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Two Dogmas of Analytical Philosophy¹

Greg Taylor

In his landmark article, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” W.V.O. Quine pushed analytical philosophy into its post-positivist phase by rejecting two central tenets of logical empiricism. The first dogma was the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements; the second was reductionism, or the belief that to each synthetic sentence there corresponds a set of experiences that will confirm or disconfirm it. But in both “Two Dogmas” and *Word and Object*, Quine stretches analytical philosophy to its limits. The problem is, ironically, his adherence to two *separate* dogmas. The first stems from Quine’s empiricism: he insists that there is nothing more to meaning than the empirical method of discovering it. The second has been taken as the defining characteristic of analytical philosophy;² it is the belief that a philosophical account of thought can only be attained through an account of language – the famed “linguistic turn.” I will argue that a philosophical account of language can only be attained *given* an account of thought,³ and that the philosophies of Kant and Davidson can help us construct such an account.

1. The Intensional Fabric

Quine begins “Two Dogmas” with a two-pronged definition of analyticity: (i) logical truths and (ii) statements that become logical truths when we substitute synonyms for synonyms (i.e. “unmarried man” for “bachelor” in “no bachelor is married”). Logical truth is transparent enough, and Quine doesn’t criticize it here,⁴ but the second class is unclear “insomuch as the notion of ‘synonymy’ is in no less need of clarification than

¹ I would like to thank the Macalester Philosophy faculty, Anthony Boutelle, and Michael Taylor for their helpful comments on various drafts.

² Dummett, Michael, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard (1994), 4. Whether all analytic philosophy actually does adhere to the ‘linguistic turn’ is highly dubitable, Russell being the most notable exception. For a critique of Dummett’s view see Ray Monk’s “What is Analytical Philosophy?” in *Bertrand Russell and the Origins of Analytical Philosophy* ed. Monk and Palmer, Bristol: Thoemmes (1996), 1-21. Whether or not the lines have been drawn correctly is a side issue; what is important is that the linguistic turn has characterized at least a massive chunk of analytical philosophy.

³ Here I am following Gareth Evans, for example, who makes use of the mental notion of *information* to analyze reference in his posthumous *The Varieties of Reference*, New York: Clarendon (1982).

⁴ In an earlier article, “Truth by Convention” (reprinted in *Quintessence: Basic Readings in the Philosophy of W.V. Quine* ed. Roger F. Gibson, Cambridge, MA: Harvard (2004), 3-30), he argued that even logical and mathematical truth can’t be “true by convention” (in Carnap’s sense – see his *The Logical Syntax of Language*, Chicago: Open Court (2002), xv), or by definition, because the notion of conventional or definitional truth only makes sense *within* a formal system, and therefore can’t be used to justify the system as a whole.

analyticity itself.”⁵ Quine then launches into a Socratic quest to explain synonymy and analyticity, proposing and rejecting explanations. The conclusion is that they all come up short.

The first attempt uses *meaning*: a statement is analytic when it is true by virtue of meanings and independently of fact. But unless we postulate abstract objects to correspond to words, and then explain synonymy as identity of those objects, a theory of meaning is reduced to a theory of synonymy. And thus we find ourselves back where we began: needing to explain synonymy.

The next go is to say that synonyms are synonymous *by definition*. But definition suffers the same fate: barring formal stipulation, it always relies on previous notions of synonymy. The lexicographer’s business is not to ground, or justify, synonymy, but to find it; he is an empirical scientist.

Finally,⁶ we can propose that synonymy consists in interchangeability without a change of truth-value. This, too, comes up short. All that is needed in a purely extensional language to guarantee interchangeability is co-extension. But then “creature with kidneys” and “creature with a heart” end up as synonymous, and their corresponding bi-conditional becomes analytic. This won’t do. “All and only creatures with kidneys are creatures with hearts” is clearly an empirical (biological) truth.

What we need is a notion of necessity, for we don’t want to merely show that “all and only bachelors are unmarried men” is true – everybody grants that. We need to show that it is *necessarily* true, while “all and only creatures with kidneys are creatures with hearts” is only contingently true. But how are we to explain necessity? *Logical* necessity only yields logical truth, not synonymy.⁷ There is also *metaphysical* necessity, but then the truths would not be based on meanings at all, and therefore would be wholly independent of analyticity.⁸ Our only option is to offer a definition of *linguistic* necessity: a statement is necessarily true if and only if it is analytic, but then, Quine asks, “what are we so hard at work on right now?”⁹

Because of this tight-knit interdependence between synonymy, analyticity, and necessity, Quine concludes that any attempt to define analyticity is “not flatly circular, but something like it. It has the form, figuratively speaking, of a closed curve in space.”¹⁰ Each attempt to define one of these notions independently of the others was found

to

⁵ “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” reprinted in Quine’s *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard (1953), 23

⁶ Quine also considers Carnap’s formal analyticity based on “semantical rules.” (“Two Dogmas of Empiricism” 32-37). Quine argues that insofar as the definition is restricted to a particular formal language, L, all we can provide is a definition of “analytic for L”, and not just “analytic”. And as soon as one attempts to explain “analytic” for *variable* language L (for any language) one runs up against all the problems of the previous considerations. (The argument is similar to the point made in “Truth by Convention” – see note 4 above.)

