L'ANALISI
LINGUISTICA E LETTERARIA

FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE
UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

2

ANNO XVI   2008

ON THE PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF THE ANALYTIC-SYNTHETIC DISTINCTION

MICHEL DUFOUR

The debate about the reliability of the analytic-synthetic distinction has a long story, for several connected controversies are similar enough to give the impression of a single epic. During the Classical Age it was central to philosophical debates about the theory of knowledge and especially the relations between concepts or "ideas". Last century, it had its own "linguistic turn" and became rather part of the philosophy of language for it appeared mostly relevant to semantics since depending on the concept of meaning.

Contemporary text-books often introduce the analytic-synthetic distinction by means of the common distinction made between statements true "by definition" and statements empirically true, either by experience or hear-say. It is worth notice that the same examples are often used to illustrate or illuminate a definition which, at first, may look a bit obscure. The fact that people generally agree that the truth of the examples of analytic statements has something specific is interpreted as evidence of the acknowledgement of a radical difference between analytic truths – also said to be self-obvious – and the others. This paper focuses on the question of the obviousness claimed for analytic truths, an important point in the debates following the seminal paper claiming to dissolve the analytic-synthetic distinction, namely Quine's celebrated *Two dogmas of Empiricism* (1951).

Both the classical and the contemporary approaches set the problem at a high level of abstraction. The fist one – at least in Kant's wake – by asking if some truths are purely conceptual, when the second, influenced by the analytic philosophy, wonders if a statement can be true only in virtue of its meaning, that is from the impersonal point of view of the semantic of a language. But it seems that the issue of analyticity needs a more pragmatic solution, for it is easy to find examples where users of a same language disagree about the analyticity of a statement. In other words, it happens that statements claimed to be analytic are not acknowledged as such by everybody. Is this disagreement just an accidental misunderstanding or is it meaningful for the very analytic-synthetic distinction? Hence a puzzling question: what would happen if nobody actually grants the analyticity of a proposition previously claimed to be analytic? This may be the case, for instance, if a new generation does not hold as analytic a statement held as such by an older generation. Here, two extreme views can be opposed: on the one hand an objectivist conception holding analyticity to be independent from anybody's opinion (this could happen on a strict interpretation of analyticity, "depends only on the meaning of words") and, on the other, a relative-epistemic view saying that "propositions are analytic only for those who think they are". Ac-

cordingly, only the objectivist has to face the possibility of the paradoxical case of an analytic proposition that nobody acknowledges as such.

But its impossibility in the relative-epistemic view does not entail that analyticity is a subjective and contingent notion. It rather suggests a conception of analyticity less bold than the objectivist, and then universalist, view claiming that any rational being should acknowledge it, for it demands to make an explicit existential statement requiring that to be analytic a proposition must be acknowledged as such at least by someone.

Up to now, almost nothing has been said about the other criteria allowing the analytic-synthetic distinction. This leaves open the possibility of a denial of the analyticity of a statement by everybody, or at least by all living people.

Two classical views

As this paper is not intended to bring a contribution to the history of ideas but to discuss a point from a philosophical point of view, we shall briefly examine only two of the classical views about analyticity. More historical details can be found in J. Proust's book (Proust 1986). We chose these examples not only because of their famous conception of analyticity but also because it is somewhat different from more contemporary views. However, our crucial question can already be raised here.

Let us turn first to Leibniz's version, strongly connected with some major claims of his philosophy of science and truth. Although he brought numerous contributions to the scientific revolution of his time, Leibniz kept on sticking to the ancient and medieval view of science, understood as *scientia* based on certainty and demonstration, as shown in the introduction to his encyclopaedic project where science is defined as «certain knowledge of true propositions» (Leibniz 1961: 43). Accordingly, in a perfect science no room is left for uncertainty and induction since demonstration (deductive proof) remains the very model of scientific reasoning.

In his famous paper on *First truths* (Leibniz 1976), Leibniz makes a distinction between these truths which «predicate something of themselves or deny the opposite of its opposite» and all the others which can be reduced to the first ones by means of definitions or a conceptual analysis. Since first truths are self-predicating, they and the truths of the same kind (definitions, truths set by conceptual analysis) amount to identities. Very explicitly, Leibniz remains faithful to the metaphorical Aristotelian formulation, still popular at his time, saying that in any of those truths «the predicate or consequent always inheres in the subject or antecedent».

