

DOGMAS OF "TWO DOGMAS"

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Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" has justly received a plethora of responses. Unfortunately, however, most such responses have been attempts to rebuttal Quine's negative arguments concerning analyticity, synonymy, interchangeability *salva veritate*, contradiction and semantical rules. While other responses have been aimed at supplying the behavioristic explication of these intensional concepts which Quine demands, far fewer responses have evaluated Quine's own positive thesis which he offers as a replacement for the empiricism which he says depends on dogmas. Thus, although I feel that much is wrong with Quine's negative thesis, I will confine my attention in this paper to an examination of Quine's "Empiricism Without the Dogmas." I will attempt to show that Quine's positive thesis is no more dogma free than is the empiricism against which he argues.

Quine tells us that his "field theory" differs mainly from dogmatic empiricism in that no single statement ever stands or falls by itself. Rather, our knowledge claims form a field or network which touches experience only at the periphery, and statements are revised by experience and by their relationship to other statements in the network. Hence, a recalcitrant experience E might cause a revision of an already accepted statement S_1 but only because we want to "hold on to" another statement S_2 . Since the choice of which statement to hold on to is always an arbitrary one according to Quine, no statement theoretically can be held true come what may¹ although we usually choose to revise the statement whose revision would cause the least amount of further revision within the system. Quine summarizes his position as follows:

A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field. Truth values have to be redistributed over some of our statements. Re-evaluation of some statements entails re-evaluation of others, because of their logical interconnections—the logical laws being in turn simply further elements of the field. Having re-evaluated one statement we must re-evaluate others, whether they be statements logically connected with the first or whether they be the statements of the logical connections themselves.²

This crucial passage reveals, I think, the dogmas of "Empiricism Without the Dogmas." Although Quine is careful to point out that statements of logical connectives are simply other statements of the system, such cannot be the case. Notice that Quine says, "Truth values *have to be* redistributed..." and "Re-evaluation of some statements *entails* re-evaluation of others. . ." "Having re-evaluated some statements we *must* re-evaluate some others. . ." Such claims obviously suggest that there is something like a logical necessity to redistribute truth-values over statements S_2, \dots, S_n given a change in the truth-value of statement S_1 . And the 'entails' in the passage, "Re-evaluation of some

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statements *entails* re-evaluation of others. . ." presumably is logical entailment. Such metalinguistic statements about the logical relationships between the statements in the "network" raise several questions. Such statements, since they tell us what must be done to other statements given a change in statements S_1 must have the force of logical rules, comparable to rules of derivation in an axiomatic system.

There are two crucial questions to be raised here about such rules: 1) Could Quine manage without such rules? and 2) If Quine cannot manage without such rules, can they be justified without raising the same difficulties which Quine has raised concerning analyticity? The answer to both questions, I think, is "No." Such notions as *recalcitrant* experience, re-evaluation of statements, and redistribution of truth-values presuppose a commitment to at least one metalinguistic rule which must be unrevisable and necessary, and hence, no less of a dogma than analyticity, synonymy, contradiction, etc. Although it may well be true that the particular rules might differ from theory to theory; nevertheless, every theory, I will argue is committed to some principle which cannot be given up or revised within that theory. By a "theory" here I mean simply (as Quine does) a systematic, logically related group of statements used to explain or predict phenomena.

The argument offered here is not a new one. It's a variation on a theme by Aristotle, and Lewis Carroll used it to demonstrate that unless one accepts some logical rule of inference without justification and regards it as necessary, no justification of even the simplest inference is possible.³ A skeptic might, to use Carroll's example, accept

- (A) Things that are equal to the same are equal to each other,
and
(B) The two sides of this triangle are things that are equal to the same.

but refuse to accept

- (Z) The two sides of this triangle are equal to each other.

The only "reason" that can be given for accepting (Z) as following from (A) and (B) is some statement of the form

- (C) If A and B are true, then Z is true.

But then the skeptic could accept (A), (B) and (C) but refuse to accept (Z), and continue to refuse to accept the legitimacy of any inference *ad in finitum*. The result of Carroll's point is clear: If one wishes to make inferences, he must, at some place, stop and admit that he is accepting some particular law or rule as given and unrevisable within that theory. The only alternative is an infinite regress because whatever justification is given, it will be of the same form and logical status as the original inference.