⁷ Quine makes this point in his criticism of Carnap’s attempts to define analyticity based on “state descriptions.” See “Two Dogmas,” pp. 23-24.

⁸ Metaphysical necessity has received renewed attention due to Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard 1972), but Quine is easily defended on this point: Kripke himself points out that his notion of metaphysical necessity isn’t sufficient for analyticity – an analytic truth need not only be true in all possible worlds, but also “by virtue of its meaning.” See pp. 34-39.

⁹ “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” 29-30

¹⁰ “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” 30

have no implications for the rest of the group; each attempt to define them using the others was found to presuppose what we were trying to explain in the first place.

With Quine's direct arguments against the first dogma concluded, we can turn briefly to the most celebrated response to his essay. In their "In Defense of a Dogma,"¹ H.P. Grice and P.F. Strawson charge Quine with making a fallacious step from "We have not made satisfactory sense of x" to "x does not make sense."² And furthermore, that analyticity, synonymy, necessity, and meaning are tightly interwoven doesn't show that the resulting fabric ought to be rejected.³ But Quine is no hack – he cannot be disposed of so easily. He was right to note the connection between these notions; what we need now is a reason for either accepting or rejecting the whole slew of them. In the concluding sections of "Two Dogmas" Quine considers just such reasons: there he argues forcefully against reductionism, and that, in rejecting reductionism, one is committed to rejecting the interwoven intensional fabric, as well.⁴

2. Confirmational Holism and the One Great Meaning

The argument against the second dogma begins with the *verification theory of meaning*: the meaning of a statement is the method of empirically confirming or disconfirming it. This theory affords a precise definition of synonymy: two statements are synonymous if they are identical in method of empirical verification. And if we take the meaning of a word to be, at least in part, its systematic effect on sentences (as we should), then it is not far to the synonymy of words and the analyticity of statements. We would confirm or disconfirm "John is a bachelor" and "John is unmarried" in just the same way. Thus we find that "all bachelors are unmarried men" is analytic, because it is vacuously confirmed by each experience.⁵

Quine concedes as much: "So, if the verification theory can be accepted as an adequate account of statement synonymy, the notion of analyticity is saved after all."⁶ But then he asks: what *is* confirmation? Since he is writing to empiricists, it must be a set of experiences to which the meaning of the sentence reduces; hence "reductionism." For Locke, the meaning of a word is a mentally private abstraction from the set of impressions to which it corresponds, called an *idea*.⁷ As Frege's context principle⁸

¹ Grice, H.P. and P.F. Strawson, "In Defense of a Dogma," in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 65, No. 2. (Apr., 1956), pp. 141-158.

² "In Defense of a Dogma," 148

³ *Ibid*, 148-149

⁴ Grice and Strawson respond to this point, too, (*Ibid*, 156-158), but their response is not very compelling. They try to spell out individual meanings within Quine's conformational holism based "on certain assumptions about the truth-values of other statements." (156) The problem with this move is that truth becomes logically prior to meaning, which, at the very least, changes the meaning of "truth" and "meaning." For Quine's response to Grice and Strawson see *Word and Object*, Cambridge, MA: MIT (1960), 63-66.

⁵ A consequence of this view is that all analytic truths are synonymous with one-another. This is an intended consequence. Carnap picks up Wittgenstein's doctrine of tautology, according to which all propositions say the same thing: nothing. See Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* trans. Pears and McGuinness, London: Routledge (1974), especially 5.142 and 6.11

⁶ "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", 38.

⁷ See Book III of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), partially reprinted in *Readings in Modern Philosophy* (Vol. II) ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, Indianapolis: Hackett (2000), 70-79.

⁸ The principle is first stated in *The Foundations of Arithmetic* trans. J.L. Austin, Oxford: Blackwell 1959, pp. x: "never ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition."

became widely accepted, empiricism morphed into modern reductionism. The mapping of names onto ideas became a correlation of sentences with experiential *facts* – experiences that *something-is-the-case*.

As valiant attempts to spell out this theory by Carnap and others in the 1930s and '40s continually failed to achieve the standards of rigor and precision demanded by the “logic of the sciences,” the extreme view that a clearly specifiable set of experiences corresponds to each sentence began to give way. But the core insight lingered; Quine writes,

The dogma of reductionism survives in the supposition that each statement, taken in isolation from its fellows, can admit of confirmation or infirmation at all. My counter suggestion... is that our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body.”⁹

Thus Quine takes a great step forward for empiricism. The unit of empirical significance for classical empiricism was the individual *idea*. In the logical empiricism of the early 20th century it had become the *statement*. For Quine, “*The unit of empirical significance is the whole of science.*”¹⁰

There is certainly some intuitive appeal to this view.¹¹ In a paper on Quine, Robert Kirk gives us a clear example of holistic confirmation: “Seeing drops of water on the window would normally lead me to believe it was raining, but if I happened to know there were builders on the roof using a hose, I might not acquire that belief.”¹² Thus all of knowledge can be conceived of as a “web of belief,” with sense experience impinging only on the edge of the web. The idea is that it makes no sense to speak of the *individual* implications of each statement, because a statement can only *have* implications once situated within the web of belief.

