

THE METAPHYSICS OF EMPIRICISM: TWO DOGMAS OF EMPIRICISM REEXAMINED

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Abstract

The empirical task carried out by Hume, Kant and the Viennese empiricists, set a new foundation and outlook for philosophy with a positivist outlook. The strength of this philosophy arguably rests on two dogmas as W. V. O. Quine expresses in his paper, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism". The dogmas are that there is the fundamental cleavage between analytic and synthetic statements (dogma 1) and that each meaningful statements are equivalent to statements about sense experience (dogma 2). Quine opines that these are logically unfounded dogmas in view of philosophical extrapolations. Thus, to base claims on logically unviable claims is defeatist, hence, he advanced a positive picture of "empiricism without the dogmas"; a form of epistemological holism to understand the nature of meaningfulness. This critique far from being a mere revision is a critique of the whole metaphysics of empiricism. Several attacks of this defence have been advanced and formidable amongst these, is Paul Grice and P. F. Strawson's "In defense of a Dogma". This reply only festered the sore of this debate. This paper sets to examine the main thrust of these two major papers which have shaped the analytic and post-analytic traditions in philosophy.

Keywords: Dogmas of Empiricism, Holism, analytic, synthetic, reductionism.

Introduction

With the turn of the 20th Century, analysis of language became the predominant focus of philosophy, especially with the analytic tradition. It was believed, with this, philosophy would resolve all its problems if not most. This is because issues in philosophy are couched in language. With this intended, philosophers like Hume, Kant, and the Verificationists came up with various criteria for determining meaningful statements. These criteria formed the fulcrum of the analytic tradition. W. V. O. Quine in his paper, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" written in the *Philosophical Review* in 1951 made a major critique of this tradition which would become an albatross to the whole empiricist movement. His major

blow was an attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction. This caused a stir and provoked a spate of replies, for if left unreplied, the whole empiricist tradition would fall apart like a pack of cards. Thus, there were various defenses against the attack and other attacks of the defenses on this issue. This as it were, pushed the analytic tradition into its post-analytic era. One of such major replies was that of H. P. Grice and P.F. Strawson in their "In Defense of a Dogma" (1958). This work is set to recap the issues and related issues on the subject matter and evaluate in the light of Grice and Strawson the tenability of the claims. The methodology of this essay shall be analytic and expository.

Empiricism and the Criteria for Sentential Meaningfulness

Empiricism as a philosophical doctrine relies on sensory experience for the acquisition of knowledge (Irele in Owolabi 183). Empiricism has its roots in the idea that all we can know about the world is what the world cares to tell us (Ted Honderich ed. 242). This doctrine is the foundation for the evolvement of other strands of empiricism like logical empiricism (logical positivism), radical empiricism, etc. Logical Positivism as a philosophical school adopts logical empiricism as an outlook which holds apart from analytic statements of mathematics and logic, no statements are significant except those which could be verified by observation. Metaphysical and theological assertions were consequently rejected not as approved, but as 'nonsensical' or meaningless (Ree Ed. 108-109). This is the nucleus of the analytic tradition in philosophy. Thus, it was a commonly held view that only by the proper analysis of language can meaning be derived.

The search for criteria for meaningfulness is rooted in Hume's empiricism. Hume is a radical empiricist argues that anything that is not verifiable is nonsensical or meaningless. He argues:

If we take in our hand any volume of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance - let us ask, does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it, then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. (Hume XII, Pt III. 140).

Hume's empirical stance led him to advocate that statements are meaningful if they relate to ideas or to facts. Anything which does not satisfy this basis is

meaningless (Hume IV. P. I 40). By this token, mathematical statements and empirically justifiable statements are both meaningful and indubitable.

Immanuel Kant (1724- 1804) was a scholar whose philosophical contributions deepened the Humean position of meaningfulness. In Kant, meaningful statements are classified into four: Analytic, Synthetic, Apriori, and Aposteriori statements. In all, there is an outright and technical distinction between them; "the distinction between empirical (aposteriori) and apriori statements, and the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. The aposteriori/apriori distinction is uncomplicated as one the former relies on sense experience, while the latter lies on an absolute independence of all experiences. The second form of distinction which is central to Kant's philosophy is more complicated and needs more elucidation. In order for Kant to fully present the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, he considered statements which have a relationship between subject and predicate, which are explicitly limited in its application to the class of affirmative statements only. This relation, that is, a subject-predicate relation can be of two kinds:

Either the predicate B belongs to the subject A as something contained (though covertly) in the concept A; or B lies outside the sphere of the concept A, though somehow connected with it. (Kant Sec. IV 7).

