VERIFICATIONISM AND ANALYTICITY LECTURE 3

1.   In Quine's famous essay 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' (*Philosophical Review* 1951), the two 'dogmas' are (i) reductionism and (ii) analyticity. **Reductionism** is the idea that the meaning of a literally meaningful sentence is given by its bearing on the stream of experience. It might not be possible to spell out its empirical meaning in terms of 'basic propositions'; but its meaning is still exhausted by what experience says about it. By attacking it Quine was attacking an empiricist tradition that reached as far back as Berkeley (probably further); one of the great achievements of this paper was to show how you could drop this dogma and *still be an empiricist*.

2.   **Analyticity**, for the purposes of the essay, was the idea that some sentences are true purely in virtue of their meaning. Q thought of it as a kind of limiting case: most sentences are true in virtue of two things: the state of the worlds, and the meaning of the sentence. Thus e.g. 'The C Minor Mass was first performed in Salzburg on 26 October 1783' is made true by two kinds of things: the course of history and the meaning of the sentence: if *either* of those had been different and the other held fixed, the sentence could easily have been false. But with 'All bachelors are unmarried', the first component makes no contribution to its truth: however we vary the history of the world, if we keep the meaning of the sentence fixed the sentence remains true.

3.   Most of the first part of the essay is directed at the second dogma, the dogma of analyticity. Quine asks: how can we distinguish the analytic sentences from the others? His basic approach goes back to Frege's *Foundations of Arithmetic*: an analytic sentence is one that can be reduced to a logical truth by exchanging synonymous expressions. This definition in turn makes use of two further technical terms: logical truth and synonymy.

4.   Quine regards the notion of **logical truth** as transparent. First, we identify a class of English expressions that we may call its 'logical vocabulary': the copulae 'is' and 'are'; grammatical conjunctions and operators like 'not', 'or', 'and'; quanitifiers like 'some', 'all' and 'every'; prefixes like 'un-' and 'in-' (e.g. in 'unnecessary' and 'insufficient'). We then define a logical truth as one such that *any* uniform replacement of its non-logical expressions yields a truth e.g. 'All unmarried men are unmarried men' or 'All unmarried men are unmarried'. A **uniform replacement** is one that replaces the same expressions with the same expressions.

5.   Thus e.g. 'All unmarried men are unmarried' is a logical truth because 'All unpredictable men are unpredictable', 'All unmarried dogs are unmarried', 'All unhappy dogs are unhappy' etc. all are *truths*. And 'All bachelors are unmarried' turns out to be *analytic* on this definition because we can transform it into the *logical truth* 'All unmarried men are unmarried' by replacing 'bachelors' with 'unmarried men', which is synonymous with it. Everything therefore turns on whether we can explain **synonymy**. Note that, as this example shows, we are concerned with synonymy of words or other sub-sentential expressions, not (or not only) with synonymy of sentences.

6.   One such attempt at a definition of synonymy, that Quine considers quite early on, is **interchangeability salva veritate**: two predicates are synonymous on this

definition if they can be interchanged in any sentence without changing the truth-value of that sentence. Quine objects that this makes synonymy of two predicates relative to the language in which they are embedded: in a language without e.g. 'Necessarily…' or other intensional operators, 'cordate' (= possessed of a heart) and 'renate' (= possessed of a kidney) will turn out to be synonymous because they are so interchangeable. But then e.g. 'All cordate dogs are renate' comes out, wrongly, as analytic. Or at least it does on the assumption that having a heart is necessary and sufficient for having a kidney. Obviously, this may be false, but you can imagine better examples.

7.   However, if we analyze synonymy as interchangeability s.v. in a language with a necessity operator, then we are running in a circle, because what does 'a necessity operator' mean other than 'an operator that picks out the analytic truths'; but what makes a sentence one of *those* is exactly what we were trying to understand in the first place.

8.   The paper then considers other ways to define synonymy and/or analyticity before rejecting them (e.g. dictionary definitions or Carnap's L-rules). But the really important point, and the one that many early commentators didn't get, was that Quine finally does settle on a definition of analyticity that he *accepts*.

9.   And this is essentially the definition that you would expect a verificationist to adopt. From a verificationist perspective the natural thing to say about meaning is that the meaning of a sentence is given by the experiences that would verify it or falsify it, conclusively or only 'weakly'. By the same token, sentences are synonymous if they are verified or falsified by the same experiences. And they are analytic if they are verified (or at least: not falsified) by *any* experience. This is the accepted meaning of 'analytic' from section 5 onwards.

10.   Now forget about all that for a minute and think about something else: **confirmational holism** ('Duhem's thesis'). What this says is that we always have a kind of *choice* when we try to settle what experience disconfirms. Logically speaking, this is because if we have say $p_1, p_2, p_3 \vdash o$, and we observe $\sim o$, then it is still 'up to us' whether to drop p_1, p_2 or p_3: nothing in the observation itself tells us which one has to go. It is also easy to think of practical examples – we make 'choices' like this every day; and when we do settle it, we do so on a pragmatic basis.

11.   But what *this* means, turning back now to analyticity and meaning, is that no sentence has its own proprietary verification conditions: whether an experience counts for or against it depends on whether it counts for or against *other* sentences that I happen to hold; and we make this decision pragmatically because nothing in the observation itself forces us either way. In principle, any sentence could be dropped in the face of experience if that turned out to be the most practical way to face experience: even logical truths. (Quine alludes here to quantum mechanics, though he doesn't discuss the example in detail. For more on this see the papers by Putnam and Dummett.) 'Analytic' is meaningful all right; but as it turns out, nothing *is* analytic.