Despite the intuitive appeal, the view seems too radical: is there really no difference in method of confirmation between any two types of statements? The sentences “John is on the corner” and “There are only denumerably many computable functions from natural numbers to natural numbers” are *exactly alike* in point of confirmation? Quine grants that there is at least *something* to our intuition here, but it is “nothing more than a loose association reflecting the relative likelihood, in practice, of our choosing one statement rather than another for revision in the event of recalcitrant experience.”¹³ We’ve reached the heart of Quine’s pragmatism: the sentences of logic and physics are not, in principle, any different from everyday empirical statements – they all play a part in the vast “web of belief.” The distinction between the two is that logic lies near the center of the web. We could, theoretically, change a logical law in response to any unexpected experience, but our natural predisposition to disrupt the web as little as

⁹ “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” 41

¹⁰ “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” 42

¹¹ The point was advanced long before Quine by Pierre Duhem, who argues in *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory* (partially reprinted in *The Philosophy of Science* ed. Martin Curd and J.A. Cover, New York: Norton (1998), 257-279) that because a prediction can only be issued from whole “theoretical scaffoldings”, “The only thing the [failed] experiment teaches us is that among the propositions used to predict the phenomenon and to establish whether it would be produced, there is at least one error.” (261)

¹² Robert Kirk, “Indeterminacy of Translation” in *The Cambridge Companion to Quine* ed. Roger Gibson, Cambridge: Cambridge (2004), 154.

¹³ “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” 43

possible stops us, because a change in logic would force so many other changes. Our everyday statements seem so “germane,” as Quine puts it, to certain experiences merely because it is those that we are most likely, on *pragmatic grounds*, to adjust.

Quine eventually moved away from such a radical holism to a view in which large “semantic masses” are tested.¹⁴ Each sentence will serve in multiple semantic masses, and there will be nothing more than prudence for deciding on adjustments within a semantic mass. With this qualification, I find Quine’s view very appealing. But the point here is not to argue for or against Quine’s confirmational holism. As I will now argue, whether or not we accept it is largely irrelevant for a theory of meaning. In short, rejecting the dogma of reductionism does not entail rejecting analyticity.

First, Quine’s integration of the two dogmas needs to be made explicit. After outlining confirmational holism, he writes, “any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system... Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to revision.”¹⁵ If the reductionist verification theory of meaning was able to get us back on the intensional rug, Quine’s demolition of it pulls the rug from under our feet. Consider the following passage from Carnap:

Two chief problems of the theory of knowledge are the question of meaning and the question of verification... The second question presupposes the first one. Obviously we must understand a sentence, i.e. we must know its meaning, before we can try to find out whether it is true or not. But, from the point of view of empiricism, there is a still closer connection between the two problems. In a certain sense, there is only one answer to the two questions. If we knew what it would be for a given sentence to be found true then we would know what its meaning is.¹⁶

As an empiricist, Quine accepts this assimilation of verification and meaning, and so if he takes verification to be *completely* holistic, then he must also hold the view that language, too, is completely holistic. That is, if meaning is empirical significance, and the “unit of empirical significance” is the *whole of science*, then meaning consists solely of all sentences sharing equally in One Great Meaning. Taken literally, this view is patently absurd: of course there is *some difference in meaning* between (non-synonymous) statements. This type of holistic argument against meaning seems rather like arguing that, since money has value only in the context of an entire monetary system, it makes no sense to talk about the individual value of the dollar.¹⁷ A confirmational holist, in order

¹⁴ He begins to give ground on the point already in *Word and Object*, writing in a footnote, “[That logical truth is germane to all topics] has been lost sight of, I think, by some who have objected to an excessive holism espoused in occasional brief passages of mine. Even so, I think their objections largely warranted.” (13). A clearer concession comes in “Reply to Jules Vuillemin” in *The Philosophy of W.V. Quine* ed. Lewis Hahn and Paul Schilpp, La Salle: Open Court (1986), 619: “For the use that I made of [holism in “Two Dogmas”], it would suffice to argue that *many* sentences that are synthetic by popular philosophical acclaim can be held true come what may, and *many* that are analytic by acclaim can be declared false.” For a good discussion of Quine’s various stages of holism, see De Rosa, Raffaella and Ernest Lepore, “Quine’s Meaning Holisms,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Quine*, 65-90.

¹⁵ “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” 43

¹⁶ Carnap, Rudolf “Testability and Meaning” in *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 3, No. 4. (Oct. 1936), 420.

¹⁷ Wittgenstein can help make the point: he writes, “I set the brake up by connecting up rod and lever’ – Yes, given the rest of the mechanism. Only in conjunction with that is it a brake-lever, and separated from its support it is not even a lever; it may be anything, or nothing.” (*Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell (2001), §6) The View that Quine seems to advocate in “Two Dogmas” would have it that there *just isn’t* a brake-lever, only the mechanism as a whole.

to account for any differences between separate sentences, must sever the link between confirmation and meaning.