Such an argument is a sound one, I feel, and it can be shown that Quine is in the position of having to admit at least one metalinguistic, methodologically necessary rule which is unrevisable. Without such an admission, it seems that such notions as Quine mentions (*recalcitrant* experience, revisability of some statement on the basis of another) do not make sense. In other words, revisability cannot take place if *every* statement is open to revision. A *recalcitrant* experience E differs from an ordinary experience presumably in that an accurate description of E is inconsistent with some other already accepted statement. The question of revision in the system rises only because of the desire to eliminate logical inconsistency; so, the very notion of *recalcitrant* experience presupposes the notion of logical consistency.

The process of redistributing truth-values evidently goes something like the following:⁴

- (a) Experience E occurs.
(b) If experience E occurs and you choose to now hold on to statements S_2 and statements S_1 and S_2 are incompatible, then S_1 , must be given up.

therefore,

(z) S_1 must be given up.

But, Quine can never get to (z) unless some rule of inference is accepted within the theory as analytic and necessary by which the inference is justified.

If pressed for a reason why one *must* accept (z) given (a) and (b), Quine could offer (c).

(c) If (a) and (b) are true, then (z) is true.

But (c) is still a hypothetical and not the end of the justification. Revisability of any statement S_1 on the basis of some other statement S_2 requires an end to the regress. Otherwise, revision or redistribution of truth-values could never take place. So, Quine must eventually accept some rule, law, or dogma by which revision takes place, and the reason for his having to do so is a logical reason and not a pragmatic one—though the place at which he chooses to stop may well be pragmatic.

“Re-evaluation of statements” and “redistribution of truth-values” presumably are processes which involve relationships between statements within a particular language. And, if we make the same stringent demands upon these notions as Quine makes upon the notion of analyticity, then what is required is an explanation of “ S must be re-evaluated in L on the basis of E ” where ‘ S ’ is a variable ranging over all statements and ‘ L ’ is a variable ranging over all languages and ‘ E ’ is a variable ranging over all experiences. Likewise, we need a better understanding of “the truth-values of $S_2 - S_n$ must be redistributed on the basis of the truth-value of S_1 in L ” where again ‘ S ’ and ‘ L ’ are variables.

One further important observation regarding the processes of re-evaluation of statements and the re-distribution of truth-values is that these processes are not randomly or haphazardly carried out in a system. A change in a truth-value of a *particular statement* S_1 entails (in Quine’s own words) a change in the truth-value of some other *particular statement or particular statements*. For example, if one accepts as true

Yeast causes bread dough to rise,
then one must treat as false,
Yeast does not cause bread dough to rise
as well as

Gremlins cause bread dough to rise
and

The gods of Homer cause bread dough to rise.
But, as far as I know, accepting

Yeast causes bread dough to rise as true,
has nothing whatsoever to do with whether or not one accepts or rejects as true,

There is one and only one prime number between 1 and 5.
though certainly accepting *some other particular statement* (e.g. 3 and 4 are prime numbers between 1 and 5) as true would require one to accept or reject

There is one and only one prime number between 1 and 5.

The important question raised by these considerations is, How is Quine to account for these relationships between *particular statements* if there are no relationships of meaning—i.e. relationships explained normally by the notions of synonymy, analyticity, semantic rule and definition? In other words, even granting that revision and re-evaluation of statements and the re-distribution of truth-values between statements must take place, how do we determine *which* particular statements to revise and re-evaluate on the bases of what other particular statements, and how do we determine which truth-value to re-distribute to what statement or statements? I do not see how an answer to such questions can be given without giving up Quine’s case against analyticity.

Part of Quine's objection to the use of Carnap's state descriptions is that Carnap's

...version of analyticity serves its purpose only if the atomic statements of the language are, unlike 'John is a bachelor' and 'John is married,' mutually independent. Otherwise there would be a state-description which assigned truth to 'John is a bachelor' and to 'John is married,' and consequently 'No bachelors are married' would turn out synthetic rather than analytic under the proposed criterion.⁵

But exactly the same difficulties arise concerning the notion of revisibility. If we have in our network a statement S_1 which says "Object O is red all over under conditions C at time t," and an experience which yields statement S_2 "Object O is green all over under conditions C at time t," how are we to know that S_2 forces a revision of S_1 ? Or, if we want to hold on to both S_1 and S_2 , how are we to know that this forces us to give up S_3 which says " S_1 and S_2 cannot both be true"? For revisibility of particular statements to take place such statements must be related by rules having the same logical status as Carnap's meaning postulates.