In the case of first truths, the identity is plain. But the germane truths can also be seen as (partial) identities since the metaphorical "inclusion" of the predicate into the subject amounts to an identity between the predicate and part of the subject, a "part" being, for instance, a property.

Leibniz's celebrated project of a universal language (the famous Universal Characteristics) intended to bring about universal understanding, peace, friendship, etc. by making any talk clear. It largely relied on the project of discovering truth by analysis, that is by the acknowledgement of "identities". But this is not always easy when you take into account another Leibnizian dichotomy between the various truths.

When the distinction between first and second truths is logical – since reasoning consists in making connections between ideas and judgements – the other one is rather epistemic: it separates rational truths, which are necessary, from factual truths which are contingent. Rational truths are themselves of two kinds: some are "eternal" (including the truths of logics, geometry and metaphysics) when the others are "positive". Positive truths are chosen by God – for instance the laws of nature – and we can learn them *a priori* or *a posteriori*.

Although he claims that all truths are necessary, Leibniz makes an important difference between rational and factual ones: the chain of identities, the chain followed by what he calls "analysis", is finite in the case of rational truths but infinite in the case of factual truths. Hence, the latter are contingent only for men since God knows their "demonstration" and, therefore, their necessity, both logical and ontological.

So, Leibniz makes only an epistemic distinction between "analytic" and factual truths since what makes "A is B" analytic is the possibility for human beings to know the "identity" between being A and being B. To use a more contemporary expression, but going back to the Leibnizian idea of substitution *salva veritate*, an analytic proposition sets an equivalence (rather than an identity) between being A and being B. But Leibniz makes a clear distinction between what we can call "human analyticity" and "metaphysical analyticity": to be humanly analytic a true proposition must link predicate and subject (or at least part of the subject) by a chain of identities which is not too long for the limited human mind. Otherwise, only God can perceive its analyticity.

And this answers our paradox. If you grant that God is "someone", the possibility of an analytic proposition that no one would acknowledge as such is precluded. Accordingly, what we have called the existential requirement about analyticity, namely the existence of at least one rational being acknowledging the analyticity of the statement is satisfied in Leibniz. At least God – supposed to be a perfectly rational being – knows! But Leibniz's metaphysics allows that no human being acknowledges the analyticity of an analytic statement. This case is even very common since it happens with any factual statement.

In classical philosophy, the analytic-synthetic distinction is often associated with Kant. This notion is even fundamental in his philosophy since at the root of his theory of knowledge we find the famous "synthetic *a priori*", depending on this distinction.

In the introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defines an analytic statement as a statement where «predicate B belongs to the subject A as something that is included (but *hidden* or *implicit*) in concept A» (Kant 1986: § 4). On the contrary, a statement B is synthetic if and only if «B is outside of concept A, although it has a connexion with it».

In a very Leibnizian tone, Kant adds that a statement is analytic «when the connection between subject and predicate is thought by identity». Here again, the relation of identity is at the root of the notion of analyticity.

It is important to stress that Kant's analyticity is explicitly a matter of thought: it is not objective in the sense of independent of the activity of the mind. Moreover, the *Critique of Pure Reason* being a book about the human mind, a call to God's knowledge would not be relevant to make a decision about the possibility of an analytic statement that no human being would acknowledge.

However, an aspect of Kant's text deserves attention. Kant makes a double shift (forwards and then backwards) from a logical point of view – since analyticity is introduced as the property of a judgment – to a psychological stance since he claims that the link between subject and predicate is *thought* by an impersonal mind. Although Kant sometimes supports an anti-psychologist view of logic – for instance in his *Logic* (Kant 2007: 12) – he assumes here a more psychological stance, even if the psychology he is dealing with is transcendental and not empirical. In the context of his research for universal *a priori* properties of the human mind, this double move from logic to psychology suggests a strong connection between logic and rational psychology which makes impossible an analytic judgment without a rational mind expressing it. Hence, the impossibility of an analytic statement that nobody – no human mind – acknowledges as such. This is why discussing the empirical possibility of a punctual mistake or disagreement about the analyticity of a statement would even be irrelevant to his normative project. Moreover, the question of border cases – judgements that could be both analytic and synthetic – cannot be raised since the analytic-synthetic distinction is based on the application of the exclusive inside/outside dichotomy to the relation between predicate and subject. However, the puzzling concept of "synthetic a priori" may well appear as a kind of monster belonging to both sides.

