

On Washing the Fur Without Wetting It: Quine, Carnap, and Analyticity

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Despite its centrality and its familiarity, W. V. Quine's dispute with Rudolf Carnap over the analytic/synthetic distinction has lacked a satisfactory analysis. The impasse is usually explained either by judging that Quine's arguments are in reality quite weak, or by concluding instead that Carnap was incapable of appreciating their strength. This is unsatisfactory, as is the fact that on these readings it is usually unclear why Quine's own position is not subject to some of the very same arguments. A satisfying and surprising account is here presented that stitches together the puzzling pieces of this important philosophical exchange and that in turn leads to an explanation of why it is so difficult to say whether anything of substance is at stake.

1. The natural reading and its discontents

Gottlob Frege was the first to articulate the central notions of classical quantificational logic in all their subtlety. He did so in the attempt to find an ultimate justification and clarification of mathematical truths, which was to be provided by a reduction of most of mathematics to logic. This project, even so schematically described, is immediately subject to an important doubt: Why should a reduction to logic bring about more illumination than a reduction to any other part of mathematics, that is, why cannot all one's questions about mathematics be raised about logic as well? Frege's answer is unequivocal. Logic's subject matter is not any particular range of truths, but truth itself. More specifically, logic is concerned with how the truth of any statement is related to the truth of others; it is concerned with the nature of inference. Logic describes no less than the laws of thought: how one must reason if one is to be rational. Given this conception of logic, it is natural for Frege to hold that the questions about justification that might be raised with respect to, say, analysis, simply could not be with respect to logic. For logic articulates what a justification is; consequently, there is no sense in asking whether it is itself justified. To ask intelligibly whether something is justified is to presuppose certain canons of justification—and this is just to accept logic. Outside logic, there is no rationality. Hence there is no vantage point from which the correctness of logic can itself be called into question or justi-

fied. To attempt this is, as Frege hauntingly summed up the situation, to seek “to wash the fur without wetting it” (Frege 1884, p. 36).

Rudolf Carnap inherited certain core aspects of Frege’s conception (directly and via Bertrand Russell’s and Ludwig Wittgenstein’s work). One distinctive respect in which Carnap parted company, however, was in his insistence that there was not just one logic, but many logics. In the 1920s and ’30s, much important work was being done in the development of intuitionism and of intuitionistic logic in particular. Carnap was well aware of this work, and it contributed to his view that there are many different collections of rules for the use of language; he eventually called these “linguistic frameworks”. They correspond to (or just amount to) different meanings that can be bestowed on words. Correlatively, these frameworks legitimate different principles of inference, and so different conceptions of justification. Within each linguistic framework, a particular conception of rationality reigns.

Carnap defends a Principle of Tolerance with respect to linguistic frameworks: he urges that scientists should feel free to adopt whichever linguistic framework proves to be most convenient for their particular needs. Indeed, one of the tasks of the philosopher is to facilitate this by describing these frameworks clearly, and also by contributing to the variety from which scientists can choose. Carnap distinguishes sharply, however, between such choices of framework and choices made within a framework. The latter, framework-internal choices, are subject to rational assessment according to the laws of reason of the framework in question. The former, by contrast, are framework-external choices and so by hypothesis not governed by any strictures of reason. For instance, with classical logic in place, the question whether double negation elimination is a valid inference is a meaningful one. However, the question whether one should adopt classical or intuitionistic logic (whether one should assign meanings to one’s words so as to make double negation elimination valid or so as not to make it valid) fails to be substantive. Framework-external deliberations are not guided by any rules of justification—indeed, it is even misleading to describe what is involved in such choices as deliberation. Carnap calls the kinds of considerations that play a role in a choice of framework “pragmatic”, and he insists on distinguishing them from the “theoretical” reasons one might have for choosing a hypothesis within a framework. In this respect, his view retains a central feature of Frege’s overall conception.

One and the same question can be raised as a framework-external query or as a framework-internal one. What determines the kind of question it is is not its syntactical form but rather the sorts of considerations (pragmatic or theoretical) that are relevant when answering it. Carnap holds that

many traditional philosophical questions are best understood as framework-external ones. As such, they have no correct answer and are cognitively empty—metaphysical, as the Vienna Circle would say.

Once a scientist adopts a linguistic framework, some sentences come to be true simply by virtue of the framework’s rules for using words. For instance, if a framework that employs the rules of classical logic is adopted, then all sentences of the form “*P* or not-*P*” come to be true automatically; many other sentences do not. Those sentences that become true simply by dint of the framework’s rules are its analytic truths; those whose truth must await the world’s verdict are its synthetic truths. If one views the rules of a linguistic framework as specifying the meaning of words, then one can say that an analytic truth is a sentence that is true by virtue of the meaning of its words; a synthetic truth is one whose truth owes something to more than just its meaning.¹

Enter W.V. Quine. It is natural to read him as offering arguments that, taken on their own, tell against the intelligibility of the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths, and so of the distinction between framework-external assertions and framework-internal ones, between the kinds of considerations that are operative when choosing a framework and those in play when making a decision once a framework has been chosen. Quine appears instead to defend “a doctrine of gradualism” (Quine 1986a, p. 100) according to which experience bears the same kind of evidential relation to the theoretical stretches of natural science as it does to mathematics and logic: the doctrine has found elaboration in his detailed descriptions of the web model of belief-revision.² Quine’s well-known arguments fall into two categories, corresponding to two different kinds of responses one might make to the request for criteria for distinguishing between analytic and synthetic truths.³

The first kind of response is to provide an explication of analyticity in terms of other notions. Quine considers many possible candidates: analyses that employ the notions of synonymy, of an intensional context, of a semantical rule, etc. Quine argues that in each case the terms used in the purported explanations are really cognate to the term “analyticity” itself and so of no greater clarity. For instance, though one might say that the analytic truths of a language are the truths that hold merely by virtue of the semantical postulates of that language, one must recognize that one has no better conception of what this distinction between postulates

¹ For a good account of Carnap’s views, see Carnap 1963a; also valuable is Carnap 1956a.

² For an extended articulation, see the final section of Quine 1953.

