

Analyticity

When making a judgement, this appears to take two different forms. If the sentence is in subject-predicate form ('x is F', which attributes the feature F to the entity x) then one form of judgement says that our concept of the entity contains that feature (e.g. this bachelor is a man), and the other sort attributes some further feature to the entity (this bachelor runs). The first type was said to be '**analytic**', because the truth of it can be known by analysing our concept of the subject, to find what predicates it 'contains'. The second type was said to be '**synthetic**', because the subject and its new predicate are synthesised into a new claim. It seemed that analytic truths are justified by the meanings of the words, while synthetic truths are justified by reality.

The analytic/synthetic distinction is important because it divides our knowledge into two realms, with separate modes of enquiry, and separate criteria for success. It suggests that analysis of our concepts can reveal interesting truths, which points towards modern analytic philosophy. It was also observed that if you deny the predicate of an analytic truth, then the result is not just a falsehood, but also a contradiction. This is the hallmark of a **necessary** truth, so it seemed that some types of necessary truth could now be explained by the fact that they are analytic.

The idea that some statements are analytic was quickly accepted by philosophers, but two problems with the proposal gradually emerged. The first was the lack of clarity in the idea of a concept '**containing**' a particular predicate. Presumably every bachelor has a face, but is that part of the concept? Must we decide which predicates are 'essential' to the concept? If someone is frightened of all bachelors (or spiders), is that part of their concept? If it is unclear which predicates are contained in the subject, that also undermines the hopes of clearly identifying a range of necessary truths by this means. The second and bigger problem is that many judgements appear to qualify as analytic, but are not in **subject-predicate** form. If Jack is married to Jill, then Jill is married to Jack; if Jill is taller than Jen, who is taller than Jane, then Jill is taller than Jane. These seem to be true because of the words and concepts, but there is no 'containment'; they are analytic because marriage is symmetric, and tallness is transitive.

A fresh approach to the problem started from the idea of a '**logical truth**'. If I say 'if Jack is either ill or lying, and he's not ill, then he's lying' this is true because of the logic, not because of the facts. It has the form 'Fx or Gx, and not Fx, so Gx', which is true whatever entity you fill in for x, and whichever two predicates are F and G. Hence it is a tautology, or logical truth. It is not true because of the meanings of the words, but despite those meanings (apart from the logical connectives 'if...then', 'or' and 'not'). Hence it seems to count as analytic, because it is justified entirely by meanings, rather than by facts.

If the new broader range of analytic truths (including many not in subject-predicate form) could be reduced to logical truths, this would not only explain analyticity, but also give it a secure foundation in logic. This reduction could be achieved, by **substituting definitions** and synonyms for the non-logical terms, so that the logical nature of the analytic truth became obvious. Thus if we say 'a bachelor is a man', we need a definition of 'bachelor', which is presumably 'an unmarried man', and when this is substituted into the statement, we find we are saying 'a man is a man', which is a logical truth. Thus the full range of analytic truths is covered, using the ideas of definition and synonymy, which may not be perfectly precise, but are better understood than 'containment'.

There remain some problem cases. If I say 'if it is yellow, it has a surface area', it is no part of the concept of 'yellow' that it has a surface area, so any substitution would be contrived and implausible. Such analytic statements can be classed as '**conceptual truths**', where the truth results from the implications of a concept which extend beyond its definition. A more sustained attack on the revised approach raised doubts about the underlying reliance on synonymy (since a definition is assumed to be synonymous with what it defines). There is no consensus on how to define anything, and if we examine synonymy it seems to rely on dubious entities called 'meanings', and has to be explained in terms of analyticity, which makes the whole thing circular.

The charge was that the whole distinction between analytic and synthetic judgements is misguided. The distinction divided our knowledge into a dictionary (analytic) and an encyclopaedia (synthetic), but the two run into one another, because our expressions of facts are riddled with analytic preconceptions, and our definitions tacitly assume facts. All attempts (notably by strong empiricists) to divide our knowledge into science plus a scheme of concepts (disdaining any other knowledge claims) was thus said to be doomed. The hopes that necessity could be explained by language, and that a priori knowledge was just a matter of concepts, were also in trouble. It had been claimed that because the analytic truths were definitional, they were therefore unrevisable, but the criticism said **anything can be revised** to suit the facts, if we choose. Hence the idea of analyticity fell into disrepute, but its defenders have fought back.

One observation is that being 'unrevisable' is not actually what the originators of 'analytic' meant by it. We could agree to change the meaning of any word, but the original idea is that analytic truths (given their meaning) are **undeniable**, because no external evidence could contradict them. It also seems that conceptual truths are necessary, even if that cannot be demonstrated by contradictions. Thus air is a gas, yellow is a colour, and a circle can't have corners. No facts need to be checked for these truths, and 'revising' them is absurd.

At the very least, the *logical* truths must qualify as analytic (given what they now mean), because they are unrevisable, undeniable, irrefutable by evidence, necessarily true, and true because of the meanings of the logical terms. Accepted definitions must also be analytically true. However, that doesn't answer the criticism, which aims at the reliance on the substitution of synonyms. Philosophers of science have had to concede that observations are often 'theory-laden', meaning that the concepts used to report them are not part of a pure world of analytic ideas. A different line of defence of analytic truths is to accept that truths can't rely on dubious things called 'meanings', but that rational understanding (e.g. about cornerless circles) can give conceptual insights that are immune to empirical contradiction; the truthmaker here are the facts, not verbal meanings. It may even be that these conceptual facts are built into the human language system, giving them a natural authority that goes beyond definitions.