

QUINE, WILLARD VAN ORMAN

(1908–2000)

Willard Van Orman Quine, an Edgar Pierce professor of philosophy at Harvard, was born in Akron, Ohio. In 1930 he was graduated from Oberlin, where he majored in mathematics, and he wrote a doctoral dissertation in logic under Alfred North Whitehead at Harvard. He visited Vienna, studied mathematical logic at Warsaw, and at Prague met Rudolf Carnap, whose work was to inspire and influence him.

Some of Quine's publications are in philosophy, some in symbolic logic, and others are concerned with the logical regimentation of ordinary language. It is his philosophy and related aspects of his advocated regimentation of language that concern us here, his contributions to logic being dealt with elsewhere.

ANALYTIC-SYNTHETIC DISTINCTION

Some philosophers have attempted to distinguish between such statements as "A river flows through Brisbane," which, they contend, are true as a matter of fact, and statements like "No bachelor is married," the truth of which is said to be independent of matters of fact. The former have been described as synthetic, the latter as analytic. Quine maintained, first, that the analytic-synthetic distinction has never satisfactorily been made and, second, that there is no good reason for believing that it can be made.

LOGICAL TRUTH. Given a list of logical particles and the notion of truth, with which Quine was comparatively satisfied, we may, he contends, derive the notion of logical truth. "All birds are birds" is logically true because it is both true and such that if we leave its logical parts alone and replace "birds" with some other word, then if we get a statement at all, we get a true one—for example, "All snakes are snakes." But even though this analytic statement is logically true, there are analytic statements like "No bachelor is married" that are not, and thus analyticity remains to be explained. If we replace "bachelor" with the synonymous "unmarried man," we have a logical truth, and it would thus appear that an analytic statement either is a logical truth or is reducible to one by interchange of synonyms.

SYNONYMY. However, according to Quine, an account of analyticity that depends on the notion of synonymy is unsatisfactory. Suppose that all and only Guards officers

are very tall soldiers with long hair. Since "Guards officers" and "very tall soldiers with long hair" are coextensive expressions, there are statements whose truth or falsity cannot be affected by interchanging these expressions. But because they are not synonymous expressions, there are also statements like "Necessarily, all and only Guards officers are Guards officers" that can be so affected. In contrast, the truth of the statement "Necessarily, all and only bachelors are bachelors" cannot be affected by interchanging "bachelors" and "unmarried men" because these expressions are synonymous. But to make the last statement is to say that "All and only bachelors are bachelors" is analytic. Thus, we give an account of synonymy in terms of the effects of interchanging expressions in certain contexts. But because these contexts cannot be specified without reference to analyticity or some equivalent notion, we cannot, without circularity, use the notion of synonymy in giving an account of analyticity. Similar difficulties frustrate the derivation of self-contradictoriness from logical falsity.

Quine also discusses the possibility of giving an account of the analyticity of statements in artificial languages, but here, as in natural languages, the difficulty is, he contended, that each of the key notions in the theory of meaning is definable only in terms of the others.

Anyone who produced an account of these notions acceptable to Quine would thereby refute him, but what sort of account this would be remains to be seen. In the meantime the strongest argument against him is *ad hominem*. "All the illuminated manuscripts are illuminated" is logically true only if "illuminated" has the same meaning in each of its occurrences. Thus, the notion of logical truth, which Quine accepts, is dependent upon the notion of synonymy, which he rejects.

RADICAL TRANSLATIONS. Quine's theory of meaning was further developed in his discussion of the difficulties that would arise if we were to attempt to translate the language of a hitherto isolated tribe. Radical translation, as he calls it, would have to begin not with words but with those sentences that have a comparatively direct relation to stimulus conditions. The stimulus meaning of a sentence for a person is defined in terms of the class that has as its members the kinds of stimulation that would prompt the person's assent to the sentence. Intrasubjective stimulus synonymy is sameness of stimulus meaning for one speaker, and two sentences are socially stimulus-synonymous if they are intrasubjectively stimulus-synonymous for nearly everyone who speaks the language. A sentence is stimulus-analytic for a person if he would

assent to it, if to anything, after every stimulation, and a socially stimulus-analytic sentence is stimulus-analytic for nearly every speaker of the language.

