

PHIL 4233: Philosophy of Language
Prof. Funkhouser
Grice and Strawson, "In Defense of a Dogma"

- What does Quine's rejection of the alleged analytic/synthetic distinction amount to?

He declares, or seems to declare, not merely that the distinction is useless or inadequately clarified, but also that it is altogether illusory, that the belief in its existence is a philosophical mistake . . . It is the existence of the distinction that he here calls in question; so his rejection of it would seem to amount to a denial of its existence. (142)

- But on what grounds is Quine justified in rejecting this distinction? Grice and Strawson argue that it cannot be simply that we have not yet clarified the distinction in a rigorous manner. For, that is true of many distinctions that we utilize and are not willing to reject.

- Quine is certainly going against philosophical practice and a long history of accepted usage. (But, of course, Quine would acknowledge this as well.)

But it is worth pointing out that Quine's objection is not simply to the words "analytic" and "synthetic", but to a distinction which they are supposed to express, and which at different times philosophers have supposed themselves to be expressing by means of such pairs of words or phrases as "necessary" and "contingent", "a priori" and "empirical", "truth of reason" and "truth of fact"; so Quine is certainly at odds with a philosophical tradition which is long and not wholly disreputable. (142)

- Plus, when we use the terms "analytic" and "synthetic" we have wide agreement over their applications (including to new cases). Isn't this some evidence that the distinction is legitimate?

In short, "analytic" and "synthetic" have a more or less established philosophical use; and this seems to suggest that it is absurd, even senseless, to say that there is no such distinction. (143)

◦ Could Quine's rejection be weakened as follows?

There is some distinction between what is called the "analytic" and "synthetic". However, those who employ these terms are radically mistaken about the nature of this distinction.

• Grice and Strawson note that Quine admits that analyticity could be understood in terms of cognitive synonymy, were the latter capable of clarification. So, to remain consistent, Quine must also reject the distinction between "means the same as" and "does not mean the same as". (145) But cognitive synonymy is not an esoteric, philosopher's notion. And Grice and Strawson argue that to deny the distinction between "means the same as" and "does not mean the same as" is absurd:

It involves saying, for example, that anyone who seriously remarks that "bachelor" means the same as "unmarried man" but that "creature with kidneys" does not mean the same as "creature with a heart" — supposing the last two expressions to be coextensional — *either* is not in fact drawing attention to any distinction at all between the relations between the members of each pair of expressions *or* is making a philosophical mistake about the nature of the distinction between them . . . Is all such talk meaningless? Is all talk of correct or incorrect *translation* of sentences of one language into sentences of another meaningless? It is hard to believe that it is. (146)

Worse yet, it seems to follow that any talk of meaning is meaningless! (See the bottom of p. 146.)

• Big Point: Grice and Strawson think that Quine's standards (e.g., necessary and sufficient conditions) are much too high.

. . . it would seem that Quine requires of a satisfactory explanation of an expression that it should take the form of a pretty strict definition but should not make use of any member of a group of interdefinable terms to which the expression belongs. We may well begin to feel that a satisfactory explanation is hard to come by. (148)

◦ This kind of clarification is not necessary for an expression to make sense. Grice and Strawson question whether *any* expression passes this Quinean test.

◦ *The Paradox of Analysis*

◦ Grice and Strawson suggest that there should be less formal tests for explanation. Consider the example involving children, on p. 150. This is an

example of the informal explanations they have in mind.

- Read Grice and Strawson’s stingers against Quine on “synonymy by stipulation” and his example “Everything green is extended” on pp. 152–153.
- Next, Grice and Strawson turn to Quine’s positive “theory”. It consists of at least two assertions, as given at the bottom of p. 154.

The apparent connection between these two doctrines may be summed up as follows. 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 enough revisions elsewhere in our system of belief. (154–155)

- Immunity from revision is supposed to be the special property of the analytic truths. Analyticity could also be understood in terms of sameness of verification conditions. This is how Quine’s two assertions apply to the debate over analyticity. (See p. 155)
- Grice and Strawson deny the alleged connection between Quine’s positive theory and the debate over analyticity.

But Quine’s second assertion does not deny analyticity:

All we have to say now is that two statements are synonymous if and only if any experiences which, *on certain assumptions about the truth-values of other statements*, confirm or disconfirm one of the pair, also, *on the same assumptions*, confirm or disconfirm the other to the same degree. (156)

- Now onto Quine’s claim that no statement is immune from revision, and its connection to analyticity:

Only, the adherent of *this* distinction [analytic/synthetic] must also insist on another; on the distinction between that kind of giving up which consists in merely admitting falsity, and that kind of giving up which involves changing or dropping a concept or set of concepts. Any form of words at one time held to express something true may, no doubt, at another time, come to be held to express something false. But it is not only philosophers who would distinguish between the case where this 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. (157)