

Phil/Ling 375: *Meaning and Mind*

[Handout #11]

H. P. Grice & P. F. Strawson: In Defense of A Dogma

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§ Main Goal:

__ To show that Quine's criticisms of the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements do not justify his rejection of it.

§ Possible Readings of Quine's Rejection of the Analytic/Synthetic Divide

1. the distinction is useless
2. the distinction is inadequately clarified
3. the distinction is altogether illusory — it does not exist
4. there is no difference between analytic and synthetic statements
5. Quine is also rejecting the distinction traditionally made between *a priori* and *a posteriori*, truth of reason and truth of fact, etc.

Grice & Strawson's reading:

__ Quine is not really denying that there is some difference between the two kinds of statements, but he argues that the nature of, and reasons for, the difference are totally misunderstood by those who use the expressions.

Q: Is there any characteristic that one kind of statements has while the other kind does not?

__ Quine's point should be that the supposed marking characteristic does not exist, but this does not mean that there is no distinction whatsoever between analytic and synthetic statements.

[Quine's Argument]

1. x and y have the same meaning (or: x means the same as y) = x and y are cognitively synonymous.
2. However, the notion of cognitive synonymy is just as unclear as that of analyticity.
3. Therefore, the notion of *cognitive synonymy* is no help to clarify "having the same meaning" relation.

[Grice & Strawson's Rebuttal]

1. If Quine rejects the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, then he must also reject the distinction between "means the same as" and "does not mean the same as."
2. However, it would be too radical to reject such expressions as "x and y have (or do not have) the same meaning," since we use them frequently.
3. Therefore, we should not abandon the notions of *synonymy* and *meaning*.

Grice & Strawson on Sentence Synonymy

___ Two sentences are synonymous if and only if any true answer to the question “What does it mean?” asked of one of them, is a true answer to the same question, asked of the other.

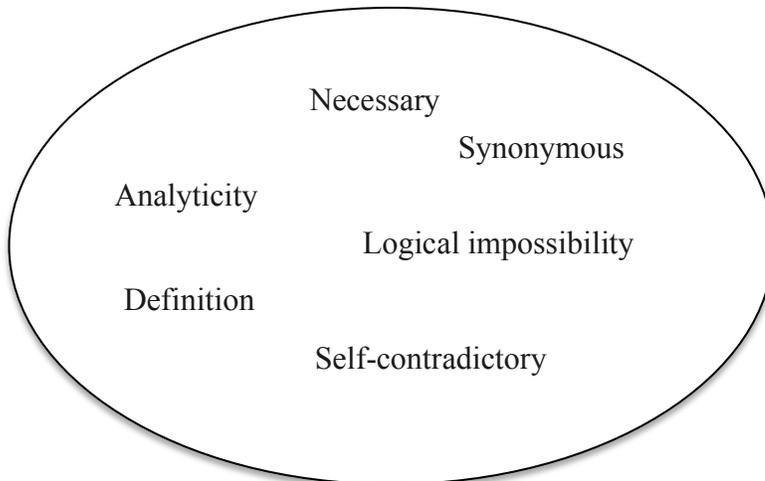
1. Sentence-synonymy is defined in terms of sentence-meaning (as above).
2. If talk of sentence-synonymy is meaningless, then talk of sentences having a meaning at all must be meaningless too.
3. If talk of sentences having a meaning is meaningless, then we must also give up the notion of *meaning*.
4. But this is an unacceptable outcome since it is common in our ordinary usage to talk about *meaning* and whether two things *have the same meaning* or not.

Quine’s mistake:

Instead of examining the actual use that we make of the notion of *meaning the same*, Quine measures it by some inappropriate standard of *clarifiability*, and declares the notion illusory because it falls short of this standard.