But Quine's overarching naturalized epistemology, according to which all epistemology ought to be modeled on and informed by the natural sciences,¹⁸ seems to prevent such a move. If we are to have knowledge about meaning it had better be empirical knowledge. To solve this problem, Quine takes a clever step: in *Word and Object* he shifts philosophy of language from meaning to interpretation. The question is this: if empirical content only comes in large packages, how do we discriminate and interpret separate bits of speech?

3. The Shift to Interpretation

The discussion of interpretation in *Word and Object* revolves around the thought experiment of *radical translation*: a linguist attempting to translate the language of a *completely* foreign culture into his own. The issue is methodological; what Quine asks is *how* the linguist would make his translations. His first move would be to use what Quine calls *stimulus meaning*: the class of all stimulations that prompt assent and dissent to the sentence when asked as a question. Thus the sentence "Animal?" would yield assent in the presence of dogs, rabbits, and pigs, and dissent in the presence of trees and mountains. Stimulus meaning is behaviorist: the meaning of a sentence *just is* the conditions under which it can be uttered.¹⁹

The famous example is the sentence "Gavagai." After the native utters the sentence in the presence of a rabbit, the linguist hypothesizes that it means something like "Lo, there is a rabbit!" He would then test the hypothesis by uttering "Gavagai" interrogatively in various situations, eventually eliminating broader and more narrow sentences (i.e. "there is an animal" and "there is a Netherland Dwarf"). To translate the sentence "Gavagai" as "Rabbit" is to say that they have the same stimulus meaning.

This method can only explain sentences with extremely simple empirical content – those on the periphery of the web of belief. Quine calls these *observation sentences*,²⁰ because the conditions that elicit their utterance require little or no collateral information. Contrast the sentence "Is that red?" with "Is he a bachelor?" Whereas a native speaker need only know what the former means (in a sense to be decided) to answer the question, an answer to the latter requires knowledge of the man's marital status. The question "is that a neutrino?" provides a more extreme case.²¹

So what happens when the linguist moves beyond observation sentences? He is forced to form what Quine calls *analytical hypotheses* about words and how they fit together to form sentences. With short one word sentences like 'Gavagai', stimulus

¹⁸ See Quine's "Epistemology Naturalized" in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, New York: Columbia (1969), 69-90.

¹⁹ This way of putting the matter comes from Quine's reply to William P. Alston in *The Philosophy of W.V. Quine* ed. Hahn and Schilpp, La Salle: Open Court (1986), 73

²⁰ This term is adopted from Carnap, who defines an observation sentence as one whose predicates are all observational; "A predicate 'P' of a Language L is called *observable* for an organism (e.g. a person) N, if, for suitable arguments, e.g. 'b', N is able under suitable circumstances to come to a decision with the help of few observations about a full sentence, say 'P(b)', i.e. to a confirmation of either 'P(b)' or '¬P(b)' of such a high degree that he will either accept or reject 'P(b)'. "Testability and Meaning", 454-455. (In short, an observation sentence is one whose truth-value is easily determined by observation alone.)

²¹ Quine sees the distinction between observation and non-observation sentences as one of *degree*. *Ibid*, 42

meaning would provide a fairly accurate translation, but once we try to translate the *term* ‘gavagai,’ or longer sentences, Quine argues that indeterminacy follows:

Who knows but what the objects to which this term applies are not rabbits after all, but mere stages, or brief temporal segments, of rabbits? Or perhaps the objects to which ‘gavagai’ applies are all sundry undetached parts of rabbits. The stimulus meaning would register no difference.... Point to a rabbit and you have pointed to a stage of a rabbit, to an integral part of a rabbit, to the rabbit fusion, and to where rabbithood is manifested.²²

This is the thesis of the *indeterminacy of translation*: stimulus meanings will be the evidence for a manual of translation, but there can be any number of such manuals, all of which are consistent with stimulus meanings, but inconsistent with one another. The thrust is not purely epistemic: “The point is not that we cannot be sure whether the analytical hypothesis is right, but that there is not even, as there was in the case of ‘Gavagai’, an objective matter to be right or wrong about.”²³ Whereas translating the *sentence* “Gavagai” relies solely on empirical observation, translating the *term* is a hypothesis that has its connection to experience only through the role it plays in sentences.

The thesis is nothing more than Quine’s confirmational holism, regarding observation in general, applied to linguistic behavior. Suppose we are trying to decide between “rabbit” and “rabbit-stage” as a translation of “gavagai.”²⁴ Our method would be to ask questions about gavagais, using sentences that we construct with other analytical hypotheses. Quine’s argument is that we could adjust those *other* hypotheses so as to accord equally well with either “rabbit” or “rabbit-stage.” Thus “is this the same rabbit as before?” becomes “is this a rabbit-stage of the same animal as before?” To adopt the old metaphor, we have a vast web of translation; adjustments of one part of the web force adjustments elsewhere in the web, but there is no objective decision between different webs that are equally consistent with all observational data.

