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Carnap and Quine

Rudolf Carnap and W.V.O. Quine are two influential philosophers of the twentieth century that possess a different ontology, or account of what exists in the world. While each similarly believes that a language is formed based on empirical evidence, they disagree on the notion of analyticity. On the one hand, Carnap accepts the meaningfulness of the notion, and on the other hand, Quine denies that the notion makes any sense at all claiming that it has no empirical content.

In his essay, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology," Carnap addresses the issue of the empiricist's apparent usage of abstract entities. This is an issue for empiricists because they rely on sense experience, and abstract entities (i.e., relations, numbers, propositions, etc.) cannot be sensed. Carnap acknowledges that abstract entities are needed in order to conduct science, and then reconciles the issue by establishing a linguistic framework (a system for using a language) and then distinguishing between "internal" and "external" questions that exist within that linguistic framework.

Internal questions, according to Carnap, are questions that are asked from within a linguistic framework. For instance, "Are there cats?", "How can I use the term 'cat'?", and "What is a cat?" are all examples of internal questions. They are questions that can be answered either by following the given rules of the language (analytically) or by going out and investigating the world (empirically). The question, "Are there cats?" is an example of an analytic internal question, because the rules of the language alone can answer it. The question "Are there cats that weigh four tons?" is an example of an empirical internal question, because (given that there is a linguistic framework for what "cat" is and what "four tons" is), one will need to go out into the world and investigate whether there is something that matches what it means to be a "cat" and what it means to be "four tons."

External questions, according to Carnap, are questions that are asked from outside a linguistic framework. For instance, "Are there *really* cats?" and "Should we have a cat linguistic framework?" are both examples of external questions. They are questions that go beyond the rules of the linguistic framework either theoretically (questioning the truthfulness of the framework) or pragmatically (questioning the usefulness of the framework). An example of a theoretical external question would be something like, "Is it true to say that there are cats?", and an example of a pragmatic external question would be something like, "Is a cat linguistic framework useful?". Carnap argues that theoretical external questions are non-sensical and meaningless because what exists depends on the given linguistic framework and whatever can be followed from the rules of that linguistic framework. Pragmatic questions, on the other hand, are considered meaningful and significant external questions because the philosopher or scientist can use them to reveal the usefulness of a linguistic framework.

By distinguishing between internal and external questions, Carnap is able to refer to abstract entities without making any commitment about the existence or non-existence of them. He argues that as long as abstract entities are being used within the rules of the language, then it is not contradictory for the empiricist to use them.

Carnap's criterion of ontological commitment, in summary, is that some questions can be answered either analytically (by following the rules of the language) or empirically (by investigating the world). This differs from Quine's criterion in that he rejects the notion of analyticity. Quine believes that no sentences are immediately true or self-verifying because a linguistic framework is constantly changing. He argues that we can reject the meanings of a language, while Carnap believes we cannot.

In illustrating the meaningfulness of language, Carnap distinguishes between semantics and pragmatics and says that semantics (pure semantics) is the study of artificial formal languages, or rather, the study of constructed language systems given by their rules. Pragmatics (descriptive semantics), on the other hand, is the study of natural language, or rather, the empirical investigation of historically

given natural languages. Carnap believes that the relations between these types of languages and what they are about can be divided into two parts: 1) the theory of extension and 2) the theory of intention.

The theory of extension deals with concepts like denoting, reference, naming, and truth, and implies that there is no fact about what words mean. The theory of intention, however, deals with concepts like synonymy (someness of meaning) and analyticity (truth in virtue of meaning), and implies that there is a fact about what words mean. This notion of analyticity, according to Carnap, is that the intention is what determines the extension of a term. For example, if the term "blau" denotes any blue object, then the property of blue is the intention, and the actual set of blue objects in the world is the extension. In other words, the extension is the relation between a linguistic item (blau) and the things in the world (blue objects). And although this "property of blueness" may seem to be an abstract entity, Carnap resolves the issue by arguing that he is merely following the rules of the language and is not making any commitments about the existence or non-existence of them.

Quine disagrees that this notion of analyticity is intelligible because he believes that it lacks empirical content. He believes that a linguistic framework can be refined at all times, just as scientific theories are, and so there is nothing so central to a language that cannot be rejected. He argues that even the rules to a language are subject to verification, and therefore nothing about a linguistic framework has the self-verifying, analytic aspect to it that Carnap claims it has. It is for these reasons that Carnap and Quine's ontologies differ, and why Quine rejects Carnap's notion of analyticity.