Remarking

Quine on Analytic–Synthetic Distinction: Re – Interpreting the First Dogma

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Abstract

The present paper is about the famous distinction between analytic – synthetic judgements that always occupied central place in the philosophical theories of so many reputed western philosophers starting from Leibnitz to Frege. However, this popular distinction has also been subjected to severe criticisms mainly presented by W.V.O. Quine. In this paper I have endeavoured to examine this bifurcation from both traditional as well as from Quinean and post – Quinean perspectives and there by, to establish it on a reconciliatory platform.

Keywords: Analytic, Synthetic, Kant, Quine, Distinction.

Introduction

View of Traditional Philosophers

Analytic– Synthetic distinction is a conceptual distinction and is primarily concerned with affirmative subject– predicate form of judgements. Analytic propositions are true by virtue of the meanings of their constituent terms while synthetic propositions are true by virtue of how their meaning relates to the world. Many renowned philosophers starting from Leibnitz to Frege maintain a sharp distinction between these two group of judgements. Beginning with Frege, many philosophers thought that knowledge of logic and mathematics and other apparently apriori domains, such as much of philosophy and foundations of science, could be shown to be analytic by careful apriori analysis. Yet, this distinction invites so many intractable problems that it leads many philosophers including Quine to raise doubt about the tenacity of this well – talked bifurcation.

Prior to Kant, though Leibnitz and Hume formulated this distinction in terms of " truths of reason" and " truths of fact", " relations of idea" and "maters of fact" respectively; Kant must be credited for introducing the "analytic" and " synthetic" to make out the same distinction at the very beginning of his *Critique* wherein he opines;

"In all judgements in which the relation of a subject to the predicate is thought this relation is possible in two different ways. Either the predicate B belongs to the subject A as something that is covertly contained in this concept A or B lies entirely outside the concept A, though to be sure, it stands in connection with it. In the first place, I call the subject analytic, in the second synthetic"[1]

Before going into an elaborate demonstration of Kantian distinction, let's take a brief look into Leibnitzian distinction between truths of reason and truths of fact. For Leibnitz, all propositions are of subject – predicate form or at least can be formulated having the form. Such propositions are classified into two categories viz. "truths of reason" and "truths of fact". The former are roughly necessary truths in the sense of their dependency upon the law of contradiction or what amounts, in Leibnitzian philosophy, to the law of identity. In contrast to truths of reason, truths of fact are not necessary propositions; their opposites can logically be conceived without involving into any contraction. They depend on the law of sufficient reason; they, in a way, enumerate the reasons for the existence of any possible or actual matter of fact.

Necessity, for Leibnitz, is a trans – world idea. He employs the concept of "possible world" to delineate this distinction. Truths of fact are necessary in this actual world that we are living in but not in all the possible worlds that God could have created had he resolved to do so. Only truths of reason turn out to be true in all the possible worlds; consequently, only they are necessary in the proper sense of the term.

However, the striking feature of Leibnitz's philosophy is that though truths of reason are necessary, these are not the only analytic propositions. All true propositions, in his theory, can be analytic in nature. So is also the case with the truths of fact. Thus, necessity is not a privileged attribute of an analytic proposition in Leibnitzian philosophy. For him, "analytic" stands for something systemic or theoretical. Necessity and

analyticity are mutually non – implicative concepts in his theory. But some interpreters of Leibnitz like Russell prefer to adhere to the traditional interpretation of necessary propositions as analytic, in nature. They call them "finitely analytic propositions". Since human beings are capable of analysing these propositions to be self–evidently true or logically reducible there into, which is not the case with truths of fact, so they prefer to term the former kind of propositions to be finitely analytic in nature which are also necessary at the same breath being dependent upon the principle of logical contradiction.

