* in extensional contexts, but clearly, these concepts differ in cognitive significance. Interchangeability will not, in general, preserve truth in non-extensional contexts.[vi] Due to Quine's analysis, it is quite plausible that in extensional language, interchangeability *salva veritate* is no assurance of cognitive synonymy. What it permits is the interchange of heteronymous expressions. Here, the examination is cognition or observation itself. At this juncture, it can be said that the sameness of extensions of two terms in an extensional language does not inform us about cognitive synonymy. Yet, this shows that the presupposed extensional language of science can be inadequate. Because this presupposed extensionality leads to typical problems of the philosophy of science relating to examination. In his "The problem of meaning in linguistics," Quine states that the problem of finding relevant respects is, if we think of the matter in a sufficiently oversimplified way, a problem typical of empirical science. Quine thus denies that there is any such confusion of intension (or

meaning) with extension, connotation with denotation as well. Whatever, it is absurd to suppose that meaning is identical with a name.[vii]

Here, it is striking to note that what is meant by a word or an expression in a given language is a matter of the behaviour of language users (how it is used by speakers of that language), but not only the effect of prejudice. Like a behaviourist, in some form, Quine remarks, "In psychology, one may or may not be a behaviourist, but in linguistics, one has no choice. Each of us learns his language by observing other people's verbal behaviour and having his own faltering verbal behaviour observed and reinforced or corrected by others. We depend strictly on overt behaviour in observable situations. As long as our command of our language fits all external checkpoints, where our utterance or our reaction to someone's utterance can be appraised in the light of some shared situation, so long all is well. Our mental life between checkpoints is irrelevant to our rating as a matter of language. There is nothing in linguistic meaning beyond what is to be gleaned from overt behaviour in observable circumstances."[viii] Quine seems to have concentrated on meaning via the actual use of language as the meaning made of language-use. According to Quine, "Once the theory of meaning is sharply separated from the theory of reference, it is a short step to recognizing as the primary 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."[ix]

Quine claims that the definition of analyticity depends on the concept of meaning, which is problematic in that it presupposes something. This makes explicit mention of the problem of analyticity that confronts us anew. For Quine, the statements which are analytic by general philosophical acclaim are not analytic. Here, Quine begins with the traditional distinction between logical truths and analytic statements. Since Frege, a distinction has been made between logically necessary and logically contingent statements. The logically necessary statements are broadly analytic. The logically contingent statements are synthetic statements. Again, broadly analytic statements can be subdivided into two classes, namely, logical truths, on the one hand, and narrowly analytic statements, on the other hand. The second class of analytic statements are those that are always true by virtue of substitution on the basis of definitions, which in turn depend on synonymy too. Quine was unhappy with the notion of truth by definition. Quine discards the second class of analytic statements (narrow analyticity). According to Quine, logical truth is acceptable because it is not problematic. Consider the following expressions (e):

e_1. No unmarried man is married;

e_2. No bachelor is married.

The expression e_1, Quine says, is 'logically true'. It is a logical truth and remains so whatever we may replace for non-logical particles ('man', 'married') – the logical particles ('no', 'is') being unchanged. For example,

e_3. No unmarried woman is married.

It is worth noting that e_3 is logically true. "A logical truth is a sentence that remains true under all reinterpretations of its components other than logical particles."[x] Quine has no objection to e_1, but e_2. Thus, Quine's target is e_2. Unlike e_1, e_2 is said to be analytic. The e_2 does not have one and the same logical form as e_1. Accordingly, the situation is different with e_2. Quine notes that 'A sentence S is analytic *iff* S can be turned into a logical truth by substituting synonyms for synonyms' (S is analytic $\equiv_{df}$ S can be turned into logical truth by replacing synonyms with synonyms). Quine notes that most people argue that the expression e_2 can be transformed into a logical truth by substitution of a synonymous term, i.e., 'unmarried man' for 'bachelor' and thereby end up with e_1. However, this shift leads to an unanalyzed notion of synonymy, on the one hand, and a need for clarification of analyticity, on the other. To explicate analyticity is to explicate synonymy. Expressions e_1 and e_2 are synonymous *iff* e_1 is defined as