Now the status of logical truths, for Quine, is somewhat in doubt. Quine does indicate at times that logical truths are immune to revision. He says, for example,

There are statements which we choose to surrender last, if at all, . . . and among these there are some which we will not surrender at all, so basic are they to our whole conceptual scheme. Among the latter are the so-called truths of logic and mathematics.⁶

But how are we to square this claim with Quine's warning that "...no statement is immune to revision. Revision even of the logical law of the excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics. . ."?⁷ The key to understanding Quine, I think, lies in the claim that "we choose" what to surrender and what not to surrender. The truths of logic are not, according to Quine, held on to because they are analytic and necessary but because *we choose* to hold on to them for pragmatic reasons. Presumably, giving up such a truth of logic would require too much revision throughout the rest of the field, and we invariably choose the course of least resistance and hold on to the logical truth. This is what I understand as a pragmatic justification of logical truths, and this is evidently what Quine means by his "thorough pragmatism" and his claim that logical truths are "simply further statements of the system."

If the argument I have offered earlier is sound, then Quine's claims that a logical truth is *simply* another statement of the system, that a logical truth's acceptance is a pragmatic concern, and that the difference between analytic and synthetic statements is a difference of degree rather than kind are all wrong. Logical truths turn out to be qualitatively different from other statements in the system since their metalinguistic forms provide the rules and laws for relating the other statements in the system to one another. Since there must be some metalinguistic statement within any system (in which anything like inference or explanation take place) which is unrevisable there will be at least one logically true statement in the object-language—the object language form of the rule or law.

Quine tells us that physical objects are simply convenient epistemological posits for explaining and predicting experience and that they have the same epistemological status as the gods of Homer. The only reason to prefer one to the other is simply that one proves to be more efficacious than the other. Following the general rules "No statement is immune to revision" and "the difference between analytic and synthetic statements is a

difference only of degree—not kind,” the suggestion is that the laws of logic are also simply efficacious posits. That such is not the case, I hope is now evident. Try to imagine for a moment what would be involved in finding a recalcitrant experience which would necessitate the giving of the law of contradiction within a particular system. The point here in no way trades upon one’s powers of imagination or conceivability; it is a logical and methodological question. In what way can one explain how it is that any experience E requires a re-evaluation of some statement S_1 on the basis of S_2 without invoking the notion of contradiction? If the law of contradiction is to be given up, no statement S_2 can prompt a revision of any other statement S_1 since it is only because the law of contradiction holds that one statement can force a change in the truth-value of another. Obviously, the business of finding some experience which contradicts the law of contradiction itself involves the notion of contradiction on the metalinguistic level. The only way in which experience can force a revision of the law of contradiction is by invoking that law itself which is to say that experience cannot force such a revision at all, and some statements are consequently immune to revision.

What Quine calls dogmas of empiricism are not dogmas unique to empiricism at all. They are dogmas of reason, of explanation, of inference, of systematic schematization. To the extent that any theory is committed to these pursuits, it is dogmatic. Empiricism without the dogmas turns out to be pragmatism with dogmas. Substituting “recalcitrant experience” and “redistributing of truth-values” and “re-evaluation of some statements entailing re-evaluation of others” for “analytic,” “contradiction,” “logical truth,” and “semantic rule” turns out to be simply a facade of innocence; underneath, the dogmas are still there.

Notes

¹Quine, Willard, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” in *From a Logical Point of View*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), p. 43.

²*Ibid.*

³See Lewis Carroll, “What the Tortoise said to Achilles,” *Mind*, N.S. (1895), pp. 278-280.

⁴This argument is suggested in a less elaborate form by Jonathan Bennett, “Analytic-Synthetic”, *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 54, 1958-59, p. 181ff.

⁵Quine, “Two Dogmas,” p. 23.

⁶Quine, Willard, “Truth by Convention,” in *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, edited by Herbert Feigl and Wilfried Sellars, Appleton-Century, Crofts, Inc., 1949, p. 70.

⁷Quine, “Two Dogmas,” p. 43.