

**EMPIRICISM BEYOND DOGMAS:
AN EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS OF QUINE'S
PRAGMATIC EPISTEMOLOGY**

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Abstract

One of the driving forces and preoccupation of empiricism is the nature, structure and theory of meanings. The attempt to provide and explain this has led the various traditions in philosophy to posit and argue for diverse perspectives. This was exactly what the empiricist traditionally did with their postulation of the analytic and synthetic statements. The implication of this submission for philosophy in general drew the attention and ire of Quine. So, influenced by the analytic and pragmatic tradition, Quine attacked this traditional distinction between analytic and synthetic statements as espoused by the empiricists, which he christened the 'two dogmas of empiricism'. He argued that this position is not just untenable but irrational and preclusive. And he called on the empiricist to strive towards integral and complete truth, as he also employed the proponents of this standpoint to interface with other disciplines, especially, those that have access to the level it cannot reach. Subsequently, this paper employing an existential-analytic approach, reasoned that the intention of Quine to dismantle the established demarcation between analytic and synthetic statements is a novel approach to further appreciation of noble marks of philosophy and its argument for an asymmetric and pragmatic approach to epistemology is likewise germane.

Keywords: Analytic, Synthetic, Pragmatic, Dogma, Empiricism, Statements, Meaning.

Introduction

It is palpable from our mundane experiences and in philosophical dialogues; that impulses are not just made known but they are also communicated using language. In doing this, words are combined in other to make good statements, sentences or prepositions. But, what seldom borders us is the very fact that, some of our statements and prepositions may not be meaningful and as such meaningless. And it is taken for granted that words whose meanings are known from sentences imply the meaningfulness of such sentences. However, this may not necessarily be the case as there are some sentences which could be grammatically correct but are just meaningless. This has indeed propelled philosophers to tailor and align their discourses towards analysis, in view of making statement really and truly meaningful. This enterprise of aligning towards analysis gave rise to the distinction between the analytic and synthetic prototypes. It seems to have started in the modern era with Kant and resurfaced in diverse shades in the contemporary era with the logical positivists. This may have explained

why a major philosopher in that philosophical tradition, in the person of Rudolf Carnap fancied the distinction between logical frameworks and factual frameworks. Carnap reasons that a logical framework is a linguistic framework where all of the internal questions formulable within it are seen as analytic, while in a factual framework, at least some of the internal questions are formulable within it are synthetic (Miller, 2007).

This distinction of Kant and Carnap especially Kant seems to underscore the empiricist and the rationalist tradition. But it appeared that Carnap was concerned with the interpretation of statements and meaningfulness of propositions. However, this whole discourse caught the attention of Quine who rather inferred and/or deciphered from the distinctions the basic framework on which the empirical tradition in philosophy tends to hinge its foundations. This is from where he coined his infamous *two dogmas of empiricism*. Quine tend to argue that this analytic synthetic distinction appears to be the two dogmas that propel the argument and position of the empiricists. It is then the task of this work to attempt a critical analysis of the argument of Quine which later informed his submission of empiricism without dogmas and rather called for a symmetrical and practical application of rules.

Conceptualisation

Epistemology:

Epistemology is one of the major branches of philosophy. Its primary concern as a critical branch of philosophy is to study the nature of knowledge, the rationality of belief together with the mode of justification. As a result, the central issues in the theory of knowledge swivels around four spheres: (1) the philosophical analysis of the nature of knowledge and its relationship with such concepts like truth, belief, and justification, (2) various problems of skepticism, (3) the sources and scope of knowledge and justified true belief, and lastly (4) the benchmarks for knowledge and justification. It studies the scope, nature, origin, limitation, reliability, and justification of human knowledge claims. Epistemology takes a critical investigation to scrutinize itself, a sort of self-examination and assessment. Epistemology is the theory of the origin, nature and limits of knowledge. It is the branch of philosophy that investigates the process of human cognition and all problems associated with its acquisition and justification. It is the task of epistemology to refute or justify cognitive claims. Hamlyn reasons that epistemology is concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, its preoccupation and basis and the general reliability of claims to knowledge. Epistemology is indeed very crucial to the knowledge enterprise. Its defining character is the idea of knowledge acquisition. For Baldwin (1960), knowledge refers to:

1. The cognitive aspect of consciousness in general, to know means to perceive or apprehend or to understand or comprehend.
2. Knowledge is also used in contrast to mere opinion sometimes called belief. In this application, it signifies certitude based on adequate grounds. There may be belief or subjective certitude without objective foundation.