In order to see that these are not our intuitive notions of synonymy and analyticity, we need to distinguish occasion sentences and standing sentences. If every minute or so we are asked to assent to “John has hiccups,” we cannot do so without having another look at John on each occasion. In contrast, having once assented to the standing sentence “Salt is soluble in water,” we may assent again without observing salt or anything else again. Applied to occasion sentences, intrasubjective stimulus synonymy approximates sameness of meaning; standing sentences, however, are related to experience indirectly, and the kinds of stimulus that would prompt assent to a standing sentence vary from speaker to speaker. Thus, the stimulus meaning of a standing sentence falls short of our intuitive notion of meaning; stimulus synonymy is correspondingly inadequate, and some socially stimulus-analytic sentences would normally be described not as analytic but as conveying information common to the whole community.

Quine demands of those who talk of analyticity and synonymy that they give of their concepts the sort of account in terms of dispositions to verbal behavior that he has given of his.

By observing and testing native speech behavior dispositions, the linguist can come to translate some occasion sentences and to recognize stimulus analyticity and synonymy. But in order to complete the radical translation of a language, he must frame analytical hypotheses. This consists of segmenting what he hears into native words and hypothetically equating these to English expressions. Quine contends that there will be many sets of analytical hypotheses that fit all native dispositions to speech behavior and yet lead to incompatible translations of countless sentences in their language. Suppose that, observing the circumstances in which a native utters “Gavagai,” we translate this sentence as “Rabbit!” Whether the word *gavagai* is to be taken to apply to rabbits, temporal stages of rabbits, or something even stranger to us can be settled only when we can ask questions like “Is this the same rabbit as that?” This cannot be done until we have translated the parts of speech that make up the native system of reference, and since this is part of what we do when we adopt a set of analytical hypotheses, there is more than one way of doing it. For example, the sentence translated as “Is this (the same) (rabbit) as that?” might, on another set of empirically sat-

isfactory hypotheses, be translated as “Is this (a rabbit stage) (of the same series) as that?”

In this way Quine arrives at the principle of the indeterminacy of translation, which says that it is possible to compile incompatible manuals for translating one language into another, all of which fit all observable speech dispositions, and that there is no sense in asking which is the right manual. It is only in exceptional cases that we can talk of the meaning of a single sentence, and when our statements about the world conflict with experience, they do so not individually but as a system. Thus, we have what might be called the Quine-Duhem conventionalist thesis that any statement can be held to be true no matter what is observed, provided that adjustments are made elsewhere in the system; it is from this thesis that Quine infers that it is impossible to make the analytic-synthetic distinction.

Quine believed that his discussion of radical translation reveals the possibility of differences between the conceptual schemes of people that are not empirically conditioned. In the case of two compatriot linguists working independently on the radical translation of a language, one linguist might conclude that he and the native see the world in the same way, as consisting of tables, chairs, ducks, and rabbits, while the other finds that the native speaks of rabbit stages, not of rabbits, and concludes that the native’s outlook is different from his own. Now, in order to determine what the native’s outlook really is, it is necessary to discover which is the correct way of translating the native’s language. But according to the principle of the indeterminacy of translation, it does not make sense even to ask this, and consequently it cannot make sense to ask what the native’s outlook is. It can be shown that the native is in no better position than the linguist here, and it then becomes hard to see the sense of talking about an outlook when there is no conceivable way of discovering what this outlook is. Quine’s position here is not clear. He admitted that these differences of outlook are in principle undetectable and grants that such cultural contrasts are threatened with meaninglessness, but he continued to speak of them.

As radical translation is not known ever to have been undertaken, the absence of incompatible manuals of translation does not count against the principle of indeterminacy. Nevertheless, it might well be contended that until there are more conclusive arguments for it, the principle is to be taken as the incredible consequence of unsound premises. Quine, in discussing meaning, did concentrate on the statement-making function of language, and it has, in fact, been argued that by neglecting

the countless other uses of language, he arrived at a concept of synonymy the inadequacy of which is revealed by the fact that it makes translation indeterminate.