But Kant's examples do raise the question. He contends that "Every body is extended" is analytic and "Every body is heavy" is synthetic. Both judgments are loaded with the physics (the "natural philosophy") of Kant's time, the necessity of the extension of a body being the topic of an ongoing debate. Thinking that extension is obviously the most essential property of matter, Descartes identified it as *res extensa*. But impenetrability, not extension, was the most essential property of any material thing according to Newton whose law of gravitation quantifies the universal synthetic truth that "Every body is heavy". And although Kant remains faithful to Descartes in writing that the "decomposition of the concept of body" leads to extension, nowadays we may be doubtful since microphysics has blurred the very notions of body and extension. Does the analysis of the concept of body still lead to extension, especially when applied to micro objects? One of the problems with this question is that the very concept of "body" sounds old fashioned and even slightly irrelevant in some fields of physics. The analyticity of Kant's example may have become contextual and, perhaps, even open to disagreement.

However, Kant's view about analyticity is not that simple, for he allows the possibility of a disagreement, doubt, or ignorance about the analyticity of a statement since the in-

clusion of the predicate in the subject may not be salient. It may be only implicit, hidden (*versteckte Weise*). And this is why an analytic judgement is "explicative" and, therefore, according to the etymology of the word, requires an "unfolding" of the subject. This is not the case with a synthetic judgement which is "extensive". And so, even if you accept the inside/outside alternative as the only possible model for the relation between subject and predicate, the fact that this relation may be hidden can make somebody hesitate or disagree about the right option. The analyticity of a judgment may not be obvious, and people may be wrong about it. Why not everybody?

Finally, according both to Leibniz and Kant a statement can be analytic without being acknowledged as such by someone. But Kant does not call to God's eye view to explain how a statement can be analytic even if everybody denies it: his normative philosophy of rationality offers no *a priori* reason to preclude this empirical possibility opened by the fact that analyticity can be only implicit.

New views on an ancient topic

Leaving aside some important contributions from the XIXth century, let us turn now to last century debates. Now, the key-words have become "meaning" and "statement", rather than "concept" and "judgment".

The most influential challenge to the analytic-synthetic distinction comes from Quine's answers to Carnap, especially in his famous paper *Two dogmas of empiricism* (Quine 1951), assaulting the analytic-synthetic distinction on the basis of the following definition: «A statement is analytically true if it is true only by virtue of its meaning alone». This definition, coming from Carnap (1956), reflects an important shift in the concept of analyticity: divorced from rational psychology it got married with semantics.

Quine's major objective is ontological: he claims there are no analytic statements since there is no such thing as those mysterious metaphysical entities called "meanings", making some statements true independently of any fact about the world. His target is not only analyticity but a cluster of concepts circularly connected, for one explains the other. Among them, we find analyticity, synonymy, necessity, meaning. For instance, the notion of meaning can be explained by claiming that words and statements have translations, or synonyms, sharing with them something that is their meaning. And the test establishing a sameness of meaning, a synonymy, depends on the possibility to substitute one expression to the other without changing the truth value or the reference of the expression. This is why Quine's various strictures on synonymy and analyticity are driven from the successful, or unsuccessful, effects of substitutions on the truth of propositions supposed to be analytic. Of course, the concept and the test for synonymy reminds us of Leibniz's analyticity based on "identity". Finally, claiming to have shown that none of the suspect notions – "true by defi-

nition", synonymy, necessity – can make sense of how a statement can be true in virtue of its meaning alone, Quine holds that the analytic-synthetic distinction is nothing but a dogma.

Quine (1960) grants the possibility of a disagreement about the analyticity of a statement and explains it may happen if people attribute different meanings to a statement or a word, or misunderstand its meaning. And since analyticity is just a semantic notion, no conclusion can be drawn about the status of a statement from such a disagreement: the claim that a statement is analytic is no warrant it is.