Kant says, when the predicate is contained in the concept of the subject, then it is analytic and when the predicate stands outside the subject-concept, even though it is of course connected with it, it is synthetic (Kemp 13). Kant explains further that analytic statements are those in which the connection of the predicate with the subject is conceived through identity, and may be termed illustrating statements, since nothing is said to be added by the predicate to the concept of the subject, rather the concept is only a division or split of the concept into its constituent concepts, which were always conceived as existing within it (Kant Sec IV 7). While synthetical statements are those in which the connection of the predicate with the subject is conceived without identity and are termed expanding statements, because the predicate, which is not conceived as existing within it add something to the concept of the subject (Kant Sec. IV. 7). In Kant, based on his distinctions, meaningful statements are analytic apriori, synthetic apriori and synthetic aposteriori. Analytic aposteriori is meaningless since if a judgment is analytic, it would not be one that was based on experience (Lawhead 330).

The contribution of Kant brought the analytic-synthetic distinction to light as the basis for meaningfulness. For long, the empiricist tradition came to be built on analyticity, that is the analytic and synthetic distinction. Other empiricists that built on this edifice include Viennese empiricists with their verification principle, that the meaning of a sentence lies in its method of verification (Ayer 10), Moritz Schlick's verification principle of meaning of "empirically possible and logically possible" (Schlick 492). Others who built on this are Carl Hempel, Rudolf Carnap, and so on. It suffices to say that the whole of the analytic tradition rests largely on the analytic and synthetic distinction. W. V. O. Quine, however, with his classic paper, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" seeks to question this foundation by attacking this edifice and falsifying its truth value.

W. V. O. Quine and The Two Dogmas of Empiricism

Against the backdrop of the analytic foundation, Williard Van Orman Quine (1908-2000) launched an attack on this foundation. He refutes first that the traditional analytic and synthetic distinction cannot be sharply drawn and also rejects that meaningful statements can only be drawn to immediate sense experience. In the opening of his article, he says:

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 constructs upon terms which refer to immediate experience. Both dogmas, I shall argue, are ill-founded (Quine in Ammerman 197).

The refutation by Quine of these dogmas which are the foundations for empiricism is premised on the fact that they are both ill-founded.

The starting point of his argument begins with the query on analyticity. Analytic statements are being true in virtue of their meaning and statements and synthetic requires empirical observation to ascertain their veracity. Analytic statements are necessarily true and their denials would be self-contradictory. Quine distinguishes two types of analytic statements: first the logically true, where a statement is true and remains true under all reinterpretations of its components other than the logical particles (Quine in Ammerman 198). Example of this is,

"No unmarried man is married" or "a triangle has three angles" (Imafidon 36). The second class of analytic statement is a more substantial form of analytic statements, is typified in that statement can be turned into a "logical truth by putting of synonyms for synonyms" (Quine in Ammerman 198). Example of this is "No bachelor is Married". In this, unmarried has been substituted for a bachelor. Quine argues that the problem is with this second class of analytic statements, that "we lack a proper characterization of this second class of analytic statements, and therewith of analyticity generally, inasmuch as we had to [in the description] to lean on a notion of "synonymy" which is no less in need of clarification than analyticity itself" (Quine in Ammerman 199).

The problem with the second form of analyticity, Imafidon clearly states is what it means to be synonymous (37). In attempting to explain a synonymy substituted for a word, there is a resort to the idea of analyticity which in turn needs a further clarification. This can only lead to a circular argument. Thus, Quine asks, instead: what is it for two expressions to be synonymous? In reply to this, Quine says, we can explain synonymy by recourse to a definition. It suffices to quote Quine here:

There are those who find it soothing to say that the analytic statements of the second class reduce to those of the first class, the logical truths, by definition: 'bachelor', for example, is defined as 'unmarried man'... who defined it thus, and when? Are we to appeal to the nearest dictionary...? Clearly, this would be to put the cart before the horse. The lexicographer is an empirical scientist, whose business is the recording to antecedent facts; and if he glosses 'bachelor' as an 'unmarried man' it is because of his belief that there is a relation of synonymy between those forms... prior to his own work" (Quine in Ammerman 199)

For Quine, definitions presuppose synonymy rather than explain it since definitions are reports of observed and selected instances of synonymy that are grounded in usage. This means that definition hinges on the prior relationship of synonymy. The notion of definition seems to be inadequate since it was unable to unlock the problem of synonymy and analyticity in view of attaining clarity of the problems, Quine, therefore, turns his back on the notion of definition and proceeded with the task of seeking clarity for the notion of synonymy and analyticity.