Knowledge is further used for what is 'known' as such. Knowledge is used as a synonym for cognition and also to specify a specific cognition. That is the cognition that satisfies three conditions which are (1) Truth (2) Self-satisfying and indubitability (3) Logically impossible to falsify.

Empiricism:

Empiricism is from the Greek word “*Empeiria*” meaning experience (Audi, 2004). This type of experience involves; inner experience, reflection upon the mind and its operations and sense perception. The knowledge of the physical world is considered a generalization from particular instances and can never reach more than a high degree of probability. Philosophically, it includes all the contents of consciousness or it may be restricted to the data of the senses only (Morris, 1962). It is contrasted with rationalist which supports innate ideas, or *a priori* knowledge. However, modern empiricism holds a conception of philosophy as the analysis of concepts and propositions with an increased hostility to speculative philosophy. It holds that aside analytic statements of mathematics and logic, no statements were significant except that which could be verified by observation. Metaphysical and theological assertions were consequently rejected not as unproved, but as nonsensical or meaningless (Ree, 2005).

Dogma:

Its root is from the Greek word-*dogma*, and it stands for “that which seems to one”, an opinion, a belief or even a public ordinance. A dogma is a doctrine, an ideology, belief, tenet or even an opinion that has been formally and authoritatively proclaimed either by a leader or by an institution such as a church (Angeles 1981, 65), however, this institution can by extend to religious, political, social and other settings.

Background for Analyticity

For Kant, in judgments that the connection of the subject to the predicate is thought of, it is;(1) either the predicate B aligns with and to the subject A, that is, as something which is contained in this concept A or (2) B lies outside the concept A; though it does not really stand in connection with it. The first of the cases is analytic while the second one is the synthetic. Therefore, analytic judgments are those that the connection of the predicate with the subject is seen through identity; while those in which this connection is without the identity should be called synthetic. Flowing from this, it is palpable that analytic statements are *explicative* in nature and synthetic statements are *applicative in nature*. The one that add nothing through the predicate to the concept of the subject, but merely breaks it up into those constituent concepts that have all along been thought in it can be seen as explicative.

Conversely, that which add to the concept of the subject a predicate which has not been in any way thought in it, and which no analysis could possibly extract from it are therefore applicative. For instance, 'all bodies are extended', is just an analytic judgement. The reason is that, there is no need to go above and beyond the concept which is connected with the body so as to find extension as bound up with it. To catch up with this predicate, what is needed is to interrogate and analyse the concept i.e., to become conscious of myself which is the manifold which I always think in that concept. The judgment then is simply an analytic one. But with 'all bodies are curvy' the predicate is quite different from anything that is thought of in the mere

concept of body in general and the addition of such a predicate therefore yields a synthetic judgment (Smith, 2009; 120). In plain terms, with an analytic judgement we don't extend our knowledge in any way but the change is in synthetic, and all judgments of experience are all synthetic.

The Argument of the Two Dogmas

In the submission of Kant an analytic sentences or statements are obvious when the meaning of the predicate term is contained in the meaning of the subject term. This implies that the predicate adds nothing to the concept of the subject, rather it only breaks it up into those component concepts. For instance, 'all wives are women'. The meaning of women is evident in the term wife which is the subject. The predicate only makes the subject simpler to understand. But a situation whereby the predicate stays outside the subject concept, even though it is of course linked with it, it is synthetic. In the first Dogma, Kant holds that the denial of analytical statement is self-contradictory. This is because Kant conceives of analytic statement as one in which the concept of the subject term includes the concept of the predicate term, whereas a synthetic statement is not. On the notion of analytic statement, Quine points out the following shortcomings. The first is that "it limits itself to statements of subject-predicate term form. Also, it appeals to the notion of containment, which is left at the "metaphorical level" (Quine, 1963:21). Owing to the fact that the definition given to analytic and synthetic statements by Hume and Kant are not clear enough, Quine attempts to give clarity to analytic-synthetic distinction by building on Kant's intention and restated analytic statement. Thus: "a statement is analytic when it is true by virtue of meaning and independently of fact" (Kaufmann, 1997: 289). He goes further to attack the possibility of the distinction using the following:

Meaning

As part of the attempts to distinguish between analytic and synthetic statements, meaning is seen as a way out. But Quine opines that, this is only possible when meaning is confused with naming. He employs Frege's example of "evening star" and "morning star", which refers to the planet "venus". This for example illustrates that different terms can mean the same thing; even though different in meaning. In his own opinion therefore, naming can be equated with extension, not meaning. He argues further that different predicates of general terms may refer to the same object, even when they do not have the same meaning. He buttresses his argument with example that the general terms "creature with a heart" and "creature with kidney" cannot be said to have the same meaning even though, they agree in extension. Nwaoigu argues further in the words of Quine that: "*there is no assurance here that the extensional agreement of "bachelor" and unmarried man" rest on the same meaning rather than accidental matters of fact as does the extensional agreement of creature with a heart and creatures with kidney"* (Nwaoigu, 2000: 133-114). The base line is that when we realize that meaning is not the same as naming, it would be clear that meaning is not a clue to the explication of analyticity.

Synonyms

This is another effort of Quine to point out the limitation of analytic-synthetic distinction. In this regard, he indicates that there are two types of analytic statements, which includes those that are logically true and as a result are explicitly analytic. For example, "no unmarried man is married". Such statement is always true in every re-interpretation (Quine, 1963). The other

ones are those that can be transformed into logical truths by substituting synonyms for synonyms. For example, “no bachelor is married”. This can be made logically true as follows “no unmarried man is married”. According to Quine, this explanation of analytical leans on a notion of synonyms which is in need of clarification as much as analytical itself (Quine, 1963). As an attempt to completely exhaust the issue at stake, Quine examines Carnap's attempts to explain analyticity by appealing to what he Carnap calls state of description. This involves assigning truth-value to atomic statements of language; such that complex statements are explained in terms of the atomic statements. In this case, a statement is analytic when it comes true under every state description (Pluhar, 1999). Responding to this, Quine argues that such can only work for the first type of analytic statements because they do not contain extra-logical synonyms pairs, such as “bachelor and “unmarried”. It follows that the other type of analytical statements, which have to do with notion of synonyms are not covered by the description. Hence, the problem of analytic-synthetic distinction remains.

Definition

Some philosophers are of the view that analytic statements of the second type can be turned into logical truth by substituting the definition of terms they define. In other words, “unmarried man” which is the definition of the term “bachelor” can replace it. Reacting to this, Quine argues that to appeal to the nearest dictionary will not solve the problem, since lexicography relies on the practical usage, which is denied from the notion of pre-existing synonyms. That is to say, if we want our definitions to accurately reflect actual usage, we will make sure that the definition only defines words in term with which they are synonyms. But this implies nothing other than the notion of synonyms. Quine's argument on this point is that synonyms have not been adequately characterized, definition, which is derived from it cannot be taken as the panacea to the problem of analyticity (Pluhar, 1999).

Interchangeability

The prevailing impression is that the synonyms of two linguistic forms are interchangeable in all contexts in which they occur without any loss of meaning. Leibnitz would call this “interchangeability *salvaveritate*. Nevertheless, Quine argues from a different perspective. He holds that, there is no linguistic term that can be totally interchangeable in this sense. According to him, this is as a result of the fact that we are not concerned with synonyms in the sense of complete identity in psychological association or poetic quality; rather cognitive synonyms are particularly our primary concern. So he vows strongly that even the “interchangeability *salvaveritate* does not give properly account for the synonyms. This is because some heteronymous expressions might be interchangeable as well. Quine however posits that the sort of synonyms needed here are the ones, which will make an analytical statement turn into a logical truth by putting synonyms for synonyms. For him, therefore, to say that, “bachelor” and “unmarried man” are cognitively synonymous is to say that the statement “all and only bachelors are unmarried” is analytical. As such, negating the fact that “bachelors” can also mean degree holders. For Pluhar, (1999), this is a mere application of cognitive synonyms which can help us in analytic-synthetic distinction.

Semantic Rule

Here, Quine observes that some people think that the difficulty in separating analytical statement from synthetic statements is because of the vagueness of that characterize natural language. Consequently, they feel that analytical language with explicitly semantic rules will give a clear distinction and from the rules, it will be easier to know which statement of the artificial language is analytic. But Quine points out that the challenge here is that, the rules

contain the word “analytic” and we don't understand this. We understand what the rules attribute analyticity to, but we do not understand the rules (i.e. analyticity) to those expressions (Aston 1964: 190).