As Leibniz, Quine makes an important distinction between several kinds of analytic propositions. Leibniz made a distinction between truths which are a matter of logic or geometry or metaphysics and the truths he called "positive" (the truths chosen by God). Quine makes a distinction between logical truths (tautologies) and another class of true statements, including the celebrated "No bachelor is married", held to be analytic but not in virtue of God's choice but of a human choice, namely the conventional definition of "bachelor".

According to Quine, except in the case of a stipulative definition, synonymy set by convention relies on prior relations of synonymy. In this case, the analyticity of the statement is not established and the possibility of an explanatory regression is open. The case of a stipulative definition does not fare better since the truth of such a statement cannot be established or warranted for ever by a *fiat* for this (new) meaning may have to be re-evaluated.

Moreover, a synonymy based on the interchange of words is possible only when relativized to a language. Granting that two terms may not be perfectly synonymous if their connotations, poetical flavour, etc. are taken into account, Quine wonders if interchangeability *salva veritate* is a sufficient condition for what he calls "cognitive synonymy", that is a synonymy such that an analytic statement can be reduced to a logical truth by substitution of synonym for synonym. Again, this test reminds us of the Leibnizian derivative truths, reducible to first truths. Unfortunately, Quine says, the agreement of two terms by coextension may rest not on their meaning but on an accidental matter of fact, as in the case of "creature with a heart" and "creature with a kidney". So, substitutability *salva veritate* – at least in the case of an extensional language – is generally not a sufficient condition for synonymy. Therefore, more has to be said to make substitution a sufficient condition for (cognitive) synonymy and this is the path leading to Quine's holism, no meaning being self-sufficient but depending on all the other statements. This would refute the view that synonymy holds by virtue of meaning *alone* and not by virtue of shared information.

On this ground, Quine claims that no truth is *a priori*: any truth may fail, including logical truths. And bachelors may be married and bodies not extended. But we can have, and do have, some favourite truths, the last ones to surrender. And the statements we make true by definition are true as long as we want them to last. And a statement that looks analytic is not necessarily true but only as long as we want to hold it necessarily true. Finally, Quine's answer to our leading question is that it is impossible that an analytic statement is not held, or has not been held analytic by someone since analyticity is made by us.

Replies and comments

Grice and Strawson's common reply (1956) to Quine puts forth the fact that when people use the analytic-synthetic distinction they apply it to more or less the same cases, and hesitate about the same cases. Moreover, when a new case is discussed people would tend to apply the distinction in the same way: there are *kinds* of cases to which the distinction is applied, even if it is sometimes applied wrongly. They conclude that since a distinction is made you can't deny there is a distinction between analytic and synthetic statements.

This point recalls Kant's approach to analyticity for it does not pay much attention to the singularity of a possible local disagreement but rather stresses the common ability to make the distinction, and the general agreement about statements which are analytic. Grice and Strawson contest Quine's theses from the point of view of common sense. But their criticism is not based on transcendental Kantian arguments but rather on statistical, hence empirical, alleged observations. They do not resist Quine's theses head on, but accuse him to make a methodological mistake leading to wrong arguments. This mistake begins with the call to the philosophical technical notion of "cognitive synonymy" used to show that synonymy established on interchangeablility is not reliable to explain analyticity.

According to them, the trouble with Quine's argument is that instead of looking at the actual uses of the expression "means the same", he takes it to mean "coextensional" that is "true of the same objects". Quine thinks about synonymy and analyticity as logicians or philosophers do, not as lay people do. So, although he is right about the fact that coextensionality is not a sufficient condition for synonymy, he is wrong when he adopts the technical point of view of philosophers to dismiss the common use of the analytic-synthetic distinction. Synonymy is sometimes claimed for words or expressions for which the criterion of coextensionality clearly does not work or cannot be practically established. So, there is no reason to believe that the common conceptions about "sameness of meaning" should conform to the requirements of formal analysis. Finally, Grice and Strawson underline that if the notion of sentence-synonymy is to be given up as senseless, the very notion of sentence-significance should also be abandoned since we could not say if two sentences have the same meaning or not.

Finally, they conclude that Quine's holistic conception of meaning is not only consistent with, but suggests an amended account of statement-synonymy. The debate should be shifted since the main problem is not the ontological question of the existence of "meanings" but the meaning of correlated terms as "synonymous" or "means the same". A clear distinction between the philosophical and the "common" uses of these notions should be made.