³ The central texts by Quine are Quine 1953 and Quine 1960.

amounts to than one does of what the original distinction between truths does.⁴

The second kind of response is to articulate observable behavioral criteria that will resolve whether a given sentence of a speaker's language is analytic or not. For instance, one might hold that a sentence is analytic in a speaker's language if there are no experiences that would lead the speaker to abandon it, and synthetic if there are. Quine argues that all such attempts founder upon the rock of holism. Nothing short of a theory—a collection of interconnected statements—can yield observational consequences. Experience may or may not accord with those predictions; but, either way, experience does not point a finger at a particular statement and hold it responsible for the result. Once it is appreciated that sentences taken one at a time have in general no empirical import, it will be seen that any sentence—even one the traditional philosopher considers synthetic—can be maintained come what may, and likewise that any sentence—even one considered analytic—can ultimately be jettisoned. The way a supposedly analytic truth contributes to the organization and prediction of experience is in principle no different from the way a supposedly synthetic one does. The one might be implicated more extensively in the generation of observational results, but the difference is merely one of degree, not of kind.

These are the considerations, then, which Quine offers against Carnap's view and in favor of his own. Or so it seems. Yet while it is very natural to set their debate in this manner, this reading is inadequate. We can begin to see why by inquiring into the source of their disagreement. What is it that Carnap believes which, from Quine's perspective, leads him astray? We can approach this most fruitfully by examining Carnap's reasons for his apparent rejection of Quine's arguments.

Why does Carnap reject Quine's first argument about explanatory circularity? Might it be because Carnap holds that the notion of analyticity

⁴ Quine (1936) offers an argument that can be taken as follows. The logical truths of a language are infinite and so cannot all be listed explicitly. We are therefore constrained to isolate a finite set of such truths ("axioms") and to say that the logical truths comprise just the axioms and any truth derivable from them. In putting the matter this way, we are assuming that the distinction between what counts as a logical rule of inference and what does not is already understood. We can, of course, specify a set of logical rules of inference, but in doing so we will still have to assume that the distinction between how those rules are to be applied to the axioms and how they are not is already understood. We can, in turn, specify rules for the application of the original rules, etc. At every point in this regress, a distinction will have to be taken as understood between how we should go on (if we are to remain faithful to the conventions regarding logical truth being described) and other ways of going on. Quine's point can be taken as the complaint that we have no better conception of what such distinctions between ways of going on consist in than we do of what the original distinction between truths does.

can be explicated by reference to a concept that is not cognate to it? In fact, he does not hold this: he is in complete agreement with Quine's observation that there exists a whole family of interdefinable notions (analyticity, synonymy, necessity, etc.). What Carnap rejects is Quine's contention that this bears negatively on the notion of analyticity. If interdefinability were itself an argument against an entire family of interlocking notions, then, Carnap suggests, one should likewise reject the concept of truth—which neither he nor Quine is prepared to do.⁵ In short, Quine's first argument is accepted by Carnap, but its relevance to the tenability of the analytic-synthetic distinction is denied.

Turning to Quine's second argument, we might ask whether Carnap rejects it because he holds that analytic truths could never be given up, that one could not intelligibly imagine a rational agent abandoning such a truth. More basically, we might wonder whether Carnap holds what Quine calls the dogma of reductionism, and so believes that statements taken individually have empirical content.⁶ Quine rejects reductionism in favor of holism, the doctrine that only collections of statements yield observational consequences. Perhaps, then, this forms the basis of their disagreement. In fact, neither of these speculations is on the mark. For Carnap, one can always choose to employ a different linguistic framework. As a consequence, one can always alter the truths that count as analytic. For instance, if one were to move from a framework that included classical logic to one that incorporated intuitionistic logic instead, one would thereby go from treating "Either Goldbach's Conjecture is true or it is false" as an analytic truth to not treating it as a truth at all. Carnap thus agrees with Quine that revision can strike anywhere:

No rule of the physical language is definitive; all rules are laid down with the reservation that they may be altered as soon as it seems expedient to do so. This applies not only to the [physical] rules but also to the [logical] rules, including those of mathematics. In this respect, there are only differences in degree; certain rules are more difficult to renounce than others.⁷ (Carnap 1934, p. 318)

Relatedly, Carnap holds that any statement can be safeguarded from revision: "I agree [with Quine] that 'any statement can be held true come what may'. But the concept of an analytic statement which I take as an explicandum is not adequately characterized as 'held true come what may'" (Carnap 1963b, p. 921 quoting Quine 1953, p. 43). Finally (and

⁵ See Carnap 1963b, pp. 918–9.

⁶ Quine has claimed that the analytic-synthetic distinction and the dogma of reductionism "are, indeed, at root identical" (Quine 1953, p. 41).

⁷ See also Carnap (1963b, p. 921), where he declares that "With all [Quine's observations on belief revision] I am entirely in agreement".

again relatedly), it is wrong to think that Carnap embraces reductionism. Carnap is explicit that an empirical “*test applies, at bottom, not to a single hypothesis but to the whole system of physics as a system of hypotheses* (Duhem, Poincaré)” (Carnap 1934, p. 318). In sum, if Carnap disagrees with Quine’s second argument, it is not because he fails to embrace holism or any of its consequences with regard to belief revision that Quine draws. What, then, leads Carnap to reject Quine’s argument that no observation of a speaker’s behavior can tell us which of his language’s truths are analytic and which synthetic?

The correct answer is, again, that Carnap does not reject this argument. Carnap insists that the existence of analytic truths should not be expected to have any empirical consequences. After noting that “The main point of [Quine’s] criticism seems rather to be that the doctrine is ‘empty’ and ‘without experimental meaning’”, he says that “With this remark I would certainly agree, and I am surprised that Quine deems it necessary to support this view by detailed arguments” (Carnap 1963b, p. 917). Carnap rejects not this conclusion but rather its bearing on the tenability of the thesis that experience is irrelevant to the justification of some truths but not others. For to view this thesis as having observational consequences is to view it as involving an empirical claim. But, from Carnap’s perspective, the assertion that some but not all truths hold in virtue of the meaning of words was never meant to be itself synthetic. Carnap insists that the thesis is a philosophical one about language, and consequently not one amenable to empirical test.

