

Philosophy 308
The Language Revolution
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Hamilton College, Fall 2015

Class #17: From Two Dogmas to Ontological Relativity

Business

- This week: Quine's meaning holism
- Brief overview of the conclusions of "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"
 - I'm leaving the details of the argument to you, if you want to write about Quine
- Michael on inscrutability of reference and indeterminacy of translation
- GTA for Thursday

The Two 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.

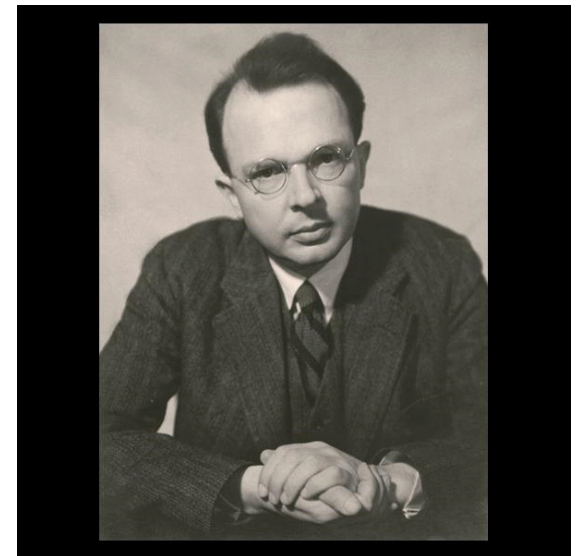


Reductionism

- Statements are confirmed (or disconfirmed) individually, by the experiences that justify them.
- Gives voice to Hume's view that all ideas must derive from initial impressions.
- Ayer: the meaning of a statement is the method we use to verify that statement.
- The early reductionists (e.g. Locke and Hume) intolerably focused on reducing terms, rather than statements.
- Frege turned to sentences as the basic units of communication.
 - Quine credits Bentham, but that's because he hates intensions. :)

Reductionism and Carnap's *Aufbau*

- The logical empiricists attempted to explain how we were to build statements out of sense data.
 - ▶ Carnap's *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt*, or *The Logical Structure of the World*
- The *Aufbau* included the whole language of pure mathematics in addition to sense data.
- Carnap treated spatio-temporal points as quadruples of real numbers, to which qualities then applied.
- So the ultimate constituents of the world were taken to be sensory events plus classes, or sets.
- Quine
 - ▶ Problems getting from sense data to the appropriate ascriptions.
 - ▶ Carnap leaves the 'is at' relation as a primitive; the most basic spatio-temporal property is unexplained.



Logical Empiricism, Atomism, and the Analytic/Synthetic Distinction

- Atomism: statements are confirmed individually.
 - ▶ I.e the basic unit of meaning is sentence-sized.
 - ▶ For logical empiricists, the meaning of an individual statement consists in the experiences we take to verify (confirm) the claim.
- Quine's representations of the logical empiricist's atomism:
 - ▶ “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...”
- The logical empiricist's atomism assumes an analytic/synthetic distinction.
 - ▶ “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” (2D, 70).

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*, dictionary definition, or meaning postulates.

QD3. Interchangeability can not explain synonymy.

QD4. Dictionary definition can not explain synonymy.

QD5. Meaning postulates can not explain synonymy.

QD6. Thus, there is no good explanation of synonymy.

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



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.
 - ▶ “No entity without identity.”
 - ▶ We must be able to determine when two meanings are identical.
 - ▶ But there is no synonymy.
 - ▶ “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 “(2D, 64).
- Second, meanings are otiose.



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.
 - ▶ “If a standard of synonymy should be arrived at, we may reasonably expect that the appeal to meanings as entities will not have played a very useful part in the enterprise. 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” (2D, 64).
- We have reference and we have behaviors; what more do we need?
- meaningfulness without meanings



ockham wielding razor

Empiricism without the Dogmas

- Sentences are confirmed or disconfirmed as a whole body.
 - We use
- There are no sentences that are immune from revision or abandonment.
- We can hold on to any statements we want.
 - Just adjust our body of knowledge and the logical framework along with it.
- Holism: the basic unit of meaning is the entire language.

Holism and the Web of Belief



- Our best beliefs are a giant web.
- Experience forms the boundary conditions.
- Peripheral statements are most closely tied to sensory experience.
- Central statements are highly theoretical guiding principles.
 - logic, mathematics, the self
- Experience forces us to adjust and readjust the whole field, not one sentence at a time, but altogether.
- 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. Or, to change the figure, total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience...The total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to reëvaluate in the light of any single contrary experience. No particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field, except indirectly through considerations of equilibrium affecting the field as a whole (Quine, “Two Dogmas”).

Underdetermination, Indeterminacy, Inscrutability

- A consequence of Quine's holism is a kind of looseness of meaning.
- Quine's arguments for the indeterminacy of translation are found throughout the work of his middle and later periods.
 - ▶ See "Translation and Meaning," Chapter 2 of *Word and Object*.
- "Ontological Relativity" is a later work, more retrospective.
 - ▶ Focus mainly on the first part of the paper, through p 51.
 - ▶ Skip or skim the material on deferred ostension on pp 39-45.