The situation with meaning is more extreme than observation in general (hence “under-determination” of scientific theory and “indeterminacy” of translation). The reason is that when testing scientific hypotheses we assume the truth of various other statements. But with translation we can’t make such assumptions; *all* of the foreign remarks want translating. If conservatism figures heavily in science generally, it is prohibited from radical translation, since we have nothing to conserve in the first place. Therefore, though *we* have our own ontology of material objects, there is nothing objectively correct about it – if it becomes useful to abandon that ontology, we ought to do so. To interpret the natives as talking about our material objects is to read our own conceptual scheme *into* theirs. Quine calls this idea *ontological relativity*.²⁵

²² *Ibid*, 52-53

²³ *Ibid*, 73

²⁴ The point expressed here is a paraphrasing of Quine’s argument from *Ibid*, 72. A similar argument appears in “Ontological Relativity” in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, 33-34, with respect to “rabbit” and “undetached rabbit-part.”

²⁵ This position was already advanced in “Two Dogmas,” in his discussion of “the myth of material objects,” as well as in “On What There Is,” reprinted in *From a Logical Point of View*, 1-19, where he famously argued that “to be is to be the value of a bound variable,” that is, existence is relative to a theory.

He has solved the “One Great Meaning” problem, but at a price. Even if there is indeterminacy, once he is able to discriminate between the meanings of different sentences, some analyticity follows. He eventually conceded the point:

Analyticity undeniably has a place at a common-sense level... A sentence is analytic for a native speaker... if he learned the truth of the sentence by learning the use of one or more of its words. This obviously works for ‘No bachelor is married’ and the like, and it also works for the basic laws of logic.²⁶

This seems very un-Quine-like. Doesn’t this notion allow for the possibility of intensional concepts like meaning, synonymy, and necessity? Thus, Quine retracts his concession two paragraphs later:

I have been expressing a generous attitude towards analyticity that may seem out of character. In fact my reservations over analyticity are the same as ever... [My criterion], based on word learning, is no help; we don’t in *general* know how we learned a word, nor what truths were learned in the process... In short, I recognize the notion of analyticity in its obvious and useful but epistemologically insignificant applications.²⁷

Even if there are some analytic sentences, we still have no means of discovering them except through observation. All we can do is construct translation manuals, and it might even turn out that different sentences would be analytic in different manuals. Thus there is no reason for giving any privileged epistemic status to the analytic sentences. Especially regarding scientific methodology, which is usually Quine’s chief concern, it becomes senseless to use analyticity as a justification: we might be better off just scrapping our whole scheme, and thereby those analytic sentences.

The question, for Quine, is whether or not intensional objects could serve any *pragmatic function* in theorizing about language. He answers “no” because of a much older point: “No entity without identity.”²⁸ Synonymy and analyticity are identity conditions for meanings, and thus Quine’s skepticism about synonymy yields skepticism about meaning. The situation we are in is this: Quine seems to be able to account for interpretation in *Word and Object* while remaining skeptical of meaning and analyticity in any important sense.

4. In Defense of Meaning

But let us have a closer look at the indeterminacy thesis. Crispin Wright points out that if Quine’s indeterminacy entails that there are *no* determinate facts about meaning, then “there are no determinate facts about meaninglessness, either.”²⁹ That is, if there are absolutely no determinate facts about what a word does mean, then there are

²⁶ “Two Dogmas in Retrospect,” 59-60

²⁷ “Two Dogmas in Retrospect,” 61

²⁸ The slogan itself first appears in “Speaking of Objects” in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, 23, but in “On What There Is” Quine criticizes “possible” entities because they have no clear standard for identity. The point also underlies his critique of Russell’s use of propositional functions instead of classes, because only the latter have clear identity conditions. See “New Foundations for Mathematical Logic” and “Logic and the Reification of Universals” in *From a Logical Point of View*, 80-129, especially pp. 81 and 122.

²⁹ Wright, Crispin “The Indeterminacy of Translation,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language* ed. Bob Hale and Crispin Wright, Oxford: Blackwell (1997), 400

no determinate facts about what a word doesn't mean, either. This, though, is just the One Great Meaning problem that Quine attempts to *escape* in *Word and Object*, so he must have a slightly weaker thesis in mind. And thus we can ask *how* strong the indeterminacy thesis is; *how much* indeterminacy is there?

One of two things is true: either there is enough determinacy of meaning to account for "No bachelor is married" being necessarily true; or there isn't. If there is, then synonymy and meaning have all that we would want from them – Quine showed in "Two Dogmas" that a functional notion of analyticity follows from necessity. If "bachelor" and "unmarried man" are synonymous, and the analytic truth is a necessary one, then the identity of their meanings is clearly defined.

But Quine takes another track. We saw that he denied the necessity of analytic statements; his justification for doing so was the possibility of different translation manuals. But, I will now argue, if the indeterminacy is strong enough to make "No bachelor is married" *contingent*, then the distinction between true and false collapses.³⁰ Imagine hearing an analytic statement 'P'. Since it is true only by virtue of meaning, the statement could be contingent only if there were at least two possible analytical hypotheses of one of its constituent terms, such that one of the meanings would make the sentence true, and the other would make it false. If Quine's indeterminacy thesis is this strong, then neither of these hypotheses is objectively correct; therefore the statement is not objectively asserted as either true or false. And if these analytical hypotheses apply to the term as it occurs in "P", then it would apply as it occurs in any sentence. Thus, according to the indeterminacy of translation, the empirical content of 'P' is no more than that of 'P v ~P;' in other words, to assert 'P' is to assert nothing at all. Without determinacy of meaning, there is no determinacy of intended truth-value; without determinacy of intended truth-value, no information can be conveyed from speaker to listener.