In line with Wittgenstein’s basic conception, we agreed in Vienna that one of the main tasks of philosophy is clarification and explanation. Usually, a philosophical insight does not say anything about the world, but is merely a clearer recognition of meanings or of meaning relations. (Carnap 1963b, p. 917)

Again, we find that Carnap agrees with Quine’s argument, but that he does not take it as entailing any difficulty for the analytic-synthetic distinction.*

* Readers of Carnap will know that he has tried to formulate behavioral tests for determining which sentences of a speaker’s language are (in some sense) analytic (e.g. Carnap 1956b). It is easy to misunderstand what Carnap is attempting to accomplish here. The pre-systematic concept of analyticity is, for him, sufficiently clear to be an acceptable explicandum. And, moreover, Carnap considers it to have been adequately explicated in terms of the semantical concept of analyticity (understood as characterized by reference to meaning postulates for a formalized language), a concept which he has shown fruitful in the development and study of linguistic frameworks. Carnap believes that Quine does not find the pre-systematic concept of analyticity clear, and so he seeks to specify, in a way that Quine will understand, another concept whose grasp he hopes will facilitate Quine’s appreciation of the value of the semantical concept of analyticity.

No doubt some will take all this as something other than a problem for the natural reading. For them, Quine’s arguments just are unconvincing, and that is the end of the matter. For others, his arguments do cast doubt on the notion of analyticity, and Carnap’s failure to recognize this betrays his inability to understand them properly. Is there no way to interpret their dispute that allows both Quine to have argued correctly and Carnap to have understood him rightly?

¶ That something more needs to be said is at any rate suggested by the fact that the natural reading saddles Quine with a position that, as it stands, is self-refuting. On this interpretation, Quine argues that Carnap’s analytic-synthetic distinction is unintelligible on the grounds that the world would look just as it does even if experience did bear the same kind of evidential relation to all statements. But this argument is a double-edged sword, and by symmetry one should be able to conclude from the fact that the world would look just as it does if there existed

Thus Carnap appeals to behavioral criteria to characterize what he calls a “pragmatical concept” of analyticity. This pragmatical concept is certainly not to be identified with the semantical concept of analyticity: “the concept of analyticity”, Carnap insists, “has an exact definition only in the case of a language system, namely a system of semantical rules, not in the case of an ordinary language, because in the latter the words have no clearly defined meaning” (Carnap 1952, p. 427). Furthermore, the pragmatical concept is not needed to legitimate the semantical concept, which has already proven its value: “I do not think”, Carnap says, “that a semantical concept, in order to be fruitful, must necessarily possess a prior pragmatical counterpart” (Carnap 1956b, p. 235; see also Carnap 1963b, p. 919). Rather, Carnap’s proposal is born from the desire to facilitate communication with those, like Quine, who claim not to see the point of, or not even to understand, semantical concepts. “Many of the concepts used today in pure semantics”, Carnap explains, “were indeed suggested by corresponding pragmatical concepts which had been used for natural languages by philosophers or linguists, though usually without exact definitions. Those semantical concepts were, in a sense, intended as explicata for the corresponding pragmatical concepts” (Carnap 1956b, p. 234). Carnap holds that “The existence of scientifically sound pragmatical concepts of this kind provides a practical motivation and justification for the introduction of corresponding concepts in pure semantics with respect to constructed language systems” (Carnap 1956b, p. 247); though, again, this “practical” legitimation is not necessary in his view.

Carnap’s hope, then, is that by specifying pragmatical counterparts to semantical concepts, he might facilitate an understanding and appreciation of the latter. In particular, he hopes that

If an empirical criterion for analyticity with respect to natural languages were given, then this [pragmatical] concept could serve as an explicandum for a reconstruction of a purely semantical concept of A-truth. (Carnap 1963b, p. 919)

As we shall see, the hope is in vain: Quine’s reflections on the relevant pragmatical concepts in no way incline him to move in Carnap’s direction.

analytic statements that the doctrine of gradualism lacks intelligibility as well.’ Again, it might be concluded, so much the worse for Quine’s argument. A better response is to reject the natural reading.

2. Philosophical temper

The natural interpretation goes wrong at the very outset when it takes Quine’s arguments to tell directly against the tenability of the analytic-synthetic distinction and in defense of the doctrine of gradualism. Rather, the arguments scouted above lead directly to a conclusion about epistemology, in Quine’s sense of this term, not to one about truth or meaning. What they purport to show is that there is no evidence that can distinguish between the view that truths are divisible into two different kinds (corresponding to the role language plays in their truth) and the view that there is no such division. The arguments, taken on their own, cannot adjudicate in any way between these two competing positions; rather, what they immediately purport to establish is that, from an evidential point of view, these positions are *not* competing, in that they are not empirically distinguishable from one another.

As already noted, Carnap finds all this so obvious as to obviate the need for argument at all. Why then do they disagree? The answer is that the broader context in which Quine considers these conclusions differs crucially from the context in which Carnap does.

Carnap, we saw, takes the claim that there are analytic truths to be a philosophical one—not philosophy in any of its metaphysical (and so nonsensical) guises, but rather scientific philosophy (or, as Carnap often calls it, the logic of science). “That part of the work of philosophers”, he says, “which may be held to be scientific in nature—excluding the empirical questions which can be referred to empirical science—consists of logical analysis” (Carnap 1934, p. xiii). Such analysis, of which the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths is one important component, is part of “a strict scientific discipline” (Carnap 1934, p.

⁹ One might think that considerations of simplicity enter to render the situation asymmetrical. The world would look the same whether there are analytic statements or whether the doctrine of gradualism is correct; since the latter is a simpler hypothesis (apparently), it should be adopted and the other hypothesis rejected. But on the natural reading, Quine’s arguments are directly to the conclusion that the analytic-synthetic distinction is not fully intelligible—and in this context considerations of simplicity have no role to play. For a helpful discussion, see Kripke 1982, pp. 38–9.

332) which studies the nature of science itself, albeit without any “empirical investigation of scientific activity” (Carnap 1934, p. 279). Quine’s arguments to the conclusion that claims about analyticity cannot be empirically tested merely establish the obvious, namely that they are meant as contributions to scientific philosophy, and not to empirical science.