Immanuel Kant, though favours this distinction, clarifies it from altogether a novel perspective and his clarification includes both logical and linguistic concepts like the concept of containment, the concept of the principle of identity or non – contradiction and the concept of inclusion into the meaning of the term under consideration. To explain, an analytic proposition is that wherein the predicate concept is already contained either implicitly or explicitly into the subject concept or forms part of the meaning of the subject term. Consequently, an analytic proposition lacks novelty in it which can be obtained only from empirical propositions wherein the predicate concept is not inherent into the subject concept. Such propositions are called synthetic propositions and add something new to our knowledge situation.Since Kant's treatment of the terms "analytic" and "synthetic" designates them as concepts, the distinction between them can be identified to be conceptual distinction in nature.

In the Introduction to his *Critique*, in addition to this distinction Kant draws another equally significant distinction between apriori and aposteriori propositions. Justification of apriori propositions does not rely on experience though its origin is embedded into experience. According to Kant, necessity and strict universality are the two fundamental elements of apriori knowledge. Since these elements are not derivable from experience, any knowledge that possesses these two features must be designated as apriori knowledge. All mathematical propositions as well as propositions of natural science like "every change has a cause" must be treated as apriori knowledge. Aposteriori propositions, on the other hand, depend on experience for their justification and are also grounded into it. Thus, it is the question of justification and not the question of origin of concepts that lies at the bottom of this popular distinction.

It is evident from Kantian philosophy that if there are analytic apriori propositions then analytic aposteriori propositions are impossible to obtain and secondly that knowledge of analytic propositions is easier to obtain. Simply by analysing our concepts we come to know them to be true.

Aim of the Study

W.V.O Quine is a significant figure in the school of Logical Positivism. He was the pioneer of several epoch–making philosophical doctrines amongst which his doctrine of Two Dogmas of Empiricism is worth–mentioning. of these two dogmas the first one concerns an age-old doctrine of analytic – synthetic distinction.Quine strikes vigorously at the very root of this distinction which in its turn aroused severe controversy amongst contemporary western philosophers. My aim in the present paper concerns a just potryal of Quine's dismissimal of this first dogma of Empiricism along with all its criticisms and thereby to re –interpret Quinean doctine from a neutral and veridical perspective. This will also help the budding researchers to explore and develop a new vision in this area of study.

Logical Positivists on the Notion of Analyticity

Later on, 20th century logical positivists took great interest in Kantian distinction between Analytic – synthetic judgements though they adopted a new approach to this issue. Kant had high hopes regarding the logical possibility of synthetic apriori propositions and he devoted major portion of the *Critique* to the demonstration of this kind of propositions in mathematics, natural science and even in metaphysics. However, logical positivists like Frege [2] and Carnap [3] were not in agreement with this Kantian contention. They maintained that mathematical. logical propositions are all apriori in nature but these are analytic and not synthetic propositions in any way. Frege's notion of analyticity involves many logical properties in addition to that of containment like symmetry, transitivity, negation etc. He emphasized upon formal definition and on the idea of synonymy to clarify his notion of analyticity. A proposition like "all bachelors are unmarried" is synonymous with "all unmarried men are unmarried" having the logical form "all F is F' which is nothing but a tautology and thus, analytic in nature. Thus, on this new interpretation, all mathematical and geometrical truths turn out to be analytic apriori instead of being synthetic apriori since they all concern knowledge of the meanings of the terms or the connection of language. To quote Carnap; "Since empiricism had always asserted that all knowledge is based on experience ; this assertion had to include knowledge in mathematics. On the other hand,we believed that with respect to this problem the rationalists had been right in rejecting the old empiricist view that the truth of "2+2=4" is contingent on the observation of facts, a view that would lead to the unacceptable consequence that an arithmetical statement might possibly be refuted tomorrow by new experience.......... By contrast the truths of logic and mathematics are not in need of confirmation by observations because they do not state anything about the world of facts, they hold for any possible confirmation of facts." [4]

This group of philosophers offer varying definitions of analytic and synthetic propositions. All these can be summarised as follows ;
1. Analytic propositions are true by definitions
2. Analytic propositions are true by the meanings of their terms
3. Analytic propositions are true by the conventions of language
4. Synthetic propositions are those that are not analytic.