e_2. But what is definition? There are those who contend that the second class of analytic statements (narrowly analytic statement, e_2) reduce to the first class (logical truths, e_1) by definition; for example, 'bachelor' is defined as 'unmarried man'. Thus, e_1 is defined as e_2 *iff* the dictionary says so. But it is quite implausible that e_2 reduces to e_1. Here Quine's argument can be brought up again, namely, who defined them thus, and when? Are we appealing to the nearest dictionary...? Quine says that "this would be to put the cart before the horse. The lexicographer is an empirical scientist, whose business is the recording of antecedent facts; and if he glosses 'bachelor' as 'unmarried man', it is because of his belief that there is a relation of synonymy between those forms, implicit in general or preferred usage prior to his own work. The notion of synonymy presupposed here has still to be clarified, presumably in terms of relating to linguistic behaviour. Certainly, the 'definition' which is the term of an observed synonymy cannot be taken as the ground of synonymy."[xi] What is revealing to Quine is that definition assumes synonymy rather than explains it. Finally, it appears circular as dictionaries report pre-existing synonymies. According to Quine, other kinds of definitions might capture this notion. Here, other kinds of definitions include what Carnap calls 'explications' and logicians call 'abbreviations'. According to Carnap's explication, expression e_1 is defined as e_2 *iff* e_2 explicates (refines) e_1. But this definition is too implausible. It is circular because 'unmarried man' explicates 'bachelor' only if they are synonymous in at least some contexts. Thus, explication is a definitional process that rests on synonymy. This shows clearly how and why the Carnapian notion of explication cannot be adequate.

Let us consider the 'abbreviations' that occur in regimented languages. According to some logicians, expression e_1 is defined as e_2 *iff* e_1 abbreviates e_2. For example,

(a) 'USA' abbreviates 'United States of America'.

(b) $(P \supset Q)$ is defined as $(\sim P \vee Q)$.

Quine's objection to the first example (a) is that many putative analytic truths are not abbreviations. And, his objection to the second (b) is that the stipulations (i.e., $P \supset Q \equiv_{df} \sim P \vee Q$) presuppose the concept of synonymy rather than explain it. Thus, it lacks a satisfactory explanation of synonymy and analyticity.

Quine admits that we can introduce a word as a definition for another merely by conventional decision, and in such a case, we can create synonymy by stipulation. However, Quine notes that most definitions do not work this way because definitions presuppose synonymy. Thus, all systems of definitions must be ultimately circular. No concept of definition can be explained without circularity. When we say definition, it hinges on prior relations of synonymy. The idea of definitions becomes viciously circular. This is why definitions fail to give us an understanding of the notion of synonymy. Quine suggests that instead of relying on definition, we concentrate directly on synonymy itself, as philosophers have assumed that every analytic statement can be transformed into a logical truth by substituting synonyms for synonyms, a move that rests on an unanalyzed notion of synonymy. Thus, in a nutshell, it can be said that the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements is not as clear-cut as traditionally thought. Quine argues that analyticity is not a well-defined concept and that it is ultimately based on an unanalyzed notion of synonymy, which itself is not well-defined and is in need of clarification.

Conclusion:

In view of the above, it can be said that Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" challenges the traditional distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. Analytic statements are supposed to be true by definition, while synthetic statements are true due to worldly facts. Quine argues that this distinction is flawed as meaning is complex and context-dependent. He claims that analyticity is circular and unclear and truth relies on both language and facts,

blurring the lines between analytic and synthetic. The statement 'Brutus killed Caesar' exemplifies this, being true due to word meanings and historical events. Quine suggests that this interplay is typical, undermining the analytic-synthetic boundary. He concludes that this distinction isn't fundamental to language or reality but a failed attempt to impose order on human understanding's complexity. Quine criticizes those adhering to this distinction as 'unempirical empiricists' who prioritize dogma over experience, urging a re-evaluation of our understanding's foundations and acknowledging language's complexity.

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