By contrast, Quine draws no such distinction between empirical science and scientific philosophy. For Quine, there is nothing beyond empirical science that counts as “scientific activity”.¹⁰ Consequently, to show that claims about analyticity are unsupportable by empirical investigation is to show that they are unsupportable period.

It should be clear by now why both Quine and Carnap can accept Quine’s arguments and yet draw radically different conclusions from them. It is not because Quine’s arguments are weak or, alternatively, misunderstood by Carnap, but rather because those arguments do not by themselves ground Quine’s conclusions about the analytic-synthetic distinction. Carnap was quite right to suggest that “Quine’s critical argument [in ‘Carnap and Logical Truth’] is not meant as a refutation” (Carnap 1963b, p. 917).¹¹ Quine’s arguments instead make a point about evidence, namely that the distinction is an empirically empty one. When conjoined with Quine’s other beliefs, this leads to a rejection of the distinction. But when conjoined with Carnap’s, the point functions instead as ratification of his conception of the distinction.

¹⁰ This is why Quine cannot be led to Carnap’s semantical concepts by reflecting on the pragmatical concept of analyticity. Because sensory evidence bears on the justification of all of science—which is to say, because all of science is empirical—no scientific explication can consist in analytic truths involving semantical concepts. Thus, in a letter to Carnap written on January 5, 1943, Quine insists that synonymy “is a relation whose full specification, like that of designation, would be the business of pragmatics (not that this excuses us from it!). [...] The definition of this relation of synonymy, within pragmatics, would make reference to criteria of behavioristic psychology and empirical linguistics” (Quine 1943, p. 298). Carnap, on the other hand, believes that there is a non-empirical wing of science which can sometimes provide explications for pragmatical concepts and which will, in particular, provide a “full specification” of the pragmatical concept of analyticity.

¹¹ It is natural, though quite incorrect, to read this remark as evidence of Carnap’s failure to grasp Quine’s point. For instance, Daniel Isaacson says *à propos* this comment that “The difference between [Carnap and Quine] is so subtle (or perhaps so radical) that Carnap seems here to fail to engage with Quine’s actual argument, brushing it aside, rather than replying to it” (Isaacson 1992, p. 112). Likewise, if one agrees with Michael Friedman (1997, p. 15) that “Carnap’s repeated attempts to fashion an explicit logical characterization or explication of the distinction between a priori and empirical truth have indeed fallen prey to Quine’s penetrating attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction”, then such remarks by Carnap will naturally be taken to reveal his failure to appreciate what Quine was saying.

What accounts for the difference between Quine and Carnap regarding the possibility of a non-empirical yet scientific philosophy? In asking this, we should be clear about what this difference comes to. For it really consists in *just their disagreement over the analytic-synthetic distinction*. To accept that there are analytic truths is just to accept that there are truths that are evidentially disconnected from experience, truths that (as Carnap puts it) say nothing “about the world, but [are] merely a clearer recognition of meanings or of meaning relations”. And to reject the analytic-synthetic distinction is just to reject that there are any truths beyond those to be gleaned in the course of systematizing experience.

In sum, Quine has no conception of analytic truth, and so his arguments to the effect that claims about analyticity lack empirical content are perceived by him to establish their unintelligibility. Carnap, on the other hand, begins with a conception of analyticity, and so arguments showing that semantical claims have no empirical substance are instead taken by him to reveal their place within scientific philosophy.

Just as Quine believes that if Carnap were true to his empiricism he would abandon talk of analyticity, so Carnap thinks that if Quine were to reflect on the implications of his arguments, he would see that they actually lead him to locate such talk within the logic of science. Carnap suggests that “a large majority of philosophers”, actually accept the notion of analyticity even though they may “not explicitly acknowledge the distinction in these terms or even reject it”. Then, referring playfully to Quine, he continues:

As an example, let me refer to a philosopher whose work I esteem very highly, although I cannot agree in all points with his views. This philosopher once undertook to destroy a certain doctrine, propounded by some other philosophers. He did not mean to assert that the doctrine was false; presumably he regarded it as true. But his criticism concerned its particular kind of truth, namely that the truth of the doctrine was of the analytic kind. To be sure, he did not use the word “analytic”, which he did not seem to like very much. Instead, he used other expressions which, nonetheless, clearly seem to have essentially the same meaning as “analytic”. What he showed was that various attempts to assign an experimental, empirical meaning to this doctrine remained without success. Finally he came to the conclusion that the doctrine, even though not false, is “empty” and “without experimental significance”. (Carnap 1963b, p. 922)

According to Carnap, Quine has, unbeknownst to himself, made room in rational inquiry for a non-empirical logic of science within which the doctrine of analytic truth finds its home.

It is a measure of the depth of this debate that each side can accommodate Quine’s arguments about evidence in a self-supporting manner. One is naturally tempted to dig a little further, to try to ground Quine’s gradualism, his rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction, in something particular about the web of belief within which he operates—say, in something about the austere science that he calls home.¹³ Here we reach bedrock, however. We may, if we like, say that those sciences “ground” his rejection of the distinction, but this means nothing more than that a rejection of the distinction figures amongst those beliefs. How could it be otherwise? The claim that some truths are analytic has no empirical content: it is not intended to commit one to the existence of any kinds of entities, or to the truth of any assertions about reality. It is, to repeat what Carnap has insisted upon, “a philosophical insight [which] does not say anything about the world”. Consequently, no matter how austere the physics within which Quine finds himself, it will be compatible with the existence of analytic truths. (Unless, of course, one includes within “physics” the belief that experience bears the same kind of evidential relation to all truths.)

Likewise, one cannot look to differing loyalties to empiricism to explain their disagreement about analyticity, for both Carnap and Quine consider themselves to be unwavering empiricists. In fact, it is the other way round: only given their positions on analyticity can one understand what their respective empiricist commitments come to. Thus, in the context of Carnap’s acceptance of the analytic-synthetic distinction, empiricism is the doctrine that the justification of any synthetic truth must make reference to experience. But against the background of Quine’s rejection of that distinction, empiricism consists in the view that all truths are to be justified in terms of experience.