In a defence of Quine, Harman (1967) grants that the philosophical talk about "sameness of meaning" differs from ordinary talk, since philosophers take synonymy to hold by virtue of meaning alone and not by virtue of shared information or background or peripheral information. But he objects that Grice and Strawson are weakening Quine's thesis when they put on a par the philosophical and the common use of words or expressions like "synonym"

or "mean the same". From the philosophical technical point of view, what is at stake is the claim made by proponents of the analytic-synthetic distinction when they argue that the truth expressed by some statements can be explained by the very notion of meaning : clearly, to support the analytic-synthetic distinction amounts to the claim that in some cases (the analytic case) meaning alone can justify this truth.

Harman's argues that Grice and Strawson's objections are misplaced. The empirical fact that between different kinds of terms, or statements, people acknowledge or feel a difference fitting more or less the analytic-synthetic distinction is not a decisive point. This distinction should stay a technical matter linked to the very possibility that the truth of a statement depends only on the meaning of their terms. Therefore, it is not relevant to criticize Quine's approach on the ground that his view of synonymy is too narrow. According to Harman, the fact that some people may classify old, or new, cases as analytic or synthetic is no evidence that the distinction they make is the same as the distinction made by philosophers to try to explain the concept of meaning. To believe that it is one and the same distinction amounts to a circular argument between the existence of analytic truths and their obviousness.

As Quine, Harman does not deny that some truths may appear analytic, but unlike Strawson, Grice and, for instance, Putnam (1975 a), he resists the confusion of an epistemic analyticity (i.e a felt analyticity) with the philosophers'technical one. This distinction between the epistemic and the semantic or philosophical definition of analyticity has clearly some bearing on the acceptability of the empirical obviousness of analyticity – i.e. an epistemic notion – as a criterion to make sense of the analytic-synthetic distinction for it immediately raises a methodological question about the relevance of personal feelings about the status of some statements to make a decision about the possibility of a statement "true by virtue of meaning alone". And if feelings do not matter, calling to the celebrated "unmarried bachelor" or "extended body" to make people understand the meaning of "analytic" may be confusing.

If the epistemic and the philosophical notions have to be kept apart, the case of philosophers who are prone to identify both notions is troublesome, for Harman claims that taking into account the epistemic version of analyticity amounts to claiming that, nowadays, there are still witches, but witches without supernatural powers. Hopefully some of those philosophers have changed their minds. After having accepted a distinction in the psychological impact of some statements as evidence of understanding the analytic-synthetic distinction, they finally changed their minds when they discovered that statements they believed analytic were synthetic in other contexts. They became sceptic about the distinction or, at least, about its generality and its stability.

A clear cut distinction between the two notions of analyticity makes possible that nobody acknowledges as (epistemically) analytic a (philosophically) analytic statement, or as synthetic a synthetic statement! But although the distinction between the philosophical and the epistemic notion points at a possible equivocation, the use of different criteria allows clearing it up. And for each type of analyticity, someone will be required to decide if a particular statement is or is not analytic according to such or such criterion. This double analyticity, requiring dif-

ferent types of assessments, possibly made by different people, reminds us of Leibniz's two judgments (human and divine) making the distinction between rational and factual truths.

Finally, Harman suggests that the success of the analytic-synthetic distinction may be the result of a confusion taking a mere similarity in meaning for a strict identity. Instead of taking into account that we slightly adjust the meaning of our terms in a changing context, for instance to optimize the understanding, to improve a translation, etc. the proponents of the analytics-synthetic distinction take it the other way. They hold that since there is no change of meaning in various situations, some conceptual relations are unaffected by changing situations and, therefore, depend only on what has not changed, namely the unchanging meaning of the terms used.

Granting the distinction between epistemic and semantic analyticity, we may wonder if the conclusions drawn from one point of view have no bearing on the conclusions coming from the other. In other words, how far can we go in divorcing the two approaches conflated by the proponents of the analytic-synthetic distinction? This question has an echo in the ambiguity that we found in Kant. We remember that he uses a situation which seems strictly logical (the inclusion of a predicate into a subject) to draw an *a priori* conclusion about the structure of the human mind. This move can be understood if we remember that, in his time, the laws of logic were commonly interpreted as laws of the human thought. Hence the acceptability of the shift from logical properties (about the structure of concepts) to normative psychological properties, a move typical of Kant's transcendental philosophy, also found in his introduction to the analytic-synthetic distinction even if, following his own terminology, the concepts involved in analytic statements are not always transcendental. Kantian analyticity is even based on the link between logic and (transcendental) psychology, as shown by the fact that his analyticity is not a matter of meaning but of thought.

