

Phil/Ling 375: Meaning and Mind
[Handout #12]

Hilary Putnam: “Two Dogmas” Revisited

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§ Main Goal

- ___ To argue that Quine is actually attacking the notion of *apriority*
- ___ To defend Quine’s attack on a particular notion of *analyticity*: the *a priori* conception
- ___ To argue that Quine’s attack on the first dogma should be cast as the rejection of the *a priori* and *a posteriori* distinction
- ___ To argue in favor of keeping the notion of *analyticity* — *contextual apriority*
- ___ To present whole scale Fallibilism.

§ Analyticity

[the linguistic notion of analyticity]:

___ A sentence is analytic if it can be obtained from a truth of logic by putting synonyms for synonyms — so its negation reduces to a contradiction (e.g. The bachelor is not married.)

[the *a priori* notion of analyticity]:

___ An analytic statement is true by virtue of definition; it is confirmed *not matter what*.

Putnam: Quine’s attack on the first notion is based on *circularity* and *vagueness*, but that is a bad argument. Quine’s attack on the latter notion of analyticity, on the other hand, is correct.

Putnam’s position:

___ The notion of *synonymy* in the first sense is legitimate and linguistically useful, whether we have a good ‘definition’ of it or not.

§ Apriority

Quine’s argument against the notion of a truth which is *confirmed no matter what*, is not an argument from the circularity of definitions, but from what is a normative description of the history of science.

Quine’s claims (according to Putnam):

1. Proposals to use non-standard logic in quantum mechanics cannot be ruled out by any legitimate principle of science.
2. Fallibilism in science extends to the laws of logic as well — even logic is not immune to revision.
3. Open-mindedness even to the extent of being prepared to revise logical law is necessary in the scientific enterprise.
4. Laws of logic are not *a priori* truth and are not immune to revision.

5. The history of science leaves no room for the notion of an *analytic* statement in the sense of being *a priori* or *unrevisable*.

Putnam's position:

1. There is no *a priori* truth.
2. There is no sensible distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* truth.
3. Quine's conflating analyticity and apriority does not invalidate his argument apriority.
4. However, we can establish the notion of *contextual apriority* so that we don't have to give up the empiricist idea that *a posteriori* statements are empirical in the sense that they have specifiable confirming and disconfirming experiences.

§ Contextual Apriority

___ A statement is contextually *a priori* in the sense that they have a sort of apriority prior to the invention of the new theory which challenges or replaces them.

E.g. logical laws have the status of *contextual apriority*, so are statements like "All vixens are foxes," or "All bachelors are unmarried."

Putnam's proposal

___ One can hold that there are no *a priori* truths but still hold that there are *analytic* (in the sense of *contextual apriority*) truths.

___ Even a statement that really is analytic is not immune from revision. A putatively analytic statement may not really be analytic, not because we were confused about meanings or confused about logic, but because *the logic of the world may be different from what we suppose it to be, as a matter of empirical fact*.

___ Therefore, even a really analytic statement will not be *a priori*. Fallibilism applies to all analytic statements, including the laws of logic.

Q: Do you believe that the logic of the world may be different from what we suppose it to be, as a matter of empirical fact?

§ Conclusion

1. **Quine is right: Nothing is true by virtue of meaning. Nothing is true by convention.**
2. **There are *no* truths by language alone.**
3. **But there are analytic truths: truths by *logic and language*, but analytic truths are not unrevisable — no truth is.**