ONTOLOGY

Philosophers have disagreed as to what there is; some have held, for example, that there are only material things, and others have denied this. Quine called such theories “ontic theories” and maintained that they are a part of the sciences distinguished only by extreme generality. Given that there are physical objects, it is the natural scientist who discovers whether there are wombats; and given classes, it is the mathematician who finds out whether there are even prime numbers. Whether there are physical objects and classes, however, is the concern of the philosopher. The integration of established theories, which is one of the aims of scientific work, may lead to any one of many equally satisfactory accounts of the world, each with its ontic theory, and there is no sense in asking which of these accounts is the true one. Thus, Quine took a conventionalist view even of the theses of ontologists.

Today it is commonly maintained that since there is no way of settling an ontic dispute, ontologists have unwittingly concerned themselves with pseudo questions. Quine, in proposing a method of determining the ontic import of a theory, attempted to make such questions decidable and thus real. His method was, in outline, as follows: “ $(\exists x)(x \text{ is a cat})$ ” may be read as “There is an x such that x is a cat” or as “There is something such that it is a cat.” According to Quine, anyone who makes this statement is thereby committed to the existence of cats. The statement consists of the existential quantifier “ $(\exists x)$,” the predicate “— is a cat,” and an “ x ” that works like a pronoun and is needed in any but the simplest cases to show under which quantifier a predicate comes. If we add to this equipment such truth-functional words as “*and*” and “*not*,” we can make statements like “ $(\exists x)(x \text{ is a book, and } x \text{ is boring})$, and $(\exists x)(x \text{ is a book, and } x \text{ is not boring})$.” This is a paraphrase of “Some but not all books are boring,” which, it is alleged, reveals the ontic import of this statement. Bertrand Russell, Quine, and others have suggested similarly revealing paraphrases of general hypotheticals, of statements containing proper names, and of statements containing such descriptive phrases as “the prime number between 5 and 11.” Quine contended that in adopting any theory, we commit ourselves to the existence of certain entities and that by translating the theory into a language in which the only formal devices

are predication, quantification, and truth-functional composition, we make these commitments explicit.

ONTIC COMMITMENTS. The commitments revealed in the above manner are incurred when certain words are used in certain ways. We are, according to Quine, committed to the existence of physical objects because of the ways in which physical object terms function in our language. In contrast, we are not committed to such objects as “sakes,” because even though we do some things for the sake of others, “sake” functions in only a few of the ways in which a term does. When constructing theories, we are, within limits, free to decide what expressions will function as terms, and by such decisions we might commit ourselves to the existence of atoms, for example, but not to that of meters. We accept the reality of physical objects more readily than we do that of atoms because typical sentences about physical objects are more closely associated with sensory stimulation than are typical sentences about atoms. By this criterion sense data are even more acceptable than physical objects, but this is counteracted by the fact that sense data are a less satisfactory basis for an account of the world. On the grounds of utility for theory, classes are to be preferred to attributes and sentences to propositions.

Many would maintain that it is only when Quine is discussing the considerations that influence ontic decisions that he tackles philosophical problems, and that he does this in a way he himself admitted to be sketchy. He does this sketchily because it has been done in detail by others to whom he refers, and believing that ontologists must take account of scientific theories, he is especially interested in working out how this is to be done. Perhaps the major philosophical problem raised by Quine’s proposed criterion of ontic commitment is that of the nature of this commitment: I may know what it is like for a nation to be, or not to be, committed to an isolationist foreign policy, but what is it like to be, or not to be, committed to the existence of physical objects?

REGIMENTATION OF ORDINARY LANGUAGE. The regimentation of language serves purposes other than that of revealing ontic commitments. The logic of ordinary language is difficult to formulate, and consequently it is more economical to theorize in a language that is ordinary except in its logical parts, which are designed to facilitate deduction. And if there are fewer kinds of construction and less obscurity in a regimented language, then in moving into it we simplify and clarify our conceptual scheme.