Quine's problem is his adherence to his own first dogma, according to which philosophy of language is subsidiary to empiricist epistemology, which leads him to believe that there is nothing more to meaning than the empirical discovery thereof. His stimulus meaning, or "the stimulations that would prompt assent and dissent," is remarkably similar to the positivist's account: "the set of experiences that would count toward confirmation or disconfirmation". The difference is that, for Quine, the observations serve in a theory of interpretation instead of meaning, but his persistent focus on observational criteria yields no account of how speaker and hearer can convey information; we have found ourselves forced into a skepticism regarding communication. As a strict empiricist and confirmational holist, Quine must either accept the One Great Meaning, or no meaning at all.

This is not a situation without historical precedent: a brilliant empiricist sweeping away dogmas and replacing them with naturalized counterparts, but who seems to "run his ship ashore, landing on skepticism, there to let it lie and rot."³¹ If Quine showed that analyticity can't be explained as confirmation "come what may," perhaps our epistemology needs a broader criterion than "what may come." I suggest that we look to Kant.

³⁰ Wright briefly considers this point in *Ibid*, 401

³¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, Indianapolis: Hackett (1977), 6 (Page 262 in the standard Königlich Preussische akademie der Wissenschaften edition.)

5. A Transcendental Deduction of the Concept “Concept”

Quine’s second dogma is the belief that analysis of language is prior to analysis of thought. Here I would like to argue that only by rejecting this dogma, and making theoretical use of concepts in analysis of language, can we hope to construct a theory of meaning. My argumentative method will be similar to a Kantian *transcendental deduction*.³² For an empirical concept, the deduction would proceed by showing that empirical objects accord with it, but for an *a priori* concept this method is unavailable. The concept “concept” seems to be such a concept *par excellence*, since its extension consists of intensional objects;³³ we certainly can’t justify the use of “concept” by showing that particular concepts fall under it. The deduction therefore needs to be *transcendental*.

Kant defines “concept” as follows: “Whereas all intuitions, as sensible, rest on affections, concepts rest on functions. By ‘function’ I mean *the unity of the act of bringing various representations under one common representation*.”³⁴ This act is taken up by the *understanding*, which is the “mind’s power of producing representations from itself.”³⁵ Two things are important here. First, the concept emerges *actively*, as an act of judgment. Kant expresses this by calling the understanding the *spontaneous* element of knowledge, as opposed to sensibility, or the “*receptivity* of our mind.”³⁶ And second, a concept is *radically* different from Frege’s concept.³⁷ Frege’s concept is propositional and purely predicative; Kant’s is neither of these.³⁸ Though Kantian concepts can serve as a predicate, they can also serve as a subject.³⁹ More importantly, we can judge *by means* of concepts. For example, we make causal judgments *about* objects, but don’t predicate causality *of* those objects. Our judgments, as wholes, “fall under” the concept of causality.

With these points kept closely in mind, let us look to Kant’s definition of analyticity. In all subject/predicate judgments, “either the predicate B belongs to the subject A, as something which is (covertly) contained in this concept A; or B lies outside the concept A, although it does indeed stand in connection with it. In the one case I entitle the judgment analytic, in the other synthetic.”⁴⁰ Quine objects to Kantian

³² Kant, Immanuel *Critique of Pure Reason* trans. N.K. Smith, New York: St. Martin’s (1965), A 84-130/B116-169 (Citations of the first *Critique* are according to the 1781 (A) and 1787 (B) pagination). Kant’s transcendental deduction is an attempt to justify the use of the pure concepts of the understanding (the table of categories); my deduction is an attempt to justify the use of concepts generally.

³³ The phrasing here is almost paradoxical, but the nearest to expressing my point as I can get. The problem is analogous to Frege’s assertion that “the concept *horse* is not a concept” in “On Concept and Object,” reprinted in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege* trans. Peter Geach and Max Black, Oxford: Basil Blackwell (1960), 46

³⁴ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 93. Italics mine.

³⁵ *Ibid*, B 75

³⁶ *Ibid*, B 75

³⁷ See “On Concept and Object,” especially pp. 43-46

³⁸ One important similarity between Kant and Frege is that Kant focuses on judgments, instead of individual ideas or representations, just as Frege focuses on propositions, instead of terms. But I resist any interpretation of Kant that takes him to be talking about linguistic propositions, except insofar as language would be wholly parasitic on thought.

³⁹ For Frege *first level* concepts *can* fall under *second level* concepts, but we can ignore this complication here.