Carnap, like Quine, cleaves to empiricism; furthermore, he might well embrace precisely those scientific theories Quine does. The difference is just that Carnap accepts all this together with the analytic-synthetic distinction, whereas Quine takes them along with the doctrine of gradualism.

¹³ For instance, Friedman (1997, p. 10) says that

Quine’s attack on the notion of truth in virtue of meaning, his correlative rejection of the Carnapian distinction between a priori truth and empirical truth, and his consequent articulation of philosophical naturalism, thus rests, in the end, on a starkly physicalistic conception of modern natural science as the standard and measure of all truth as such.

The difference is one of surd “philosophical temper” (Quine 1981a, p. 31).¹¹

3. Linguacentrism

This reading resolves most of the difficulties that beset the natural interpretation of the debate between Quine and Carnap. There is still the serious matter, broached at the end of §1, of Quine’s hoisting himself with his own petard. This remains an apparent consequence of the present reading. Quine’s arguments are to the conclusion that no empirical evidence could support the existence of analytic truths over a doctrine of gradualism. And to Quine (given his rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction), this amounts to saying that there is no substance of any kind to the notion of analyticity. But by parity of reasoning, then, there can be no substance at all to the claim that gradualism is to be adopted over the view that some truths hold purely by dint of language.

In “Carnap and Logical Truth”, Quine says: “I do not suggest that the linguistic doctrine [of logical truth] is false and some doctrine of ultimate and inexplicable insight into the obvious traits of reality is true, but only that there is no real difference between these two pseudo-doctrines” (Quine 1960, p. 113). Readers may have been misled into thinking that what makes the second doctrine a pseudo-doctrine is that it involves some

¹¹ Quine also uses this phrase, in his letter to Carnap of January 5, 1943, to describe the “hard-headed, anti-mystical philosophical temper” they share. In spite of this kinship, there remain differences, and in this letter Quine makes it clear that, from his perspective, “in accepting the notion of ‘analytic’ we take on an unexplained notion to which we were not committed hitherto” (Quine 1943, pp. 295–6). By contrast, Carnap is already in possession of the concept of analyticity: “we have an understanding of the notion of analyticity, in practice clear enough for application in many cases, but not exact enough for other cases or for theoretical purposes” (Carnap 1952, p. 430).

A comparison to the debate between classical and intuitionistic logicians is instructive here. In discussing it, Quine isolates what he calls “verdict functions”: “These are more primitive than the genuine truth-functional conjunction and alternation, in that they can be learned by induction from observation of verdictive behavior”. The verdictive behavior of a speaker forces neither a classical nor an intuitionistic construal of his connectives. Verdict functions, Quine says, “are independent of our parochial two-valued logic, and independent of other truth-value logics”. Scientists of one philosophical temper favor classical logic. On the other hand, “Some theorists, notably the intuitionists, favor another logic, and there is nothing in the observable circumstances of our utterances that need persuade them to assign meaning to our two-valued scheme” (Quine 1974, p. 78). Verdict functions can be compared to Carnap’s pragmatical concept of analyticity, which forces neither the analytic-synthetic distinction nor its rejection in favour of gradualism.

form of “ultimate and inexplicable insight into the obvious traits of reality”. But this is not so: if one replaces it with Quine’s doctrine of gradualism (as articulated, say, in the final section of “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”), one still gets a pseudo-doctrine, that is, a doctrine which presents itself as in conflict with Carnap’s position and yet which is empirically indistinguishable from it. With Carnap in mind, Quine has asked “why all this creative reconstruction, all this make-believe” (Quine 1969a, p. 75). But his gradualism is itself no less a piece of creative reconstruction: if one assumes that the only relevant facts are those about the observable use of language (e.g. the stimulus meanings of speakers’ sentences), then gradualism pretends to go beyond all the facts there are—at least, it must so pretend if it is taken to differ from the doctrine of analytic truth, since the two doctrines agree on all these facts. How can Quine reject the doctrine of analytic truth in favor of gradualism, and simultaneously offer arguments to the conclusion that “there is no real difference between these two pseudo-doctrines”? In fact there is a way of understanding how this can be, and it hinges on a fundamental feature of Quine’s position. We can approach it helpfully by considering Quine’s views on ontology.

Quine’s argument for the indeterminacy of reference proceeds by considering a permutation of the extensions of the words of a speaker’s language. For instance, instead of our usual homophonic translation of a fellow English speaker *S*, one could take *S* to be referring to the cosmic complements of whatever one previously took him to be referring to; for instance, one might take “Neptune” to refer to everything in the universe except the planet Neptune. One can accordingly readjust one’s interpretation of all of *S*’s predicates; for instance, “planet” is true of something just in case its cosmic complement is a planet. According to Quine:

The apparent change is twofold and sweeping. The original objects have been supplanted and the general terms reinterpreted. There has been a revision of ontology on the one hand and of ideology, so to say, on the other; they go together. Yet verbal behavior proceeds undisturbed, warranted by the same observations as before and elicited by the same observations. Nothing really has changed. (Quine 1981b, p. 19)

He concludes that there is no fact of the matter regarding which of these two hypotheses about *S* is correct.

Quine recognizes that someone could engage in the same reinterpretation of his, Quine’s, speech. And he acknowledges that there is no evidence that might lead a translator to select the one hypothesis about Quine’s language over the other. In spite of this, Quine does not draw the conclusion that there is no fact of the matter regarding what he is referring to by the word “planet”. This has struck many readers as a refusal to recognize that his own views lead to a paradoxical conclusion and so must be

rejected. It is not always appreciated, however, that Quine's resistance, whether ultimately tenable or not, reflects a central aspect of his philosophy.