The Second Dogma of Empiricism

This constitutes Quine's critique of reductionism, which is the aftermath of the verification theory of meaning. As a theory of meaning, verificationism holds that the meaning of a statement lays in empirically confirming it. Going by this definition, analytic statement would be those which must be confirmed. In the same vein, two expressions would be said to be synonymous, if and only if, they are alike in point of method of empirical confirmation (Flew, 1971). Verification principle in its first explicit formulation states that “the meaning of a statement lies in its method of verification” (Ashbey, 1969: 240). The implication of the above is that, for a sentence to have cognitive, factual, descriptive or literal meaning, it must express a statement that could at least in principle be shown to be true or false or to some degree probable by reference to empirical observations (Ayer, 1999). Reasoning with Quine therefore, a proposition is said to be verifiable in the strong sense of the term, if and only if its truth could be overwhelmingly established in experience, but it is verifiable in the weak sense, if it is possible for experience to just render it probable.

This led to the idea of radical reductionism which views the relation between a statement and the experience as a direct one. The task of this radical mode of reduction therefore is to set the goal of translating any noteworthy statement into sense-datum language. This task was vividly embarked upon by Carnap and for Quine; such a view attributes all meaningful statements as a translation of direct immediate experience. Quine is of the view that the dogma of reductionism is not isolated from the dogma of analytic-synthetic cleavage; rather there exist a kind of connection between the two dogmas (Quine, 1963). Even though Quine concedes to the fact that the truth of statement in general depends on language and extra-linguistic fact, he argues that the truth of statements are analysable in linguistic components and factual components. Despite the fact that science depends on experience and language, this cannot be traced to individual statements when they consider one by one. Rather, the unit of empirical significance is the whole of science (Quine, 1963). It therefore means that truth or the falsity of sentence or statements cannot be reduced to immediate sense experience. Quine treating “two Dogmas” concluded that both are ill founded and cannot be adequately established. He does not merely condemn the theories he re-affirms his standpoint in “empiricism without the Dogmas”.

Empiricism beyond Dogmas

Quine holds that the totality of our knowledge on belief starting from geography and history, to physics even mathematics and logic are man-made fabric which impinges on experience. All subjects are interconnected but while some seem to be peripheral, others form the core. Yet, all are resulting from experience (but not limited to sense experience alone). Any conflict with experience at the peripheral brings about rearrangement in the interior of the field, such that everything that constitutes the system is affected. The occasional readjustment in the interior of the field necessarily brings about redistribution of truth values in some of our statements, leading to their re-evaluation. This entails re-evaluation of others because of their logical interconnection. Based on this, Quine argues further that: “*if the view is right, it is misleading to speak of the empirical content of an individual statement (reductionism, the second dogma) ... furthermore, it becomes a folly to seek a boundary between synthetic*

statement which hold contingently on experience and analytic statements, which hold come what may (first dogma) ” (Quine, 1963:43).

Following from the above, any statement can be held true come what may, if we make enough changes within the system (not peculiar to analytic statement alone). Quine, going further postulates that if the distinction between analytic and synthetic truth is jettisoned, we would realize that mathematics, science, metaphysics etc. are all of epistemological footing. They are all attempts to explicate what we have received from experience and all based on myths, fictions and unclarified assumptions. No discipline is better off in this sense. This is against the claims of Hume, Kant and the position of the Verificationists, where they regard some explanatory models as meaningful (that is science) and others as meaningless (that is metaphysics, religion etc). Therefore, Quine dismantled the established demarcation between the analytic and the synthetic by advancing a pragmatic approach, he says; *“Each man is given a scientific heritage plus a continuing barrage of sensory stimulation; and the considerations, which guide him in warping his scientific heritage to fit his continuing sensory heritage to fit his continuing sensory promptings are where rational pragmatic ” (Quine, 1963:46).*