§ Clarifiability

- Quine seems to be demanding too high a standard for clarifiability:



1. There is a family-circle of expressions such that if any one member of the circle could be taken to be satisfactorily understood or explained, then other members of the circle could be satisfactorily explained in terms of it.
2. Quine seems to assume that to clarify one expression, two things are required:
 - (i) it would involve providing an explanation which does not incorporate any expression of the family-circle, and

- (ii) the explanation provided must have the general form as an explanation — providing a list of necessary and sufficient conditions such as “a statement is analytic *if and only if...*”
- 3. However, under this standard, it is hard to come by any satisfactory explanation.
- 4. Furthermore, it is not a necessary condition of an expression’s making sense that a satisfactory explanation (in the sense sketched above) be available.
- 5. Therefore, Quine’s demand on clarification is unreasonable.

Few people would want to say that the expressions are senseless on the ground that they have not been formally defined except in terms of members of the same group.

Grice & Strawson:

___ Quine’s standard for *meaningfulness* is too stringent and it singles out (unjustifiably) the group of expressions in the analyticity circle.

___ The fact that the expressions cannot be explained in precisely the way which Quine seems to require, does not mean that they cannot be explained at all.

§ Quine’s Positive Theory

- (1) It is an illusion to suppose that there is any class of accepted statements, the members of which are in principle “immune from revision” in the light of experience, i.e., any that we accept as true and must continue to accept as true whatever happens.
- (2) It is an illusion to suppose that an individual statement, taken in isolation from its fellows, can admit of confirmation or disconfirmation at all. There is no particular statement such that a particular experience or set of experiences decides once for all whether that statement is true or false, independently of our attitude to all other statements.
- (3) Whatever our experience may be, it is in principle possible to hold on to, or reject, any particular statement we like, so long as we are prepared to make extensive revisions elsewhere in our system of beliefs.
- (4) In practice our choices are governed largely by considerations of convenience: we wish our system to be as simple as possible, but we also wish disturbances to it to be as small as possible.

§ The Second Dogma: Reductionism

The connection between the two dogmas is the *verification theory of meaning* because:

- (i) two statements might be said to be synonymous iff any experiences which contribute to, or detract from, the confirmation of one statement would do the same for the other to the same degree.
- (ii) Synonymy can be used to explain analyticity.

Quine's main point:

___ It is a mistaken belief to think that individual statements, taken in isolation from their fellows, can admit of confirmation or disconfirmation at all.

Grice/Strawson:

___ He wants to reject the oversimplified picture of the confirmation-relations between particular statements and particular experiences and turn toward *holism*.

§ Grice & Strawson's Critique

1. One can accept Quine's *holistic* principle of confirmation and yet still maintain sentence synonymy:

___ All we have to say under Quine's *holistic* principle of revision is that two statements are synonymous iff any experiences which, *on certain assumptions about the truth-value of other statements*, confirm or disconfirm one of the pair, also, *on the same assumptions*, confirm or disconfirm the other to the same degree.

___ So Quine's views are not only consistent with, but even suggest, an amended account of statement-synonymy along these lines.

2. One can accept Quine's view that no statement is immune from revision, and yet still adhere to the analytic/synthetic distinction:

___ Revision of *all sentences* is still possible. We can claim that synthetic statements could be revised by one's admitting falsity, while analytic statements could be revised by one's changing or dropping a concept or sets of concepts.

___ Anyone could distinguish between the case where revision happens as the result of a change of opinion solely as to matters of fact, and the case where this happens at least partly as a result of a shift in the sense of the words.

___ So there is still a distinction to be drawn between these two kinds of statements.

3. The existence of *conceptual revision* can help us preserve the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic, while conceding to Quine the revisability-in-principle claim.

___ The same form of words, taken in one way may express something true, and taken in another way may express something false. → This is a case of conceptual revision.

§ Conclusion

___ Quine's case against the existence of the analytic-synthetic distinction is not made out.

___ No single point is established in Quine's positive theory of truth that those who accept the notions of the analyticity group would feel any strain in accommodating in their own system of beliefs. So, Quine's two parts of the essay are not connected.