Quine has insisted that nonsense awaits if one fails to recognize that one must work from within, that one cannot leap outside language and all systems of belief to evaluate these as from a distance. The view bears a great affinity to Frege's position on the unintelligibility of a wholesale justification of logic. Harry Sheffer called this "logocentrism" (Sheffer 1926, p. 228), and generalizing we might label Quine's central view "linguacentrism". It so happens that, in Quine's case, among his presently held beliefs those of natural science figure prominently. This specific manifestation of linguacentrism is often called "naturalism", but it is useful to treat naturalism as just one particular form that linguacentrism can take and also to remember that naturalism so described encompasses many different positions.¹⁴

On Quine's view, the insight that there is no fact of the matter regarding the reference of another's words cannot intelligibly be used to impugn the beliefs that led to the insight or the determinacy of the language in which the insight is couched. If I am to understand my question "Does my term 'planet' refer to planets?", then I must know what I mean by "planets"; likewise, with respect to my assertion that "No empirical evidence can settle whether by 'planet' I am referring to planets or to their cosmic complements". I can, in turn, raise questions or make an assertion about what I mean by this word, but they must themselves be formulated in a language the reference of whose terms must, at least provisionally, be taken for granted. Because there is no languageless perspective from which one can get a fix on what one's terms really refer to, at any given point one must accept the intelligibility of the language that one uses to frame questions and the correctness of the theory that leads to one's answers—including answers to the effect that there is no empirical content to disputes regarding the reference of one's terms. Thus Quine insists that

To recognize [indeterminacy of ontology] is not to repudiate the ontology in terms of which the recognition took place.

¹⁴ Earlier, I argued that what is responsible for Quine's rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction is not helpfully described as his naturalism, for Carnap understands himself to be working within science as well (the logic of science, after all, is "a strict scientific discipline"). Nor is it determinative that Quine takes himself to operate within the most austere physical sciences, for those sciences cannot adjudicate the issue between gradualists and defenders of analyticity, that dispute being empirically empty. Rather, the crux is no more and no less than that Quine's world view, his science if you will, includes the rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction. In this potentially misleading sense, the sciences within which Quine and Carnap locate themselves are different, and so too their respective naturalisms.

We can repudiate it. We are free to switch, without doing violence to any evidence. If we switch, then this epistemological remark itself undergoes appropriate reinterpretation too; nerve endings and other things give way to appropriate proxies, again without straining any evidence. But it is a confusion to suppose that we can stand aloof and recognize all the alternative ontologies as true in their several ways, all the envisaged worlds as real. It is a confusion of truth with evidential support. Truth is immanent, and there is no higher. We must speak from within a theory, albeit any of various. (Quine 1981b, pp. 21–2; see also Quine 1969, pp. 47–51)

We can come to judge that all the "alternative ontologies" are evidentially on a par without abandoning the ontology of the theory on the basis of which we arrived at this epistemological judgment. Quine's linguacentrism leads him to affirm that two theories could be empirically indistinguishable even though only one of them is correct.

By way of further discussion, let us return to the above referential dispute. According to my theory of the world, the word "Neptune" in my language refers to Neptune, "planet" refers to planets, and so on. From within my theory, I can see that there is no empirical dispute between it and one identical to it but for the other's claims that "Neptune" refers to the cosmic complement of Neptune, and so on. Despite their empirical equivalence, the two theories appear to be inconsistent with each other. Quine is motivated to dismiss such apparent inconsistency as an illusion, however, for his empiricism militates strongly against allowing matters of truth or falsity to transcend all possible experience. He proposes the following:

Take any sentence *S* that the one theory implies and the other denies. Since the theories are empirically equivalent, *S* must hinge on some theoretical term that is not firmly pinned down to observable criteria. We may then exploit its empirical slack by treating that term as two terms, distinctively spelled in the two theories. *S* thus gives way to two mutually independent sentences *S* and *S'*. Continuing thus, we can make the two theories logically compatible. (Quine 1992, pp. 97–8)

Following Quine's suggestion, then, we can say that the one theory (mine) holds that "In language *L*, 'Neptune' refers to Neptune", and the other that "In language *L*, 'Neptune' refers to the cosmic complement of Neptune"; and so on. "So we are imagining", Quine continues, "a global system empirically equivalent to our own and logically compatible with ours but hinging on alien terms", such as "freres" (Quine 1992, p. 98). Now, led by his linguacentrism, Quine recommends that we "simply bar them [the alien terms] from our language as meaningless":

After all, they are not adding to what our own theory can predict, any more than "phlogiston" or "entelechy" does, or indeed "fate",

“grace”, “nirvana”, “manna”. We thus consign all contexts of the alien terms to the limbo of nonsentences. (Quine 1992, p. 98)¹⁴

From within one’s theory, one can appreciate that it is empirically indistinguishable from another one, and yet judge one’s own to be correct and the other not fully intelligible.

Quine’s view is very suggestive, and easier to sustain than perhaps some of his critics recognize. Here, however, I neither wish nor need to defend it. Rather, I have tried to sketch the contours of the kind of position to which Quine’s linguacentrism leads him, for its structural features characterize also his debate with Carnap over analyticity.

Quine agrees that his own doctrine of gradualism is empirically indistinguishable from a theory that adheres to the existence of analytic truths: they both yield the same predictions with regard to language use. (Indeed, I have argued that this is the direct upshot of Quine’s arguments.) If Quine were to view this dispute as from a distance, then he would conclude, symmetrically, that the assertion of the one doctrine over the other is without any meaning, there being no fact of the matter regarding the dispute. (This is just the conclusion he takes with respect to a disagreement about what another speaker is really referring to.) But Quine’s perspective is not as from a distance; rather, it is that of someone who is a party to the dispute.¹⁵ From Quine’s engaged point of view, Carnap’s theory contains “irreducibly alien terms” that are “meaningless”, while his own remains both intelligible and the basis for deciding what the facts of the matter are. In the previous section, we saw that Quine’s commitment to the doctrine of gradualism is what permits him to move from a claim about empirical evidence (on which he and Carnap agree) to the negative conclusion (about which they disagree) that insistence on the existence of analytic truths is without any meaning.¹⁷ And now we see that this commitment at the same time blocks any like conclusion about gradualism itself: Quine’s adherence to gradualism shapes the limits of meaning and truth so as to include that doctrine. It does not follow that gradualism cannot be abandoned, for everything is

¹⁴ See also (Quine 1986b, p. 157), where Quine says that “Our own system is true by our lights, and the other does not even make sense in our terms”.