His next attempt to bring clarity to the notion of synonymy was carried out using the idea of interchangeability which is usually between two linguistic forms or cognitive synonymy in all contexts without altering its meaning *salva veritate*. By interchangeability *Salva Veritate*; is a principle attributed to Leibniz by which two expressions are said to be synonymous if the substitution of one for the other does not change the truth value or meaning of any context in which either expression appears. Quine asserts that "it is not quite true that the synonymy 'bachelor' and 'unmarried man' are everywhere *salva veritate*. Truths which become false under substitution of "unmarried man" for "bachelor" are easily construed with the help of "bachelor of arts" or "bachelor's buttons""(Quine in Ammerman 201-202). The problem of interchangeability arises as Quine notes that not all the time that "bachelor" is used for instance does the truth value remains when the synonymy "unmarried" is substituted for both are not cognitively synonymous all the time. Cognitive synonymy means the kind of synonymy that has a connection with analyticity, such that it will make "any analytic statements to be turned into a logical truth by putting synonyms for synonyms (Quine in Ammerman 202). Further, Quine pointed out that in extensional languages that are interchangeable *salva veritate* cannot assure us of the desired cognitive synonymy. This means that interchangeability *salva veritate*, when viewed in relation to an extensional language, is not a sufficient condition of cognitive synonymy. Hence, interchangeability does not resolve the analyticity issue.

With the appeal to meaning, definition, and synonyms failing to provide satisfactory justification for analyticity, Quine resorts to semantic rules. He engages the position that argues the true nature of the analytic-synthetic distinction is made clear with the appeal to artificial language that has explicit semantic rules. However, an appeal to semantic rules involves different forms and this has a purported relationship between statements and languages and statements are only true or analytic if they conform to the semantic rule. Quine, however, says this is going back to the first point or clarification of the meaning of what the semantic rule is, just as it is to ask what analytic is. Thus, the shift from analytic to semantic rule has also failed to resolve the cleavage between the analytic-synthetic distinction. In view of the difficulty of giving a justifiable explanation of analyticity or something close to it, Quine concludes that the analytic propositions will be those in which the factual content is null or simply those which are informatively trivial (Quine in Ammerman 207)

Quine makes another appeal to substantiate the dilemma of analyticity by recourse to the verification theory. This is an appeal to the second dogma which is the second side of the coin of the logical positivist dogmas. The logical positivists view verification as a method of confirming and infirming the meaning of a statement and such process is justified if it coheres with empirical confirmation or information. Thus, analytic statement is that limiting case which is confirmed no matter what (Quine in Ammerman 208). This is both foundationalist and reductionist in approach. Thus, meaning statements are only those translatable to direct sense experience. But Quine criticizes this verificationist position of meaning or the reductionist view which reduces the goal of translating any significant statement to sense-datum language. This is fundamentally wrong as its supposed validity rests on a defective conception of meaning which regards individual statements as independent of primary units of meaning. (Imafidon 39). Quine argues that if we have reasons to reject the analytic-synthetic distinction, we must also reject the reductionist thesis because they constitute two sides of the same coin (Aigbodion and Igbafen 68).

In view of the epistemic impasse in finding justification for the analytic-synthetic cleavage and the hypocrisy and weakness of verificationism, Quine proposes a new foundation for empiricism, which he tags "empiricism without the dogmas"; a form of holism which is regarded as confirmation holism or epistemological holism. Holism is regarded as "any view according to which properties of individual elements in a complex are taken to be determined by relations they bear to other elements (Holism in Honderich 397). Epistemological holism which has been advanced by W.V. O. Quine and Donald Davidson argue that "the meaning of a sentence depends on its relations with other sentences in a language; thus, understanding a sentence involves understanding a language either the language in which the sentence is expressed or one into which it is translatable". (Holism in Honderich 397-398)

Quinean holism is a form of deconstruction of the empiricists' edifice which argues that there is no demarcation as it were, between the analytic and the synthetic. He argues that what we have is a network of linkage connecting various sentences, hence, we cannot compartmentalize sentences into two sharp categories or reduce them to only empirical verification. (Irele in Oladipo 179). The whole of science is built on the unit of empirical significance and scientific

statements are interconnected. Thus, if we think of verification, it would be the whole field of science and not single statements that are verified. Because of this interrelatedness of science, the talk about the empirical content of individual statements is misleading and it is similarly incoherent, therefore, to set boundaries between analytic and synthetic statements, with the former being contingent on experience and the latter necessary on experience. For Quine formulation, therefore, statements are held as necessarily true if the right changes are made somewhere else in the system. He argues further that the function of science is to predict future experiences in the light of past ones; the only ground for choosing which explanations to believe is "the degree to which they expedite our dealings with [sense experiences](#)". (Quine in Ammerman 212). This position is a tilt towards pragmatism. Aigbodion and Igbafen interpret Quine's criterion clearly:

