Handout 15

Critique of Carnap: Quine

LOGICAL TRUTH: NOT GROUNDED IN LANGUAGE. Quine complains that Carnap is misled by the analogy with artificial languages. He imagines 'Ixmann' (X-man), a logical positivist concerned to liberate science from metaphysics. Ixmann *in turn* imagines a Martian community armed with its own language which nevertheless is free of suspect ontological commitments. But how is this done? By showing that those Martians simply introduce meaning postulates, so that the alleged metaphysical claims come out as conventions. Quine argues, somewhat obscurely, that Ixmann's parable and the Martians' rules are indeed conventional—yet Ixmann's own language, with its own rules, is not thereby shown as conventional. [81] [82]

The intent is clearer when Quine turns back to artificial languages. These languages may be conceived as conventional, and some of their sentences may be named 'analytic' or 'true in virtue of meaning alone'. However, all they do is express sentences in a familiar ordinary language (the meta-language) whose sentences have not thereby been shown to be any of the kind. [82]

ANALYTIC-SYNTHETIC DISTINCTION. Another line of Quine's attack (only implicit in our selection) is that the distinction between external and internal questions corresponds to the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. External questions (and answers) of existence are all analytic. Internal questions mostly are synthetic, with the exception of the questions concerning the existence of numbers etc.

But the objection does not seem too convincing either. First of all, there is a good reason to resist Quine's reading. External questions, on the reading we have suggested, are badly formed and illegitimate. Instead, it is the internal *general* questions that may be analytic. Internal particular questions are either synthetic or analytic.

But, secondly, does Carnap's view depend on the analytic/synthetic distinction at all? All we need to do, from Carnap's point of view, is to be able to identify different frameworks—i.e. identify different regimented languages. Then we should be able to identify semantical rules governing the use of the expressions in the given language. Without these rules there is no way to identify languages at all. Once we have these rules, we can then have our particular internal questions and general internal questions. Then Carnap's claim should be that any questions of existence that fall outside the scope of such questions are external. What does that mean? It should mean that these questions are asked before the semantical rules are laid down, i.e. asked outside any specific framework.

YSB