¹⁵ Actually, the particular distanced perspective just imagined might be illusory for this reason: it must be one which takes no position on the dispute about analyticity (so as to preserve distance) and yet one which also rejects the notion of analyticity (in order to allow the inference from empirical indistinguishability to indeterminacy).

¹⁷ Recall that Quine writes of the “un-understood word ‘analytic’” and of its being “nonsense, and the root of much nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement” (Quine 1953, pp. 34, 42).

revisable.¹⁸ But what one reaches standing on something cannot convince one that there was really nothing to stand on after all.¹⁹

4. Different differences

We have touched on the contrast between intuitionism and classical logic. It seems that Carnap and Quine would disagree about how to represent it. For Carnap, there are no factual issues at stake. The two positions represent, rather, two different proposals regarding which linguistic framework to adopt, which meanings our logical words (“all”, “not” and so on) are to have. Philosophical progress would consist in locating a meta-perspective from which one can neutrally describe these two proposals, and perhaps even describe their respective conveniences and drawbacks.²⁰ The choice between the two, however, is not a substantive one about the natural world. Rather, it is a choice regarding which system of representation to adopt for empirical scientific inquiry. Substantive talk is possible only once such a system is in place: a representational system, “a linguistic framework”, provides the background against which correct or incorrect claims can be made. Furthermore, these systems might not be commensurable with one another: for instance, within the intuitionist’s framework the word “all” might have a particular meaning which corresponds to nothing in the classical mathematician’s framework. Thus, communication is not guaranteed. “It seems obvious”, Carnap says

that, if two men wish to find out whether or not their views on certain objects agree, they must first of all use a common language to make sure that they are talking about the same objects. It may be the case that one of them can express in his own language certain convictions which he cannot translate into the common language; in this case he cannot communicate these convictions to the other man.

¹⁸ For example, Quine has extensively revised his views on observation; for a discussion of these revisions and of their impact on his other doctrines, see George (forthcoming).

¹⁹ Again, a comparison with the debate about logic might prove helpful. Just as Quine’s recognition that there is nothing in verdictive behavior that could settle the disagreement between intuitionists and classical logicians does not shake his adherence to classical logic, so his recognition that there is nothing in verbal behavior that could adjudicate the dispute about analyticity does not imperil his confidence in the doctrine of gradualism.

²⁰ Whether Carnap succeeded in sketching a meta-perspective appropriately neutral to these two approaches to logic is an issue passed over here. (See George (1993) for skepticism about one such attempt, that found in the work of Michael Dummett.)

Carnap then explicitly adds that “a classical mathematician is in this situation with respect to an intuitionist” (Carnap 1963c, pp. 929–30).

On the other hand, for Quine, who lacks Carnap’s distinction between change of language and change of theory, the choice between intuitionism and classical logic is on a par with any other in science; it is to be made using just the canons of reason that are appealed to in any inquiry about the natural world. Given the linguacentric predicament, this choice can only be made from within one’s present views about the nature of reality. As it happens, Quine’s present view is one that embraces classical logic, and from this perspective “intuitionistic logic lacks the familiarity, the convenience, the simplicity, and the beauty of our logic” (Quine 1986a, p. 87).²¹ Someone of a different philosophical temper, in particular someone who had already adopted intuitionistic logic, might not concur with these judgments—although Quine’s recognizing this cannot intelligibly be grounds for his abandoning them.

We thus have an original difference between proponents of distinct logics (for instance, over which logical inferences are correct) and another difference, a second-order difference, about the nature of the original difference. Do we then also have a third-order difference that concerns the status of Quine and Carnap’s second-order divergence over how to view the original debate between intuitionistic and classical logic?

This question points to the difficult issue of how we are even to take the debate between Quine and Carnap about analyticity. They appear to be in disagreement, but we might still wonder how substantive the dispute actually is. Thus, Carnap says that there is a semantic distinction between analytic and synthetic truths, while Quine says that he rejects this. Above, in the hope of making sense of an otherwise puzzling exchange, certain structural features of the dialectic were uncovered in order to explain why Carnap and Quine come to these apparently different conclusions. But no attempt has yet been made to assess whether anything is at stake in this difference.

By analogy with the manner in which Carnap viewed the debate between intuitionist and classical mathematician, let us call a *Carnapian* perspective on the Quine–Carnap dispute one from which the latter lacks substance, there being no question of a correct resolution to it. Carnap, then, would plausibly be a Carnapian, that is, he would have adopted the same stance toward his debate with Quine as he did toward the dispute

²¹ Unintentional support for Quine’s admission that he finds intuitionistic logic unfamiliar is that he sometimes makes mistakes about it. Thus he says that, according to the intuitionist, “Fermat’s Last Theorem still qualifies as true or false, even though nobody knows which, because we could mechanically check a counter-instance of it if one were presented” (Quine 1987, p. 55). This is incorrect: pending an intuitionistically acceptable proof or refutation of Fermat’s Last Theorem, the intuitionist would not assert excluded middle with respect to it.

between intuitionist and classical mathematician: whatever else might be, no facts are at issue. What makes it possible for Carnap to adopt a Carnapian perspective is that he embraces the analytic-synthetic distinction: the realm of the logic of science, where choice of representational apparatus takes place, provides a locus for a kind of disagreement that is beyond the bounds of the factual. Carnap’s endorsement of the notion of analyticity allows him to judge the difference between himself and Quine to be insubstantial by virtue of being rooted in different choices of concepts to use in the formulation of scientific judgments; such choices make judgment possible and so questions of correctness do not hang in the balance.

A *Quinean* analysis of the debate appears quite different. It holds that substantive issues arise regarding choice of concepts in just the same kind of way that they do with regard to decisions about judgments themselves. There is no qualitative distinction between, say, disputes about whether the Earth is flat and those about whether to employ the concepts *phlogiston*, *nirvana*, or *analyticity* in one’s account of reality. On this analysis, the difference between Quine and Carnap is a substantive one—or at least, it is a difference comparable to any other, there being no real distinction between a difference over the facts and one over how to talk about the facts.

