

Theories of Meaning

Lecture 2: The Dogmas of Empiricism

1. Naturalising semantics Willard Van Orman Quine (1908-2000). Naturalist. Philosophers have used the analyticity of certain statements to do work (Dogma 1). But what is analyticity?

2. Defining analyticity Predicate-in-subject containment and contradiction unilluminating. Two forms of analyticity: truth in virtue of logical form; truth in virtue of definition.

3. What is definition? Can we reduce the second class to the first? Logical principles + definitions. Quine: we need *correct* definitions. What is a correct definition?

4. Synonymy Can we define analyticity in terms of synonymy? What is synonymy? Substitution *salva veritate*. Inadequate when construed extensionally, circular when construed intensionally.

5. What do we lose when we lose analyticity? Grice and Strawson: “If talk of sentence-synonymy is meaningless, then it seems that talk of sentences having a meaning at all must be meaningless too.”

6. Quine against the Logical Positivist Many have assumed that at least some statements can be confirmed or disconfirmed in isolation (Dogma 2). Quine: only if we hold further premises fixed. Yet no statement is immune to revision.

7. Is Quine’s holism coherent? Quine’s holism requires us to assess empirical evidence in light of *recalcitrance*. But verdicts about recalcitrance are themselves empirical statements.

8. Meaning and conditions of verification What is left of the meaning of simple terms such as ‘apple’ or ‘water’, or simple assertions such as ‘the cat is on the mat’. Do they bear any correspondence to the world or to experience?