⁴⁰ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 10

containment as “too metaphorical,”⁴¹ but there is no metaphor. Before making an analytic judgment, one must have unified the predicate into the subject, because if one hadn’t, then one wouldn’t be able to make judgments about the subject in the first place. To grasp a concept *just is* to possess the right kind of analytic knowledge regarding it,⁴² because a concept is formed by actively uniting various representations under a single representation.

I suggest, in line with Kantian *spontaneity*, that we must bring the ability to make judgments, that is, unite representations under a concept, *to* the acquisition of language. To be able to correctly use the word “mama,” a baby must be able to unite the varied and unique representations⁴³ of her under the concept “object.” Only then does she become “mama.”⁴⁴ Without conceptualization, all we have is an incoherent flux; in Kant’s words, “intuitions without concepts are blind.”⁴⁵ Before we can even approach interpretation, we must have a conceptual apparatus, and as we learn more and more language, it becomes necessary to presuppose higher levels of conceptual sophistication. Thus to be able to discuss Marx’s dialectical materialism we need certain concepts; to do calculus or real analysis we need others. To each language game its conceptual apparatus.

At the end of the first section we were left with the need to break into the circle of intensionality. Nowhere has Kant mentioned meanings or synonymy – he has given a purely conceptual account of analyticity. But we still have a problem: though he seems able to approach the circle from the outside, it isn’t clear that we’ve actually made it in. For if his account of judgment and concept is not propositional, what role can it play in a theory of meaning or interpretation?

Two elements of Donald Davidson’s later philosophy indicate how to connect Kantian analyticity with philosophy of language. The first is his account of interpretation: due to the idiosyncrasies of all individuals, when interpreting anybody, we must at least find evidence that they use their words as we do.⁴⁶ In short, all interpretation is radical, in Quine’s sense. Furthermore, the acts of interpreting the meaning of a person’s words and attributing beliefs to that person presuppose each other.⁴⁷ To meaningfully assert or interpret the sentence “the gun is loaded,” one must at least

⁴¹ “Two Dogmas,” 21

⁴² Analytic knowledge isn’t actually knowledge for Kant at all, since there is no intuition involved (“Thoughts without content are empty,” *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 75); one can’t “know” anything about a concept, but only “explain” or “elucidate” it (*Ibid*, B 755-758). On the other hand we can, I will argue, know whether a person *possesses* a certain concept – obtaining this information is the task of interpretation.

⁴³ By “representation” I do not mean anything like the empiricist’s sensations; I point out only the simple fact that she appears once from this angle, again from another. Once in a dress, once in jeans, etc...

⁴⁴ Quine discusses this issue in “Speaking of Objects”, 6-11, and notes the important fact that the child might originally conceptualize “mama” much as we think of “red” or “water” – as in “Hello! More mama, more red, more water.” *Ibid*, 7. But regardless of whether the object is singular or massive, it is still a unity of manifold representations, that is, an object that is brought under a concept.

⁴⁵ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 75

⁴⁶ Davidson, Donald “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs” in *Truth, Language, and History*, Oxford: Clarendon (2005), 89-108. He also made the point less explicitly in the earlier article “Radical Translation”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 125, where he writes, “The problem of interpretation is domestic as well as foreign: it surfaces for speakers of the same language in the form of the question, how can it be determined that the language is the same?... All understanding of the speech of another involves radical translation.”

⁴⁷ Davidson stresses throughout all of his work that “interpreting an agent’s intentions, his beliefs and his

possess the belief that a gun is a weapon, that it is a physical object, etc...; and to possess these beliefs one must be able to understand “the gun is loaded.”⁴⁸

Using Davidson’s model of interpretation from “Epitaphs,” the issue becomes more localized. Imagine that my friend says “Lo, a rabbit!” How am I to interpret him? I will never have access to the whole extension of his “rabbit”; I must form a hypothesis about his *concept*.⁴⁹ The issue is most important regarding statements made *by means* of concepts. To interpret “I pulled one book off the shelf and the whole thing came tumbling down on me” we need to attribute the concept of causality to the speaker, though it is not the meaning of any word in the sentence. “That vase is red” demands the concept of color; “he thinks we’re not home” demands the concept of a mind.

Davidson would concede some of what’s been said, but there is a point at which he would jump ship. In “Seeing Through Language” he writes:

To have a concept is to *classify* objects or properties or events or situations while understanding that what has been classified may not belong in the assigned class. The infant may never say ‘Mama’ except when its mother is present, but this does not prove conceptualization has taken place, even on a primitive level, unless a mistake would be recognized *as* a mistake. Thus there is in fact no distinction between having a concept and having thoughts with propositional content, since one cannot have the concept of mama unless one can believe someone is (or is not) mama, or wish that mama were present, or feel angry that mama is not satisfying some desire.⁵⁰

Up until the last sentence, the argument is good. He is right to bring in the Wittgensteinian requirement for the possibility of error, but it doesn’t follow from this that “there is no distinction between having a concept and having a thought with propositional content.” If it did, then from Davidson’s claim that we can’t have beliefs without meanings it would follow that there is no distinction between believing and meaning something. But that doesn’t follow. The suggestion here is that we don’t just interpret a person’s beliefs and meanings, but their concepts as well.