They do not consider necessarily true propositions or propositions that are true in all the possible worlds to be analytic though they believe conversely all analytic propositions to be necessarily true in nature. Under this new interpretation, all synthetic apriori judgements of pure mathematics and natural science of Kantian interpretation turn out to be analytic.

Rudolf Carnap 5 in Empiricism , Semantics and Ontology drew a similar distinction formulated in different terminology.He called it internal – external distinction or distinction between internal questions raised within a theoretical framework and external questions asked prior to the adaptation of any such framework. Internal questions are categorised into analytic or logical and factual or empirical questions. Similarly, external questions are also brought under two subheads viz. pseudo questions and practical or pragmatic questions about the framework under consideration. However, it is notable that both factual internal and external statements may be treated to be "synthetic" being grounded in experience and Carnap himself was dubious regarding the actual logical status of such external statements. So, the internal – external distinction does not come closer to the traditional analytic – synthetic distinction.[6]

Quine's Treatment of the Distinction

W.V.O.Ouine, inspite of himself being a generous adherent of logical positivism, did not offer support to this distinction as formulated and preached by his predecessors. However, prior to opposing to this distinction he favoured it. This defensive approach of him is at least evident from his lectures namely ; " The Apriori", " Syntax" and " Philosophy as Syntax" which is delivered at Harvard University of Fellows in 1934 in order to express his appreciation for Carnap's new book *The Logical Syntax of Language.*[7] As we all know, Carnap was a pronounced supporter of Kantian analytic – synthetic distinction and Quine's rapport with him, his lectures approving Carnap's work at this time–all these portray Quine's acceptance of this distinction.

But strikingly, a year before his deliverance of these lectures at Harvard, Quine began to feel dubious about the tenacity of this distinction and he communicated his feeling not only in private conversations with Carnap but also with other the then reputed philosophers like Alfred Tarski, Nelson Goodman and Norton White.[8] As a result, he wrote down his often – overlooked article " The Analytic and The Synthetic – An Untenable Dualism" even before he presented his famous article "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" at American Philosophical Association meeting in 1950.[9]

In this paper Quine adopted several strategies to repudiate this distinction. First, he attempted to clarify the notion of analyticity by virtue of the meaning of words a sentence comprises and then advances the view that the nature of meaning itself is very obscure. Following Carnap, Quine argues that meaning of a word is not to be confused with naming. To exemplify, the expressions " the morning star" and " the evening star" have different meanings but they name the same object, say the planet Venus i.e. both have the same "reference", to borrow Fregian terminology. Again we have to make a sharp distinction between intension and extension of a general term which, in a way, carries forward the distinction between meaning and reference. The expressions "creature with a heart" and "creature with a kidney" have the same extension since any creature can have both heart and kidney at a time though their intensions differ.

Meaning then comes closer to the essence or the essential property of a word. Quine notes that this analytic –synthetic distinction carries with it a legacy of Aristotelian distinction between essential and accidental properties. "Meaning is what essence becomes when it is divorced from the object of reference and wedded to the word."[10]

The concept of analyticity involves two sub – concepts namely; analyticity via logical axioms and analyticity qua synonymy. Logical truths, Quine affirms, are evidently analytic statements no matter how we interpret the non – logical particles contained in it. Thus, "no non – X is X" is a logical truth and there by, analytic regardless how we interpret X in it.