Because of misgivings about synonymy Quine cannot maintain that for an ordinary-language sentence to be replaced by a regimented one, the two must be synonymous. Indeed, we may be making the replacement just because one sentence is ambiguous and the other is not. Paraphrase into a regimented language consists, he maintains, of replacements that, in certain contexts, forward certain programs. Against this it has been argued that for any two sentences there will be a program that is forwarded by replacing one with the other, and consequently Quine's notion of paraphrase is vacuous unless contexts and programs can be specified. If this can be done, however, the notion of sentence synonymy can be derived. This notion is no less satisfactory, and no more difficult to make adequate sense of, than the notion of paraphrase, without which Quine cannot talk of putting theories into a regimented language.

The bulk of Quine's philosophical work was published after 1947. By 1960 he had combined into a coherent position theses some of which were first put forward ten years earlier. Between 1947 and 1960 certain changes in his views occurred. From declaring, in 1947, that he did not believe in abstract entities, he had come not only to accept such entities but also to claim that he had always done so; from counting phenomenalism, in 1948, as a conceptual scheme suitable for certain purposes, he came to reject it; and from maintaining, in 1951, that in the face of recalcitrant experience we could change our logical laws, he had apparently come to hold that there is nothing that would count as changing our logical laws.

Quine's status as a philosopher never depended upon the number of people who agreed with him. On the contrary, the sign of his achievement is the valuable discussion he provoked by his persistent and penetrating attacks on analyticity and related notions and by his unfashionable conviction that philosophers want to discover what reality is like.

See also Analytic and Synthetic Statements; Analyticity; Artificial and Natural Languages; Carnap, Rudolf; Logic, History of; Ontology; Philosophy of Language; Synonymy; Underdetermination Thesis, Duhem-Quine Thesis; Whitehead, Alfred North.

Bibliography

The topics of the two main sections above were first treated in detail in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951) and "On What There Is" (1948), reprinted in Quine's *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953). A definitive statement of Quine's position, including an exposition of the indeterminacy thesis, is in his *Word and*

Object (New York: MIT Press, 1960), in which a list of Quine's many other philosophical publications will be found. His views on analyticity and logical truth are briefly stated in his "Mr. Strawson on Logical Theory," in *Mind* 62 (1953): 433–451. Important earlier articles are his "Truth by Convention," in *Philosophical Essays for Alfred North Whitehead* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1936), reprinted in Herbert Feigl and Wilfrid Sellars, eds., *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), and "Steps toward a Constructive Nominalism," in *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 12 (1947): 105–122, which he wrote with Nelson Goodman.

Among the many discussions of Quine's views are the following, which are the sources of critical points made in this article. H. P. Grice and P. F. Strawson, "In Defence of a Dogma," in *Philosophical Review* 65 (1956): 141–158, defend the analytic-synthetic distinction. P. F. Strawson, "Propositions, Concepts and Logical Truths," in *Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1957): 15–25, is an attack on Quine's notion of logical truth. Comments on indeterminacy are made in L. J. Cohen, *The Diversity of Meaning* (London: Methuen, 1962), pp. 67–74. Quine's views on ontology are criticized by G. J. Warnock in "Metaphysics in Logic," in *Essays in Conceptual Analysis*, edited by A. G. N. Flew (London: Macmillan, 1956), pp. 75–93, and from a different standpoint in Rudolf Carnap, *Meaning and Necessity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947). The relation between conventionalism and the analytic-synthetic distinction is discussed in G. H. Herbert, "The Analytic and the Synthetic," in *Philosophy of Science* 26 (1959): 104–113. Some points made above are also developed in C. F. Presley, "Quine's *Word and Object*," in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 39 (1961): 175–190.

C. F. Presley (1967)

QUINE, WILLARD VAN ORMAN [ADDENDUM]

Willard Van Orman Quine, the Edgar Pierce Professor of Philosophy Emeritus, at Harvard, author of twenty-one books and scores of journal articles and reviews, made many significant contributions to metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, logic, philosophy of logic, and set theory, and ethics (and ethical theory). These contributions are of a stature that firmly places Quine among the titans of twentieth-century Anglo American philosophy.

In most of his publications following *Word and Object* (1960), Quine sought to sum up, clarify, and expand on various themes found in that book. Quine can occasionally be seen changing his mind regarding some detail of his prior thought, but by and large he remains remarkably consistent.