From Quine's viewpoint, we may regard analytic statements as those we would want to conserve and regard as somewhat well entrenched, such that they are the truths which we would be least willing to give up in the face of apparently falsifying circumstance. This is the Quinean pragmatic criterion of preserving analyticity. (69)

Quine argues further that no statements are immune to revision. This is the famous critique against induction and the empirical principle which categorizes some statements as incorrigible. Quine argues to the contrary. Several replies to Quine's pragmatic reproach of empiricism have been advanced from Rudolf Carnap to Hilary Putnam to Paul Grice and P.F Strawson. It suffices to capture the defense of Grice and Strawson against the attack on empiricism.

Paul Grice and P. F Strawson: In Defence of a Dogma

Quine made a swipe at the analytic-synthetic distinction with his epochal paper, "Two dogmas of empiricism", arguing that the claim is an unempirical dogma of empiricism, a metaphysical article of faith, hence not rationally grounded (Imafidon 39; Aigbodion and Igbafen 62). Quine declares or seems to declare, "not merely that the distinction is useless or inadequately clarified, but also that it is altogether illusory, that the belief in its existence is a philosophical mistake" (Grice and Strawson 142). Thus, Quine makes a radical rejection of the distinction which amounts to a radical skepticism of analyticity. However, Grice and Strawson (henceforth GS) contest the rational and logical basis of Quine's claims and argue as not sufficient for an outright rejection of analyticity. GS argue that

the claims of Quine do not amount to a rejection, hence, they make an amendment of Quine's claim which would not amount to an outright denial.

The basis for GS's refutation stems from the fact that there are grounds which would lead to a denial and not. It may seem that they that fact of incomprehension of a concept or its ambiguity does not amount to inexistence. It may seem that those who hold the view on analyticity may not present the argument as it should be, but, this incoherence or rejection of a claim as useless ore pedantic or can be done away with does not lead to a rejection (Grice and Strawson 141). GS think that the presentation of Quine's critique should be a critique on the philosophical elucidation of doctrine, rather, than a radical rejection of it. GS expressly backlashes Quine:

It is worth pointing out that Quine's objection is not simply to the words "analytic" and "synthetic", but to a distinction which they are supposed to express, and which at different times philosophers have supposed themselves to be expressing by means of such pairs of words or phrases as "necessary" and "contingent", "a priori" and "empirical", "truth of reason" and "truth of fact"; so Quine is certainly at odds with a philosophical tradition which is long and not wholly disreputable. (Grice and Strawson 142)

The point that GS try to make is that, since the terms "analytic" and "synthetic" are not contested philosophical terms, but its distinction; and a certain kind of distinction at that, as Quine argues, that, "Our major difficulty lies not in the fist class of analytic statements, the logical truths, but rather in the second class, which depends on the notion of synonymy (Quine in Armmerman 199), then, Quine's inability to understand at least the second class of analyticity or at worst to explain it, does not mean that they cannot be explained at all or therefore does not exist. GS reinterpret Quine in the light of this logical sequence that his thesis is not that there is no difference at all, "but that the nature of, and reasons for, the difference or differences are totally misunderstood by those who use the expressions" (Grice and Strawson 143).

GS takes a further swipe at Quine in contesting the notion of synonymy which the latter agrees pose a difficulty in understanding the analytic distinction; a term he describes a "cognitive synonymy" which he claims is as unclarified as that of analyticity. The strength of the Quinean rejection of synonymy is that x

and y means the same at all the time that they can be interchanged, and in which case, none exists since any expression recourses back to the definition and further clarification. Hence, both "analytic" and "synthetic" do not exist. GS replies that if Quine is to be consistent, then, his use of the words, "means the same as" and "do not mean the same as" do not exist. This is so because the words "analytic" and "synthetic" are not the special property of philosophers (Grice and Strawson 145). Thus, both from a philosophical point of view and from ordinary language GS argue that Quine's position is not sufficient to claim that "analytic" and "synthetic" do not exist.