Recently, Boghossian (1996) used the possibility to split analyticity into an epistemic and a semantic notion, to hold a mixed view. He claims that in spite of what he calls the "metaphysical" view undermined by Quine, an epistemic version could be saved. His thrust is that, in some cases, the meaning of my words derives from my intentions as to how to use them; and this would be enough to assert that when used in this last way the resulting statement is analytic since true independently of anything about the world.

In his reply to Boghossian, Harman maintains that you can't radically separate the two notions: to hold the epistemic view amounts to holding the metaphysical one. The main problem with Boghossian's stance would be that deriving the meaning of a word from an intention amounts to derive it from a postulate or a convention, and this is not enough to assure the truth of an assertion.

It seems that Grice-Strawson and Harman agree that part of the misunderstanding and, perhaps, of the very problem of analyticity lies in the divergence between Quine's technical criticism and the intuitions of ordinary people. But is it true that ordinary people have intuitions about analyticity? This question leads us back to the first one we asked about the

obviousness of the analyticity of a statement. This may appear as a mere factual detail of this very abstract debate, but it may matter for there is a strong disagreement about it. Grice and Strawson claim that ordinary people can easily be brought to make and understand the analytic-synthetic distinction. But Harman (1994) challenges this point by arguing that ordinary people do not make this distinction «difficult to teach to students, as they confuse it with all sorts of other distinctions». And this raises again the very practical question of the criteria acceptable and actually used to qualify a statement. If analyticity is introduced to students, or other people, by a definition illustrated by examples such as "Every body is extended" or "All bachelors are unmarried", a popular approval both about the truth and the specificity of these statements will support primarily the epistemic approach and only indirectly the semantic (philosophical) one. And this will support both the Grice-Strawson's view about a wide acknowledgment of the analytic-distinction, but also Harman's point since acknowledging the truth and the obviousness of some statements does not entail that the philosophical meaning of "analytic" is understood. When you read the papers of the various authors discussed here, nothing very clear or precise is said about the practice and interpretation of this kind of "experimentation". Philosophers stick to their definitions, but when they talk about the public understanding of analyticity nothing is very clear about its expression and its interpretation.

A trouble for the analytic-synthetic distinction – unless you anticipate it with a contextualized notion, for instance a monster like "local analyticity" – is that you may get both a wide assent to the analyticity of a statement and some suspicion, usually expressed by "Isn't it context dependent"? Putnam (1975 a) writes about «border cases» but tries to improve this sweeping formulation by adding: «what matters is that the AS distinction is construed as a dichotomy». Rather than universal, border or mixed cases, some statements seem clearly analytic in some contexts and clearly synthetic in others. Hence a possible ambivalence about their status: they are obviously analytic (or synthetic), but in a limited area or for the time being. And this may be the reason why metaphorical meanings are sometimes devastating for analyticity.

So, the analyticity of a statement may appear both obvious and relative. Hence a situation compatible with Grice-Strawson's view and Harman's as well: people often grant the obvious truth of statements like "Every body is extended", "Iron is a metal", "Cats are animals", "Women are females" and so forth, but remain suspicious, foreseeing the possibility that in some weird cases this is not true. And this may be another reason why many authors, including Leibniz and Kant, acknowledge that analytic statements are easy to grasp but sometimes have a dark side, hidden or accessible only to another eye.

The analytic style in argumentation and dialogue

For dialogue or argumentation theory, what are the consequences of the analyticity of some statements? First, we know that the analytic-synthetic distinction is not sponta-

neously made by lay people and that there may be some disagreements about it. But the obvious truth of some statements can explain the style of some dialogues or arguments – let us say they are "analytic" – which can be recognized in some fields of human communication. Let us sketch some of their fundamental features.