Again, when we replace a word with its synonymous word in a sentence then that sentence turns out to be a logical truth and thereby, analytic. However, the very notion of synonymy is problematic for Quine. For, all the attempts to explain synonymy presuppose a prior notion of analyticity and thus, there is apparently no non – circular way of explaining analyticity in terms of the concept of synonymy. Here, Quine is particularly concerned with cognitive synonymy that is devoid of any mental image often linked up with a specific word – meaning. Concept of synonymy refers to definitions but all definitions apart from that of ascribing abbreviations on a purely conventional basis require us to have a prior grasp of the concept of synonymy. So, Quine notes "What we need is an account of cognitive synonymy not presupposing analyticity." [11]

The concept of synonymy often is explained in terms of Leibnitz's third logical principle namely; the principle of interchangeability salva veritate. Two words are said to be synonymous if they are interchangeable without affecting the truth value of the sentences in which they occur. However, this notion of interchangeability is also too problematic. The words "bachelor" and "unmarried men" are synonymous and thus, interchangeable according to this rule. But problem arises when we try to substitute the word 'bachelor" with "unmarried men" in phrases like "bachelor of arts", "bachelor has less than ten words". To get rid of this difficulty, Quine speaks of cognitive synonymy that is refrained from all these verbal plays. But the very notion of cognitive synonymy is vitiated by the charge of circularity.

Two Expressions are, thus, cognitively synonymous if what we ordinarily express by saying that x and y have the same meaning or that x means the same as y. For, Quine, however, to mean the same as when applied to the predicate expressions differs from and goes beyond the notion of just being true of the same object. The predicate expressions, to use Quine's, examples, " the creature with heart" and "the creature with kidney" may indeed be ture by virtue of referring to one and the same object and yet, they are not cognitively synonymous much as Frege's examples of morning star and evening star were not cognitively synonymous. In other words, it is not what is thought about that determines cognitive synonymity, but rather it is the way it is thought about that is the same.

The problem for Quine is that there is no example that would or could satisfy the conditions of cognitive synonymy or analyticity as Quine extends

his critique. Among the problems with the Kantian understanding of analyticity is the manner in which an analytic statement can conceptually contain all that is necessary without any reference to the outside, to something that is contained and thus, containment must be taken metaphorically. In his use of the term, Kant appears, according to Quine, to take a statement to be analytic when it is true by virtue of meanings and independently of fact. If taken in this way, then analytic statements can not be subject to revision for they already contain the meaning that makes them analytic and they do not refer to anything outside that may prompt a revision.

Quine endeavours to rescue this kind of synonymy by accommodating the word "necessary" in our language. But, unfortunately, this word also bears along with it an inseparable notion of analyticity. Thus, Quine argues that the concept of analyticity can not be endorsed in a non–circular way in our natural language. So, he takes recourse to a formal language governed by the semantical rules developed by Carnap[12] and develops a general Carnapian paradigm regarding artificial language and semantical rules. But even this sincere effort, in Quine's view does not bear much hope for us for the reasons below :

1. Let us assume first that there is an artificial language. So, its semantical rules specify which statements are analytic in it. But then a serious problem is generated. By defining analyticity extensionally, the intensional meaning is anticipated in the rules simply because the rules contain the word "analytic" which is certainly baffling for our present purpose.
2. Let it be supposed instead then that there is a kind of semantical rule that does not specify which statements are analytic but simply those that are true. Thus, one may then define analytic truths as those belonging to this set. So, by following any particular semantical rule a statement becomes analytic. Then, again the same problem crops up For in what way can these semantical rules identify analytic statements without taking into account an intensional meaning of the word "analytic". This circle is so pervasive that Quine suggests;" we must just stop tugging at our boot steps altogether."[13] This age – old distinction, Quine argues, is the first dogma of empiricism with which it is paralysed and his main project is to cure empiricism of this paralysis.

Objections to Quine's Thesis

There exists a wide range of reactions to Quine's thesis on analyticity. Davidson, Stich, Dennett approve of Quine's interpretation and accordingly, attempt to account for our practice of meaning ascription within its own non–factual domains. On the other hand, Neo–Cartesians repudiate Quine's thesis to be an inevitable result of blind adherence to empiricism and naturalism which, in a way, bear the marks of Quine's own uncritical dogmas. They emphasize upon our intuitive faculty to grasp directly and immediately truth of particular claims. However, the reasons for its acceptance are quite poor. I am not discussing its favourable reasons in the present context. Instead, what I intend to do is

to throw some light on the criticisms levelled against Quine's theory.