The reason Davidson tries to reduce concepts to beliefs comes out in the article “Thought and Talk,” where he writes “the pattern of relations between sentences is very much like the pattern of relation between thoughts.”⁵¹ But his only argument for this point is to preface it with the word “obviously.” Quine’s second Dogma was the belief that analysis of language is prior to analysis of thought. Davidson explicitly rejects this in its radical form,⁵² and in doing so he takes a crucial step in the right direction. But there is still no reason to assume that conceptual structures should (or can) be reduced to propositional structures. The point is this: one must be able to have propositional

words are parts of a single project” (“Radical Interpretation,” 127). See also “Belief and the Basis of Meaning,” in the same collection, 141-154. His suggestion of how to break into this seemingly vicious circle is to construct a theory of truth.

⁴⁸ The example is from Davidson’s “Thought and Talk,” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 158

⁴⁹ This argument is already given in Russell and Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica* regarding the intensionality of propositional functions. (Russell and Whitehead, *Principia Mathematica* to *56, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1987), 39-40) Although intensional propositional functions are one of the chief targets of Quine’s work, I have not found any response to this simple argument in Quine.

⁵⁰ “Seeing Through Language,” in *Truth, Language, and History*, 139

⁵¹ “Thought and Talk,” 158

⁵² Immediately following the previous quotation he writes, “But clearly the parallel between the structure of thoughts and the structure of sentences provides no argument for the primacy of either.” *Loc. Cit.*

attitudes and the ability to use language to have concepts, but it does not follow that having a concept *just is* having propositional attitudes.

In “Thought and Talk” Davidson describes interpretation as construction of a three dimensional logical space consisting of propositional attitudes, utterances, and actions. I propose that we move to the fourth dimension and add Kantian concepts. Quinean holism will still play an important role, just as it does in Davidson’s thought, in that the ultimate goal of interpretation is to construct a consistent *entire* logical space for the speaker. But despite both Quine’s and Davidson’s assertions to the contrary, some of this space must be intensional.

This brings us to the second element required from Davidson: his rejection of “the very idea of a conceptual scheme.”⁵³ The simplest argument for this view is that anything that could count as a reason for determining that somebody possesses a conceptual scheme would be an interpretation of that scheme: “the criteria for what would constitute a scheme incommensurable with ours are simply unclear.”⁵⁴ Thus it would be impossible to justifiably assert that there exists a conceptual scheme that is incommensurable with our own. This is not to say that we don’t have concepts, but only that if there is no alternate conceptual scheme against which to compare ours, then there is little sense in calling ours a “conceptual scheme.”

Davidson’s arguments are good, but he stops short in explanation. He concedes more “localized” schemes, such as those possessed by “biologists, aeronautical engineers, and solid state physicists,”⁵⁵ but nowhere addresses what accounts for the differences of scheme. It seems that if we were to give an account of the conceptual apparatus by which a language game judges, then we would have an account of what distinguishes it from other language games. While Davidson might attempt to explain these in terms of beliefs, it just isn’t clear how we can explain the connection between “I dropped the book and it fell” and the requisite causal beliefs without addressing the intensional *concept* of causality. There is no purely logical connection between the sentence and any belief about causality.⁵⁶

The primacy of language over thought comes out in Quine’s suggestion that “The uniformity that unites us in communication and belief is a uniformity of resultant patterns overlying a chaotic subjective diversity of connections between words and experience.”⁵⁷ My countersuggestion, issuing essentially from Kant’s account of knowledge and Davidson’s attack on conceptual schemes, is that discovery of a uniformity of connections between words and experience is only possible given a uniformity of conceptual patterns. The stress I’ve laid on Davidson leads me to believe that many particular concepts will vary from person to person, but differences can only be discovered against the background of some shared conceptual apparatus.

⁵³ See “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 183-198, and “Seeing through Language” in *Truth, Language, and History*, 127-142. There are differences between the views in these two articles; when there is a conflict I side with “Seeing Through Language.”

⁵⁴ “Seeing Through Language,” 128

⁵⁵ *Loc Cit*

⁵⁶ Particularly, I think that Davidson’s suggestion that a Tarskian theory of truth can serve as a theory of meaning won’t, in itself, be able to explain how concepts connect to propositional attitudes and meanings. Davidson first proposed a Tarskian theory of truth in “Truth and Meaning” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 17-36

⁵⁷ *Word and Object*, 8

Kant, of course, paved the way for much subsequent analysis of thought, but since Frege gave his propositional account of judgment, it has been widely assumed that thought and language possess completely isomorphic structures, and therefore that any philosophy of language is *ipso facto* philosophy of thought. Now while that may turn out to be the case, it ought to be discovered and not assumed as a methodological principle. I still haven't provided any explanation of *how* a Kantian analysis of judgment could connect up with the logical space of meaning and belief; I've only given an argument that to explain the concepts needed for different language games we need something like a Kantian analysis. It is clear that the "museum myth" won't do – we can't simply attach concepts to words like a nametag. What isn't clear is what we should do instead. But nonetheless, I think this is a *good* problem, for in thinking about it we are thinking about how thought relates to language without presupposing that the only way to investigate the problem is through sentence structure.

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