The Ontological Status of Quine's Pragmatism

Quine's abandonment of the two dogmas of empiricism means that Quine concurs to the fact that metaphysical expressions as well as other expressions precluded by the two dogmas of empiricism as meaningless are rather meaningful. It is instructive to point out here that prior to Quine, science and its method was considered by many to be the sole, complete and satisfactory explanation of reality. Consequently, they gave priority to science and assert that only scientific statements and statements that depict immediate sense experience are meaningful, while metaphysical statements are nonsensical, meaningless and also useless (Ayer, 1974). However, it is apposite to state here that the whole of reality is not and should not be limited to empirical realities alone; instead reality duly comprises empirical, super sensible, transcendental and ontological realities. As such, science cannot give the totality of all that is meaningful and as O'Hear asserts “... science is not a complete account of the natural world” (O'Hear, 1989:208). It is therefore pertinent for science to be complementarily intertwined with other disciplines which it cannot access, so as to grasp a fuller knowledge of reality. It is then blatant that the pragmatism of Quine is not otiose as far as philosophy is concerned. This stems from the conviction that even the ancient period of philosophical enquiries gave credence to metaphysics and even took it as the core of philosophy, and Aristotle even referred to it as 'first philosophy'.

Culminating Reflections

Quine's work on the “two dogmas of empiricism” has been regarded by some scholars as a burden. In Gustav Bergmann's view, the two beliefs, that is, analytic-synthetic distinction and reductionism should not be seen as two dogmas as Quine called them, rather they should be called the two cornerstones of philosophical analysis from the perspective of the empiricist (Bergmann, 1967). Arguing against Quine, Bergmann reiterated that the point of justification of dichotomy between analytic and synthetic statements is not that important; that we are not obliged to justify anything, not even, as some still believe induction. Hence, instead of applying the term justification, he would prefer to use explication in the cleavage of analytic and synthetic statements. In the same vein, L.P. Pojman is of the view that analytic-synthetic distinction should be discarded. He rather proposes an amended version of Kant's definition of analyticity that eradicates the metaphysical containment, which Quine strongly criticized. For

him, “analytic statements should be viewed as conditional statements in the form of modus ponens: if (A and B), then A; or if (A and B and C), then A and B” (Pojman, 1995: 201). He argues that analyticity as a conditional explication better exemplifies Kant's original intention and it does not pose a problem to the notion of synonyms. But unfortunately for him, it is not all the traditional examples of analytic statements that could fit into the definition.

Moreover, there are other philosophers like Samuel Gorovitz, Donald Province, Rong Williams, Merrill Province and others who are of the opinion that there are some sentences that are clearly synthetic and others analytic. But between these extremes, there are many sentences and statements that appear to be analytic or synthetic but cannot be placed into one category with certainty. It follows therefore, that the distinction remains ambiguous. And this makes Quine's position tenable. Apart from that, many questions that seem quite fundamental have not been answered. A good example of this is the nature of human soul. Another is the relationship between the soul and the body, among others. These are phenomena that science cannot approach with absolute certainty. It therefore means that for science to arrive at integral and complete truth, it needs to cooperate with other disciplines, especially, those that have access to the level it cannot reach. Hence, metaphysics and other related disciplines can confidently provide this deficit on the part of science. In an attempt to make his argument against the “two dogmas of empiricism”, Quine posited that to arrive at certain and reasonable knowledge, all fields of human learning will team up and collaborate. Concurring with this submission A.O' Hear says that, science is not a complete account of the natural world (since the natural world is not limited to natural things), and it is premature, to accept a metaphysical view whose cogency depend on the explanation of human mental and physical activity in neurophysiological terms (O'Hear, 1989:208).

In all, it remains blatant that Willard Van Oman Quine has been one of the most influential philosophers leading the charge against traditional empiricism. His classical essay “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (1953) shook the foundation of empiricism. He attacked the traditional distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. His work was influenced by both the analytic and pragmatic tradition (Lawhead, 2002). The core of this work has been centred on the meaning of statements. What criteria are to be used to assert that so and so statement is meaningful or meaningless? These (Kantian, verifiability) criteria as it were could not meet the set goal of finding which statements are meaningful and which are not. That is why the different criteria of judging meaningful statements from meaningless ones by modern empiricists caught the attention of Quine. Upon enquiry, he noticed that the reason why modern empiricism was able to affirm some statements as meaningful and others meaningless was due to the fact that modern empiricism has been conditioned by analytic-synthetic cleavage and reductionism, which he called dogmas. Consequently, his criticism which shook the foundations of modern empiricism brought more light to the field of analytic philosophy and in the discourse of philosophy in general. However, his work on the two dogmas of empiricism could neither be relegated to the background nor considered a philosophical jargon, due to its existential impact. And this impact is on philosophic thinking and disposition but it is more particular in the area of epistemology, analytic tradition, the existentialist movement, the pragmatic tradition and it also underscores the basic elements of the philosophy of science.

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