Paul Grice and P.F. Strawson[14] make the point that Scepticism about The notion of synonymy culminates into scepticism about meaning itself for questions of these two are inter–related. If statements have meaning then it can be meaningfully asked as to "what does it mean?". If this question can be asked meaningfully then the criterion of synonymy also becomes meaningful for, two sentences are synonymous if and only if true answer to any one of them also turns out to be true regarding the other. Moreover, in the last section of the same article Quine hints at radical translatability criterion.[15] Both Grice and Strawson could rightly notice that indeterminacy of translation would make differentiation between correct and incorrect translations altogether impossible.

At the heart of the debate between Grice and Strawson and Quine is the analytic-synthetic distinction. For them though, Quine's objections to this distinction do not hold up and they base their responses upon a specific notion of meaning, what they refer to as "cognitive synonymy" is a notion they take to be a part of the analytic group. The problem for Quine is that there would be no example that would satisfy the conditions of cognitive synonymy or analyticity Quine extends his critique. However, both Grice and Strawson argue that despite Quine's arguments that attempt to define analyticity in terms of cognitive synonymy or despite the fact that a formal, conceptually contained definition is not possible, it does not warrant the repudiation of this distinction on the absolute grounds. They opine that if it is a fact that expressions cannot be explained precisely in the same way which Quine seems to require, does not mean that they cannot be explained at all. To prove their point they put foward the following example;

1. My neighbour's three - year old child understands Russell's theory of types.
2. My neighbour's three- year old child is an adult.

The first statement is verifiable, by contrast, the second statement is something we cannot understand unless we undergo a wholesale revision of our concepts of "child" and "adult". This second statement, for Grice & Strawson, exemplifies analytic statement. Barring a conceptual revision no evidence would lead us to accept the second statement to be an analytic statement. Quine's observation in this respect is essentially this;

As soon as we give up the idea of a set of experiential truth conditions for each statement taken separately, we must give up the idea of explaining synonymy in terms of identity of such sets. Herein, both Grice and Strawson argue that we need not to repudiate the idea of conceptual revision. For, all we are now required to admit is that two statements are synonymous if and only if any experiences, which on certain assumptions about the truth-value of other statements, confirm or disconfirm one of the pairs, also, on the same assumptions, confirm or disconfirm the other to the same degree. Furthermore, if we can make sense of the notion that the same form of words may express something true and given another set of assumptions, express something false, then, they conclude, we can definitely make sense of conceptual

revision and once we become able to make out this sense, we can very well preserve the analytic-synthetic distinction.

Again, John Searle in "Speech Acts"[16] argues against Quine's thesis by urging that the insubstantiality of the notion of analyticity does not follow validly from certain difficulties encountered while explaining this concept. Considering the way in which we would test any proposed list of criteria which involves comparison of their extension to the set of analytic statements, it would follow that any explication of what analyticity means presupposes that we already have at our disposal a working notion of analyticity.

Hilary Putnam[17] observes differences between two expressions viz. "all bachelors are unmarried" and "there is a book on this table" as between two things in the world or at any rate between two linguistic expressions in the world.Analytic statement derivable from a tautology by putting synonyms for synonyms is closer to Kant's treatment of analytic truth as a truth whose negation is a contradiction. Analytic truth as a truth confirmed no matter what, however, is closer to one of the traditional accounts of apriori.

Quine's argument appeared in the concluding section of this paper is totally independent of his arguments sketched in the first four sections regarding analyticity. Actually problem regarding analyticity does not arise at all if analyticity can be explained in a non – circular way without anticipating the notion of analyticity. Jerrold Katz[18] made the same attempt by explaining this notion on the basis of the syntactical features of the sentences.