It is natural to suppose that Quine’s perspective on his debate with Carnap, like that on the debate between classical and intuitionistic mathematicians, is that of a Quinean: because of Quine’s rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction, there is nowhere for any dispute to locate itself beyond the arena of factual disagreement. For one who embraces gradualism, as Quine does, all disputes are on the same footing, and consequently the dispute between himself and Carnap is of the same kind as disputes in the natural sciences; if we deem those substantive, then so too is the one about analyticity.

We are thus led to the view that one’s position on the analytic-synthetic distinction conditions how one views the debate about the distinction. Upon reflection, this is only to be expected: for this distinction between kinds of truth is of a piece with one between kinds of difference, and so differences over analyticity must affect how those very differences can be conceived. This is no doubt a source of the difficulty in obtaining a satisfactory perspective on the dispute between Quine and Carnap: for there appears to be no way even to judge what kind of dispute it is without thereby taking a side in it. To try to determine the nature of a disagreement over the nature of disagreements without taking any kind of position on that disagreement is just to try to wash the fur without wetting it.

5. *The call of empiricism*

What is Quine's own view of his differences with Carnap? It is natural to expect that his own analysis would be Quinean, as understood in the last section: because Quine rejects the concept of analyticity in favor of the doctrine of gradualism, he must view his dispute with Carnap as comparable to any disagreement within science. What complicates the matter, however, is that Quine's and Carnap's positions are empirically equivalent (or so they both agree): the world would look the same whether the doctrine of gradualism holds or the doctrine of analytic truth does.²² In the context of his rejection of the notion of analyticity (and hence his rejection of a locus of discourse comparable to Carnap's logic of science), Quine's empiricism makes it difficult for him to maintain that there is a substantive choice between empirically equivalent theories: any intelligible assertion should be one on which empirical evidence could bear, however indirectly.

Quine can resist this difficulty in so far as he leans heavily on the linguacenterist leg of his position: for it is linguacenterism that moves Quine to judge that two theories can be empirically equivalent, and yet the one (that which he holds) true and the other unintelligible. Led by his linguacenterism, Quine could still maintain a Quinean perspective on the debate, namely that the choice between the two theories, his and Carnap's, involves matters of substance.

As just indicated, however, this stance—which Quine dubs “sectarian”—seems in tension with his empiricist scruples in so far as it treats differently (as regards truth or meaning) theories which are empirically indistinguishable and “equally economical” (Quine 1992, p. 99). And Quine acknowledges that doing total justice to his empiricism would demand a more “ecumenical” approach that would “account both theories separately true, the truth predicate being understood now as disquotations in an inclusive and theory-neutral language in which both theories are couched” (Quine 1992, pp. 99–100). Thus, if Quine were to approach his disagreement with Carnap in the spirit of ecumenism, he would be led to the conclusion that both his account and Carnap's are “separately true”, and that there is no sense in asking which theory is really the correct one or really the intelligible one. They represent, he would then conclude, two “various defensible ways of conceiving the world” (Quine 1992, p. 102).

²² Furthermore, I assume that the two views are equally simple, or perhaps incommensurable as regards economy. This is in contrast to the debate between classical logicians and intuitionists, at least as Quine views it: for he entertains the possibility that a change of logical laws might simplify one's overall scientific theory (e.g. Quine 1953, p. 43).

It is striking that Quine's ecumenical perspective on this disagreement is well-nigh indistinguishable from the Carnapian one discussed in the previous section. In the light of Quine's complaint that Carnap's embrace of analyticity is a betrayal of his empiricism, it is especially ironic that Quine, if he were completely faithful to what he takes the demands of empiricism to be, would find himself acknowledging truth on all sides. The irony is somewhat explained, if not fully ironed out, by the fact that Quine is moved both by linguacenterism, to adopt a sectarian stance toward empirically equivalent accounts (and so to take his own theory to be true and Carnap's to be not fully meaningful), and by empiricism, to favor an ecumenical approach (and so to take his and Carnap's theories to be “separately true”).

But only somewhat. For what one wants to know is whether the two motions can be sustained, that is, whether there is a genuine conflict at the root of Quine's position, namely that between his sectarian and his ecumenical impulses. Is there a substantive disagreement between these two responses to empirically equivalent theories that are logically compatible but mutually irreducible?

The question is a slippery one. For if one imagines that the sectarian suggestion regarding such empirically equivalent theories is itself empirically equivalent to the ecumenical one (as is plausible, in so far as these abstract speculations have any meaning at all), then one's answer to this question may well depend on whether one is sympathetic to sectarianism or ecumenism. We have here another lesson in fur-washing.

It seems that Quine, for his part, cannot assert that there is a substantive disagreement between ecumenism and sectarianism on pain of acknowledging a substantive conflict within his view, ultimately a conflict between the pressures of his linguacenterism and his empiricism. And indeed, he suggests that he sees no substance to the apparent disagreement between sectarians and ecumenists over how to describe empirically equivalent theories: “the cosmic question whether to call two such world systems true [simmers] down, bathetically, to a question of words” (Quine 1992, pp. 100–1). He opts, as it were, for an ecumenical approach to the dispute between the sectarian and the ecumenist.²³

It seems then that if Quine were asked which view, ecumenical or sectarian, it is really right to adopt with regard to his dispute with Carnap, he would judge the question contentless, “a question of words”. At the end of the day, Quine appears to find no substance in the question whether one

²³ There is a paradoxical flavor to this: if Quine adopts an ecumenical approach to the dispute between sectarianism and ecumenism, then it seems that he is siding with ecumenism—and so being sectarian after all. At the very least, there is an interesting form of constitutive instability at work here that would deserve further reflection.

should take Carnap's theory to be true (a defensible way of conceiving the world, alongside his own), or in fact only partially intelligible. Debate about whether their dispute is empty or instead substantive is, for Quine, itself lacking in content. No doubt, this provides another explanation for the difficulty in arriving at a clear conception of Quine's dispute with Carnap. For Quine's considered position is that the question we have most recently been worrying—whether there are matters on which he and Carnap substantively disagree, whether to adopt a Quinean or a Carnapian perspective on their disagreement—is a question on which nothing hangs. And so perhaps at this level, where the very substance of Quine's disagreement with Carnap is at issue, they are one.

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