The statements taken to be analytic are common dogmatic truths and are presupposed to be shared by any people intervening in the verbal exchange. Of course, the word "dogmatic" should be given its ancient meaning of "systematic", any pejorative connotation being left aside. Analytic statements can be rightly called "first truths" as in Leibniz (that is non derivable from other propositions) or "central truths" – to use Quine's metaphor which has the virtue to raise the pragmatic question: « central to what or whom? »[1].

Leaving aside the problem of determining if these statements are accepted because true or held true because previously accepted, it is important to stress that they are looked upon as lasting definitions established by a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. Granting that none of the terms involved in these statements is ambiguous, situations like Harman's witches without supernatural powers should be prevented. These strict conditions of analyticity set a frame, working as a normative system, whose typical stability will make its confrontation with empirical truths more salient.

The previous conditions remind the first steps in the building of an axiomatic system, but also the requirements expected by classical philosophers from a "perfect language" as the project that Leibniz associated with his optimistic "Calculemus!", supposed to solve any problem in human communication. An analytic system actually works very much like a "calculus" or a systematic argumentative field where deductive proofs are supposed to lead to the indisputable settlement of a controversy.

Analytic statements work as principles and so, cannot be challenged without threatening the stability of the whole system. Moreover, an assault or a doubt about the necessity of one of them would have devastating inferential consequences since analytic propositions like "A is B" can also be used as inferential rules making elementary arguments like "x is A, therefore x is B" deductively valid.

As suggested by Quine's argument, denying that some statements are analytic or necessarily true allows asking for some new or renewed evidence of their truth. In this case, a dialogue can always be reopened and an argument may become endless since a doubt can always be raised about the truth of any justification or the validity of any inference. A well-known strategy to avoid it is asking for rigid definitions to block the meaning of key terms and prevent any regression in the justification of inferential moves. But to use this strategy amounts to acknowledging that the meaning of the redefined words or expressions was floating or that not everybody may take an alleged analytic statement to be analytic.

---

[1] Putnam (1975 b: 253-257) discusses it briefly.

References

Boghossian, Paul Artin (1996). Analyticity Reconsidered, *Noûs* 30 (3): 360-391.

Carnap, Rudolf (1956). Meaning and Necessity. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Grice, Herbert Paul & Peter Strawson (1956). In Defence of a Dogma. *Philosophical Review* 65: 141-158. Reprint in Grice, H.P. (1989). Studies in the Way of Words. Harvard: Harvard Univ. Press, 196-212.

Harman, Gilbert (1967). Quine on Meaning and Existence, I: The Death of Meaning. *Review of Metaphysics* 21: 124-151. Reprint in: Harman, Gilbert (1999), Reasoning, Meaning and Mind. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 119-137.

Harman, Gilbert (1994). Doubts about conceptual analysis. In: Michael, M & J. O'Leary-Hawthorne (eds). Philosophy in Mind: The Place of Philosophy in the Study of Mind. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 43-48. Reprint in: Harman, Gilbert (1999). Reasoning, Meaning and Mind. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 138 – 143.

Kant, Emmanuel (1986). Introduction. In: Critique de la raison pure. Paris: P.U.F.

Kant, Emmanuel (2007). Logique. Paris: Vrin.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm (1961). Praecognita ad Encyclopediam sive Scientiam universalem. In: Gerhardt, G.I. (ed.). Philosophische Schriften, vol. 7, Hildesheim: G. Olms.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm (1976). First Truths. In: Loemker & Leroy (ed). Philosophical Papers and Letters. Dordrecht: Reidel, 267-271.

Proust, Joëlle (1986). Questions de forme, logique et proposition analytique de Kant à Carnap. Paris: Fayard. English translation: Proust, Joëlle (1989). Questions of Form: Logic and the Analytic Proposition from Kant to Carnap. Univ. of Minnesota Press.

Putnam, Hilary (1975 a). The analytic and the synthetic. In: Mind, Language and Reality, Philosophical Papers, 2. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press, 33-69.

Putnam, Hilary (1975 b). The meaning of "meaning". In: Putnam, H. Mind, Language and Reality, Philosophical Papers, 2. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press, 215-271.

Quine, Willard Van Orman (1951). Two Dogmas of Empiricism. *Philosophical Review* 60: 20-43.

Quine, Willard Van Orman (1960). Carnap and logical truth. *Synthese* 12: 350-374.