As a matter of fact, Quine's circularity argument persists only when philosophers accept two theses at the same time viz : i) all necessary and apriori truths are analytic and ii) analyticity is needed to explain and legitimize necessity simultaneously. Indeed, early logical positivists accepted both these theses. But "very few philosophers today would accept either, both of which now seem decidedly antique." [19]

Post – Quinean Explanations of Analyticity

The most unsympathetic response to Quine's challenge has been essentially to insist upon an inner faculty of intuition whereby the truth of certain claims is simply grasped directly through, as Bonjour puts it :

" an act of rational intuition that is seemingly direct or immediate and yet, also intellectual or reason-governed...........it depends upon nothing beyond an understanding of the Propositional content itself."[20]

Bealer[21] defends similar proposals. Neither Bealer nor Bonjour is particularly concerned to defend the analytic by such claims, but their recourse to mere understanding of propositional content is certainly what many defenders of analytic have had in mind. Perhaps, the most modest reply along these lines emerges from a suggestion of David Lewis[22] who proposes to implicitly define common psychological terms by platitudes. He, later on, amends this suggestion to make room for the folk theory that may tacitly underlie our ordinary use of mental terms.

Quine 's reply to these objections is too simple and expressive of the real heart of the challenge to all the proponents of analytic i.e how are we going to distinguish such claims of rational insight, primitive compulsion, inferential practice or folk theory of the neo–Cartesians from some deeply held empirical conviction, from mere dogma? If the Cartesians attempt to meet the question by appeal to internal rules then, as Quine argues, they are going to have sort through these and related complexities in understanding people's intuitive responses.

On the contrary, externalist philosophers view Quine's thesis by considering how matters of meaning need not rely upon connections among thoughts and beliefs, that the traditional philosophers were accustomed to do, as involving relations between words and phenomena in the word they choose.Putnam, Kripke, Burge opined this view though gradually it takes the form of positive theories in the works of Dretske, Fodor who base meanings on various forms of natural co–variations between states of the mind and external phenomena.

Obviously, an externalist might allow some analytic truths like "water is H_2O" to be external and subject to empirical confirmation or dis -confirmation. Such a view will definitely accommodate well an older traditional view interested in the meanings of words and concepts and more interested in the essences of the worldly phenomena they pick out. Locke, for example, posited real essences of things rather along lines resuscitated by Putnam and Kripke–the real essences being the conditions in the world independent of our thoughts that make something the thing it is actually like H_2O makes something water. But even this view will dash down the hopes of philosophers looking for the analytic to explain apriori knowledge–claims. T o save the hope, one is required to mean by "analytic" something justified by virtue of meaning, for, this prima facie justification will never be over–ridden by other global, theoretical considerations.

Recently some philosophers have offered some empirical evidence that might be taken to undermine these efforts to empirically ground the analytic, casting doubt on just how robust the data for analytic might be. The movement of experimental philosophy has pointed to evidence of considerable malleability of subject's intuitions with regard to the standard kinds of thought experiments on which defences of analytic claim typically rely. Questions can obviously be raised against such experimental results. However, the results do serve to show how the determination of meaning and analytic truths can be regarded as a more difficult empirical question than philosophers have traditionally supposed.

Conclusion

It is noteworthy at this point that Quine was very much influenced by Carnap's writings but while attacking this distinction his chief concern was not the traditional empirical formulation of it but rather Carnapian formulation of it Thus, when Quine speaks of resurrecting "modern empiricism" i.e. logical positivism out of what he considers to be a dogma of analyticity, he is, thereby, speaking of abandoning not only a favoured thesis of traditional empiricism but also some of logical positivists' account ; Carnap

being an eminent member of the positivists' camp. He is accusing positivism for progressing with the traditionally weak clarification of this distinction though in anew cloak.

Quine's outright rejection of this age – old distinction left a lasting impression upon metaphysical enquiry.It paved way for the emergence of a new camp of metaphysicians who, no longer, pursue deductive method to arrive at metaphysical truths but instead empirical method to yield such metaphysical truths that are easily testable and refutable by experience.Thus, Quine's drive was not only towards blurring the boundary between "speculative metaphysics and natural science", thus in a way towards naturalism But also towards the genesis of a new kind of metaphysical enquiry.

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