The intelligibility standard created by Quine in view of understanding analyticity as being part of a closed circle of concepts, all of which stand in need of clarification, GS make an attempt to break into the circle with a concrete example of logical impossibility - unfortunate, because, as I shall argue, it is precisely the kind of analyticity that experience might persuade us to discard (Pidgen "Two Dogmatists; Grice and Strawson 150-1). An example of logical impossibility would be the example of a child of three being an adult and as distinct from natural impossibility with an example of a child of three understanding Russell's theory of types (Imafidon 40; Grice and Strawson 152-3). Thus, Quine's difficulty stems from incomprehension and thus, rather than take a posture of Socratic assumption that something not easily describable has no place in discourse, it only needs clarity. Quine's intellectual rebuff can only lead to skepticism of meaning. GS further says, in view of synonyms, it is only wise to ask, what does it mean? GS thus conclude that two sentences are synonymous if and only if the true answer of the question, "What does it mean?" asked of one of them is the true answer to the same question asked of the other.

In view of Quine's critique of the second dogma; verificationism or reductionism, which is based on the principle of "immune from revision", he had said, it is absurd to think that a statement taken in isolation from its fellows, can admit of confirmation or disconfirmation at all. GS replies this thus:

[Quine] does not deny that individual statements are regarded as confirmed or disconfirmed, are in fact rejected or accepted, in the light of experience. He denies only that these relations between single statements and experience hold independently of our attitudes to other statements. He means that experience can confirm or disconfirm an individual

statement, only given certain assumptions about the truth or falsity of other statements. (Grice and Strawson 156)

GS say the implication and prescription of Quine is only a revision of the analytic-synthetic doctrine on synonymy. And so, since individual statements are not denied confirmed or disconfirmed, just that they are not immune to revision, but justified by experience, therefore, they [GS] argue that:

All we have to say now is that two statements are synonymous if and only if any experiences which on certain assumptions about the truth-values of other statements, confirm or disconfirm one of the pair, also, on the same assumptions, confirm or disconfirm the other to the same degree. (Grice and Strawson 156)

What GS interpret this claim of Quine as an amended account of statement-synonymy along these lines. Thus, the query or attack by Quine ends up according to GS in strengthening the doctrine of analyticity. The reply or defense of an attack by GS, Pidgen describes as "analytic imperialism" ("Two Dogmatists") as it has bloated the empire of the analyticity. This reply by GS safeguarded the empiricist edifice, yet, leaves the burden and difficulty of analyticity as a ravaging ghost in analytic and post-analytic philosophy.

Grice and Strawson on Quine: An attack on the defense, but not defense of the attack

Several revisionists' positions have come up since the formidable reply by Grice and Strawson to Quine's criticism to empiricism and his subsequent positive theory of empiricism without the dogma; an epistemological holism. A notable Quinean revisionist is Hilary Putnam and subsequently Quine himself in his book, *Word and Object* (1960), where he presented his theory of "indeterminacy of translation". While GS have faulted Quine on theoretical grounds and claim that Quine suffers incomprehension and should not suffice for incredulity, their own position is also fraught with some inconsistencies which has made the "analytic debate" a perennial discourse in analytic philosophy.

In GS's reply, the epistemic impasse in understanding analyticity remains. Two main arguments are used to critique Quine and that is *logical impossibility* and *natural impossibility*. GS illustrate this by two respective examples: (1) My neighbour's three year old is an adult and (2) My neighbour's three year old child

understands Russell's theory of types. The distinction between both GS argue is the distinction between an utterance meaning something and not meaning anything. The first example; case of *logical impossibility* is one that require a new explanation because it is not logically possible to claim a three year old is an adult; but one may think that the speaker is using familiar words to express new concept. Thus, in this case, either one is asserting it with a meaning other than the standard conventional one, or with no meaning at all. Whereas in the second; the case of *natural impossibility*, it is evident that the case is false, except, it would take a more convincing situation to assert one. In the face of this main thrust of GS argument, it seems to me, that the argument hatched to attack Quine is true to attack theirs, as they need to clarify what Quine means in his claims even if it appears to be *logically impossible*. The contribution of GS leaves the understanding of analyticity more vacuous than ever. Their reply did not advance a new explanation to the problem but to Quine and so, the difficulty remains.

The contributions of Putnam and latter Quine has further spiralled this philosophical problem. However, it suffices to mention that Quine's revision did not amount to the radical skepticism attributed to his work, as, he also claims that the problem is with a set of analytic statements; when synonymy is applied, not to logical truths whose truth-value are self-evident. It seems that the case of analyticity shifted from the incredulity of belief to issue of incomprehension of thought, both of Quine and misreading by GS. While it is impossible to hold completely to the Quinean position as it leads to the skepticism of meaning, his revision, breaks empiricism from a form of foundationalism.

Over 60 years of Quine's attack on the empirical foundations, the Quinean ghost has continually haunted analytic philosophy and pushed it into new intellectual frontiers, part of what has formed the foundations of post-analytic philosophy.

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